

International Review of Humanities Studies
www.irhs.ui.ac.id, e-ISSN: 2477-6866, p-ISSN: 2527-9416
Vol.2, No.1, January 2017,
pp. 22-38

**THE *MMONWU* MASQUERADE OF THE ISOKO AND
UKWUANI PEOPLE: A RELIGIO-RITUAL FACTOR OF
CONTACT
IN THE WESTERN NIGER DELTA OF NIGERIA**

Uwomano Benjamin Okpevra, Ph.D

Department of History and International Studies,
Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria
ubokpevra@gmail.com, okpevra@delsu.edu.ng

Abstract

A major factor of contact amongst the people of the Western Niger Delta of Nigeria, which for want of a more appropriate term, maybe described as cultural, between the Isoko and her Ukwuani neighbours is the religio-ritual factor. One of the ancient and wide-ranging religio-ritual factors, which helped to promote intergroup contact between the Isoko and her Ukwuani neighbours, was associated with the *Mmonwu* masquerade, a socio-cultural institution. The work therefore examines the impact of the *Mmonwu* masquerade on the relations between the Isoko and Ukwuani people of the western Niger Delta of Nigeria. The work was carried out with the use of primary and secondary sources, using the historical and analytical method. The result/findings shows that, the Isoko-Ukwuani *Mmonwu* Masquerade is not an original Isoko-Ukwuani culture, but came as a cultural intercourse with their Igbo Neighbours. The work further shows that the *Mmonwu* Masquerade has a viable socio-cultural, religio-ritual, and economic impact on intergroup relations of the Isoko-Ukwuani Peoples.

Keywords: *Mmonwu* Masquerade, Intergroup Relations, Religio-Ritual, Western Niger Delta, Isoko-Ukwuani.

Introduction

Isoko and Ukwuani are two ethnic groups that inhabit a part of the Western Niger Delta, of Nigeria. The Isoko today comprises two Local Government Areas and nineteen clans. Ukwuani on the other hand has three Local Government Areas and twenty – three clans. Nevertheless, some Isoko clans share common boundary with contiguous Ukwuani clans. For instance, Owhe an Isoko clan shares boundary with Abbi an Ukwuani clan, Aradhe another Isoko clan shares boundary with Emu–Uno and Ushie. Again, Ovrode shares boundary with Igbuku and Ushie, Ofagbe share common boundary with Ibrede and Igbuku Isoko communities in Ndokwa East. Okpe–Isoko also shares boundary with Azagba. History has it that Isoko and Ukwuani had similar historical origin or migration story (Okpevra,2014).

Isoko is divided into North and South Local Government Areas, while Ukwuani is divided into Ndokwa East, Ndokwa West, and Ukwuani Local Government Areas. Moreover, there exist Isoko groups outside the two Local Government Areas and some Isoko communities are in Ndokwa East. This is an indication that there have been active relations between Isoko and Ndokwa East. Isoko and Ukwuani people developed contacts and perfected their contacts overtime. In the course of the contact, ideas were borrowed. The early contacts were in different forms. It is important to note here that the Isoko and Ukwuani clans shared similar culture and social organization, which foster their relations (Okolugbo,2004). The Isoko and Ukwuani ethnic groups are made up of clans. It is said that there are different traditions of origin of the various clans. However, there is a controversy over where they came from. Some claim Benin origin, some Igbo origin, and some autochthony (Okpevra, 2014 and Ojieh, 1989).

It is against the above backdrop that this work focuses on the *Mmonwu* Masquerade, one of the genres of masquerades in Nigeria, as an aspect of the socio-cultural relations between the Isoko and Ukwuani people. Masquerades are part of the socio-cultural institutions in Isoko and Ukwuani and are held in very high esteem. Masquerades are said to be the bridge between the living, dead, and even the unborn (Jibrin, www.xa.yimg.com/Ekwe+Ayegba+masquerade). There are different types of Masquerades in Africa, which may be differentiated by the type of mask and what they represent.

