

MASKING TRADITION IN IPARA-REMO, OGUN STATE, SOUTHWESTERN NIGERIA: A STUDY OF PROVENANCE, FORMS AND COSTUMES OF SOME SELECTED MASQUERADESING

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Abstract

Masking traditions are a prominent socio-cultural practice among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. Though, the study of Yoruba masks has enjoyed the attention of several scholars, both local and foreign, and diverse views have been postulated on how they were perceived, especially in relation to their forms and functions, there has not been any on the masking tradition of Ipara-Remo in Remo division of Ogun State, a Yoruba sub group of Southwestern Nigeria. The most relevant existing work is the one on Egungun masquerades of the Remo Yoruba by Marrilyn H. Houlberg (1978), it was however not sufficiently detailed. This paper therefore presents the findings of a recent research work carried out on masking traditions in Remoland particularly in Ipara-Remo, in Ogun State, southwestern Nigeria. The paper attempts to trace the origin of some of the various existing masking traditions: their imagery/forms, costumes, function as well as the similarities noted in the various types in Ipara-Remo. Three distinct masking traditions were recognized; these are Egungun masks and masquerades, Oro masks and Agemo masks. From these three groups, twenty different masking traditions were identified and examined. Out of these twenty masking traditions, one is found to be of the Oro type, two Agemo type while the remaining seventeen are of



the Egungun type. This may indicate the popularity of Egungun over Oro in Remoland. This paper also attempts a classification by provenance. It classifies Egungun masks into three types: the community owned mask and masquerades, the section/group-owned masks and masquerades and the privately-owned masks and masquerades. Finally, the costumes, carved imagery, and the forms and functions of each of the masks are also discussed against the background of their socio-cultural significance in Ipara-Remo.

Keywords: *Costume, Forms and Functions, Masking Traditions, Socio-Cultural Practice, Remo Division, Yoruba Sub-group, Southwestern Nigeria.*

Introduction

Remo is a Yoruba sub-group of Southwestern Nigeria. It is one of the four major provinces/divisions in Ogun State. Others are Ijebu province, Egba province and Egbado/Awori (now Yewa) province.⁴ Before the unification of the diverse groups of people in Remoland, a recorded intelligence report on the Ijebu/Remo district revealed that there were two conflicting traditions about the origin and history of the Remo⁵. Like some other ancient cities or groups, the sources for the early history of the Remo are also limited to oral tradition, which was carefully handed down by their forefathers. According to Remo mythology, *Akarigbo*, the paramount ruler of Remoland, is said to be a crowned chief of the Irewo quarters in Ile-Ife who migrated with his followers and founded some of the various towns in Remoland. It is also held that the name Remo is derived from the Irewo quarters in Ile-Ife.

Tradition has it that there were thirty-three towns/ villages in the then Ijebu-Remo land. This is why they are referred to as “*Remo metal orogbon*” or “*Remo metalelogbon*”. Which literally means Remo thirty-three traditional towns. But with state creation and boundary adjustments, many of these towns have been grouped with other states, while some others have been put in their proper division. For example, towns like Ikorodu, Imota, Agbowa-Ikosi,

⁴ Adekoya, S. K. 1999. Remo Masking Traditions: A Study of Forms and Function in Ipara Remo. An Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Nigeria

⁵ Abel, A.F. 1935. Assistant District Officer. "Recorded Intelligence Report on Ijebu-Remo District.

Igbogbo and Epe are now in Lagos State, while Odogbolu, Okun-Owa, and Aiyeye, which were formerly classified among the thirty-three towns in Ijebu-Remo according to Abel in his reports, are now under the jurisdiction of the Awujale of Ijebuland. This leaves about twelve major towns/villages and twelve quarters in Sagamu, leaving twenty-four towns/ villages/ quarters as present-day Remo.

Ipara Remo is a town in the Remo North Local Government area in Remo province of Ogun State. It is the last Remo town to the north that shares a boundary with Ibadan in the present Oyo State. It is one of the towns that claim migration from Ile-Ife. There are two conflicting traditions about how Ipara-Remo was founded. The first version of the traditions reveals that Oguola, a hunter - warrior and a prince of Iremo quarters in Ile-Ife and his wife Oroye, founded Ipara-Remo. According to tradition, Oguola and Oroye left Ile-Ife to hunt and while in the forest hunting, they got to the place now known as Ipara-Remo. They consulted an oracle, and the oracle instructed them to settle there, assuring them of prosperity. It is possible that Oguola knew that he might not return to Ile-Ife, so he carried along with him his paraphernalia of office, such as the staff, a beaded crown decorated with sixteen birds (*Ade Eleye merindinlogun*). As a warrior, he carried his Dane gun, spear and arrow, which he used in hunting.

The second version also has it that the same Oguola, a warrior and a prince from Iremo quarters in Ile-Ife, and his wife Oroye, founded Ipara. It, however, holds that before they departed from Ile-Ife, they consulted an Ifa oracle who gave them an Iron chain which they dropped on the ground and followed its movement to the final destination. The chain is said to have gone under the ground before reappearing at a place where it directed them to settle. The chain came out of the ground at a place called *EJINA* in Ipara-Remo. This is why the people of Ipara-Remo are referred to as *Omo atile run bi atorin*, meaning: “the people that grew up from the soil like whip”. Because the other end of the iron chain that Oguola and Oroye followed to Ipara is still believed to be at Iremo quarters in Ile-Ife, the people of Ipara are greeted as *Omo Ojumo to mo loni, Iyen ti Olufe, Ile to mo loni, Iyen ti Onipara*, meaning “Today’s dawn belongs to Olufe, today’s daybreak, all for Onipara”. Also, because they followed an iron chain underground moving like a snake, they are called *Omo a fi ewon rin bi ejo*, meaning: “the people who travel with an iron chain moving like a snake” .

