



## Metaphor and Symbolism in Sacred Costumes: The Omabe Masking of Orba in Purview

Johnson Arua, Nkem Alu, & Livinus Ngwu

### Abstract

The *Omabe* masking tradition of Orba, in Nsukka cultural enclave is a masquerade festival celebrated quadrennially by its members and adherents. The cultural heirloom has exhibited an expansive array of masquerades with a glut of metaphoric art objects and symbols to exemplify spirituality, aesthetics and social status. The spectacular cultural display enthralled a legion of scholars that wrote extensively on *Omabe* masking but scarcely ventured into a documentation of its metaphor and symbolism. Costuming is said to be sacred if it involves members of cults or groups who share common traditional trust and values. The leopard is a general symbol of the *Omabe* cult, and its bodily aesthetics greatly reflect the sacred costumes of *Omabe* masquerades. The spirals reflect mysticism and mythology as obtained in the Orba spiritual undertones, just as the sun-ray patterns symbolize the explosion of abundant blessings. The venerable treatment given to such costumes implies that only initiates are entitled to wear them. This paper explored and examined critically, the visual cultural elements of metaphor and symbolism in *Omabe* masking. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. Findings showed that the artistic motifs on the *Omabe* costumes are as metaphoric as they are symbolic. And with a myriad of intricate motifs like (i) hued embroidery, (ii) collage and crochet, (iii) pendant and dotted leopard spots, (iv) sun or sunflower-shaped motifs, (v) the white threads that project from the position of the eyes, signifying sunrays and vibrancy, (vi) the fragments of mirrors and rattles, repelling evil forces, and (v) strands of thread and fur. Some motifs and collages translate to simplistic meanings while others remain the special reserve of cult members. The visual artistic imports of the *Omabe* costuming motifs can transcend immediacy, thereby becoming worthwhile prescriptions for industrial designs. The *Omabe* masquerade costumes epitomize art and Igbo philosophy in one mould.

**Keywords:** Omabe, immediacy, metaphor, symbolism

## Introduction

The *Omabe* masking tradition is an integral aspect of the socio-cultural well-being of the people of Orba in Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu state, Nigeria. The study area is located in the northern part of Enugu State, Nigeria and is bounded to the north by *Ovoko* and *Iheaka* in *Igbo Eze-South* L.G.A, on the south by *Eba-Alumona* in *Nsukka* L.G.A., on the east by *Imilike* in *Udenu* L.G.A and on the west by the *Obukpa* in *Nsukka* L.G.A, all in Enugu State. It has an area of about 52 square kilometres and a population density of about seventy-eight thousand people. *Orba* is culturally divided into two parts -*Ejuona* and *Ekutara*. The two cultural parts perform their *Omabe* celebrations differently every four years but their cultural and artistic configurations, functions and meaning of *Omabe* masquerade and masking traditions are the same in all ramifications. The epoch-making event lasts for one year during which the community engages deeply with cultural creative works of art.

Orba also belongs to the Nsukka cultural enclave of the state. The use of the term Orba-Nsukka, in Nsukka public gatherings, especially among elders connotes geographical inclusiveness. Before the advent of states and local government areas' creation, names of communities around Nsukka town are often intertwined with Nsukka, for instance, Orba-Nsukka, Opi-Nsukka, Edem-Nsukka, Ede-Oballa Nsukka, Obukpa-Nsukka and others. In all the Nsukka geographical centres and the outskirts, cultural inclinations are often interwoven. The seed of interrelations, therefore, has long been sown among the people by the Nsukka patriarchs in their wisdom. The *Omabe* masquerade and masking traditions of Orba, in the current Udenu Local Government Area of Enugu State, epitomize a strong philosophical and cultural aspect of the people's living.

The cultural heirloom is a celebratory umbrella where the dead (masquerade) and the living interact and celebrate in the same vicinity. It is also a vehicle through which the community exerts and propagates its cultural and artistic heritage. Their intermittent appearance every four years reassures the participants' maximum spiritual protection and total panacea to the timeless vicissitude of life. *Omabe* cult members and adherents claim that *Omabe* is a mythical being (spirit) in animal form – leopard, a metaphoric material form, believed to shower bountiful blessings and sometimes unleash curses upon the aberrant community members at every festive period. This connotes that the *Omabe* masquerade is more spiritual than physical and a symbolic representation of a supernatural being. In the same vein, Heinz (1976) asserts:

In so doing, the actor can be said to make tangible what is otherwise ineffable, and to express the inexpressible without betraying it. Therefore, since the interpreted connection of the objects activated with the sensory display is deliberately created and is commonly accepted, the masquerade is better referred to as a symbolic presentation, a ritual symbol.

