Mmọnwụ:
A Dramatic Tradition of the Igbo

Nnabụenyi Ugonna

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To Judith
and to our parents
Olive, Stan
Ihudia, Ugonna.

TONE–MARKING SCHEME

Wherever tone–marks occur in this study the following scheme has been adopted:

High tones are unmarked, e.g., *mmọnwụ*.
Downstepped high tones are marked with a macron, e.g., *agū*.
Low tones are marked with a grave accent, e.g., *Òmèrèìgbò*.

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PREFACE

This work, which is based on the thesis which I submitted for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy of the University of Ibadan in 1976, is primarily an investigation of the general dramatic structure and poetic content of mmọnwụ of the Igbo. It attempts a systematic analysis of mmọnwụ dramatic tradition of a number of contiguous Igbo communities south of Ọnịcha, north of Owere and west of Ọlụ and Ọkigwe, an area that has often been called the *central Igbo*.

In this study, I have attempted to illustrate the Igbo assumption that the mmọnwụ tradition is a mirror of their way of life, an embodiment of their philosophical and religious thought and a generic symbol and reflection of their art forms — verbal, visual and mimetic. Igbo literary forms which include oral narratives *(ifo)* and *(iduu)* and poetic chants *(abụ)* find expressions in the mmọnwụ dramatic performance.

The source material for this study is derived partly from literature or published works but mainly from oral tradition transmitted in the form of chants, myths, legends, and individual and group recollections of incidents that took place during the relatively recent history of mmọnwụ drama. Besides oral sources, I have derived material from the tradition of Igbo visual arts as well as, of course, from the varied traditions of Igbo dramatic forms.

My fieldwork, conducted between 1972 and 1975, entailed the completion of two sets of questionnaires by a sample of respondents, the conducting of personal interviews with leading mmọnwụ members, recording of some mmọnwụ plays on tapes, and later transcribing them, holding symposia with some *mmọnwụ* groups during which illuminating discussions were had on the past, recent and projected developments in mmọnwụ drama, and the taking of a number of photographs of mmọnwụ characters.

The greatest problem that confronts a researcher into the

particular tradition of mmọnwụ under study is its cultish nature which makes information regarding it difficult to get. But where there is willingness to give information, mmọnwụ data is relatively easy to cross-check because the external facts of an mmọnwụ theatre, for instance, the names of mask characters, the initiation procedure, etc., are so similar and so well known, at least to the initiated members, that a thorough study of the workings of a few dramatic groups would enable an investigator to acquire sufficient knowledge of the entire mmọnwụ corpus. However, this willingness is often lacking because of the secret oath taken by mmọnwụ initiates which forbids them to discuss the stark reality of mmọnwụ with non-initiates. Any information meant for the public would, perforce, conform to the usual mystical, or what one may regard, as the poetic view of mmọnwụ.

I have, therefore, primarily based my study on this poetic view derived from myths, songs, narratives, and testimonies during personal interviews. Thus, in the main body of this work, guided by this poetic view, I have attempted to:

(a) define the concept of mmọnwụ as it applies to the study area;
(b) investigate the cultish origins of mmọnwụ and its development into an oral literary genre;
(c) analyse the genre as a form of communal theatre with an elaborate chain of dramatic groups each organised around a play house (ekwuru) and a play arena (obom);
(d) discuss different categories of mmọnwụ performers, the distinctive features of the mmọnwụ performance, and the characteristics of its spectacle and audience; and
(e) give a critical appraisal of the language of mmọnwụ drama.

Nnabụenyi Ugonna

Lagos, 1982.

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During the course of this study, I have been assisted by so many people that it would be impossible for me to mention all of them by name here. Let me say then that I am very sincerely thankful to all who, through personal letters, interviews, discussions, suggestions and casual remarks, have made this work possible.

I am particularly grateful to the following: Oyin Ogunba whose work on the ritual drama of the Ijebu greatly encouraged me to engage in similar study of an aspect of the drama of the central Igbo; M.J.C. Echeruo whose interest in Igbo festival drama has influenced considerably the theoretical background to the present study; Adeboye Babalola and Laz E.N. Ekwueme who have inspired and encouraged me; and all my other colleagues in the University of Lagos, especially in the Department of African Languages and Literatures of the University who have in one way or the other helped me in the completion of the work.

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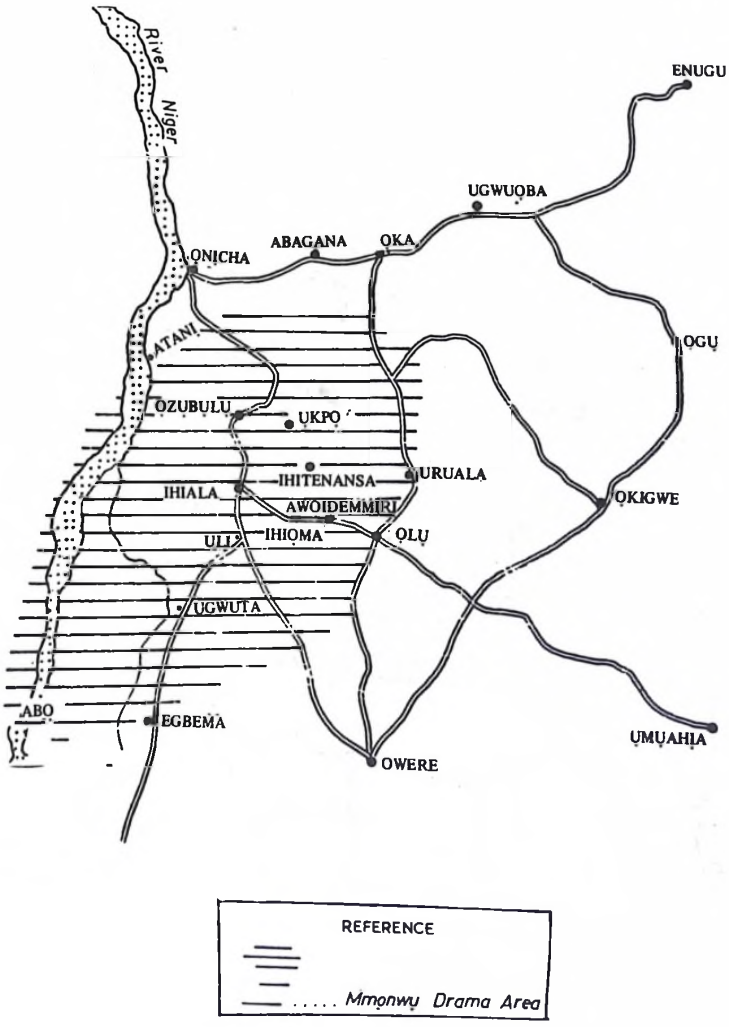
I have also to thank all my relations not yet mentioned, in particular, my wife, Judith, for making available to me relevant reference material besides giving me much-needed advice and encouragement; my mother Ihudia, for chanting for me some of the verses here recorded; my father Ugonna Ezenwaka for often accompanying me to several ekwuru to gather information; my brothers, Ezenwaka and Mọdebe for transcribing some of the oral information received; my father-in-law, Rev. Dr. H.S. Corran,

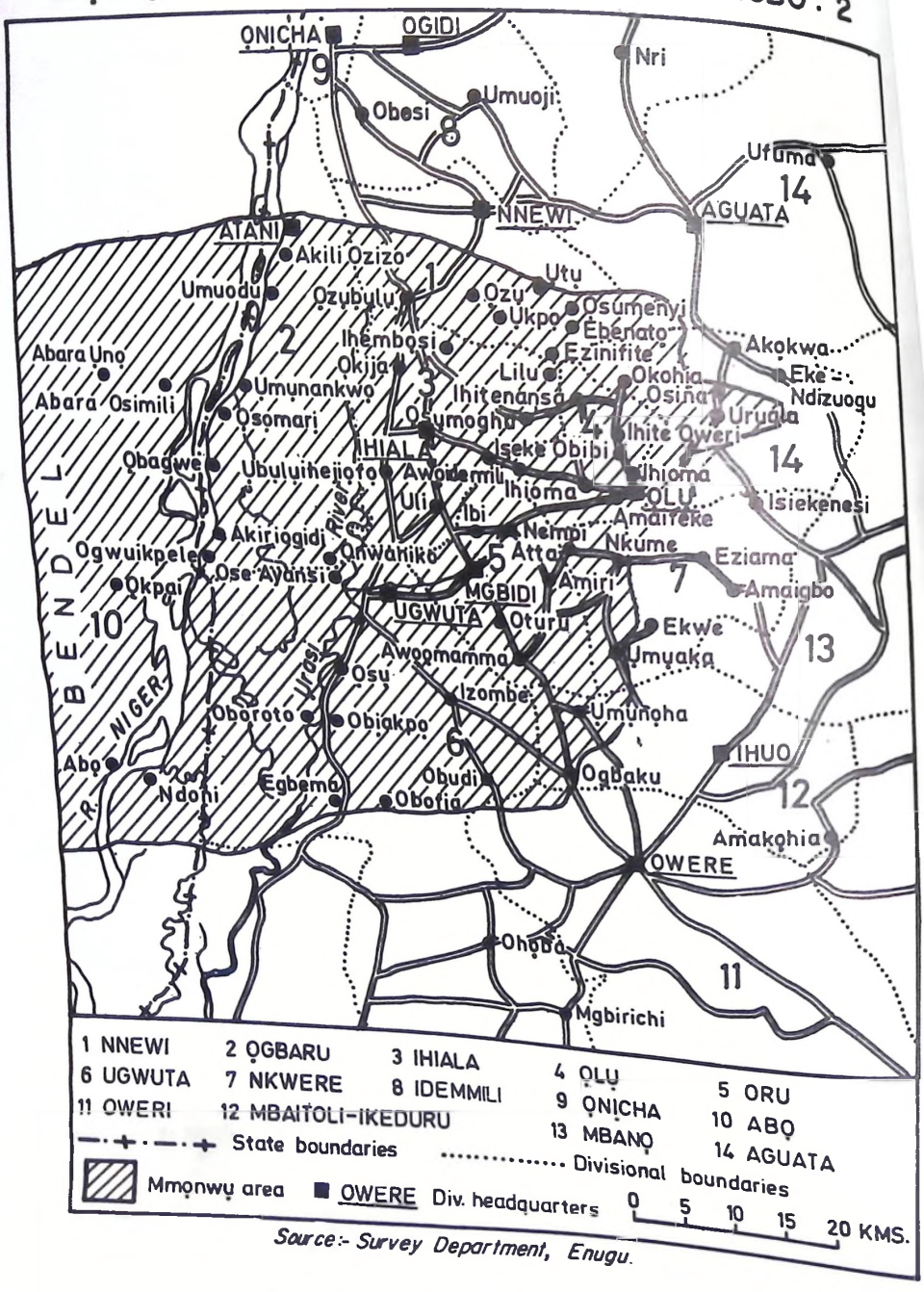
and my brother-in-law, Tom Corran, for taking many of the photographs that illustrate the study; and finally my brother-in-law, Chief A. Nwaele, for bringing me in contact with members of the National Society of Mmọwụ Communities of Nigeria. I am very grateful to this Society and particularly its officers including J.L. Ikeji, R.O. Igwe, Akabụeze Omenkeukwu, and A. Okoro, for their contribution to the study.

Finally, I wish to thank all the staff or the Lagos University Library for their assistance and cooperation, as well as Chike Aniakor and A.U.J. Kamen for providing some of the illustrations in this work.

MMỌNWỤ DRAMA AREA OF THE CENTRAL IGBO : 1



MMỌNWỤ DRAMA AREA OF THE CENTRAL IGBO : 2



Source:- Survey Department, Enugu.

1

THE IDEA OF MMỌNWỤ

The use of the term *mmọnwụ* among the Igbo is complex and unless a clear distinction between its different uses is made from the outset, the specific area of our present investigation will not be readily grasped.

To some, mmọnwụ refers to any figure that is masked, even partially, with his legs, arms or eyes exposed to the spectators. To others the term represents a special type of sacred masked character. To those who regard every masked figure as mmọnwụ the concept is clear-cut — a figure in any form of mask (and by mask is meant any disguising device or camouflage whether made of straw, cloth, wood or a combination of them) is mmọnwụ.

On the other hand, to those who define the term strictly as a type of sacred mask, other masked figures are not conceived as mmọnwụ but as human players wearing symbolic masks and, therefore, what such players perform is not regarded as *egwuregwu mmọnwu* (mmọnwụ drama) but as *egwu nkịtị* (ordinary dance drama). Thus to different Igbo people mmọnwụ may mean different things and what some communities might call mmọnwụ others would refer to as mere dance drama.

It should be made clear from the start that in this study the term *mmọnwụ* is restricted to a unique type of drama featuring masked characters generally regarded as "spirits" and therefore does not apply to all and every performance in which masked figures feature. It is reserved for the sacred drama performed in the designated study area, an area to be defined later in the study. Here, two forms of masking, one sacred and the other secular, are recognized, the sacred being exclusively known as *mmọnwụ* and the secular described as *egwuregwu eworewo*. This rigid differentiation between *mmọnwụ* and eworewo emphasizes the mystic nature of mmọnwụ drama and it would be sacrilegious in this area to refer to *egwuregwu eworewo* as *mmọnwụ* or vice versa.

It should also be pointed out that although mmọnwụ is

sometimes called mmanwụ by some people, no conceptual difference is implied by this since both words mean the same thing, being merely dialectal variants of the same word. In this study, *mmọnwụ* is preferred to *mmanwụ* since it would appear to be more central and perhaps more original. Everywhere in Igboland the mmọnwụ figure is addressed also as mmụọ (spirit) and the closer phonemic relationship between mmụọ and mmọnwụ is a compelling reason for advocating the use of mmọnwụ instead of mmanwụ.

Having discussed the sense in which the term *mmọnwụ* is used in this investigation, let us now examine what the people of the study area mean by the term.

Mmọnwụ is probably derived from two words: *mmụọ* (spirit) and *ọnwụ* (death) and would then seem to imply a shortening of the expression, *mmụọ ndị nwụrụ anwụ* (spirits of the dead). This probably means that originally mmọnwụ might have been conceived as a manifestation or concretization of the spirits of particular dead ancestors. In other words, a particular dead person would reappear in the form of mmọnwụ when the need arose. It would then seem that in some respects the concept of mmọnwụ may have developed partly from the necromancing practice of the Igbo. More of this will be discussed later.

The concept of mmọnwụ, however, has now significantly changed as illustrated by the following descriptions of mmọnwụ given by some informants:

(a) a mask with supernatural powers, regarded as a visible spirit in the community and accorded all spiritual respect;
(b) a spirit coming from the underground in a masked form;
(c) a spiritual mask deified, sacrosanct and not to be touched or approached by humans, inhabiting under the ground; and
(d) an age-old form of mask supposed to come to man's world from the spirit world.

From these descriptions it is clear that mmọnwụ is now conceived not as the spirit of any particular dead ancestor but as a unique *dramatic* spirit called into being by man's creative imagination, a being with his own identifiable personality, a character in a community play. In other words mmọnwụ is a spiritual idea personified and endowed with spiritual attributes, not the reappearance of the spirit of a known dead ancestor.

Literary Sources of the Mmonwụ Idea

Mmọnwụ is in the genre of that type of African mask drama in

which the masked players are regarded as spirit. In some masking traditions, however, the spirits are symbolic but in the mmọnwụ tradition spiritual transubstantiation is claimed. That is to say, the myth of spiritism is enforced through a rigid oath-taking mechanism and sustained by religious propaganda and mysticism.

The concept of mask as spirit is almost as old as humanity and has developed from early man's inherently mythopoeic mode of consciousness which, it would appear, made him choose animal characters for his narrative purposes as cave-man art tends to suggest.[1] At first masks were possibly used to represent the animal characters in early man's fictional tales but since certain animals, for example, the snake, were conceived by man's myth-making imagination either as gods or as manifestations of spirits, masked forms came to represent not just animals but spiritual forces. In many African societies this primordial idea has developed into traditions of mask drama, mmọnwụ being one of them.

While some ethnological and literary studies have been done of some East and West African traditions of mask drama, no real investigation of mmọnwụ has before now been made. This study will therefore attempt to analyse mmọnwụ in depth, and through the analysis broaden our critical view of indigenous drama in Africa. Some literary critics have tended to doubt whether indigenous dramatic performance in many African communities could legitimately be termed "drama." Ruth Finnegan, for example, has questioned the "existence of native African drama" and has affirmed that "it would perhaps be truer to say that in Africa, in contrast to Western Europe and Asia, drama is not typically a widespread or developed form."[2] Similarly, Ulli Beier has asserted that "there is no conventional theatre in Yoruba tradition"[3] basing his idea of "conventional" apparently on the modern manifestations of the Western theatre. He, however, as Adedeji has rightly pointed out, "fails to see that what he goes on to describe as the Agbegijọ theatre is in fact the Yoruba conventional theatre — a development which followed its own artistic traditions."[4]

On the other hand, many critics, including Delafosse and Traore, as Finnegan herself has pointed out,[5] Ogunba,[6] Adedeji, and others, have not only affirmed the existence of an oral tradition of African drama but have also demonstrated its unique development. The present study of mmọnwụ is further illustration of how widespread and well developed, in its own characteristic way, is the indigenous African dramatic tradition. Mmọnwụ drama, like most other forms of African drama, has

continued to develop over the years and the accelerated pace of modernization in mmọnwụ theatre has given rise to the genuine feeling that it is gradually developing into a modern form of drama as unique to the Igbo as, for instance, Noh drama is to the Japanese or Hsi to the Chinese.

Among the many sociological investigations of African masking traditions similar to mmọnwụ of the Igbo could be mentioned Victor Turner's study of the Ndembu *ikishi* described by Muchona (Turner's informant) as "a terrible thing that stays under the ground"[7] and Peter M.Weil's analysis of the masked figures of the Mandinka of Gambia.[8]

The Ndembu of East Africa, according to Turner, perform the *ikishi* drama during the *chikula* rites, that is, the ceremonial washing after recovery from circumcision. During the performance, costumed and masked figures, chief among whom are Mwweg'i Katotoji, Chizaluki Mudimbula, and Chikumbu, feature. Their main function is to entertain and thrill their spectators through awe because the novices, like the women, believe that the masks are dead people *(afu)*.[9] The *ikishi*, Katotoji, like *akakpọ mmọnwụ*, is clever and fierce and pursues and beats the uninitiated and makes people run by acting in a mad way while women sing for him. Thus his character is strikingly similar to that of *akakpọ mmọnwụ*.

Peter M. Weil, on the other hand, has examined the sociopolitical role played by Mandinka masked figures in a community with dispersed authority for "rule-making and rule-application." He maintains that in such a society masked figures "provide a mechanism through which the probability of sustained, divisive conflict is decreased by converting secular actions of rule-application into sacred, supra-social actions."[10] Similarly, mmọnwụ has this social role, for, as Tamuno has observed in his study of maintenance of law and order before the introduction of the Western-style police organisation in Nigeria, in Igbo communities "human and supernatural agencies were supposed to have been involved in the prevention and detection of crime"[11] and therefore "masked dancers purporting to represent a spirit cult were used by elders whenever there was difficulty in enforcing law and order."[12] However, since our study is mainly literary we would not concern ourselves unduly with this social and governmental aspect of mmọnwụ institution. Yet, the diverse roles of mmọnwụ are so integrated that it is often difficult to separate the dramatic from the social and ritual functions, for, often, the ritual and rule-application roles are acted out within the dramatic frame-work.[13]

However, Weil's description of *fara-kankurang* or bark mask,

in the words of Francis Moore, as "a Mumbo Jumbo, an Idol, which was among the Mundingoes a kind of cunning Mystery... dressed in a long Coat made of the bark of trees, with a tuft of fine straw on the Top of it, and when a person wears it, it is about eight or nine Foot high,"[14] and *fita-kankurang* or leaf mask, which Gray and Dochard saw in 1818 as "a man covered from head to foot with small boughs of trees,[15] makes it clear that the Mandinka masks are similarly conceived as the Igbo and the Ndembu masks, though each community uses locally available material for the costuming: the Igbo use *asangwọ* (raffia straw), the Mandinka shredded or woven bark of the baobab tree, and the Ndembu a type of stiff grass.

Mmọnwụ in its broad concept as spirit play is analogous to several other dramatic displays among some Nigerian communities, for example, *igbo*[16] and *owu*[17] plays staged by the Kalabari *ekine* society; the *ekpo* and *ekpe* mask display[18] of the Efik and Ibibio communities, which have spread to many parts of Igboland bordering them including the Ọhụhụ-Ngwa and the Aro-Ọhafia; the *egu ata* of Ida which features such masked figures as *ekwe* and *ikeleku-ehuma*[19] and, finally, the *alekwu* drama of Idoma.[20]

The Yoruba *egungun,* which has received considerable critical attention[21] appears to have some link with mmọnwụ as is indicated by the fact that mmọnwụ is also known as *egwugwu*[22] (which word is surely an Igbo trascription of the Yoruba *egungun)* and, taking into consideration the mythic content and dramatic features of both genres, it would appear that either one derived from the other or they are cognate. It is, indeed, possible to link the legend of Moremi, centred around the warring raffia-masked figures of the Igbo, an indigenous people inhabiting the area now occupied by the descendants of the sons and followers of Oduduwa[23] with the emergence of the *egungun* concept in Yoruba land, Adedeji's theory of the origin of *egungun*[24] notwithstanding. In other words, it is possible that the Yoruba got their idea of *egungun* from these autochthonous people they displaced or intermingled with. It is similarly possible that mmọnwụ developed from these early forest-dwellers' masking traditions from which *egungun* might have got its inspiration. Commenting on the theory of the dispersal from Ife of the descendants of the primordial Ọba or the worshippers of Ọbatala, Adedeji notes that the Ife people referred to them (after they moved into the jungle in the outskirts called Igbogbo the grove of the Igbo — following their defeat during the civil war at Ife) as Igbo and also that Ọbatala is addressed by his worshippers as king of the Igbo.[25]

Regarding the origin of African mask drama both Ogunba and Adedeji believe that Yoruba theatre, including *egungun* drama, is ritual in origin. Oyekan Owomoyela however disagrees, arguing that Yoruba theatre has its origin in folklore. Refuting Adedeji's theory that "religion is the basis of dramatic developments in Yoruba as in most cultures of the world", and J.P. Clark's view that "as the roots of European drama go to the Egyptian Osiris and Greek Dionysus so are the origins of Nigerian drama likely to be found in the early religions and magical ceremonies of the peoples of this country,"[26] Owomoyela contends that man's mimetic instinct is the basis for the development of the theatre because, according to him, "the mimetic develops in man very much earlier than any evidences of religious inclination, and before religious indoctrination."[27]

He may well be right, since statements about the origin of drama beyond recorded history, beyond the early Egyptians and Greeks, would remain largely conjectural. However, the question is not which is primary, mimetic instinct or religious inclination, but which of the two urges gave rise to the earliest known developments in theatrical art. It is indeed arguable whether, as Owomoyela has maintained "before children can make any sense of religious beliefs and practices, they evince a sense of mimesis by playing house,"[28] because children do, in fact, experience some fear of the unknown (a basic religious feeling) ever before they learn to play house. But even if one grants that children imitate before they can worship, the crucial question remains; did theatre in the past in Egypt and Greece or today in Nigeria primarily grow because man wanted to indulge his mimetic instinct or because he wanted to satisfy a god? In other words, did theatre grow out of the act of worship, and therefore ritual, or from a desire to imitate for the sake of imitation?

It would appear that although man has always had mimetic instinct, it was religious motive that galvanized this mimetic urge into the act of creating dramatic art. Playing house and cops and robbers, as Owomoyela admits, are "mimetic activities associated with the learning process" but surely not theatrical art. It could be said that it was during his religious acts of worship that man, the artist, utilized his mimetic drive to create drama, properly called, in order to please or appease his deities. Thus would have emerged ritual plays and ceremonies which, with time, developed into profane plays by a gradual process of secularization. It is true that when people perform plays today often the religious connection is lost sight of, yet it is evident that the earliest plays emerged from religious rituals and festivals and not from folklore, for it seems

self-evident that religious myth is older than folkloric mythology, mythology being debased myth or a demythologized system of religious beliefs.[29]

The religious origin of drama is upheld by William Ridgeway who, while denying that tragedy proper arose in the worship of the Thracian god Dionysius, posits that "it sprang out of the indigenous worship of the dead, especially of dead chiefs such as Adrastus, the anciest pre-Dorian and pre-Achaean King of Sicyon, as described by Herodotus in a passage which is our earliest for Greek "tragic dancers."[30]

Like other forms of drama, mmọnwụ is ritual in origin and in this study an attempt is made to investigate this ritual origin. It would be seen that the concept of mmọnwụ is intimately related to the Igbo man's mythopoeic tendencies. And since myth is not only ritualistic but also poetic,[31] mmọnwụ is equally inspired by the Igbo man's artistic impulse. Thus the study of mmọnwụ poetic drama is to a large extent an exercise in myth-criticism.

As has been remarked above, no systematic work has been done on mmọnwụ as a poetic and dramatic genre. Such critical references to it as exist are either merely sociological, anthropological or are brief comments on its general entertainment value. The few studies that deal with the Igbo masking tradition at some length, as we will see presently, discuss mainly its visual rather than its verbal characteristics, and, what is more significant, mostly investigate the tradition of masking generally regarded by the people of the present study area as *egwu ewọrewọ*, that is, dance drama performed by masked humans. It could therefore be said that the present investigation is the first literary study of what has been regarded by its practitioners as the sacred masking tradition of the central Igbo.

Several social anthropologists who have shown general interest in the Igbo masking tradition have discussed it as it relates to social anthropology, hardly as literature. Richard and Helen Henderson,[32] for example, have discussed the socializing role of the Ọnịcha masking tradition as embodied in the "mmụọ" initiation rituals and Ahanotu has emphasized the political function of "the many religious based societies in the activities of the Ọha, the general assembly of an Igbo town-state or *obodo*." His explanation of the mmọnwụ concept, as would be expected, is couched in "law and order" tones:

> Igbo ancestors were believed to be very active in the spiritual world after their burial. These ancestors appeared periodically to inspect the activities of their respective communities. They would appear in the form of mmọnwụ (masked men or mmo). The Igbo utilising this idea of the position of ancestors vis-a-vis the spiritual world of Ala, gave spiritual attributes to mmo displays.[33]

One is therefore not surprised when he concludes that "the primary aim of *Mmọ* displays was to enforce the laws of the Ọha."[34]

His citing of Rev. A.C. Strong's report that "the Mors (mmụọ) are the highest and supreme authority to legislate, execute, enact and repeal all laws binding the people as a nation in this one regard (the Obi of Onitsha) is inferior to the Mors and is himself bound to abide by the decision and judgement of them in any political matter,"[35] is evidence of early concentration of critical opinion on Igbo masking tradition on its governmental and ritual functions rather than on its dramatic and poetic form.

Also mainly treating the ritual and socializing aspects of masking among Igbo communities is G.I. Jones's study of masking in south-eastern parts of Nigeria including Igbo, Ibibio and Ijọ communities. Jones discovers that the common features of masked plays in this area include: (a) the religious or magical element resulting in the fact that the identity of the masked player is never disclosed since the figures are supposed to be supernatural beings; (b) the disciplinary feature which keeps women and children in awe and makes men belong to a cult into which they are initiated and whose mysteries and rules they are compelled to keep and obey and (c) the element of pageantry and play. [36]

Similarly, in his study of the *ọkụmkpa* play of the Afikpo Igbo, Simon Ottenberg has seen their masking tradition from a predominantly non-literary and mainly socio-political standpoint. He summarizes his view on the Afikpo tradition of masking by observing that in the area "each village has a secret society with its own secret initiation bush, its special spirit, and a host of rituals which its members carry out.[37] His attempt in a subsequent paper[38] to reinterpret his data aesthetically has not been very successful.

Perhaps the earliest known work of any significance on the subject of mmọnwụ is Ọnụọra Nzekwu's study of the changing theories of masking in Igbo society, a change largely brought about by increased urbanization of the people and the overwhelmingly rational attitudes engendered by this.[39] He rightly thinks that the origin of masking in Igbo society is traceable to the Igbo belief in the existence of ancestral spirits who could manifest themselves to humanity in any chosen form. But again he hardly discusses the literary aspect of this tradition.

A more scholarly study of mmọnwụ (but again, of the not strictly sacred variety) is E. Okechukwu Ọdịta's work on Igbo masking tradition. In this study which claims to represent "the *first* attempt at a regional approach to the masking tradition of the

Igbo-speaking peoples,"[40] the emphasis is predictably on the masks as visual objects of art rather than as poets or *dramatis personae* notwithstanding the statement that the study would view "the Igbo masking tradition as the product of human actions so that the meaning of the masks, their inseparable vision, story, and perhaps dance. . . . would be understood."[41]

M.J.C. Echeruo's critique of the state of Igbo drama,[42] though relevant to the study of the general theory of mmọnwụ, does not deal specifically with mmọnwụ theatre. Rather, it is more directly concerned with the nature of festival drama and raises the crucial question as to what extent ritual celebration could be considered as drama. The critical issues raised in that study will be discussed in the next chapter.

Perhaps most relevant to the present study of mmọnwụ is Raymond C. Arazu's work on the subject.[43]

In his essay he attempts a general analysis of the organization of mmọnwụ theatres, the mmọnwụ characters and the mmọnwụ initiation rituals. Probably the most important point in Arazu's discussion is his observation regarding the modernization of mmọnwụ theatre. He suggests that the *obom* or mmọnwụ threatre should be modernised so that gate fees could be paid by spectators who wish to participate in the mmọnwụ play.

Arazu's study, like most other studies already discussed, is by no means literary; it is sociological, having been provoked by Arazu's personal experience as a parish priest at Ihiala and his involvement in the social and religious questions in his community. As would be expected of a Catholic priest, he has, like the Church authorities, criticised mmọnwụ society for what he has called:

> the "devilish actions" perpetrated by the group: Charms, sacrifices to idols before big shows, the idea of spirits being believed to be incarnate in the mask, the victimisation of dissident groups and persons, the oath of secrecy sworn on idols, etc.[44]

He was later, however, convinced of the need for dialogue and mutual understanding between the church and mmọnwụ institution. He was therefore initiated into the mmọnwụ society, since initiation appears to be the only meaningful basis for discussion. His paper, written from the stand-point of an initiate, is perhaps an attempt to reform mmọnwụ from within. He has, in fact, called on "enlightened and influential christians . . . to enter the mmọnwụ ranks and reform it from within without infringing on the religious rights of anyone, christian or animist" because he holds that "the best thing to be done ... is to by-pass the religious issue and modernise the mmọnwụ society along scientific and

demythologised lines."[45] The problem however is not in demythologization (after all there is myth in christianity) but in the recognition of myth as myth and not dogma.

Regarding the dramatic and philosophical role of mmọnwụ, Arazu says:

> Mmanwụ supplies the necessary recreational needs of a given rural community. It incorporates choral chanting, instrumental music and communal gesticulations into the drama of its masquerading. It is so well organised that it takes in the global structure of the Igbo man's philosophy of life. The initiated dance and sing around the masks. The chanting girls keep their distance in fear and trembling, while the uninitiated (ogbodi) stay far away in bushes out of sheer dread. And yet there is joy and merriment shared in by the entire community both old and young.[46]

These are cursory remarks on the poetic and dramatic qualities of mmọnwụ and one could, in fact, say that, like social anthropologists, Arazu has discussed the "play" motif in mmọnwụ only in so far as it highlights and perhaps helps to resolve the ritual and social conflicts between Mmọnwụ and Church. One could therefore continue to maintain that the present study is significant in spear-heading the study of mmọnwụ as a literary genre. There is, indeed, urgent need for continuing research into similar forms and features of mask displays so as to achieve the compilation of comprehensive mmọnwụ literature for use as texts in schools and universities.

To understand and appreciate fully the concept of mmọnwụ drama it may be necessary to examine the social and philosophical conditions under which this drama grew and the mind of the people who created it.

The communities whose concept of mmọnwụ is being investigated radiate from Ọzụbụlụ where, it has been established through authenticated oral tradition, the present concept of sacred masking originated. As will be seen in the next chapter dealing with the rise of mmọnwụ, it is believed that from Ọzụbụlu the mmọnwụ tradition spread to other parts of the central Igbo.

The mmọnwụ area covered in this study comprises, wholly or in part, the local government areas of Nnewi, Ihiala, and Ọgbaru, in Anambra State; Oru, Ọlụ, Mbaitoli-Ikeduru, Ugwuta and Nkwere, in Imo State, and Abọ, in Bendel State. It lies in the lower Niger basin approximately between Lat. 5° 30" N and Lat. 6° N. Two other important tributary river basins, the Ụrasị and the Njaba, drain this area. The Ụrasị River, which rises in Isiekenesii, flows through such towns as Ihiteoweri, Amaruru, etc., to Ọnwakịkọ where it is joined by one of the distributaries of the Niger. From Ọnwakịkọ it flows into the Ugwuta Lake and

then southward until it merges with the Andoni Creek. The Njaba which rises in and around Isunjaba and Ekwe flows through Ụmụaka, etc., and empties itself into the Ugwuta Lake.

This low-lying area (rising from about a height of 30 metres in the Niger flood plains to about 270 metres to 300 metres above sea level around Akpo, Amaeshi and Akọkwa) is in the great palm belt of southern Nigeria and as is to be expected, the two main varieties of the palm tree in the region — the oil palm and the raffia palm — play an indispensable role in the production of mmọnwụ plays. The symbolic use of the ọmụ (the tender yellow leaves of the oil palm) in decorating the mmọnwụ stage and the asangwọ (straw material produced from the tender leaves of the raffia palm[47]) in the costuming of the mmọnwụ figures will be discussed later.

Igbo World View and the Mmọnwụ Idea

The theoretical and philosophical frame-work upon which the concept of mmọnwụ is erected is the Igbo idea of existence. In general, the Igbo have a view of existence that makes it possible for the idea of masked spirit to emerge. Although their theory of being is basically dualistic, the spirit is held to be the prime mover of the world.

This ontological belief in the primacy of the spiritual principle is particularly strong in the mmọnwụ area that lies within the two Igbo cultural regions of Igboetiti and Oru. This area exhibits the polarity between the upland Igbo and the riverine Oru with their at once contrasting and complementary qualities; the former being dry, hard, full of struggling, astute and ambitious men and women and the latter wet, productive, rich and full of contented, easy-going and poetic people. Thus in mmọnwụ drama the upland Igbo generally develop the "poetics" and stage techniques while the Oru compose the songs and chants.

It could, however, be said that mmọnwụ has basically developed in what has come to be regarded as the heart of Igboland, the belt formed by Owere, Ọkigwe, Ọlụ and Ọka which Uchendu has called "the nuclear Igbo land."[48] G.I. Jones terms "Ibo centre or core,"[49] and Ọnwụejeọgwụ has regarded as "one of the primary cores of the Igbo culture area"[50] from where early Igbo population dispersed to other secondary cores. Summarising all the "hypotheses on Igbo dispersal produced by social anthropologists and ethnographers," A.E. Afigbo states:

> Wherever the Igbo people came from originally, it would appear that they settled first in the region enclosed by the present Awka, Orlu and Okigwi Divisions. As population grew and the soil

> became exhausted, people left this nuclear centre for the Nsukka–Udi area and for the region towards the coast. The latter group gave rise to the present Oratta, Ikwerre, Etche, Asa, and Ndokki ... in time too another group left from the Isuama area. A fourth wave arising out of the latter then left in two prongs; one prong settled the Ngwa area, the other the Umuahia and Ohafia-Arochukwu regions.[51]

It can be seen that most of the communities whose indigenous drama we are investigating lie within this core Igbo area, the inner Igbo about which little is said or known. This is because the people inhabiting this area have no oral tradition of migration from elsewhere, unlike the peripheral Igbo such as the Oru, the Ika, the Aro, the Ọkpọtọ and the Nsụka, among others who have differing accounts of their origin outside the Igbo homeland.

But where did the central Igbo come from originally? One can no more than speculate about the origin of the Igbo for this probably cannot be accounted for by relatively recent Hamitic migrations or the dispersal of so-called black Jews, the Igbo origins being perhaps of greater antiquity. In fact, it is possible that the early Igbo might have comprised some groups fleeing from the dry conditions of the Sahara Desert and settling in the forest area of what is today the middle belt and the south of Nigeria. They might have carried with them into the forest their neolithic culture. They possibly, at first, converged at the core area, that is, around Ọka, Ọlụ, Ọkigwe and Owere. They were, no doubt, periodically joined by immigrants from different parts of the world seeking for shelter either from drought or oppression as the forest tended to be the land of freedom.

With time the disparate people who occupied the forest region might have fused into one people who knew themselves as the Igbo. In their habitant in the central Igbo they probably started developing their unique culture. They discovered metal and entered into the iron age.

Commenting on the antiquity of the Igbo in their present habitat, C. Xrydz-Eyutche has asserted:

> Going back to 2,555 B.C. and probably beyond the Igbo were occupying their lonely spot in Africa without interference from the outside world. Nobody knew about the Igbos until recently even though they are the ethnic nucleus of the aborigines of West Africa — This Igboland, until the contrary is proved, has an original pre-history entirely its own as old as the prehistory of the African continent.[52]

Although in the light of our present knowledge, there is little proof of the truth of this claim, D.D. Hartle's test excavations at the Ụkpa rock shelter near Afikpo and at the University of Nigeria Agricultural Farm, Nsuka, dating back to 29[illegible] and 2,[illegible]

B.C. respectively,[53] may lend some credence to the antiquity of the Igbo. Thus by both dates it is probable that the Igbo had already migrated from their nuclear habitat to the Afikpo region and the Nsụka-Udi area respectively. Perhaps much earlier some of the people had crossed over to the west bank of the Niger and inhabited the vast forest areas in that region. Thus might have been formed, in the early history of the Igbo, two centres, one in the east and the other in the west bank of the Niger, from which subsequent Igbo migrations originated. From these centres the Igbo possibly migrated to the Oru or riverine Igbo, to the Owere-Ikwere, Ọhụhụ-Ngwa, Afikpo-Izii, Aro-Ọhafia and Nsuka-Udi areas.

It is reasonable to assume that the rural Igbo have sojourned continuously in their present abode for about eight thousand years and have here developed their world view, their cosmology, that has systematically ordered both observable matter and inferred forces around them, an ontology that has enabled the communities in the study area to evolve their poetic theory of mmọnwụ. An analysis of the Igbo traditional theory of being would reveal that the people envision the world as inherently dualistic and therefore they make a clear distinction between visible and tangible things, things of the perceptible world, matter *(ihe ụwa,)* on the one hand, and things of the spirit, things without substance, invisible and imperceptible things *(ihe mmụọ)*, on the other. The active principle of *ihe ụwa* is dust *(ntụ)* or sand *(aja)*. That of spirit is *ụfụrụ* (breath) or *ikuku* (air).

Although both are believed to have separate identities and could co-exist, for example, in a human being, the spirit, which may be coincident with idea, energy or force *(ike)* is believed to predominate over matter to such a degree that in some respects the Igbo may be described as monistic in their conception of reality, believing that what really exists is spirit. Matter is seen as inert, malleable and perishable but the spirit is active and remains for ever. Nothing moves unless it is moved by spirit. When spirit finally leaves the human body the body ceases to move and begins to dissolve. Under certain circumstances the spirit, it is believed, could abandon temporarily a body that it animates and could assume a new form, human, animal or vegetable, while the vacated body lies in a type of coma.

The notion of mmọnwụ basically derives from this ontological view, namely, that spirit predominates over matter. Nonetheless both spirit and matter, to the Igbo, are real. But matter is held together by spirit which is sometimes conceived either as breath or as shadow. This gave rise to the belief that a man's last breath

marks the departure of his spirit from his body and that when a person dies the lifeless body ceases to cast a shadow. Spirits are also believed to have the capacity to animate any material object such as staff, stones and masks and in this way either lend force, or endow spiritual mobility and character, to such objects. Thus emerged the idea of mmọnwụ, a spiritual being that animates a masked form.

The same notion of the predominance of immaterial forces over matter pervades the Igbo conception of his cosmos, a cosmos that is earth-centred its centre being the spot where the particular Igbo thinker happens to stand. The Igbo tend to envision their cosmos as an infinite dome-shaped, three-dimensional expanse with an infinite stretch of land surface. It is limitless in all directions. Horizontally, there are successive rings and chains of hills, forests, expanses of water, and deserts, stretching to infinity. Vertically upwards, there are clouds *(urukpu)*, stars which are twinkling objects in the sky *(kpakpando)*, the sun *(anyanwụ)*, the moon *(ọnwa)*, the sky *(igwe)* and the above-sky, heaven *(eluigwẹ)*.

Vertically downwards, stretches infinite earth with caves here and chasms there. The Igbo universe is like an infinite domed cylinder with three storeys; the middle storey is inhabited by man, the top storey by God and non-human spirits and the bottom storey primarily by spirits of the dead. The picture, of course, is not as clear-cut as the above analysis would suggest because sometimes it is held that above the sky there live some preternatural creatures who are conceived as not altogether spiritual. Sometimes when there is the sound of rain in the sky and yet the rain does not reach the ground, people might say that rain had fallen for "those who live above." Chukwu (God), it is believed, lives above all creation. Again, spirits are not confined to space and time as humans are. Thus while below the earth *(ime ala)* is conceived as the abode of human spirits (that is, dead ancestors) and empty spaces, woods, water, sky, and above the sky are regarded as homes of non-human spirits, it is possible, and indeed easy, for spirits from one category to move to the other. So the Igbo cannot locate with absolute certainty the domicile of particular spirits. Spirits are everywhere and since they have the attributes of speed, ubiquity and elasticity, their abodes are conceived as hardly fixed. This conception of spirit is basic to the understanding of the mmọnwụ idea.

Igbo Religion and the Mmọnwụ Notion

The concept of mmọnwụ derives directly from the Igbo man's spirit-centred religion. It is the Igbo man's inherent belief in the

existence of spirits together with his conviction that these spirits can affect his well-being in this world and in the next that has disposed him to accept the poetic reality of mmọnwụ.

In Igbo religion there are two broad categories of spirits: (a) pure spirits, that is, spirits that have never had a human body; and (b) spirits of the dead. In the first category we have Chukwu, the creator, *onye dị ọkpụ na egede* (he who has been from the beginning). He is the maker of all things, the beginning and the end.

After Chukwu there is the group of spirits known as *chi*. Chi, in fact, is in the first order of spiritual beings, since Chukwu himself is the supreme chi, *Chi Ukwu*. Chi is a kind of guardian spirit and creative principle rolled into one. Each individual has a chi and so there are as many chi as there are individuals in the society.

The next group of non-human spirits in Igbo belief are the *arụsị* sometimes called *agbara* or *iyi*. They are numerous in Igbo society and include the following deities: Anyanwụ (sun), Igwe (sky) Amadịọha or Kamalụ (thunder), Ala (earth deity), Ogwugwu, Agwụ, Osimiri, Ụrasị, and every known body of water, in Igbo land.

After the arụsị come myriads of non-human spirits that live everywhere and anywhere in bushes, trees, caves, in the water, in the wind, in lonely places, in valleys and hills. These are the spirits that feature prominently in traditional tales. Sometimes they are indistinguishable from the spirits of the insignificant dead. Some of them are harmless while others are extremely malignant. There is, for example, *Anwụmmụọ* (polio spirit) which is pictured as a deformed spirit with one hand, one leg, etc., lurking in lonely places and causing harm, deformity or even death to erring children.

In this miscellaneous group of non-human spirits may be included those ambivalent spirits called *ọgbanje* who are born to die. Believed to have double consciousness – spiritual and human – they are referred to as *ndị otu* (members of a society) who hold regular spiritual meetings where they frolick and decree when those of them who are born into the world should return into the spirit world.

In the second category of spirits, that is, ancestral spirits, consisting generally of all the spirits of dead humans known metaphorically as *ndị nwụrụ anwụ* (those that are dead), a clear distinction is made between *ndioki* (hallowed dead ancestors) often referred to in petitions as *nnanna anyị ha* (our fore-fathers) or *ndị mbụ na ndị egede, ndi gboo* or *ndị ọkpụ* (the ancients) and

akaliogeri (the unhallowed dead) also referred to as *eferekenza*. This distinction is important for a clear picture of the land of the dead to emerge.

When any man or woman who has lived a responsible life in the community dies and receives full funeral rites he, it is believed, joins the community of dead ancestors. There is communion between the living and the dead ancestors, the living paying homage to the ancestors and the ancestors warding off evil from the living.

The *akaliogeri*, spirits of all those who were feckless, wicked, irresponsible or unmarried, on earth before they died, are believed to be flying about without a fixed abode. Said to be very malignant, nobody pays any homage to them but they usually receive placatory sacrifice to prevent them from harming people.

From the foregoing account a picture of spirit land *(ala mmụọ)* begins to emerge. It is an anthromorphous picture with spirits having similar institutions as humans do, the difference being that their institutions and processes are conceived as more perfect than human ones. It is this conceptual spirit world that provides mmọnwụ drama with its poetry and action.

Visual and Performing Arts

Material for the study of mmọnwụ drama is not only derived from Igbo philosophical and religious thought but also from Igbo oral arts. Igbo creation myths, oral tales, praise chants, *ilu* (proverbial literature), all constitute the raw material with which mmọnwụ poets create their dramatic works. In their creation myths the Igbo hold that from the beginning God has existed. At first he was alone in heaven but later created innumerable spirits who lived with him. Time passed. Later he created *ụwa* (the world), at first a mass of formless dust which in course of time compressed into firm earth. Then Chukwu caused water to cover the whole earth and later this water subsided and gathered in hollows, and wet earth appeared. God sent down spirits to take charge of his creations. Ala became the Earth Spirit, and Osimiri, the god of the seas; and then numerous spirits such as Ụrasị, Idemmiri, Njaba, Nkisi, Imo, Ezize, Ekure, and so on, came to take charge of the rivers and streams bearing their respective names.

Separating heaven, Chukwu's abode, from land is the sky under the guidance of the deity, Igwe, another of Chukwu's powerful spirits. From the start Igwe has been regarded as mightier than Ala, the earth deity. Thus he is also called Igwekaala (sky is greater than earth). In time he came to have his most celebrated shrine at Ụmụnọha. At first there was darkness everywhere and as usual God caused his powerful spirits to form luminaries and thus

were formed the sun *(anyanwụ)*, the moon *(ọnwa)*, and stars *(kpakpando)*. Of these luminaries Anyanwụ is male, Ọnwa is female and *ụmụ kpakpando* are the children. The powerful Anyanwụ rules during the day time while Ọnwa and her numerous children come out at night.

At first, the earth that appeared was unfirm just like a pot that was newly made but, with time, it solidifed. The chameleon was reputed to have said that the reason why he walked slowly was because he was created when the earth was soft. So he learnt to walk slowly lest he would break it. At first there was no life in *ụwa*. Eventually life first appeared in water and after, on land and then grew all species of plants and animals.

From such creation myths the mmọnwụ poets derive their picture of the intimate relationship between all the categories of spirits, human and non-human, good and evil, benevolent and malignant.

From traditional tales, stories in which human heroes adventure into the land of the dead and in which spirit characters court human maidens, tales in which human wisdom, human deceit and folly, human strength, diverse human idiosyncrasies, are projected through the character of different animals; from all these narrative sources the mmọnwụ dramatic poet creates the mmọnwụ atmosphere.

But perhaps more importantly, as will be seen later, mmọnwụ drama utilizes the rich tradition of Igbo praise poetry and the almost inexhaustible mine of Igbo aphorisms, anecdotes, proverbs, riddles and so on, in achieving its aesthetic purpose.

As Adedeji has pointed out, there is "a strong link between the fine arts and the drama. They both show a strong reflection on, and expression of, the culture linked closely by a belief system and a philosophy."[54] This is certainly true of the relationship between mmọnwụ drama and Igbo visual arts. The richness of Igbo culture is shown in several aspects of Igbo visual art which art, in turn, is reflected in the Igbo masking tradition.

The Igbo achievement in pictorial art is illustrated by the many murals that decorate walls of *mbari* temples, living rooms and meeting halls, and walls surrounding compounds. These murals often consist of highly stylized portraits of gods and goddesses, ancestral spirits, human beings and animals. Beautiful patterns cut on the skin, especially the *ichi* scarifications and the *nkị* marks, used to be unique art forms. A great contribution to art in Nigeria has, indeed, been made by the carvers and smiths of Ọka, Ụmụdioka, Nri and Nkwere. Equally important is the artistic achievement of the Akwete weavers.

Igbo artists also produce decorative pottery, terracotta, laterite and wooden sculptures as well as masks. The Igboukwu bronzes are perhaps the greatest artistic contribution which the Igbo have made to art. Before the Thurstan Shaw excavations that revealed the Igboukwu artistic treasures, no art critic dreamed that the Igbo had a great artistic past. The Ife and Benin bronzes were believed to be the earliest and finest examples of Nigerian sculpture. But with the discovery of Igboukwu bronzes the history of Nigerian art has perhaps drastically changed for it has virtually established that the Igboukwu sculptures were made early in the ninth century A.D. long before either Ife or Benin bronzes.

The Igboukwu finds could in fact be considered a microcosm of Igbo classical art because, as Northrup has said, they "showed evidence of metal working, weaving, and pottery making of unusual skill."[55] The finds included 110 major and 575 minor copper and bronze objects, two types of textiles; one of grass or leaf fibres, the other of cloth, and over 20,000 pieces of pottery.[56]

The skill employed in the execution of the Igboukwu art objects, and used today in the production of different types of works of art is employed in the costuming of the large number of mmọnwụ characters in the study area. Mmọnwụ art, indeed, belongs to the rich tradition of Igbo visual arts.