Ipara-Remo occupies a unique position in Yorubaland. It was a permanent military base for the Ijebu and Remo warriors during the various Yoruba intertribal wars. Oral tradition has it that Ipara-Remo was the only town in the entire Ijebu and Remo that was never conquered. It was revealed that Oguola loved his children so much that he built an underground bunker to hide them during warfare in order to save them from the aggression of the enemies who might want to take them as slaves. This is why Ipara people are referred to as *Omo a ba ile soro kile lanu*, meaning: "Descendant of he, whose command opens up the ground".

Relationship between *Oro* and *Egungun*

Early scholars who have at one time or another written on *Oro* and *Egungun* regarded them as secret cults and men's deities, which perform the same functions as intermediaries or links between the living and the dead (ancestors). Morton-Williams once reiterates that since both *Oro* and *Egungun* perform identical functions, traditions should present them as brothers⁶, but, in fact, they do not have much in common. For instance, *Egungun* is a secret cult that allows women membership, while *Oro*, on the other hand, does not give room for any woman participation: it is strictly forbidden for women to know its secret. According to Afolabi, *Oro* is regarded as the head of all deities⁷, while Ogunba claims that *Oro* is as old as man on earth⁸. However, for the purpose of this study, some aspects of *Oro* masking traditions would be examined alongside *Egungun*, which is more prominent in Ipara -Remo.

Origin of *Egungun* (Masking Tradition) in Remoland

Egungun are regarded as the collective spirits of the ancestors who occupy a space in heaven; hence they are referred to as *Ara Orun*, meaning "dwellers of heaven". These ancestral spirits are believed to be in constant watch over the people on earth. They bless, protect, warn and punish their earthly relatives depending on how their relatives remember or neglect them. The ancestral spirits have collective functions that cut across lineage and family loyalty. They

⁶ Morton-Williams, P. 1956. "The Egungun Society in Southern Yoruba Kingdom" Proceedings of the third Annual Conference of the West African Institute of Social and Economic Research Ibadan, 90-103.

⁷ Afolabi, S.O. 1998. Oro festival Music in Oyo Town, Unpublished M.A. Dissertation, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

⁸ Ogunba, O. 1973. *Yoruba Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: University Press.

collectively protect the community against evil spirits, epidemics, witchcraft and evildoers, ensuring the well-being, prosperity and productivity of the whole community in general. This is why they are celebrated annually.

Egungun appearances reassure the Yoruba of life after death. Every member of a Yoruba community seems to be involved in the worship of *Egungun*, since everybody has at least one ancestor to call upon. Nevertheless, men are more exposed to *Egungun* mystery than women, and only the members of the *Egungun* society know the secrets and functions of *Egungun*. In essence, *Egungun* tradition is a secret cult just like *Oro* and *Agemo*. Few women know the *Egungun* mystery, and such women are not to divulge the secrets of the cult. They adhere strongly to the saying that:

*Aya Oje lo le mo,
Bobirin ba mo awo,
ko gbodo so*

Meaning:

It is only the wife of an *Egungun* cult member who can know their secret
If women know cult secrets,
They must never tell.

The origin of *Egungun* in Yorubaland has attracted some discussions by different scholars and researchers. These early writers on the origin of *Egungun* in Yorubaland found out that written materials about the cult are scarce, so they have had to rely on oral traditions and rituals relating to *Egungun*. The principal sources of studies of *Egungun* are *Odu-lfa* (*Ifa*-Corpus) and *Esa Egungun* (chants). Traditions collected during *Egungun* festivals and professional *Egungun* entertainments supplement these sources, while information from a few secondary sources is employed by them. One is aware of the limitations of oral traditions, but they are capable of giving a fairly accurate account of what is described in the oral traditions. They tend to emphasise the myths and legends or give religious interpretation to historical events. Both the *Egungun* chant and *lfa*-Corpus could be subjectively rendered depending on who recites them.

They could even be distorted or falsified. However, if they could be weighed along with other sources, it may be possible to attempt some plausible explanations for these traditions.

According to Morgan, Iba Oluyole was the man who introduced the *Egungun* masquerade to the Remo⁹. It is said that during an *Egungun* festival, one *Egungun* masquerade annoyed him so much that, in anger, he sold him as a slave, fully clad in his *Egungun* regalia, to an Ijebu-Remo slave trader. The man took the *Egungun* to Remo, where the particular *Egungun* began to teach the secrets of the *Egungun* cult to the Ijebu. With this act by Iba Oluyole, *Egungun* drummers in Ipara Remo added this verse to the *Egungun* praise name:

Egungun kan ko de Ijebu ri.

Iba' lo m'egungun wo'gbo Remo:

Egun' f'aso. Iyanda si fa so

Ebe I'ambe "Yanda ko to faso

Egungun sile.

Meaning:

Egungun never entered Ijebuland before

It is Iba Oluyole who introduced *Egungun* to the forest of Remo.

Egungun wanted to keep his regalia

Iyanda also wanted the regalia

We have to appeal to Iyanda before he can allow the *Egungun* to go away fully clad in his regalia.

“ Another tradition”, according to Ogunba, states that Remo towns received *Egungun* from their Egba neighbours¹⁰, while the people of Ijebu Igbo received the cult from Ibadan. The cult was introduced into Ife, Ijesa and Ekiti communities by the fleeing emigrants from the northern Yoruba towns that were deserted in the early 19th century and since then, *Egungun* has become

⁹ Morgan, K. 1985. *Egungun Masquerades in Ibadan: A study of the Origin and Forms of Major Masquerades*, Ibadan: Chipman and Hall.

¹⁰ Ogunba, O. 1973. *Yoruba Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: University Press.

a Yoruba ancestral cult. Ogunba¹¹ maintains that the *Oba* of each community found the cult a useful weapon for political, economic and social control of their people.

Mangiri posited that masking is the most popular, the most versatile, and the most entertaining public performance in most ethnic groups in Africa¹². This acceptability by the people and frequent display that unite and invigorate different groups weary of domestic activities in an area makes it a tradition. Masked figures, which are generally face coverings used largely in ritual activities, disguise the wearer and usually communicate an alternate identity that is believed to be a spirit entity¹³.