The *Mmonwu* masquerade (with its variant spelling as *Mmanwu*) is popular among the Ibos, Aboh, Ukwuani, and some clans in Isoko. The Isoko-Ukwuani *Mmonwu* places emphasis on Ancestral worship and it is said to be the worship of a deity, (Uyeri,2014) and a social group with some level of secrecy. Initiates are initiated into the group and as a male dominated cult (Jibrin, www.xa.yimg.com/Ekwe+Ayegba+masquerade) yet, it is perceived in the feminine gender, hence they are usually mother and child. Aside its spiritual underpinning, the *Mmonwu* masquerade is mainly for entertainment and preservation of Africa culture and traditions, believed to be a part of Africa Traditional Religion.

The *Mmonwu* masquerade has been one of the mode of promoting Isoko – Ukwuani relation. Despite the linguistic and some other differences, the *Mmonwu* masquerade and masqueraders in both Isoko and Ukwuani speaks the same language in their incantations and communications (Igbologe, 2010). Again, both the Isoko and Ukwuani *Mmonwu* have the similar masks and instruments, even the names of the masquerade and their titles are the same.

The *Mmonwu* masquerade has featured in Isoko and Ukwuani socio-cultural life from a fairly early time. The *Mmonwu* masquerade is not an original Isoko - Ukwuani culture rather it was derived from cultural contact or interactions with other neighbouring Western Niger Igbo communities such as Aboh and Isiagu, and even Ibos across the Niger. The name *Mmonwu* sounds unmistakably Ibo. It is important to bring to bear, if the *Mmonwu* started in Ukwuani before Isoko or *vice versa*. The *Mmonwu* masquerade symbolized the spirit of the dead; *ipso facto*, what

is therefore the relevance of the *Mmonwu* in the socio-cultural organization of the Isoko - Ukwuani people?

Conceptual Frame Work

Culturally the *Mmonwu* masquerade is said to be a traditional group mainly for entertainment during festivals and other ceremonies. It is perceived spiritually, as a traditional secret cult with strong spiritual powers or forces. It is also perceived as a part of African traditional religion, which is a medium of ancestral worship (Uyeri, 2014). The term *Mmonwu* is generally used in two different senses. It is either as a general concept for all forms of plays involving masking or as sacred mask drama, in which traditionally conceived masked spirits perform various dramatic activities with speeches and dialogue, on an open-air arena or stage (Ugonna,1981).

The *Mmonwu* is one of the masquerades among some ethnic groups in Delta State, Nigeria. However, not much has been documented on this aspect of the history of the Isoko and Ukwuani peoples. Nevertheless, there seem to be some general literature on masquerade. To this, we now turn to see the relevance of these literatures to the concept of the *Mmonwu* masquerade among the Isoko and Ukwuani people.

Ancestral masquerading is held in very high esteem among the various communities in traditional African society. This is because masquerades are said to be a bridge between the living, dead and the unborn often referred to as the cosmic circle (Jibrin, www.xa.yimg.com/Ekwe+Ayegba+masquerade). Among the Isoko and Ukwuani people, during festivals, the spirits of the dead reincarnates, and the siblings of the reincarnated dead are seen in the act of worshipping the Ancestors (Welch, 1934).

It is believed that the art of masquerading is very sacred in the traditional society and this may be realized in the Isoko-Ukwuani *Mmonwu* masquerade that is believed to be making the cosmic circle complete. This explains why masquerade and masquerading is an important part of African heritage and history.

Socio-culturally, masquerades are used to assist adolescents to become responsible adults as this fosters good upbringing. The adolescent males are initiated into the masquerade cult where they are taught values and moral, the rudiments of the culture of the people. It also helps the elderly in preparation for death, to spiritually link the living with the dead, sustain food supplies and to teach interdependence between environment and the community (O'Toole, African masquerade: Art and its performance... www.africancultures.org).

The masks and costumes are made to embody the spirits and most African culture believes the dancer becomes the spirit, in that a transformation takes place when the mask is worn, and the masker becomes the spirit of the mask, this needed to promote an interdependent society within the environment, and the spirits of their ancestors (Enendu,2014).