"Drama of any sort," says Roger D. Abrahams, "calls for the creation of a play world by the players, generally through the use of conventional symbolic objects— masks, costumes, a special area for playing — and conventional stylized actions."[57] And quoting Huizing, Adedeji holds the view that play begins when one steps out of real life into a temporary sphere of activity which has its own disposition, also that play becomes drama when the action is symbolic or when it implies some imagined element in a make-believe situation and it is intended to develop or improve social relations.[58]

The Igbo, like many other peoples the world over, stage different types of symbolic plays and these constitute elements of Igbo drama. Most of the plays had ritual beginnings but are now enacted and appreciated as symbolic actions that satisfy the aesthetic needs of the community. The funeral plays, for instance, while satisfying the aesthetic requirements of the participants — actors and spectators alike — dramatize the passage from human life into spiritual existence and in the final analysis symbolise the acceptance of the spirit of the departed into the spiritual community of his ancestors. Also, the impromptu plays staged

at births, naming ceremonies and marriages and the more elaborate ones enacted during initiations into cult and age-grade societies and at communal festivals like the *Ịla Ọsọ* of the Ozuakọli[59] have ritual basis.

Drama is, therefore, basic to Igbo life and has manifested itself in numerous masking traditions among which are the *ekpe*, the *ọkọnkọ*,[60] the *ebuebu*, the *Okorosha*,[61] the Owu, the *Keleke*, the *Ọkụmkpa*,[62] and so on, of the southern and north-eastern Igbo, and the various forms of mmụọ of the northern and western Igbo [63] and mmọnwụ of the central Igbo. To put mmọnwụ drama into perspective, it will be instructive to examine briefly two dramatic traditions in areas adjacent to the study area: the Okorosha drama of Ụmụọkpara village in Amụcha town and the Ojiọnụ and Mgbadike plays of Akọkwa. Okorosha is not regarded by its producers as mmọnwụ play, whereas Ojiọnụ and Mgbadike are seen as forms of mmụọ play by their performers though not so recognised by communities in the study area.

The Ụmụọkpara Okorosha performance is usually staged during the Christmas season, the normal time for rehearsals being between October and early December and the display usually lasting for four *izu* that is, four Igbo weeks.[64] This means that when it begins on an Nkwọ day as it usually does, the second, third and fourth performances would take place on subsequent Nkwọ days.

During the opening Okorosha performance, *Nwaọnyeọjọọ* (the ugly one) masks dramatize. About twelve actors masked variously as *Ebule* (the ram), *Aṭụrụ* (the sheep), *Iche* (the parrot), *Iwenaọnụma* (anger); *Nkịta* (the dog), and so on, display in the arena. An orchestra, comprising drummers beating *ekwe*, *nkwụ* and *ọgele*, and singers who constitute the chorus, plays music while costumed characters dance. *Iwenaọnụma* keeps order, and sees to it that enough room is made for the masks to perform. *Iche* and the other symbolically masked actors sing satirical songs and dance. The purpose is always to entertain the audience. The songs are usually learnt by the audience during the performance and they eventually become part of the oral poetic tradition of the community. The wooden masks are either face or head masks attached to thick woven cloths. The legs of the masked figures are covered with cloth. The masked actors also put on wornout shoes. They are generally costumed to look ridiculous.

The second performance which follows four days later features mainly *Nwaọnyeọma* (the beautiful one) masks. As their name implies they are beautifully wrought and they contrast greatly both in appearance and comportment with the *Nwaọnyeọjọọ*

masks that feature in the first display. During the second performance, however, a few Nwaonyeọjọọ masks dramatize. The costumed characters emerge from a shelter or costume house and come into the arena one at a time to play their respective parts.

There are two types of Nwaọnyeọma masks: Nwaisimkpirisi and Nwaonyeọma proper. Nwaisimkpirisi (the shortheaded one) has silk head-dress, casual shirt and shorts. Girdled round his waist and above the shorts are variously coloured pieces of cloth to imitate raffia straw, but the legs are not generally covered.

Nwaonyeọma proper is differentiated from Nwaisimkpirisi by a headmask *(mbunisi).* The mask usually represents the sculptured head of a prominent person in the society. On the occasion of the second display it is possible for about twenty masked figures symbolising dignity and pomp to participate in the drama.

During the third performance, the *Nwaisimkpirisi* display is usually repeated and on the fourth and final session a summary performance of the season's show is given. The purpose is to give all those who might have missed previous performances the opportunity to see the year's performance and to make it easy for all to learn once and for all the current *okorosha* songs which would then form part of the community's poetic heritage.[65]

The okorosha players and their spectators regard what is being enacted as a drama in which human actors impersonate allegorical characters by means of symbolic masks and costumes. The masked actors are not presumed to be sacred. If *okorosha* were to be staged in those communities that regard every masked performance as mmọnwụ, it would of course be knonw as *mmọnwụ okorosha* but this ambiguity does not arise in the Ụmụọkpara Okorosha tradition. In the societies that regard every mask as mmọnwụ there are penalties, usually severe, for offences generally termed *itikwo isi mmọnwụ* literally "breaking *mmọnwụ* head", offences that range from openly saying or doing something that would amount to a revelation that mmọnwụ is human to assaulting an mmọnwụ character.

An examination of the Ọjiọnụ and Mgbadike plays of Akọkwa in Ọlụ would illustrate the drama of the communities that regard all mask plays as mmọnwụ. Ọjiọnụ and Mgbadike, regarded by the people as spiritual characters, are believed to be "the spirits of ancestors who come from ant-hills."[66] As in the mmọnwụ tradition under study, members are initiated into the dramatic society and non-initiates are known as ogbodi.

Ọjiọnụ and Mgbadike, together with such other dance dramas as Ụlaga, Egwuagụ, Ọgbamgbada, Ọkpọka, Atụ, Agụ, Oluku, and so on, despite the fact that some people call them "mmọnwụ"

or "mmụọ", are regarded by the people of the mmọnwụ area by our definition of the word, as non-mmọnwụ dramas. They group them together with okorosha, keleke and others, as *egwuregwu eworewo* and therefore not mystic. They regard them as part of the tradition of plays the communities in the mmọnwụ area claim to have had before mmọnwụ was created. Included in the dramatic displays exising before the advent of mmọnwụ is Ayaka which a respondent describes as masked forms "made and dramatized by man."[67]

It would appear that from the earliest times the Igbo have believed that masked figures could represent whatever people wished to personify — animals, emotions, ideas and spirits. In effect, all masked figures were regraded as some kind of spirit, the type of mask notwithstanding. But during a period of scepticism some types of masks were discredited especially by the "core" Igbo. The result is that while in some parts of Igboland people still regarded the original masked figures as spirits, in the mmọnwụ area proper such figures with wooden faces and other animal and human forms were despiritualized as the new tradition of mmọnwụ developed at Ọzụbụlụ.

It can therefore be said that the mmọnwụ tradition under study is broadly related to all the other forms of Igbo drama in which masked figures claim to be spirits. Despite what mmọnwụ players think of such other traditions, their performers regard them as forms of spirit drama. Indeed, mmọnwụ has sprung up from the same masking tradition as other Igbo masked performances and is therefore related in principle to (a) the Ayaka, Ajịkwụ, Ijere,[68] etc., of such communities as Ọba, Ọka, and others that border the study area to the north; (b) the Ọwụ and related masks of Owere, Ikwere and Opobo areas to its south; (c) the Keleke, Okorosha, Ekpe, Ọkọnkọ, Ọkụmkpa, Isiji[69] and Okereke Mkpa[70] traditions existing in places like Ụmụọwa, Aba, Afikpo, Arọchukwu, Mbaise and others that lie to the east and northeast of the area under investigation; and (d) the non-Igbo masking traditions such as the Yoruba egungun and the Urhobo Ojowu,[71] to its west. They are all related in their basic claim to spirituality but mmọnwụ, as known in the study area has a unique history as will be seen in the next chapter, and other peculiar features as are discussed in subsequent chapters.

Notes:

1 Paul McPharlin, "Mask", *Encyclopedia Americana,* Vol. XV111, New York, Americana Corporation, 1963, p. 378.

2 Ruth Finnegan, *Oral Literature in Africa,* Oxford Library of African Literature, London, O.U.P., 1970, p. 500.

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2

THE HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE MMỌNWỤ IDEA

The mmọnwụ tradition under investigation, also known as *Nwaezenogwu*[1] mask play, is believed to have started developing out of the general Igbo masking tradition by the beginning of the nineteenth century at Egbema Ọzụbụlụ and phenomenally expanded between 1900 and 1920. Although it would be difficult to give the precise date of its birth, from information derived both from completed questionnaires and from oral interviews, it is apparent that it started before the middle of the nineteenth century when the oracular deity of Arọchukwu was at the height of his power.

It has been established that there was a time when there was no mmọnwụ in the society and all respondents appear to agree that mmọnwụ started in Ọzụbụlụ. Pius Obi, for example, informs us that "an Arọchukwu immigrant whose home can still be traced and whose descendants are still alive" originated it in the nineteenth century. And as has been shown above,[2] Udeze has said that before the introduction of mmọnwụ in his community they had *ayaka* masks.

It would appear that ayaka was the generally accepted form of mmụọ play in most parts of central Igbo including the study area before the emergence of the nwaezenogwu tradition. There are some communities north-west of the study area, for example, Ọba, Ojoto, etc., where ayaka is known as mmụọ agwọ̀[3] (raffia-strawed mask) and is today venerated as spirit. Indeed, when the early missionaries described mmụọ as an obstacle to their missionary endeavours in the central Igbo area, they had in mind ayaka. For example, the following observation made by Basden is a rather quaint analysis of the ayaka tradition:

> There is a great deal of alleged intercourse with the spirit-world, and the custom of making maw (ju–ju) is an almost daily affair .. This making ju–ju has no religious significance; it is held to be a visitation of the spirits of the dead to their late familiar haunts [4].

It could therefore be concluded that, first, there was ayaka, and then mmọnwụ emerged, and that for a time both co-existed

uneasily in the study area until the former gradually disappeared from the area while still existing in other areas where the latter had not yet penetrated. Thus, where ayaka today exists exclusively it is regarded as spirit but where it has been ousted by mmọnwụ, it is described as we have already seen, as masked figure "made and dramatized by man".

Regarding the account of the origin of the nwaezenogwu mmọnwụ tradition, it should be borne in mind that in most of the communities surveyed some of the people who formed the initial mmọnwụ dramatic groups are still active today and could therefore supply eye-witness accounts of the establishment of mmọnwụ in their society. Furthermore, each dramatic group surveyed has tended to trace the origin of its mmọnwụ directly or indirectly to Ọzụbụlụ.

From oral testimonies given by Chief Umeamaagba of Ụkpọ, Chief F.O.C. Olikagụ of Liilu, Bernard Chikwendụ of Ihiala and other respondents, it would appear that the date of the founding of the Nwaezenogwu tradition was in the early 19th century. Chief Olikagụ estimates the date of the establishment in his town, Liilu, of the first mmọnwụ theatre, that is, Ezejiọfọ's ekwuru, to be about the 1870s. He arrived at this estimation by reasoning thus: his grandfather who died before the outbreak of the Influenza (1918) brought mmọnwụ from Ụkpọ when he was about forty years old and he died at a ripe age of about 80. This means he got mmọnwụ to Liilu forty years before the Influenza, that was, in the 1870s.

Umeamaagba's estimation of the date of the establishment of mmọnwụ in Ụkpọ agrees in general with Chief Olikagụ's account. He testified that by the time they learnt the mmọnwụ process from Ọzụbụlụ there were no white people in their midst though vague stories of their presence either along the coasts of the *mmiri nnụ* (seas) or along the banks of *mmiri osimiri* (the Niger), circulated; and as is well known, European explorers came in contact with the Igbo as from the 1830s. And, a respondent from Ọzụbụlụ, after a thorough investigation of the Ọkonkwọ Ogbuchi lineage (Okonkwọ Ogbuchi is the reputed founder of mmọnwụ) in Egbema Ọzụbụlụ, came to the conclusion that the Nwaezenogwu tradition was created either late in the eighteenth century or early in the nineteenth. He based his calculation among other factors on the feast of *Mgburi* or *Asara* which in Ọzụbụlụ comes every sixteenth year.

Another important circumstantial evidence for the assumption that mmọnwụ started in the early nineteenth century is the date of the founding of Arọchukwu, estimated to be in the seventeenth

century[5] and the growth of the influence of the Chukwu oracle or Ibritam believed to be in mid-eighteenth century. If the concept of Nwaezenogwu was inspired by the Ibinukpabi, as is generally held, then it is reasonable to conclude that mmọnwụ might have grown either in the late eighteenth century or the early nineteenth century. Thus all evidence points to the fact that it was established before 1840, the estimated date given by a respondent, Pius Obi.

The Egbema Ọzụbụlụ Origin of Mmọnwụ

From all available information three theories regarding the origin of mmọnwụ have emerged. The first is that mmọnwụ is of non-Igbo origin, and was borrowed either from the Igala or the Yoruba and through Asaba came into the central Igbo, thus its names – nkapịa (nkakwụ)[6] Igara and egwugwu. The second theory which is widely held and generally accepted as the true account of the origin of mmọnwụ is that nwaezenogwu tradition is a cultish invention of the Aro elements in Ọzụbụlụ, aided by powerful dibịa (medicine men) from among the indigenous population. The third point of view which is a variant of the second, is that the Aro had nothing to do with the creation of mmọnwụ. Those who hold this third view argue that mmọnwụ was an attempt by the non-Aro Igbo to establish an institution analogous in some ways to the *Chukwu* of the Aro.

In spite of these differing view-points, all evidence indicates, as has already been stated, that mmọnwụ theatrical art as today practised in the area under study was first developed in Ọzụbụlụ. There also appears to be a definite link between the growth of mmọnwụ and the Arọchukwu oracle whether as a substitute or a supplement. The original mmọnwụ concept was, in a sense, an attempt to bring nearer to the people of central Igbo the psychological, judicial and religious benefits derived from *ije Chukwu* (going to Chukwu oracle).

There is a legend that the first mmọnwụ appeared in a dream to an Ụmụchukwu (Aro) man named Okonkwọ Ogbuchi who was instructed on what to do to make the spirit manifest himself in the form of a masked figure. Ogbuchi, who lived in Egbema Ọzụbụlụ, got together some renowned medicine men and initiated them into his secret knowledge thus forming the first *ekwuru* (house of wisdom). From this *ekwuru* emerged the first mmọnwụ called Igbokwe who is reputed to be the father of all mmọnwụ. From the start he was said to be very powerful and the initial members of the ekwuru were famous medicine men who performed miraculous feats. They were, in effect, the first disciples of mmọnwụ and were called *ụmụnkwụ, ọsụkwụ* or *adụkwụ*. This

name applied to all initiated into the mmọnwụ group.

In his ekwuru, Igookwe had *ọda*, a ritual earthen platform, from where he spoke prophetically and with authority. According to an informant, "whatever he said must come to pass. There was a little element of *dibia afa* (divination) in it. He could tell about the future and the past."[7]

Soon the idea of family household[8] was introduced into the organisation of mmọnwụ and a theory of spirit procreation was posited whereby a spirit could beget another spirit by a process of self-projection. Thus Igbokwe was said to have begot such other masks as Ebuzọeme, Ụdụmnaehi and others, all of Ọzụbụlụ.

Predictably, the Igbo social institution of marriage was applied to mmọnwụ theory. The expression "*ịlụ* mmọnwụ" (to "marry" mmọnwụ) was introduced and it has since come to mean the process of establishing a new mmọnwụ theatre and this involves the acquiring, by a new group, of the knowledge of the theory and practice of mmọnwụ art from an already established mmọnwụ theatre. If therefore a group wants to introduce mmọnwụ drama in its community it would go to an existing ekwuru and "marry" one of the mmọnwụ characters. After all the ceremonies the group would go home with the newly acquired mask and establish him in his own *ekwuru*. What this means is that no new *ekwuru*, that is to say, no new mmọnwụ dramatic group could be established without its getting legitimacy from an already recognized *ekwuru*, otherwise it would be declared *egbengwu*, a mask that may have all the trappings of mmọnwụ but is regarded not as a spirit but as a masked human being. It is as much the procreative idea as the uniformity of costuming technique which distinguishes this Ọzụbụlụ tradition of mmọnwụ from other masking traditions of Igbo land.

The origin of mmọnwụ in Ọzụbụlụ now appears rather hazy owing to the shattering influence of Christianity. Ọzụbụlụ was one of the earliest outposts of both the Anglican (C.M.S.) and Catholic missions in Igboland. Commenting on the Protestant and Catholic struggle for supremacy in Ọzụbụlụ, Ekechi has succinctly remarked that both missions deemed the station "an excellent base from which an aggressive war could be launched against the citadel of Satan.[9] The missionaries regarded the mmọnwụ tradition as one of the corner-stones of the so-called "citadel". Even Archdeacon Dennis, whose contribution to the development of standard Igbo can hardly be surpassed, declared in a letter to his father in 1895, "I cannot help regarding the "Mo" as a very great hindrance to our work here."[10] The theme of cultural confli[illegible] which has been explored by many African writers [illegible]

been sparked off by the early contact between Igbo culture and the Christian doctrinal way of life. The conflict between mmọnwụ and the Christian Church has been well articulated by Father Arazu:

> The relationship between mmọnwụ and the Church has not been friendly. The institutions have always viewed each other as mortal enemies. Candidates for Baptism have had to renounce mmọnwụ initiation in a lot of places. Initiated Christians have been denied the Sacraments till they showed signs of renouncing their membership of the forbidden society.[11]

There is little doubt that the mmọnwụ-church conflict arose from the narrow-minded preachings of the early missionaries (who often misunderstood the social and dramatic role played by mmọnwụ) and the blind and fanatical enthusiasm of their converts (who came to see themselves innocently, even if naively, as waging war against a so called Ṣatan and his ways). The Church's condemnation of what they have called mmọnwụ's "devilish actions" including, as we have already seen, "sacrifices to idols before big shows" and "the idea of spirits being believed to be incarnated in the mask"[12] shows that the missionaries did not understand the mythic, social and artistic significance of mmọnwụ. The main point however is that the early missionary activities in Ọzụbụlụ did a lot to alter the direction of mmọnwụ development even at its source. The situation is such that today some groups who originally derived their mmọnwụ from Ọzụbụlụ are reluctant to admit the fact. Pius Obi, an important member of Ekwuru Ikezulagụ of Ihembọsị says, for example, that although they derived their mmọnwụ from Ọzụbụlụ, from Ekwuru Okpubeigwe of Egbema, they "are not proud to locate actual ekwuru at Ọzụbụlụ because the Ọzụbụlụ people (some) have deviated seriously from the norms of mmọnwụ." The fact is, however, that before missionary activities in Ọzụbụlụ, the nwaezenogwu tradition had not only been firmly established in Ọzụbụlụ but had also been transplanted into neighbouring communities.

The question could be asked why the nwaezenogwu tradition of mmọnwụ rose in Ọzụbụlụ at the time it did and in no other place. Such a question, of course, is a hypothetical one that can hardly be satisfactorily answered, for it is often not easy to say with certainty why particular inventions are made at particular times. However, Ọzụbụlụ was centrally placed for the spread of new ideas and movements in the central Igboland and the people appeared to have had great capacity for myth-making. For, not only did the customs and practices of Ọzụbụlụ seem "to reflect those of the Igbo interior"[13] as Shanahan had said but, also the [illegible] experiment with new ideas, as was reflec-

ted in their interactions with the christian missions in the area. These conditions probably prevailed in the late eighteenth or early nineteenth century when Okonkwọ Ogbuchi introduced the mmọnwụ idea. Ọzụbụlụ sages and divines instead of stifling the idea helped to encourage and disseminate it.

One of the factors that enabled the mmọnwụ idea to grow in Ọzụbụlụ was the prevalence of divination practices in the area. There were many well-known *dibịa afa* (diviners) in Ọzụbụlụ and clients from far and near came to consult them. As has been made clear in a testimony privately communicated to me, the original mmọnwụ mystique was formulated by Ogbuchi and a group of diviners. In Ọzụbụlụ, as in most towns in the central Igbo, two forms of divination *(afa)* are practised:

(1) the *ịkpụkpara* based on the principle of the sixteen configurations of *mkpụrụ afa* (afa seeds), namely, *ọgbì, àkwụ, ọgòrì, ọdì, ụluhì, ọgalì, ọbàrà, ọkai, ịjite, ọ̀sa, àkà, àtọkpà, ètule, èté, ọse, ọfụ;* and

(2) *okwe* based on the principle of direct vision. Diviners using the ọ̀kwè method may gaze into a mirror and then tell their clients what has happened or will happen to them. Mmọnwụ invariably has the attributes of a diviner.

The concept of the oracle perhaps more than any other factor contributed to the creation of the mmọnwụ concept. The Igbo had many oracles including Kamalụ of Ọzụzụ, Agbala of Ọka, Igwekaala of Ụmụnneọha and, most importantly, the Chukwu of Arọchukwu. By the time of the rise of mmọnwụ the influence of the Chukwu oracle was widely felt in eastern Nigeria. James Schön has remarked this in his journal written in 1842 when he states:

> there is a certain place or town in the Ibo country in which Tshuku dwells, and where he delivers his oracles and answers enquiries. Any matter of importance is left to his decision, and people travel to the place from every part of the country – Tshukwu cannot be seen by any human eye: his voice is heard from the ground.[14]

Schön goes on to catalogue the legends he heard of the oracle such as the belief that water miraculously surrounded an enquirer who went to Chukwu, that Chukwu spoke every language on earth, made known thieves and revealed fraudulent enquirers, and concludes that the Igbo and their neighbours "sincerely believe all these things, and many others, respecting Tshukwu, and obey his orders implicitly."[15]

Ahanotu has rightly pointed out the importance of the Arọ Oracle in the history of Igbo religion. For, by promulgating the idea that Chukwu participated directly in the affairs of men, the Arọ not only revolutionized Igbo religion, using it for econo-

mic gains,[16] but also Igbo drama, by inspiring such people as Okonkwọ Ogbuchi who originated mmọnwụ. Okonkwọ Ogbuchi being an Arọ resident in Ọzụbụlụ was probably a local agent of the Oracle. His experiences as liaison between the Arọ priests and the local people might have inspired him with the idea of creating an institution somehow complementary to the Chukwu oracle for there were no known conflicts between the mmọnwụ tradition and the Chukwu of the Arọ. Indeed, theoretically, mmọnwụ as one of the numerous spirits inhabiting the universe would be seen as subject to Chukwu. However, like the *afa* priests and the Chukwu Oracle, mmọnwụ characters reportedly speak oracularly revealing what happened in the past and foretelling what will happen in the future.

What, however, seems to have given definite form to the mmọnwụ idea was the belief which Ọzụbụlụ people shared with all Igbo that spirits, whether human or non-human, could manifest themselves physically, that is, the belief in the possibility of spirits taking material forms. This involves a kind of epiphany in which a spirit could assume animal, vegetable or mineral form. The physical manifestation was not restricted to pure or non-human spirits (for example, the god Ụrasị assuming the form of a rich titled man), but also applied to spirits of dead humans. All spirits, therefore, could assume human forms or the form of anything whatsoever. Also, human spirits could assume their original form.

At times it was believed that the spirits of living human beings had the power to assume other forms. Some people were reputed to have the gift of turning themselves into leopards. The belief in these manifestations was so widespread that some hunters were said to have shot animals that turned out to be assumed forms of their relations. This belief in the ability of the spirit to assume whatever form it pleases might indeed have enabled Ogbuchi and his fellow artists to create spirits out of masks. Thus masks came to be regarded as not merely symbols but real and sacred manifestations of spirits.

To sustain their spiritual image, masks were known to perform miracles. To do this the masks depended on the collective wisdom of the medicine men who abounded in Igbo society before the introduction of Christianity. These dibịa prepared what Arinze has described as "charms" or "medicines," known in Igbo as ọgwụ (medicine). An ọgwụ could be an object or a formula believed to be capable of either preserving a protagonist from evil or inflicting harm on an adversary through "some mysterious, immanent and unconscious power".[17] Mmọnwụ

dramaturgists would not, of course, admit the use of ọgwụ since it would conflict with the claim of spirituality. *Mmụọ ka ọgwụ*, that is, a spirit is mightier than medicine, and therefore it would look incongruous for a being reputedly omnipotent to resort to charms.

Mmọnwụ however could not have developed fully as drama had its originators not enmeshed it in the Igbo tradition of the dance and the dance drama, that is, in the Igbo tradition of exhibitive shows which usually feature in different forms of celebrations and festivals, in worship and war and in rites of passage — birth, initiation and burial. Ọzụbụlụ people, like all other central Igbo people, had group dances which tended to be spontaneous, featuring the clapping of hands and rhythmic movements of the body or the beating of instruments such as the xylophone, the *ekwe*, the *nkwa* and the *ogene*. They had also more elaborate dances like *ịgbakwụ, atịlogụ, egwuobi* and *ðsðji* which involved complex orchestration and intricate choreography.

These dances later developed into dance drama, the main difference between them being that dance drama involves a *mythos* or a fable. This means that human actors impersonate characters who perform roles in the play. Mmọnwụ drama emerged when the spirit characters first created by Okonkwọ Ogbuchi and his group became actors in a communal play. Mmọnwụ is therefore a form of Igbo dance drama but it has acquired its unique dramatic canon which differentiates it from all other forms of Igbo drama.

Mmọnwụ as distinct from other forms of mask drama

In all forms of Igbo mask drama masked figures impersonate characters who perform different roles in the play. The principal role of character in any Igbo mask drama consists in his representing a mythic or imagined figure rather than a real person or animal. In other words the character achieves artistic distance, being removed from the actuality of daily life. In a non-dramatic dance the dancers, chanters and musicians are actual Okeke and Okorie, Mgbafọ and Mgbọkwọ, who are known to the spectators and who are performing in their personal capacities and exhibiting their individual skills, but in the mask drama some or all of the performers are actors impersonating fictive characters. They are dancing, chanting praise verses, and displaying other skills, not in their personal capacity, but in the role of their assumed characters.

Performers in a mask drama, needless to say, transform themselves into the assumed characters by means of the mask,

although costuming could be used as well. For example in the Egbeluọba dance drama, the dancers impersonate the warriors of Iduunaọba who were so called.[18] Although Egbeluọba players do not wear masks, their costumes, which consist of heavy helmets of tall feathers held together with cowries, short skirts of multi-coloured cloth and rattling anklets; their make-up involving the painting of the face half black and half white; and their props consisting of dane guns and sheathed *obejiri* (swords), are enough to transform the actors into the warrior characters of the play and thus achieve the illusion of reality.

While costuming may enable an actor to impersonate a human character, it is only masking that could enable him to impersonate satisfactorily any being — animal, human or spirit. It would, indeed look unconvincing to see an actor crouching on a stage in imitation of a leopard but with the aid of masking it would be easy to achieve the illusion of a real leopard. In Igbo drama where characters are generally personified ideas, forces and spirits, depicted in abstract or animal forms, the heavy reliance on masking is therefore understandable and consequently there is a variety of masks depicting a variety of dramatic forms.

The main difference between mmọnwụ and other forms of masking in Igboland is that in the latter, fictional characters are often symbolic of abstract ideas relating to human values such as poverty, beauty, richness or ideas relating to family life, marriage, childhood, youth and old age; but in the former, masks are presumed to be spirits from the land of the dead. Thus, in such dramas as *Agụ* (leopard), *Enyi* (Elephant), *Ele* (Antelope), *Atụ* (Bushcow) *Ebule* (Ram), actors are masked to impersonate these animals and in such dramas there is a *mythos* expressed in the character of the assumed animal figure: the leopard symbolising terror, the elephant strength, the antelope and the bushcow beauty and grace and the ram truculence. In this form of drama the audience is entertained mainly by the spectacle provided, since no specific fable is usually enacted though there may be rudimentary miming.

Often in such a drama, there may be a plot and elaborate characterization, the plot being generalised rather than specific and the masks telling much of the story of the drama. For example, in the play Onyeriabaradịmma (Who-ails-and-looks-well) the story is told by two sets of masks who depict health and sickness respectively. In the first Act two beautiful masks, one male and the other female, appear severally on the stage and then meet to mime the act of courtship and marriage. In the second Act, illness sets in and the once good-looking couple are dis-

figured. Two hideous masks replace the beautiful ones and dance a sickly dance to the repeated rhythm of the following song played instrumentally:

(Who ails and looks well
Kwom kwom kwo dim
Who ails and looks well
Kwom kwom kwo dim [19]

In another play called Awụka, or sometimes Oluku,[20] unmasked players beat the rhythmic udu music and chant admonitory verses while the masked characters dance. The chief masked characters, Ogbuehi, is the lead chanter and he sketches the plot of the play in his chants.

The story of Awụka is well-known in the communities where the drama is performed. It is the story of a wealthy man who is desirous to have a worthy son to succeed him when he dies; but who fails, his only son, Ọgbanokọrọbịa, being a fool and his other children daughters. Ogbuehi relates these facts through akwaariri (laments) but he also consoles himself by recalling that there are people more afflicted than himself. He recounts, for example, the story of Osungwu, a rich man like himself who lost his only son. Despite its elaborate masking technique, its characterization and its fable, Awụka, a performance now regarded as an Igbo classic, is not regarded as mmọnwụ by the communities in the study area.

The main features that distinguish the tradition of mmọnwụ under investigation from other masking traditions like Awụka are as follows:

(a) *The Unity of Mmọnwụ:* This means not only that all mmọnwụ personae derive from the same ancestor, Igbokwe of Egbema Ọzụbụlụ, but also that all mmọnwụ theatres have a similar mode of dramatic performance, share the same mythic and poetic heritage and therefore have the same dramatic conventions so that any mmọnwụ player or character from one theatre will be perfectly at home in another theatre.

(b) *The Sacredness of Mmọnwụ:* Mmọnwụ is sacred and holy in the original Old Testament sense of the word, that is, unapproachable, and therefore the mmọnwụ figure cannot be touched by any human being. This is not surprising since mmọnwụ is conceived as a concretization of the spirit and while other masking practices are seen as human modes of symbolic expression, mmọnwụ is conceived as a mystic emanation of the

spirit, an epiphany or a transubstantiation. Since traditionally the Igbo believe in the spirituality of all existence, it was not very difficult to create and disseminate the idea that a masked figure could be a spirit since a spirit could assume any form. As we have seen, the world of the Igbo is a world of spirits so that in traditional tales and religious myths spirits intrude at will into human existence. The idea of mmọnwụ could therefore be easily accommodated in Igbo thought and having accepted the idea of mmọnwụ being spirits and believing that spirits are known to have immense power over humans, it was logical for mmọnwụ figures to inspire fear, awe and respect in the population a majority of which still believed that their dead ancestors could cause or avert suffering and death.

The sacredness of mmọnwụ derives from the Igbo vision of the land of the dead, a vision that is not merely religious but philosophical and artistic as well. Even those Igbo who have no religious faith in spirits have a mental picture of the existence of spirits. A religious sceptic may not believe in the reality of these spirits (there is, in fact, an Igbo proverb which specifically says that behind a talking bush lurks a human being — *ọhịa na-ekwu okwu mmadụ nọ ya n'ime*) and yet such a sceptic envisions the land of the dead and of spirits generally. This ontological and cosmological view conditions the Igbo concept of life and this concept of spirit has a striking resemblance to the Christian idea of the next world and is in its particulars Platonic. Mmọnwụ is imagined as emerging from and returning to this world of the spirits, hence his sacredness. He is addressed in terms reserved for a deity and is praised as omniscient, omnipresent, all-powerful, the confounder of the sceptic, etc.

(c) *The unique masking technique:* Another characteristic aspect of mmọnwụ drama that distinguishes it from other forms of mask displays among the Igbo is the way mmọnwụ figures are costumed. While other masked actors are costumed mainly in cloth (though some of them wear short raffia skirts), and put on wooden masks that depict animal or human features, mmọnwụ is mainly in raffia straw and is adorned with a head-piece that has no animal or human association. But not all masks that are costumed in raffia and cloth and have no wooden head-piece are universally regarded as mmọnwụ. Ayaka, for example, has no wooden head-piece and is costumed in raffia straw and yet is not regarded as mmọnwụ in the study area, as we have seen, because he and masks like him are outside the Ọzụbụlụ mmọnwụ complex, not being descended from Igbokwe of Egbema Ọzụbụlụ.

Generally speaking, mmọnwụ is elegantly but abstractly

made in such a way as to symbolise a spirit and inspire awe. There is an underlying uniformity in the creation of mmọnwụ figures, though each mask has his own individual expression.

The Early Twentieth Century Expansion

At first mmọnwụ was in the form of an ark, a symbolic spirit in a long basket, a spirit that had a voice but was not generally seen or exhibited, a type of portable oracle that had no dramatic role. Today this tradition of mmọnwụ may be said to be represented by Ọjiọnụ of Ụkpọ – a voice that is never seen by the general public. Ọjiọnụ, reputed to cause leprosy, blindness or instant death if beheld by an unauthorised person, usually comes out at night, for he never sees light. Before he "visits the earth" people would be warned to keep inside their houses and put out all lights. At the sound of his awful voice all humans would scurry into the shelter of their homes and a total blackout would descend on the whole vicinity.[20] The function of this early type of mmọnwụ was primarily for social control and for mental and physical health through divination.

By the later part of the nineteenth century the ark-like symbols started to acquire masked forms more or less ugly in shape and soon there followed a masking revolution in the area under study. Mmọnwụ figures, as we know them today, then appeared – graceful, dignified and awe-inspiring. Before this revolution there were few mmọnwụ characters because the tradition had not yet spread far and wide and so the change in the art of costuming was not overwhelming. The early masks therefore either descended into *ọhaudide* (udide land)[21] and reappeared with new forms or remained as they were with their old identity as in the case of Ọjiọnụ of Ụkpọ.

By 1880s and 1890s the Ọzụbụlụ tradition of mmọnwụ became fully established and all the neighbouring towns and villages had acquired or started to acquire their individual theatres either from Ọzụbụlụ or from other theatres that were originally derived directly from Ọzụbụlụ. Moreover, already by this time some villages in Ụkpọ and Liilu had established their own playhouses based on the Igbokwe tradition,[22] for example, Ebuzọeme and Ụdụmnaehi both descendants of Igbokwe of Ọzụbụlụ had established their own offspring, Ọjiọnụ and Ezeokpube, in their ekwuru at Ụmụmbọsi Ụkpọ and Ụmụahaba Ụkpọ respectively. Similarly, Ikezuluagụ of Ihembọsi had been "married" from the theatre of Ezeokpubeigwe of Ẹgbema Ọzụbụlụ, Okpubeigwe himself being one of the offspring of Igbokwe, the first mmonwu.

In the early 1900s mmọnwụ theatres proliferated throughout central Igbo. New groups were initiated into the tradition by already established ones of their choice. For example, in about 1904[23] some 32 young men from Amaọkpara village in Ihitenansa formed a dramatic group and went to Liilu "to marry mmọnwụ" from Ezejiọfọ's ekwuru. Thus Ezejiọfọ became the progenitor of their mmọnwụ whom they called Ezekwereobi, while Ezejiọfọ himself was descended from Ezeokpube of Ụmụahaba Ụkpọ who in turn was the offspring of Ụdụmnaehi a descendant of Igbokwe the first mmọnwụ. The idea of mmọnwụ spread very fast and by the 1920s mmọnwụ theatres had spread to nearly all the communities performing mmọnwụ plays today. However, new groups could and are still being formed, for example, in 1968, because of some internal conflict some members of Mbanude theatre of Ogum Ihitenansa broke away from the rest and established a new ekwuru called Ekwuru Igbojekwe.[24] They "married" Igbojekwe from Ezenagụ of Ụmụabịam who is descended from Ezekwereobi of Amaọkpara, offspring of Ezejiọfọ of Liilu who is descended from Ezeokpube of Ụkpọ, a descendant of Ụdụmnaehi of Egbema Ozụbụlụ, offspring of the first mmọnwụ, Igbokwe. Also in Ogum, in 1970, there was another split in an existing drama group and one of the factions acquired their ekwuru called Ekwuru Ụdụmnaehi from Igbojekwe Theatre of Ogum established, as mentioned above in 1968. This shows that the process of establishing new ekwuru continues all over the mmọnwụ area.

As the early mmọnwụ groups continued to grow and develop, the oracular, ritual and judicial functions of mmọnwụ lost ground to the purely dramatic and therefore aesthetic forms of the genre. In other words, the poetic forms of the tradition grew and developed as its divinational role decreased. People started to appreciate mmọnwụ drama with more aesthetic detachment and although the central mystery remained, mmọnwụ became increasingly viewed as an illusion of reality which has developed from an accepted myth of human existence.

Thus from small beginnings mmọnwụ has now grown into a complex dramatic institution which has defied all the attempts made by early missionaries and their converts to destroy it. To be a member of an mmọnwụ dramatic group was regarded by Christian authorities as one of the sins against the First Commandment of God, yet in spite of this initial conflict the mmọnwụ tradition is still growing and developing without destroying its central myth which holds it together. In fact everybody in Igbo society now appears to be aware of the cultural significance of

ınwụ and many who are critical of certain aspects of the nization are indeed desirous that the "good in it should be erved for posterity and for the furtherance of Igbo culture"[25] as been said with some justification that mmọnwụ is among very few Igbo cultural traditions that have not been comple eroded by the Igbo man's mania for modernity[26] and that it endured because of the sustained interest it has been genera as poetic drama.

e Development of Mmọnwụ Poetic Theory

has been pointed out earlier, Ruth Finnegan and Ulli Beier ve raised doubts as to whether indigenous African plays could regarded as drama. Although Oyin Ogunba and others have aintained that African plays could be seen as a tradition of ama with its own type of plot and stage, [27] M.J.C. Echeruo as e have already remarked, has once more questioned the legiti- ıacy of regarding African indigenous performance as real ırama[28] and, indeed, has asked for the re-examination of the use of the word "drama" in describing communal African plays like the *Ekine* and *Odo*. As far as mmọnwụ is concerned, however, it would appear to us demonstrably an indigenous form of Igbo drama, differing from the Western tradition in its artistic manipulation of myth and plot and its theatrical design of stage and costume. Thus the approach to the critical study of mmọnwụ, and indeed of African indigenous drama generally, should be largely descriptive rather than prescriptive. We can only attempt to analyse the different characteristics of both traditions but not conclude that one is developed while the other is not. The mmọnwụ tradition of drama, like the Western form of drama, is fully developed in its own context, and as it has grown in a different environment and for a different society it would not be expected to be similar to Western drama.

Yet, Echeruo's tentative conclusion that real drama is yet to emerge from African traditions of drama because, as it appears to him, African societies have allowed their dramas to be bogged down by ritual, is of great relevance to the study of African oral plays as it is crucial to the continued existence of indigenous drama in a fast changing African world. His statement follows from his theory that "drama flourishes best in a community which has satisfactorily transformed ritual into celebration and converted the mythic structure of action from the religious and priestly to the secular plane."[29] His argument is that a distinction ought to be made between festival (that is, the ritual aspects of festival), and drama. But the question arises; on what basis is this distinc-

made; on the basis of the "elaboration of action" by
ival or drama, which Echeruo appears to favour, or on
of external "dramatic" characteristics shared by both,
eems to reject, or by some other criteria?

uo's argument that the distinction between festival and
uld best be based on their "elaboration of action,
r not this action is supported with dialogue (as distinct
ech)[30] would seem to apply more to the European,
n to the African tradition of drama because the concept
n" in both traditions differs significantly. But before
further the meaning of action as it applies to African
ne might well point out that the statement "whether or
ction is supported with dialogue" tends to raise a funda-
roblem of analysis. Does it mean that dialogue is irrele-
he elaboration of action? If so, then, once there is action,
is not very necessary and therefore mime could qualify
, and if mime is drama then many African plays which are
re dramas. If one accepts this interpretation, there is still
lem of explaining the phrase in parenthesis — "as distinct
eech" — for, if dialogue is irrelevant to drama one would
speech also to be; that once there is plot, whether it is
d by speech or dialogue is immaterial. However, if the
nt means that elaboration of action presupposes action
d with dialogue as opposed to one supported with speech,
the former is drama while the latter is festival, then mime
ny African forms of drama which are mimed would hardly
s drama even though some of them involve action.

impression one gets is that Echeruo restricts the meaning
to the enactment of a specific story or fable and not to
resentation or expression of a general situation or
al myth, for herein lies the difference between African
us drama as we know it today and Western drama. If we
mmọnwụ, for example, we notice that its action is based
eneral myth of man's interaction with the world of spirits,
f "community" plot and not on specific stories, though
y feature in any one play. It can thus be said that basing
inction between festival and drama on elaboration of
ay appear problematic.

larly, to make the distinction solely on the criterion of
dramatic characteristics shared by both festival and drama
ot be fully rewarding, since it is possible to see "dramatic"
in a purely ritual act such as a religious service. It would
hat the distinction may best be made by the application of

interior appreciation to the external dramatic characteristics. In other words, the motivation of the participant or spectator ought to constitute the basis for the distinction between festival and drama.

Drama could constitute part of festival, for it is usually the culmination of festival, though there can be festival without drama. In effect, before a ritual performance becomes drama the element of ritual festivity must have ceased to operate. However, there can be a festival of drama during which either different types of drama are presented or different types of dramatic groups perform dramatic plays. This is so because the word festival means celebration and has its purely religious and ritual aspect as well as its purely aesthetic feature, its "show".

Although both the ritual and dramatic aspect of festival may co-exist in the same celebration, it is possible to separate the ritually religious from the ritually dramatic. This separation could either be spatial when they are held in different locations, for example, in a grove for the sacrifice and on the village square for the dramatic performance, or it may be attitudinal when both "sacrifice" and "show" are enacted simultaneously. In this latter case, two participants in a celebration may have two totally different experiences, one religious and the other aesthetic. For the religious devotee, to use Echeruo's words, "the drama is absorbed in ritual action" and "the *mythos* is subsumed in ritual,"[31] although there may be moments when he would vacillate between his religious experience and role performance especially if there is a non-participating audience, that is to say, an audience that is not taking part in the ritual activity. In general, however, the devotee sees himself as performing a religious rite. If one sees this ritual act as drama *simpliciter*, then, to attend an Aladura prayer-house, a Catholic mass or indeed any church service is to go to a playhouse.

On the other hand, the non-devotee has a different attitude to the festival. For him ritual becomes celebration and religious myth is transformed into mythology. He easily achieves artistic distance and can appreciate "the show". He sees himself as either presenting a show or witnessing one. Indeed, a religious devotee often realises when a celebration ceases to be purely ritual, that is a purely religious act of worship, and has turned into drama. For example, a Ṣango worshipper demonstrating to an audience in the Ibadan University Arts Theatre would know that he or she is dramatising to the audience how Ṣango is worshipped and not worshipping him in real life. When direct ritual involvement is annulled, the performer or spectator appreciates the performance

as drama. This is perhaps the point Ogunba makes when he remarks that the young man from an urban area going back to his rural home for an annual Ogun festival "does so not because he believes so much in Ogun like his forefathers but because the Ogun festival has an artistic interest for him."[32] In this statement, it would appear, lies the crucial distinction between festival and drama.

It could therefore be said that the distinction between ritual festival and drama does not primarily hinge on the question of whether or not a performance has plot, dialogue, action, and so on (though the importance of these is not minimised) but on what is the mental attitude of the participants (actors and spectators alike) to the performance. It is a question of performer-spectator, cast-audience intellection and appraisal. If the participants — performers, spectators and critics — see the performance primarily as a religious act of worship, propitiating a deity through sacrifice, burying the dead, and so on, the performance may be regarded as ritual because they are merely employing "dramatic" gestures to achieve a religious experience or perform a ritual ceremony. And here Echuruo's analysis applies — drama is overwhelmed by ritual. But on the other hand, if they see the performance, as a re-enactment of a myth, expressed or understood, then there is drama. Any ritual act in this type of performance simply enhances the drama and is done not in reality but "acted". Alternatively, as suggested by Robert G. Armstrong, in a personal communication, we might make the distinction between the ritually religious and the ritually dramatic "turn on whether the attempt is to mobilise (propitiate, placate) the spirits or to mobilise (entertain, arouse emotions in) the people — audience, congregation, etc".

It is therefore the attitude to the performance that changes and this tends to create drama out of ritual and in so doing a definite critical idiom is produced, a critical attitude that divorces the purely religious (devotion, supplication, atonement) from the basically aesthetic (appreciation of beauty, purging of the emotion, teaching of morals). There may be, in a few cases, some ambivalent attitude but the lines are generally clearly drawn and the participants can fairly see when the celebration has changed from the religious and ritual to the aesthetic and "dramatic".

Mmọnwụ (and when the term is used it should be understood in the restricted sense of "the sacred mask", as used by the tradition under study and not in the general Igbo sense of the word), from the time it first emerged has been conceived generally as drama. Although it can trace its origin to Ibinukpabi of the

Aro, its *raison d'etre* has always been more dramatic than ritual. Mmọnwụ has never been an object of religious worship as such but a symbol of collective authority and a dramatic institution, its mysticism having been calculated to enhance its dramatic force. Indeed, it can be said with some truth that the degree of ritualism in mmọnwụ has always been very minimal, that it is less ritualistic than many other African dramas. Although mmọnwụ has some ritual overtones, such as the inspired belief in its sacredness, the concept is not strictly ritual in the sense that it has no implication of a religious ceremony.

Mmọnwụ as poetic truth

Mmọnwụ characters are merely conceptual but having been conceived they have become dramatic realities and their existence an artistic truth. What art has created always endures. Although mmọnwụ is a product of the imagination or perhaps a "dream"[33] it is a dream that has a reality of its own, a concretized dream.

The reverence and respect given to mmọnwụ is a stylized, an artistic reverence rather than a religious act of worship and may be compared, in real-life terms, to the respect given to a judge. The point emerges that mmọnwụ as a concept is merely theatrical and as theatre mmọnwụ embraces the whole drama of the Igbo man's existence. Mmọnwụ is indeed not merely theatre but poetic drama.

The principle of artistic reproduction, that is, imitation of nature applies to mmọnwụ poetic. This presupposes that the mmọnwụ artist imitates or copies nature and the nearer the copy is to the original, that is, observable human environment, the better the work of art. In other words, the artist attempts to achieve an illusion of reality. Mmọnwụ is imitative art in so far as its poetic vision of life attempts to represent as realistically as possible the Igbo mythic concept of the world. But to the extent that the world mmọnwụ poetic drama attempts to depict also embraces the supernatural, mmọnwụ poetry reflects other forms of art, for instance, symbolism, which are non-realistic.

Mmọnwụ is very symbolistic as mmọnwụ art uses words, actions, objects, colours, etc., to suggest and represent as vividly as possible the supernatural as well as the natural. It is because mmọnwụ is an attempt to represent not only the world we see and know but also the conjectural world of the supernatural which is beyond our direct experience that it tends to be a synthesis of all poetic theories. It is partly representational, partly presentational, both heroic and epic, partly illusionistic and partly non-illusionistic. Hallie Flanagan Davis's description of what has been called

"non-illusionistic", "documentary" and "epic" form of drama as, "factual and formal, musical and acrobatic, abstract and concrete, visual and aural, psychological, economic, and social",[34] aptly applies to mmọnwụ.

Mmọnwụ poetic art is a good illustration of stylized and abstract African art within whose logic the artist is liberated, and being liberated can exhibit new forms which his imagination has created, and the form created by the artist can be defended as an expression of truth. Mmọnwụ does not therefore imitate nature alone but also the spirit and this it does through nature. This makes it necessary for mmọnwụ to be realistic but to achieve this realism the mmọnwụ artist has to resort to abstraction in order to accomplish the illusion not only of nature but also of the super-natural.

Perhaps the most controversial aspect of the study of mmọnwụ drama is mmọnwụ's claim to truth. What disturbs many commentators on mmọnwụ is this: what is it that is behind the mask? If one answers, "a human actor impersonating a spirit", the questioners would be satisfied, but no informant who has been initiated into mmọnwụ society would give you such a simplistic answer. Indeed the dramatic interest aroused by mmọnwụ has its basis on the supposed spirituality of the mmọnwụ characters.

Both Plato and St. Augustine have comented on what they regard as the "lie" in literature. As Kuhns has said, "in one obvious sense drama is false: it is the work of creative imagination which erects traditional stories or private fantasies into shows. The audience then responds to what is shown by having all the emotions, involvement, beliefs that they would have, if the representations were true, that is, actual happenings."[35]

What is therefore the truth of mmọnwụ? Some regard it as a huge lie or a palpable deceit, and would agree with A.B. Ellis, that like *egungun*, mmọnwụ is a bogey "set up by a few powerful men to cheat and terrorise a helpless and superstitious society."[36] But mmọnwụ may be regarded as false only in the same sense as works of imagination are false: the truth in mmọnwụ is poetic, and is revealed in the totality of the exhibitive form of mmọnwụ drama and "not in the individual statements which make it up"[37] and surely not in the fact as to whether the figures are real spirits or not. Mmọnwụ is a fictive reality and the dramatizing *persona* is a sacred symbol or an apotheosis of a spirit, a concretization of the idea of spirit or force. In the conception of the Igbo performers of mmọnwụ drama and the audience as well, the conception of spirit, once made, becomes absolute. Mmọnwụ, being a creation of the liberating imagination, is real and it is irrelevant whether it

is a spirit or symbol of a spirit or whether it is based on myth, dream or faith. It can be said that the truth of mmọnwụ is mythic rather than experimental or empirical. The truth of mmọnwụ is based on the truth of imagination.