Provenance of *Egungun* in Ipara

According to oral tradition, the first *Egungun* to be seen in Ipara town is *Elegbojo* or *Egbojo* (Figure 1). "*Egbojo*" is said to have come from Oyo during the reign of *Alaafin* Abiodun Atiba in the 18th century. This masquerade is believed to have come into the town one afternoon and started moving about. The first compound it entered was the Oloyede family compound because it heard the sound of a drum coming from the compound. But when the masquerade entered the compound, it was not well received. The reception was so poor that the masquerade left the place and later went to a place called Ijabata and met a member of the Bisayo family who happened to be a renowned *Gangan* (talking drum) drummer. It was received well, and since then, the Bisayo family has been the custodian of the first *Egungun* in the town. *Elegbojo* is so respected among the *Egungun* cult in the town that during any of their functions, it is accorded a respected position. The popular saying in Yorubaland that *Elegbojo ni Baba Egungun*, meaning: "*Elegbojo is the father of all Egungun*", substantiates this.

¹¹ Ogunba, O. 1973. *Yoruba Traditional Religion*, Ibadan: University Press.

¹² Mangiri, S.G. 2014. "Masking Art Tradition as a Cultural Manifestation of Olugbobiri People of Nigeria", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*, 4(11).

¹³ Mangiri, S.G. 2014. "Masking Art Tradition as a Cultural Manifestation of Olugbobiri People of Nigeria", *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*,



Figure 1:

Elegbojo Masquerade in Ipara-Remo

Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya (1996)

Origin of *Oro* Cult in Ipara-Remo

According to Finni Sopenu¹⁴ and Soboye Sunday,¹⁵ both the *Alaha Oro* and *Olumale Oro* (the two major leaders of the *Oro* cult), respectively in Ipara-Remo, it was never heard in any of the existing traditions of the town that the *Oro* cult was introduced to the town from somewhere else. This is why they refer to their *Oro* headpiece as *Isese Ipara* (Ancient and Indigenous), this

¹⁴ Oral interview held with Pa. Sopenu Finni, Age: 85, *Alaha Oro* (Leader of *Oro* Cult) at Ipara-Remo, *Conversation with one of the authors*, 1998.

¹⁵ Oral interview held with Pa. Soboye Sunday, Age: 85, *Olumale Oro* (Leader of *Oro* Cult) in Ipara-Remo, *Conversation with one of the authors*, 1998.

is to say that the *Oro* cult may have started in Ipara-Remo. But when its origin is not known, this information could be plausible if Fadipe's assertion that the *Oro* mystery is of greater importance among the Ijebu and Egba than between any other Yoruba sub-group", is anything to go by¹⁶. More so, during the period mentioned above by Fadipe in his assertion, all the present Remo towns, including Ipara, were regarded as Ijebu.

Traditional festivals constitute an important aspect of the socio-cultural life of the Yoruba. It has been mentioned earlier that the *Oro* cult dovetails into the *Egungun* cult. *Oro* and *Egungun* festivals, as well as others, are celebrated elaborately annually between September and December in Ipara-Remo. This period is known as *Abo ojo* or *Abo'jo*, meaning: "dry season when rainfall had stopped for the year, and farmers have little or no work in the farm", when different types and shapes of masks are used for cultural festivals and various other activities ranging from dances to rituals and traditional competitions.

The African Concept of the Mask

There has not been a universal definition for the word 'mask'. The availability of many kinds and different styles in various places gave it its multi-purpose nature, which has even made it somehow difficult for people to arrive at or agree on a particular and acceptable definition. For instance, to some people, it is a representation of an ancestral spirit. Some people see it as a protector, while some see it as an object of play used in entertainment or to derive fun. Hence, people tend to define it the way they perceive it, or based on the purpose it serves them. For instance, Casimir, Nwakego and Umezinwa posited that in Africa, a mask is fundamentally a spiritual and metaphysical value before it is transformed into a socio-cultural value that helps the African people to create their sense of what constitutes order, law, authority and the proper way people should be governed¹⁷. They maintained further that masks are representations of the African ancestral origin and authority that account for what constitutes human value, worth and meaning. They believe that the spiritual ancestors are the source of life, order and continuity in any African society.

¹⁶ Fadipe, N. A. 1991. *The Sociology of the Yoruba*, Ibadan: University Press.

¹⁷ Casimir, K.C.A., Nwakego, O. S. & Umezinwa, E. 2015. "Masking Traditions and Their Behavioral Functions in Accounting for Stability and Order: A Critical Exposition of Select Study of West, East and Central African Masks", *Open Journal of Political Science*, 5, 115-127.

Oyejide asserts that the mask is as old as man's history, and the importance of the mask cannot be overemphasised in any given environment among the Yoruba¹⁸. It is regarded as a vital entity in the African socio-cultural life. Mask, in the African setting, is conceived as a false face or covering for the face, often shaped to form a representation of human or animal features. A mask is also perceived to be a form of disguise. It is an object that is frequently worn over or in front of the face to hide the identity of a person and his features, to establish another being. These essential characteristics of hiding and revealing personalities or moods are common to all masks. However, Hornby defines a mask as a covering for part or all of the face, worn to hide or protect it or something that covers the face and has another face painted on it.¹⁹

There are many kinds and different styles of masks in various places. This illustrates both the underlying purpose of commemorating and continuing the power of the ancestors and also the great variety of art forms in Africa. Masks may also differ in style from figures because of the manner in which they are used or because of the differing rates of destruction and replacement. Some masks are naturalistic: pleasant or impassive, some are terrifying, and others are abstract or formal; however, whatever their forms, they illustrate the universal conviction that "Death is not the end of human life". Although men whose bodies are hidden under robes, wear masks, they are supposed to represent spirits who must not be referred to as human beings.

Mask makers have shown great resourcefulness in selecting and combining materials for their production, among such materials are: wood, animal skin/leather, metals, shells, fibre, mat, clothes, and thread. In some cases, raffia is used. Generally, masks are used with a costume, often so complete that they cover the whole body of the wearer. The masks are made of a great variety of materials, all of which have a symbolic connection with the mask's total imagery.