From the same perspective, Aniakor (1978) and Onu (2005) opine that the *Omabe* spirit of Nsukka is seen as a dramatic symbolic representation of a Leopard. These explain concisely why in Nsukka Igbo, Orba in particular, Leopard (*edi*) is conceived and revered metaphorically as *Omabe* spirit and conversely, *Omabe* as a leopard. Nwoko (1986) asserts also that *Omabe* is an ancestral spirit that renders political and social functions such as fining and punishing those who breach socio-cultural ethics in the community. However, *Omabe* masquerade (*maa/muo*) is viewed generally in Orba as a manifestation of an ancestor in tangible form, an illusion of reality and a conceded myth through the ages.

The masquerade design poses some challenges to the artist in as much as the design elements and styles must conform to the spiritual essences, dictates of the masquerade's priest and the expected theatrical actions. Most of these elements used in the making of *Omabe* masquerades (motifs and symbols) are metaphorical and symbolic and perform their distinctive spiritual and physical functions in a convenient celebratory atmosphere. Some of these inevitable design symbols include— spiral (*okirikiri*), moon (*onwa*), status symbol (*akara-okwa*), *ofor* (symbol of justice) *ozoebule* (elbow band made of ram skin-fur reflecting authority), sun (reflects vibrancy, brightness) among others.

*Omabe* Orba typology includes *Igele/Echaricha*, *Ogbuokwuru/Egbeche-ala*, *Agbaeji*, *Obianwaishi* and others. The ancestral masquerades have the same spiritual and social meanings but earn different metaphoric and symbolic costuming based on the convention that the masquerades' costumes must be in concordance with their anticipated theatrical performances. *Igele* is designed with innumerable reflective chrome buttons fastened on the black fabric base to simulate leopard spots and strands of white treads projecting from eye position to emblemize linear makings and whiskers of leopard. The design elements are so simplified and lack weighty super structures to enable it to jump and maintain a sustained motion in the air at performance.

*Ogbeoche-ala* is a crowed controlling Omabe masquerade, designed with locally woven white fabrics(*ekpoto*) or the improvised imported white calico to allow it to perform its primal social and spiritual roles in the performance arena. The *agbaeji* which is usually costumed with thick appliqué that covers the masker is so elegant and gentle at performance and pulls out more crowd than *Edioghene* which is aggressive and hyper-active in the performance arena. *Edioghene* is dominantly costumed with leopard leathers and represents the character of a leopard (*edi*) at every performance). *Obianwaishi* is generally conceived as the eldest, high-spirited and the most sluggish (in movement) Omabe masquerade in Orba and costumed with dyed dark-blue locally woven fabrics. It is usually the last Omabe masquerade to return from the sacred forest (*ugbele*) with its leopard leather bag to bless the living on every festive period.

### Morphological Assessment of *Omabe* Masquerades Types



Plate 1: *Omabe* Masquerade (*Echaricha/ Igele*) from Orba.  
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*Igele/Echaricha* is a unique and elegant masquerade that symbolically represents an ancestor in animal form, specifically, the Leopard (*edi*). *Igele* suit is designed with black woollen fabric as a base on which white reflective chrome buttons are deliberately and creatively fastened with strong thread, by hand stitch to emblemize a leopard (*Omabe* spirit). The chrome buttons are hand-sewn all over and are closely knitted hence captivating and have magical crowd-pulling power. The headpiece, unlike most masquerades that use wooden head cover, is designed with strands of immaculate white woollen thread, thickly embroidered to imitate sunrays around eye-openings, projecting towards the back of the headpiece in a very artistic way. Two moderately sized reddish-feathers (*abuba-awo*) are fixed on both sides of the implied mouth area to simulate leopard whiskers. The sewing of the fabrics and its encompassing artistic touches are presently done by men in *Orba* since the death of *Oyimaa Nwaona nwaugwu* of *Amagu Umadeshi* (a woman). According to Innocent Ugwuobia (2015), most of the existing artists got their artistic inspiration from late Agboeze Ugwuobia of Amagu and Odo nwa Ngwoke of Umuokara. He further asserts that women that did such creative works in *Orba* have all died. According to Ifeanyi Onyeke (2016), Onyebuchi Odo of Umu-Eworogu is the only active traditional artist producing *Omabe* masquerade presently in Ajuona *Orba*. *Echaricha/Igele* headpiece is an oval-shaped fabric design that carries on top, numerous clustered up-ward projections of sticks covered with black or white locally woven fabric (*ugere-ekwa*). The upward projections are stuck with numerous white, black and red feathers (Awo and Ebuba Ugo and others) which metaphorically and symbolically represent prestige, kineticism, sustained motion in the air and economic status. The *Ugere-ekwa* holds the feathers in position on the projection, basically to satisfy the aesthetic and symbolic quest of the artist, participants and admirers.