Nevertheless, the pre-colonial African religion upholds that, the ancestors of the living in the unseen spirit world strongly influence the fabric of the living world for good and bad, anything from the weather to human relationships. This explains why African culture is strongly underpinned by this sense of spirituality. In that, traditional civil life was one thoroughly infused with it. The rituals performed by the masquerade on these occasions symbolically bridge the earthly and spiritual worlds, as the masquerades become divine emissaries (Roy, www.afrostylemag.com/com.2/masquerades.php). This rituals explains why the Masquerades are feared and revered, loved and respected in the traditional communities.

However, the masquerade institution has very powerful religious connotation and always revered for its supernatural essence. From the religious point of view, a masquerade has the force of an invocation and introduces extra human forces into the human spheres, in which mythical beings commune with the living and manifest their powers (Enendu,2014). It has also been observed that in the traditional society, there exist numerous masquerade institutions and performances that are part of everyday experience. The fact is that all males, young and old are initiates of one masquerade institution or the other as part of their social and cultural rites and associations (Agun, <http://tony55/hubpages.com/hub/magnificent> African masquerade). This was peculiar to the Ukwuani in Delta State in case of the *Mmonwu* masquerade institution. For the Isokos initiation rites was not said to be generalized rather it was on the basis of family line and was optional.

Nzekwu (1981:131-135) notes that the manifestation of Ancestral spirits is a vital facet of ancestral worship. He opines that traditionally like everything else of any importance, masquerading and its secrets are at the prerogatives of the men who are initiates. Women are excluded from sharing in the secrets for they are weak and fickle and are therefore not fit to take part in them. They are also mysterious and sometimes unclean. They cannot therefore approach these ancestral manifestations, whose character is diametrically opposed to their own.

In a few places however, according to (Nzekwu, 1981) very elderly women of means may become initiates - but they are not allowed into the Masquerade *Ekwuru* when preparations for a display are going on. Normally, women watch a Masquerader dance from a distance, admiring the beauty of his costume and performance. They know that Masquerades are men dressed up in strange costumes; yet they are forbidden to tell of this or discuss it. Their knowledge is however challenged by the Masquerades' voice and occasionally by some extraordinary performance of a Masquerader.

The secret of the Masquerader's voice was the most jealously guarded of all the secrets of the cult, for among most tribes, 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, (to give a twitter voice) (Nzekwu,1981:133)

Again In the magnificent African masquerade, (Agun [http:// tony55/hubpages. com/hub/magnificent](http://tony55/hubpages.com/hub/magnificent) African masquerade) is of the view that masquerades are colourful costumed figures that are said to represent the spirits of the dead ancestors, deeply entrenched in the social cultural fabric of the traditional and modern day civilization, the costumed figures can be seen at town gathering and meaningful occasion in all their masked glory. He notes further that there are many genre of masquerade in Africa. For instance, *Gelede, Eyo, Egungu, Zambeto, Ekpo, Ekpe, Mmanwu, Ekwe Ayeba*. What differentiates these masquerades is the type of masks they wear, and what the masquerade represents. In the *Ekwe Ayeba* masquerade, Jibrin, begins by stating that ancestral masquerading is held in high esteem among various communities in the traditional African society because it's a bridge between the living, dead and even the unborn. He further traces the origin of masquerade to the 15th century A.D. To him masquerade is a traditional cult, which is very sacred in the traditional African society (www.xa.yimg.com/Ekwe+Ayegba+masquerade).

In his "*Mmonwu na Mmuo*" (<http://www.oraitifte.com/Masks-and-masquerades/>), Odiaka, notes that mask and masquerade are known as "*Mmonwu na Mmuo*." *Mmuo* are spirit of dead person of a town. These spirits are classified into good and evil. To him masquerades ranges from the *Umu Ada* that is the spirit of married daughters to the spirit of *Ozo* title men hierarchically. Omeokwe (2012) describes the *Mmonwu* Masquerade as a deep occult practice in Iboland, which has the powers that control and revolves round the entire community it represents. He also like (Nzekwu,1981) notes that the power of the *Mmonwu* masquerade is an exclusive secret society consisting of adult male.