Classification of the Masking Traditions in Ipara Remo

Masking traditions in Ipara-Remo fall into three major groups: (i) *Egungun* masquerades; (ii) *Oro* masks; (iii) *Agemo*. Having discussed the origin of the *Egungun* masquerade and the *Oro*

¹⁸ Oyejide, J.O. 1989. "The importance of masks to the inhabitants of Aramoko in Ekiti West Local Government", Unpublished N.C.E. Project, Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria.

¹⁹ Hornby, A.S. 2000. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Oxford: University Press.

cult, respectively, and their relationships, it is considered imperative to distinguish between masks and masquerades. Although they are two different entities, they dovetail to form the two paraphernalia usually used in *Oro*, *Agemo* and *Egungun* cult activities.

Mask: According to Wingert, masks have served an important role as a means of discipline and have been used to admonish²⁰. Common in China, Africa, Oceania, and [North America](#), admonitory masks usually completely cover the features of the wearer. Some [African peoples](#) hold that the first mask to be used was an admonitory one. Cole (1985), cited in Casimir et al., informed that African masks should be seen as part of a ceremonial costume²¹. They are used in religious and social events to represent the spirits of ancestors or to control the good and evil forces in the community. They come to life, possessed by their spirit in the performance of the dance, and are enhanced by both the music and atmosphere of the occasion. Some combine human and animal features to unite man with his natural environment. Alluding to the foregoing, Wingert, while analysing mask of wood, shell, cloth, raffia, and pigment from the Kuba Culture of the Democratic Republic of Congo, observed that many masks are primarily associated with ceremonies that have religious and social significance or are concerned with funerary customs, fertility rites, or the curing of sickness²². Other masks are used on festive occasions or to portray characters in a dramatic performance and in reenactments of mythological events²³. Masks are also used for warfare and as protective devices in particular activities or during inclement weather²⁴. In many cultures throughout the world, a judge wore a mask to protect himself from future recriminations. In this instance, the mask represents a traditionally sanctioned spirit from the past who assumes responsibility for the decision levied on the culprit²⁵. Whereas, Casimir et al noted that many African societies see masks as mediators between the living world and the supernatural world of the dead,

²⁰ Wingert, P. S. 2024. Encyclopedia Britannica online

²¹ Casimir, K.C.A., Nwakego, O. S. & Umezina, E. 2015. "Masking Traditions and Their Behavioral Functions in Accounting for Stability and Order: A Critical Exposition of Select Study of West, East and Central African Masks", *Open Journal of Political Science*, 5, 115-127.

²² Wingert, P.S. 2024. Encyclopedia Britannica online

²³ Wingert, P.S. 2024. Encyclopedia Britannica online

²⁴ Wingert, P.S. 2024. Encyclopedia Britannica online

²⁵ Wingert, P.S. 2024. Encyclopedia Britannica online

ancestors and other entities²⁶. They posited that masks became and still become the attribute of a dressed-up dancer who gave it life and word at the time of ceremonies²⁷.

In this study, a mask could be defined as any material, be it wood, raffia, mat, leather, fabrics, beads, ivory, coral, plastic, metal, or other materials, often shaped to form a representation of human or animal features meant to obscure one's identity: it is a form of disguise. Masks could be grouped into a facemask or a helmet mask. Whichever way, it is an object that is worn over or in front of the face to hide the identity of a person and, by that, establish a new or a strange being. These characteristics of obscuring and revealing a personality's mood are common to all masks. However, the purpose for which the mask is made determines its features, as observed by Bleakley, that "one should be able to ascertain the function of a mask through its form, being beautiful or terrifying"²⁸.

Masquerade: It is another concept that does not agree with a single or universal definition. Jegede defines it as an entity, which includes mask, colourful costume, drumming and singing²⁹. Whereas Pemberton sees it as the totality of the costume/regalia, including mask and other figures/image(s) that may be present as part of the costume used in Egungun and other cult activities³⁰. From these two definitions, it is possible to say that a mask is a unit among many other items that make a masquerade among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. But, then the definition by Jegede sounds more plausible because of its composition, which includes an entity (a living being) and a living being, as we are all aware, carries the costume. Although they (masquerades) are regarded as ancestral spirits, this definition cannot be considered as universal or sufficient to adequately explain the meaning and scope of the concept of masquerade. While the Yoruba see it as representation of their ancestral Spirit (*Ara-Orun*) who is invited to visit the earth physically, the Igbo regard it as masked Spirit used in all that is held

²⁶ Casimir, K.C.A., Nwakego, O. S. & Umezina, E. 2015. "Masking Traditions and Their Behavioral Functions in Accounting for Stability and Order: A Critical Exposition of Select Study of West, East and Central African Masks", *Open Journal of Political Science*, 5, 115-127.

²⁷ Casimir, K.C.A., Nwakego, O. S. & Umezina, E. 2015. "Masking Traditions and Their Behavioral Functions in Accounting for Stability and Order: A Critical Exposition of Select Study of West, East and Central African Masks", *Open Journal of Political Science*,

²⁸ Bleakly, R. 1978. *African Masks*, London: Thames and Hudson

²⁹ Jegede, D. 1988. *Art by metamorphosis: selection of African Art from the Spellman College Collection*, Binghamton: Spellman College, Atlanta Georgia.

³⁰ Pemberton, J. 1978. "Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba", *African Arts*, 2(3), 65-76

secret, mythical, magical, mysterious and supernatural while the Mama people of Jos Plateau see the appearance of masquerades as something connected with agricultural festivals: masquerades appear at different stages of the agricultural cycle, for funerals of cult members and to commemorate their legendary hero who taught them their agricultural skill.