Plate 2: Edi-Ogbene from Orba (One of the Omabe variants, ©Researcher Arua J.E., 2014

*Edi Ogbene* is another artistically garbed *Omabe* variant. It plays the character of a leopard (*edi*) as dominantly costumed so. *Edi-Ogbene* is meant to control and maintain some entertaining peace within the performance arena. It is considered aggressive and sometimes too hyperactive but in all that, artistic motion is fastened. The headpiece is masked with leopard skin pierced with a sharp tiny needle to indicate the eye openings. *Edi Ogbene* does not hold the rattle metal staff (*oji*) or any form of machete due to its aggressive nature and function. It holds the whip only for controlling the over-excited mammoth crowd. The traditional artist uses white ram fur (*ozoebule*) are used to band up the greater part of its elbows, signifying strength, authority and status. *Ozoebule* is a dominant costume in all high-spirited masquerades in *Orba* and in the wider Igbo traditional spectacle, the white ram skin-fur adorns persons and places of authority.



Plate 3: *Omabe* type-, Egbecheala/  
Ogbuokwuru ©Researcher Arua J.E., 2014

*Egbecheala* is one of the *Omabe* masquerades, artistically designed with white locally woven fabric costumes (*Ekpoto*), and sewn as suit. The masquerade is usually worn by average young men, between the ages of 30 – 50 years since its primal functions are to control and maintain law and order during *Omabe* performance in the community. According to Nwoko, (1986), *Egbe-ochela* is a crowd-controlling and whipping spirit that performs with the *Igele/Echaricha*. On certain occasions, it appears alone, especially when rendering political or social functions such as fining and punishing those who breach socio-cultural ethics in the communities.

*Egbecheala* has a peculiar visual visage that lacks heavy decorative elements. Comparatively, *Egbecheala* and *Igele/Echaricha* have a sharp contrast in the level of costuming. *Egbecheala* is simple in design because the visual form of the Igbo masquerade must be in concordance with its anticipated performance actions. *Egbecheala* also holds a forged machete in one hand and the machete usually is not decorated as the ones held by the spectacular *Igele*. It is profusely used to exert its power and authority over social and political issues. White calico is tied round the waist to run down from the waist to the

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knee level with a knot at the end (some tie cloth without knotting). *Omabe* cult adepts interviewed (2017) claim that the “knotting” at the end of the white “calico” and light-blue check fabrics is symbolic. It symbolizes the complete wrapping/seizing of all negative forces against the masquerade and the participants in the arena. It was also gathered that the cloth tied around the waist heightens and sustains the masker’s spiritual and physical energy throughout the performance. All *Egbeochala* wore cylindrically shaped ram’s fur (ozoebule) on the upper part of the elbow as a band. *Omabe* cult members in Orba insist on using white ram’s fur to produce *Ozoebule* deliberately to strengthen and heighten the aesthetics as well as its spiritual connotation and aura. The ram’s fur is cut from the neck area of a mature ram which has long and healthy hairs, folded and worn on the elbow to satisfy the aesthetic quest of the artist and participants and to inflate the socio-economic status of the social group that owns the masquerade. The more the socio-economic level, the more heavily costumed and revered in and across the community that informed it. *Egbeochala* maskers paint their legs with white clay/chalk (nzu) in a stippling technique to simulate leopard spots and increase their spectacle.