On the two basic ways of viewing myth — as a kind of perception or as deliberate make-believe — mmọnwụ probably derives more from the former than from the latter. In the former view, myth becomes synonymous with the mythopoeic mode of consciousness, that is, it is seen as a conscious and reasoned attempt at recreating the imaginative world. This view of myth carries no necessary connotation of storytelling while the latter view sees myth as merely story and at that, a tale that is not according to the facts. In whichever way myth is viewed, it has been regarded by many as literature. For example, Chase writes that "myth is literature and must be considered as an aesthetic creation of the human imagination"[38] and by this he means that early mythologizers were individual poets, i.e., "makers" or story tellers who from imagination constructed tall tales characterized by peculiar complication "of brilliant excitement, of the terrific play of the forces natural and human and eventuating in some deeply desired and socially sharable feeling of reconciliation among those forces."[39]

Mmọnwụ mythologizers belong to this category of poets. But in the creation of mmọnwụ it is obvious that there was, in addition to the mythopoeic instinct, an element of deliberate artifice, hence mmọnwụ is sometimes described as *aghụghọ Ụkpọ* (Ụkpọ trick). It is evident therefore that from whichever angle you look at mmọnwụ drama, it is fictional. But this is expected, for as Bonamy Dobrée has remarked, drama "is unreal with respect to fact." The test of its truth "is to be applied not to the facts, but to the feelings."[40]

Anyone who has participated fully in any mmọnwụ dramatic performance will attest to the feeling of awe generated by the sacred presence of the masked players and how spectators run away in genuine fear of the figures. Mmọnwụ drama is centred on fear and everything is done to induce this fear in the audience. Indeed mmọnwụ plays achieve their catharsis through the emotion generated by fear rather than from pity. The mmọnwụ thought consists of statements of the superhuman attributes of mmọnwụ which statements create awe and dignity, nobility and fear, thus generating a feeling of the unlimited power of the spirit and a corresponding feeling of human weakness and helplessness.

The spectacle also depicts mystery, power, beauty and wealth, because apart from the symbolic decoration of the open air

theatre, mmọnwụ has rich and expensive costume – bright red and yellow velvet cloth, golden tassels, rich silken bands, often with either maned or helmeted head. The chief mmọnwụ or ezemmụọ towers in his splendour to a height of about four metres. The chief emotion which mmọnwụ characters, whether the huge ezemmụọ or the dimunitive akakpọ, inspire is *èbùbè* (sacred awe). On confronting mmọnwụ, the spectator, irrespective of his status in mmọnwụ drama, experiences emotions of fright, weakness, vulnerability and humility, and in this way human arrogance is purged.

The plot in mmọnwụ plays helps to create the illusory awe surrounding mmọnwụ drama. Mmọnwụ drama is not story-based but character-oriented and the character acts as a member of a family. Mmọnwụ is neither a tragedy nor a comedy but what one may call cosmic drama with the family as the base. It is a dramatization of the totality of human experience, tragic, comic, spiritual, mundane. The protagonist is the mighty head of a family whose members live in the spirit world but generally materialize in masked figures in an ekwuru from where he and some or all of them emerge to enact the whole drama of life with its sorrows and joys and all its social and educational implications.

Mmọnwụ, however, has a plot which is not the enactment of one unified story but a plot based on the myth of Alammụọ (Spiritland) and the effect this land of spirits has on human lives. Family relationships, deaths, reincarnations, human and spiritual forces, foreknowledge, the nature of truth, justice, beauty and love, are some of the recurrent themes in mmọnwụ poetry. The plot is generally based on the concept of an eze's household, the human characters in the play forming part of this spiritual family.

Mmọnwụ, as we have so far seen, is indeed a microcosm of the Igbo artistic world for it is not only a play but a heroic poem. Hobbes has declared that "the work of an heroic poem is to raise admiration, principally, for three virtues, valour, beauty, and love,"[41] and Aristotle posits that tragedy is an imitation "of incidents arousing pity and fear."[42] In mmọnwụ tradition of literature these emotions are derived more from the underlying myth (for instance, stories told of miraculous deeds of mmọnwụ *personae* and of the sorrows of a doubting novice), and gorgeous and symbolic spectacle, than from dialogue between the masked actors. Mmọnwụ is therefore a drama that portrays the material and spiritual sides of human life, an imagined human action with a universal plot in which the Igbo world view is mirrored – a world view in which spirits mingle with humans in a naturalistic setting.

Notes

1 Nwaezenogwu literally means the prince (or king) amidst (surrounded by) thorns, that is, a dreaded lord. It is the unique name given to the Ọzụbulụ tradtion of mmọnwụ theatre.

2 See note 67 of Chapter 1.

3 Information supplied by Ben Obumselu.

4 G.T. Basden, *Among the Ibos of Nigeria,* London, Sealey, Service and Co. Limited, 1921, p. 235.

5 Elizabeth Isichei, *The Ibo People and the Europeans: the genesis of a relationship – to 1906,* London, Faber and Faber, 1973, p. 34ff.

6 Nkapịa – musk shrew (crocidura spp.)small, long snouted insectivore noted for its strong smell and sharp cries. See A.H. Booth, *Small Mammals of West Africa,* London, Longmans, 1960, p. 2.

7 The informant wished to be anonymous.

8 Harry A. Gailey, in *The Road to Aba: a study of British Administrative Policy in Eastern Nigeria,* London, University of London Press, 1970, p. 22, says, "the family household, although not in itself a political unit, was the foundation on which all complex Ibo institutions were based".

9 F.K. Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise and Rivalry in Igboland* 1857–1914, London, Frank Cass, 1972, p. 141.

10 *Ibid.,* p. 160.

11 Arazu, "The Visible Spirit", p. 3.

12 See note 44 of Chapter 1 above.

13 Ekechi, *Missionary Enterprise,* p. 141.

14 James F. Schön, *Journals of the Rev. James Frederick Schön and Mr Samuel Crowther who, with the Section of Her Majesty's Government, accompanied the Expedition up the Niger in 1841 on behalf of the Church Missionary Society,* London, Second edition, Frank Cass, 1970, First ed., 1842, p. 51–52.

15 *Ibid.,* p. 53.

16 Ahanotu, "The Economics and Politics of Religion", p. 60

17 Francis A. Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion,* edited by J.S. Boston, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1970, p. 20.

18 Information given by Ugonna Ezenwaka.

19 The term *oluku* is derived from a Yoruba expression meaning friend, used in what Ulli Beier has called the "Yoruba Enclave" in the west Niger Igbo area. It was used by Ọnịcha traders in the 1950s to entice customers from this area whom they easily duped. The word soon came to connote a fool.

20 Ọjịọnụ of Ụkpọ, an mmọnwụ character, should be distinguished from the Akọkwa dance drama (also called Ọjịọnụ) described on page 20 above.

21 Udide are the mmọnwụ costumers. See Chapter 5 for further discussion on Udide.

22 Chief Olikagụ's testimony.

23 Ugonna Ezenwaka's estimation.

24 Information from Clement Obiesie, Ogum, Ihitenansa, August 28, 1973.

25 Arazu, "The Visible Spirit", p. 3.

26 Remark by C.A. Okafor of Amaifeke during a personal interview.

27 Oyin Ogunba, "Studying Traditional African Literature", *Black Orpheus*, 2, 7, p. 47.

28 Echeruo, "The Dramatic Limits", p. 21–31.

29 *Ibid.* p. 22.

30 *Ibid.*

31 *Ibid.*, p. 25.

32 Ogunba, "Studying Traditional African Literature", p. 47.

33 Echeruo, "The Dramatic Limits", p. 24.

34 Quoted in John Gassner, *Form and Idea in Modern Theatre.* New York: Holt Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1956, between p. 151 and 152.

35 Richard Kuhns *Literature and Philosophy: Structures of Experience,* London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1971, p. 4.

36 Quoted in Chief Olajubu's Seminar paper, SAAS, University of Lagos, 1973, p. 14. See A.B. Ellis, *The Yoruba Speaking Peoples of the Slave Coast of West Africa,* Costerhout, N.B. Netherlands, Anthropological Publications, 1966, p. 108.

37 Kuhns, *Literature and Philosophy,* p. 7.

38 Wheelwright, in *Poetry and Poetics,* p. 539.

39 *Ibid.*

40 Bonamy Dobree, *Restoration Tragedy 1660–1729,* O.U.P., 1958 (1929), p. 13.

41 Thomas Hobbes, *Homer's Illiad,* translated out of the Greek, in *The English Works of Thomas Hobbes,* collected and edited by Sir William Molesworth, Vol. X, London, John Bohn, 1844, Second reprint, 1966, by Scientia Verlag, Aalen, p. iv.

42 *Poetics,* Ch. 9. II.

3

OBOM AND *EKWURU:* THE PHYSICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL SETTING

The Igbo concept of play area, like the typical idea of the indigenous African stage is based on the notion of the *obom* (the open-air theatre) where spectators surround a central staging area on which actors perform. The indigenous African theatre is abstract in the sense that the theatricality is realised more by symbolism and the mental disposition of both the actors and the spectators than by the effect of actual staging or environment. In other words, in mmọnwụ as in the indigenous theatre generally, illusion of reality is achieved more by the use of abstract symbols than by the re-creation of physical environment. Any location where spectators witness performers in action becomes a theatre, and illusion is achieved mainly through a prior knowledge of the mythic content of the drama and not necessarily as a result of a realistic representation on the stage.

The obom could justly be described as the Igbo name for theatre since the word "theatre", derived from the Latin *theatrum,* which in turn is derived from the Greek *theatron,* means a place to behold spectacle *(thea).* Obom mmọnwụ is therefore a place to produce and behold an mmọnwụ spectacle. It consists generally of an open space usually in the centre of the community.

The obom could be a vast sandy tract like Amachereku in Amaọkpara Ihitenansa, a hardened, dusty, barren laterite expanse of land like Amaogidi in Ụmụezike Amaọkpara, Ihitenansa, a grove like the Amaidiinaọba arena in Ihiọma or the Nkwọudele theatre in Eziawa or an open space like the Ụbahaọsụ playground which lies astride the main road leading to Ekeụtụtụ from Amaọkpara Ihitenansa. An mmọnwụ theatre may therefore be surrounded by or dotted with large trees such as the iroko tree and the *ọgbụ* (Ficus eriobotryoides) that have religious signifi-

cance and offer shelter from the heat of the sun, or it may be barren of all vegetation.

The obom varies greatly in size but an average theatre may be the size of about four football fields, that is about four hectares and on it are normally located the *ekwuru* (the mmọnwụ house), the *ọda* (the mmọnwụ platform), the *ụlọọmụ* (the enclosure for the female chorus), the *ọnọdụigba* (the area for the male chorus and orchestra) and the *ọgbọ* (the central staging spot) within which regular mmọnwụ plays take place. In most cases the *obom mmọnwụ* coincides with the traditional village square where communal assemblies, political rallies and other social and cultural gatherings are held. In such cases the arena would have been in existence before the introduction of the mmọnwụ tradition in the area.

In some cases, however, mmọnwụ theatres are constructed specifically for mmọnwụ drama although they could be used for other purposes when mmọnwụ is not in session. What makes an arena an *obom* is the presence of the *ekwuru*, the *ọda*, the *ụlọọmụ* the *ọnọdụigba*, the *ama* and the *ọgbọ*, whose features are discussed below.

The Ekwuru

The most important feature of the *obom* is the *ekwuru*, a term which in mmọnwụ language means a dwelling place. Consisting of a house, often with a compound that is either fenced or walled round, and usually located some 300 to 400 metres from the ọgbọ or the staging spot, *ekwuru* has come to acquire cultish over-tones in Igbo usage. Thus only initiated members of the drama group could enter this playhouse though once a person has been initiated into the mmọnwụ society he may enter into any ekwuru in the mmọnwụ area provided he gets the permission of the akatakpo (the director of the ekwuru) to do so.

Ekwuru is important in mmọnwụ drama because the mystery that surrounds the whole mmọnwụ tradition is generated within its walls and the awe with which mmọnwụ *personae* strike their audience is mainly due to the influence of the *ekwuru*. Indeed, there is what one may term "the *ekwuru mythology*" if by mythology one means the product of mythopoeic consciousness.[1]

The cultish nature of the ekwuru is illustrated by the fact that anything that happens in it ends there and would not be subject to any further enquiry outside the ekwuru. Thus the saying, "*ihe mere n'ala ekwuru*" (a thing that happens in the ekwuru), describes something of the utmost secrecy which is not subject

to any non-mmọnwụ probe. Because ekwuru is regarded as the house of the spirit, it is believed that anything that happens there is the work of the spirit, and what human being can question the doings of a spirit? And so it was that if a person was no longer seen after he had entered the ekwuru, his disappearance was attributed to his having been consumed by mmọnwụ *(mmọnwụ ataala ya atụghị atụ)* and that was the end of the matter.

Ekwuru is central to mmọnwụ drama, for to be initiated into mmọnwụ is, in fact, to be admitted into the mysteries of the ekwuru and it is largely true that without the ekwuru there would be no mmọnwụ. Besides, mmọnwụ initation, known in Igbo as *ịma mmọnwụ*, which literally means "knowing the spirit", is actually a kind of process of education in the complicated stage-craft of mmọnwụ drama and the systematic unravelling of the seemingly mysterious representation of the mask as a "visible spirit."

To some, ekwuru is the house of mmọnwụ which can be entered only by members of the mmọnwụ group, a hut where mmọnwụ repairs from time to time on the occasion of dramatization for rest and consultation with some ọsụkwụ or a shrine set aside as the place of abode for the spirits. And to others, it is the living place of the masks, usually a strongly built house belonging to a staunch member of the mmọnwụ group, a building often surrounded with walls from where the mask rises and descends to the spirits, or an enclosure strongly fenced or walled round, inside which all the secret transactions about mmọnwụ are carried out. From the above descriptions it can be seen that although usually a house, ekwuru could, in fact, be any enclosure or secret spot, a shrine, a grove or a "bad bush." Ikwe of Ọhaakpụ, for example, is reputed to emerge from and descend into the spirit world in the *ajọọhịa* (bad bush).

The ekwuru could be seen as a house of creative art, the repository for mmọnwụ myths and texts and the depository of mmọnwụ costumes. The ekwuru is such a sensitive theme in mmọnwụ that it is not surprising that respondents and informants were either unwilling to discuss it, or when they did were rather contradictory in their statements. Some people interviewed maintained that the mmọnwụ, as spirit, disappears with all his costume when he descends into the spirit world. Others thought that mmọnwụ deposits his costume in his ekwuru before he vanishes into the unknown. People were evasive and everyone questioned tried to excuse his inadequacy remarking: "This is a matter for spirits. I really do not know what happens. I am only guessing. Nobody wants to betray the spirits." The ekwuru mysteries there-

fore consist in the process of embodying the immaterial spirit in a mask through secretly shared dramatic convention.

In the growth of mmọnwụ theatre the ekwuru has progressed from being an acquired to being a specifically designed building and by this is meant that whereas originally the ekwuru had been usually located in the house of one of the leaders of the drama group (generally a bachelor), now it is more customary for a special building to be designed and erected. This does not mean that the old practice of acquisition has altogether disappeared. It is still in vogue. In Amaọkpara Ihitenansa for example, Ezekwereobi's ekwuru was until recently located in the old thatched house[3] of late Umeojiakụ Duruike whose wife, Oludia, is one of the few women initiated into the mmọnwụ society. Now it is in Mbamara Daraojimba's compound.

The acquired ekwuru has no special features different from the original house that has been converted, the only factor turning it into an ekwuru being that mmọnwụ has chosen it as his dwelling place. Thus by being declared an ekwuru a previously unimportant house becomes sacred and unapproachable, and the uninitiated enters it under pain of death or forced initiation.

Ezekwereobi's ekwuru, mentioned above, illustrates an acquired ekwuru (see Fig. 3). Before the house was converted into an ekwuru it was like any other house in the village; after conversion it became a sacred abode of mmọnwụ personae and a meeting place for mmọnwụ players. The main living-room, for example, became the "ekwuru hall" and the sleeping-room the "Udide chamber" while the back-yard became the "sacred enclosure". Oludia Ojiakụ who, as would be expected, is an mmọnwụ initiate,

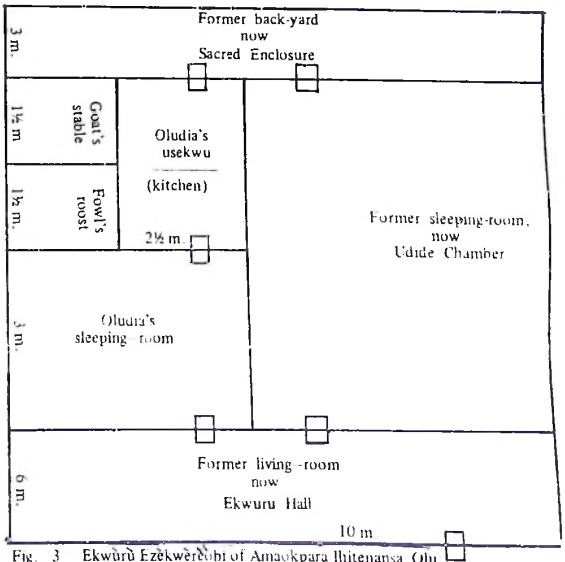

Fig. 3 Ekwurụ Ezekwereobi of Amaọkpara Ihitenansa, Ọlụ, an example of converted ekwurụ.

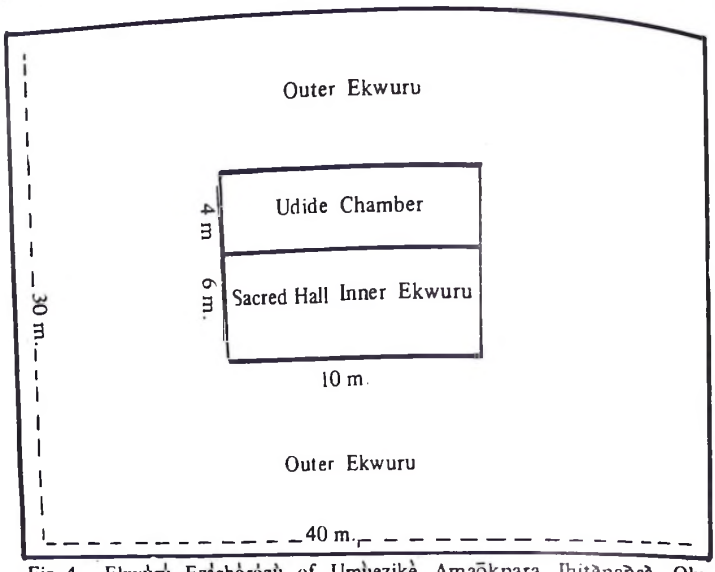

Fig. 4 Ekwùrù Ezégbòrọ́gụ́ of Ụmụezikè Amaọ̄kpara Ihitènaǹsà, Ọlụ: example of early specially built èkwùrù.

uses the two remaining rooms in the house, one as her sleeping-room and the other as the *usekwu* (kitchen).

On the other hand, a specially erected ekwuru may take a variety of forms and shapes but it is generally always fenced, or walled round, the space between the fence or walls and ekwuru building being called the *mbara ekwuru* or the outer ekwuru while inside the building itself is called the *ime ekwuru*, that is, inner ekwuru. The early ekwuru were generally built of mud walls and roofed with raffia mats.

Ekwuru Ezegborọgụ of Ụmụezike Amaọkpara, Ihitenansa (see Fig.4), illustrates the early type of specially built ekwuru. This ekwuru that was built in about 1904 and has ever since been constantly re-roofed consists of a hut surrounded by a large compound enclosed with a wall about two and a half metres high. The ground plan consists of a cult house and its immediate compound, the former being used for the actual art of masking mmọnwụ figures and for storing masking paraphernalia and the latter for holding mmọnwụ meetings and rehearsals of mmọnwụ plays, as we will see later. This type of ekwuru house may be generally partitioned into the Sacred Hall, entered only by the anyamammọnwụ (the inner mmọnwụ circle), and the Udide Chamber, from which it is said mmọnwụ figures emerge.

Although some of the early, mud-built playhouses, like Ekwuru Ezegborọgụ described above, still exist today in the study area, many of them are disappearing and are being replaced with more permanent structures in which the wall formerly enclosing the outer ekwuru becomes an integral part of the whole ekwuru

complex as the following analysis of Ekwuru Ezebude of Amaneese Amaifeke would illustrate.

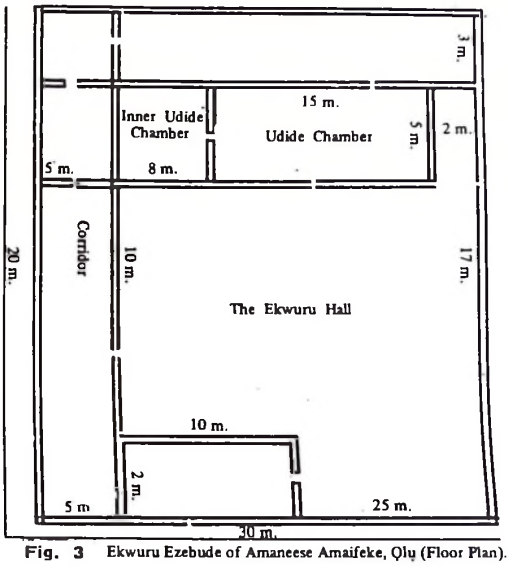

Fig. 3 Ekwuru Ezebude of Amaneese Amaifeke, Ọlụ (Floor Plan).

Ekwuru Ezebude whose front view is shown in Plate 5 and the floor plan in Fig. 5 is approximately 30 metres long and 20 metres wide. It is a modern building made of concrete and roofed with corrugated iron sheets. It has a porch that is about 2 metres deep which opens into an Assembly Hall approximately 12 metres by 25 metres. From the Assembly Hall a door opens into the Udide Chamber *(Ọnụ Udide)* and there is another entrance into a long corridor that leads to the Sacred Spot in the Sacred Enclosure. Both the corridor and the Sacred Enclosure are uncovered while the rest of the theatre is roofed. The Sacred Enclosure is really a long corridor, approximately 25 metres by 3 metres, and accessible only to the akatakpo and a few of his lieutenants, for it is said to be the platform for the emergence and descent of mmọnwụ characters from and into the spirit world, the Sacred Spot symbolizing the imagined point of emergence and departure. The Udide Chamber is the most important and mystic area of the whole ekwuru. It is always securely locked and is indeed the costume room with all the mmọnwụ paraphernalia and sacred symbols like the *ọfọ* (the staff of authority) and the *okuku* (the emblem of power). Theoretically the only place accessible to all the initiated members is the Assembly Hall, but even here one needs the permission of the akatakpo to be admitted.

The Ezebude theatre demonstrates the modern trend in the

development of mmọnwụ drama, namely, that mmọnwụ is becoming more and more an objectified rather than a largely visualized and symbolic theatre.

The Ekwuru Chain

To demonstrate the great significance of ekwuru in the tradition of mmọnwụ drama, it would be rewarding to refer to the selected list of ekwuru in the study area given in the

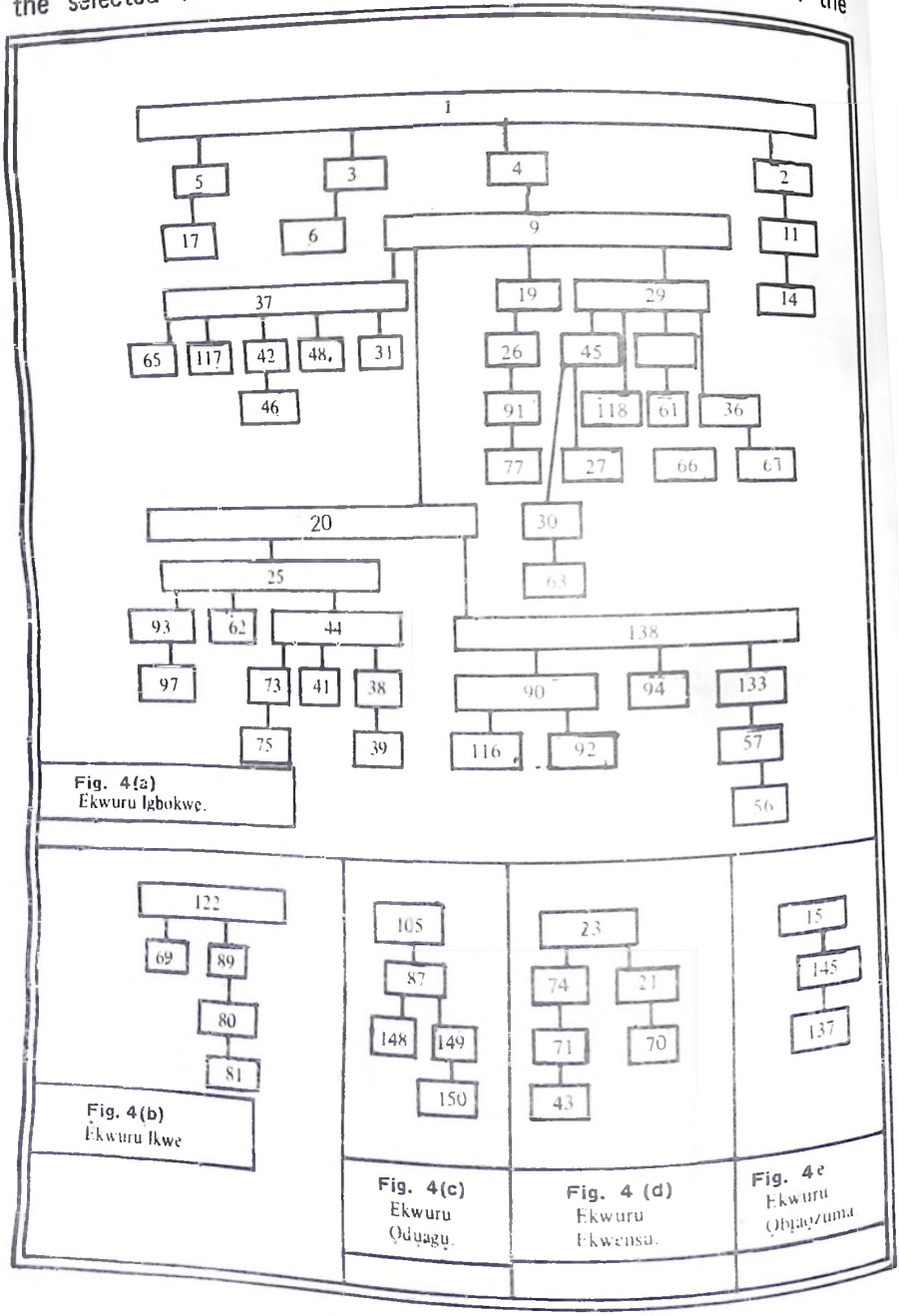

Fig. 4(a)
Ekwuru Igbokwe.

Fig. 4(b)
Ekwuru Ikwe

Fig. 4(c)
Ekwuru Oduagụ.

Fig. 4 (d)
Ekwuru Ekwensụ.

Fig. 4e
Ekwuru Obịaọzụma

Appendix. It is necessary to point out that the list is neither comprehensive nor systematically selective; it is merely illustrative, and is given mainly to show that all known mmọnwụ in the drama area investigated derive from the first ekwuru in Egbema Ọzụbụlụ. For example, as illustrated in Fig. 6a, Ekwuru Ezeụdụmnaehi (39), established on 16 November, 1970, was derived from Ekwuru Ezeigbojekwe (38), which, in turn, was derived from Ekwuru Ezenagụ (44). Ezenagụ's theatre, established about 1903, is an offshoot of Ekwuru Ezekwereobi (25) which was derived from Ekwuru Ezejiọfọ (20) established about the 1880s. Ezejiọfọ was "married" from Ekwuru Ezeokpube (9) established as an offshoot of Ụdụmnaehi's theatre (4) one of the early ekwuru that grew out of the original Igbokwe theatre (1).

Although the mystic and cultish nature of the mmọnwụ institution makes it rather difficult to obtain full information regarding the mmọnwụ theatres, an attempt has been made to establish that all the mmọnwụ theatres in the Egbema Ọzụbụlụ tradition of mmọnwụ form a theatrical chain, one deriving from the other and all tracing their root to one progenitor. This genealogical link is, as has already been remarked, one main feature distinguishing mmọnwụ from all other masking traditions in Igbo land.

In summary it could be justifiably said that the ekwuru is the powerful system that coordinates all the mmọnwụ functions. It is also the sacred place where all the behind-the-scenes activities of mmọnwụ drama take place. The construction of props, the designing and making of costumes, the composition of praise poems and chants, the rehearsal of dramatic displays and general organizational meetings of the group take place in the ekwuru. It is therefore more than anything else a place for mmọnwụ stagecraft.

Iro Mmọnwụ: the spectator area and the stage

Perhaps the most important feature of the obom from the point of view of exhibition and audience appreciation is the *iro mmọnwụ* by which we mean the open space unoccupied by any other feature in the obom. This area therefore constitutes what in Western theatre would be the auditorium *(ama mmọnwụ)* and the stage *(ọgbọ)*.

The auditorium *(ama mmọnwụ)*

This is not usually physically separated from the stage—the distinction is conceptual. The fringes of the arena where spectators stand constitute the auditorium *(ama mmọnwụ)* while the central spot where masks and others display for the audience forms the

stage (ọgbọ). During the presentation of an mmọnwụ play the theatre assumes the shape of a horse-shoe, with the spectators occupying the obom and surrounding the ọgbọ on three sides, leaving clear the end occupied by the ekwuru.[4] This is, of course, in the normal theatre, where the ekwuru is located in the obom, but where the ekwuru is removed from the obom, the spectators usually surround the entire ama, always making way, of course, for the performing mask or masks to make exit from the stage.

The central area on which the masks perform and which is usually surrounded by the spectators forms what one may term the dramatic focus, or indeed, the "open air stage" which according to Ogunba "may be a clearing in a grove or an open, level place in a town."[5] Its size depends on a number of factors including the over-all size of the arena, the numerical strength of the spectators, the number and character of the performing masks, the nature of the display and the general mood of all the participants. For example, while it is easier to realise a comparatively larger central stage in a big obom than in a small one, a large audience tends to surge forward into the central spot thus making it smaller, and since there are usually no barriers separating the audience from the central stage there is a problem of crowd control with large audiences.

Where numerous masks perform more room is made for them, for spectators would dread getting too near masks. What appears to be most decisive in the size of the stage is the character of the masks performing. The ezemmụọ, for example, does not require much stage space whereas the youthful dimkpammụọ needs considerable room for acrobatic displays. When the akakpọmmụọ, the pursuer of the uninitiated, is on the stage, then there is adequate room for display because with his whips he drives the spectators to the edges of the arena. This central spot therefore is the focal point of mmọnwụ display for although critical attention shifts from the *ereere* singing, clapping their hands and dancing in their *ụlọọmụ* to the *ọkụigba* and their orchestra in their corner and to the mmọnwụ on his platform, it is only when all these players — mmọnwụ, ọkụigba and ereere — enter the ọgbọ that one might say the mmọnwụ display has reached its climax.

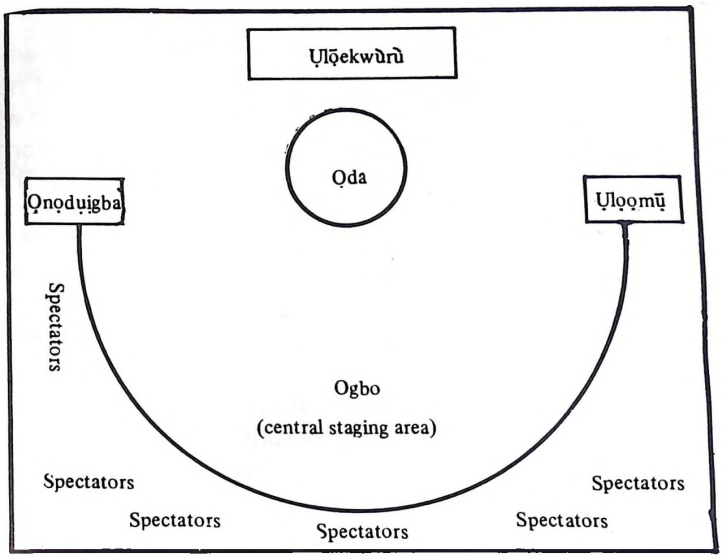

Fig. 5

An Obom Mmọnwụ (an mmọnwụ play centre)

The Ọdà

Besides the ekwuru, another aspect of the obom mmọnwụ that is of great theatrical significance is the ọdà, that is, the platform of authority which is usually erected on one side of the obom near the ekwuru.[6] Some commentators think that ọda might have derived from the English word "order",[7] but if this is so it means that the concept must have developed well after mmọnwụ might have been established in Ọzụbụlu. It must be remembered that mmọnwụ all along has been adapting itself to modern conditions; it is in fact, referred to as *nwa ọsọ̀ oyìbo bịa* (he who came with the whites). But to many Igbo people the word "ọda" denotes a stylised statue, a sculptured figure of an animal, a human being or a spirit, usually moulded in mud, laterite, clay or cement, as opposed to the ọkịka which is a figure carved in wood. While the ọkịka is movable the ọda is fixed to the ground like the anthill. And in Idoma, according to R.G. Armstrong, in a personal communication, "ọda is a high platform in the compound for storing food out of reach of goats and also a high platform in the farm, where boys sit and drive birds away". To the Igbo man ọda has sacred associations with fertility rites and would appear to be the central Igbo version of the Owere

mbarị. It is certain therefore that mmọnwụ derived its concept of ọda from the traditional Igbo usage.

In mmọnwụ tradition, ọda was originally a truncated conical mud structure that symbolized mmọnwụ's power and whenever the ezemmụọ came out into the arena he usually stood near the ọda for some time before he started his display. As time went on the ọda lost its conical shape and became a laterite platform with sides scrubbed and painted white, yellow and brown. It served then as a type of rostrum on which mmọnwụ mounted to deliver important messages or make prophetic pronouncements.[8] P.J.M. Obi who appears to be very knowledgeable about mmọnwụ drama describes the ọda as "a raised embankment of mud representing something like a shrine serving as a mark of having successfully performed the ekwuru ceremony and the title; and as an outward sign of possessing great medicinal power". It should however be pointed out that generally the ekwuru ceremony comes after the ọda title.

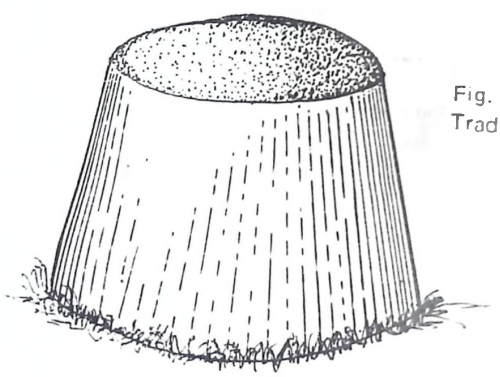

Fig. 6
Traditional Ọda.

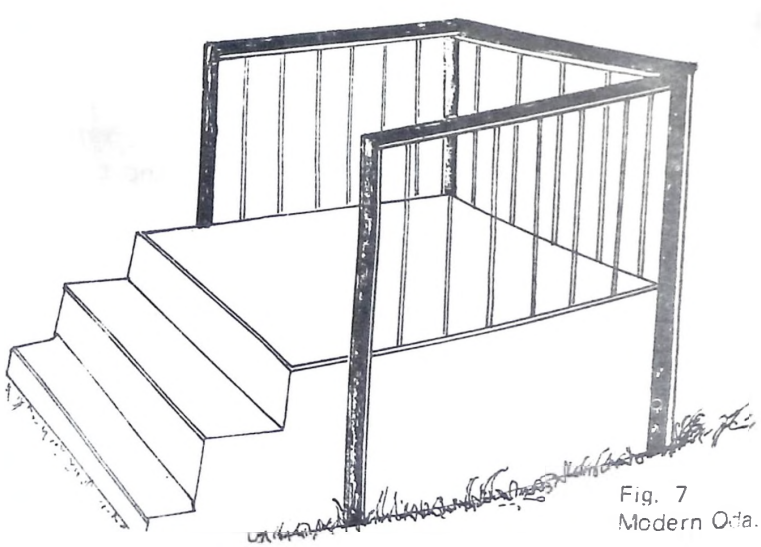

Fig. 7
Modern Ọda.

In modern mmọnwụ theatres, however, the concept of ọda has considerably changed, for it is now seen as a wide platform,[9] from which mmọnwụ delivers his poetic chants and there are indications that the ọda might well become a full-fledged stage on which all mmọnwụ action would be taking place. Today, the ọda, in some mmọnwụ theatres are built of concrete, three to four feet above ground level, with stairs leading to the top of the platform whose edges are surrounded with decorative iron girders. The modern ọda, like the walls of the modern ekwuru, is often beautifully and brightly painted and in most cases has mural paintings of mmọnwụ figures.

Ụlọọmụ: enclosure for the choral maidens

The next important feature of the usual iro mmọnwụ besides the ama, the ọgbọ and the ọda, is the ụlọọmụ (house of the yellow palm leaves) which is traditionally an enclosure within which members of the *mmarigo* chorus stand and sing. This enclosure, which is generally oblong, though it may be square or circular, is often made of widely-spaced network of bamboo sticks and raffia poles decorated with the sacred straws of *akọrọ* and *izize* and decked with *ọmụ*, hence the name *ụlọọmụ*.

Ọmụ, the tender yellow shoot of the oil palm tree which matures into the green fronds, is among the Igbọ, a sacred symbol, an essentially protective symbol as it warns people of ritual danger. In Igbo religion ọmụ is perhaps as important as the cross in the Christian religion. For example, sacrificial vessels (ụgbọaja) are made of ọmụ; shrines are generally decorated with ọmụ, to indicate the presence of spirits in them; and ritual and sacred feasts are heralded by the spreading of ọmụ in strategic places in the community. Ọmụ is, in effect, a spiritual symbol. It is also used as a warning signal, for instance, when it is placed round a farm, people would realise that the farm has a protective charm that would afflict trespassers with a type of skin disease that is characterised by itching and rheumatic swellings and rashes (afụfụ).

Ọmụ symbolism thus implies a fundamental belief in the efficacy of ọmụ in restraining spirits and their influence just as it has been thought by some spiritualists that chains could confine spirits of the dead to their graves. This perhaps explains the Igbo practice of decking vehicles that carry corpses with ọmụ, presumably to confine the spirits within such vehicles. It therefore can better be understood why mmọnwụ poets have represented mmọnwụ characters as unable to pass a sacred barrier of ọmụ. Thus ọmụ is used to screen off the mmarigo and in this way

protect them from the sacred influence of the mmọnwụ whom they could not ordinarily approach. Decorated ụlọọmụ, along with ekwuru and the ọda, contributes to the gorgeous appearance of the general mmọnwụ theatre thus heightening the dramatic effect which mmọnwụ plays have on the audience.

Ọnọdụigba: the platform for the male chorus and orchestra

Also contributing to the heightening of the mmọnwụ dramatic effect is the ọnọdụigba which may be seen as the male counterpart of the ụlọọmụ. But it is not enclosed like ụlọọmụ; instead it is an ọnọdụ, that is, a position or better still, a formation. During a performance, ọkụigba singers and dancers take a suitable position or formation in the obom often opposite the mmarigo chorus (see Fig.7). Occasionally the singers and dancers accompanied by players of mmọnwụ musical instruments perform around the obom in different formations. Indeed, an important feature of the ọnọdụigba formation is that it is shifting: it moves round the play area and returns to its former position as we will see in Chapter 5.

What we have attempted to show in this chapter is that each mmọnwụ belongs to or has a definite, spatially defined play centre, an obom. It is true that a mask could also constitute himself into a type of travelling theatre, in the same way Ogunba has described egungun:

> Whenever he (egungun) decides to create his stage as he makes his dance round the town, he can count on eager or curious spectators forming a ring round him, leaving him enough space to make his display. . . [10]

Nonetheless, in the end he would return to his permanent obom in which, as we have seen, are located his ekwuru, his ọda, the ụlọọmụ and ọnọdụigba, the ama and the ọgbọ.

To conclude this account of the physical and sociological setting of the mmọnwụ play area, it should be pointed out that the obom and ekwuru serve important social as distinct from aesthetic functions.

The obom is therefore not only a play centre but sometimes a court area as well; the ekwuru, not only a playhouse but also a cultural institution for the socialization of the young; and the mmọnwụ environment not always just a play environment but occasionally also a ritual one.

The obom could therefore become a community centre where members may settle disputes, interpret customary laws and make new rules. In such an environment mmọnwụ becomes the judge who, after listening to both sides of a case as stated by the com-

plainants, the defendants and their witnesses, gives a final verdict. He becomes not only the judge but also the chief law enforcement officer. Mmọnwụ is, indeed, the symbol of collective authority.

The mmọnwụ society is a powerful instrument of community development. The mmọnwụ figure gives orders for the execution of such projects as the erection of public stalls, bridges, etc., keeping community markets, paths, streams and so on, clean, and collecting levies from different groups and individuals in the society and imposing and collecting fines from defaulters.

Mmonwu as an institution may however generate some social stresses, for, being essentially autocratic (some have equated its administration to military dictatorship), it tends to override individual liberty in its stride towards general social order. Yet it performs important socialising functions as will be seen later in the chapter dealing with the audience.

The mmọnwụ arena therefore becomes not only a stage for the performance of plays but an environment for cultural and ritual celebrations, for initiation into the traditional way of life of a community, and for social reunion between the living and the dead through festivity.

Notes

1 See Wheelwright, note 29 in Chapter 1 above.
2 Information supplied by A.I. Nwankwọ.
3 The thatch has been replaced with corrugated iron sheets.
4 See Fig. 7, p. 57.
5 Ogunba, "Ritual Drama", p. 36.
6 See Fig. 8 and 9, p. 58.
7 F.N. Nwakile, personal communication, 1972.
8 *Ibid.*
9 See Fig. 9.
10 Ogunba, "Ritual Drama", p. 52–53.

Ezekwereobi Play, Scene 1: Ezekwereobi (with helmet) and Omereigbokwe performing the opening dance at Amachereku open air arena.

Mmonwụ Characters in Ezebude Theatre: From left to right: Isikoroebu (akakpommụọ), Ọgụnaede (dimkpammụọ), Akpụokiakpụala (akakpọmmụọ), Anụfọrọudensi (dimkpammụọ), Nwaụlarị (egbọgbọmmụọ), Ezebude Igbonaekwu Ọdụagụ (ezemmụọ).

Some of the Human Performers In Ezebude Theatre.

Ezekwereobi Play, Scene 2: Ezekwereobi performing at the Amaechereku Obam with his patrony and members of the ekuigbe.

Ụlọakwụrụ Ezebuọ (Front View).

Mural on the front wall of Ezebuda's Ụlọ ẹkwuru (Playhouse).

Obom Amachereku.

4

THE PLAYERS

As has been remarked above, mmọnwụ drama may best be seen as a drama of character and spectacle rather than of action in the sense of fable or plot. In our context, it is perhaps more appropriate to define action as activity rather than as plot, since random, episodic happenings, plotted into a dramatic sequence, constitute mmọnwụ drama. Plot, in its classical meaning, is not relevant to mmọnwụ drama. This does not mean that a story is always absent in mmọnwụ drama; but that a story can be part of the sequential performance rather than the pivot of dramatic action. Again, there may be an underlying *mythos*, a religious belief or a theory of existence, which is being represented in the obom and which, therefore, may be regarded as constituting the plot or action of the play.

It is thus understandable why characterization rather than plot is central to mmọnwụ drama. What readily comes to mind when people think of mmọnwụ play is the mmọnwụ character, and if one de-masks the mmọnwụ one destroys the mmonwụ theatre. Thus, the myth that regards the mmọnwụ *persona* as spirit is still upheld even if only dramaturgically and this is why today the mmọnwụ world teems with mmọnwụ characters.

It is possible that there are well over 4000 mmọnwụ characters of all categories that have at one time or the other been costumed in the nwaezenogwu tradition of mmọnwụ theatre. Assuming an average of four masks in each of the 172 ekwuru listed in the Appendix there would be a total of 688 mmọnwụ characters and when it is realized that the number of playhouses surveyed represents a mere fraction of all the ekwuru in the mmọnwụ area, one will see that the estimate of 4000 is reasonable. There may be as many as eight masks in an ekwuru[1] but owing to the enormous cost of production, most ekwuru limit the number of their masked figures to four, one mask for each of the four categories of ezemmụọ, dimkpammụọ, akakpọmmụọ and

agbọghọmmụọ.[2]

To illustrate further the large number of mmọnwụ characters in the mmọnwụ drama area, one could point out that in Ihitenansa alone there may well be over 100 mmọnwụ characters because each of the twenty five ekwuru (25–49), known to exist in the area, has at least four characters while some have more than four characters.[3]

Thus throughout the drama area under investigation there are many playhouses with more than four masks each. And, indeed, there is no limit to the number of mask-characters that could be created in an ekwuru.

The mmọnwụ character in general is symbolized by *asangwọ* (raffia straw) costume, though the female mmọnwụ is exclusively costumed in cloth. Each of the four categories of mmọnwụ *personae* is distinctly made to reflect his or her character. The akakpọ is almost entirely of straw, with a round patch of cloth on the crest of the head similar to the patch in the crown of the raffia rain-shade (okpungwọ). On the other hand, the dimkpa-mmụọ and the ezemmụọ are partly costumed in raffia and partly in rich cloth. Their rather elongated, slightly conical trunk and neck, a neck that often carries a maned head (isi ọza ebule), is costumed in rich cloth. Two velvet bands of cloth run along the front and back of the majestic straw-clad figures of the ezemmụọ and dimkpammụọ and pendants of multi-coloured tassels, red, yellow or orange, are neatly arranged along both velvet bands, so that the mmọnwụ appears to have two fronts, hence the reference to ezemmụọ as mmọnwụ ihu naabọ (mask of two faces or fronts). This artistic rendering of their figure is symbolic of their all-knowing and all-seeing attributes. The female mmọnwụ has silken coverings that symbolize grace, swiftness, sophistication and refinement. The dimkpammụọ is slightly shorter than the ezemmụọ who may be as tall as four metres and both are costumed almost alike except that the ezemmụọ is more expensively decorated.

The Spiritual Character of the mmọnwụ figure

Generally, all mmọnwụ characters are reputed to have spirit attributes and are therefore said to be holy and unapproachable. Nobody, not even the akatakpo known as *onye nwe mmọnwụ* (the owner of mmọnwụ) could dare touch a masked figure, the only person capable of touching him being another masked figure. This is because humans cannot touch spirits, who are metaphorically called the deep sea which drowns the unwary, the all-knowing that is capable of revealing what happens in secret in the present and in the future. The mmọnwụ is characterised as a being that could sanction, reward and bless human beings,

for he is also conceived as having immense wealth which he could bestow on those he wishes to enrich.

Mmọnwụ attributes are illustrated in mmọnwụ praise poetry which would be discussed in the seventh chapter below. Mmọnwụ is generally praised as onyo o nyoo ọ hụ (peeper, who peeps and sees), àmaragwo àjụ (he who knows but yet asks), ọnọ n'ụlọ mara ihe zụrụ n'ahịa (he who stays at home and knows what sells in the market) and as

Nkụ na-egbu anwụrụ:
A hapụ n'ọkụ, anwụrụ egbube,
A lọpụ alọpụ ụlọ ajụọ oyi.[4]

Smoke-emitting firewood:
Left in the fireplace, smoke oppresses
Removed, the house becomes cold.

Mmọnwụ is therefore characterised as a dreaded, mighty being who is all-knowing; an enigma who inquires about what he already knows; the destroyer; and he who overwhelms. His ambivalence as the bringer of life and death, reward and punishment (in dramatic terms, perhaps, as one who entertains the audience and excites their emotions) is succinctly expressed in the phrase "smoke-emitting firewood." Thus as smoky firewood mmọnwụ is depicted as providing aesthetic pleasure to the spectators at the same time as he makes disturbing psychological and social demands on them. This dual function of the mmọnwụ idea, that is, the ability to provide pleasure and pain, the tragi-comic function, is well portrayed in the verse that sees mmọnwụ as "the two-edged sword" (mma ihu naabọ).

In addtion to what is known about the mmọnwụ character through praise poems, numerous stories of mmọnwụ power are retold in communities in the mmọnwụ area. A scholarly compilation of these would prove a useful contribution to African mythology and poetry. There are, for example, stories of mmọnwụ telling women and the uninitiated some secrets that are known only to their families. Also some masks, espcially in the past, were reputed to cause trees with green foliage to dry up merely by pointing at them,[5] as we will soon see.

The Character of the Ezemmụọ in Relation to the Mmọnwụ Categories

The chief persona in each ekwuru is the ezemmụọ, the crowned and enthroned ruler or king of this "dramatic" kingdom. In his ekwuru each ezemmụọ rules with all the paraphernalia of kingship, all the other masks being seen as his offspring, though the agbọ-

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The Wonder Working Phenomena

Ezemmụọ like other mmọnwụ characters are noted for their various acts of enchantments such as:

(a) ***ọkpọrọihu*** – afflicting an adversary with lethal migraine;
(b) ***egbeaka*** – magically destroying objects by pointing at them;
(c) ***ọnụatụ*** – a curse being effective as soon as it is uttered; and
(d) ***isielile*** – performing acts that defy natural laws, for example, suspending a knife in the air, filling a basket with water or causing a pot of palm wine to remain full irrespective of the quantity poured out of it.

Acts of *ọkpọroihu*, *egbeaka* and *ọnụatụ* are known as either *ịgbạ ọgwụ*, literally meaning, "inflicting harm with medicine" or *ịkụ ọgwụ*, striking with medicine. To the Igbo, medicine *(ọgwụ)*[8] implies not only chemical drugs but also substances conveyed by supernatural means to effect good or evil. This type of medicine is made by the dibịa who uses certain formulas in combining herbal, animal and mineral substances to produce the required effect. Acts of enchantment, perhaps real in the past, are now largely theatrical though the fear they generated may still be felt by some playgoers even if the original cause of the fear has been removed. It would perhaps be correct to say that the original fear has now given place to reverence, to respect and to decorum.