From the above definitions of mask and masquerade, one can easily say that a mask is only worn on the head or face alone, while a masquerade means a container or a reliquary that houses an entity: the costume covers the whole or every part of the wearer to the extent that no part is exposed or revealed to the public. Mask or masquerade could be grouped into two: (1) Zoomorphic; (2) Biomorphic/Anthropomorphic. Zoomorphic: These are masks and masquerades that are styled in the form of animals; a typical example in Ipara-Remo is the *Ekun* (Leopard) mask (Figures 2a and 2b). Biomorphic/Anthropomorphic: These are masks and masquerades derived from, related to, or incorporating the form of living beings or human attributes into their total imagery. Interestingly, Ipara masking traditions cover the two groups.



Figure 2a:
Ekun (Leopard) Masquerade in Ipara-Remo
Source: Bisola Adewale Adekoya, (2021)

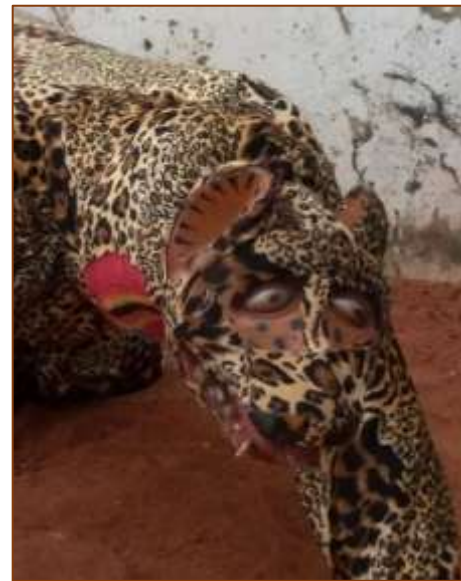


Figure 2b:
Carved Leopard Mask attached to the
Costume
Source: Bisola Adewale Adekoya (2021)

Ipara-Remo town is divided into two major quarters (Esepe and Oke-Aro), almost equally by the market road that passes through the town. These divisions bring about an interesting competition, especially in *Egungun* and *Oro* festival activities as well as during some other prominent social-cultural activities like *Ayo* game, hunting expedition and sporting activities during their Oguola's (founder's) day celebration. Masking tradition falls into three groups: *Egungun* masquerades, *Oro* and *Agemo/Olire* cult activities. During this research, it was discovered that these *Egungun* masquerades and the masks used in *Oro* cult activities, respectively, are varied in styles, techniques and purposes. Among the existing *Egungun* masquerades in the town are *Elegbojo* (Figure 1), *Ekun* (Figure 2), *Oroku* (Figure 3), *Oyeniwo* (Figure 4), *Bata* (Figure 5) selected for this paper; others are: *Agbomola*, *Layole*, *Onisigu*, *Etiyeri*, *Ape*, *Asofo*, *Saba*, *Lyalode*, *Olabode* and *Aiyekonogbon*, etc.

Those used in *Oro* cult activities include "*Isese Ipara*" (Oro head piece), and that of *Agemo/Onire* is the *Olire*, which is also known as *Boromo Ipara* (Figure 6) and *Agemo* (Figure 8-10). Scholars like Adepegba³¹, Houlberg³², Drewal³³ and Pemberton³⁴, who have written on the masks and masquerades in Yorubaland at one time or another, made several classifications based on the forms, functions and costumes of the masquerades as well as their stylistic group, type and the geographical location of the masks. There has not been any classification by provenance of these paraphernalia used in *Oro* and *Egungun* cult activities. Hence, the submission by these scholars is based on their observational perspective of masks and masquerades with strong aesthetic connotations as opposed to the functional roles of deities ascribe to them by the owners. However, the reliability of the custodians/aides and worshippers on the supernatural power of the masks and masquerades indicates that they have a deeper meaning within the society in which they exist. Hitherto, this research work classifies the ownership of the existing masking traditions in Ipara-Remo into three groups, as shown in the table below.

³¹Adepegba, C.O. 1984. Yoruba Egungun: Its Association with Ancestors and the typology of Yoruba Masquerades by their Costume. Seminar Paper, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

³² Houlberg, H. Marilyn 1978. "Egungun masquerades of the Remo Yoruba", *African Arts*, 2(3), 20.

³³ Drewal, H. J. 1978. "The Art of Egungun among the Yoruba peoples", *African Art*, 11, 18-19.

³⁴Pemberton, J. 1978. "Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba". *African Arts*, 2(3), 65-76

Table 1: Classification of masking tradition in Ipara-Remo

OWNERSHIP	EGUNGUN	ORO/AGEMO
Community	<i>Elegbojo Oroku</i>	<i>Onire (Boromo Ipara), Agemo</i>
Section/Group	<i>Agbomola, Layole, Onisigu, Ape, Ekun (Leopard), Asofo/Lagbaji.</i>	<i>Isese Ipara</i>
Private	<i>Bata, Oyeniwo, Saba, lyalode, Olabode, Aiyekonogbon, Etiyeri</i>	

From the table above, one can see that private individuals do not own the *Oro* or *Agemo* masks. However, for more clarification on the forms and functions of the masking traditions, each tradition will be discussed one after the other according to its ownership group.

Egungun Masquerade Morphology and Functions

As earlier stated, out of the twenty different masking traditions examined for this study, fifteen belong to the *Egungun* masquerade cult group. These are: *Elegbojo, Oroku/Aara, Agbomola, Layole, Onisigu, Asunmo, Lyalode, Ekun, Saba, Bata, Aiyekonogbon, Asafo, Ape, Oyeniwo, Etiyeri* and *Olabode*. Seven of them make use of masks made from wood and other assorted materials, ranging from fabrics to beads. Each of the two major quarters in Ipara town has its own masquerades, similar in both forms and functions to the other quarters, except that their names differ. For example, in Esepe Quarters, there is *Agbomola*, which is similar in form and function to *Layole* owned by the Oke-Aro/Igodo Quarters. The ownership of these masquerades is categorised into three:

- (1) Those that are owned by the community at large
- (2) Those owned by different sections/groups
- (3) Those owned by private individuals.