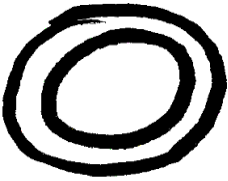
Plate 4: Uma *Omabe* (Forged Machete)  
©Researcher Arua J.E., 2017

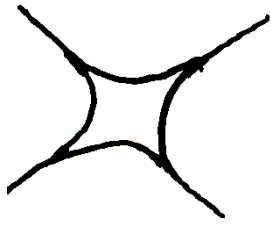
All *Igele* masquerades observed in Orba heighten their aesthetic status, and spiritual and symbolic essences with a locally forged long machete in each hand. Metaphorically, the machete reflects authority, security and power in Orba celebratory atmosphere and is produced by the blacksmiths. According to Madu (2014), to fashion a long machete, a long strip of iron is made and cut using a chisel, then heated with bellows and thinned down using the sledgehammer. At the handling part, softwood is bored and fastened with a metal pin and finally smoothened. The knife which came in different shapes and designs is used by the maskers at a performance. At the end of the handle part of the knife are different colours of striped fabric materials fastened/ fixed either by tying or stitched with thread. These red, blue, yellow, black and white striped fabric materials are added to increase the beauty of the *Igele* / *Echaricha* masquerade as it dangles in every direction in performance. Apart from creating beauty with its brilliantly coloured strips of fabric, dancing in the air, it is believed to appease and vitalize the spirit (*Omabe* masquerade) and also as a cover to the medicine (mystic power) attached to the machete's handles. This mystic power is believed to re-channel any negative power unleashed by the enemies usually from the neighbouring community and competing groups. The long striped fabric materials on the forged machete are found to be imported except for the locally woven dark- blue and white fabric known as *Ugere-akwa* in the study area.

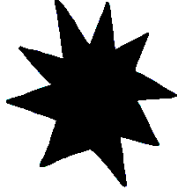
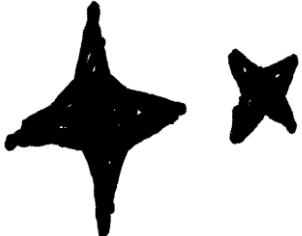
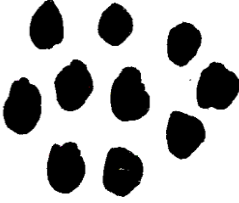
### **Common *Omabe* Masking Motifs and Symbols**

There are some motifs derivable from *Omabe* masquerade head gears, regalia, accessories and even musical instruments for art productions and research. Some are shown in the following table; and it's worth noting that the drawings below were made to represent exactly or simulate the way it was drawn by the traditional artists on the masquerades, props, instruments, costumes, wall and body.

**Table 1: Masquerade Motifs and Symbols**

|         | Motif                                                                               | Igbo name                                            | English name                          | Usage/<br>Meaning                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Plate 1 |    | <i>Ebuba- Ugo, anwo, okunko oji and okunko ocha.</i> | Eagle feather and others.             | Symbol of Prestige, kineticism and sustained motion in the air. Found on <i>Omabe</i> masquerade to heighten the spiritual, social and aesthetic aura. It also reflects leopard whiskers                                                                                                                          |
| Plate 2 |    | <i>Akara Eje- Ala</i>                                | Going and coming back ( zig-zag line) | Safe outing and return. Found on <i>Omabe</i> forged machete and other costumes. It also symbolizes the zig-zag movements of <i>Omabe</i> masquerades at the performance arena.                                                                                                                                   |
| Plate 3 |  | <i>Okokoro</i>                                       | Circle                                | A circle is representing mirrors on masquerade costumes. It reflects and repels evil machinations within and outside the performance arena. It also reflects and corroborates the Igbo adage – okirikiri ka a na- agba ukwu ose, anaghi ari ya enu. ( pepper tree can only be viewed round and cannot be climbed) |
| Plate 4 |  | <i>Akara- Okwa</i>                                   | Status Symbol                         | Mostly found on crowd-controlling masquerade (egbeoche-ala) and Igele machete (see machete above) to indicate spiritual and social status.                                                                                                                                                                        |