The Origin of *Mmonwu* Masquerade in Isoko and Ukwuaniland



Figure 1. Igbo people celebrating with (*Mmonwu*) Masquerade.
Wikipedia.org

The masquerade is found mainly in Iboland, Ukwuani and some clans in Isoko. In tracing the origin and history of the *Mmonwu* masquerade in Isoko and Ukwuani, it is important to note that it is found only in frontier Isoko clans that border Ukwuani clans either geographically or by their interactions. It was said to have been introduced as a result of cultural intercourse between frontier Isoko clans and the Ukwuani clans of Aboh and Ashaka. Initiates of the *Mmonwu* in Ofagbe and Ozoro claim that, prior to the introduction of *Mmonwu* to Isokoland, the social cultural organization of Aboh in the early twentieth century was that all males both young and old must be initiated into the “*Mmonwu* cult” as a medium of association. (Oral evidence obtained from, Ogochukwu, Onioza, and Ashiafa 2014). Oral source by some renown *Mmonwu* initiates also has it that, the masquerade was brought into Isokoland in the early twentieth century by a man who travelled to Aboh for

farming and fishing. He was initiated into the *Mmonwu* deity and the act of masquerading. The deity was called “*Agueze*”, this was the strongest *Mmonwu* at that time (Oral evidence obtained from, Ugbegwo, Ogochukwu, Ashiafa, Onioza, Olise, and Ossai, 2014).

Upon his return to Ofagbe in Isoko he came with the branch of *Mmonwu* which was said to have been given birth to by “*Egorumba*”. This led to the establishment of *Mmonwu* in Ofagbe with the name “*Udemezue*”. It is an agreeable fact that most *Mmonwu* in Isokoland are the offspring of *Udemezue* (Oral evidence obtained from Ashiafa, Ossai, Ogochukwu, Ugbegwo, Olise, and Onioza 2014). The establishment and the inauguration rites were done in the early twentieth century. It is worthy to point out here that the *Mmonwu* in Isoko and Ukwuani is structured in a lineage, which is likened to be a family.

Subsequently, *Agueze* gave birth to *Egorumba* and *Udemezue*. *Udemezue* of Ofagbe gave birth to *Akaka* in Ozoro, *Egorumba* on the other hand gave birth to *Uduekreze* and *Udoshinigbo* in Ozoro and Aradhe respectively. Thus, it cannot be gainsaid that the *Mmonwu* masquerade came to Isoko as a result of contact with the Ukwuani; and the spread thereof also came from *Udemezue*.

From the above, the *Mmonwu* masquerade in Isoko was a result of cultural borrowings from their Ukwuani neighbours. The question arising from this would be if the *Mmonwu* masquerade is an original Ukwuani cultural cult or it is as a result of interactions with other neighbours? To that extent, some *Mmonwu* initiates in the Ukwuani area aver that the *Mmonwu* masquerade is a borrowed culture from their Igbo neighbours. But they could not give the name of the persons that brought the *Mmonwu* to the region. All they agreed upon was that it was brought from Iboland via Aboh.

There is however the belief that the word “*Mmonwu*” is from the word “*Mmouwu*”. That the *Mmonwu* originated from Iboland by an Aro Chukwu immigrant in Egbema Ozubulu, called Okonkwo Ogbuchi, who in about 1840 got together some renowned “*dibia*” (medicine men) and initiated them into the secret knowledge of *Mmonwu* which was reputedly revealed to him in a dream. This gave rise to the establishment of the first house of wisdom called “*Ekwuru*” in Iboland and “*Echichi*” in Ukwuani and Isoko. This first *Mmonwu* was called “*Igbokwe*” (Ugonna, 1981:497).

Furthermore, it was believed that the *Mmonwu* tradition spread all over the North and South and between the towns of Orlu in Imo State and Aboh in the present Delta State, to the East and to the West. Moreover, that by the 1880s and the early twentieth century the *Mmonwu* theatres were well established all over these towns (Ugonna, 1981:497).