From information derived from some of the completed questionnaires many ezemmụọ are known for one type of *ịkpa ike* or another. Ezegbọrọgụ of Ụmụadụ Amaruru (75) for example, is reputed to be so powerful that if he said a particular house would fall, it so happened, and to impress his audience with his power he used to rise carrying what looked like a human skull.

Other examples of powerful ezemmụọ include Ekwusike of Ụmụodochi Abọ Liilu (19) who "could overcome charms from all directions," Ezejiọfọ of Akwa Liilu (20) believed to be capable of "causing a tree to dry up" and making a rival mask stand motionless on the stage and Ezeriọha of Ọkwụ Umuhu Ọkabịa (169) known to grow taller or shorter at will.

Similarly Ekwensu of Ebeteghete Liilu (33) is believed to be one of the most powerful of chief masks and could with bare hand cause an iroko tree to dry up and fall to the groud while Mbanụrụde of Ihuoweri Ụbahangwu Ọsụihiteụkwa (137) could make a tree dry up by pointing at it and could emit snakes from his figure at will. Igbonaekwu of Ụbaha Ọsụihiteụkwa (138) is noted for "causing leaves and fruits to fall from a tree, relieving a woman of her pregnancy and causing sudden death of misbehaved spectators".

Udeebube of Ekwuru 162 reportedly "shoots an invisible gun using his finger to destroy a rival" and Ọbiaọzụma of Ekwuru 164 allegedly "performs miracles such as causing trees to dry up". Also Ojiọnụ (11) alias Ọkụgbaraala (fire that burns the land) whose fame, as a very powerful and ancient spirit not generally beheld, has earlier been discussed, is one of the most talked-about wonder-workers. It is said that during the few occasions he appeared at night a person carried his carved symbol in a basket and when the basket was left on a spot a bird was said to jump out, and things began to happen: tree branches would begin to break and trees began either to dry up or fall down.

One of the most celebrated wonder-workers among the ezemmụọ in the study area is Ikwe (122) who is regarded as the foremost ezemmụọ in Oru area including Egbema and Ugwuta. In this area he plays a leading judicial role and wherever there is a serious mmọnwụ dispute or mmọnwụ desecration he goes to adjudicate. What is characteristic of his ekwuru is that its initiates are generally mature men, most of them elderly, and none less than forty years of age. Moreover his ekwuru is most unconventional because he descends, as they say, into the spirit world not in a playhouse but in an ajọọhịa (bad bush). Called *ekwu ama oju* (he who talks and strikes the staff of authority on the ground), when on the stage, he exudes power and awe and he has a functionary who carries the oju and thrusts it into the ground for him. Such an *oju* carrier is as a rule not less than fifty years of age. Ikwe is reputed to have one leg, one hand and half a head and he goes about with bees that inhabit one part of his head from where he sends them to visit his foes.[10]

Dimkpammụọ and the Performance of Wonderful Acts

Performing miraculous feats is, as would be expected, not the sole preserve of the ezemmụọ in the ekwuru. After all, every mmọnwụ, being conceived as a spirit, could perform any wonder. Thus many dimkpammụọ and akakpọ have become famous as wonder-workers. Among dimkpammụọ famous for their ability to perform wonderful acts may be mentioned: Anụfọrọudensi Ezebude (148) from whose head, it is said, smoke emits whenever he confronts danger; Ezeụgụrụ Ezeọnọnigboekwu (76) who has a three-pronged head with which he inspires awe and neutralises danger.

Onyekwuruje (54) could cause a swarm of bees to come into existence and could make any animal that passes on his left side remain rooted to the spot while Iwuobodo (124) is famous for his acts of *isielile*, his ability to neutralise any rival and to pass danger

unscathed. Noted for his *atụọnụ (ọnụatụ), egbeaka* and directing bees to a rival or to an offender is Akpasuoanụ Mbanụrude (139) whereas Mbanasọ Ezenagụ (44) better known as *mmụọ otu aka* (one-armed spirit) is famed for his ability to emit smoke from his head and to cause a tree to dry up. Legend has it that he is the spirit of a person killed by a lion, the body having been recovered only after the lion had consumed one of the arms. Mbanaso is known for carrying fighting impements such as a small axe and a cutlass on his one arm.

Akakpọmmụọ and acts of enchantment

Like ezemmụọ and dimkpammụọ some akakpọ have been noted for acts of wonder, for example, Agbatazọbaeze Igbofụnanya (153) is reputed to be very fierce and fond of *ịgba ọgwụ* (use of charms) and Ojiisietiwaakc (23), like his parent Ekwensu, is known to be very powerful and, true to his name, breaks gates with his forehead. Like Mbanasọ (44) he often carries a little axe and is extremely active. Also, Omeninyo Ezekwereobi (25) as the name implies is characterised by sudden appearances and disappearances.

Apart from performing miraculous feats, some akakpọmmụọ have peculiar characteristics, for instance, Igboenweakụ (155) is noted for his wretched appearance symbolising the poverty of the common man and bringing out dramatically the meaning of the name "people have no wealth." Also, Egbedum (90), Akpasuoanụ (93) and Agụdịegwu (94) are all known for their shortness and their chasing tendencies and are respectively believed to be destructive, noted for maintaining order and peace and famous for throwing missiles at people.

It should be borne in mind that the masks whose names are given above — the ezemmụọ, the dimkpammụọ and the akakpọmmụọ — are by no means the only powerful mmọnwụ characters in the area under study. There are several other celebrated masks whose names have not been mentioned and whose characteristics have not been recorded. But the particular cases we have thus far discussed have perhaps given us some insight into the nature of the different categories of mmọnwụ.

The Character of the Agbọghọmmụọ

The agbọghọmmụọ is not generally noted for any role other than the purely aesthetic one. She appears, as a general rule, only on very important dramatic occasions and for very brief moments. As has been said she never moves about alone; she is always looked after and taken care of by the other mmọnwụ *personae*. Perhaps

agbọghọmmụọ is most characterized by her lithesome movement, her brisk gestures and graceful, if quick, dance steps. She hardly stays or stands still at a place and her hands never stop moving about her as she either glides or dances about the arena. Other masks generally surround her partly obscuring and partly revealing her grandeur and often patting her silken figure. She is therefore rather mercurial in appearance – briefly seen and hardly heard. Her function is spectacular rather than poetic and her appeal visual rather than verbal. She concentrates attention on herself and never fails to draw and hold the attention of both the audience and the actors whenever she is in the arena. As a capricious, skittish, even at times vain female character, the mmọnwụ nwaanyị shuttles between the open stage and the ekwuru.

All the informants interviewed during the fieldwork agree that the main function of the agbọghọmmụọ is to entertain the audience with the display of various dance patterns and to add more grace and beauty to the mmọnwụ show. The agbọghọmmụọ hardly ever gives chase to spectators and it is a rare occurrence when this happens and thus the Igbo use the expression: "ebe agbọghọmmụọ na-achụ ka akakpọ (where the maiden mask gives chase like the dwarf mask)" to indicate an excitingly unique incident.

Despite the fact that the maiden mask does not pursue spectators, she stimulates other forms of activity like, as we have seen, the attention paid to her by the other performing masks and the display of okuku, a symbolic, decorative mmọnwụ gourd which, as a rule, is only displayed as a kind of mace before the ezemmụọ whenever the mmọnwụ nwaanyị takes part in a play. And, as a matter of fact, whenever the maiden mask is present in the arena the full awe of mmọnwụ display is realised.

The Charactistic Roles of Different Mmọnwụ Categories

Essentially all mmọnwụ characters perform a similar function in providing spectacle and provoking activity but specifically, while the main role of the ezemmụọ is poetic, providing entertainment by the magic of words and giving interpretation to the Igbo philosophy of life, the functions of the agbọghọmmụọ, the dimkpammụọ and the akakpọmmụọ are action-oriented. When the ezemmụọ is on the stage, the other three categories of mmọnwụ mentioned above are more seen than heard. This is not to say that they are all dumb during the performance for they can individually communicate either among themselves or with members of the audience and any of them could intone chants or initiate the dramatic chase. What it means, in fact, is that the

ezemmụọ is the supreme head and the sole director of the performance and the other actors are subservient to him.

Perhaps to illustrate more fully the respective character of each of the mmọnwụ categories it may be useful to give below some examples of what respondents regard as the general characteristics of some mmọnwụ personae known to them.

In Ekwuru 148 for example, the ezemmụọ, Ezebude, who is noted for chanting and dancing has abundance of tassels (ọza ebule). Of the two dimkpammụọ in this ekwuru Anụfọrọudensi, an awful mask, emits smoke from his head when danger awaits him, while Ọgụnaede makes peace in the society. The akakpọmmụọ, Isikoroebu, in addition to his dramatic function, sees to the communal sanitation, ensuring that the women keep the village paths clean. And finally, in this ekwuru, the agbọghọmmụọ, Nwaulari is famous for her dancing skill.

In Ekwuru 90, the ezemmụọ, Udekwereze is described as beautiful in nature, a good musician and dancer while Igboanụ, the dimkpammụọ is said to be a very fearless and radical spirit. Egbedum, one of the two akakpọmmụọ, we are told, is short and destructive and Agụeze, the second akakpọ, is also short, a clever chaser and a guard to Udekwereze, the ezemmụọ. Ucheegojiigbo, the agbọghọmmụọ, is described as a beautiful-looking woman and a dancer.

Also, in Ekwuru 164, Ọbịaọzụma, the ezemmụọ, we are told, performs miracles such as causing trees to dry up. His dimkpammụọ, Udeebube, sings and dances while the second dimkpammụọ, Ọdịadịghịmma, who has one arm is said to run faster than other masks. The akakpọmmụọ. Omewubuọgụ, is characterised by going about with a wooden spoon and Ekuruekwe, the agbọghọmmụọ dances.

Name as index to mmọnwụ character

Much of the character of the mmọnwụ personae is revealed or implied in their names and titles. Their stature, bearing, behaviour, and so on, can be deduced from their names, and, in this respect, the Igbo are perhaps not much different from the Indo-Europeans who originally used only one name, generally a compound name which mirrored,

> the boastful, warlike, extrovert character of conquerors. Thus one finds Germanic Herbert "shining in the army", Wille-helm, "whose will is helmet". Gunde- bald, "bold in battle" ... Russian Vladimir, "dominator of the world" and Gallic Dumno–rix, "king of the world."[11]

Similarly, Gbadamosi and Beier have remarked that among the Yoruba the name has great significance,

> and children will be named "Joy enters the house", "I have someone to pet" . . . But in addition to these names given at the naming ceremonies, there are others with which the child is born and which relate in fact to circumstances of birth ... Most important however, is the third group of names, the oriki, of which a person may acquire more and more during the course of his life.[12]"

Among the Igbo, names are important. At birth, the Igbo child (especially among the central Igbo) acquires his first name known as *aha nne jiri mụ onye*, usually compressed into *aha ejirimụ* (the name one is born with). He or she is automatically called Okeke, Okorie. Okafọ, Okonkwọ, Mgbeke, Mgborie, etc., after the name of the day of his or her birth.

These Igbo "natal" names are usually pet and familiar names used informally by friends and relatives, though many people adopt them today as surnames owing to Christian influence. They are usually names of endearment used by mothers to address their sons and daughters. It ought to be pointed out that apart from ejirimụ names there are others that derive from other circumstances of birth such as primogeniture and physical characteristics. Thus, a first male child is called Ọkpara and a first female child Ada; a fair-complexioned female child may be called Mgbọcha, a fair-complexioned male, Nwokọcha; a dark-complexioned male, Okoronji (Okoroji, Okonji) and twins, Ejima.

About the eighth day, a new born child gets his second name known as *aha agụragụ* or *abaraba* (name given). This is usually given by the parents or grandparents, though anybody could suggest a name. Every name has its significance and often expresses the thoughts, reflection or philosophy of life of the parents. It may imply or verbalize gratitude or petition to and praise or criticism of God, spirits, kith and kin, self or the society. For example, a man who feels he has enemies and critics may call his son Ọnụọha. that is, the shortened form of *Ọnụ ọha egbuna m* (let not the voice of the people kill me). The man who wishes to thank God for the gift of a son calls the child Chukwuemeka (God has done a great thing).

In addition to the birth name and the given name, the Igbo man usually has a third personal name, not a surname. He acquires this third name usually when he enters adulthood. It is a praise name generally and is personally chosen by the individual to make manifest his own attributes or achievements. It is known as *aha azaraza* (a name taken or chosen). As soon as one acquires this new name, also called *aha otutu* (name of salutation) people would begin to address him by it and it becomes his formal name of address. Before it attaches to him permanently, for it should be realised that at first it would compete with the first and second

names, he may resort to telling those who mistakenly call him by his earlier names to address him by his new name.

Included in this category of chosen names are those names taken during initiation into cults and traditional societies. Thus *aha ọzọ̄*, *aha Ele*, *aha ebiri* and *aha egwu* are names chosen by individuals when they are initiated into Ọzọ̄, Ele, age-set and dance societies respectively. These are in general praise epithets, for example, Nnabụenyi (father is elephant), Nnanyereugo (father has given the eagle), Ugochukwu (God's eagle), Nnanaemere (father achieves for). Other chosen names include Ogbuehi, the praise name for one who has killed a cow, Ogbuagụ, killer of lion.

To the Igbo as to most Africans, names are more than mere labels for identifying individual persons and things, for to them, considerable religious significance attaches to names. They therefore regard names as sacred symbols or even forces that signify the essence of persons and things.

> What's in a name? That which we call a rose by any other name would smell as sweet,

says Shakespeare through the mouth of Juliet, and echoing Shakespeare, Thackeray in his *Book of Snobs*, writes:

> That which we call a Snob, by any other name would still be snobbish.

The Igbo would tend to think that there is something in a name, for, like the Bantu they believe that a person's name tends to denote his spiritual powers" and thus is "a vital part of him" which should be guarded as are his hair, his nail parings, or pieces of his garments, possession of which, by another, would put him in the possessor's power." [13] Thus before an Igbo father gives a name to his child he first thinks of the implication of the name. There is a feeling that a child turns out to be a fulfilment of his name. People feel a child named Dike might grow into a fighter On the other hand a child called Ngọzi would be expected to bring blessing, and the one called Obiọma to be meek and humble of heart.

This Igbo onomastic philosophy, as would be expected, applies to mmọnwụ characterisation. In general, each of the four categories of mmọnwụ has characteristic names pertaining to members of the category. Characters in the ezemmụọ category assume kingly and mighty names, dimkpammụọ *personae* are given heroic and dynamic names while akakpọ characters have militant names and the female masks are known by dear and graceful names.

All chief masks, for example, have the title of eze (king or ruler) whether this title occurs in their name or not. Thus Igbonaekwu (77) is in fact Ezeigbonaekwu. Conversely, Ezembakwe (29) could be addressed simply as Mbakwe, in which case the title of eze is understood. Names of chief masks show them as great and mighty beings whose greatness is emphasized by their awesome height. Ezebude, for example, is a straightforward statement that king is fame and Ezeanuforoude (74) implies a rhetorical question, "has not my fame (as king) been heard?" The meanings of other ezemmụọ names are:

> *Udekwereze,* fame befits a king; *Ezekwereobi,* kingship befits the obi (legimate lineage); *Ezegborogụ,* king stops the fight (dispute), that is, (restores peace; *Udebụeze* fame is king; *Ọbiaraka,* who comes and overshadows all: *Udeebube* the fame of awe; *Igbojiude, Igbo (humanity) holds fame; Mbanude (Mbanurude),* the nations have heard (my) fame; *Igbokwe,* Igbo (humanity) acknowledges (that I am the greatest); *Ụdụmnehi,* the report of my fame spreads; *Ezejiọfọ,* king holds the staff of authority;
>
> *Ezeokpudo,* king that overshadows; *Egwurugwu,* the rainbow; *Ọnyịrịmba,* who is too tough for the nations; *Obinaṣọ,* others are afraid of; *Ezenagụ,* kingship is desirable; *Otigharaọfọ,* the final arbiter, judge of judges; *Ezechọrọudo,* king who wants peace; *Ọjiewuru;* the iroko (colossus) stands, *Ezekaude,* king is mightier than fame; and *Udekaeze,* fame is mightier than king.

From the above names the character of each ezemmụọ emerges, and in general, it would appear that the emphasis is on fame. And as fame is achieved either through a show of wealth or through miraculous deeds, the masks with the "ude" appellation would be expected to be elegantly costumed, oracular in their utterances or potent in their actions. The relationship between *ude* (fame) and *eze* (king) is intriguing: depending on one's point of view, fame befits a king, fame is king, king is fame, culminating in the apparent paradox – "king is mightier than fame" and "fame is mightier than king". What is meant is that both *ude* and *eze* are complementary and inseparable. Those who cannot imagine a king without fame name their ezemmụọ Udekaeze and those who decry empty fame call their ezemmụọ Ezekaude. In effect, a king without fame is not king and fame without a basis is not fame.

Ọbịaraka, Ọnyịrịmba, Obinaṣọ, Ezeokpudo and Otigharaọfọ portray another dimension of ezemmụọ character – a symbol of authority, power, reverence, respect for primogeniture. These names depict the respect accorded to the personae bearing them. On the other hand, the name Egwurugwu connotes the beautiful and is as symbolic of wealth as the rainbow. The importance of legitimacy, non-*osu* pedigree in the Igbo social order is reflected

in the names with the obi affix. Ezegborọgụ, Ezechọrọudọ and such-like names characterise those ezemmụọ who are primarily peace-makers.

Names given to dimkpammụọ also are indicative of their character as an examination of the names of the dimkpammụọ given above would clarify. Consider, for example:

> ***Anụfọrọudensi,*** has the report of poison not been heard? ***Ezeụgụrụ,*** harmattan; Omesu, who provokes; Onyekwuruje, who would ever rival (him)? Iwuobodo, community law; Ikezuagụ if strenght meets lion, and ***Mbanasọ,*** nations fear (him)

and it will be seen that these names are intended to foreshadow the characters of the masks bearing them. Indeed, Mbanaso, (44) literally meaning the nations fear or dread, is in reality feared by all, and when he is on the stage the audience is spell-bound. *Ụgụrụ*, meaning harmattan, has the titular appellation of *"eze"* prefixed to his name indicating that a *dimkpammụọ* could be given a title name. Thus it is not only the *ezemmụọ* in the ekwuru who could have the "eze" appellation. Dimkpammụọ, for example, Ezeuguru, given above, and Ezegborogu (19) could have eze affixed to their names as well. This, of course, conforms to the Igbo egalitarian practice of not restricting title-taking to heads of families but of making it open to all deserving members of the community, fathers and sons alike, who are "sons of the soil" and can afford to perform the ceremony. The point then is that not all mmọnwụ with the eze title are ezemmụọ and in this context "eze", in fact, means *ukwu* (great) and not *isi* (head or chief).

The names of the akakpọmmụọ also depict their character as can be seen from the meanings of the following:

> *Agbatazọbaeze,* **let the nations struggle for kingship;** *Igboenweakụ, the masses never have wealth;* **Egbedum,** *gun's boom;* Akpasuoanụ, *If the bee is provoked; Agụdịegwu, the terrible leopard,*,Omeninyọ, *one who surprises; and* **Ojiisietiwaako,** *who with the head breaks the gate.*

As has earlier been explained, the character of Igboenweakụ, a name symbolisng the poverty of the masses, is implied in the name, so that, on hearing the name one would visualise a character that embodies want, raggedness, and of course, anger and strife. Similarly, Ojiisietiwaako, Agụdịegwu, and others, provoke images of aggression and destruction.

Names of agbọghọmmụọ, on the other hand, characterise them as symbols of beauty, attraction and grace, pageantry and high value, as the following names already given would illustrate:

Egodịnobi, there is money to the obi (legitimate lineage); Egoigudagwụ, Wealth of the people has been expended (on creating the mask); *Akụajụma*, when seen, enquiries are made; *Akụjagwụ*, wealth will be exhausted (in decorating her); *Uzụmma*, the din of beauty; Nwaoduagụ, charming lionfall; *Udeebube*, fame of dignity; Egobuude, money is fame; *Udeinyịnya*, fame of horse; *Nwaujuagụ*, charming lion's mane.

As can be seen from the above, the idea of money and wealth is paramount in the concept of the agbọghọmmụọ. This reflects the cost involved in the costurning of this category of mmọnwụ and the general belief that an expensive thing is generally precious. Thus *ego* (money) and *akụ* (wealth) feature in the names of agbọghọmmụọ and consequently the term is used in naming them. And as a beautiful thing necessarily acquires fame the concept "ude" (fame) recurs in the names of agbọghọmmụọ. The mask named Uzụmma, for example, evokes images of alluring beauty, a beauty that generates such loud admiration and ovation that spectators are deaf to other sounds.

The significance that the Igbo attach to personal names is therefore reflected in mmọnwụ characterisation and thus, on hearing the name of an mmọnwụ, one could fairly say not only to what category of mmọnwụ the one mentioned belongs, despite the fact that at times the ezemmụọ and the dimkpammụọ bear similar names, but also his or her general character.

Characterisation of Non-masked Performers

In each dramatic group, apart from the masks who are generally regarded as spirits, there are also non-masked performers who contribute to the achievement of the mmọnwụ aesthetic effect. Members of the *ọkụigba* constitute a group of such actors. Their number varies from one play group to another depending on the numerical strength of the group.

The youthful members of the dramatic group (ụmụ okorọbịa na ụmụ dimkpa) who are between the ages of 20 and 45 constitute the ọkụigba actors. Initiated minors and the elderly initiates do not usually take part in the ọkụigba action as it involves deeds of strength, and since in the pre-christian days in Igbo land "deeds of strength" largely implied "medicinal", that is, "magical" or miraculous deeds, the very young and fairly old and feeble were not thought fit for ọkụigba action.

In the past the ọkụigba was primarily conceived as a warrior – brave intrepid, fearless, unemotional. He was psychologically armed to withstand satirical, ritual or magical warfare and depended heavily on what was called "medicine" (*ọgwụ*). "*Anụnụ isi*

akaghị aka anaghị eje ọgụ ọtukpukpọkpọ" (the bird with the soft head does not engage in a woodpecker's fight) was a saying often applied to the ọkụigba of old when charms were used by rival performing groups to demonstrate their relative strength and when Igbo society was plagued by the fear of medicine or the fame of poison (ude nsi). In those days the ọkụigba actor during normal performances wore costumes that depicted him as a warrior — thick hand woven cloth girded round the loins and silken bands slung across the shoulders with velveteen head-dresses. Some of them carried *igba* (from which they derived their name, ọkụigba — beater of *igba*) a type of kettle drum, which they beat while others danced.

During major or festive performances they were elaborately costumed in *abada* or jọọji skirts or multi-coloured strips of velvet material called *ịpa*.

Today the concept of the ọkụigba has greatly changed and he is primarily seen as an artiste and not mainly a psychological warrior. Now his costume, usually designed in each ekwuru to enhance the mmọnwụ spectacle, depicts him as an illustrious son of a wealthy and all-powerful father. The ọkụigba can now be conceived as the nearest characters to the mmọnwụ personae and as mmọnwụ disciples they could easily identify with the masks. There is indeed a saying that "ihe mmọnwụ mere, ọkụigba nwere ike ime ya" (what mmọnwụ does, the ọkụigba can do). During an mmọnwụ performance the ọkụigba sees himself not as real Okeke or Okorie but as an actor who impersonates the role of a disciple of a spiritual household, the ekwuru, and plays the part as long as they play lasts, after which he becomes once more his real self.

Another group of performers in an mmọnwụ play are the mmarigo who used to consist of unmarried maidens and betrothed girls who were still living in their maiden homes and who had not finally gone to live with their husbands. The qualification, "who had not finally gone to live with their husbands" is an important one because in the past a girl ceased to be a maiden only when she had gone to settle in her husband's place (ịla obi) by which time she would be exptected shortly to become a mother and thus an *obuakwa* (carrier, i.e., wearer of cloth). This term *"obuakwa"* in itself has cultural significance because it indicates that in the past only women were expected to be fully clothed, nudity being then a sign of freshness and innocence.

In those days (the early decades of the century) the mmarigo players, like the ọkụigba, were generally elegantly costumed. Each

actress, as we will see below,[14] strove to achieve aesthetic appeal through bodily decorations – elegant hair-do, application of body-paints, namely, *uri, agarụ, nkịsịala, uhie, edo, atanjele*, etc., and costumes consisting of colourful cloths stylishly tied round the wrists, ankles, the neck, arms and waist.

Now due to cultural changes arising from Christian influences and modern education, it has not been possible or even desirable for the original mmarigo idea to remain unchanged. The Christian missionaries have been largely instrumental to the great change in the mmarigo concept for they saw the structure as a challenge to some of their youth movements such as the Catholic Mary League (Otu Mmeri) and Legion of Mary, the Anglican Youth Fellowship, etc. Thus they (especially the Catholic authorities) barred the christian girls from taking part in the mmọnwụ play with the threat of refusing them "holy communion".

But with the increasing independence of the church today interested girls are no longer prevented through intimidation from taking part in mmọnwụ plays. And yet many girls, because they are in schools, and other insititutions, cannot actively take part in mmọnwụ displays. Consequently married women can now become members of the Mmarigo group and in some dramatic groups it is even possible for the mmarigo to be made up exclusively of married women.

Just as the ọkụigba or otiigba are conceived as the male disciples of mmọnwụ so also are the mmarigo regarded as the daughters of the ekwuru, the unspoilt, obedient and truthful daughters of mmọnwụ, well brought up in the mores of the community. They are indeed the "mmọnwụ virgins" who symbolize the incomparable beauty and purity of nature for in the past their education included what one could term orientation into "mmọnwụ love", a unique form of platonic love in which both sexes interacted with each other without being sexually intimate, in which the virgin saw her male partner as a surrogate for the ancestral spirits and the young man saw his female love as the queen, agbọghọmmụọ. The mmọnwụ lovers could sleep together but were not permitted sexual indulgence. It was a strict education in moral control, an education imparted without the promiscuity generally associated with some modern theories of sex education. There were occasional stories of mmọnwụ lovers' intemperance, but so are reports of some Catholic priests abusing the confessional, and in any case, it was said that mmọnwụ invariably found out those who abused his "spiritic" love and meted out such punishment as would deter potential abusers.

The mmarigo concept has great moral influence in the community for not only does it inculcate in the maidens sound moral principles but also provides the society with the means, satirical means, of controlling itself morally. Verses, satirising such social phenomena as profligacy, gossip and theft, are often chanted by the mmarigo with the main objective of mending the society. For instance, in three traditional mmarigo verses, "Ezikeobiaku", "Ọcha Nwamiriagu" and "Ọsukwu Tugharịba",[15] the mmarigo satirise Ezikeobiaku and his family for theirsquander-mania, Nwamiriagu for her gossip, and an unnamed protagonist for stealing cassava in a hill-side farm, in that order and through these victims, individuals in the society are admonished to avoid evil and do good.

Directors and Producers

The spiritual head of each ekwuru is the ezemmuọ (chief mask) but the real or executive head is the akatakpo or ọtaala. Although the ekwuru comprising all the members of a particular mmọnwụ group, has a collective responsibility, it is the akatakpo who is ultimately responsible for the acts of the mmọnwụ in his ekwuru and has the final say in such matters as the occasion for the emergence of mmọnwụ from the ekwuru, the schedule for mmọnwụ plays and initiations, the type of mmọnwụ play to be staged and so on. He could, for example, prevent mmọnwụ from answering in the ekwuru and more than anybody else in the group he is expected to be versed in the lore of mmọnwụ for he is not only the chief administrator of the group but also the director and often producer of mmọnwụ plays. In most cases the office of the akatakpo is elective in the first instance and thereafter hereditary. This means that a group that wishes to establish an ekwuru appoints one of its members as the first akatakpo for life and when this akatakpo dies his heir succeeds him as the new akatakpo for the group. In some drama areas such as in Azia the eldest man in the ekwuru assumes the post. Early in the history of ekwuru formation, dramatic groups tended to appoint, as akatakpo, a lonely man, often an elderly bachelor in whose custody the mmọnwụ secret was expected to be secure and who could devote most of his energies to the development of the mmọnwụ tradition. As time went on the power of the akatakpo grew so enormously that today the post is generally held by highly respected citizens as the list of akatakpo given in the Appendix shows.

The sacred palm frond carrier or waver (ọpiaọmụ) who directs the movement of the mmọnwụ character, is a very important

character in an mmọnwụ performance as we will see in the next chapter. When he wishes the mmọnwụ to move forward he strikes the ọmụ on the ground and would say, "Nna m ụzọ wam" which may be interpreted freely as "Father, the way is clear" and the mask moves foreward. If he wishes to check the advance of the mmọnwụ character, he places the ọmụ against the ground in the front of the mmọnwụ and says either, "Nna m ọmụ dị ya", "Nna m iyi dị ya" or Nna m egbo dị ya" (My father, there is sacred palm leaf, my father, there is river, or father, there is sacred barrier) and mmọnwụ, as a rule, does not cross such a metaphysical barrier.

The main objective of the ọpiaọmụ in sounding such a note of warning to a performing mask is to check the mask s advance. For instance, if the mmọnwụ is giving chase to uninitiated members the most effective way of stopping him would be by using the ọmụ in the way indicated. If the mmọnwụ action is taking place along the road, uninitiated persons can hardly ever pass without the aid of an initiated member, and here the ọpiaọmụ may use his sacred frond in confining mmọnwụ to a corner while the trembling uninitiate is conducted across to safety.

The act of *ịpịa ọmụ* performed by the akatakpo or any other initiated player is often regarded as dramatically hazardous because it is held that it is most risky to restrain a powerful spirit. It is, however, stimulating to watch the opiaomu's efforts to hold the mask in check without physical contact, that is, without getting near to the mmọnwụ, not to talk of touching him. The ọpiaọmụ feints around with the ọmụ, knowing when to give the sign for movement and for halt, when to restrain and when to allow, for, in spite of the fact that he has the sacred *ọmụ*, a symbol that restrains mmọnwụ, the ọpiaọmụ still has to retreat from mmọnwụ for there is the saying that "mmọnwụ abụghị nwanne mmadụ" (mmọnwụ is not anybody's relation). The awe inherent in the mmọnwụ *personae* is expressed in the statement, "nwata buru mmọnwụ ụzọ ọ gbagburu onwe ya n'ọsọ" (a child who goes before mmọnwụ destroys himself running).

The interpreter (akịrịakị), translates normal Igbo into mmọnwụ language and vice versa. He could use his initiative in interpreting any mmọnwụ utterance that appears to him ambiguous – and mmọnwụ is characterised by ambiguity, ambivalence and equivocation, for he is praised as ọgọdọ ighara mighara (cloth that turns this way and that way), mma ihu naabọ (two-edged sword) and amụmaigwe (lightning) that is unpredictable. *Inaputa mmọnwụ okwu* (interpreting mmọnwụ language) is indeed a difficult and risky undertaking that demands a great deal of

presence of mind because of the unpredictability of the mmọnwụ character. It is not uncommon for a performing mask to embarrass, on the open stage, an interpreter who has made what he regards as a faulty rendering of his utterance. An astute interpreter would endeavour to avoid such awkward situations but if unavoidably they arise he would promptly give what the mmọnwụ would accept as the right interpretation. In an ekwuru it is possible for more than one person to know the art of interpreting so that when the official interpreter is not available any other person could perform his function.

One of the occasional characters during mmọnwụ performances is the *obuokuku* (carrier of the *okuku).* He is occasional because he appears only whenever the mmọnwụ nwaanyị takes part in an mmọnwụ show and this is not always. In other words, the agbọghọmmụọ may appear without the obuokuku appearing. The *okuku* is a symbolic, decorative gourd which is paraded by the obuokuku as a kind of emblem or mace before the ezemmụọ. In the past it used to be the symbol of the "medicinal" power of the ezemmụọ and represented so to speak, the sovereignty of the ekwuru just as the *ọda* signified the throne. Now the *okuku* may be regarded as the theatrical insignia. The obuokuku, like the other human actors and actresses, is often gaily costumed. He carries the okuku carefully in both hands and glides gracefully through the arena. He moves in front of the ezemmụọ and from the ekwuru into the obom and back. He parades the heraldic symbol before the audience to impress them with the authority and dignity of the ezemmụọ and in this way contributes to the appeal of mmọnwụ drama.

Related to the obuokuku is the otiọfọ (ọfọ staff striker). He acts when mmọnwụ performs a judicial role. The relationship between ọfọ, justice and authority has been illustrated by E.N. Njaka in the following statement:

> The Eze of a city-state places his two feet on the ancestral ọfọ or piously holds it in his hands, makes the pronoucement (purported to be coming from the ancestors with Chukwu's attention, direction and sanction) to the Constitutional Deity and all the elders with their Ọfọ each representing the ancestors of the segmentary units, reply in unison Ịha, Ịha, E-O-Oh, Iha (let it be, let it be, we all agree, so let it be). From that time onward any violation is considered as *imeru Ala* (violation of the constitution.[16]

Thus when mmọnwụ is acting in his capacity as a law-giver and judge his otiọfọ strikes the ọfọ mmọnwụ on the ground as a sign that the final ruling on an issue has been given.

The dramatic function of the *ọkwaekwe;* (the ekwe drummer) and the ọkwaọdụ (the horn-player) will be discused in the next chapter. Their art is acquired after a long period of apprenticeship

and each ekwuru usually has at least one ọkwaekwe and one ọkwaọdụ. Where there are many of these players they may form themselves into separate committees and into these they admit interested ọsụkwụ who wish to learn how to play these instruments. In this way the art of playing both the ekwe and the ọdụ is perpetuated. The ọkwaekwe and the ọkwaọdụ, of course, are part of the ọkụigba and together they form what may be regarded as the mmọnwụ orchestra and chorus.

It should be pointed out that this aspect of mmọnwụ structure, although useful in the achievement of mmọnwụ aesthetic effect, is not indispensable to the production of mmọnwụ plays, for there could be mmọnwụ performance without the orchestra and chorus, that is, without the otiigba, the ọkwaekwe and the ọkwaọdụ. Nonetheless, this musical aspect of mmọnwụ dramatization has plenty of scope for further development and modernization.

The Invisible Characters

Apart from the performers who appear on the stage there are others who form what one may regard as the invisible characters of the ekwuru. The most important of these unseen characters is probably the Udide (Spider) who symbolises the supreme artist and is mythologized as a creative being living underground in the ekwuru. He is said to create mmọnwụ figures from raffia straw and this is why he has been given the name of Udide (Spider) a being that in Igbo mythology has the power of gathering together fragments of any object and creating them into a new object. Indeed the name "spider" in Igbo myth is as synonymous with creativity as "tortoise" is with cunning, and thus the people talk of "Udide Ọkwanka" (Spider the Artist). As Udide is best seen in relation to the creation of the mmọnwụ figure, his artistic function will be further discussed in the chapter dealing with mmọnwụ spectable.

Other Unseen Actors

These would include such characters as the *anyamammọnwụ* (the eye that recognizes mmọnwụ), the *onọchianyaudide* (who blocks the entrance to the Udide Chamber) and the *ọchịakpammọnwụ* (the carrier of mmọnwụ's bag). Each ekwuru has a number of these functionaries depending on the size of the ekwuru and the number of the masks. The identity of these unseen actors is never revealed to the uninitiated.

The Play Group

All these players -- seen and unseen -- form the play group which is also known as the ekwuru. Thus, apart from being a physical building for the production of plays, the ekwuru is a system embracing all the members (umụnkwụ) of a playhouse with the akatakpo as the executive head.

Members of each play group could act as individual members of that group or as members of sub-groups within the group, that is, as members of what may be called ekwuru committees to which members could belong by paying some fee usually consisting of some litres of palm wine.[17] At first these committees probably were offices occupied by individual members but as time went on the individual functionaries admitted other interested members into these offices thus turning them into committees. *Ngaduọgụ* (the foremost in battle, vanguard) and *Ojeeme* (he who acts), for instance, were at first functions performed by individual members but later on, in most ekwuru in Ihitenansa and Amaruru, they were turned into committees to which important members of the ekwuru are admitted if found worthy. In some ekwuru these committees are known as *ọzọ mmọnwụ* (mmọnwụ title). Members of these committees generally advise the akatakpo in the over-all administration of ekwuru affairs.

As we have seen in this chapter the players involved in the presentation of mmọnwụ play are many and varied: different categories of masked figures, male and female singers and dancers, players of musical instruments, and the producers seen and unseen. All these play their individual roles to achieve the ultimate mmọnwụ dramatic effect as will be shown in the next chapter dealing with the mmọnwụ performance.

Notes:

1. See Ekwuru Ezewuru (100), in List of Mmọnwụ Characters in 8 selected Theatres in the Appendix, p. 207

2 *Ibid.*, Ekwuru 70, 72 and 73.

3 *Ibid.*, Ekwuru 25, 28, 29 and 37.

4 Traditional praise verse recited by Ugonna Ezenwaka.

5 During an interview with Raphael Okwe of Ihịọma, one elderly participant told of what happened once, in the 1920s, when his mmọnwụ went to Uruala Ezeagụ to compete with the Ebuebu mask in a show of "medicinal" strength at the invitation of the leader of the town, Chief Okosisi. On the way to the show their mmọnwụ caused a cyclist to fall off his bicycle possibly to his death merely by pointing a finger at him because the cyclist defiantly tried to ride past the mmọnwụ after he had been warned not to do so. At the contest itself the mmọnwụ reportedly set a tall palm tree ablaze in the same manner, that is, by pointing at it. In the end, the mmọnwụ overpowered Ebuebu. Okosisi and his people therefore "married" mmọnwụ and so established their own ekwuru.

His supposed father.

See Fig. 6a. p. 54.

Arinze, *Sacrifice in Ibo Religion*, p. 20.

I have a batch of completed questionnaires in my collection numbered from 1 to 172 (File RW/Q2/1—172).

RW/Q2/118.

Giuliano Bonfante, "Personal Names", *Collier's Encyclopaedia*, Vol. 15, New York, The Crowell-Collier Publishing Co., 1961, p. 219.

Bakare Gbadamosi and Ulli Beier, *Yoruba Poetry*, Ibadan, 1959, p. 63.

Quoted in T. Adeoye Lambo, *African Traditional Beliefs: Concepts of Health and Medical Practice*, Ibadan, Ibadan University Press, 1963, p. 7.

See p. 92 below.

See full text of poems in Chapter 7, p. 183—185 below.

Ahanotu, "The Economics and Politics of Religion", p 23-24.

In Ezekwereobi Theatre of Amaokpara Ihitenansa, for example, an initiate is admitted into the Ojeeme Committee after he has brought 9 litres of "upwine".

5

THE PERFORMANCE

e performance of mmọnwụ plays is based on the tradition the oral text. An oral text implies the unwritten, more or less ndard version of a hereditary tale, praise song or chant which, general, members of the community can recite without much ficulty and reproduce in the same way as literate people read recite a novel, a poem or the text of a play.[1] However, in the esentation of mmọnwụ plays, neither the series of actions nor e texts of the poetic utterances follow the same sequence ch time the plays are repeated because of the oral nature of e tradition and the rather episodic form of Igbo literature.[2] erefore, each mmọnwụ performance could be regarded as a ique experience hardly ever to be repeated.

Nonetheless there are characteristic features underlying all nọnwụ plays. These include the practices and rehearsals in e ekwuru, the construction of the needed sets, the various corations of the obom, and the actual presentation of the play volving masked and non-masked actors. Futhermore, in this apter, two illustrations of normal mmọnwụ plays — texts recorded mmọnwụ plays -- would be given, and specialised rms of mmọnwụ play examined.

eparatory

ne date and time of performance is agreed upon by the perform- g company in their ekwuru and a public announcement is made. the past this was by word of mouth, but in recent times modern vertising techniques, for example, handbills, posters and press nouncements, have been employed as well. The announcement ten creates excitement within the community and generates scussions of mmọnwụ lore and mmọnwụ myths. While eculations regarding what spectacle to expect spread through e society, the genealogy of the ekwuru producing the play ould be recounted and the character of each participating mask,

what it has done in the past and what has been done to it, would be discussed. Indeed, details of the appearance of each mmọnwụ character are generally well-known in the community, and people discuss them as literary critics discuss the character of Hamlet or Brutus. This period is a time of expectation and as the day of the display draws near the anticipation mounts.

Before the actual presentation of the play, preparations aimed at the achievement of maximum theatrical effect are made in two major directions, namely, in the setting of the obom and in the decorating and costuming of players who also hold regular practices and rehearsals. The setting of the obom involves the cleaning and sweeping of the arena, the decoration of the ekwuru and the construction of fences, stands, enclosures and seats where necessary. The human members of the play group prepare themselves for the performance by the application of elaborate make-up, the female players in their hair-do, their *uri*,[3] *agarụ* and *nkịsiala* body paints and *uhie* and *edo* ointments.[4]

In the past the men were not averse to the application of almost the same make-up as the maidens to the extent that some of the *ọkụigba* wore *jigida* (waist beads) as the mmarigo. Today, however, new forms of costumes are designed and new make-up techniques introduced. As part of the general preparations the Udide makes sure that the figures of the masks are in good order, all the players have constant rehearsals both formally in the ekwuru and the *ụlọọmụ* and informally in their homes.

The *ọkwaekwe* (player of the slit wooden drum) and the *ọkwaọdụ* (the horn player) practise constantly on the *ekwe*[5] and the *ọdụ*[6] which are essential mmọnwụ musical instruments and which often herald the day of the mmọnwụ performance. On the morning of the day, the familiar sounds of *ekwe* and *ọdụ* put members of the community in the mmọnwụ mood and invite and indeed urge them to the *obom*. An artist who performs a similar function of inviting participants to the theatre is the *ọkwamkpụkpọ* (ululator), a purely verbal artist, and he too at this time chants his verses proclaiming the authority, power, serenity and beauty of mmọnwụ *personae*. As those who have participated in an mmọnwụ performance would attest, the music produced by the *ekwe* and *ọdụ*, punctuated with the ululator's chants, helps significantly to create in the spectators the feeling of awe, admiration and majesty associated with the mmọnwụ character.

The mmọnwụ play itself may take place at any time of the day, but it is usual for it to be staged in the morning or in the evening, to avoid the intense heat of the sun. Where, however,

the show unavoidably takes place in the afternoon heat, spectators may take shelter under trees available in some theatres. Where shelter is not provided either by trees or specially constructed sheds the spectators will defy the heat in order to watch the performance. In any case, since participants in an mmọnwụ show traditionally move around, the heat hardly becomes unbearable; in witnessing mmọnwụ the spectators do not stand on a spot for a long time but are ever mobile, thus the saying *"a naghị anọ otu ebe ekiri mmọnwụ."* (one does not stay at a spot to witness mmọnwụ). However, this practice is gradually changing with the change in the concept of the mmọnwụ theatre and in the psychology of the audience.

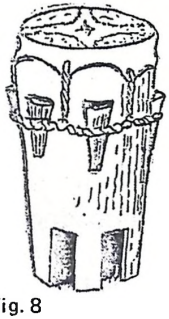

Fig. 8
Igba (membraneous drum)

Fig. 9
Ekwe

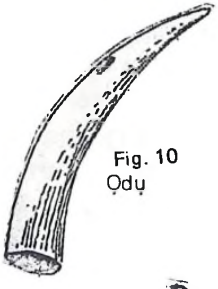

Fig. 10
Ọdụ

Fig. 11
Ogene

Fig. 12
Okuku

Presentation of Play

Mmọnwụ performance opens when one[7] or more players, masked or not masked, enter the obom to perform before an audience any episode of the mmọnwụ action. Mmọnwụ action may be described as the sum total of all the activities – chanting, dancing, acrobatic displaying, story-telling, chasing spectators, spell-binding, and so on – which actors in the mmọnwụ drama perform on the mmọnwụ stage to entertain and thrill the audience and effect in them, through fear and spectacle, a resolution of tensions, and develop in them moral fortitude and loyalty toward collective authority. The action is not, therefore, as has been emphasised, one long plot or story but an under-current of *mythos* which links the present world of the living with the invisible world of the dead. It is made up of a number of episodes unified by the where and the when and may be said to consist of the happenings in the day to day existence of a character who, concretized in mask, re-enacts the complex drama of Igbo family and social life.

(a) Opening Acts

It has been stated that mmọnwụ presentation does not follow a set parttern yet it is usual that after the spectators have settled down in their places around the central staging area the following opening scenes (and sometimes, behind the scene activities) are enacted, though not necessarily in the same order:

(i) From their ụlọọmụ the mmarigo would begin chanting these or other mmọnwụ verses:

Mmarigo: Ụmụ ereere welitebe ọkpa
Welitebe ọkpa, na anyị ga-eje Oru.
Ụmụ mmarigo welitebe ọkpa,
Welitebe ọkpa na anyị ga-eje Oru.
Ebe Oru na-èkwo akwà,
Na-agba atụtụkọrọ
Ụmụ ereere welitebe ọkpa
Ma ogbodi amaghị ya.
Ma ogbodi mara akwa
Ọ maghị ihe e jiri kwo akwa.
Ugerumba, eze,
Nna ya na-ekwu àma ojù
N'iro mmọnwụ.

Maidens, hurry up
Hurry up for we will go to Oru
Maidens, hurry up

Hurry up for we will go to Oru;
Where Oru weaves cloth
And sews together —
Maidens, hurry up
For the non-initiate knows it not.
Even if the non-initiate knows the cloth
He knows not the material with which
the cloth is made.
Ugerumba, king,
Whose father legislates and implants
the iron staff
In the mmọnwụ arena.

Nga m na-eje nga m na-eje
Jere pụta ebe iche na ugo yiri okpe;
Ị hụla iche ebère, ugo ebère.
Iche ebère n'ọjị jụọ m onye mụ m,
Ugo ebère n'ọjị jụọ m onye mụ m
Ajụọ m ugo sị, "onye mụ gị?"
Ajụọ m iche sị, "onye mụ gị?"
Anyị arụba àbà rụkata,
Anyị arụkata rụjiri egbe tọba.
Anyị arụkata rụjiri mma tọba.
Ị hụla iche eburu ụzọ ka ọkwè,
Iche sịrị na ọ bụ egbengwu mụnụ ya.
Asị m na ọ bụghị egbengwu mụ m.
Esibeagụgọ nwa oje ka okoro mụ m.
Ugerumba nwa oje ka agbọghọ mụ m.
Ha nụ ya anụ ha ga-egburu m eghu na ime,
Ha anụghị ya anụ ha ga-egburu m eghu
na ime.
Irighiri na-eri egwu, anyị ma ole?
Nkenke, na-ekere m mmesuru.
Iko ọcha adàrù àlà, zà ego bụ ude.
Obere nkachiifu, zà ego bụ ude.
Nke nne na-eme dị, zà ego bụ ude.
Ego ooo.[8]

I was going where I was going,
And came where parrot and eagle had
dispute;

You see, parrot perched and eagle
perched.
Parrot perched on the iroko and
asked me who begot me,
Eagle perched on the iroko and
asked me who begot me.
I asked eagle, "who begot you?"
I asked parrot, "who begot you?"
We argued and argued and argued,
The tension that resulted was enough
To break a gun and a cutlass into pieces.
You see, parrot took the lead like
the game-seed.
Parrot said that egbengwu was his
father.[9]
I said that egbengwu was not my
father.
Esibeagụgọ who walks like a man
begot me.
Ugerumba who walks like a maiden
begot me.
If they hear it they will kill a
pregnant goat in my name.[10]
If they hear it not they will kill a
pregnant goat in my name.
Irighiri that eats dance, what do
we know?
Nkenke, beat the mmesuru drum for me.
White cup that never falls to the
ground, respond "money is fame"
Little handkerchief, respond "money
is fame".
What mother does is manifest,
respond "money is fame".
"Money ..."

The Ọkụigba Opening Act

As the mmarigo are about to end their chants the ọkụigba[12] emerge from the ekwuru compound and make an opening display consisting of chanting and dancing. They move round the stage in intricate and graceful formations, sometimes in one large circle or in a single file and at other times in groups, chanting:

Ọkụigba, mgbawụsa mgbawụsa
Ọkụigba, mgbawụsa mgbawụsa
Ọkụigba, mgbawụsa, oo
Obi ego, mgbawụsa mgbawụsa... [13]

or any similar verses. The above traditional chant is evocative of the ọkụigba group who, in chanting it, are reciting a praise poem whose theme derives from the general theme of the mmọnwụ action — strength, power, pedigree. By addressing themselves as ọkụigba they imply that they are the bold and youthful sons of their masked lord, his disciples, warriors, and entertainers who share in his spiritual power. Their reference to *"obi ego"* introduces the theme of pedigree, for by it they mean they are descended from a free, unsullied lineage of wealthy and influential forebears. After moving round the central staging area they would then repair to their own part of the arena, and from there, accompanied by the mmọnwụ orchestra, chant and dance to the tune of such verses as the following:

Ọgụtaegwu: Okorie Nwamaraude
Solo: Okorie Nwamaraude
Ọkụigba niile: Amaghị m ihe m mere odudu,
Odudu ji eri m,
Amaghị m.
Chorus: I know not what I have done to tsetse-fly
That makes tsetse-fly prey on me
I know not.
Ọgụtaegwu: Onyeasị gbuo agụ ...
Solo: If an enemy kills a lion
Ọkụigba niile: Amaghị m ihe m mere odudu,
Odudu ji eri m,
Amaghị m.
Chorus: I know not what I have done to
tsetse-fly,
That makes tsetse-fly prey on me
I know not.

Ọgụ: Ọ bụrụ nnawuruede..
Solo: It becomes a wild cat.

Ọkụ: Amaghị m ihe m mere odudu,
Odudu ji eri m,
Amaghị m.

Chorus: I know not what I have done to
tsetse-fly,
That makes tsetse-fly prey on me,
I know not.

Ogu: Ma onye ụlọ ka eme.

Solo: But a kinsman does worse.