|         |                                                                                     |                                                                                      |                                 |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Plate 5 |    | Ishi- Oji                                                                            | Kola- Nut Head                  | Found on masquerade Applique and embroidery, Wall and Body Adornment<br>Indicating the spiritual relationship between masquerades and kola nuts. Kola nut is the most needed item for appeasing the gods.                                                                                                       |
| Plate 6 |    | <i>Eju/ Agworoagwo, Akuruaku Okirikiri ka a na-agba ukwu ose, anaghi ari ya enu,</i> | Spiral                          | Found on <i>Omabe</i> costumes. Symbolizing the mysticism of <i>Omabe</i> It also reflects and corroborates the Igbo adage – okirikiri ka a na-agba ukwu ose, anaghi ari ya enu. (pepper tree can only be viewed round but cannot be climbed) <i>Omabe</i> masquerade- a phenomenon beyond human understanding. |
| Plate 7 |  | <i>Mpu- Anu (opi) (atu, enyi, eshu)</i>                                              | Buffalo, elephant and caw horns | On masquerade costumes and <i>Aghaji, costumes and</i> others. When blown, it invites good spirits and repels bad ones. It symbolizes “invitation” and authority. Inviting good spirits and humans.                                                                                                             |

|          |                                                                                     |                                           |                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                     |
|----------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Plate 8  |    | <i>Ngu</i>                                | Metal Pin.                                | Mostly drawn on costumes and physically seen on shrines. Used for pinning-down evil spirits/ negative forces while in the performance arena.                                        |
| Plate 9  |    | <i>Anyannwu</i>                           | Sun                                       | <b>Sun- rays.</b><br>An outburst of sun-rays on <i>Omabe</i> headdress (eye position), props and costumes symbolizing brightness, hope, and vibrant explosion of abundant blessings |
| Plate 10 |   | <i>Ije – Agwo</i>                         | Wave-symbol                               | This motif on <i>Omabe</i> forged knives and other costumes symbolises the snake-like movement of <i>Omabe</i> masquerades                                                          |
| Plate 11 |  | <i>Kpakpando</i>                          | Star                                      | Found on most masquerade costumes, especially <i>Omabe</i> , symbolizing a bright future and abundant blessings.                                                                    |
| Plate 12 |  | <i>Pom-pom/ tupom-tupom</i> (agwugwa-edi) | <b>Dotted/Spot motif</b><br>Leopard spots | The dominant motif on <i>Igele</i> and <i>Edi-ogbene</i> masquerades emblemizing <i>Omabe</i> as spirit in leopard form.                                                            |

## Pictorial Overview



Plate 5: Sun-Rays On Agbaeji Applique and Embroidery Suit.  
©Researcher Arua J.E., 2021



Plate 6: Sun-Rays On *Igele Head Piece*. ©Researcher Arua J.E., 2021

### **Sun-Rays Motifs and Symbols (*anyanwu*)**

The plate 9 drawing on the table above depicts sun rays (*anyanwu*) and it metaphorically symbolizes light and energy that sustains the masking participants and the entire community during and after the performance. It also reflects an explosion of abundant blessings, hope, vibrant, universal coverage, brightness and strands of white wool thread that radiate from the eye position of the *Igele* masquerade to the back of the headpiece. Sun rays are the dominant motifs and symbols of *Igele* and *Agbaeji* masquerades which have inflated their aesthetics and spiritual status and also propel them to earn more reverence than other high-spirited masquerades. According to Onuma Esedu, the intricate symbolic manually rendered embroidery and applique are done on thick fabric materials as a base by the traditional artist. The traditional artist uses strips of fabric material of different colours to superimpose the base beforehand- stitching with threads of contrasting colours on the thick base basically to pervade the metaphoric and symbolic messages of the motifs and symbols, heighten the aesthetics and earn profound veneration in the performance arena.