It is important to state here that initiates of the *Mmonwu* both in Ukwuani and in Isoko agree upon these claims. This is based on the fact that, the language used by the masquerade and masqueraders of Ukwuani and Isoko in communication, and incantation is likened to be a mixture of Ibo language and Igala (Nzekwu, 1981:134). The names of the deity and the masquerade, even their titles

also likened to be Ibo names. In their performance, the masqueraders sing Ibo songs.



Figure 2. Mmonwu Masquerade in a Street at Ashaka, in Ndokwa East Local

The Organizational Structure of the *Mmanwu* Masquerade in Isoko and Ukwuani

The *Mmonwu* is a social cultural institution that is well organized. The *Mmonwu* masquerade is structured in an organized hierarchy, which give room for the promotion of members. The hierarchy of the *Mmonwu* masquerade begins with the "ordinary *Mmonwu*", which is the first stage after initiation. During performance, it takes the lowest part of the "*Echichi*" (shrine), which means it is not qualified to climb the step in the shrine. This is the most common *Mmonwu*, in that it makes appearance anytime there is the reason for appearance (Oral evidence obtained from Ogochukwu, Onioza, and Ashiafa, 2014).

The next stage is the "*Echichi Eze Ogbefi*," this masquerade has been inaugurated, and during performance with all *Mmonwu* its position is the first step of the *Echichi*, it appears lesser than the ordinary *Mmonwu* that is more than once in a year. This *Mmonwu* thereafter will after some years, be promoted to the "*Echichi Eze-Mmonwu*." It is said to be too old and powerful to make regular

appearance like the ordinary *Mmonwu* and “*Eze-ogbefi*.” It makes appearance once in three years. It climbs two steps ahead of the *Eze-Ogbefi* in the *Echichi*.

The next and the highest ranks is the “*Echichi Ogbragu*.” Here the *Mmonwu* climbs the highest level of the *Echichi*, during the promotion ceremony. Two life tigers (*Ekpe*) were required to prove the strength and powers of the masquerade. This *Mmonwu* is regarded to be the strongest and most powerful. It appears almost once in three years. It appears with a sword and a staff, *Uzu* in Isoko and *Igbachi* in Ukwuani, which is carried by an offspring that accompanies it (Oral evidence obtained from Ugbegwo, Ogochukwu, Ashiafa, Onioza Olise and Ossai, 2014)

Nevertheless, it could be said that the organizational structure of the Isoko-Ukwuani *Mmonwu* Masquerade is hierarchical, so that the young ones can learn respect for elders and seniors even in such social groups. Again, the *Mmonwu* is used to honour the gods, ancestors, and spirits during festivals through dancing and singing of masquerade songs. The organization also has a way of linking the living and the dead.



Figure 3. The *Mmonwu* Masquerade performing at Etevie Quarters, Ozoro, Isoko North Local Government, Delta State, Nigeria.



Figure 4. The Mmonwu Masquerade and Masqueraders in the street of Ibrede, Ndokwa East Local Government Area of Delta State Nigeria.

The Role of *Mmonwu* Masquerade in the Socio-cultural organization of the Isoko and Ukwuani

The *Mmonwu* Masquerade performs several roles in the socio-cultural organization of the Isoko and Ukwuani people, at different platforms. Spiritually, the *Mmonwu* masquerade is used to honour the gods (deities) and the ancestors. It is believed that the masquerade represents the spirits, in that it is the linkage between spiritual and the physical. The masquerade is also a medium of communication between the gods, ancestors, spirits, and men. Such that upon the appearance of the masquerade the people are either blessed or cursed. The masquerades also appease the gods on behalf of the community (Oral evidence obtained from Ashiafa, Ossai, Ogochukwu, Ugbegwo and Olise, 2014).