Oku: Amaghị m ihe m mere odudu,
Odudu ji eri m,
Amaghị m.

Chorus: I know not what I have done to
tsetse-fly,
That makes tsetse-fly prey on me,
I know not.

2

Nwaokeke gbara ọkpa n'akpụ,
Biko na-ekwere m egwu,
Na nwayọọ bụ ije.
Nwaokorie jere ọgụ gbuo nnụ,
Na-asụrụ m egwu,
Na egwu aburula igba.
Nwaokafọ gbara aka rị ọjị,
Na-etere m uri.
Ụbọchị aburụ egwu.
Nwaokonkwọ nwere akụ dumdum.
Na-ekwere m egwu,
Ọ bụ alpataghị akụ bụ ịtụkwụba ọnụ.
Mgbirichi loro alọ n'Aro.
Ahịa zuchaa udele enwere ala.
Ebowusi, oke agụ, ị dinwakwa ka i di?

Anorọla m na mgbenye mara ihe.
Okeke nne,
Onye dị ka adaghị ejebe mbịa?
Adaghị ejebe mbịa,
Ya ka dibịa jiri nwụchie uzọ.

Onye na-eje ka Okafọ Egbokaidei?
Okafọ Egbokaidei, ụbọchị aburụ egwu,
Ubochị aburụ egwu, ma gị were nwayọọ
Gị were nwayọọ, na nwayọọ bụ ije![4]

Nwaokeke who shook the cotton tree
with his foot,
Please chant on for me,
For, by walking slowly and steadily
a difficult journey is accomplished.
Nwaokorie who went to battle and
killed hundreds,
Chant for me
For chant is become drum dance.
Nwaokafọ who climbed the iroko
with bare hands,
Dance for me,
It is time for show.
Nwaokonkwọ who has all wealth,
Chant for me,
It is poverty that causes anger.
Mgbirichi is new in Arọ.
When market disperses vultures
possess the land.
Ebowusi, male lion, are you as
you used to be?
I have learnt much in poverty.
Okeke, my dear,
Who is like the unseasoned
itinerant medicine-man?
Being unseasoned before a
healing tour
Causes the death of the itinerant
medicine man.
Who goes like Okafọ Egbokaidei?
Okafọ Egbokaidei, it is time for
show.
It is time for show, but take
your time,
Take your time for gradualness
is journey.

"Raising" Mmọnwụ

While the ereere and the ọkụigba entertain the audience with their music and dance, the akatakpo who directs the production of mmọnwụ plays, or his deputy and other ekwuru

hands, cause the mask or masks expected to perform on the stage to rise, as they say, from the spirit world below. Among the stage hands needed for the raising of the masks are the ọnọchianyaudide whose function is said to be the guarding of the entrance to the udide chamber to restrain Udide from emerging and "consuming" the masks.

The mystique of "raising" mmọnwụ, like that of initiation, is well-known in every mmọnwụ community. The story is given out that the akatakpo or anybody who has the authority to make the mask rise squeezes the liquid of some herbs into an agbisi ant-hole and as he or other stage hands beat on the floor around, the mmọnwụ "answers" in a shrill and long-drawn voice. Each mmọnwụ before he emerges usually "answers" in this manner though there is nothing preventing him from emerging without the shrill answer, for after all, he is supposed to be a spirit. On very rare occasions, it is possible for the "raising process" to be completed without the mask emerging and it may then be said that the akatakpo has thrown the sacred palm-leaf into the ekwuru (akatakpo atụnyela ọmụ n'ekwuru). When this happens no mmọnwụ could rise from the ekwuru until the akatakpo removes the ọmụ.

The Main Acts

After the mmọnwụ has answered in the ekwuru a kind of spiritual air descends on the whole obom, the preliminary acts are over, the mmọnwụ character takes over command and the main acts begin as the spirit character or characters emerge on the stage.

Entry of The Masks

As the mmọnwụ characters emerge from the ekwuru into the obom there is general excitement which causes the spectators to surge forward toward the central stage. To control this and thus make adequate staging room, it is usual for the akakpọ, the dimunitive mask that controls the audience through fear, to come into the obom first. By sudden movements toward the audience he makes them run backwards in fear to the edges of the obom thus keeping the ọgbọ clear for the players. Indeed, nobody would allow himself to be approached by the akakpọ or any other mmọnwụ because it is said that a person who happens to be within certain limits of any mmọnwụ figure could be harmed by some force that radiates from such a mask.

After the akakpọ (though it is not a rule that he comes out first), the other characters — the ezemmụọ, the dimkpammụọ and, on special occasions, the agbọghọmmụọ would then come

t. The Ezemmụọ, dimkpammụọ, akakpọ and agbọghọmmụọ, as e have seen in the preceeding chapter, form the four categories in ekwuru. There are always in each play-house, as we have so seen, only one ezemmụọ and one agbọghọmmụọ although here could be several dimkpammụọ and akakpọmmụọ. or example, in Ekwuru Ezekwereobi of Amaọkpara itenansa, there are two dimkpammụọ -- Anyanasọ nd Omerigbokwe. It has been observed that perhaps the cost of roduction dictates the number of characters to be created in n ekwuru because these actors "from the land of the dead," in pite of their reputed spiritual wealth, still demand funds from heir "humble human followers" for the purchase of their costly ostumes possibly because their currency is not legal tender here!

The Welcome Verse

As soon as ezemmụọ approaches the arena the mmarigo break into an antiphonal welcome anthem, intoned by the ọkwaaguruagụ and responded to by the rest of the mmarigo. This verse which could still be chanted even if the ezemmụọ does not feature in the performance, can be considered as the verse that declares open the main mmọnwụ acts:

Ọkwaaguruagụ:	Nnọọ, Eze, nnọọ!
Solo:	Welcome, King, welcome!
Mmarigo:	Eze oo oo oo.
Chorus:	O King ...
Ọ.	Nnọọ, Eze, nnọọ.
S.	Welcome, King, welcome.
M.	A hụ eze ekele eze ekele.
Ch.	When a king is seen he is greeted.
Ọ.	Igboezue, nnọọ;
S.	Igboezue, welcome;
M.	Igboezue amaba oju n'ọgbọ.
Ch.	Igboezue implants the oju staff in the centre.
Ọ.	Esibeagụgọ, nnọọ;
S.	Esibeagụgọ, welcome;
M.	Esibeagụgọ, akpọba abụ n'iro.
Ch.	Esibeagụgọ chants in the arena.
Ọ.	Ugerumba, nnọọ,
S.	Ugerumba, welcome;
M.	Ugerumba achụba ogbodi ọsọ.

Ch. Ugerumba gives ogbodi the chase.
O. Egobude nnọọ;
S. Egobude welcome;
M. Egobude emebe ure n'iro.
Ch. Egobude displays grace in the arena.
O. Nna mmụgọ,
Egwugwu ka ije na-agu o kporo.
Nna ereere,
Akịrịakị Ezeugo, onye mmụta.
Nna mmarigo,
Esibeagụgọ m pụtara zu n'iro,
Akwaeke apụtarusie
Kpọ m nwa ọkwaagụrụagụ mmọnwụ,
Nwa ọkwaagụrụagụ,
Sị m lee egwụ gụba n'iro.
Etie m okokookoo,
Ereere Igboezue kwee nụ:

S. Father of the maidens,
Mask desires a walk and so arises.
Father of the maidens,
Wise Ezeugo, the learned.
Father of the maidens,
Esibeagụgọ I met on the arena
Boa egg came out
And called me lead-singer of mmọnwụ,
Lead-singer,
And told me to sing in the arena.
I exclaimed okokookoo,
You maidens of Igboezue sing:
M. Eze, nnọọ Eze,
Igboezue amaba oju n'ọgbọ
Esibeagụgọ akpọba abụ n'iro
Ugerumba achụba ogbodi ọsọ
Egobude emebe ure n'iro
Ihe a na-ahụ n'ụzọ oyibo
Elele bịa lee ojiri akụ kpo
Ojiri akụ kpo elu
Eze oo oo oo[16].

Ch. King, welcome King,
Igboezue implants oju staff in the centre
Esibeagụgọ chants in the arena
Ugerumba gives ogbodi the chase

Egobude displays grace in the arena
Happenings beheld on the highways
Let beholders come and see he who
emerges with wealth
He who emerges with wealth
O King.

The Opening Dance

By the time the chant ends the ezemmụọ has entered the staging area and may dance to the rhythm of the opening chant. This constitutes what we may call the opening dance and is generally a slow and dignified dance, a dance with which a king is welcomed to his palace. Usually the other masks accompanying him take part in this initial dance. Though at first in slow tempo the dance like most mmọnwụ dances, gradually gathers momentum and ends in a flurry of steps. Each category of mmọnwụ dances is characteristic manner as we will see later.

The Dialogue

Despite the Ezemmụọ's assumption of the role of both director and chief character at this point in the mmọnwụ production, the akatakpo still directs the whole movements from background. After the welcome dance and the applause follows it, there may be a dialogue between mmọnwụ characters and important members of the audience. This dialogue principally in the mutual exchanges of greetings and epithets between masks and human beings.

Much dramatic and poetic importance is attached to praise names by all those who take part in the mummery of praise phrases extolling different mmọnwụ either as performers or spectators. There is, in fact, a his fore-knowledge, omniscience, omnipresence, his cence and sense of supreme justice. He is compared seas, the earth and all the natural forces, he is ref or deified spirit but he is never called Chukwu This is because mmọnwụ are regarded as being created by Chukwu.

As the chief performing mask address several of them return the salutation with s Wekaala (sky-mightier-than-earth). Osimiri ọgbodi (doer of the uninitiated), etc. by answering, "yes" or "my child" (ma will be later illustrated in the t

also that mmọnwụ

hat is called *abụ* chant. This is a myths, hortatory features *ilu* (Igbo of Igbo figure of Igbo literature.[17] sk, in a recitative

kwu okwu
oi nwa Ezejiọfọ,
be na-ekwu okwu.
nwụrụ. 5

ma ntigbu,
e gharara,

vumaagala 10
ee okpoko.

eaks.
n of Ezejiọfọ,
of Ezeokpube,

hat kills him.
t be beaten to

the climbing

o the chame-

her to the

rken
his wrists.

When the performing mask concludes giving the *abụ* it is normal for him to be saluted by some initiated members present. Just as in the Dialogue episode, giving praise names also features in this salutation act called *itu aha*.

Sung Verse

At this point in the presentation a song may be intoned by the performing mask though the male or female lead-singer may begin it. The mask may thus intone the following verse:

Mask: O teka mgbe m ji agba elu. *Chorus:* Ugbo Oru
Ọ bụ onye amaghị o jebe achurụ nta? " " "
Ọ bụ onye amụtaghị ọ na-ejenụ ukwe? " " "
Ukwe m bụkwanụ ihe m ji aga ụzọ.
Agàlà m bụ enyo m ji ahụ ụzọ
Akatakpo m bụ ndị m kworo kpo elu
Adàba-erughị-ala bụ ihe m ji ahụ ụzọ;
Akata-esibe-agụgọ bụ ihe m hụrụ n'ụzọ.
Nwoke teghete, kedụ ka egwu si eje be mmụọ?
Ọ'kwa onye nduḍọ anaghị ekènụ nwa?
Ọ kepụga nwa nduḍọ eburu ego.
Ugbo Oru ka m jikwa ejenụ egwu.
Akatakpo, arụọla m ala puo eze elu.
Aghaamaobi,Onyenaeme bu m eje n'ọnụ.
Ọkwaọdụ, nwa m, àkụ akpaiiela m olu.
Echi dị ime, onye manụ ihe ọ ga-amu?
Ọ bụ onye na-ele anya na-ahụ mmụọ.
Abịakwasị, ọ bụ nnyocha ka enwe jiri buru mgbọ.
Akatakpo, o ruola mgbe anyị ji eri egwu.[20]

Mask: It is long since I have been a masked performer. *Chorus:* Riverine vessel
If one knows not how, does he go a-hunting?
If one learns not how, does he go a-chanting?
Chanting is what enables me walk the highways.
My crown is the mirror with which I see
My akatakpo is among those on whose behalf I rise.
Falling but not reaching the ground is what I see with.

Mention and there would be disbelief
is what I saw on the way.
Man worth nine, how can fear go to
spirit land?
Is it not true that the litigious man
does not give his daughter in marriage?
If he gives away the daughter, litiga-
tion makes away with the bride-wealth
It is with Oru vessel that I go for displays.
Akatakpo, I have desecrated the land and
cut the upper inicisors first.[21]
Aghaamaobi, Onyenaeme carries me to
the hole.
Hornplayer, my child, wealth has broken
my neck.
Tomorrow is pregnant who knows what
it will deliver?
It is a person who watches that beholds
the spirit.
Again, it is over-probing that made the
monkey receive the bullet.
Akatakpo, it is time for us to dance.

Ihụ Mmọnwụ

An important feature of mmọnwụ performance is the phenomenon of *ịhụ mmọnwụ* or what may be loosely translated as "applauding" the mask. The translation is inadequate because "ịhụ" mmọnwụ does not merely imply an applause but also an appeal. It may also be symbolic of danger. At the end of each dramatic episode or scene, the ụmụnkwụ present in the obom, but especially the ọkụịgba chorus, would cry, "Aao" or a variety of that sound and this would be a definite sign for the performing mask to bring the scene to a close. If this sound signal is not given the mask might continue to perform. It is the function of the ọkụịgba to discern when to give the signal "aao" as the failure to do this in good time might bring down on the heads of the unmasked players in the theatre the wrath of the spirit performers. Sometimes the mask might continue to perform in spite of the "dramatic applause". It is the duty of the initiated members participating in the drama to continue to applaud louder and louder until the mask performer brings the scene to a close.

As a danger signal the mmọnwụ applause becomes frightful in the extreme. This is because during trouble or emergency, the initiated members frighten away those who "do not know"

mmọnwụ (the uninitiated) with a continuous, persistent and loud applause. For example, during an mmọnwụ initiation ceremony when the story is given out that the initiate is being "consumed", *ịhụ mmọnwụ* helps in an intangible way to make the insubstantial and imagined world of the ancestors seem real. Also when "mmọnwụhead has been broken"[22] or when the mask is in any other way, threatened with revelation or desecration the phenomena of ịhụ mmụọ creates a ghost-like air in the community. Such an untoward event may take place in or outside the mmọnwụ stage. There was for instance the story of a mask colliding with a vehicle and the ụmụnkwụ present applauding incessantly until it was given out that the spirit had disappeared into the spirit land. The driver came shaking with fright but he was waved aside and told to drive off. During dramatic displays ịhụ mmọnwụ heightens the emotional disposition of the audience and thus enables them to derive maximum aesthetic value from the mmọnwụ play.

Various Facets of the Mmọnwụ Dance

In African social and aesthetic life, music invariably is danced to. Thus mmọnwụ chants, the choral music of the mmarigo and the ọkụigba and the instrumental rhythms of the ọkwaekwe and the ọkwaọdụ all culminate in the mmọnwụ dance. There are several facets to the mmọnwụ dance. The mmarigo may dance to their own tunes and rhythms. Their dance takes place either in their ụlọọmụ or in the central staging area. They display fascinating dance steps that follow the rhythm resulting from their songs accompanied with hand-clapping and guttural hums (udeobi).

Similarly, the ọkụigba display different dance patterns and styles individually or as a group. But more importantly, the performing masks on the stage dance individually or together from time to time. They dance to the music supplied either by the mmarigo, the ọkụigba or both combined. The mmọnwụ at times conducts the music in person, chanting antiphonally with the ọkụigba, the mmarigo or the combined choir of both the ọkụigba and the mmarigo. Each musical piece generally comes to an end with what may be called the mmọnwụ climactic dance in which the entire audience, clapping and singing produce a crescendo of voices and sounds and the mmọnwụ dances with such a flurry of steps and with such intricacy and intensity as would thrill everybody present.

Each mmọnwụ dances in a characteristic style which conforms to his stature and mien. The akakpọ dances vigorously and fiercely, the ezemmụọ dances with dignity, the agbọghọmmụọ

with lightning grace and the dimkpammụọ with a combination of all these characteristics — vigor, dignity, speed and grace. The dimkpammụọ, who in dramatic terms ranks next to the chief character, the ezemmụọ, does often perform a type of acrobatic display known as *iti aba* which involves spinning round and round and beating his tall frame on the ground. This awe-inspiring display augments the emotion of fear already building up in the minds of the spectators. At the end of each mmọnwụ dance or acrobatic exhibition there is the usual applause.

Mmọnwụ Tales

At any point in the display a narrative scene may be enacted. Here the chief performing mask, generally the ezemmụọ, may narrate any entertaining stories of what happened in the past, what is now happening and what may happen in the future either in ọha ogbodi (world of the living) or in ọha mmụọ (world of the dead). The story may be woven around a current scandal in the society such as how a woman went to uproot another's cassava and how he, the dramatising mask, alerted the owner of the cassava into apprehending the thief or how an unmarried girl in the community got pregnant, etc.

The story may be based on the history of the community such as how a section broke away from the rest of the people and fought a successful or unsuccessful war as the case may be against the rest of the group. Or the tale may be entirely mythical, dealing with, say, how spirits of the dead do certain things in their community. The mask may also narrate stories concerning the domestic affairs of either his or other ekwuru in the mmọnwụ area. Such stories as some imagined feud between the Udide and one of the masks in a particular ekwuru, a power contest between potent mmọnwụ characters or how the novice is chewed and remoulded, feature in these mmọnwụ domestic tales.

Mmọnwụ Speech Form

Mmọnwu narrates his tales and addresses his audience in a poetic language known as *asụsụ mmọnwụ*. The language is peculiar to mmọnwụ drama and is understood by most participants. Yet because of its specialized nature there arises the need to have a player who acts the interpreter of mmọnwụ tongue. Mmọnwụ language differs from every-day speech in both its vocabulary and syntax. Water (mmiri), for example, is known by mmọnwụ as *ohu gworo gworo* which is an onomatopoeic expression for a thing that flows audibly. *Ọta kpọrọ kpọrọ*, another onomatopoeic

phrase for a thing that drips is the word for wine (mmanya). Fowl (ọkụkọ) is called ajụ̀rụ. This word is probably derived from the practice of the Igbo to touch their breasts with a sacrificial fowl before offering it to the spirits. In this way the fowl was believed to have carried away the sins and blemishes of the offerers of the sacrifice.

The syntax of mmọnwụ language is a little more complex and for this reason mmọnwụ usually address the audience and, in turn, members of the audience address mmọnwụ through an interpreter. Here audience includes every unmasked participant in the play. Although at first sight mmọnwụ speech appears difficult and almost incomprehensible it is in fact easy to understand when it is known that to address an mmọnwụ a person uses a positive statement when a negative meaning is intended and vice versa. In addition to this reversal of meaning the time suffix "rị" is freely used, so also is the suffix "chara". Let us consider, for example, the following statements in plain Igbo:

Ejere m ahịa (I went to market).
Aga m eje ahịa (I will go to market).
Enwere m ego (I have money).
Agaara m enwe ego (I would have had money).
Ejeghị m ahịa (I did not go to market).
Agaghị m eje ahịa (I will not go to market).
Enweghị m ego (I have no money.
Agaghara m enwe ego (I would not have had money).

In an address to mmọnwụ the above utterances would be rendered as follows:

Ejeghị m rị ahịa (I did not in fact go to market; which here means, I went to market).
Agaghị m rị eje ahịa (I will not in fact go to market).
Enweghị m rị ego (I have not in fact money).

Agaghara m rị enwe ego (I would not in fact have had money).
Ejere m rị ahịa or Ejechara m rị ahịa or Ejechara m nnọọ ahịa (I did in fact go to market, meaning, I did not go to market).

Aga m ejechari ahịa or Aga m rị eje ahịa (I will go to market).
Enwere m rị ego or Enwechara m rị ego or Enwechara m nnọọ ego (I have money indeed, meaning of course, I have no money).

Agaara m rị enwe ego or Agaara m enwechaṛị ego or Agachara m ri enwe ego (I would have had money meaning in fact I would not have had money).[23]

The audience always enjoys this transposition of meaning and spectators are overawed by the mmọnwụ's sphinx-like attitude to anyone who dares to address him without mastering this mode of language. One of the epithets of mmọnwụ is "onye ọ ghọrọ o buru okwu", that means "he who offends gets into trouble". If therefore in the attempt to address mmọnwụ onẹ offẹnds in words, one cannot be excused. This is why mmọnwụ has an interpreter called *ada akịrịakị*. The interpreter or the "linguist" is extremely important in an mmọnwụ drama because he, in most cases tells the audience what mmọnwụ says. He is particularly important when mmọnwụ dramatises in his judicial capacity. This type of mmọnwụ play is explained later in this chapter.

The Dramatic Chase

Another feature that contributes greatly to the dramatic effect of mmọnwụ play is *ọsọ mmọnwụ* (mmọnwụ chase). Intermittently any mask, but in particular the akakpọ, instils fear into the spectators by giving them what may be called the "dramatic" chase. The initiated deferentially move back while the non-initiates flee. No human would allow himself to be approached closely by a spirit because of the sacredness of the mmọnwụ character. In fact no non-initiate passes through the path of mmọnwụ without being accompanied by an ọsụkwụ. Conducting shaky non-initiates, for instance school children, past an mmọnwụ character is an aspect of mmọnwụ performance.

The conductor addresses mmọnwụ thus:

Nna m, ọ gaghị adị rị mma ka ogbodi ntị obodobo a gafee.

Father, it would not in fact be proper for this broad-eared non-initiate to pass.

The mmọnwụ may refuse to let the ogbodi pass at first but when eventually he gives consent the ogbodi is led by the hand across the arena. As he is being led across, needless to say that the ogbodi is usually half-dead with fright for mmọnwụ is a drama of fear and trembling to the extent that in dreams many people are often pursued by mmọnwụ. Mmọnwụ's awe is such that it needs no whips to frighten people away; his mere presence is enough to disperse a formidable crowd for when he shakes his straw-clad body members of the audience flee in awe.

The Closing Acts

This usually comes towards the end of the performance and is often reached when as a result of the intensified activities of the ọkụ̀ụ̀gba and the mmarigo singing, clapping and dancing, the ọkwaekwe and ọkwaọdụ beating and blowing their instruments, and all the masks present either dancing, chanting or merely displaying their figures, the spectators are moved into conceiving themselves as being in an entirely different environment created by man's imagination, an illusory but yet artistically real environment. The audience is hypnotised into accepting the reality of what the imagination has created and has presented to them as spirits. At the climax of the mmọnwụ play the spectators are spell-bound by the mmọnwụ magic.

After about three to four hours the show gradually comes to a close when the mmarigo chant a closing verse such as:

E lebe ugo nwa mma
Ugo alaa
E lebe ugo nwa mma
Ugo alaa.[24]

Behold the beautiful eagle
The eagle goes

Behold the beautiful eagle
The eagle goes.

This particular chant is repeated responsively as the masks make their exit from the obom into the ekwuru while the spectators, followed by the mmarigo, gradually depart. The ọkụ̀ụ̀gba and all other initiated members who so wish could enter the ekwuru to review the day's display. To end the particular production the masks that had performed would then descend into the spirit land. It is said that the akatakpo or his deputy, using certain herbal liquid, would send down (ịtụda) the spirits. As an indication that the masks have descended, the same shrill, metallic voices which heralded the rising of the spirits are again heard and people would then say "mmọnwụ adaala ala" (the spirit has descended into the ground). All would then disperse.

Two texts of mmọnwụ plays

To illustrate some versions of mmọnwụ display the edited texts of two plays staged by two different dramatic groups are given below:

1 Ezeigboezue Play

The first is a play staged by the Ezeigboezue playhouse of Ogwugwuenye, Ihitenansa, on January 27, 1973, at the Central School football field:

The Cast

Mmọnwụ (masks)

Ezeigboezue – ezemmụọ (chief mask)[25]
Esibeagụgọ – dimkpammụọ (youthful mask)
Ugerumba – akakpọmmụọ (dwarf mask)
Egobude – agbọghọmmụọ (maiden mask)

Ụmụnkwụ so n'egwuregwu (initiate performers)

Akatakpo – director of play
Akịrịakị – the clerk
Ọpịaọmụ – wielder of the symbolic yellow palm leaves
Ọkwaọdụ – horn player
Ọkwaekwe – wooden drummer
Otiofo – ọfọ staff striker
Ọkụigba – male chorus and dancers

Ndị ọzọ (others)
Ụmụ mmarigo (female chorus and dancers)

The Text

EMUME 1
ACT I

Ndị oleanya anọọ obom gburugburu. Ọkwaekwe na ọkwaọdụ ana-etu mmọnwụ aha. Ndị ọkụigba ana-asụ egwu, na-agbakwa egwu n'ọgbọ. Otu n'ime egwu ha gụrụ bụ "Ọkụigba, mgbawụsa, mgbawụsa".

Spectators surround the arena. Horn players and wooden drummers give mmọnwụ praise rhythms. The male players chant and dance on the stage. One of the chants is "Ọkụigba, mgbawụsa, mgbawụsa".[26]

EMUME 2
ACT 2

Ndị ọkụigba akwụsị. Ụmụ mmarigo ebido ịgụ egwu.
Exit ọkụigba. The mmarigo begin to chant.

Mmarigo: Ụmụ ereere welitebe ọkpa ...
Maidens, hurry up ....[27]

EMUME 3
ACT 3

Ụmụnkwụ abaa n'ekwuru itili mmọnwụ. Mmọnwụ aza n'ekwuru. Oge ha na-apụta n'ọgbọ, ọkwaaguruagụ ana-agụta egwu nnabata, ụmụ mmarigo niile ana-ekwe.

The initiates enter the ekwuru to "raise" mmọnwụ. Mmọnwụ answer in the ekwuru. As they come into the central stage the mmarigo lead-singer intones the welcome song and all the maidens respond.

Ọkwaaguruagụ: Nnọọ Eze, nnọọ ...
Lead-singer: Welcome King, welcome ...[28]

EMUME 4
ACT 4

Mmọnwụ apụtasịa n'ogbọ, na-agaghari. Ụfọdụ ana-achụ mmadụ, ụfọdụ ana-eme ure. Ezemmụọ ebido okwu.

Enter masks on the stage and they move around, Some chase spectators, some display grace. King Mask begins a dialogue.

Ezeigboezue: Ọha ogbodi, ụnụ ezue?
Mụọma e!
Nwa Ugonnịa, ị nọkwa n'elu?
Humans are you assembled?
Mụọma,
Son of Ugonnịa, are you present?
(Ọ kpọba Osimiri) Osimiri ka egoigwe!

(Addressing Osimiri) Osimiri is mightier than minted money!

Osimiri: Agụ.
Mma e jiri gbu agụ.
Ube.
Akpụ na ogwu.
Eso tụrụ nwa nnụnụ.
Agbịrịgba tụrụ nwa ebule.

Ụdọ e jiri kpụrụ enyi.
Ọdara n'ala puo ome.

Lion.
Knife used to kill a lion.
The mysterious voice.
Cassava and thorns.[29]
Lime that binds the bird.
The adherent seed that clings
to the ram.
Rope used to pull an elephant.

What falls on the ground and burgeons.

Ezeigboezue: Ezeosimiri, nnọọ nwa m.
Igwe ka m bụ
Burụkwa omere mara
Azụ kaa isi ọ laa osimiri,
Ụrasị gbara agbata gburugburu,
Ọnọ n'ụlọ mara ihe zụrụ n'ahịa,
Osimiri nwa m.

Ezeosimiri, welcome, my son,
I am the sky –
And also who acts and knows,
The mature fish returns to the sea,
Ụrasị river that encircles the
nations,
Who stays at home and knows what
sells in the market,

Osimiri my son.

(Ọ kpọba Mụọma) Mụọma be Ugonnia!

Addresses Mụọma Mụọma, of Ugonnia's household!

Mụọma: Obeke!
Obeke![30]

Ezeigboezue: Mụọma e...

Mụọma.

Osimiri: Onye ọ ghọrọ o buru okwu...

Who offends gets into trouble..

Ezeigboezue: Ebelebe na-egbu n'ọha ogbodi,

Kwa o gbuela?

Nwoke kpakwachaa agala

O were agala kpuru n'isi ya.

Okokporo otu nwaanyị were nwayọọ

Ọ ghọlaha ya, na ihe gwụrụ n'otu.

The usual wonder that occurs in human society –

It has taken place?

The strong man after making a crown

Puts the crown on his head.

The one-wifed bachelor should take care,

If something happens to her, all is lost.

Anyaọha: Nna m, anaghị m rị atụpụrụ gị *ten* naira,

(ọ tụpụrụ mmọnwụ ego) Ka a sị *twenty* naira?

Ndị oleanya na ọchị emee. Ihe Anyaọha chọọrọ ikwu bụ, "otu naira")

(tosses money to the mask) Father, I am not indeed tossing to you ten naira

Or, is it said, twenty naira?

(Spectators burst into laughter. What Anyaọha wanted to say was, "one naira")

EMUME 5
ACT 5

Ụmụ mmụọ ana-eme ihe nkiri dị iche iche. Ezemmụọ ana-ehu ngọ. Dimkpammụọ ana-erughari ka egbe, na-elekwasị agbọghọ-mmụọ. Agbọghọmmụọ ana-eme o kpuo ekpuo ọ pụta apụta. Akakpọ ana-achụchigha ndị mmadụ azụ na-emeja ogbodi. N'ikpeazụ ụmụ mmarigo ebido gụbara mmọnwụ egwu nke a, na-akụ aka, mmọnwụ ana-agba.

The masks perform different acts. King mask displays majestic gait. His deputy hovers round like the kite, and looks after the maiden mask. The maiden mask goes in and out of the ekwuru. The akakpọ chases spectators and frightens the uninitiated. Afterwards the maidens begin chanting for the masks the following verses, clapping their hands while masks dance:

Ọkwaaguruagụ: Olee mmụọ na-agha ka ugo?

What mask glides like the eagle?

Mmarigo niile: Iche agha ka ugo.

Parrot glides not like the eagle.

Ọkwa: Igboezue na-agha ka ugo.

Igboezue glides like the eagle

Mma: Iche agha ka ugo

Parrot glides not like the eagle.

Ọkwa: Olee mmụọ na-agha ka ugo? 5

What mask glides like the eagle?

Mma: Iche agha ka ugo.

Parrot glides not like the eagle.

Ọkwa: Esibeagụgọ na-agha ka ugo.

Esibeagụgọ glides like the eagle.

Mma: Iche agha ka ugo.

Parrot glides not like the eagle.

Ebe a ka Esibeagụgọ bidoro iti aba. O tikata, tikata, ụmụ ọsụkwụ ahụọ ya "aao ooo... "

Here Esibeagugo begins the acrobatic spin. When he reaches the climax of spinning, the initiates applaud "aao ooo... "

EMUME 6
ACT 6

Ezeigboezue ebido ịkpọ abụ. Ụmụ mmụọ ndị ọzọ ana-eme ihe sọrọ ha n'ekwughị okwu ọ bụla.

Ezeigboezue begins the epigrammatic and satirical chant. The other masks entertain the audience in silence in different ways.

Ezeigboezue: Kee kee kee ke nụ oo!
Ogbedi nwa ogbodi gbaghara nụ ee
Ogbedi nwa na ụkwụ dị gị n'ojere.
Ezenwaka,
Nwa Ezenwakaibeya ma akwụkwọ.

Kee kee kee ke, you all!
Uninitiated child, be not anxious,

Small child you are on a
journey.

Ezenwaka,

Son of Ezenwakaibeya, who is
learned.

Ezenwaka: O bibic o kpachie!

He who destroys and restores!

Ezeigboezue: Ogbodi bụ ogbodi, nnọọ nụ.
O na-eme nwoke jee Ọnịcha bute ego
Ọ lọrue ala nna ya,
Ya na ịsụ olu Ọnịcha emee.
Mgbe o richara ego ọ kpatara

O zute ịsụ olu obodo nne mụrụ ya.
Mgbe onye siri ọrụ gomenti lọta
Bidoro ịma ufaakwa ọcha
Ma ọ bụ bido ikụkụdo afarangidi
n'ahụ
Ṣi mata na ego ọ kpatara agwụla.

All humans, welcome.
It happens that if a man goes to
Ọnịcha and accumulates wealth,
When he returns to his fatherland
He begins to speak the Ọnịcha
dialect;
When he has exhausted the money
he made,
He remembers to speak the tongue
of his land.
When a retired governemnt
official
Begins wearing bed sheet
Or starts wrapping up himself
in blanket
Let it be known that the money
he earned is exhausted.

Otu ọsụkwụ: Kpim

One initiate: Kpim

Ụmụnkwụ: Aao

Aao

Ezeigboezue: Ekwueme!

Ekwueme!

Ekwueme: Obeke

Oji mma egbu akụ

Obeke

He who has much wealth.

Ezeigboezue: Nwa ọkara nwata ibe ya ihe mara

Ma akwụkwọ,

Ekwueme!

He who is more knowledgeable than
his comrades,

And is lettered,

Ekwueme!

Ekwueme: Asaa asatọ! 25

Seven, eight. 25

Ezeigboezue: Onye okechi na oseaka bụ nwanne.

Enweghị ego jọrọ nwoke njọ.

The unlucky one is brother to
the prodigal.

For a man not to have money
is bad.

Ọtụtụ ndị ogenti: Enweghị ego jọrọ njọ.

Several listeners: Not to have money is bad.

Ezeigboezue: (ekuchaa) Ko ko ko.

(ululates) Ko ko ko.

Osimiri: (etue ya) Obeke!

(praises him) Obeke!

Ezeigboezue: Osimiri, ee...

Osimiri ....

Osimiri: Òjì aka akpọwa ọjị

He who splits the iroko with
bare hands.

Ezeigboezue: Ọ na-eme iyi ka nkụ
É were ebule gboo ya;
Ọ dị nwayọọ, ọ buru okeọkpa
Ka a ga-eji tụrụ ya n'otu.
Osimiri, ee,
Kama nwoke ga-abụ a ma ama
A machaghị amacha,
Nwoke too ka ụga, laa n'ike.
Na enweghị ego jọrọ nwoke njọ.

It happens that if a deity becomes
very strong
He is appeased with a ram;
If he is lenient, then it is with
a cock
That he would be molified.
Osimiri,
Instead of a man to be
Inconsequential
Let him, like the ụga palm, grow
fast and depart.
For a man not to have money is bad.

Osimiri: Ọ jọkakwa.
It is very bad indeed.

Ezeigboezue: Oji ego gbaghara nụ m ee.
Ezeihedinobi, Ihedi ee.
A mụta a maghị ihe na ụga ọmụmụ
bụ nwanne.
Ọ na-eme a gbakọọ okwu n'ọha
ogbodi,
A sị okwu dịba ma okeọkpa akwaa,
Ogbodi ndị nwere okeọkpa ma ndị
enweghị enwe.

Holders of money please pardon me.
Ezeihedinobi, Ihedi,

To beget an idiot is the same thing
as to lose a child.
It happens that when humans
assemble for a meeting
It is agreed that it would be held
at cock crow.

Humans, some have cocks, some
have none.

Diizugbe: Isi ka nkwa.
(etue ya) Head like drum.

Ezeigboezue: Ee.
Diizugbe ee!
Yes.
Diizugbe

Diizugbe: Mmụọ ka ị bụ!

You are the spirit!

Ezeigboezue: Ebelebe na-egbu n'ọha ogbodi,
O gbuola.

The great action that takes place
in human land,
It has taken place.

Diizugbe: O gbuola egbuo
It has taken place.

Ezeigboezue: Osimiri ee,
Nwoke kpata ego, o rie ufọdụ,
o debe ufọdụ.
Ụbọchị onụụwa kaara dike, dike alaa.
Nnadị obodo zukọọ hụ ihe a kwaa nwoke
Nnadị obodo zukọọ ahụghị ihe, e
yigharịa ozu.
Ya dị izu ato ogbodi ji nwụ, a kwaa
ozu.
Mgbe ọ dịrị izu ato ogbodi jiri
la obodo ahụdebe,

Ọtụiremire dị na mmụọ na mmadụ
ezukọọ....
Ndị gbaraakụ gburu onye kwara ha,
Ndị kpara akụ erighị eri onye
kwara ha,
Nwoke atalasịa.

Osimiri,
If a man gets money, let him spend
some and keep some.
On the destined day the brave departs.
If the kindred meet and find the means,
funeral rites would be performed.
If they meet and find nothing, the
rites would be deferred.
Three weeks after death there would
be funeral rites.

Three weeks [31] after the human has
departed to the land of
"see no more,"

Counsellors among spirits and
among humans would assemble ...

Those who died of small-pox who
mourned them.

Those who accumulated wealth
without enjoying it who mourned
them –

Man goes to naught.

Ndị ogentị ana-ekwe n'isi, na-eto mmọnwụ. Ụmụ ogbodị na ụmụ ogeri ana-eticha; ụmụnkwụ ana-ahụ mmọnwụ "aao." Ụmụ mmarigo ana-agụ egwu, na-akụ aka, mmọnwụ ana-agba. Ọdụ mmọnwụ ana-egbu. Ndị ọkụigba ana-asụ egwu. Egwu mmọnwụ abụrụ ụla.

The spectators nod their heads in appreciation of the performance. The non-initiates and the women begin to exclaim in wonderment, the initiates would be applauding mmọnwụ. The maidens sing and clap their hands and masks dance. The mmọnwụ horn sounds. The ọkụigba sing. Mmọnwụ play comes to an end.

2 EZEBUDE PLAY

The second text is that of a performance by the Ezebude playhouse at their obom in Amaneese, Amaifeke, Ọlụ, 1975.

The Cast

Mmọnwụ personae[32]

Ezebude — ezemmụọ

Isikoroebu — akakpọmmụọ

Ụmụnkwụ so n'egwuregwu

Akatakpo

Akịrịakị

Ọpịaọmụ

Ọkwaọdụ

Ọkwaekwe

Ọkụigba

The Text

EMUME 1
ACT 1

Ezebude na Isikoroebu ekpoo n'ekwuru, si ebe ahụ pụtasịa n'ọgbọ. Ezebude bido gụtaba ukwe mmọnwụ a na-akpọ "Ugbọ Oru." Ha were ịgba egwu mechie ihe nkịrị a.

Ezebude and Isikoroebu rise from the ekwuru and from there enter the stage. Ezebude starts intoning the mmọnwụ chant called "Ugbọ Oru."[33] *They close this act with a dance.*

EMUME 2
ACT 2

Ha agbasịa egwu, Ezebude ebido nkọrịta.

After the dance Ezebude starts a dialogue.

Ezebude: Ọha ogbodi nnọọ nụ.

Ezedịmbụ, nwa m!

Humans welcome.

Ezedịmbụ, my child!

Ezedịmbụ: Nna m.

Father.

Ezedịbude: Ezedịmbụ, nwa m,

Onye jere Elugwu kọọ ji

Ọ ga-ebukwa ya ebu?[34]

Ezedịmbụ my child,

Who goes to Elugwu to cultivate yams,

Can he carry them?

Ezedịmbụ: Nna m, ọ dịghị nnọọ egwu.

Ọ dịghị isi ka okwu. [35]

Father, it is not indeed terrible.

It is not indeed apt.

EMUME 3
ACT 3

Ebe a ka Ezebude bidọro abụ na nkọrịta otito.

Here Ezebude starts chants and dialogue of praise.

Ezebude: Ọkwaọdụ, kpọ m akụ na-etigbu okwu,

Kpọ m mma e jiri gbupe anyụike ọnụ.

Horn player, call me wealth beats palaver to death.

Call me knife used to chip off the axe's blade.

Ọkwaọdụ (etue va) Tititi riri titi.

(calls him) Tititi riri titi.

Ezebude: Ọkwaọdụ, were nwayọọ

Na ihe na-eme ije

Na ije na-eme ntụgharị

Onye ma ka ọ ga-adịrị ya na njedebe?

Mbirichiụwa na okechi bụ nwanne.[36]

E rikata e rizighị na-agbaghari ahụ kpororo,

Ị nụ oo?

Hornplayer, slowly, slowly,

For journeys are characterised by incidents

And incidents during journeys are subject to change.

Who knows how it will turn out for him in the end?
Fortune and fate are related

Not to feed well after once having fed well emaciates the body,

Do you hear?

(O bido ịkpọ abụ) Kee kee kee ke nụ oo.
Ihe ọnụma anaghị eru ọjị n'ahụ.

Ezeri, nwa m, ewee e;

Ezeriakụ nne ya na-akpọ n'ụlọ,

Ọ na-azakwa oku ọ kpọrọ ya gboo?

Ọkwaekwe kpọ m akụ na-etigbu okwu,
Kpọ m mma e jiri gbupe anyụike ọnụ.

(He starts chanting Kee kee kee ke nụ,
A thing of sadness does not touch the iroko

Ezeri, my child...

Ezeriakụ whose mother calls in the house

n time? 15
e wealth
n,
o off

20
chi

a m ike.
i ejie
ugbo ọji, 25

wụghị

oo.
te
30
ụrụ izu

t

20
wn

I have journeyed from morning
till night
In the end I pointed to an
iroko tree,
The iroko tree shedded its
leaves at once.
I am he who breaks the child's
pot and never pays him back;
The black sky that eats the
moon, it is I.
The hilly land that snatches the
pot from the child
And causes the child to support
his head with his arm, it is I.
I am the thing talked about for
whom a meeting is being held
among humans
And he goes to the spirit world;
If a child profanes he suffers
the consequence.

Umụnkwụ: Okokoo!
Okokoo!

Ezebude: Ọ bụ m.
Ọ bụ m bụ ijiji amaghị n'otu
mbamba,
A ma ama a machaghị amacha.
Osoro bekee lọ.
It is I .
I am the fly that never perches on
one surface,
Known and not fully known.
One who is of recent origin.

Umunkwu: Kpọkọm, Ezegboo, Akụkaria,
Mmụọ na mma.
Kpọkọm, Ancient king, Surfeit
of wealth,
Mask and Beauty.

Ezebude: Ọ bụ m oo.
Ọ bụ m bụ a dị abuọ gbaa izu
Aburụ m onye atọ.
Abụ m ọtụgbuo o rie, mmụọ na egwu;
Amara m egwu atụ m,
Osi n'ala aga,
Agbịsị na-agba afọ,
Akụ na-achụ mba,
Ọnwụ na-egbu ogbodi,
E kwuchaa e kwughasịa,
Ọkpụkpụ na ogugu,
Mkpumkpu na ngọngọ,
Ụgbalụgba.

It is I.
I am if two have secret conclave
I am the third.
I am he who spears to death and eats, spirit and fear.
Known and yet feared,
One who passes through the ground,
The insect that stings the entrails,
The arrow that sacks a town,
Death that kills the non-initiate,
He who unsays what has been said,
Bones and poles,
Bumps and bends,
Trouble.

Otu ọsụkwụ: Kpim!

One " : Kpim

Umunkwụ: Aao!
Aao!

Otu ọsụkwụ: Dum.
One ọsụkwụ: Dum.
Ezebude: Ee.
Yes.
Otu ọsụkwụ: Igwe.
Sky.

Ezebude: Ee.
Yes.

Otu ọsụkwụ: Mmụọ ka ibe ya.
Spirit mightier than others.

Ezebude: Ee.
Yes.

Otu ọsụkwụ: Eze a na-ekwu.
King talked about.

Ezebude: Ee, nwa m.
Yes, my child.

Otu ọsụkwụ: Ohuru Igbo àzụ.[37]
He who turns his back to the world.

Ezebude: Nwa m.
My child.

Otu ọsụkwụ: Ohugide.
He who overshadows all.

Ezebude: Ọ bụ m.
It is I.

EMUME 4
ACT 4

Ezebude ebido gụba egwu mmọnwụ a na-akpọ "Oji amara" Ọ na-aguta, ndị ọkụigba ana-ekwe "Oji amara".

Ezebude starts intoning the mmọnwụ song called "Oji amara". As he chants the ọkụigba respond "Oji amara".

Ezebude: Oji amara, bịa ere, nwa m.
Holder of paddle, come here, my child.

Umụnkwụ: Oji amara.
Holder of paddle.

Ezebude: Oji amara m ji eje ukwe.
Oji amara m ji eje egwu.
Oji amara m ji eje n'ụgbọ.
Holder of paddle which enables me go for music drama.
Holder of paddle which enables me go for dance drama.
Holder of paddle that enables me go by canoe.

Egwu adagharia. Ndị okweegwu ana-ekwezi. "Oji amara nwe ugbọ".

The chorus changes. The response becomes "Holder of paddle owns the vessel".

Ezebude.

O ruela mgbe m ji eti ekwe.
Akataaka nyiri ọzọdimgba.
Ihe onye na-eme ka e ji ama ya.
O teka mụ na akatakpo agụ.
Origwidi, nwa nwaezenogwu
M kpọba akịrịaki nwaezenogwu,
Biko gị kpọọrọ m Ụwadịmma.
Ụwadịmma lara olee?
Ụwadịmma, ome ihe jide ọfọ.
Ọ ga-egbu m taata ma m kwuo ụka
Ọ mụta nwa ya ekwuna ụka.
Ọ ga-egbu m taata ma m lebe anya,
Ọ mụta nwa ya ahụna ụzọ.
Ọ ga-egbu m sị ana m aga ije,
Ọ mụta nwa ya kụọ ngwọrọ
Ọ ga-egbu m sị emepere m ọnụ,
Ọ mụta nwa ya daa ogbu.
Ewo o, Ụwadimkpa,

Ụwadimkpa bịa gbaba ọkụigba.
Oji amara bịa lere m na mmọnwụ

Time has reached for me to beat the wooden drum

Chimpanzee that is too tough for the gorilla.
What a person does, he is known by.

It is long, the relationship between me and akatakpo, the lion.

Origwidi, the son of the mask.
I call the interpreter of the mask,
Please call for me Ụwadịmma.
Ụwadịmma, where has he gone?
Ụwadịmma, the doer of acts should hold *ọfọ*.[38]

He who would kill me because I talked,
If he gets a child may he not talk.
He who would kill me because I looked,
If he gets a child may he not see.
He who would kill me because I walk.
If he gets a child may he be a cripple.

He who would kill me because I
opened my mouth,

If he gets a child may he be dumb.
O, Ụwadịmkpa,
Ụwadịmkpa, come and do the ọkụigba dance.
Holder of paddle, come and see me in
mmọnwụ drama.

Otu osụkwụ: Mmọnwụ ka ọ bụ,
Mmọnwụ ka ọ bụ.
It is mmọnwụ play,
It is mmọnwụ play.

Ezebude: Obu ọfọ nye m ọfọ e ji eti mmụọ,
Egbengwu ga-emekata saa m okwu.
Ọ saa m okwu aga m enwezikwa àsọ̀?
Ọ saa m okwu aga m enwezikwa ebube?
Ọ teka mgbe m jiri kpobe elu.
Ewo, Ụwadịegwu,
Ewo, Ụwa, nwa m.
Ewo, eze buru ụzọ bịa ukwe,
Akpọ m akatakpo,
Eze buru ụzọ bịa ukwe,
Akpọ m akatakpo,
Bịanụ ka i kele m na mmọnwụ.
Abaa nụ
Abaa nụ.

Carrier of ọfọ give me ọfọ by which
mmọnwụ is played,
Lest false mask might answer me back
If he answers me back would I have
sacredness any more?
If he answers me back would I have
dignity any more?
It is long since I have been dramatizing
on stage.

O, Ụwadiegwu,
O, Ụwa, my child.
O, chief that comes to music drama
first;
I call akatakpo,
Come and greet me in mmọnwụ play.
Greetings, all.
Greetings, all.

Ụmụnkwụ: Ee, Nna m.

All initiates: Yes, Father.

Ezebude: Ogbodi bụ ogbodi, nnọọ nụ.

Ọha ogbodi mata na ụwa na
atụghari atụghari.
Onye ma ka o siri dere ya n'isi
njedebe?
Na erikata erizighi na-ebute okwu.
M kpọba ogeri, bịa ere o!
Okeibiri mụrụ otu mkpụrụ nwa
Na-atagbu onwe ya n'ahụhụ;
Mgbe ọ bụla ọ chiri ụme n'aka.
Ọ naghị ekwe nwa ya rahụ ụra ehihie
Maka nwa ya ahụ rahụọ ụra ehihie
O chee na ọ ga-esi n'ụra jewara
obodo Chukwu.

Mgbe ahụ ọ ga-adọlite nwa ya n'ụra,
Kuru ya n'aka na-akwụghari.
Ọ hụ ka di ya si jesianụ bata
Ọ sị, "Di m bịa letara m
Ka nwata si eku ume,
Na nwata a na-ejewara ejewara".
Asị m nwaanyị otu nwa
Jisie onwe ya ike,
Chi ya ga-atụghariri ya ajụ.
Ihe dị njọ ga-emechaa dị mma —
Ihe adighị mma na ọ ga-adị njọ.
Echi dị ime,
Onye manụ ihe ọ ga-amụ.
Nwaanyị mụtara otu nwa
Zutekwanụ nwaanyị àgà
Di ya jebere obodo Chukwu;

Nwaanyị ana-ebe,
"Di m ejewarala obodo e jee a laghị ala
Hapụ sọsọ m n'ụwa anyammiri".
Nwaanyị aga, ghara, ebezina akwa,
Na ihe adighị mma na ọ ga-adị njọ.
All humans welcome
Humans, know you that the world
turns round
Who knows what has been decreed for
him in the end?
Not to feed well after once having
fed well brings trouble.
I summon womanhood, come close.
The woman with an only child
Suffers much anguish;
She is for ever anxious.
She permits not her child to sleep
in the afternoon
For if the child sleeps in the
afternoon
She imagines he would pass from
sleep into the land of God.
Then she would pull the child up
from sleep
And holding him in arms, would pace
up and down.
If she sees her husband return
She says, "My husband, come and
find out for me
How this child breathes,
For this child appears to be
departing".