The above forms the basis of how the *Egungun* masquerade morphology and functions will be discussed. Among the *Egungun* masquerades owned by the community are *Elegbojo* and *Oroku*. Those owned by the different sections/groups are *Agbomola, Layole, Onisigu,* and *Ape*, while privately owned masquerades include *Bata, Saba, Lyalode, Ekun, and Olabode*.

Selected Masquerades and their Costumes

Costume, according to Hornby, is defined as the clothes worn by people from a particular place or during a particular historical period. It is also defined as the clothes worn by actors in a play or film/movie, or worn by somebody to make them look like something else³⁵. The last sentence here well defines the use of costume for masquerading. Masquerade costumes in Ipara-Remo are made from different materials of different colours, ranging from hand-woven fabrics (*Aso-Oke*), raffia, mats, velvets, Ankara and poplins. Costume is one of the identifiable or distinguishing factors in masking tradition in Ipara-Remo.

Elegbojo or Egbojo (Figure 1): This is said to be the first *Egungun* masquerade to be seen in Ipara-Remo, as believed by the people. It came from Oyo during the reign of Alaafin Abiodun Atiba in the 18th century. *Elegbojo* appears very simple and naturalistic in form. The costume is made of expensive dark blue hand-woven material: 'Aso Oke', sewn into a simple, loose, long and almost sack-like shape. Its short and loose leggings are joined straight to the trunk, made without any outlet for the arms. As such, the masquerade keeps its hands inside the costume. No sculpture (mask) is employed (as the headpiece of the costume), nor is any material attached to it. This costume completely covers the wearer to the extent that no part of the wearer's body is exposed or revealed to the public. In the face, a net often woven from threads of different colours is attached to provide a space for vision for the wearer who enters the costume through a slit created at one side of the costume.

Egbojo is owned by the community at large. It is accorded the respect to dance last during *Egungun* cult activities. It dances at a very slow pace typical of old age. Apart from dancing last during functions, it carries the "Obuko" (He-goat) that the *Egungun* cult members use in the burial ceremony of their dead member. The he-goat is usually carried from the deceased's house to the grave where the rituals will be performed. When this is done, the people say: *Egbojo ti gbe Obuko*, meaning *Egbojo* has carried the *Obuko* (He-goat). It is also used in fertility rituals for barren women.

³⁵ Hornby, A.S. 2000. *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, Oxford: University Press

Ekun (Leopard Mask) Figure 2: It is the only masquerade that falls into the zoomorphic/animal form types of *Egungun* in the town. It belongs to the Ogbodo/Oliwo compound in the Ijabata area of the Oke/Aro section of the town. According to Chief Sobade Lolade Sosanwo, the idea of 'Ekun mask' started a long time ago in the town and later died down for some time before Late Pa Teriba Awotola Sowanwo revitalised it³⁶. The *Ekun* costume is composed of two parts: (i) a Leopard face helmet-type mask attached to the costume, which is sewn in the form of an animal (Leopard) shape with the legs and hands well defined, (ii) a small tail at the buttocks and a net on the face of the masquerade under the helmet mask through which it sees. The masquerade is always in a crawling position. Apart from the fact that the leopard's face is naturally depicted on the helmet-type headpiece, the personal identity of the masquerade is obscured, but takes the form of a life leopard. The leopard mask is carved in such a way that it depicts a hungry and salivating leopard with its mouth wide open. Its ears are straightened up, and its eyes are also open *in search of prey*. *Ekun* is employed for entertainment during festivals and burial ceremonies. It is magical and skilful; it climbs and descends trees and roofs with a thread.

Oroku/Aara: *Oroku* (Figure 3) is said to have been brought to the town from Ede, a town in the present Osun State, Southwest Nigeria, by Sanni Inaibi, who went with some other people from Ipara to fight a war, which they eventually won. *Oroku* Masquerade happened to be the head of the slaves at Ede by then. This is why it is praised as: *Oroku Anijalapo Baba Eru Ede*, meaning *Oroku*, the troublesome father of the slaves at Ede.

³⁶ Oral interview held with Chief Sosanwo Sobade Lolade, Age: 65, Baale Ajagba Village, *Conversation with the authors*, 2021



Figure 3:

Oroku Anijalapo masquerade, Ipara-Remo

Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya (2020)

Its costume is made of expensive fabric materials ranging from stripped hand-woven material (*Aso Oke*) to a plain red poplin fabric material. The *Aso Oke* is sewn into a simple, loose, long, sack-like costume. In this costume, the hands are separated, unlike in *Elegbojo's* costume, in which the hands of the masquerade are in the costume. The masquerade, after wearing the sack-like *Aso Oke* from the top, folds the remaining portion behind, and a rope is used to tie it neatly to the body with some piece of cloth tied to the belly to make it look obese. The red poplin fabric is sewn into "*Dansiki*" (a small flowing gown), which is worn on top of the sack-like costume. The "*Dansiki*" is often decorated on the shoulder with the military sergeant rank: this is to show that the *Oroku* masquerade was used at Ede to guard slaves. There is also a net on its

face through which the masquerade sees. By the left hand-side of the forehead is a ball-like attachment, which is believed to house some magical (supernatural) powers. The people call it "Akara" (bean cake). So they address *Oroku* as '*Alakara gudugbe*' (One with a big bean cake).

Except for the obscured personal identity under the face net, the total imagery has a male adult shape with a big tummy. To show how troublesome it is, it often carries whips and pursues children and adults who tease it. Also, it normally carries a bag where it keeps its gift items. According to Pa. Raimi Sobanke the custodian, the masquerade is so powerful and magical to the extent that in the past, it used bare feet to quench burning fire and used bare hands to remove boiling palm kernel from fire and take it to the *Osugbo*: it was decreed that nobody should boil palm oil around the huts that people were living in then and people used to violate this law. Hence, the owner of the palm kernel will pay a fine to the *Osugbo*³⁷. The elders in the town now recognised the unique strength of the masquerade, such that whenever they had to perform any sacrificial rites, they call upon it to carry out the rituals wherever they should be taken. *Oroku* also pulls a crowd during *Egungun* cult functions.