In addition, the *Mmonwu* masquerade is used for entertainment in commemorating special occasions like, coronation, death of prominent members and festivals. Indeed, the presence of masquerade at cultural festivals adds glamour and fun to the occasion by the appearance of the *Mmonwu* in its beautiful regalia and the dance that accompanies it. Dance is an integral part of the *Mmonwu*, they

are good dancers of choreography dance steps, acrobatic, sharp whirling, twists and turns and elaborate gesticulation (Enendu,2014)



Figure 5. Mmonwu Masquerade Performing during Art and Cultural Festival, Asaba in Delta State, Nigeria.

Furthermore, the *Mmonwu* masquerade as an institution of culture and tradition is a means for the preservation of African culture and traditions. It was said that masquerade and masquerading is the only viable symbols, Nigeria could present to the outside world. In that, it has become a point of tourist attractions when they come out in their colourful regalia accompanied by traditional dancers and music (Enendu, 2014).

However, in borrowing the act from Iboland, they have left out the myths, which surrounded individual masquerades in their original setting.... The result is that while the basic principle - that Masquerades are physical representation of ancestral spirits - has survived to control their display and their relationship with men, Masquerade displays have become more of a social appendage to the religious festivals and observances to which they were attached. This explains why the Ibo were the first in the country to make masquerade displays and traditional dances the highlights of such Christian feasts as Christmas and Easter (Nzekwu,1981: 134-135). This has become a common feature of the *Mmonwu* in both Isoko and Ukwuani clans that perform the masquerade dance.

Impact of the *Mmonwu* Masquerade on Isoko – Ukwuani Relations

The *Mmonwu* masquerade had impacted on the Isoko-Ukwuani relations, over the years in several ways. The *Mmonwu* masquerade served as a means for the

youths to earn some money, in Isoko and Ukwuani during traditional festivals (Ejugbo, www.africaontheblog.com). This take place usually between March and December every year, in the various Isoko and Ukwuani clans (Abraham, 2014). The spectators being thrilled by the display of the *Mmonwu* masquerade in any occasion dole out money voluntarily to the masquerade team. Also in the streets, road users like vehicle drivers give money to the masquerade team. They may also be invited to perform for a fee as entertainers.

Socio-Cultural Impact

For centuries, masquerades have remained largely a symbol of culture and customs. It is a relevant institution of cultural entertainment. However, modernization has caused it to be more of tourist attraction. When it comes out in its colourful regalia accompanied by music and traditional dancers, it thrills the audience.

Again, masquerades appear in accordance with the requisite social events. *Mmonwu* masquerade represents ancestral spirits and family deities. The *Mmonwu* in the past was regarded as a means of maintaining peace and order and for the enforcement of laws governing communities. It has an entertaining dimension, with its beautiful robe and dance, not to be out rightly seen as fetish, though there may be some fetish elements.

It also promotes unity among initiates and *Mmonwu* communities. It could be said that the bond between *Mmonwu* clans in Isoko and Ukwuani clans is stronger than non *Mmonwu* clans. The *Mmonwu* masquerade attends events in Isoko and the ones in Isoko attend events in Ukwuani during annual festivals. This is exemplified in the “Ozoro-Ashaka, Ushie, Aboh, Igbuku, Emu-Uno” relations. Nevertheless, there is another view about the activities of the *Mmonwu* masquerade. It is argued that there are some negative influences of the masquerade. What happens sometimes during masquerade performance explains a great extent the behaviour of some members as miscreants, cultists, ruffians and mischievous elements captivates and take advantage of masquerading to commit crime; maim, kill, harass, smoke Indian hemp, cocaine and excessive alcohol which makes them fight at the slightest provocation.

Religio–Political Impact

It is a point of fact that, the factors that affect the moral training of an adolescent are customs, practices, and religious belief of the parents (James, 1972). Given that, “morality is the opium of religion”, in African tradition, children are required to show their parents and elders prompt respect and obedience and unquestionable submission to their will. This is because African tradition and religions believe that, if the child is given his own way, he will do foolish and harmful things to himself and the others as well. The point to be made here is that the *Mmonwu* masquerade is an institution that upholds the African traditional

religion and its morals and values, by initiating the adolescent into the *Mmonwu* cult to build in them the African belief and morals respect and obedience to elders and authorities. Also the initiation rites prepare the young ones for the challenges of life and awaken their minds to embrace responsibilities (Enendu, 2014:9-13). That is to be their own men beyond the protective shadows of parents.