I say that the woman with one child
Should hold herself together firmly,
Her creator will turn the pad for her.[39]
What is bad will ultimately be good –
A thing will either be good or bad.
Tomorrow is pregnant,
Who knows what it will deliver?
The woman with one child
Should remember the barren woman
Whose husband has departed to the land of God;
The woman laments:
"Oh, my husband, my husband come along.

My husband has gone to the land of 'go and return not'
And left me alone in this world of tears".
Barren woman, have comfort, cry no more,
A thing will either be good or bad.

Otu ọsụkwụ: Kpim ! 75

One ọsụkwụ: Kpim !

Ụmụnkwụ: Aao !

Initiates: Aao !

Ezebude: Abaa nụ ! Abaa nụ !
Farewell, all ! Farewell, all !

Ụmụnkwụ: Ee, Nna m
Yes, Father.

Egwu agwụsịa. Mmọnwụ niile abaa ekwuru, daa ala.
End of play. All the masks enter the ekwuru and descend.

Types of Mmọnwụ Plays

ORDINARY PLAYS

The edited texts given above are those of normal, non-festive mmọnwụ plays which could be presented in any open-air theatre at any convenient time of the year. In the first play, as has been shown, all the mmọnwụ characters in the theatre of Ezeigboezue of Ogwugwuenye Ihitenansa, namely, Ezeigboezue himself, his deputy and eldest son, Esibeagụgọ, the queen of the ekwuru, Egobude and the ever-small mask Ugerumba, took part. But in the second play only two masks, the ezemmụọ, Ezebude, and his akakpọ, Isikoroebu, featured.

The differences between the two plays however are not only in the number of masks performing; there are also differences in the composition of the audience and in the venue and nature of dramatic action. As regards the audience, in Play 1, there was a large audience of over five thousand whereas in Play 2 there were very few non-playing spectators. Regarding venue, as we have seen, the first play was enacted on a school playground and the second on a modern obom. As for the nature of dramatic action, Ezeigboezue play was what we may regard as a full dramatic performance with chorus and orchestra, dialogues, dances, poetic chants, acrobatic displays, graceful movements, gorgeous shows, etc. On the other hand, Ezebude play had little action.

When the ezemmụọ alone features people do not expect to see much activity but they can behold elegant spectacle, hear words of wisdom and be moved by poetic chants. In most cases, however, the ezemmụọ never comes out alone; he is often accompanied by one, some, or all of the masks in the ekwuru. The Ezeigboezue play, the text of which is given above is, in fact, an ezemmụọ play. During the ezemmụọ play in general the "obom teems with spectators from far and wide".[40]

What characterises a dimkpammụọ display is the acrobatic show which may feature, (1) *itiaba*, that is "striking the ground in four directions with the top part of the head";[41] (2) *ijiazụaga* in which the mmọnwụ may walk backwards for a long distance while apparently facing the spectators; (3) *ịnọ n'ogbe ụkwa eti aba*, that is, standing on a breadfruit and from there touching the ground with his head; (4) *igba abantụgharị* or "stationary turning round" in which the mmọnwụ "may decide to turn himself round (the face becoming the back and vice versa) without moving the legs"; and so on. In this type of ordinary display the ezemmụọ does not feature though the akakpọmmụọ may accompany the dimkpammụọ in the presentation and in general the dimkpammụọ show attracts spectators almost as much as the ezemmụọ display.

THE AGBỌGHỌMMỤỌ PLAY

The agbọghọmmụọ play could, in a sense, be regarded as part of ezemmụọ display since she usually appears as part of the ezemmụọ cast. But as there are ezemmụọ presentations in which the agbọghọmmụọ does not feature we could legitimately term the plays in which she features agbọghọmmụọ plays. A usual agbọghọmmụọ show has been aptly described by Obi:

> Before she rises all the spectators will know before hand. This is preceded by the display of a special "okuku". When out she tiptoes gradually as a woman mmọnwụ in the midst of the other "raffiaed" mmọnwụ and can hardly be fully seen by spectators. Then the mmarigo and ogerimkpukpu clap ecstatically to her and she dances for about five minutes of her rise, she goes into the ekwuru again. She may again come out as briefly as before for about three times. Before she comes out as aforesaid the other mmọnwụ must have almost come near to the end of the dramatic show. In each case she is accompanied by the others.[42]

FESTIVE AND SPECIAL PURPOSE PLAYS

As has been indicated, besides ordinary displays whether by one mask or by many, there are mmọnwụ performances for specific or festive occasions, for instance, there are such special performances as *ịlụ* or *ikè mmọnwụ* (marrying or giving out mmọnwụ in marriage), *ịgbali mmọnwụ* (costuming mmọnwụ for the first time or anew). *ikpe okpe mmọnwụ* (mmọnwụ court), *ịkpa iwu* (collec-

ting fines) *ikpoeke* (fertility show),[43] *ima mmọnwụ* play (initiation), *ịsụ ọda* and *ịdọ ekwuru* plays (forms of mmọnwụ title-taking), *inye onyinye* (harvest performance), *ịgba mmọnwụ* (annual mmọnwụ festival) and *ọta mmọnwụ* (mmọnwụ assembly). It should be pointed out that such performances follow the general pattern of the ordinary performance already discussed above but in addition each contains features characteristic to it.

It is indeed possible to see some of these displays as non-dramatic, for it could be legitimately argued that in some cases, for example in the judicial displays, what takes place is not a "play" but some serious day to day social activity, the result of which does not terminate with the play but is carried forward into "real" life. The main problem is that in mmọnwụ it is difficult to know where fiction ends and reality begins or where play begins and actual life ends; reality and unreality are intricately blended. But more importantly, in most of these plays the audience come to the arena to witness mmọnwụ drama but during the "play" mmọnwụ characters interpolate these social activities such as initiation, holding court, etc., into the main dramatic framework, so that it would be difficult to isolate them from the main dramatic "fiction" and call them "real life" as distinct from the mmọnwụ "play", though, as has been said, it is possible to do so.

ỊLỤ MMỌNWỤ PLAY

When a community wishes to establish an mmọnwụ society they may go to a diviner to ascertain, first, the propitiousness of the venture, and if pronounced propitious, secondly, the ekwuru from which they would derive their mmọnwụ. When this is known they would communicate to the parent ekwuru their intention to learn mmọnwụ drama from them. Then would follow what is metaphorically called "marriage negotiations". When for example Amaọkpara people went to negotiate to "marry" their Ezekwereobi from Ekwuru Ezejiọfọ of Akwa Liilu, it is reported that the people of Liilu asked them: "Are you able to do it? You know you will bring us a big basket of money (cowries), a goat and four fowls and come with a keg of wine per head *(kwa isi kwa nkwụ)*.[44]

On the day of ịlụ mmọnwụ ceremony all the men in the borrower group accompanied by their would-be mmarigo (choral maidens) would go to the parent ekwuru with the required mmọnwụ bride-wealth consisting of money, animals and palm wine. It is assumed that the borrowers are not yet initiated into the mmọnwụ tradition and therefore the major task of the hosts would be to initiate their guests into the mmọnwụ tradition. Before this however the ọsụkwụ and mmarigo of the parent

ekwuru would each choose a friend of the same sex from among the visitors.

This ceremony known as *iwe enyi mmọnwụ* is of great dramatic importance as it enables the borrowers to learn mmọnwụ art with more ease than would otherwise be possible because the hosts teach their individual friends the different aspects of mmọnwụ performance informally at home after the public sessions in the ekwuru. The actual choice of friends is in itself a type of show. Where there is an equal number of hosts and guests there would be no problem but where the guests are more in number than the hosts, then the hosts would choose more than one friend each and where they are less some hosts may go without friends. What is important is that all the guests should have somewhere to go to be entertained privately after the public ceremonies. The choice, in spite of the fact that it may cause some initial embarrassments and anxieties as some guests might be chosen by those they would not at first fancy, tends to cohere once made and is, as has been said, a kind of show in itself, for all the guests and their hosts, male and female, would usually assemble in the arena and the hosts, in the order of their age, would make their choice.

The borrowers' stay with their hosts and their orientation course, as it were, in mmọnwụ drama production and performance may last for two Igbo weeks, that is, eight days, and within this period the visiting company would be conversant with the rudiments of mmọnwụ play acting. At the end of this theatrical orientation course the new group would then return to their own community with the mmọnwụ they have "married" and would thus have founded their own ekwuru.

In *ilu* mmọnwụ performance therefore, in addition to the usual mmọnwụ acts there are activities of settling and payment of bride-wealth and after the show when the masks might have made their exit, there would be the "bridal" feast.

IGBALI MMỌNWỤ PLAY

One of the most remarkable of the specific mmọnwụ performances in terms of spectacle, is the igbali mmọnwụ play. Igbali mmọnwụ (literally meaning shooting up, as distinct from itili, i.e., beating up, mmọnwụ) may imply two things: (1) costuming, that is, creating, mmọnwụ for the first time; or (2) re-costuming an existing mmọnwụ that had discarded its former costumes and acquired new ones. As more on mmọnwụ costuming will be discussed in the chapter on spectacle it is enough here to say that igbali mmọnwụ performance could be seen as the pivot of all

mmọnwụ drama because without it there would be no mmọnwụ *personae* in the first place. It is the final embodiment of mmọnwụ art.

Ịgbali mmọnwụ involves the creation of a new mmọnwụ figure with unique physical characteristics by the Udide, the spider artist. The figure would then emerge for the first time either from his ekwuru, from any other ekwuru or from a "bad bush". During the ịgbali mmọnwụ performance the mmọnwụ in question exhibits his new form to the jubilation of all the masks and human participants present. It is always a spectacular manifestation. The play ultimately takes place in the particular mmọnwụ's ekwuru whether he first emerged from there or not. If raised in his ekwuru the usual mmọnwụ play takes place with the added glamour contributed by invited masks who may take part in the whole show. But if he is raised in any location other than his ekwuru there would be a processional show starting from the place of first emergence, stretching through the theatrical route (along which spectators may throng, some following him ultimately) to the home obom where the final drama would be acted out.

JUDICIAL PLAY

In all judicial performances[45] in which the ezemmụọ is often the supreme judge (although any mmọnwụ could pass judgment) and the akakpọ the enforcement officer, the theatrical action is basically intermingled with a judicial act in which disputants state their points of view of any dispute and the mmọnwụ gives his verdict. In cases where mmọnwụ metes out punishment to erring members of the society, the akakpọ usually goes out during performances to "catch fowl or goat" as the case may be "on behalf of the defaulting member". The killing of the animals seized as fines is often part of a judicial performace. The animals caught may not necessarily belong to the guilty person and this is why they are said to be caught "on behalf of the defaulting member". What happens is that the person on whose behalf the animals are caught would compensate the owners.

INITIATION PLAY

Ịma mmọnwụ (initiation) performance is perhaps the most gripping of mmọnwụ performances as it often, in the past, bordered on tragedy. During an initiation performance there is always tension in the air because fear grips both the novice and his supporters. Describing the state of mind of the novice before initiation S.M. Obidike says, "He is very afraid, dreams of fearful

things, e.g., mmọnwụ pursuing him mercilessly; he loses appetite, prefers staying indoors among other people especially towards evening; sometimes postpones the date ... frequent stooling and urinating, etc."[46]

The initiation episode is woven into the usual mmọnwụ action. At the climax of the show the ezemmụọ enters into the ekwuru and from there orders the akatakpo to bring in the novice or novices to be "consumed." The supporters of the would-be initiates often accompany them to the ekwuru for the initiation act. At this point, as Obidike also says, the candidate is "very nervous and half dead. Overcharged by fear, heightened by the guttural voices of the spirits, he may faint and know nothing of what happens."[47]

Indeed in the past, initiation into mmọnwụ used to be a terrible experience for the youths but now its rigours are minimised. Strangely, the story told to the novice about to be initiated is akin to what J.G. Frazer reports the youths of the Wonghi tribe of New South Wales about to be initiated into manhood are told in a secret ceremony:

> It is given out that the youths are each met in turn by a mythical being called Thuremlin (more commonly known as Daramulun), who takes the youth to a distance, kills him, and in some instances cuts him up, after which he restores him to life ... Their belief in the power of Thuremlin is said to be undoubted.[48]

In the case of mmọnwụ initiation, when the novice is led into the ekwuru the master of the ekwuru, that is, the akatakpo, makes him first of all swear the oath of secrecy on the ọfọ mmọnwụ. Then there begins the process that is metaphorically known as the "consuming" of the novice by mmọnwụ *(mmọnwụ ọtịta)* after the novice has been warned, under oath, by the akatakpo that if after the initiation he is found wanting he has himself to blame and not the officiating minister.

Mmọnwụ ọtịta consists in the initiation ordeals which were often rigorous and usually took place at night and in the dark. There used to be, as a general rule, the creation of the illusion of going through the bowels of the earth and the would-be initiate would hear mmọnwụ voices shouting, "I will have this limb," "I will have the eyes", etc. The initiating minister would then ask the candidate to plead for mercy and to promise the spirits something, a goat or a fowl, and if the novice had not enough courage he would promise what his parents or guardian or himself if he was a *dibịụlọ* (a man in his house) would find difficult to fulfil. In any case, whatever he promised during this initiation trial must be given to the spirits.

In the end the novice is said to have been remoulded and is later reported to have been thrown out (mmọnwụ atụọla ya) and deposited where he would be discovered. During the period he was supposed to be in the guts of several masks he is taught the rudiments of mmọnwụ tradition and is shown what is called *akwụkwọ mmọnwụ* (mmọnwụ leaf) which is, in reality, a kind of password and a sign which he is expected to demonstrate or identify in order to prove that he is an ọsụkwụ (initiate). This initiation procedure is akin to that described by Ọdịta in his analysis of the dramatic significance of the Ọnịcha mmụọ initiation ceremony where he shows that initiation is a prerequisite for auditioning mmọnwụ performers and for the participation of members in play rehearsals.[49]

Initiation plays are often in the evening and the stage display often ends with the taking of the novices into the ekwuru. After this the spectators disperse and the rest of the initiation rite takes place in the ekwuru as we have already seen.

The following day the new initiates are reportedly deposited somewhere (mmọnwụ ọtụtụ) after they are said to have been remoulded or reborn. There are stories that in the past there were instances where a novice would fail to reappear because the spirits refused to disgorge him on account of wrongs he had done in the society or because he doubted the spirituality of the mask, etc. This indeed is the origin of the fear and trembling associated with initiation into mmọnwụ society. There were instances too when neophytes were not "thrown out" until months after they had been "consumed." Such incidents strengthend the grip which mmọnwụ drama had on the society.

TITULAR PLAYS

In the ịsụ ọda and ịdọ ekwuru performances as in the ịlụ mmọnwụ and initiation plays the titular rites are interwoven with the regular episodes of the mmọnwụ play. The consecration of the ọda and the ekwuru, the ritual killing of the animals, with the accompanying incantations,form episodes in the titular shows.

ỊDỌ EKWURU

This is perhaps the greatest mmọnwụ ceremony and the costliest. It is an exhibition of a group's wealth and is usually performed when a group has reached its dramatic peak, has exhibited all the masks in the ekwuru and has attained internal unity and cohesion. For the ceremony at least one cow must be slaughtered, enormous quantities of food and drinks would be provided and all the neighbouring mmọnwụ groups would be entertained. Not many

ekwuru perform this festival because of its cost. It is performed only once, and the ekwuru that performs it ranks high in the mmọnwụ world.

HARVEST PLAYS

Some mmọnwụ plays are characterised by *inye onyinye* (giving presents). During such mmọnwụ performances, spectators, especially the women known to mmọnwụ as ogerinkwukwu, would bring gifts to the masks. Such gifts generally consist of money, yams, cocoyams, bananas, plantains, eggs, fowls and items that make up mmọnwụ costume such as woollen tassels, sacks, Kano cloth, velvets, and so on.

In general during mmọnwụ performances any spectator could at any point in the drama throw money to the mask as a gift in appreciation of the mask's artistic performance.[50] Also an episode that mmọnwụ sometimes re-enacts is to give to any member of the audience a cowrie shell (now a half kọbọ) and ask him to buy him a piece of cloth or a sack that would cost many naira adding with a tongue in his cheek, "bring me back any money that is left."[51]

ANNUAL FESTIVAL PLAY

Each year it is usual for members of an ekwuru to perform an mmọnwụ feast known as Ịgba mmọnwụ. Friends and well-wishers from other areas are usually invited with the expectation that they in turn would reciprocate during their own mmọnwụ festival. Such ceremonies are often very elaborate and apart from the usual feasting and the display of new outfits by the celebrants, spectacular mmọnwụ plays are staged.

ỌTA MMỌNWỤ

To end this discussion of the different types of mmọnwụ plays it is necessary to mention the ọta mmọnwụ display which is, in essence, an mmọnwụ pageant. It does not take place often, nor regularly; it is mostly *ad hoc*. But when it does take place it is most thrilling, gorgeous and awe-inspiring. Basically an ọta mmọnwụ means the massing together of innumerable masks from far and wide at a spot and is generally occasioned by very serious cultish matters such as internal rivalries or an open and flagrant desecration of mmọnwụ character.[52] Ọta mmọnwụ may however occur at other occasions such as during ịdọ ekwuru or any other mmọnwụ ceremony.

It would be difficult to exhaust all the possibilities of an

mmọnwụ performance. Within its broad outlines there is endless room for improvement and creativity, experimentation and growth.

Notes

1. Nnabụenyi Ugonna, "Reviews", *Black Orpheus,* 3, 1, 1974, p. 65

2. M.M. Green, "The Unwritten Literature of the Igbo Speaking People of South-Easthern Nigeria", *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies,* University of London, Vol. XII. 1948, p. 839.

3. An illustration of some uri patterns is given in Fig. 16, p. 150 below.

4. See p. 84 above.

5. Ekwe, a musical instrument generally fashioned from a hollowed tree-trunk, is very characteristic of the Igbo orchestra. It ranges from the mkpọmkpọ made simply by slitting a segment of a bamboo stem and used by children's play groups to the ikoro usually scooped out of a large log of the iroko stem and used only on ritual ceremonial occasions. *Ekwe* is not only used in making music, it is also used in sending messages or disseminating information. The sound of *ekwe* may announce the birth of a child or the death of a man or woman, may summon the people to a meeting or to communal labour and during a funeral, people could easily know whether the mourners intend to kill a cow for the deceased or not merely by the sound or the ekwe used in the funeral music.

6. *Ọdụ* (also called ọpi) made from the horn of an animal like *ele* (antelope), *atu* (bushcow) or any other animal, is also very important in an Igbo orchestra and is almost indispensable in mmọnwụ drama.

7. One female singer may start a performance, for example, during a scheduled performance in about 1945 at Amaọkpara Ihitenansa, spectators thronged the Amachereku arena but there were no performers except one maiden called Ajaefuruego Ezenwaka, now dead. She started the show by going into the ụlọọmụ and chanting: "Nna m nalanị m na-agụ, ekwe, oo mya oo oo o (Father, I alone am solo and chorus), repeatedly. It was after this that other performers started arriving. As would be expected mmọnwụ commended Ajaefuruego and fined the late-comers.

8. Chants by Anthonia Agwụbụike and Alice Ọkpara both primary school girls at St. Mary's School, Amaọkpara, Ihitenansa and mmarigo to Ezeigboezue of Ogwugwuenye at the time (1972) chants were tape-recorded.

9. L. 12: egbengwu, this means false mask.

10. L. 16: kill ... goat in my name, i.e. as a fine. The animal killed might or might not belong to the offender; the important point is that he pays for it.

11 L. 18: that eats dance – that dances very well.

12. Ịgba is a type of drum made of strong hide. As only the very strong can strike it, ịgba has come to symbolize strength, thus the name ọkụigba, striker of ịgba. Ịgba is also often used to connote a particularly beautiful thing as when people describe a beautiful girl, or a work of art as ịgba – *ihe nke a* or *onye nke a bụ ịgba* (this thing, or this person is excellent, beautiful very good). See Fig. 10, p. 93.

13. Traditional ọkụigba chant.

14. Chant by Daraèbowusi Daraojimba and Ezikeonyeoruru Ezikeobiaku, 1974.

15. L. 13: the art of facial scarification.

16. Originally chanted by two mmarigo, see note 8 above, and subsequently rendered by the full mmarigo chorus of Ezeigboezue during a play the text of which is given on p. 112 ff.

17. F.N. Ugonna, "Ilu in Spoken Igbo Literature", *Lagos Notes and Records*, 5,1974, 56–57.

18. L. 10: Egbemkpu means this side of existence. This expression may be derived from the ayaka masking tradition in which "mkpu" (anthill) is seen not only as the entrance to the spirit world but also as the ọda platform.

19 Chanted by Daraebowusi Daraojimba.

20. Chanted by Ezebude during a special performance in his obom at Amaneese, Amaifeke, 1975.

21. L. 13: cut the upper incisors first — this was regarded as aru (offence against the earth deity).

22. Breaking mmọnwụhead essentially means saying that mmọnwụ is human.

23. Information given by Ezeugonna Ezenwaka, 1973.

24. See note 8 above.

25 The character traits of the masked figures are implied in their names, for example, Ezeigboezue means "all Igbo are assembled", Esibeagụgọ means "those who doubt would get into trouble", Ugerumba implies that "charm would be ineffective", Egobude means "money is fame". For illustrations of the masked characters see Plates 1–4.

26. See p. 97 above.

27. See p. 94 above.

28. See p. 101.

29 L. 8: cassava and thorns, i.e., unsifted cassava, rough and tough.

30. L. 21: *obeke* is the only species of yam known to be inedible.

31. Cf. note 64 of Chapter 1 above.

32. See Plate 2 for illustrations of masks in Ekwuru Ezebude.

33. See p. 105

34. Ll. 5–6: : Another way of expressing the Igbo proverb: . Ala ụzọ nto na-eru ji mana ọ bụ onye mbute (the distant farm yields abundant yam harvest but the problem is the person to carry home the harvest) reminding one of the mode of transportation in the rural Igbo community.

35. Ll. 7–8: note the negativity of mmọnwụ affirmative. Ezedimbụ means to say that it is both terrible and apt.

36. L. 8: Mbirichiụwa — spirit of fortune; okechi -- spirit of casualty, accidents, mishaps.

37. L. 64: he who surpasses all.

38. L. 14: because *ọfọ* is the symbol of legitimacy, truth and justice, to hold *ọfọ* means to be in the path of righteousness.

39. L. 62: to turn the pad for somebody means to change the person's fortune for the better.

40. Obi's response.

41. Obidike's response.

42. This answer to question 113 given by Obi, aptly describes the general features characteristic of the display by each of the mmọnwụ categories.

43. In the past, a form of love association where male and female participants embraced without coitus.

44. Ugonna Ezenwaka, Qu/8, answer to question 14.

45. For a camparable judicial performance, see Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, Chapter 10.

46. Obidike, answer to question 50 of Questionnaire 1, namely, "Describe the state of mind of the novice before initiation".

47. *Ibid.*

48. J.G. Frazer, *The Golden Bough: A Study in Magic and Religion*, abridged ed., London, Macmillan and Co. Ltd., 1963 (1922), p. 906.

49. Ọdịta, "Igbo Masking Tradition," p. 85.

50. See text of Ezeigboezue play, Act 4, line 30, p. 115 above.

51. This has given birth to an Igbo proverbial saying, "ịtụ ahịa mmọnwụ", meaning, asking a person to do the near-impossible.

52. See note 22 above.

6

THE SPECTACLE AND THE SPECTATORS

The Spectacle

The appeal of the mmọnwụ display derives partly from the mmọnwụ myth, that is, the oral saga detailing the general history of ekwuru and the several exploits of different mmọnwụ characters, and partly from the mmọnwụ spectacle. Both the spectacle and the saga are, indeed, interrelated because both attempt to depict the mmọnwụ character. In mmọnwụ drama the spectacle or the machinery is of paramount importance because the performance is strongly visual. Mmọnwụ theatre stresses the "priority of the eye", to use Gordon Graig's words.[1] Thus it has a verbal and a nonverbal character. Words in mmọnwụ are not used to narrate the fable of a play but to inform and to teach. The nonverbal aspect is the spectacle, that is, the mmọnwụ masking and costuming tradition.

Spectacle certainly plays an important role in the development of the mmọnwụ form. Its main purpose is to serve as the vehicle through which the mmọnwụ concept could be realistically conveyed to spectators. The mmọnwụ spectacle is therefore necessarily symbolistic since it is a means of making the insubstantial visible, making a spirit concrete.

The word spectacle as applied to mmọnwụ is all embracing and covers many aspects of the external form of the obom and the aesthetic affects they produce in the spectators. Spectacle describes the exhibitive dimension of mmọnwụ play and therefore emphasises the "show" element, the pageantry, the nonverbal and purely visual form of mmọnwụ art. It embraces the intangible dance movements and styles, and the more permanent decorations of the arena, the pageant of colours exhibited in the costumes worn by the spectators and human performers and the expressive forms of the spirit-masks.

As the main objective of the spectacle is to make an illusion appear real and since the "dream" to be concretized is the environment of a deity, the spectacle is contrived to depict splendour. This is achieved by the use of a wide range of coloured materials — cloth and banners, tassels and staffs — in the construction and decoration of the theatre. Artistic construction of the obom with its ekwuru, ụlọọmụ and ọda; decorating the obom with multicoloured straws, and symbolic leaves tied onto fences made of split bamboo and raffia poles; the display of buntings, flags, banners and posters; the painting of mmọnwụ portraits on ekwuru walls; all contribute to making real the mmọnwụ concept.

As we have seen, the stage and the ekwuru, the whole mmọnwụ environment, is decorated in such a way as to create in the mind of the spectator spirit awareness and prepare him for the artistic contemplation of the masks. Thus, apart from the colourful stage, mmọnwụ characters themselves are symbolically masked.

The focus of mmọnwụ spectacle is on the spirit-character himself. This is the figure whose form thrills the audience more than anything else. In general, he is costumed in such a way as to depict his spiritual attributes. His features are neither human nor animal. It is true that he has four costumed limbs but his torso and his head have no human or animal resemblance. They are uniquely his. Commenting on the varied motivation for the use of masks in modern Western drama Gassner maintains that "the mask helped to depersonalize characters for one purpose or another".[2] In mmọnwụ tradition the mask does not depersonalize, it personalizes, it concretizes. In mmọnwụ the mask attains its highest and final apotheosis: the mask is the spirit. Indeed, Gassner's further comment on masks approaches the mmọnwụ idea:

> The mask emphasized the ritualistic character of some of Yeats's plays. And, in general, it could distance, elevate, and dignify dramatic experience, freeing it from the temporality and flux of realistic theatre. Craig sensed this, when he designed the mask for the Blind Man in Yeats's *On Baile's Strand*. "The advantage of a mask over a face", he wrote, "is that it is always repeating unerringly the poetic fancy". The theatre must learn the lesson of "durability" from Egyptian art and return to the ancient practice of covering the actor's face "in order that his expression — the visualized expression of the poetic spirit — shall be everlasting".3

Mmọnwụ, since its early manifestations, has adopted the convention of masking the whole figure to express a spiritual form.

Owing to the sacredness of the mmọnwụ drama the mmọnwụ masking technique has been mythicized. Mmọnwụ, it is said, is concretized by Udide (Spider) who lives in the ekwuru. The myth is that mmọnwụ being a spirit has no visible form independent of the costumes. The costumes are fashioned by the Spider in his subterranean abode from material supplied by members of the community. Before the ceremony of ịgbali (shooting up, raising) mmọnwụ, the mmarigo are asked by the ọsụkwụ to produce enormous quantities of *asangwọ* (raffia straw). *Asangwọ* is got from the tender leaves of the species of raffia palm called *ode*.[4] From each swordlike blade of raffia leaf a stringy covering is removed from the apex to the base. This method of producing *asangwọ*, known as *izie* (peeling off) *asangwọ* needs some measure of skill. This thin layer of covering when first removed is translucent but soon it dries up into a grey-coloured string, tough and generally useful in the home as well as in the farm.

For the creation of the mask, bundles of these strings produced by members of the mmọnwụ community in question are carried into the ekwuru where they are reportedly thrown into Udide's chasm. Depending on the category of mmọnwụ to be fashioned, other materials such as different types of cloths, tassels, helmets, animal mane, are also reported to be deposited into the said chasm. Then Udide, uses these materials supplied to create the mmọnwụ character desired by the members of the dramatic group. If the mmọnwụ character had been in existence before and had only descended into Udide land the artist merely reweaves him. Members of the community contribute funds and materials towards the costuming of their masks. Some well-to-do patrons may make endowments towards the costuming of one or more masks in the ekwuru. In fact, one or more patrons may sponsor the establishment of an entirely new ekwuru.

The actual process of costuming is still kept an artistic secret only revealed to the anyamammọnwụ (the eye that knows the spirit). It is however thought that after Udide has made the costume it is then animated by the particular spirit character for which the costume is intended. These are no doubt convenient terms for describing the process of an actor assuming the role of the character. In mmọnwụ drama the actor is so fused with the character that the identity of the actor is completely lost; the dramatists themselves insist that there are no actors but characters.

People claim not to know exactly what happens during the process of costuming and, even if they know, the are not at liberty to say. It is however said that the artist Udide, weaves raffia straw (asangwọ) on to a framework similar to the form of the mask

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erge the masks. Another disp
is whether the costume i
or not. Those who hold i
tume maintain that after Ud
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nask *persona* puts it on ar
the end of the play he ente
before reportedly descend
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w outside the mmọnwụ.
aracter, the costume has
soma and therefore when
spirits he descends with

nation regarding what
rmants were so wary
he question: "When
d) does he descend
leave them in his
re divided in their
re etc., behind in
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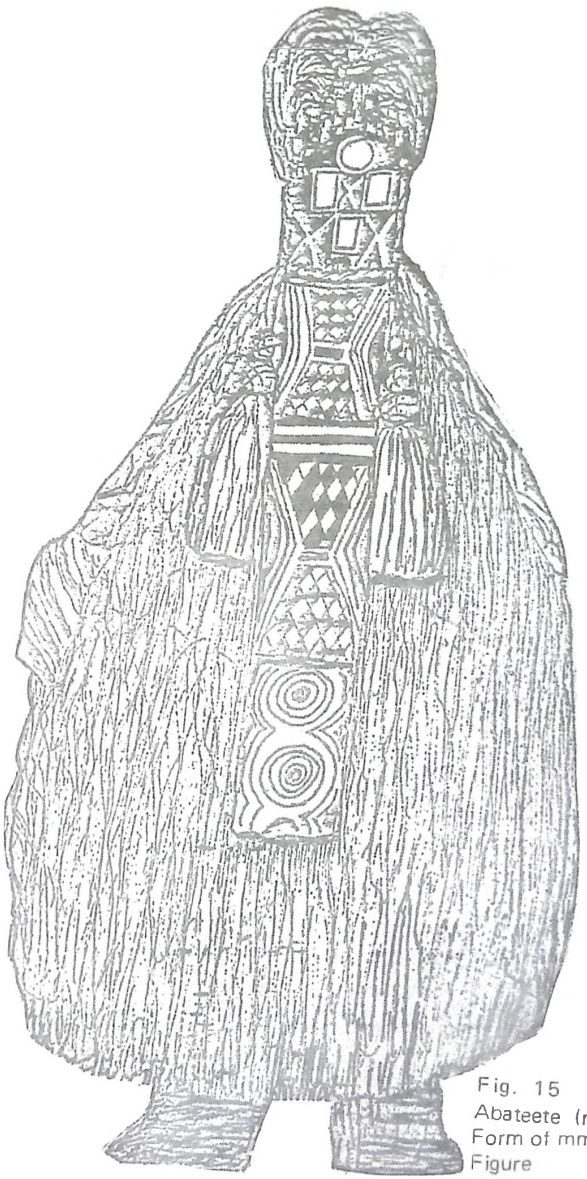


Fig. 15
Abateete (mirror)
Form of mmọnwụ
Figure

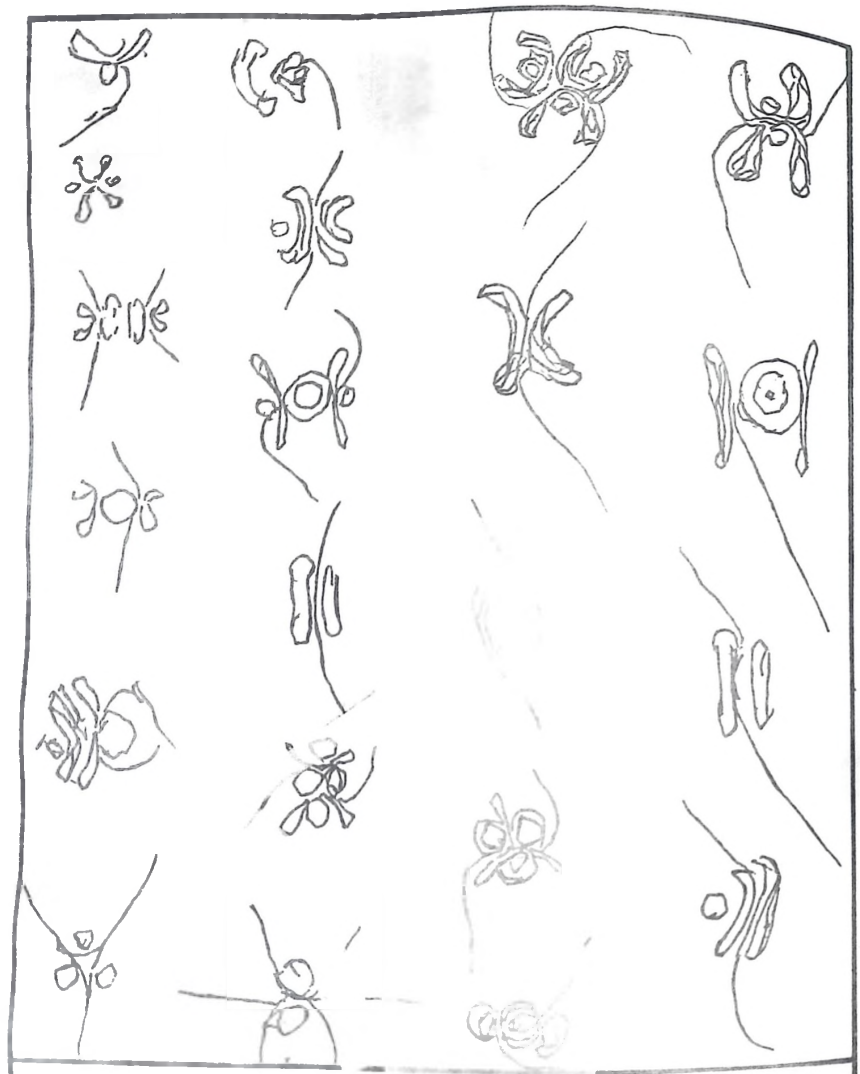


Fig. 16

Uri (body decoration) patterns.
Lagos, Oct. 1972.

Sketches by Ikedia Ugonna.

Key to patterns Oakuruaku O opene X agharagha
/ mbagu C onwa

What physical spectacle, therefore, does a typical mmọnwụ in each of the four categories present to the spectators? To begin with the ezemmụọ, he looks like a colossus. He is strikingly like the Mandinka *farakankurang*,[6] except that while the Mandinka mask is made of the bark of the baobab tree, ezemmụọ is made of raffia straw, etc.

There are two main ezemmụọ costuming styles, the egwurugwu (rainbow) style and the abateete (mirror) style. In the former, the cloth part of the mask has symmetrical patterns of various colours which lend to the whole form a rainbow appearance. In the latter, the ezemmụọ figure has reflective mirrors all about him. In general the ezemmụọ figure is conical in shape, with a maned top that looks like a shiny black wig. The staw which fans out bell-bottomedly somewhat like an Elizabethan skirt, where not covered with cloth, falls gracefully from the upper regions downwards.

The general appearance of mmọnwụ characters has been described in the last chapter. The dimkpammụọ so resembles the ezemmụọ in many respects that it is often difficult for a person not familiar with them to readily distinguish one from the other. In general, however, the eze is often more splendidly adorned with egboawụsa (tassels) and he is also slightly taller. This is illustrated by the picture of Ezekwereobi and Omerigbokwe, Plate 1.

The agbọghọmmụọ contrasts with the other masks not only in her sex but in being exclusively cloth-costumed. She is, in fact, also known as mmọnwụ ọgọdọ (cloth mask) an appellation that suggests expensiveness, beauty and showiness.

The akakpọ, strawy, versatile and relatively short with a small patch of cloth on his crest is shaped like a giant onion or an inverted bucket (see Isikoroebu's picture in Plate 2).

The mmọnwụ spectacle achieves the following aesthetic ends:

Artistic creativity

To the Igbo, mmọnwụ is not merely a mimetic art, it is the ultimate artistic expression, the summation of poetic creativity. But should mmọnwụ and other African visual art forms be considered as "art" in isolation or in relation to their social functions. Boris de Rachewiltz, for example, thinks that an "aesthetic analysis based on the Kantian definition of beauty is inapplicable" to African art. In African, as in ancient Egyptian art, he maintains that

> Sculpture, bas-reliefs, pictures, all serve a specific end, their creation being based on rules belonging to the world of magic. There are thus close points of contact between Egyptian artistic conceptions and those proper to Black Africa. Above all, they both lack a word, for "the Beautiful."[7]

This is, of course, nonsense as our analysis on p. 155–156 below will show, but it raises the question posed by Paden and Soja: "does the belief that African sculpture is only understood in its religious context not underestimate the potential of the art form, the genius of the sculptor, and the aesthetic tastes of the sculpture users?"[8] It certainly does, at least in the opinion of Robert Farris Thompson who has investigated the Yoruba artistic criticism and has come to the conclusion that,

> Yoruba qualitative criteria are consensual. This means they are matters of opinion, widely shared, but perhaps only fully comprehended by the guardians of philosophic thought. The best example of the latter are the priests of the divination cult. Yoruba aesthetic criteria are perhaps best nuanced by sculptor-critics who lend to their words their special insights of process and form. But the roots of the criteria lie with the common people without whose supporting testimony the fabric of aesthetic thought loses conviction and certainty.[9]

Perhaps Frank Willett is right when he holds that the best approach to the criticism of African art is somewhere between the two extremes of social usage and pure aesthetics.[10] In other words, African art is committed art, pragmatic art, but art all the same.

Mmọnwụ is perhaps one clear example of an African artistic form which though performing a social function has a purposefully defined aesthetic value. While, as Rachewiltz has contended, "many of the objects which European aesthetic sensibility has classified as works of art are in fact ritual instruments, strictly functional in purpose" the mmọnwụ mask is a "beautiful" object of art created to be admired and appreciated. The mmọnwụ artists have a definite aesthetic objective in view as they create the masked forms. They set out to create beautiful forms that would thrill their beholders. The mmọnwụ art forms are not religious objects to be realistically venerated; they are dramatic characters with forms to be conventionally admired, praised and feared. Thus mmọnwụ masks objectify the Igbo artistic "vision of suprasensible reality"[11] and as objects of art they have some of the formal and aesthetic characteristics of classical African art forms summarised in part by R.P. Armstrong as follows:

> Bodies are not executed with any marked interest in naturalistic depiction, and the space which has been exploited for the figure is disrupted with intervals different from those one encounters in European art. Further, the characteristics of the interrupting volumes themselves are radically different as well. The predominating scheme of spatial interruption is vertical. Length or height is the overwhelming spatial interval ...[12]

Mmọnwụ figures differ in one important respect – as we will

soon see, from figurines and masks sculptured in wood. While the latter tend to depict animal and human forms permitting "some abstraction from reality" which Si, one of the four Dan sculptors Fischer worked with, maintains. "is necessary in a work of art,"[13] the former objectify abstract beings.

Mmọnwụ therefore shares with all African classical art forms abstractism which is achieved by the accentuation of the vertical volume without undue distortion of the horizontal and the displacement of the natural proportion between the head, the trunk and the limbs. It could be said indeed that mmọnwụ is the ideal abstract, expressive and stylised artistic tradition of the Igbo. Mmọnwụ explicates the theory that art is independent of physical reality — art is spiritual, magical. It creates. It also proves that the artist can use forms to give life to abstract and religious thought. The mystical power of the artist who at the point of inspiration, becomes as it were a spiritual force is demonstrated. In mmọnwụ art the artist becomes the spirit Udide. The mmọnwụ artist like the Neo-Thomist artist exemplifies (1) "the integrity of the habit of an artist, such that his construction of a thing is an honest part of his total placement toward the world"; (2) the anonymity of art, since art is the product of reason applied to making things; and (3) the intuitive nature of art "as a productive encounter with divinity in the dark night of the soul. "[14]

Symbolism

Mmọnwụ art extends the scope and meaning of symbolism to the point where a symbol becomes almost inseparable from the idea. Masking is in fact a dramatic exercise in symbolism. Straw and cloth — light, inflammable and easily disposable — symbolize the airy and immaterial nature of spirit. The flighty nature of straw symbolizes the quickness of spirit and the colour of the costume and the intricate designs on the cloth all symbolize the beauty and mystery of the dramatic spirit. The grey colour of the straw suggests the paleness associated with the dead, so also do the flapping cloths, the tassels, the staff, and the dirge-like orchestration symbolise the idea of the spirit of the dead.

Art and the concept of spirit

Man's first contact with the supernatural is believed to be through fear and awe. Primitive man, it is held, developed religion through contact with dreadful and awful nature, the roaring sea, the destructive flood, the powerful wind, the terrifying forest with its teeming population of plants and animals, all these suggested the idea of the transcendental to primitive man. In fact before

revealed religion, man's instincts taught him that there must be a higher being, infinite, invisible, unapproachable and terrible. Man has therefore from the very dawn of history conceived spirits as fearful and capricious beings.

The mmọnwụ artists, identified with the Spider, have succeeded in manipulating masking and decorative art in achieving a conceptual representation of spirit. This accounts for the uniqueness of the mmọnwụ appearance. This uniqueness consists in the fact that mmọnwụ has no wooden mask. Because of the absence of carved figure, facial or head mask, which represents realistically, unrealistically or symbolically, any animal form — man, beast, bird, fish or insect — the abstractness and spirituality of mmọnwụ is emphasized. This is so because in beholding mmọnwụ, there is no animal analogy whatsoever. What the spectator contemplates is the representative of a non-animal being that animates a straw exterior. Mmọnwụ thus becomes the Igbo artistic spirit.

Some of the imagined qualities of a spirit are symbolically expressed in the appearance of mmọnwụ. A spirit being conceived as all-knowing, all-seeing and all-comprehending does not require localised visual, auditory and vocal organs. He could see, hear, feel and talk from every part of his being. Mmọnwụ therefore has no visible eyes, ears or oral cavity. This is perhaps the reason why the mmọnwụ artists have found it unnecessary and, indeed, unrealistic to use carved wooden masks which depict human or animal features.

The vision of a facial or head mask with two eyes is artistically circumscribed. He can only see imperfectly like animals or men. But mmọnwụ with no visible eyes has eyes all over him. In fact he is known as "all eyes". Thus mmọnwụ the maskless mask in his appearance evokes images of the supernatural, a being liberated from the physical limitations of natural beings, limitations like eyes that have limited vision and flesh that easily corrupts, etc. There is no portrayal of the auditory organs on the mmọnwụ figure as such a portrayal would appear to limit mmọnwụ to hearing things within ear-shot. Such a representation of the spirit would detract from the mmọnwụ illusion.

Similarly, to depict mmọnwụ as a figure with an oral cavity would seem to detract from the spiritual concept of mmọnwụ. Despite the fact that the oral area is not indicated mmọnwụ has a clear and distinct voice, the voice of an oracle, a voice that comes from nowhere. The significance of this voice can only be appreciated if it is realised that there can hardly be mmọnwụ drama without the peculiar mmọnwụ voice. One can recognise mmọnwụ from his voice without actually seeing him. And the

voice inspires the same fear and awe as the spirit himself. One cannot imagine a mask that speaks in a human voice and not in the characteristic mmọnwụ voice, weird, guttural, metallic and high-pitched, a voice that differs from any human or animal voice.

More will be said on the significance of the mmọnwụ voice in the next chapter that deals with the stylistics of mmọnwụ poetry.

Another feature of the mmọnwụ figure that reflects its spiritual concept is the contrasting size of the masks — the colossal ezemmụọ with the diminutive akakpọ. The vertical extension of the ezemmụọ is concomitant to his superhuman quality and character. His size symbolically enables him to overshadow all living animals on the land and by projecting himself above all humans ensures his domination of them. This also accords with the general Igbo idea of the dominance of the "high" over the "low". On the other hand, the smallness of the akakpọ symbolises the ubiquity of the mmọnwụ character. With his small size the akakpọ can intrude into any available space. In effect, while the ezemmụọ draws the attention of the spectators by the power of his hugeness, the akakpọ achieves this by the might of his quickness. Most of the props carried by the masks help to emphasise the power and therefore the supposed superhuman character of the masks. Missiles, swords, bows and arrows, axes and spears — all help to impress the audience with the power and spirituality of the mmọnwụ characters.

The Aesthetic Appeal

The ultimate objective of the mmọnwụ play is, without doubt, its aesthetic appeal, that quality in it that entertains, satisfies. What satisfies the audience at the mmọnwụ play is the beauty of the mmọnwụ spectacle. Mmọnwụ is regarded among the Igbo as the acme of beauty, truth and goodness — values represented as the three basic ideals of man. Thus, when a thing is extremely beautiful Igbo people refer to it as "mmọnwụ". "Ọ dị ka mmọnwụ (it is like mmọnwụ)" is an expression describing the very beautiful. Mmọnwụ spectacle therefore attempts to represent the ideally beautiful. To appreciate mmọnwụ is to contemplate beauty.

Earlier in this chapter Rachewiltz's contention that the African lacks a word for "the Beautiful" has been quoted. As far as the Igbo are concerned this statement is not true because the word, *mma*, connotes "the beautiful" in Igbo. And in this regard, R.G. Armstrong has, in a personal communication, commented: "There is also Yoruba ewa (quite possibly cognate with mma) and Idoma *ohi* or *osi*. The Africans are not ignorant of beauty, but

authors like de Rachewiltz are often ignorant of African languages and culture."

It is true that the Igbo word mma also means "goodness" but the two connotations are distinct. The Igbo man clearly distinguishes when mma means goodness from when it means beauty or the beautiful. One of the attributes of mmọnwụ is *mma dọrọ ọgụ* (beauty that causes contention) and here one is not referring to goodness which has moral implications but to beauty with its aesthetic and emotional overtones.

In their appreciation of mma, in their evaluation of the beautiful, the Igbo, in general tend to adopt the realist approach. This means that mmọnwụ spectators would not normally consider the beauty in the mmọnwụ spectacle as a subjective quality of their own mind, that is, as merely an emotional state of consciousness, nor would they consider it to be "a particular kind of relationship between the mind and the object of perception."[15] As Bertram Morris has pointed out, these two latter fundamental interpretations of beauty, the first held by Benedetto Croce and the second by George Santayana are respectively subjective and relational. The Igbo tend to consider beauty to be "an intrinsic property or quality of a thing in and of itself, whether or not anybody apprehends it."[16] Thus the spectators in an mmọnwụ play would maintain that the beauty exhibited in a mask is a definite quality of that mask, a quality which pleases when beheld. The quality therefore belongs to the object perceived and not to the subject perceiving.

It is the appreciation of this objective beauty immanent in the mmọnwụ spectacle that partly enables the spectators to achieve catharsis though the beauty of the dialogue also helps. By contemplating mmọnwụ spectacle spectators are moved to a realisation of their own insignificance in contrast to the vast mmọnwụ environment. It is perhaps a matter of education and orientation, for when one is witnessing mmọnwụ there is a tendency to accept the illusion for the reality: in other words, during the drama, if not afterwards, illusion acquires a reality of its own; a union with the invisible creation is imaginatively achieved, spiritual concepts, through art, materialize into masks who perform on the stage and are at the same time visible objects of art appreciated by the spectators.

The Spectators

During the early period of mmọnwụ drama, about the 1920s and 30s when the communities whose dramatic tradition is being

investigated were hardly influenced by modern education, the mmọnwụ audience mainly consisted of the rural farmers and artisans, all interested elders, the nze, members of certain religious movements or groups — *ndị ele, ndị mbata, ndị agwụ, ndị eze arụsị* (members of religious cults and priests), *ndị dibịa* (members of the healing profession), and *ndị eze ikpe* (members of the judiciary). Also attending would be prominent members of such women's societies as *ndị lọọlo* and *ụmụada*. This was the mmọnwụ audience before the transition to the modern social order.

Today, as a result of constant social change, the mmọnwụ audience has become more complex. Mmọnwụ spectators now include not only people from the community whose ekwuru is producing the mmọnwụ play and their immediate neighbours, but also invited guests from far and near and other interested people who might have learnt of the staging of the play from different sources. The audience would therefore include men, women and children, the highly educated and the barely literate, the farmer, the labourer and the professional, the chief, the public servant and the self-employed, people from the rural communities and those from the urban centres.

Fundamentally the audience is composed of those initiated and those not initiated into the mysteries of mmọnwụ. The uninitiated spectators comprise mostly women, children and those men who have not been initiated. The reasons for non-initiation may be religious, psychological, philosophical or practical. For example, many christians in the past were not allowed by their churches to become members of any mmọnwụ dramatic group. Also, some people could be prevented from seeking admission into the *ekwuru* because of fear arising from stories of pain and agony during initiation spread by initiated members. Besides, there are those who just do not believe in the whole concept or the veracity of mmọnwụ and others who could not afford the initiation fee.

Each of these two categories of spectators tend to appreciate mmọnwụ plays differently. The ọsụkwụ (initiated member) "knows" mmọnwụ, after all, mmọnwụ initiation is called *ịma mmọnwụ* (knowing mmọnwụ),[17] and the ogbodi (uninitiated member) does not. But yet during an actual performance the emotions engendered by the drama may grip every heart irrespective of whether the spectator "knows" mmọnwụ or not.