Oyeniwo Masquerade (Figure 4): *Oyeniwo* masquerade is owned by an individual. *Oyeniwo* masquerade activities in the town started around the early 80s. It was introduced to Ipara-Remo from Ilara-Remo in Remo North Local Government Area of Ogun State by one late traditional Chief called Osoro Baba Ojo. This masquerade costume composed of three parts, the leggings made separately into a pair of trousers; the underwear takes care of the chest and the hands with gloves covering the fingers while the big costume is made up of expensive fabric materials, all of bright and contrasting colours of '*Aso-oke*', damask, Ankara and velvets in a patch work of long thin pieces joined to the helmet that holds the Cow horns. *Oyeniwo* masquerade is mainly for entertainment during festivals and other ceremonies.

³⁷ Oral interview held with Pa. Raimi Sobanke, Age: 85, The *Oroku* Custodian. *Conversation with the authors, 1998*



Figure 4a:

Oyeniwo in Ipara-Remo

Source: Bisola Adewale Adekoya, (2021)



Figure 4b:

Oyeniwo in Ipara-Remo

Source: Bisola Adewale Adekoya, (2021)

Bata (Figure 5): It is the most common type of masquerade in the town. It is owned by individuals (young or old). It resembles '*Elegbojo*'. The only difference is that *Elegbojo* is bald while the *Bata* masquerade has rectangular-shaped leather with which animal (Ram) fur is attached to its head. *Bata* costumes are made of fabric, mostly blue or black marocain and striped materials, sewn into a sack-like shape costume with a face net through which the masquerade sees. From the forehead down to the chest is an overspread of a rectangular-shaped cloth with a panel and bits of cloth of bright and contrasting colours. There is no outlet for the arms in the *Bata's* costume; the masquerade keeps his hands inside the costume just as in *Elegbojo's* costume. The costume completely covers the masquerade, and the masquerade's personal identity is thereby hidden from the public. This type of masquerade is the one to which Adepegba³⁸, Drewal³⁹ and Pemberton⁴⁰ refer to as *Egungun onidan*, meaning: "Performer of Miracles".

³⁸ Adepegba, C. O. 1984. Yoruba Egungun: It's Association with Ancestors and the typology of Yoruba Masquerades by their Costume. Seminar Paper, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

³⁹ Drewal, H.J. 1978. "The Art of Egungun among the Yoruba Peoples", *African Art*, 11, 18-19.

⁴⁰ Pemberton, J. 1978. "Egungun Masquerades of the Igbomina Yoruba". *African Arts*, 2(3), 65-76



Figure 5:

Bata masquerades and one of their aides in Ipara-Remo

Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya (2020)

Origin and Ownership of *Oro* and *Agemo* Masks in Ipara Remo

Onire/Olire Boromo Ipara (Figure 6): It is a dance mask owned by the entire community. There are two conflicting traditions about its origin in Ipara-Remo. The first tradition, according to Mureni Ogunleye, has it that *Onire* was imported into the town from Idomowo Quarters in Ijebu-Ode by a group of brass-smiths who came to the town on a business trip and discovered that the place was prosperous and decided to stay there⁴¹. This tradition is questionable because, although there is *Onire* and *Agemo* masking tradition in Ijebu Ode, women are forbidden to watch their activities, while in Ipara-Remo and other Remo towns, women are permitted to watch *Onire/Agemo* activities. See (Figures 6-9)

⁴¹ Oral interview held with Mureni Ogunleye, Age: 70, Retired Secondary School Teacher, *Conversation with the authors*, 2021.

The second tradition of origin is by Nosiru Awosola⁴² and Oguntayo Ogunyabo⁴³, who asserted that *Onire* was brought to the town from Ile-Ife and it is regarded as a living deity (*Orisa*), rather than the *Egungun* that represents the spirit of the dead ancestors. The Ife tradition is more plausible as the true origin of *Onire* in Ipara Remo. This is because it resembles the descriptive account of “Igbo masquerade that was used as a stratagem by which the Igbo disguised themselves to terrorise and plunder the Oduduwa group who drove them out of Ife”⁴⁴. But then it was not conceived as a deity. Its costume is made of *Iko* (raffia) fibre runs of different colours, which covers the wearer from head to toes and a headpiece known as 'Ade'(Crown) made of polished red coral with nine chameleons built around it and a parrot feather standing upright on top of the 'Ade'. It is the tallest of all the masking traditions (about 9ft). It is huge and round in shape, like a standing log of wood, with the coral headpiece seated firmly on top of it. It is also the most striking and magnificent in appearance. Because of this unique size and round form, it is being praised as: *Omo oyi rara woja*, meaning: The one who walks majestically and roundly into the market.

Agemo (Figures 7-10): The Community at large also owns *Agemo*, a dance mask. Both *Agemo* and *Onire* usually perform the same day, but in most cases *Agemo* performs before *Onire*. They have the same tradition of origin and the same sets of people who are the custodians of *Agemo* are also the keepers of *Onire*. *Agemo* is simple but unique in appearance. Its costume is made of raffia, woven into a local mat with pigments used to draw lines and different shapes on the mat. The wearer rolls the mat around himself. The total imagery looks like a barrel. There is no specific portion for vision for the wearer; he probably sees through the tiny space in between the warp strands of the mat. It is magical: the wearer can turn or change into various things during the performance. It is regarded as a deity, and people worship it.

⁴² Oral interview held with Nosiru Awosola, Age: 75, *Agemo* Devotee in Ipara-Remo, *Conversation with the authors*, 1998

⁴³ Oral interview held with Oguntayo Ogunyabo, Age: 75, Oke-Aro Section *Apepe* Group Leader, *Conversation with the authors*, 1998

⁴⁴ Babyemi, S.O. 1980. *Egungun among the Oyo Yoruba*, Ibadan: Oyo State Council for Arts and Culture.