Furthermore, the traditional African culture is rooted in the worldview in which there is continuous interaction between spiritual forces and the community. The *Mmonwu* masquerade represents the ancestral spirits and deities. It is a bridge between the spiritual and the physical and a medium of communication between the ancestors and their descendants. The complex web of human relationships is continuously renewed and restates in rituals, which marks the completion of the cosmic circle.

Challenges of *Mmonwu* Masquerade

Christianity and Western Education, which are said to be colonial legacies in Africa, are seen as the greatest challenges to the activities of the *Mmonwu* masquerade and masquerading in Nigeria at large and Delta State in particular. To that extent, the activities of *Mmonwu* masquerade from the late twentieth century has been dwindling.

However, Christianity is now a professed religion of most people in Isoko and Ukwuani lands. Through centuries of contacts with the Europeans, the Isoko-Ukwuani people heard about the western concept of God, while they traded with Europeans at the major coastal points. Its acceptance affected the activities of the African Traditional Religion in general. Nonetheless, it is said that one of the greatest killer of traditional masquerade is the Christian belief that the masquerade institution represents evil and could harm innocent people (Abraham, 2014). Christians are preaching the view that the *Mmonwu* is evil and many converts tends not to be involved in the activities of the *Mmonwu* masquerade.

It is held by Christian adherent that masqueraders ignorantly pretend to be serving the ancestral spirits that is beyond men, and that *Mmonwu* brings the whole community or lineage to abject subservient to the deities the *Mmonwu* represents and this meant selling the community or lineage into bondage. And the only way to break off these yokes is to serve the living God, who has manifested himself in Christ Jesus (Omeokwe, 2012). Thus, with the Christian preaching and their activities, the *Mmonwu* masquerade and the African traditional religion experienced a sharp decline in the Isoko and Ukwuani lands.

Today Masquerading has lost most of the religious ideas, which brought it into being and sustained it. Yet, at first sight, it still appears to have all the essence, vitality, and prestige, which characterised it not so long ago. In the rural areas, one sees only a reflection of its more glorious past, but even that is dwindling in importance as the people become more and more used to western ideas. In urban areas, the changes, though greater, is veiled. There non-initiates feign the awe, born of traditional usage (Nzekwu, 1981).



Figure 6. *Mmonwu masquerade of Ndokwa East entertaining at Ovie festival.*

Conclusion

From the above, it could be said that one of the socio – cultural organization that have promoted the Isoko-Ukwuani relations is the socio – cultural institution of the *Mmonwu* masquerade. The *Mmonwu* masquerade is the repositories of spirits; ancestral spirits and deity the masquerade represents. It is clear that the *Mmonwu* masquerade came into Ukwuani as a result of cultural relation with their Igbo neighbours and it came into Isoko as a result of the cultural intercourse with the Ukwuani.

However, the *Mmonwu* masquerades over the years have remained a symbol of culture and custom. It has enjoyed among other things durability and continuity overtime, this is made possible by family and communal inheritance. It is imperative to state here that the Isoko-Ukwuani *Mmonwu* masquerade has promoted inter-group relations between the two ethnic groups in their social, political, vocational, ritual, religions and ethnical lives.

Table 1: Common Ibo/Aboh words used by the Mmonwu initiates in Isoko and Ukwuani

Ibo Words	English	Ibo Words	English
Osi ego	Tree of Money	Uzo die egu	Fearful Road
Ogaranya Mmonwu	Rich/wealthy Masquerade	Nntechi	Interpreter
Otighu Anyenya	Slaughter or killer of Horse	Ogbuefi	Killer or slaughter of cow
Akaka Mmo	The great or mighty spirit	Ekwuru	House of wisdom/Inner chamber
Mmo k' Obo	You are indeed a spirit	Ekwe	Wooden gong
Oriako	Eater of Wealth	Obodo dike	Strong Town
Igbachi	Spear/staff	Othagbaragu	Chewer of root
Chiozor	Acquired title	Ogbodi	Non-initiate
Udemezue	My peace is complete	Nwam	My child

The *Mmonwu* masquerade has been experiencing a level of decline in its activities as a result of challenges in the late twentieth century. The challenges have manifested in the activities or preaching by Christians against the African Traditional Religion and modernization. So that it was said that as a result of modernization the *Mmonwu* masquerade more relevant as an institution for cultural entertainment and has made it more useful for tourist attractions.