The Motivations of the Spectator

The question may be asked, why do people go to the obom mmọnwụ? And it could be answered that they do so primarily for

three reasons: (1) to listen to and appreciate the chanting of mmọnwụ poems; (2) to watch the masks perform different acts on the stage – dance, glide, spin, chase spectators about, dramatize short stories, and so on; and (3) to behold and contemplate the beauty that is the mmọnwụ spectacle. George M. Gohan, American actor, playwright, and producer once said that people go to the theatre for one of three reasons – to laugh, to cry, to be thrilled."[18] People therefore go to the mmọnwụ theatre for a variety of reasons but principally to be thrilled, to be soothed, vexed and overawed. They go to the theatre to satisfy their basic drives, namely, the desire for social interaction and social recognition, the need for adventure and security. Going to the obom is indeed, a kind of social outing. The desire for social response draws many playgoers to the obom where they would meet friends and foes, chat, banter and lose their identity in a crowd. Many playgoers use the obom as a meeting ground for other forms of social interaction not connected with mmọnwụ play. But more fundamentally the play itself affords the spectator an opportunity to identify himself with any other character in the performance and assume any desirable role he pleases. Mmọnwụ plays therefore satisfy the herding tendency in man.

Mmọnwụ, perhaps more than any other artistic form in Igbo tends to satisfy the spectator's human desire for fame, for leadership, for social recognition. And since the most effective and immediate means of giving expression to these drives would appear to be through praise, the mmọnwụ poets attach great importance to praise poetry. The Igbo, it appears, believe that "etu onye siri *to mmadụ ka a ga-esi to ya*" (as a person praises another so will he himself be praised). And one could hear an Igbo person who has done what he thinks is praise-worthy mutter to himself, "onye etoghị m etoo m onwe m" (if nobody praises me I praise myself). The masks are praised by the spectators and the spectators in turn are praised by the masks. Mmọnwụ is indeed a drama of praise. The mmọnwụ spectator finds himself surrounded with dazzling fame, opulence and splendour and shares in the general heroism.

Man is an adventurous animal, a being that glories in warfare, derives pleasure from risks and finds strength in danger. Mmọnwụ play is a forum for the spectator to indulge his primordial cravings for conflict and excursions into the land of romance denied him in the reality of everyday life. The mmọnwụ chase and terror are the spectator's mines of adventure. The mysterious, the magical and the fearful aspects of mmọnwụ theatre appeal to the spectators' desire for the occult and the unknown.

In spite of his love of adventure, man hankers after security

which mmọnwụ authoritarianism appears to provide and symbolize. Mmọnwụ show of absolute power and his claim to omniscience impress the audience with a sense of security and confidence. Much of the appeal of mmọnwụ drama is due to the fact that during mmọnwụ plays the spectator is safe to indulge his "emotional and imaginative sensitivity and to be stimulated and diverted"[19] by a mythic world of his own creation. He is safe in an obom to accept masked figures as incarnate spirits that have risen from their subterranean abodes to play before admiring spectators without appearing childish. Thus he is secure from ridicule in erecting what some critics would regard as fantasy or dream and apparently believing in it and giving to it all the reverence due to a deity.

Admittedly there is danger in mmọnwụ play (the danger is the source of the mmọnwụ adventure), yet the spectator finds security in the danger because he knows that the mmọnwụ danger is controlled and that the ultimate danger only engulfs the unwary and the fool. And since no spectator thinks that he is a fool he is secure from the danger.

It should be noted that not all spectators go to mmọnwụ theatre solely to satisfy their basic emotive drives. Mmọnwụ, as might have been seen from the previous chapters of this study is a synthesis of various Igbo social systems — political, judicial, and educational — and a mirror of Igbo artistic, metaphysical and ethical traditions. Thus many spectators attend mmọnwụ plays for their socializing influence, some attend to obtain justice or to obtain a wife and others merely to contemplate the beauty of the spectacle. Mmọnwụ is therefore not all emotion and myth, it is also highly philosophical and intellectual. The witty mmọnwụ dialogues are replete with philosophical sayings and intellectual arguments. However, one can do no more than agree whole-heartedly with Dietrich's shrewd observation that when "all is said and done, the great attraction of the theatre lies in the opportunity to participate imaginatively in the dramatic action. A play can survive without art or intellect; it cannot survive without emotion."[20]

The Audience Response

How does the audience participate in the mmọnwụ play? As has been mentioned earlier the members of the audience surround or nearly surround the mmọnwụ arena allowing an open stage in the centre. When dramatic influence is felt in the obom and the masks

have cast a sort of hypnotic spell on the spectators, the spectators behave as one mass. They are excited, thrilled. The initiated members in the audience give praise names to the performing masks. They engage in dialogues with and applaud the masks either spontaneously or when prompted to do so by the leaders of the play. The mmọnwụ applause as we have earlier seen is of great dramatic importance as it adds to the excitability of the crowd. The uninitiated, the women and the children run away in terror as some belligerent masks, mainly the akakpọ, give them the dramatic chase. The crowd derives awful pleasure from the agitation of the uninitiated and this gives them the sensation of power and authority.

In a large arena spectators would find it easy to behold all the players, but in a relatively small arena and especially if there is a large audience order could only be maintained through the stern discipline of the mmọnwụ characters. The akakpọ would repeatedly pursue the spectators to create ample room for the players and to prevent the spectators from surging into the centre stage. This leads to the constant positional shifts on the part of the members of the audience. During very successful performances the audience is silenced by the mere presence of the masks and the desire to hear every syllable of their utterances.

Mmọnwụ performance, as already indicated, has verbal as well as nonverbal characteristics. In this chapter we have discussed (a) the nature of the nonverbal aspect, that is, the spectacle, and the audience; and (b) the aesthetic effect which the spectacle has on the audience. In the next chapter we will analyse the verbal form of the mmọnwụ presentation.

Notes

1 Quoted in Michael Kirby, *Happenings: an illustrated anthology*, New York, E.P. Dutton and Co., 1966 (1965), p. 12.

2 *Gassner, Form and Idea in Modern Theatre, p. 167–8.*

3 *Ibid.*, p. 168.

4 See note 47 in Chapter 1 above.

5 Samuel Obidike's answer in Q0/3.

6 See p. 4–5 above.

7 Boris de Rachewiltz, trans. by Peter Whigham, *Introduction to African Art*, London, John Murray, 1966, p. 40, first published in Milan, 1959, under the title, *Incontro Con L'arte Africana.*

8 John N. Paden and Edward Soja, edited, *The African Experience*, Volume II, Syllabus, London, Heinemann Educational Books 1970, p. 57.

9 Robert Farris Thompson, "Yoruba Artistic Criticism", in Warren L. D'Azevedo, *The Traditional Artist in African Societies,* Bloomington and London, Indiana University Press for International Affairs Centre, 1973, p. 22.

10 Paden and Soja, *The African Experience,* p. 53.

11 Rachewiltz, *Introduction to African Art,* p. 47.

12 Quoted in Paden and Soja, *The African Experience,* p. 55.

13 *ibid.,* p. 120.

14 See Katharine Gilbert "Aesthetics", in *Colliers' Encyclopaedia,* New York, Collier Publishing Company, 1961, p. 155.

15 Bertram Morris, "Beauty", in *Collier's Encyclopaedia,* 1961, p. 156.

16 *Ibid.*

17 Another possible and perhaps original interpretation of the phrase is "to consecrate to mmọnwụ", cf. ịma ahụ (ritual ablution).

18 John E. Dietrich, *Play Direction,* Englewood Cliffs, N.J., Prentice Hall, 1953, p. 38.

19 *Ibid.,* p. 40.

20 *Ibid.,* p. 41.

7

THE LANGUAGE OF MMỌNWỤ DRAMA

The strong verbal character of the mmọnwụ genre has already been emphasized through the many examples of mmonwu verses which have been given in the preceding chapters. It has similarly been stressed that one of the most important aims of mmọnwụ art is to give pleasure through words. In other words, the primary function of the mmọnwụ poets and actors is to please the spectators at an mmọnwụ performance or individual reciters of traditional texts of mmọnwụ verse, alone or in company, in the home or at work, by providing them with what Adeboye Babalọla calls "strikingly rhythmical expression of elevated thought or feeling in figurative language."[1]

Babalọla has described the language of *ijala* as "a formalized version of Yoruba speech."[2] In like manner, mmọnwụ language is a special form of Igbo diction. Thus, like the language of ijala, as analysed by Babalọla, it is characterized by certain conventional poetic formulas and devices. These features (poetic formulas and devices), together with the mmọnwụ imagery, thematic content and dramatic features, constitute what one may term the inner form, the internal features, of mmọnwụ stylistics while the technicalities of versification – voice production, tone, rhythm, duration of utterance, pause, and so on – may be considered as the outer form. Both aspects of the mmọnwụ verse will be discussed below.

The outer Form of Mmọnwụ Poetry

Perhaps it will be more convenient to begin with the outer form of mmọnwụ language.

The Mmọnwụ Voice

Any study of the external characteristics of mmọnwụ language

may perhaps begin with the mmọnwụ voice and its production. The mmọnwụ voice is probably the most mythicized and mystified aspect of the mmọnwụ tradition. This is philosophically understandable: the voice is the being. Mmọnwụ poets and producers therefore make people believe that the mask's voice is a spiritual one. They attempt to produce in the audience the illusion of spiritual reality by making the mmọnwụ voice uniquely different from the voice of any other being known to man. Indeed, to demythologize the mmọnwụ voice would perhaps amount to destroying the mmọnwụ illusion.

It has not been possible in the research area to get willing information about the nature of the production of the mmọnwụ voice. Even those who know the device would not be at liberty to reveal what they know perhaps in the interest of the dramatic myth. What is known of the voice however is that it is shrill, unearthly, reedy, vibratory, metallic, sharp, articulate, loud and clear. It is melodious and ideal for recitative poetry. Besides, it emphasises the rhythmic flow of mmọnwụ language, making the utterances more pleasant to hear, and, in ideal situations, creating a hypnotic and dream-like effect on the auditors.

Despite the fact that people in what is claimed to be the true mmọnwụ area dismiss other masked forms in Igbo land as non-mmọnwụ, what is said in these other masking traditions, notably the Ọnịcha tradition, might throw some light on the nwaezenogwu voice production. Ọnụọra Nzekwu, for example, in his revealing article on the Igbo masking tradition states:

> The secret of the masquerade's voice was the most jealously guarded of the cult for, among most groups, it is the voice that is really the masquerade. Yet it is a simple device: a hollow cylindrical reed some two or three inches long and about three-tenths of an inch in diameter over one end of which a spider's cocoon is drawn taut and secured in position with a thread. This device will disguise a man's voice giving it a harsh, grating quality, something like the sound of a gramophone record played with a worn-out needle[3].

And describing the initiation into the Ọnịcha Boys' "mmụọ" society, Ọdịta reveals that during the ceremony, the initiates are told for the first time, first, what constitutes the society's password, and, secondly, that "maskers are really members of the mmụọ society in costume". And about the voice "often believed to be ndichie's (ancestor's) voice", he says:

> It is produced by the use of Ududo (Udide), a contrivance of reed fitted at an end with spider's cocoon. Before being introduced to this secret, the recruits are taught, as a first step, to contract and pull in degrees, by hand, the flappy wings of their nose, while reciting certain incantations and songs or calling out the mmụọ society pass-word. The position of the nose for best results is long

> and pointed. The purpose is to produce a variety of voice qualities, the best of which is comparable to the high-pitch voice produced by a masquerade. Perfecting this imitative voice is advantageous to a masker during an emergency because he could readily switch to an imitative voice and sustain the reputation of mmụọ society, if he accidentally dropped the Ududo at performance[4].

It has been necessary to quote both Nzekwu and Ọdịta at length as their findings, if relevant to the mmọnwụ tradition under study, as one would be inclined to suspect, may well explain some of the mysteries surrounding the mmọnwụ voice and the creative myth of Udide. One would quickly add however that what they describe is the production of the Ọnịcha mmụọ voice and not that of nwaezenogwu, the maskless mask.

The Oral Verse Form as distinct from oral prose

More significant to the study of the outer form of mmọnwụ utterance is the product of the mmọnwụ voice — the oral verse itself[5].

But before discussing the features of this outer form the question could be asked: how does mmọnwụ oral verse differ from ordinary speech? The obvious answer that mmọnwụ verse is chanted in the mmọnwụ guttural voice does not go far enough since the mmọnwụ poem could be chanted and enjoyed by people in situations far removed from the conventional mmọnwụ stage. In fact, though the mmọnwụ voice enhances the poetic and mythic effect of the mmọnwụ poem, it is not intrinsically part of the poem. It is only a medium even if a very important one, through which the poem is rendered. What is being stressed is that the mmọnwụ poem could be recited or said outside the theatre by interested persons in their everyday lives without destroying the mmọnwụ poetry. The poetry therefore derives from other external characteristics besides the chanting voice. The relevance of musicology to mmọnwụ poetry would be discussed presently when the question of rhythm in mmọnwụ verse is examined.

What then constitutes the difference between mmọnwụ verse and ordinary oral prose, and this is true of oral poetry and prose in general? It may be stated that the distinguishing line between them, like in the vexed distinction between written verse and prose, is thin and controversial. Nemerov's criterion for distinguishing between poetry and prose, and this may be interpreted to include oral poetry and prose seems to be a most objective one:

> Formally, poetry is recognizable by its greater dependence on at least one more parameter, the *line,* than appears in prose composition. This changes its appearance on the page; and it appears clear that people take their cue from this changed appearance, reading poetry aloud in a very different voice from their habitual voice, possibly because, as Ben Johnson said, poetry "speaketh somewhat above a mortal mouth."[6]

It could be held that, as the line is the main feature distinguishing poetry from prose in the written tradition, what has come to be variously known as the "pause-group", the "pause-length", or the "breath-length", differentiates oral verse from oral prose. According to Wande Abimbọla, "a group of utterances between one breath pause and the next" could be defined as the line.[7] Stressing the significance of the line in poetry Nemerov argues convincingly that if "people are shown poems printed as prose, it most often turns out that they will read the result as prose simply because it looks that way; which is to say that they are no longer guided in their reading by the balance and shift of the line in relation to the breath as well as the syntax."[8] In the same way if the more or less regular occurrence of the breath-pause is obscured or absent in an oral verse people would tend to regard it as prose.

In view of this similarity between the oral poetic mode and the written verse there is justification in regarding Igbo oral poetry in general as metrical just as Babalọla has argued in the case of Yoruba poetry when he declares, "There is a marked difference (perceptible to the native speaker of Yoruba) between the stressed and the unstressed syllables in every line (of Yoruba) and this is the principal feature of Yoruba metre."[9]

Igbo Metre

Igbo poetry in general and specifically mmọnwụ verse form, as shown in the texts given in Chapter 5 above, is metrical. This means that it conforms to definite laws of prosody or the regular flow of langugage measured in rhythmic units. Igbo verse form is thus characterised by regularity of rhythm-units each of which is marked by a definite pause during which the chanter or reciter usually takes in breath. Thus the rhythm-unit is also known as the breath-length which corresponds, as most critics of the outer form of the oral poem have pointed out, with a line of verse also ambiguously called verse, from the Latin *versus* which means a turning, "and is consequently used for a furrow and a row or line."[10] The Igbo metrical form therefore, like all "rhythmic art of poetic composition expresses itself audibly in a succession of movements of different kinds occurring and recurring in definite order."[11]

In Igbo metre this succession of recurrent movements is achieved by the ordered arrangement of strong and weak elements corresponding perhaps to the raising of the foot from the ground and its being put down in the course of a measured movement or dance. This, no doubt, explains the use of the term "foot" to imply that unit measure in the prosodic analysis of the English poem. In Igbo prosody the concept "*igidi*" (dance-step) may

conveniently express the idea of "foot." This is because th. Igbo metre may be said to have its basis in the Igbo dance. As the African dance is not strictly linear, being more or less circular, the movements both in the dance and poetry of the Igbo occur in a series of rhythmic segments. Each segment tends to be marked by either a slow or quick tempo, the quick tempo alternating in some regular order with the slow one. In the process a cluster of rhythm-segments forms a rhythm-unit or a breath-length which, as has been pointed out, is synonymous with a line of verse.

But it may be argued that prosaic utterances are also marked by the occurrence of rhythm-units, pauses, and breath-lengths. Wherein then lies the difference between prosaic and poetic utterances? The difference, of course, lies in the element of regularity which is a necessary features in metrical composition.

The problem confronting critics has been how best to measure this principle of regularity in an oral verse. Babalọla, Siertsema, Afọlayan, Abimbọla and Iṣọla, all agree that the regular occurrence of prominence in the syllabic sequence determines metre, but they tend to disagree on what constitutes prominence. Some of them think that prominence and stress are synonymous. Others deny this. But what is more important is their differing critical opinions regarding the occurrence of prominence. "The stress that can be heard in Yoruba," says Babalọla who identifies prominence with stress, " is not inherent in particular words or syllables but is a function of the rhythm-unit, whether this rhythm-unit is a sentence in itself or combines with one or more other rhythm-units to form a sentence."[12]

On the other hand, Abimbọla, like Afọlayan, denies the existence of stress in Yoruba, declaring that "the term prominence as used for Yoruba is an equivalent of the word 'stress' as used for the English."[13] He implies therefore that Yoruba has prominence and not stress and in this way makes a distinction between prominence and stress where Babalọla does not. Furthermore, he holds the view that prominence is "a property of the unit syllable"[14] and therefore disagrees with Babalọla's observation that stress is not inherent in particular words and syllables as stated above.

Babalọla may well be right in stressing the importance of syllabic prominence in metrical composition but one could not help wondering as Iṣọla has done, if prominence, in the sense Babalọla has defined it, could be a convenient tool in the hands of the literary critics as distinct from the musicologist when it comes to determining the units of rhythm in poetic utterances. This is because emphasis or stress that is not related to the tonal or

accentual feature of language becomes a rather subjective and therefore unpredictable metrical determinant. And, as Ịsọla has rightly pointed out, it would seem "that a discussion of rhythm should dwell mainly on features of the language that are predictable. Experience has shown that the question of which syllables are prominent and which are not is certainly very controversial as shown by an experiment performed by Afọlayan (1969).[15] A purely quantitative view of prominence would make its occurrence largely dependent on the individual style of the artist or the reciter as Ịsọla maintains when he observes:

> By more or less reflex action, an artist emphasises some syllables in the poem. In another artist's articulation of the same poem, prominence may attach to an entirely different set of syllables. So the prominence of syllables, like the duration of pauses at the end of lines, is a matter of the artist's individual style and not a feature that can be predicted.[16]

And as he says elsewhere, "the prominence of syllables is a subjective decision which is best discussed under individual style."[17] This subjectivism, of course, arises when prominence is not related to tone or accent.

These critical views on Yoruba oral poetry are relevant to the general study of Igbo oral poetry and in particular mmọnwụ verse. The fact that Igbo and Yoruba belong to the Kwa group of languages and are both tonal makes a form of relationship between Yoruba and Igbo traditions of oral poetry inevitable. Rhythm, in Igbo, as in "Yoruba oral poetry is the sense of movement created by the overall succession of utterances, by tone patterns and by varying durations of the successions of vowel syllables."[18]

Rhythm in Mmọnwụ Verse

In Igbo versification, poetic rhythm is achieved by more or less regular arrangement of stressed and unstressed syllables. The regularity however is flexible. It may, in fact, be said that Igbo oral verse is free verse. But as has been remarked with regard to Yoruba oral poetry, the freedom is within ordered limits. The regularity of rhythm is achieved at some points in the verse by the recurrence of stress on some syllables at more or less regular intervals. There is the tendency for the stress to fall on one, and occasionally on more than one, of a group of syllables. Each of such groups of syllables forms what we have called an *igidi*, or a rhythm-segment. A number of igidi or occasionally a single igidi, depending on the occurrence and duration of the pause, constitutes the rhythm-unit which is assumed to be synonymous

with such terms as the line, the verse, the pause-length, the breath-group. In Igbo metre it could be said that rhythm, apart from its musicological quality which is unpredictable without the use of musical notation, is dependent on tone which is objective and easily predictable. But as Ịsọla also points out, musical notation is not only cumbersome in purely literary and non-musical analysis of a poem but is in fact not appropriate in the appraisal of freely chanted or recited oral verse.[19] Indeed, stress or prominence in Igbo utterances can be said to coincide with the high tone or in some cases the downstep. It is therefore the regular alternation of high, downstep and low tones that produce rhythm in Igbo verse.

If the rhythm in the following satirical mmọnwụ poem is examined it would be noticed that the balancing of high and downstepped high tones with low tones results in the following groups of rhythm-segments separated with bars:

Efejadị

Ẹ́jìrì m̀/ sịsị/jébé ịlụ̄/Éfèjàdị́,/
I took/ sixpence[1]/ to go marry/ Efejadị,/

À jụ̀rụ́ m̄/ sịsị/ jụ̀rụ́ m̄/ Éfèjàdị́./
They rejected my/sixpence/refused me/Efejadị./

Ẹ́jìrì m̀/ kọ́bọ̀ jébé ịlụ̄/ Éfèjàdị́,/
I took/kobo to go to marry/ Efejadi,

À jụ̀rụ́ m̄/kọ́bọ̀/ jụ̀rụ́ m̄/ Éfèjàdị́./
They refused my/kobo/and refused me/Efejadị./

Ẹ́jìrì m̀/ áfụ̀/ jébé ịlụ̄/ Éfèjàdị́,/
I took/half kobo/ to go to marry/Efejadị./

À nárá m̄/ áfụ̀/ kpọ́nyé m̄/ Éfèjàdị́./
They accepted from me/ half kobo/ and gave me Efejadị./

Ọ́gọ̀ ḿ/ nwáànyị̀/ bịá/ dụ̄kèbé m̄/
My mother-in-law/ come/ and see me off/

Ànyị́/ ánāghị̀/ àlụ́/ nwáànyị̀/ èrèọ́nụ̄./
We/ do not/ marry/ a wife/ (that is) flippant./

Ọgọ m̀/ nwáànyị̀/ bìá/ dụ̀kèbé m̄,/
My mother-in-law/ come/ and see me off,/

Ànyí/ ánāghị̀/ àlụ́/ nwáànyị̀/ ịnyàngá./
We do not/ marry/ a wife/ (that is) arrogant./

It would be noticed that the above poem consists of 10 rhythm-units, each corresponding, of course, to a line of poetry, and consisting of a number of rhythm-segments (igidi). As can be seen, each rhythm-segment is made up of between two and five syllables and contains at least one stressed syllable. For our critical purposes, each stressed Igbo syllable is seen to be coincident with a high tone. The rhythm is produced by the manner low tones interact with high and downstepped high tones. In line 1, for example, each rhythm-segment begins with a high tone followed by one or more low tones except in segment C where the initial high tone is followed by two other high tones and a downstep:

a	b	c	d
Éjìrì m̀	sísị	jébé ịlụ	Éfèjàdí

But in line 2 the first rhythm-segment begins with a low tone, the second with a high tone, the third with a low tone and the fourth with a high tone. In these segments excepting the third, the initial tone whether high or low is followed by a low tone. In segment 3 the initial low tone is followed by one high tone and one downstep tone:

a	b/	c /	d/
À jụ̀rụ́ m	sịsị	jụ̀rụ́ m̄	Éfèjàdí

This metrical scheme recurs almost with the same frequency in lines 3 and 4, 5 and 6. It would be noticed that all but two of the rhythm-units given above consist of four rhythm-segments each. The exceptions are lines 8 and 10, with five igidi each. It will be further seen that from line 7 to 10 the rhythm of the poem changes primarily because of the tonal changes in the last segment of each rhythm-unit. Thus the quick-slow slow-quick tempo, or better still, the high-low-low-high pitch produced by the four-syllable rhythm-segment *"Efejadi"* is replaced by the high-low-high-downstep rhythm of *"dukebe m"* (lines 7 and 9) and the low-low-high-downstep rhythm of *ereọnụ* (line 8) and the low-low-low-high of *inyanga* (line 10).

Tones and Igbo Rhythm

It can be said that in general the rhythmic pattern in Igbo verse is preeminently achieved through the tonal levels of the language

and so there is justification in identifying Igbo stress with different gradations of high tones in the Igbo language. And, as can be observed from the "Efejadị" poem discussed above, often in Igbo prosody, the regularity of a particular tone at the line ends, that is, at definite breath-pauses or at specific points along the line, creates the rhythmic cadence of Igbo poetry. This tonal harmony is an important feature in the creation of Igbo rhythm.

Tone Terracing

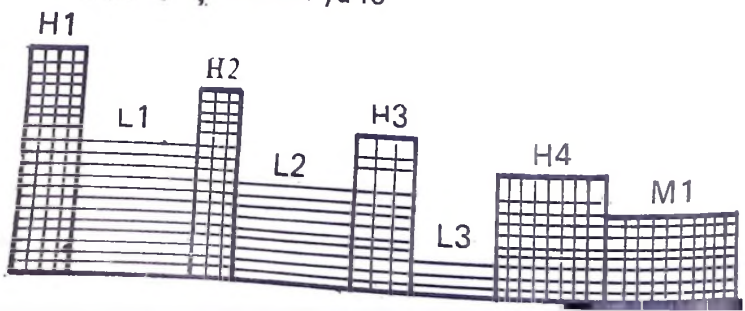
Besides the high-low-downstepped high tone-levels, a feature of Igbo tonology that influences Igbo rhythm is tone-terracing or downstepping. The English equivalent of what has been generally called Igbo terrace tones is the "glide down." But in Igbo the tones do not necessarily glide (although R.C. Abraham[20] thinks they do), they step down and form tonal terraces. What this means is that a successive high, downstep or low tone is a terrace lower than a preceding one. This phenomenon in Igbo tonology has led to many theories regarding Igbo tones. R.C. Abraham, for example, describes the terracing of Igbo tones as tone-switching and declares:

> Where, through standing after a previous word, the original tone of a word starts at a pitch different from its normal tone-level, then the pitch of the words which follow must be switched to tones differing from their normal tone to maintain the original intervals between tone and tone.[21]

He then goes on to distinguish the following tone levels:

High (H), mid (M), low (L), very low (VL), deep (D), and profound (P). This elaborate classification which, in most part, is arbitrary (since the degree of downstepping is to a large extent a matter of individual mannerism), could be avoided if we realise that in Igbo, although the tones step down, they generally do not change significantly. This is to say that in each tonal downstep we generally have the usual tones high, downstep or low as the case may be except that they are usually in a lower pitch than the preceding terrace. For example:

Há sị̀rị́ ụ́nụ̀ bịá mà chí yā fō



(They say you (plural) should come the following day).

From the above it would be observed that although H1, H2, H3 and H4 are at different tone terraces they have the same tone level high. The same thing applies to L1, L2 and L3. The above illustration also corroborates the observation that "the tendency in Igbo, as in many African languages, is that a sentence starts high in the voice and gently falls, eventually (depending on the length of the sentence) ending on a pitch considerably lower than the pitch of the highest point of the first word in sentence containing a high tone."[22]

The effect of tone terracing has been felt in Igbo music as Laz. E.N. Ekwueme comments: "On account of the terraced nature of Igbo speech, the melodic shape of Igbo songs is also a terraced one which, in general, starts at the highest point and gently works its way down to the lowest point."[23]

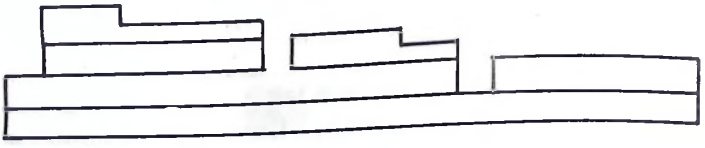
It is therefore to be expected that the terraced nature of Igbo tones has profound influence on the rhythm of Igbo verse. In mmọnwụ verse this tonal terracing characteristic of Igbo speech is easily evident. Thus the Igbo verse generally begins with a big bang, a stressed, that is, high-toned syllable (though as we have seen a low-toned syllable might begin an mmọnwụ line), and then steps down to a lower terrace. This is not to say that the line always drops to a low tone. What is meant is that when the tone drops to a new terrace the high tone is usually still high except that it often starts on a lower pitch and the low tone is still low though it begins on a lower pitch. This feature of the rhythm of Igbo speech is quite natural to the Igbo speaker just as the "glide down" is to the English speaker. As a matter of fact the step down could be regarded as a sophistication of the Igbo language for it is possible to read or speak Igbo without stepping down in tone.

In an mmọnwụ verse, however, the rhythm is, as in an Igbo song, pre-eminently achieved through tonal terracing:

(i) Ézíkèòbíàkụ̀, díọ́kpárá ìzìzì ị̀ mụ̀tàrà...

(ii) Á sị́ kà é kwúrú ókwū ànyị́ ékwúrú

(iii) Ànyị́ ánāghī̀ èjí óhí ákpū èti ḿmọ́nwụ́.[24]



Examples of the effect of step tones on the general rhythm of Igbo poetry could be multiplied. Suffice it to say that tonal terracing lends to mmọnwụ verse a sort of descending rhythm, creating a kind of *diminuendo* effect.

The overriding feature of Igbo oral poetry, as has been stressed, is its rich rhythm. Mmọnwụ verse in particular is characterised by various forms of rhythm that correspond to various dance movements — slow, quick, tripping or a combination of all, as many of the poems studied here illustrate. And apart from the succession of stressed and unstressed syllables which make up rhythm-segments which in turn form rhythm-units, other stylistic features contribute to the creation of mmọnwụ rhythm. These include assonance, repetitiion, balance, parallelism, and poetic inversion.

Assonance

Assonance, that is, correspondence or similarity of vowel sounds in successive rhythm-segments in rhythm-units is characteristic of mmọnwụ poetry as can be illustrated from the following lines of mmọnwụ poetry:

Ihe dị mma n'agbata naabọ
Nwoke dọkata akanya dọta ego
Ha mara na egwu amara abụrụ ịgba

The reliance of Igbo oral poets on the recurrent sound effect in their creation of rhythm can be illustrated by the popularity of tongue-twisters among the Igbo:

Gbaa ukwu ngwọ mgbaeregede
(Run round the foot of the raffia palm)

Hụ nga agụ gara ngwọ mbọ.
(And see where the lion scratched the raffia stem).

Ọgbanta buuru egbe gbere egbere
(The hunter took a gun and stalking)

Gbagbuo egbe beere n'obuegbe.
(Shot and killed a kite perching on a fern).

Evidence of sound rhythm, by which is meant the succession of different types of related sounds to form a rhythmic sequence, is in fact found in many an mmọnwụ verse as the following lines from an mmarigo chant can illustrate:

Ha nụ ya anụ ha ga-egburu m eghu na ime.
(If they hear it they will kill a pregnant goat
in my name).

Ha anụghị ya anụ ha ga-egburu m eghu na ime.
(If they hear it not they will kill a pregnant
goat in my name).

Irighiri na-eri egwu, anyị ma ole?
(Irighiri that eats dance, what do we know?)

Nkenke, na-ekere m mmesuru.
Nkenke, beat the mmesuru drum for me).

(See p. 95).

The succession of "a" and "u" sounds in the first and second lines blending with the "i" and "e" sounds in the third and fourth lines creates a pleasing lilting rhythm. And, apart from the sound effect, there is a play on words the significance of which we would discuss later when we analyse the inner form of mmọnwụ poetry.

Repetition

This is an important characteristic of mmọnwụ verse. Words, phrases, and antiphonal refrains are repeated to produce the mmọnwụ rhythm. Mmọnwụ poetry is replete with examples of these verbal repetitions.

Zurugbe zurugbe nụ.
Assemble ye.
Ogologo nkwụ dachiri ụzọ.

Tall palm that falls across the path.
Ogologo nkwụ gbara ete gharara.
Tall palm that upturns the climbing rope.
Ebelebe egbuola ebelebe,
Wonder has wrought wonder.
Ebelebe egbuola ibe ya.
Wonder has wrought further wonder.
Ọnwụ laa.
If death ceases,
Mmiri too ala ajụọ.
When river is in spate the land quietens.

Examples could be multiplied.

Parallelism

From the above excerpts it could also be seen that the uses of repetition include the balancement as well as the parallelism of rhythm. For example, the high tones of ebelebe above balance the predominant low-tones of ebèlèbè. Similarly in the next line ebelebe balances egbuola ibe ya. This form of balancing is, of course, a kind of parallelism a predominant feature of Igbo oral verse. In the use of parallelism as well as in the prolific use of proverbial sayings (a feature soon to be discussed) Igbo reminds one of Hebrew poetry. Igbo parallelism appears to be generally contrastial:

Nwoke kpata ego, o rie ụfọdụ, o debe ụfọdụ
If a man earns money let him spend some and keep some.

Ụbọchị ọnụụwa kaara dike, dike alaa.
On the destined day the brave departs.

Nnadị obodo zukọọ hụ ihe a kwaa nwoke;
If the family members meet and find the means,
funeral rites would be performed;

Nnadị obodo zukọọ ahụghị ihe, e yigharịa ozu.
If the family members meet and find nothing
the funeral rites would be deferred.

In the above extract from Act 6 of Ezeigboezue play given in Chapter 5 above, we have examples of both balance and parallelism. In rhythm-unit 1, "o rie ụfọdụ" balances with "o debe ụfọdụ" while in rhythm-unit 2, "kaara dike" balances with "dike

alaa". And rhythm-unit 1 parallels rhythm-unit 2. The same pattern is repeated in lines 3 and 4 where "nnadị obodo zukọọ hụ ihe" balances with "a kwaa nwoke" and "nnadị obodo zukọọ ahụghị ihe" balances with "e yigharịa ozu". The latter balanced rhythm parallels the former. The contrast in the parallel should also be noticed: "nnadị... hụ ihe" and "nnadị... ahụghị ihe". This is akin to the contrast in the following parallel rhythm-units already quoted:

Ha *nụ* ya anụ ha ga-egburu m eghu na ime,
Ha *anụghị* ya anụ ha ga-egburu m eghu na ime.

Similarly, in the following couplet:

Okpoko bụ nwanne ogwumaagala
Ogwumaagala bụ nwanne okpoko.

there is contrastial parallelism but the syllogistic terms are inverted. The result of this inversion is a balanced rhythm, a kind of see-saw-saw-see rhythm, descending unevenly from the high tones of ọ̀kpoko to the low tones of ogwùmaàgàlà and rising from the low tones of ogwùmaàgalà to the high tones of ọ̀kpoko. Again, while ọ̀kpoko which is essentially high begins with a low tone, ogwùmaàgàlà which has predominantly low tones starts with a high one.

Equal syllabic lineation

In general Igbo rhythm can be created by having more or less equal number of syllables in successive lines of verse as can readily be illustrated with the "Efejadị" satiric poem given above.

Conventional Poetic Formulas

Apart from the tonal arrangements and balancing of segments and units of rhythms mmọnwụ verses are further characterised by what Babalọla has labelled "conventional poetic formulas" in his treatment of the language of ijala.[25] In the mmọnwụ context there are the conventional salutes from the human actors to the spirit characters and vice versa. In their salutatory exchanges mmọnwụ characters would address members of the audience variously as follows:

Ọha ogbodi, nnọọ nụ.
Assembled humans, welcome.

Ogbodi bụ ogbodi nnọọ nụ.
All humans welcome.

Ụmụnkwụ m ụnụ ezue?
My initiates are you whole? or
My initiates are you assembled?

An mmọnwụ character generally addresses an individual by name and then adds the salutatory formula as follows:

Ezeosimiri ee,
Ezeosimiri, nnọọ nwa m.
Ezeosimiri, welcome my son.

The spectators, on the other hand, would usually salute the mmọnwụ character variously as follows:

Nnọọ eze, nnọọ.
Welcome king, welcome.

Eze nnọọ, eze nnọọ.
King welcome, king welcome.

Nna m (my lord).
Nna m isiala (my lord, a kowtow).

Nna m mọọ (my lord, obeisance).
Nna m ekele (my lord, greetings).

Besides the salutatory formula there is also the mmọnwụ prefatory ululation or rhythmic grunt called nkùcha:

Kee kee kee nụ oo.
Koo koo koo oo.

These and similar exclamations signal to the spectators that the performing character is about to make poetic utterances (ịkpọ abụ) as distinct from intoning or chanting songs or antiphonal chants, or merely giving directives.

Other poetic formulas used by mmọnwụ performers include:

(i) kpọ m (call me) as in:
Ọkwaọdụ, kpọ m akụ na-etigbu okwu

Hornplayer, call me wealth beats
trouble to death

Kpọ m ọkụ dawara ọkwa.

Call me the earthen vessel that
breaks the wooden vessel;

(ii) ọ bụ m (it is I) as in:
Ọ bụ m bụ uchichi na abali,
It is I who am night and darkness,

Eso tụrụ nwa nnụnụ, ọ bụ m.
the lime that binds the bird, it is I.

And generally an mmọnwụ play ends with such poetic formulas as:

Adọekwe ndaalụ (farewell greetings).
Adọekwe ndaalụ nụ (farewell greetings, all).
Abaa (farewell).

The Inner Form

What we have examined so far regarding mmọnwụ verse may be described as its outer form. The inner form consists of the meaning of a given mmọnwụ poem and the devices used in conveying this meaning. In other words, it concerns the content of mmọnwụ utterance, its message, and the techniques employed by the poets to convey this message and to enhance aesthetic appeal. The examination of the inner form would further entail an analysis of the relationship between the mmọnwụ poem and the social fabric from which it is created.

The Poetic Dialogue

In general the verbal aspects of mmọnwụ play constitute a poetic dialogue between masked figures on the one hand and unmasked performers and spectators on the other. The masked figures, as potent characters from the other world, address the mmọnwụ spectators in the manner. fathers address their children, commanding, informing, teaching, questioning, praising and exhorting them and making assertions:

Ezeigboezue: Ebelebe na-egbu n'ọha ogbodi,
Ọ gbuola.

The great action that takes place in human land,
It has taken place.
(Ezeigboezue Play, Act 6, l. 53–54).

Ezebude:
Ezedịmbụ, nwa m,
Onye jere Elugwu kọọ ji
Ọ ga-ebukwa ya ebu?
Ezedimbu, my child,
Who goes to Elugwu to cultivate yams,
Can he carry them?
(Ezebude Play, Act 2, l. 4–5).

Ezeigboezue:
Na enweghị ego jọrọ nwoke njọ.
For a man not to have money is bad.
(Act 6, l. 41).

These and similar poetic observations and statements are directed by the mmọnwụ characters to the spectators who listen, hear, acquiesce and then respond, thus contributing to the dialogue:

Diizugbe:
O gbuola egbuo.
It has taken place.
(Ezebude Play, Act 6, l. 55).

Ezedịmbụ:
Nna m, ọ dịghị nnọọ egwu.
Father, it is not indeed terrible.
(Ezebude Play, Act 2, l. 7).

Osimiri:
Ọ jọkakwa.
It is very bad indeed.
(Ezeigboezue, Act 6, l. 42).

Apart from these responses, members of the audience may initiate a dialogue. See, for example, Ezeigboezue Play, Act 4, l. 30, where Anyaọha tries to initiate a dialogue.

The Praise Motif

As can easily be seen from the text of mmọnwụ verses thus far given in this study, the theme of praise is fundamental to the general structure of mmọnwụ poetry. In all its aspects – the chants by both the mmarigo and the ọkụigba, the abụ, the ululations and the poetic narratives – the mmọnwụ poetry is characterized by praise. Even satire, which is also an important theme in the mmọnwụ poetry may be a form of inverted praise.

Praise is easily the most ubiquitous motif in the oral tradition of African literature. The praise idea has, in fact, been utilized by

modern African poets (notably Christopher Okigbo in his poem, "Lament of the Masks"[26]) in their creative work. In Yoruba, Zulu and Ankole traditions of oral poetry, to mention a few, praise poems predominate. In a Zulu *izibongo* (praise song) to Chaka the praise poet chants:

> The nations he hath all destroyed,
> Whither shall he now attack?
> He! Whither shall he now attack?
> He defeated kings,
> Whither shall he now attack?[27]

In a similar vein the Hima poet praises himself in the following *enkome* (verses):

> I Who Stand Firm in Battle defeated them
> utterly and so did The One Who Needs
> No Protection.
>
> I Who Am Clear Headed faced the spears together
> with The Ceaseless Fighter.
>
> I Who Am Eager For Battle, with The One Who
> Seeks No Help, captured a slave girl.[28]

These verses are very similar to Yoruba *oriki* (praise verses) which have been seen as "descriptive phrases referring to the character or deeds of a person. They may be invented by relatives or neighbours or – most frequently – by the drummers, and they remain with the person, and everybody in his surroundings will know them by heart.[29] The following praise verse to the Timi of Ede is illustrative of the Yoruba *oriki:*

> No one can prevent the ape
> from sitting on the branch of a tree.
> No one can dispute the throne with you.
> No one can try to fight you.
> One who shakes a tree trunk shakes himself
> We do not try to resist you[30].

Igbo praise verse has the same characteristics as the chants illustrated above. Indeed, as Jahn has aptly pointed out, the structure of the praise song in Africa is the same: "it is put together from a series of aphoristic parts, which in their turn consist of praise names, allusions, proverbs and picturesque incantations."[31] How this statement applies to mmonwu poetry is illustrated in the following praise epithets given to any mmonwu character:

Nna anyị, Ezekwereobi,
Asaraụgụ na-ekwu okwu,
Ihe mmụrụ anwụ na-atụ ụka,
Ọgwe ọkụdọrọ ụwa aka n'anya,
Ụdọmpali,
Agụ ọ tagbuo o rie,
Agụ ọ isi abụọ dị egwu;

Osi n'ala eje ije,
Agoawọ izu,
Ọmezuru ihe niile,
Ihe e mere e bo dike,
Ekwensu ọbara chaa dike,
Oburu isi nwata kpo elu.
Omesu igwudu.

Our father, Ezekwereobi,
The raffia straw that talks,
The dead that talks,
The sky that overshadows the earth,
The sticky substance,
The leopard that kills and devours,
The fearful two-headed snake;

Who walks beneath the ground,
Who cannot be excluded from a conclave,
Who knows everything,
The strong held responsible for any act,
The agent that causes blood letting,
Who sees with the head of the novice
Chastiser of the multitude.

As can readily be seen, the central theme in the above poem is the supernatural personality of the mmọnwụ character – his power and might. Mmọnwụ is praised, hailed, revered and feared for the impossible things he is said to be capable of doing and for the mysterious attributes ascribed to him. He is, for instance, saluted as the dry raffia straw, the dead thing that talks, the overpowering sky, the sticky lime that holds captive, the fearful leopard that devours, and the two-headed snake that enchants. He is the breakable earthenware that, from a height, falls on an unbreakable wooden vessel and breaks it! He is the absolute contradiction of nature – the dead object that is alive!

The Structure of the Mmọnwụ Praise Poem

The structure of the mmọnwụ praise poem, as illustrated in the above lines, is that of self-contained rhythm-units strung together to form a poetic vehicle that conveys praise to a powerful character who conceptually owns the earth and the sky. Because of the structure of the verse form, the mmọnwụ praise lines do not follow a regular sequence. Like traditional lines in general they are known eclectically by members of the community but during a performance these individually and separately learnt or inherited lines are strung together by performers to form a praise episode. In such arrangements the lines need not follow a pre-arranged order. They are spontaneously uttered by the praise-singer "as the spirit moves him". Another chanter may arrange them differently.[32]

What is therefore consistent in a praise passage as the one given above is the individual line. Each line could be dislodged from its present place and fitted into another without, in most instances, altering the meaning or minimising the impact of the whole poem. Each line merely adds to the cumulative portrait of the character praised. It is clear that all the praise epithets chosen at random from the common pool of Igbọ praise phraseology combine to portray mmọnwụ as the all-powerful being who could do everything, see and know everything and who has absolute authority in the community. Indeed, as Jahn has well remarked, the praise poem is made up "of separate 'praise names', of compressed aphorisms alluding to events, stories and myths which are the common possession of the neighbourhood or the group, and which only need to be hinted at, because everyone knows them."[33]

On the theme of praise, it should be emphasised that it does not always flow in a one-way direction, that is, from the spectators and chorus to the masked characters, only. The masks also often praise individual members of the audience as exemplified in the texts of the mmọnwụ plays in Chapter Five where the performing masks praise Ọsimiri, Ekwueme, Ezenwaka and others.

Praise of Self

An important aspect of the praise tradition is the phenomenon of self-invocation or self-proclamation otherwise known as praise of self. Examples of this have already been given in lines cited in this study such as in the passages where the mask begins his utterance with "Ọ bụ m bụ ..." (It is I who am). This aspect of the praise theme is consistent with the Igbo tradition of self-assertiveness, which in its turn arises from their self-justifying religious

attitude[34] and their njakịrị tradition. In his prayers to his deities the Igbo man proclaims his innocence — ọ dịghi ka m mere (there is nothing I did), emeghị m oji, emeghị m ọcha (I did not do black, I did not do white); he prays for the failure of his enemies — onye siri m nwụọ, onye ahụ nwụọkwa (who says I should die, the person should die); and then asks for gifts from the spirits, at the same time reminding them of the good acts he has performed. Only in very rare cases and that only in private or when in a state of delirium does the Igbo man admit he has sinned.

Njakịrị, on the other hand, is a kind of good-humoured verbal duel during which the disputants employ two opposing though complementary ideas — asserting of self and deflating of opponent. They are complementary in that the deflation of the opponent would enhance the importance of the self. Njakịrị primarily is a blend of praise and satire: praise of self and satire against the antagonist.

Satire

This brings into focus the importance of satire in mmọnwụ poetry. The basic function of satire among the Igbo is to punish a victim through exposure to public ridicule so that his punishment would serve as a deterrent to others in the society. Satire is therefore a means of social control. Mmọnwụ plays from the beginning have aimed at maintaining social order. In this respect mmọnwụ drama is pre-eminently in the commitment literary tradition. One would therefore expect satire to play an important role in the mmọnwụ genre.

Satire in mmọnwụ is, as has been said, primarily expressed in *mmarigo* chants as the poem "Efejadị" given above would illustrate. Efejadị, the girl satirised in the poem, is one of the girls in the traditional Igbo society who remained unmarried after all those in their age-group (ebiri) had got married and possibly got several children. It was said that such a girl *kpọrọ ahịa* (was refused by the market, i.e., the marriage market). In their estimation, a number of factors were responsible for such a disaster (failure to secure a husband!) to befall an Igbo woman. It may be extreme ugliness, unfortunate deformity, extreme moral laxity, thievish tendencies or laziness.[35] Efejadị is in the poem satirised as being "flippant" and "arrogant" (ịnyanga).

Ịnyanga is an epithet applied to a girl who is adjudged to be disrespectful, haughty and disobedient not only to potential husbands but also to members of the families of the potential husbands. Since marriage used to be essentially a family affair the attitude of a wife-to-be to each and every member of an

extended family mattered a great deal. Even more important is the attitude of every member of the family toward the girl. Consequently girls about to be married resorted to camouflaging their real character during the period of courtship and betrothal.[36]

Efejadị perhaps is so bad that no amount of camouflage could do her any good or else she is so careless. And so she remains in the village without a husband and is therefore satirised for her inability to secure one. She is so undesirable that her parents are prepared to give her away to anybody who cares. They are prepared to take a token brideprice, only a half kobo. The potential husband naturally detects her undesirability from the abnormally low bride-price and so Efejadị the old maid still remains without a husband.

In the following satirical poem, for example, nearly all the members of a family are satirised:

Ezikeobiakụ, okenye Ihungwo,
O rere ọfọ nna ya n'ahịa.

Ezikeobiakụ, dịọkpara izizi ị mụtara,
Ọ lara Ata na Ụmụtanze.

Nwadim, ewena iwe, Nwadim, ebena akwa, 5
Ihe mee mmadụ ya amụta ihe.

Akụoyibo Ezike, ori ngwotangwo,
Ọ chụlara nwunye nwa ya Oru.

Ezikeobiakụ, the elder of Ihungwo,
He sold his ọfọ (birthright) in the market.

Ezikeobiakụ, your first-born
He has fled to Ata and Ụmụtanze.

Nwadim, don't be sad, Nwadim, don't cry,
If misfortune befalls a person he learns
something.
Akụoyibo Ezike, the gluttonous squanderer,
She made her daughter-in-law flee to Oru.

The head of the family, Ezikeobiakụ, is described as selling his father's ọfọ (symbol of truth, justice and legitimacy) in the market. What the satirists are saying is that Ezikeobiakụ is a profli-

gate. Ezikeobiakụ's first son ran away from home, probably becoming a vagrant in Ata and Ụmụtanze, two adjacent communities in Oru Division. Akụoyibo, one of the wives of Ezikeobiakụ satirised as "ori ngwotangwo" meaning a squanderer, has through her improvidence driven her daughter-in-law from the house. The only member of the family not satirised is Nwadim, the other wife, who is asked by the satirists not to be sad and not to cry. Ezikeobiaku's family is ridiculed because of its squandermania. It lives above its income perhaps to keep its reputation as "the compound of wealth" which is the meaning of the name "Obiakụ".

Two other poems illustrating the satirical nature of mmọnwụ verses are as follows:

Ọcha Nwamiriagụ

Eze nnọọ, Eze nnọọ,
Eze nnọọ, Eze nnọọ.
A sị ka a ghara ego, anyị aghara,
A sị ka a ghaba ego, anyị aghaba.
A sị ka e kwuru okwu, anyị ekwuru.
A si ka e kwube okwu, anyị ekwube.
O gekwarabala o ji la nkọzi.
Ọcha Nwamiriagụ ọcha ghighagha,
Ọ bụrụ ma m chàa ya èjie m oji.
Onye uwere kọọ ọkọ
Uru eruoro danda.
Aga ha ele m, anya kpọrọ ha.
Ọcha Nwamiriagụ ọcha ghighagha,
Kama m chàa ya ejie m oji.
Ego nnọọ, ego nnọọ.