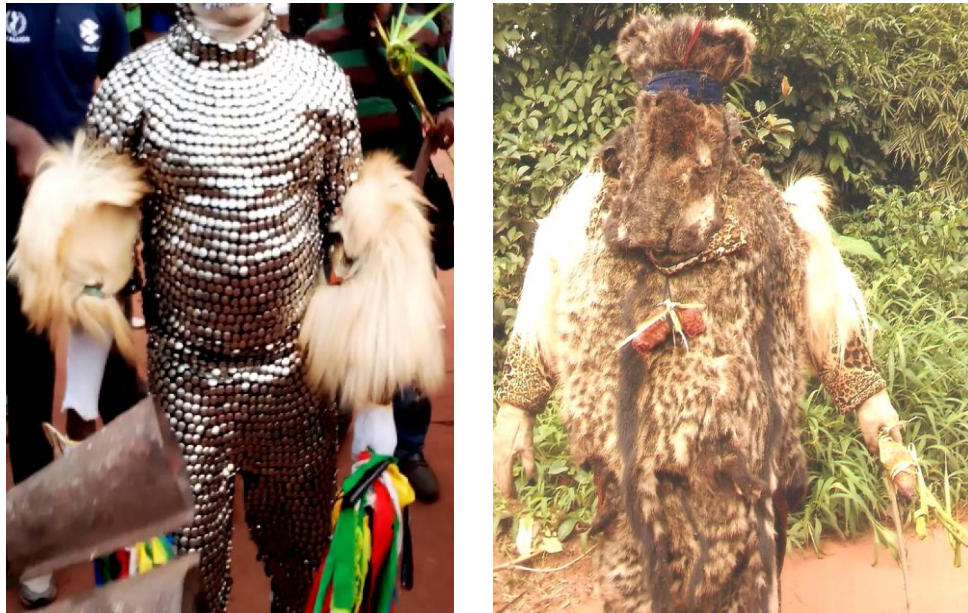


Plate 7: Spirals on Omabe Accessories. ©Researcher Arua J.E., 2021

### **Spiral Motifs and Symbols (okirikiri/akuraaku, agworoagwo):**

The plate 6 on the table above depicts Spirals. Spirals in *Omabe* masking reflect myth. It signifies *Omabe* masking as a phenomenon beyond human understanding and the communion of the dead and the living in the same vicinity. Spirals are profusely harnessed by the traditional artist in the making

of *Agbaeji* and *Igele* masquerades to expand the aesthetics, spiritual status and sustain the mythology that surrounds the overall visual visage. It is usually carved, stitched, painted or embroidered by the traditional artist on costumes and accessories to represent the metaphoric connotation of spiral in Orba- “*okirikiri ka a na-agba ukwu ose, anaghi ari ya elu*”. (pepper tree can be viewed round but cannot be climbed) and “*Omabe bu maa/muo, oma-ama amasi-amasi?*” (*Omabe* spirit is beyond human knowledge). Some prominent Nsukka Art school scholars have ventured creatively beyond the obvious to appropriate these indigenous motifs and symbols to showcase the Igbo artistic idiom. It is pertinent to note that “*Uliism*” of Nsukka Art School and signs and symbols in *Omabe* masking have no significant difference in visual appearance and shares some metaphoric and symbolic connotation in common. Perhaps, this could be as a result of proximity and cross-cultural influence existing between the Nsukka Art School and the Nsukka cultural zone



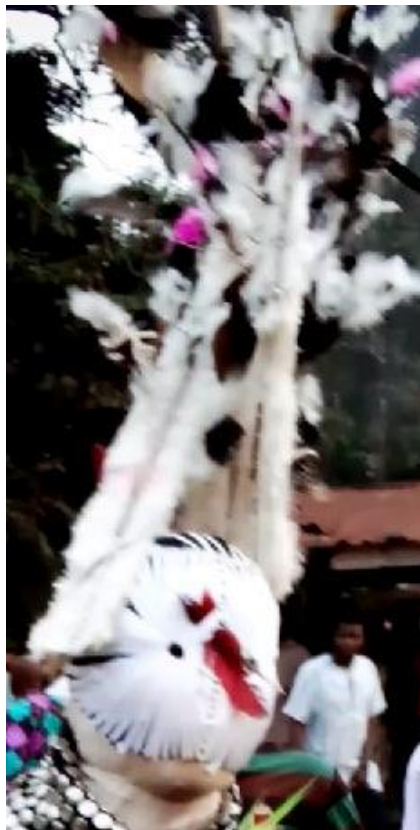
Dotted/ Spot Motifs on *Igele* and *Ediogbene* Masquerades  
©Researcher Arua J.E., 2021

### **Dotted/ Spot Motifs and Symbols (agwugwa-edi/tupom-tupom/pom-pom)**

According to Plate 12 on the table above, dotted/spot motifs and symbols are not ordinary pictures in Orba. It signifies leopard which metaphorically connotes the *Omabe* spirit. Traditional artists have appropriated these dotted/spot motifs and symbols to simulate leopard spots on *Omabe*