References

- Abraham, A. A (2014) "Masquerades and festivals giving way to modernization" *Leadership magazine*; March 9.
- Agun, F The Magnificent African Masquerade .
<http://tony55/hubpages.com/hub/magnificentAfricanmasquerade>.
- Ejugo, C, Mmanwu: The Masquerade, Africa on the blog,
www.africaontheblog.com.
- Enendu, M.L.O (2014) "African masquerade: The Essence, Performance, and Institution", *Peak Journal of Social Science and Humanities*, 2.
- Igbologe, S.A (2010) "Isoko - Ukwuani relations from the Earliest Times." B.A. Long Essay, Department of History, Delta State University, Abraka Campus.
- James, M.H (1972) *Child – Rearing Practices in northern Nigeria*, Ibadan: Ibadan University Press,
- Jibrin, J “Ekwe Ayegba masquerade”
www.xa.yimg.com/Ekwe+Ayegba+masquerade.
- Nzekwu. O. (1981) “Masquerade” in *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source book*, ed. 'Yemi Ogunbiyi (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, Department of Culture Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth Sports and Culture.
- O’Toole, S.A African masquerade: Art and its performance in African culture, Pittsburgh Public Schools/Arsenal Middle School
www.africancultures.org.
- Odiaka, S. Mmanwu Na Mmuo in Igboland,
<http://www.oraitifte.com/Masks-and-masquerades/>
- Ojeh. C.O (1989)"The Ukwuani and their Neighbours 1500 – 1905", B.A Long Essay, Department of History Bendel State University, Abraka Campus.
- Okolugbo, E.O (2004) *The History of the Ukwuani and Ndosumili People of the Niger Delta*, Benin City: Ethiopie Publishing Cooperation.
- Okpevra. U.B. (2014)"The Isoko and her Neighbours, 1800 - 1970: A Study of the Diplomacy of Conflict Resolution in the Western Niger Delta of Nigeria" Ph.D Thesis, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma Nigeria.
- Omeokwe. M.J. (2012)"Masquerade and the Iboland", *Ndi-Igbo Magazine*, October 6th Oral Evidence obtained from D. Ugbegwo, 43, Trader, at Ozoro 16/08/2014 F. Ogochukwu, 58 Welder, 12/07/2014 Daniel Ashiafa, 52, 02/07/2014. W. Onioza, 42, Carpenter, 06/07/2014.Egodike Olise, 58, Farmer, at Ashaka, on 25/10/2014.Ochonogo Ossai, 57, Farmer, at Ibrede, on 26/10/2014. F. Ogochukwu, 58 Welder, 12/07/2014. Video recording.
- Roy. R “The spirit of Carnival in the society” Afro style magazine.
www.afrostylemag.com/com.2/masquerades.php.
- The menace of Mmanwu Masquerade leader views online, 28/09/2014,
<http://theleadervirenewassupta.com>.
- Ugonna, N (1981) "Eziegboezue: an Igbo Masquerade Play”, in *Drama and*

Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source book, ed. 'Yemi Ogunbiyi (Lagos: Nigeria Magazine, Department of Culture Federal Ministry of Social Development, Youth Sports and Culture.

Uyeri, O.O. (2014) "Mmanwu Masquerade and Intergroup Relations: The Isoko-Ukwuani Experience." B.A Long Essay, Department of History and International Studies, Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. November.

Welch, J.W (1934) "The Isoko Tribe," *Africa* Vii, No. 2. 163