Figure 6:

Olire/Boromo Ipara in Ipara-Remo

Source: Olori'tun Simbo Ogunnubi (2023)



Figure 7:
Agemo in Ipara-Remo

Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2020)



Figure 8:
Agemo in Ipara-Remo

Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2020)



Figure 9:
Agemo in Ipara-Remo

Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2020)



Figure 10:
Agemo in Ipara-Remo

Source: Samson Kehinde Adekoya, (2020)

Isepe Ipara (Oro Headpiece): The two distinct sections, Esepe and Oke-Aro, own the Isepe Ipara series. None of its present custodians knows its origin. They make use of them during their 'Oro festivals' as dance masks. Each consists essentially of a carved headdress, which is divided into two parts: the lower portion and the upper portion. The lower portion is fitted on the carrier's (dancer's) head like a helmet. The upper portion contains the superstructure. Its subjects/ assemblages are depicted in far more realistic terms. The dancer dresses like a woman, and his identity is easily known. *Isepe Ipara (Oro head piece)* is in a series. The sculptures are carved from wood and are much more compact. They are similar to the *Epa* head piece/headdress of the Northeast corner of the Yoruba region occupied by the Ekiti. Unlike the *Epa* headdress, which is carved from a log of wood, *Isepe Ipara* is an assemblage of different figures on the two to threestep platforms arranged on top of each other. *Isepe* is purely a dance mask. For secrecy and forewarned instruction from the community, I will not be able to publish the picture in this article. However, *the Isepe* headdress is similar to the *Magbo* headdress of the Ijebu (Figure 11).



Figure 11:

Magbo Oro Head dress

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Conclusion

In Yorubaland, *Egungun* masquerade activities are widespread, constituting one of the most popular religious phenomena in Remoland. However, it has since been taken beyond the realm of ordinary religion. It is now conceived as a medium of artistic expression through which pomp and pageantry are displayed. The existence of different types of costume designs, whose owners have been classified into three: community, sections/groups, and private individuals are the basis of this research study.

There are two conflicting traditions about the introduction of *Egungun* into Remoland, the first tradition, regarded as the Ibadan tradition, which credits the introduction of *Egungun* to Remoland to Oluyole (the founder of Ibadan) and the second tradition, which is the suggestion made by Ogunba that Remo towns received *Egungun* from their Egba neighbours” .

However, among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria, it is generally believed that the *Egungun* cult started in the old Oyo Empire and spread to all other parts of the Yoruba-speaking country in the early 19th century, as asserted by Adepegba (1984) and Pemberton (1978). However, Marilyn H. Houlberg (1978) claimed that “*Egungun* masquerades of the Remo Yoruba do not have carved wooden masks as part of their costume.” This paper does not support this assertion or give credence to previous studies. It has revealed that some *Egungun* masquerades in Remoland use masks/carved images. In Ipara-Remo, typical examples include *Ekun* (Leopard) masquerade, *Agbomola* masquerade, *Layole* masquerade, *Onisigu* masquerade, and *Saba* masquerade, to mention a few.

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Review Format for Author(s)

<i>Comment(s) or concerns raised by reviewer(s).</i>	<i>How the revision was done.</i>	<i>Give a bold typeface in the portions in the paper where the revisions occur and indicate the page(s) as well.</i>
<p>1.The title. There are three words in the title that give the impression that they are separate concepts for elaboration in the article: 'provenance', 'formalism' and 'costume'. 'Provenance' has to do with origin, and indeed, the writers provided ample demonstration of the origin of masks. The word 'formalism', however, presents an ambivalent situation. In one respect, it gives one the sense of form, which the paper has addressed. In another respect, the appearance of 'formalism' in the title evokes the notion of the critical theory of formalism which places premium on the form and structure of a work of art rather than on its origin, context, etc. As a theory that arose as a reaction to romanticist criticism, formalism often</p>	<p>The word 'formalism' in the title has been changed to 'form' as advised/suggested by the reviewer?</p>	<p>The word formalism has been changed to form in the title.</p> <p>In the abstract, though has been replaced with and as suggested by the reviewer. Still in the abstract, is has been replaced with presents as suggested. On page 3 the English/literary meaning of Remo <i>meta'lelogbon</i> have been provided. On page 4, the sub-theme has been spaced. On page 5 “being” has been deleted as suggested. On page 8, the referencing issue has been addressed. The issue raised on page 9 is part of our research and not Oyedeji’s opinion. The rearrangement suggested on page 10 has</p>

<p>ignores issues of origin of texts, sociocultural influences and authorship. It is interesting to note, however, that the writers in this article have conjoined this word with provenance, which evidently concerns itself with the origin of an art work. The first encounter with the topic would give a reader the notion of formalism as a critical theory to be expounded on at some point in the article. The authors may have to disambiguate the term and provide ample elucidation on what exactly their focus is. Would the article lose anything if the word 'formalism' is changed to 'form'?</p> <p>2. A number of issues identified in the write-up to do with language use, and formatting have been commented on in-text and the writers need to pay attention to them.</p> <p>3. I am not really sure what</p>	<p>All other issues raised by the reviewer have been addressed in the paper.</p> <p>The issue of reference style has been addressed in the paper. The references have been changed to Footnote as requested by the editorial team.</p>	<p>been done. Masquerade in the Yoruba context as observed on page 12 represents ancestral spirit. It does not have any relationship with the 17th century 'masques' in England.</p> <p>As suggested on page 17, the labels of all the figures have been moved to the bottom of all the figures. The word 'it' on page 19 has been capitalised as suggested. On page 20 the word 'Morphology' has been changed to Origin and Ownership of <i>Oro</i> and Agemo Masks to address the observation of the reviewer. Similarly on page 22 'the' has been capitalised as suggested. The observation on page 24 as regard clarity of the statement has been re-framed. The sentence has been reconstructed to emphasise among the Yoruba of Southwestern Nigeria. Also, the word 'spreads' on</p>
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<p>reference style is required by the journal. What I see here is not the APA style which has become commonplace. The authors may have to confirm with the editors about the appropriate style.</p>		<p>page 24 has been changed to 'spread' as suggested.</p>
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