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costumes, props and accessories and where the carving, stitching, embroidery and painting of such spots seems impossible, they will alternatively use leopard skin to represent it. This is mostly done because any *Omabe* devoid of either simulated or real spotted materials will be conceived generally as lacking the expected spiritual impetus and profound reverence in the performance arena. *Ediogbene* masquerade above has been covered completely with leopard skin by Makido (the traditional artist) to heighten its spirituality and veneration. On the *Igele* masquerade, dazzling chrome buttons are creatively hand-stitched all over the suit (regalia) to emblemize leopard spots and inflate the spiritual aura and aesthetics. According to Ifeanyi Omeje (*Omabe* cult adept interviewed), countless spots (either implied, simulated or real) on *Omabe* masquerades reflects the innumerable blessings it will provide for the participants after every festive period hence the saying – “*Omabe* na-amaba uzo nuku iheoma “ (*Omabe* that breaks the barrier against abundant blessings)



Feathers (abuba) on Igele head dress ©Researcher Arua J.E., 2021

Plate 1 on the table above depicts FEATHERS (abuba). Almost every *Omabe* masquerade is adorned with feathers of different sizes and colours. Feathers from an eagle, guinea fowl, hen, cork and peacocks are used to form enormous crowns of feathers projecting upwards from the oval-shaped head gears of Agbaeji and the elegant *Igele* masquerades. Metaphorically, the feather reflects leopard whiskers, prestige, kineticism and sustained motion through the air. The traditional artist employs strips of pointed sticks folded with fabric materials (usually locally produced) to hold firm the numerous feathers in an up-ward position. A greater number of feathers indicates the socio-economic and aesthetic status of the group that informed it.

### Conclusions and Recommendations

The objective of this study was to survey the metaphor and symbolism in the *Omabe* masking of Orba Nsukka. The research design was a survey. A simple random sampling technique was used to select one town from *Igbo-Omabe* communities. Four (4) research questions were posed. Interview was used as the primary method of data collection. The data were analyzed based on the research questions. From the study, Motifs and symbols found in *Omabe* masking have metaphoric and symbolic connotations and their potency and essences dwell so much on spiritualism, exorcism, status and aesthetics. Generally, the appearance of *Omabe* masquerade and some deliberately used motifs and symbols reflects, promotes and sustains peace, love, justice, security, respect, sacredness, sanctity, chastity, purity and danger. The drawings on the table above have been explained concisely with the real picture of such a diagram on the masquerade costumes and accessories hence metaphorical, the uncountable spots on *Igele/Echaricha* reflects leopard which symbolizes *Omabe* spirit and the countless blessings it is expected to offer to the cult members, Feather reflects prestige, kineticism, sustained motion in the air and leopard whiskers, spiral symbolizes myth/mysticism of *Omabe* masquerade- a phenomenon beyond human knowledge and communion of the dead and the living and corroborates the Igbo adage –*okirikiri ka a na-agba ukwu ose, anaghi ariya enu* (pepper tree can only be viewed round but cannot be climbed). A few imported materials that have some spiritual and symbolic connotations such as dazzling chrome buttons and fabrics were profusely used to simulate the leopard. Metaphors and symbolisms of indigenous design motifs and symbols in *Omabe* masking have been exposed to both foreign and indigenous scholars who may replicate this work or the like. In other words, it's a convenient umbrella for research scholars that are in search

of Orba cultural symbolic phenomenon and its metaphoric implications. The plethora of *Omabe* motifs and symbols that are profusely appropriated by some Nsukka Art school scholars tend to tilt in favour of the strong assertion that *Omabe* motifs and symbols share the same similarity with “uli” and consequently, the former had a great influence on “Ulist” (Nsukka Art school artistic style). Some of the Nsukka Art School scholars who have gone out of the box to appropriate these signs and symbols greatly in their works are Chike Aniakor, Krydz Ikwemesi and Chijioke Onuora. Legions of traditional and contemporary artists have profusely harnessed varieties of these metaphoric, captivating and provoking motifs and symbols in their art productions. The study has expanded the scope of appreciation of the metaphor and symbolism in *Omabe* masking and recommends that metaphoric motifs and symbols in *Omabe* masking would form a content of study in art education.

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