Greetings, king, greetings, king,
Greetings, king, greetings, king.
If it is strewing money, let us be strewing,
If it is talking, let us be talking.
If it is to talk, let us talk,
She is listening in order to gossip.
Nwamiriagụ's fair complexion, a mad
complexion –
Instead of such a complexion, let me be dark.
If the scaly-skinned person scratches,
The gain is that of the danda ants.
They leer at me, their eyes may be blinded.

Nwamịrịagụ's fair complexion, a mad
complexion –
Instead of such a complexion, let me be dark.
Greetings, Money, greetings, Money.

Ọsụkwụ Tụghariba

Ọsụkwụ tụghariba,
Mmarigo tụghariba,
Anyị n'onwe anyị tụghariba,
Anyị anaghị eji ohi akpụ eti mmọnwụ.

Akatakpo si ka e tibe,
Ereere si ka e tibe,
Mụ n'onwe m sị ka e tibe,
Anyị anaghị eji ohi akpụ eti mmọnwụ.

Ee, ka e tibe,
Ee, ka e tibe,
Ee, ka e tibe,
O kworo jiakpụ na mgbago.

Akatakpo chegharịa,
Ereere chegharịa,
Onye ụlọelu chegharịa
Anyị anaghị ezu jiakpụ na mgbago.

Let the ọsụkwụ repent,
Let the mmarigo repent,
Let us ourselves repent,
Cassava theft is not part of our mmọnwụ drama.

Akatakpo says we should play,
Ereere say we should play,
I myself say we should play,
Cassava theft is not part of our mmọnwụ drama.

Yes, let us play,
Yes, let us play,
Yes, let us play,
She uprooted cassava yonder.

Let akatakpo be converted,
Let ereere be converted,
Let the up-stairs dweller be converted,
We do not steal cassava yonder.

In the first of the two poems, Ọcha Nwamiriagụ is satirised, in line 7, as a gossip; in lines 8 and 9, as having an unflattering complexion; and in lines 10 and 11, as having scaly skin. In the second poem, an unnamed victim is satirised for stealing cassava from a hillside farm.[37]

Way of Life

Another important aspect of mmọnwụ poetry is its moral and philosophical content. Mmọnwụ poetry inculcates in the Igbo youth Igbo philosophical and religious ideas. Hence much of mmọnwụ poetry is full of apophthegmatic verses which state Igbo view of life. Such mmọnwụ verses as the following:

Ihe dị mma n'agbata naabọ
Cmefereofe na emeghịchaa bụ nwanne.

A thing is good in the middle
To happen too much and not to happen at all
are brothers.

Ihe gharachaa, ọdịnala anaghị agha,
Ntọala anaghị agwụ agwụ.

If all else change tradition remains.
Custom never disappears.

Nwoke dọkata akanya dota ego
Ya jee na ngwuru siri ike lụọ nwaanyị

If after much struggle one gets money
Let him go and marry from a strong family —

give expression to the thoughts of the Igbo on life. Nearly every passage of mmọnwụ poetry is marked by such wise sayings which edify members of the mmọnwụ audience.

Besides the moral and philosophical aspect, mmọnwụ poetry has a story element. As has been said, during performances a mask may at certain points of the drama chant or recite narrative verses. The story may relate to incidents that have supposedly taken place in the land of spirits or those that are said to have occurred in the land of the living. A partial example of narrative verse is given on page 132 above where the mask-poet is telling the story of the woman with one child" vis-a-vis "the barren woman."

Expressive Devices

Having seen the various themes that are possible constituents of the inner form of mmọnwụ poetry — dialogue, praise, satire, moralising, etc. — the question of how these are aesthetically conveyed remains. What devices does the mmọnwụ poet use in expressing praise or satire and in teaching morals? All the devices used by the Igbo poet in his creative work could perhaps come under the rather inclusive term *ilu*.

As has been discussed elsewhere,[38] to the Igbo ilu or what has been translated into English as proverb for lack of a better word "has the primary meaning of the Hebrew word *mashal*, which has been rendered in the Vulgate translation of the Bible as *proverbium*, meaning similitude".[39] In effect, the essential element of any *ilu* is the similarity between a statement and common human experience. Thus *ilu* can be seen as an image that portrays the common experience and observation of humanity. In its complexity, *ilu* can manifest itself in many forms, as a reflective, illuminating or disguising mask, as a witticism, a homily, an ailegory, a parable or even as a riddle. In short to the Igbo *ilu* is expressive of simile, metaphor and irony. In fact, *ilu* is in Igbo what irony is in English literature. Igbo literature may indeed be regarded as a type of *ilu*.[40]

Ilu is therefore a ready tool in the composing of mmọnwụ *poetry*. The mmọnwụ praise poem, for example, is generally in the form of *ilu* and here *ilu* means extended simile or metaphor. So that when the mmọnwụ mask is praised as:

> Sky that covers the eye of the earth.
> The rumbler
> The race that runs in the sky
> He who surpasses the world
> Who comes from Oru
> The Ụkpọ device
> Who mystifies humanity,

the poet is employing metaphorical language to make more striking the attributes of the mmọnwụ character. The power of mmọnwụ is thus emphasised when he is viewed as the sky which overshadows the whole earth. Furthermore, humans could be seen as the earth. The inference could then be drawn: as the sky covers the earth, so mmọnwụ subjugates individuals in the society. Besides the comparison between the sky and the earth in terms of hierarchy and power, there is the implied association of vision with knowledge and authority. A person with an impaired vision

knows less than a far-sighted person, and he who knows less is easily dominated by him who knows more. Because the sky is above, it easily blindfolds the earth, and being blindfolded, the earth has limited vision and is therefore an easy prey to dominance. All these ideas are succinctly expressed merely by calling the mmonwu character, *"igwe"* (sky). Similarly, by calling the mask, "the rumbler", the praise-singer implies that the mmọnwụ character overawes people as the thunder does. "The race that runs in the sky" is the lightning. The metaphor expresses across the sky before it strikes. And as lightning is associated with sudden death and retributive justice, to praise mmọnwụ by giving him the praise name of lightning is to say that he destroys instantly anybody who offends him. The metaphor, Ụkpọ device *(aghụghọ Ụkpọ)*, as applied to mmọnwụ is a deliberate hint that much of the mmọnwụ mysteries originated in Ụkpọ.

A close look at all the praise lines that occur in the examples so far given in this study would show that *ilu* is a basic ingredient of the praise motif. Mmọnwụ is hailed as raffia straw that speaks (allusion to the mmọnwụ costume in relation to the traditionally conceived spirituality of the mask), and one who passes through the ant-hole (also alluding to the fact that mmọnwụ is a spirit). Each metaphor emphasises one aspect of the mmọnwụ character or the other.

Ilu as irony, in the sense of an utterance that means more than what is expressed on the surface, that is, an utterance expressed in language that tends to have opposite or different meaning, is pervasive in mmọnwụ literature. Mmọnwụ character is, for example, addressed by the seemingly contradictory appellation of

> Mma na-ebute okwu.
> Mma dọrọ ọgụ.
>
> Beauty that brings discord.
> Beauty that provokes battle.

And as has been said above a man with one wife is ironically called a bachelor with one wife. Related to paradoxes are ironical statements that express near impossibilities. They may be regarded as exaggerations or hyperboles. The praise poem "Ezekwereobi" has a chain of such statements: "Where there is one he becomes the second", "Knower of things done in secret", "Mud without water", "Something that is dead and yet talks", and so on. Exaggerations include, "Mma e jiri gbu agụ (knife used to kill a lion)", "Ụdọ e jiri kpụrụ enyi (rope used to pull an elephant)" and

"Ọdara n'ala puo ome (that which falls on the groud and burgeons)." It is a wonderful knife that kills a lion, a wonderful rope that pulls an elephant and a wonderful seed that drops on the ground and germinates instantly.

Litotes or understatement is another aspect of *ilu* as irony. In "Efejadị" for instance, we are informed that the parents of the satirised girl refused to accept five kobo on behalf of their daughter but accepted half kobo instead. This understatement heightens the irony of the situation. Similarly, in a statement such as:

> Onye asị gbuo agụ
> Ọ burụ nnawuruede.
>
> If an enemy kills lion
> It becomes a wild cat.

the reduction of the lordly lion to a mere wild cat emphasizes the malignity of the enemy.

Play on Words

Although *ilu* in all its ramifications plays a major role in the fashioning of the inner form of mmọnwụ verse there are other rhetorical devices that are clearly non-ilu. Perhaps the most important of these non-ilu rhetorical devices is the play on words already mentioned.

Although a word-play may have *ilu* implication it has a semantic facet that can be distinguished from its proverbial meaning. In *"irighiri na-eri egwu"* and *"nkenke na-ekere m mmesuru"* the play on words apart from producing pleasant sound achieves an involved meaning. The sound suggests the meaning. Thus irighiri (tiny, small) suggests –ri (eat); and iri egwu means literally to eat dance, that is, to dance exceptionally well. The beauty of the phrase lies in the fact that it has been observed that small and lightly built people exhibit intricate dance steps, hence the aptness of "the small person that eats dance". Similarly nkenke (shortness) suggests –ke (beat). It is also observed that drumsticks are usually short and the shortness of the drumsticks suggests the shortness of the drummer. The phrase "shortness beat drum for me" is therefore very meaningful. But the dynamism of the word-play seems to derive greatly from onomatopoeia. Thus kekeke is the sound of several types of Igbo musical instruments – ekere, ekwe (slit drums), ekelembe (xylophone), etc. *Nkenke na-ekere m* therefore suggests drumming and *irighiri na-eri egwu* dancing.

These two lines, from an introductory mmarigo chant come at the climactic point when the lead-singer summons individual mmarigo to come into the ring to dance.

As a matter of fact, Irighiri is the choice name of one of the mmarigo. Similarly Nkenke, Iko Ọcha Adaṛu Ala, Obere Nkachiifu, and Nke Nne Na-eme Dị (Shortness, White Cup That Never Falls to the Ground, Little Handkerchief, What Mother does Exists) are "names of address" (aha ọtutu) assumed by the maidens. Each of these names is, of course, a form of praise epithet. When a maiden is addressed she responds in gleeful appreciation with a short ululation (nzacha). The name that means "White Cup That Never Falls to the Ground" presupposes that the maiden that bears the name is as popular and desirable as "white" palm wine drinking gourd, and here white means bright ochre.

Notes

1. Adeboye Babalọla, "Not Vernaculars, but Languages: Inaugural lecture delivered at the University of Lagos on Friday, November 1, 1974, MS, p. 11.
2. Adeboye Babalọla, *The Content and Form of Yoruba Ijala,* Oxford University Press, 1966, p. 56.
3. Nzekwu, "Masquerade," p. 192.
4. Ọdịta, "Igbo Masking Tradition," p. 85.
5. See texts of mmọnwụ verses specially in Chapter 5 above.
6. Howard Nemerov, "Poetry," *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* 15th edition, 30 vols., Chicago, E.B. Inc., 1974, Macropaedia 14, p. 600.
7. Wande Abimbọla, "Rhythm in Ifa Divination Poetry," SAAS Staff Seminar, Feb. 1970, MS, p. 3.
8. Nemerov., "Poetry," p. 600.
9. Babalọla, *The Content and Form,* p. 346.
10. C.T. Onions, "Prosody" in *Cassell's Encyclopaedia of World Literature,* Vol. One, Histories, London, Cassell and Company Ltd., 1973 (1953), p. 467.
11. *Ibid.*
12. Babalọla, *The Content and Form, p. 346.*
13. Abimbọla, "Rhythm in Ifa," p. 2.

14. *Ibid.*

15. Akinwumi Ịṣọla, "The Rhythm of Sango-pipe," paper presented at the 11th Congress of the West African Languages Society, 1974, p. 2.

16. *Ibid.*

17. Akin Ịṣọla, "Rhythm in Yoruba Oral Poetry," SAAS Staff Seminar, Feb., 1973, p. 2.

18. Ịṣọla, "The Rhythm of Sango-pipe," p. 2.

19. See *ibid.*, p. 4.

20. R.C. Abraham, *The Principles of Ibo: Archival Edition of Typescript*, Occasional Publication No. 4, Institute of African Studies, Ibadan, 1967, p. 9.

21. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

22. Laz. E.N. Ekwueme, "Linguistic Determinants of Some Igbo Musical Properties," *Journal of African Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 3, Fall 1974, p. 339.

23. *Ibid.*

24 See respectively, 1. 3 of "Ezikeobiakụ" p. 183, 1. 5 of "Ọcha Nwamịriagụ" p. 184 and 1. 4 of Ọsụkwụ Tụghariba," p. 185.

25. Babalọla, *The Content and Form*, p. 57ff

26. D.E.S. Maxwell and S.B. Bushrui, *W.B. Yeats 1865—1965: Centenary Essays*, Ibadan University Press, 1965, p. xiii-xv.

27. Cyril Lincoln Sibusiso Nyembezi, "The Historical Backgroun to the Izibongo of the Zulụ Military Age," in *African Studies*, Vol. 7, Johannesburg, 1948, p. 114.

28. Henry F. Morris, *The Heroic Recitations of the Bahima of Ankole*, Oxford University Press, 1964, p. 54.

29. Gbadamosi and Beier, *Yoruba Poetry*, p. 6.

30. Ulli Beier, ed., *African Poetry: An Anthology of Traditional African Poems*, Cambridge University Press, 1966, p. 42.

31. Janheinz Jahn, *A History of Neo-African Literature*, trans. by Oliver Coburn and Ursula Lehrburger, London, Faber, 1968, p. 63.

32. Ugonna, 'Reviews," p. 66.

33. Jahn, *A History of Neo-African Literature*, p. 63.

34. F. Nnabụenyi Ugonna, "Ilu in Spoken Igbo Literature," *Lagos Notes and Records: A Journal of African Studies* Vol. 5, p. 60.

35. In Amaọkpara Ihitenansa, there is the joke about the advice which Chukwubueze, a village wag, gave to his sister before her first visit to the house of a suitor. Addressing her to the hearing of all, he said: "When you get to your present suitor, my sister, please take care. Let it not be like the former places you have been to and were sent home unceremoniously because of your unbridled tongue and laziness. So, in this new place, do hold your tongue and above all,

sweep the compound in the mornings and fetch water. If an old woman falls twice the contents of her basket will be numbered. Anyway, I know that you are the sludge pot carried to Afọ and Nkwọ markets (which nobody has bought!)."

36. This situation has probably led to the myth of the seven parcels. Igbo sages say that a girl "embarks on the journey of marriage" with seven *ngwugwu* (parcels). At the start of the "journey" she opens the first parcel which is reputed to be very fragrant. With this she charms her suitor and his people. The proverbial parcels, as they are unfolded, become less and less agreeable in smell. By the fifth parcel they become difinitely malodorous. The seventh, in the hands of some women diffuses a divorce-inducing scent. Surely, the seventh parcel in the consignment of every woman is believed to have in it something disturbing, in some more, in others less.

37 Cf p. 85 in Chapter 4 above.

38. Ugonna, "Ilu in Spoken Igbo Literature," p. 54–64.

39. *Ibid., p. 55.*

40. *Ibid.,* p. 63.

8

CONCLUSION: THE MMỌNWỤ THEATRE

In this study it has been strongly argued that mmọnwụ is a continuation and further development of the Igbo masking heritage, a tradition which the Igbo might have either developed independently from antiquity or borrowed from neighbouring peoples. In any case, masking is almost as old as humanity. From this study therefore it could be concluded that mmọnwụ is a form of drama which typifies the indigenous African dramatic tradition, a form of drama which, though differing from the fable-based Western dramatic tradition, is nevertheless a developed type of theatre.

As theatre, mmọnwụ upholds the idea of the freedom of dramatic form without which it becomes difficult for any dramatic tradition to develop fully. By this we mean that mmọnwụ is not tied down to any rigid set of dramatic rules to which each individual play must conform. To some, the idea of dramatic freedom in mmọnwụ may appear suspect since the institution is known to be highly authoritarian and its art stylized. However the implied freedom in mmọnwụ performance is related to the nature and sequence of action and theme and not to spectacle and costume. A performing mask group are free to present any type of play they please with episodes and themes in free association, as mmọnwụ action is not governed by hard and fast rules of dramatic convention. Any mmọnwụ character is at liberty to improvise and create events and episodes as he performs.

This study makes it evident that because of the unique nature of the mmọnwụ theatre some of the Western theories relating to stage, dramatic action, actors and spectators do not apply to indigenous African theatre. For instance, can we, from our foregoing investigation conceive the mmọnwụ stage as a platform or as an environment? Is there a rigid dichotomy between actors and spectators?

It can be said that in the platform stage convention the play

area is conceived as "a platform on which to play to the audience"[1] and in some cases either needs no setting or when there is stage, setting is treated as magnificently irrelevant to the actor's performance. The convention of platform stage entails the actor's consistent awareness of the audience to whom he plays and with whom he communicates by means of soliloquies, asides and direct speeches. Thus in the platform staging tradition both the audience and the actors do not insist on absolute naturalism or verisimilitude. They realise that scenes and actions are being represented on a platform and therefore in this staging technique the environment is merely imagined because both actor and spectator are aware that they are in one geographical location.

On the other hand, stage as environment entails a simulated scenery which "encloses the characters and the stage action"[2] and in which either "the acting area is treated as both geographically and psychologically distinct from the area occupied by the audience" or both the stage and auditorium are treated as a single environment.

The idea of creating, as it were, a gulf between the stage and the auditorium for the accomplishment of the illusion of a distinct environment within which the actor can ignore the audience has led, in Western tradition of drama, to the conception of the stage as a "peep hole." In the "peep hole," also known as "picture frame" stage the spectator, it is theorized, "is set apart from the stage and looks through the peep hole of the proscenium into the lighted box of the stage and "beyond."[2] But to achieve realistic environment, consistent realists have insited on the observance of the "fourth-wall" convention – the assumption that the open space framed by the proscenium arch is the fourth wall of a room, meaning that the actor is not supposed to see the audience and that the playgoers are simply not supposed to exist.[4]

The mmọnwụ theatre appears to be a fusion of the stage as platform and as environment. In some way the ọgbọ or mmọnwụ stage is a kind of platform on which mmọnwụ actors play to the audience although here the audience is not merely at the receiving end but is actively and emotionally involved in the play. It is significant that no attempt is made during an mmọnwụ play to induce the spectators to focus attention only on the actors on the *ọgbọ*. Spectators, indeed, derive dramatic fulfilment not only from the actors but also from the activities of the audience.

Equally it can be said that mmọnwụ is an environment, but an environment of a different kind. In it there is no distinction, geographically, though there may be psychologically,

between the stage and the auditorium. Geographically everybody in the *obom* is in the same environment but psychologically they are all enclosed in the mmọnwụ world in which everyone present assumes a kind of dramatic role and apparently becomes a character in an environment quite removed from the everyday rationalistic world. Thus in the presence of an mmọnwụ one becomes a type of actor, responding to a code of behaviour different from what applies to everyday life.

The environment the mmọnwụ playgoer finds himself in is an imaginative one, an environment in which the inner ekwuru is seen as a mythic muzzle of the obom, the entire ekwuru as an artistic household and the *iro* as a theatrical compound, an environment within which the ezemmụọ rules supreme. The other masks in the ekwuru are seen as his spiritual children or consort as the case may be and all the human beings within his jurisdiction as his children.

In such an environment therefore the acting area is not treated as geographically distinct from the observation area, instead the whole obom becomes a vast compound to which a father-king has invited his offspring-subjects and his household to participate in the dramatisation of the mysteries of life and death, the conflicts in society, family tensions and their resolutions.

This environment is created not necessarily by stage setting but largely by mythic indoctrination and suggestion. It is also achieved by the central staging technique which, instead of separating the spectators from the actors, treats them as part of the whole environment and in many cases as part of the cast who by their active involvement especially their intermittent applause and emotional responses help to achieve the mmọnwụ catharsis. Thus mmọnwụ dramaturgists had from the first time realised the effect of group psychology on the creation of desired environment.

Thus in the mmọnwụ display the dichotomy between actors and spectators tends to disappear. The usual conceptual gulf, especially in the fourth wall convention theatre,[5] separating the spectators, in time and space, from the actors does not generally apply to mmọnwụ stage. There is neither a gulf nor walls. Spectators, as a rule, do not witness, in the present, events that are happening elsewhere, events that have happened in the past or will happen in the future; they watch events that are symbolically happening on the spot. They witness eternal characters who transcend time and space perform acts on the community square, a square they have transformed by their mere presence into a supernatural plane (obom mmọnwụ). It is perhaps true to say that

in mmọnwụ theatre "the line between life and art gets obliterated."[6]

In an mmọnwụ play the spectators are, indeed, part of the total mmọnwụ environment, for although they are spectators, they are also part of the spectacle because each mmọnwụ spectator witnesses not only the performing masks, the dancing ọkụigba and the chanting mmarigo but also the movements, and reactions of the other spectators. After all, performers and spectators, in the broad day light and in full view of one another, sit, stand and move around in the mmọnwụ arena contributing individually and collectively to the final realization of the mmọnwụ dramatic effect which may be said to consist in a "feeling of mystical eminence ... heightened and stretched beyond the level of the purely physical to effect the psyche, precipitating a state of trance," as the dramatist, Ọla Rotimi aptly says in his analysis of the masking tradition in Nigeria.[7]

It may therefore be said that what separates the actors from the spectators in an mmọnwụ show is not geographical or chronological distance but the distinction in dramatic roles. Thus, apart from the psychological distance between spirit-masks and maskless performers on the one hand and the mmọnwụ initiates and non-initiates on the other, in an mmọnwụ performance, those who provide primary spectacle and initiate action may be described as actors or characters while those who respond or react to action and witness the primary spectacle (though they themselves may provide a secondary spectacle) may be said to constitute the audience. The main difference between mmọnwụ and the fourth wall convention theatre is that in the latter the audience is supposed not to exist and the 'actor plays without violating the so-called 'fourth wall,' that is, without breaking into contact with the audience "[8] and in the former the audience and the performers belong to one "dramatic" community with leaders and followers, the leaders being the actors and the followers the spectators.

It is thus seen that in mmọnwụ dramatization aesthetic detachment is not conveyed by mere spatial contrivance but by the visualization of the obom as a partly mundane and partly extra-mundane environment into which spectators project themselves. In this environment the illusion of a dramatic confrontation and communion between the living and the dead is sustained.

The mmọnwụ genre might in future develop in any of the following directions or a combination of them:

First, it is possible that mmọnwụ might stagnate and then degenerate into mere masked plays staged by children and age-grade societies as popular entertainment during feasts and ritual

ceremonies. Secondly, mmọnwụ may become more and more cultish and less and less theatrical and, in the end, may die a natural death through lack of general support and patronage.

There is little doubt that if mmọnwụ does not modernize its central myth and consolidate its theoretical basis its credibility would be increasingly undermined by an increasingly empiricist society and its relevance to the modern age would be questioned. And thirdly (and this appears to be the most likely alternative) mmọnwụ may develop into a full-fledged modernized form of Igbo theatre.

In its development, as has been emphasised, mmọnwụ has tended to become a characteristic form of Igbo theatre comparable to the classical Indian, Chinese or Japanese theatre. Indeed, the Chinese Hsi and the Japanese Noh are like mmọnwụ, for all three correspond closely to the opera in their "principal elements: dialogue or monologue which carries forward the action; arias, which may either be purely lyrical or held to advance the action; acting which includes dancing, posturing, acrobatics and other spectacles."[9]

Besides, mmọnwụ, Hsi and Noh are similar to one another in terms of organization and performance because originally, like mmọnwụ, Hsi and Noh dramas were oral in nature but later they were written down.

Mmọnwụ, as we have already seen, has greatly changed in scope and it would appear that with further development its obom and ekwuru complex would be expanded and modernised to form a type of integrated structure akin to a modern auditorium into which spectators would be admitted after they might have purchased entry tickets. Such an integrated mmọnwụ theatre could be designed in such a way that seating facilities are provided and the concept of ekwuru as the muzzle of the land of the dead could be maintained. A section, a kind of inner stage, could be separated from the rest of the theatre either by a wall or a curtain and could be regarded as a kind of "holy of holies" into which only the masked figures and those "who know them intimately" may enter. From that section of the theatre the mmọnwụ characters, after appropriate stage direction, would rise to perform on the outer stage.

Thus mmọnwụ plays would then take place in the modernized mmọnwụ theatre, a type of integrated central staging arena, a circular structure with the stage in the centre and the ekwuru (the inner and the outer) occupying one half of the theatre

le the other half would be open to non-initiates. The inner
vuru would be reserved exclusively for masked figures and their
nediate functionaries such as the akatakpo, the ọnọchi and the
niakpa, and, of course, the invisible Udide. From there they
uld emerge and then enter the central stage and after their
play, to it they re-enter. The actors would enter the central
ging platform through corridors that might separate initiated
rformers from initiated spectators. Near the inner ekwuru,
e male chorus and orchestra (the ọkụigba) and the female chorus
d orchestra (the mmarigo) could be located, side by side.
tiated spectators could occupy seats near both choruses and
ner spectators, initiated and not initiated, would occupy the
t of the arena as roughly illustrated below:

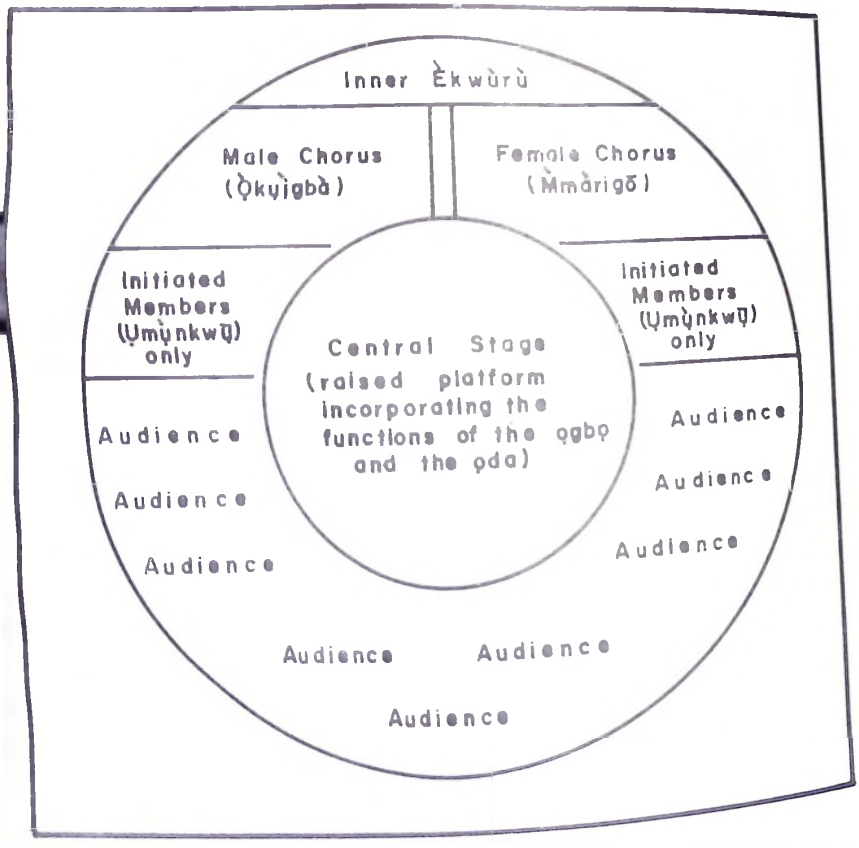


Fig.17 : AN INTEGRATED OBOM MMỌNWỤ

ould be emphasized that what has been said so far regard-
future development of mmọnwụ theatre is mainly
ral and indeed could only be fully realised if mmọnwụ is
ed as a form of national theatre and thus attracts to itself
t grants and subsidies for full-scale development. But the
development would be quickened if mmọnwụ becomes
ully or partially professional and also constantly receives
ancial support of wealthy patrons which would enable
wụ companies to construct modern theatres and acquire
eded costumes and other props.

sently continuing changes that take place in mmọnwụ
in many areas include the formation of central mmọnwụ
tions. Each town in the mmọnwụ area has an mmọnwụ
ation embracing all the ekwuru in that particular town. In
towns as Ihiọma, Ụkpọ, Ihitenansa, Uli, to mention but a
mmọnwụ associations are functioning. Members of these
iations discuss the general organization of mmọnwụ society
eir area and lay down rules governing the establishment of
companies, the initiation of new members and the general
ng of plays. Apart from town associations there are larger
ciations grouping together ekwuru from several contiguous
ns. An illustration of such an organisation is the National
ety of Mmọnwụ Communities of Nigeria with its headquarters
maifeke, Ọlụ as has already been mentioned.

Evidence of the rapid development of mmọnwụ drama may
be seen in the modernization of the mmọnwụ playhouse as
have already noticed. It has been observed for instance that in
Ezebude theatre in Amaneese Amaifeke (Fig. 5) a completely
v concept of the ekwuru has been developed. This makes it
sible for a full mmọnwụ play to be staged within the ekwuru
lls with the spectators (all initiated members) sitting down on
airs or benches provided. There are however sections of the
wuru that are out of bounds to people who are not members of
ekwuru executive. The idea of the circular theatre envisaged
ove has partly been inspired by the Ezebude theatrical
novation.

Today it is not only the ekwuru that is being modernised, the
stume worn by the performers has also seen tremendous deve-
ment. Masks are more gorgeously costumed and the costumes
male and female performers have been revolutionised. Each
ama society now tends to design its own costumes to depict the
auty, the power and the wealth of the mmọnwụ instead of
rmitting each performer to wear what apparel he likes.

The new developments notwithstanding mmọnwụ plays are

still today staged in many places in their traditional way and the mmọnwụ character continues to play his multipurpose role of the peace-maker, the entertainer, the philosopher and the poet. And as poet he retains the ancient role of the poet as seer.

Mmọnwụ, therefore, still forms the bedrock of Igbo artistic expression not only in its visual aspect but also in its verbal form — a form which, as we have seen, encompasses all the aspects of Igbo poetry — praise, satiric, epic, narrative as well as lyric. Besides, the genre performs didactic and educational functions by inculcating in the young sound moral principles, and in the adult, respect for constituted authority and a sense of self-discipline.

In conclusion, it could be said that this study has attempted to examine mmọnwụ, first, as a specific form of oral art as practised among the central Igbo and, secondly, as part of that great tradition of indigenous communal drama prevalent in African societies. An attempt has further been made to establish that mmọnwụ as a literary form, is a unique contribution to the world of drama. Mmọnwụ is therefore a developed and satisfying type of drama that has its unique principles, independent of other non-African dramatic traditions.

Notes

1. Gassner, *Form and Idea in Modern Theatre,* p. 56.
2. *Ibid.,* p. 55.
3. Dietrich, *Play Direction,* p. 305.
4. Gassner, *Form and Idea in Modern Theatre,* p. 26.
5. See *ibid.,* p. 26–27.
6. Charles Marowitz, Drama and Happenings" in *The Use of Drama : Sources giving a background to acting as a social and educational force,* ed. by John Hodgson, London, Eyre Methuen, 1972, p. 183.
7. Ọla Rotimi, "Traditional Nigerian Drama," in *Introduction to Nigerian Literature,* ed. by Bruce King, University of Lagos and Evans Brothers Limited, 1971, p. 44.
8. Dietrich, *Play Direction,* p. 51.
9. Chi-Chen Wang, "Chinese Literature," in *Chambers' Encyclopaeida,* Vol. III, New Revised Edition, Oxford, Pergamon Press, 1967, p. 492.

APPENDIX

A SAMPLE LIST OF EKWURU (MMỌNWỤ THEATRES)

This list is, as far as possible, in chronological order of establishment. The following symbols are used: A. for Akatakpo or Ọtaala, the chief executive and director of the mmọnwụ theatre, and EN for Ekwuru Nsirilụta, that is the mmọnwụ theatre of origin.

After each ekwuru which is, as a rule, named after the Ezemmụọ, the name of the village in which the ekwuru is located, the name of the Akatakpo, if known, the reference number of the EN in this listing, and in some cases, the estimated date of the establishment of the ekwuru, follow in that order.

I. ỌZỤBỤLỤ, NNEWI L.G.A.

1 *EKWURU IGBOKWE,* Egbema. The origin of mmọnwụ theatres. Late 18th c.
2 *EKWURU EBUZỌEME,* Egbema. EN 1. Early 19th c.
3 *EKWURU ACHỌGWOAFỤ,* Egbema. EN 1. Early 19th c.
4 *EKWURU ỤDỤMNAEHI.* EN 1. Early 19th c.
5 *EKWURU ỌKPUBEIGWE.* EN 1. Early 19th c.
6 *EKWURU EKWEBATA. EN 3.*

II. UKPO, NNEWI L.G.A., MBANESII KIN GROUP

7 *EKWURU OGBUKAIGWE,* Uboma. A Nnajiọfọ.
8 *EKWURU ỌTAMGBỌROGWỤ,* Ụmụngwu Ụmụahaba. A. Ụzọchukwu Ezikemmadụbụuko. EN 18th c.
9 *EKWURU EZEOKPUBE,* Ụmụike Ụmụahaba. A. Ezikeirooha. EN 4. 1865.
10 *EKWURU IKEZUAGỤ,* Ụmụahaba. A. Ohaanụka. EN 13. 1870.
11 *EKWURU OJIỌNỤ,* Ụmụmbọsị Ụmụdike. A. Nwokoro Umeobiaeri. EN 2. 1830.
12 *EKWURU OMEIRE,* Ụmụọgaazi Ụmụahaba. A. Ikejiakụ.
13 *EKWURU ỤDỤMNAEHI,* Ụmụnkwere Ụmụdike.
14 *EKWURU ỤDỤMNAEHI,* Ụmụọgaazi Ụmụahaba. A. Ucheaghụba. EN 11. 1860.
15 *EKWURU OBIAỌZUMA,* Ụmụngwu. A. Ụzọukwu. EN Ikejemba of Amaakwa Ozubulu.

III. IHEMBỌSI, IHIALA L.G.A., EBONESII KIN GROUP

16 *EKWURU IKEBUDE,* Otukwe.
17 *EKWURU IKEZULUAGỤ,* Ụmụohi. A. Ezeanyidugwu. EN 5.
18 *EKWURU EZEOKPUBE.*

IV. LIILU, IHIALA L.G.A., EBONESII KIN GROUP

19 *EKWURU EKWUSIKE,* Ụmụodochi, Abọ. A. Dike Ụkọmmadu, EN 9. 1914.
20 *EKWURU EZEJIỌFỌ,* Akwa. A. Ezeanyiburuekwu Ezuike. EN 9.
21 *EKWURU EGWURUGWU,* Odoji Akwa. A. Dara Ezeanya. EN 23. 1931.
22 *EKWURU EZEGBOROGỤ,* Ụmụduji Akwa. A. Onyeharam. EN Ụzọgbaraụgwọ of Akwa.
23 *EKWURU EKWENSU,* Ebeteghete.
24 *EKWURU UGERUMBA,* Eziọsụ.

V. IHITENANSA, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

25 *EKWURU EZEKWEREOBI,* Amaọkpara. A. Pius Ụzọukwu. EN. 20. 1903.
26 *EKWURU EZEGBORỌGỤ,* Ụmụezike Amaọkpara. A. Obodozie Ngobidi. EN 19. 1904.
27 *EKWURU EZEOBIEKEE,* Akama. A. Aloysius S. Ezeanị. EN 45. 1907.
28 *EKWURU UDEKWEREZE,* Obinaatọ Akama. A. Egbuchulam Duruakụ.
29 *EKWURU EZEMBAKWE,* Ụmụegbugwo Akama. A. Umeọdụagụ Umeakụnebu. EN 9. 1905.
30 *EKWURU EZEỌBIARAKA,* Uhualaogwugwu Ụmụdim. A. Okafọ Ehinne. EN 45. 1919.
31 *EKWURU ỌBIAỌZỤMA,* Akpụobu Asaa. A. Richard Okeke. EN 37. 1908.
32 *EKWURU UDEBỤEZE,* Elugwụ Umuhu Asaa. A. Okeke Egbuaba. 1909.
33 *EKWURU OBIARAKA,* Ọkwụ na Uhuala Asaa. A. Dominic Ijikara. EN 32. 1950.
34 *EKWURU ANỤFỌRỌUDE,* Ụmụidi Asaa. A. Ekwueme Okwuaka. EN 164. 1964.
35 *EKWURU UDEEBUBE,* Ụmụọka Asaa. A. Ojukwu Nkezie.
36 *EKWURU IGBOJIUDE,* Nansa. A. Idiakụekwe. EN 29. 1905.
37 *EKWURU MBANUDE,* Ogum. A. Hyacinth Eze. EN 9. 1903.
38 *EKWURU EZEIGBOJEKWE,* Ụmụegorom Ogum. A. Clement Obiesie. EN 44. 1968.
39 *EKWURU EZEỤDỤMNAEHI,* Achakpo Ogum. A. Nwagbara Okwuneze. EN 38. 16.11.70.
40 *EKWURU EZEJIỌFỌ,* Ogwugwuenye. A. Samuel Ọkpara. EN 28.
41 *EKWURU EZEIGBOEZUE.* Ogwugwuenye. A. Ezechikaria Ọnwụgamba. EN 44. 1906.
42 *EKWURU EZEKWEREOBI,* Ụmụcheke. A. Okonkwọ Mbamara. EN 37. 1905.
43 *EKWURU EZEOBIJAKA* Ụmụọgụ Uhuala. A. Umeozuruigbo Ezeihekaibeya. EN 71. 1910.
44 *EKWURU EZENAGỤ,* Ụmụabịam. A. Umeakụnwanne Umeodurukwe. EN 25. 1903.
45 *EKWURU EZEDỊNOBI,* Ụmụagụ. A. Ibeole Ọhazuruike. EN 29. 1908.
46 *EKWURU OTIGHARAỌFỌ,* Ụmụlome Uhuala. A. Dominic Akụnwanne. EN 42. 1909.
47 *EKWURU EZEIGBOKWE,* Ụmụdiaba. A. Daraezinwanne Idi. EN 30. 1960.
48 *EKWURU EZEJIOFỌ,* Elugwuekpe Umudim. A. Ezeamaama Idi. EN 37. 1908.
49 *EKWURU EZEBUDE,* Ọdọagbara Ụmụdim. A. Chimaeze Okafọ. EN Obiaozuma of Eziawa. 1908.

VI. IHIALA, IHIALA L.G.A., EBONESII KIN GROUP

50 *EKWURU ANỤFỌRỌUDE,* Ogboro.

VII. IHIỌMA, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

51 *EKWURU EZEMBAKWE,* Ibuzọ. A. Okafọ Ikpeama. EN Igbonude of Akuma.
52 *EKWURU EZEJIOFỌ,* Ụmụdibịa. A, David Igwe. Mbanude of Ebenaatọ. 1905.
53 *EKWURU EZEMBAJEKWE,* Obinugwu Ọkwụabala. A. Raphael Okwe. EN 114. 1909.
54. *EKWURU ODENIGBO,* Ụmụdim Ọkwụabala. A. Ekwebelem Okafọnta Agụkwe. EN 51.
55 *EKWURU EZEBUDE,* Ọkwụekpe A. Akabụeze Omenkeukwu. EN Ezekwereobi of Okwuruokwu Amannachi, Ebenaatọ. 1918.
56 *EKWURU UDEEBUBE,* Ọnụọgwụgwu. A. Okorie Ọdọkoro Okponwa. EN 57. 1920.
57 *EKWURU EZENAGỤ,* Ụmụazala. A. Sylvanus Okafọ. EN 133. 1918.

VIII. ISEKE, IHIALA L.G.A., EBONESII KIN GROUP

58 *EKWURU ANỤFỌRỌUDE.*
59 *EKWURU UDEKWEREZE,* Amaudo. A. Ọkwa Chikelụba (eldest in ekwuru). EN 111.
60 *EKWURU EZEOKPUDO,* Ihite. A. Asọegwu Ezesibe. EN 59. 1904.

IX. IHITEOWERI, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

61 *EKWURU EZECHỌRỌUDO,* Abọ, A. Okorie Udele. EN 68.
62 *EKWURU EZEAKAAKA,* Nkụimo Abọ. A. Amaobi Ọkpara. EN 25. 1921.
63 *EKWURU OBINASỌ,* Amanaatọ. A. Onyeawụsiọfọ Ajaebiọnụ. EN 30. 1924.
64 *EKWURU UDEKWEREZE,* Arọihiteoweri. A. Udọji Okoli. EN Ezeohuchara of Arọ Ọsụ. 1913.
65 *EKWURU EZEDINOBI,* Obinugwu. A. Aloysius Okafọ. EN 37.
66 *EKWURU IGBỌJEKWE,* Obinugwu. A. Clement Nwagboro. EN 36.
67 *EKWURU ANỤFỌRỌUDE,* Uhuala Obinugwu. A. Godwin Mbiere. EN 36.
68 *EKWURU EZEJIỌFỌ,* Ụmụezikeapụzie Obinugwu. A. Romanus Eziọbụla. EN 29.

X. AMAỌKA, ORU L.G.A., ORU KIN GROUP

69 *EKWURU UGOỌCHA.* EN 122.

XI. AMARURU, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

70 *EKWURU EZEJEKWU,* Amakam. A. Albert Mmadụ. EN 21. 1920.
71 *EKWURU ỌBIAZỤMA,* Amaokwe, Ụmụokpokiri, Ụmụọgụ. A. Albert Ọhaụsị. EN 74. 1908.
72 *EKWURU EZEOBINAEDE,* Elugwu. A. Mmadụkaejiekwu Ezeala.
73 *EKWURU IGBOJEKWE,* Elugwutokpi. A. Okonkwọ Okwundụ. EN 44. 1907.
74 *EKWURU EZEANỤFỌRỌUDE,* Ihungwo. A. Ezenwaka Ese. EN 23. 1890.
75 *EKWURU EZEGBỌRỌGỤ,* Ụmụadụ. A. Dominic Ọkpara. EN 73. 1904.
76 *EKWURU EZEỌNỌNIGBOEKWU,* Ụmụawụla. A. Alajekwu Ekeigwe. EN 72. 1909.
77 *EKWURU IGBONAEKWU,* Ụmụnume. A. Emmanuel Obiadị. EN 91. 1908.

XII. AMIRI, ORU L.G.A., ORU KIN GROUP

78 *EKWURU ELUGHARA,* Ibubu. EN 79.
79 *EKWURU EKWURUGWỌ,* Nchoko. EN 147.

XIII. ATA, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ISU KIN GROUP

80 *EKWURU AGỤEZE,* Chima-Ụbụdom. A. Nnanna Stephen Nwosu. EN 89.
81 *EKWURU AKARUGWỌ.* Eziụbâha. A. Lawrence Jacob Ihenaetu. EN 80.

XIV EBENAATỌ NNEWI L.G.A., MBANESII KIN GROUP

82 *EKWURU EZEỌNỌGIDE,* Okpumma-Ụbaha. EN Ikejemba of Ụkpọ. 1890.
83 *EKWURU EZEỌDAJIRI,* Ụmụnwume. EN 12. 1890.
84 *EKWURU EZEEZUỌ,* Ụmụka. A. Dim Okoli. EN 85. 1902.
85 *EKWURU EZEKWUDE,* Ụmụmune Ụbaha.
86 *EKWURU EZEOKPUME,* Ụbaha.

XV. EBENAATỌ, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

87 *EKWURU IGBONAEKWU,* Amannachi. EN 105.
88 *EKWURU UDEKWEREZE,* Ụmụeremọdụ. A. Joseph Uchenwoke.

XV1. EGBU, UGWUTA L.G.A.

89 *EKWURU IGBOJIỌNỤ,* Obinugwu. EN 122.

XVII. EZIAWA, ÇLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

90 *EKWURU UDEKWEREZE,* Amakpara. A. Raymond Obidike, EN 138. 1912.
91 *EKWURU EZEOBINASỌ,* Ikpọ. A. Fabian Ọdịdika. EN 26. 1910.
92 *EKWURU EZEEKWUSIKE,* Ụbaha. A. Okafọ Ibeeto. EN 90. 1921.
93 *EKWURU EZEUDEMEZUE,* Ụbaha. A. Okonkwọ Onyebi. EN 25. 1925.
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XVIII ATANI, OGBARU L.G.A.

98 *EKWURU OBURUỌGBAKETAAZỤ,* Ogwuikpereosimiri.

XIX. AWỌIDEMMIRI, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUPS

99 *EKWURU ỌBIAỌZỤMA,* Amaokwu.
100 *EKWURU EZEWURU,* Edenta. A. Ndumnwere Mbagwụ. EN 112.
101 *EKWURU EZEUGO,* Isieke. EN 58.
102 *EKWURU ANUFỌRỌUDE,* Ohukaabịa.
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105 *EKWURU ỌDỤAGỤ,* Ụbahaobu.

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111 *EKWURU EZEKWEREOBI*
112 *EKWURU ỌNYỊRỊMBA.*

XXII. MGBIDI, ORU L.G.A., ORU KIN GROUP

113 *EKWURU UDEKWEREZE.*

XXIII. OBIBI, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

114 *EKWURU IKPEOKWU,* Ụmụigbujinnu.
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121 *EKWURU ỌBIAỌZỤMA,* Ụmụomedị.

XXIV. ỌHAAKPỤ, ORU L.G.A., ORU KIN GROUP

122 *EKWURU IKWE,* Amafọ. A. Okafọ Idimgbe. 1901. EN is from Ọkija.
123 *EKWURU ITEAKPURỤ,* Ọhakpụ.

XXV. OKPORO, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

124 *EKWURU EZEMEROGỤ,* Abara. A. Aloo Egoolu EN Igbonaekwu Ọduagụ.
125 *EKWURU IGBOYIRIUDE,* Ezioha. A. Okafọ Ele. EN Ezewuru of Amannachi.
126 *EKWURU UDEKAEZE,* Ududu na Ụmụechem. A. Edwin Okafọ. EN 125.

XXVI. ỌMỤMA, ORU L.G.A., ORU KIN GROUP

127 *EKWURU UDEORUMBA,* Abịa.
128 *EKWURU AGBAYIAKA,* Ọkwụ Abịa. EN 135.
129 *EKWURU IGBOANỤKERE,* Ọkwụọzụ. EN 130.
130 *EKWURU EZEKAUDE,* Ụbahaọzụ. EN 127.

XXVII. ỌSỤIHITEỤKWA, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

131 *EKWURU EZEANỤMBA,* Amihe. A. Festus Alagwụ. EN 101.
132 *EKWURU ỌKỤNAGBA,* Amihe.
133 *EKWURU MBANỤRỤDE,* Amihe. A. Anasonye Uchenwoke. EN 138.
134 *EKWURU IGBONAEKENWA,* Ihiteụkwa.
135 *EKWURU UDEKWEREOBI,* Okuru.
136 *EKWURU ỌJIEWURU,* Ụbahangwu. A. Okonkwọ Onyedịkwa. EN 146.
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142 *EKWURU IKEJEMBA,* Ụda. EN Ugerumba of Eziọsụ Liilu.
143 *EKWURU OHURIGBOAZỤ,* Ụda. A. Egboka Ụgẹle. EN Ugerumba of Eziọsụ Liilu.
144 *EKWURU ỌKỤNAGBA,* Eziama Ụda.

XXVIII. ỌSỤMOGHU, IHIALA L.G.A., EBONESII KIN GROUP

145 *EKWURU EKWUSIKE,* Ụmụdi. EN 15.
146 *EKWURU IGBOHỤNANYA.*

XXIX. OTULO, IHIALA L.G.A., ORU KIN GROUP

147 *EKWURU UDEEBUBE,* EN 113.

XXX. AMAIFEKE, ỌLỤ L.G.A., ỌSỤ KIN GROUP

148 *EKWURU EZEBUDE,* Amaneese. A. Chief Okafọ Anaasọ. EN 87. 1922.
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XXXI. UGWUTA, UGWUTA L.G.A.

151 *EKWURU EZEKAUDE,* Ụmụnsọọha.
152 *EKWURU UDEEBUBE,* Abatu.

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XXXVI. URUALA, ỌLỤ G.G.A., MBANASAA KIN GROUP

172 *EKWURU ODOGWU.*

LIST OF MMỌNWỤ CHARACTERS IN 8 SELECTED THEATRES (Numbers in brackets refer to those in the Ekwuru List above)

Ekwuru	Ezemmuo	Dimkpammuo	Akakpommuo	Agboghommuo
Ezekwereobi (25)	Ezekwereobi	Anyanaso Omerigbokwe	Udeogunaede Oganampie	Uzumma
Udekwereze (28)	Udekwereze	Agueze Ekwensu	Igboanudu	Oduagu
Ezembakwe (29)	Ezembakwe	Omesuigwudu Ajaanubiudu Ajaakachu	Omeninyo Oganampie	Egodinobi
Mbanude (37)	Mbanude	Ajoubosi Abiaogboro	Ichekuoku Abiamodudu	Nwaoduagu
Ezejekwu (70)	Ezejekwu	Ananti	Oruuka	Egodinobi
Ezeobinaede (72)	Ezeobinaede	Agueze	Akataaka	Egoigboagwu
Igbojekwe (73)	Igbojekwe	Uzotumegwu	Ajoubosi	Ahuajuma
Ezewuru (100)	Ezewuru	Igbohunanya Otaagbara Ezegborogu Ebubeagu	Ogunaedo Ebutemkpo	Nwakamma

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Names of places in the Igbo speaking areas are given in standard Igbo orthography following the usage in the text. The familiar spellings are given in brackets and cross references are supplied in cases where the standard version differs considerably from the familiar version.

Mmọnwụ : A Dramatic Tradition of the Igbo

This book is unique in the sense that it is the first attempt to investigate seriously the structure of the sacred drama of the central Igbo and publish the text of its poetry.

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