CULTURE, MEDIA & FILM | RESEARCH ARTICLE

Reappraising the iconography and ethno-aesthetics of Adada masquerade of the Nsukka Igbo, southeast Nigeria

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Abstract: This study seeks to interpret the iconography and ethno-aesthetic of Adada masquerade of the Nsukka Igbo people of Southeastern Nigeria, an iconic system imbued with mystical aura and uncommon beauty. Adada is also a compendium of Igbo cultural history and a storehouse of Igbo knowledge and worldview. Despite its socio-cultural significance in the life of Nsukka Igbo people, Adada masquerade has not received deserved attention of scholars and researchers. Building on Victor Turner’s theory of cultural liminality which identifies a betwixt and between state in the middle phase of rites of passage, the study examines how the cultural ingredients of Adada masquerade anchor, ritualize and project the cultural identity of Nsukka Igbo people within the changing fields of society. Art historical approach was used in analyzing data collected through fieldwork carried out in three communities in Nsukka Igbo area. This involved participant observation in Adada masquerade performance in Ovoko community in 2014, photographic documentation of the masquerade and oral interviews with 17 relevant stakeholders comprising masquerade initiates and elders in the three communities. The iconography and aesthetics of Adada contain irresistible cultural ingredients that reveal how Nsukka Igbo people contained the liminal conditions of cross-cultural

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PUBLIC INTEREST STATEMENT

This study seeks to interpret the iconography and ethno-aesthetic of Adada masquerade of the Nsukka Igbo people of Southeast Nigeria. Adada is an iconic system imbued with mystical aura and uncommon beauty. It is also a compendium of Igbo cultural history and a storehouse of Igbo knowledge and worldview. Building on Victor Turner’s theory of cultural liminality which identifies a betwixt and between state in rites of passage, the study examines how the cultural ingredients of Adada masquerade anchor, ritualize and project the cultural identity of Nsukka Igbo people within the changing fields of society. The study advances knowledge in African cultural studies by providing a contextualized view of how masking traditions communicate a people’s response to the liminal spaces engendered by cross-cultural encounters.
encounters. However, Adada’s absence from the public space in recent times shows how acculturative agents like Christian evangelism, urbanism and modernism have adversely affected the willingness to animate the masquerade whose outing and performance is both entertaining and didactic.

Subjects: Art & Visual Culture;; Performance Theory;; Practice and Practitioners;; Cultural Studies

Keywords: Adada masquerade; cultural liminality; cross-cultural encounters; ethno-aesthetics; iconographic formalism; Nsukka Igbo area

1. Introduction

Igbo people of southeastern Nigeria strongly believe in life after death. They believe that their deceased only transit to the spiritual realm to dwell among their ancestors. The Igbo deify and personify their ancestors in masked forms called muo onwu (the spirit of the dead) as incarnates to serve as the link between the living and the dead. Consequently, masquerading is an inextricable part of the Igbo socio-political and cultural life. They regard it highly as “spirit manifest”, not a plaything or fantasy but a metaphysical reality (Emeka, 1993) whose activities are sacrosanct. They equally treat them with great deference and re-enact their relationships with the ancestors through the masked forms, ancestral worship and other mortuary activities. This belief system finds similar interpretive contexts in many African societies. For instance, among the Yoruba of southwest Nigeria, Egungun masquerade embodies the spiritual link between the ancestors and the living progenies. As Drewal (1978, p. 18) points out, the presence of Egungun masquerade “honors ancestors by serving as evidence of a descendant’s commitment to continuing the traditions of his predecessors and maintaining the reputation of his lineage.” The performative rituals associated with ancestor masquerades prepare a deceased person for an insured subsistence in the spiritual realm. The masked figures in this instance, act as emissaries of the ancestors of Igbo communities who come to commune with the living progenies in their own world in the event of human activities. In maintaining and sustaining this primordial relationship, masking and masquerading ensure that the soul of the deceased does not lose full contact with the land of the living.

Different types and forms of masquerades categorised according to their structures and forms, as well as behavioural manifestations (Egwuda-Ugbeda, 2003), display during Igbo ceremonies and festivals. There are gentle and ferocious or what Basden (1983) calls “beauty and beast”, beautiful and ugly, male and female, ritual and secular. There are also others that can be classified as distorted, grotesque and frightening. In his appraisal of the ethno-aesthetic of Igbo masquerades, Sorell (1973) asserts that though many of them seem to be ugly in their looks, when considered in their socio-cultural contexts nevertheless, they are “beautiful in their ugliness.” Every work of art as “a product of environmental and social circumstance … bound up in a society’s value systems” (Denyer, 1978) is better appreciated in the context of the environment in which it is produced and used. Thus, it could be used as a reflection of the people’s ideals.

In the Nsukka Igbo area in southeastern Nigeria, there exists a river called Adada. It is in the hydrographic class H and a tributary of the famous River Niger. It has rivulets across almost all the Nsukka Igbo communities. In the pre-European contact era, the river played vital roles in many facets of their socio-economic and religious cum ritual lives. The river is highly venerated by the people who believe that it is central to their thought and religious beliefs. Thus, some communities in the area deified and/or personified it in a masquerade which they hold in high esteem. For instance, Leija Ugwuoke, a community in Nsukka Local Government Area of Enugu State, venerates Adada (Nwabueze) as “the female ancestor and ancestral mother of all Leija people” (Opota, 2011,
In many communities in Nsukka Igbo area including Ovoko, Iheaka, Obukpa and Lejja, Adada River is personified in a masquerade.

Adada masquerade (Figure 1) is an iconic system imbued with mystical powers and uncommon beauty. It is equally a mobile theatre rich in iconographical elements that visually amplify its culturally assigned role as a compendium of Igbo cultural history and a storehouse of Igbo knowledge and wisdom. Because of its flamboyance and visual elaboration, it is likened to a water spirit of great wealth (Asogwa Arua, personal communication 8 August 2015). It is therefore not uncommon to hear Igbo titular names that metaphorically associate wealth with the river. For instance, a man of great wealth is referred to as *iyi* or *oshimiri ata ata* (the river or the ocean that never dries). Adada masquerade commands similar exaltation based on the expansiveness of its physical attributes and mystical power. The profundity of Adada's mystical power is such that nobody makes negative remarks against it. Ugwokeja Ezugwu, a masquerade initiate and elder in Ovoko community explained that doing so is a sacrilege that incurs the wrath of the gods which may lead to great loss of the victim's livestock and in extreme cases, human lives (personal communication, 24 February 2014). Adada masquerade usually performed during the second burial ceremony of an important personality especially the *Onyishi* (oldest man) of a community. Due to its grandeur, majesty and cultural significance to the Nsukka Igbo people, its outing is always highly anticipated and joyfully celebrated.

Surprisingly, despite its splendid morphological attributes and socio-cultural significance as an exemplary embodiment of Igbo worldview, identity and culture, Adada masquerade, unlike similar masquerades with comparable morphologies and ethno-aesthetics, has not received deserved attention.

![Figure 1. Adada masquerade.](image-url)
attention of scholars and researchers. For instance, several studies have focused on Igbo masks such as Ijele (Aniakor, 1978a; Cole & Aniakor, 1984; Okonkwo, 1981), Odo (Itanyi, 2011; Oguamanam et al., 2018) and Omabe (Aniakor, 1976; Aniakor, 1978b; Ray & Shaw, 1987; C. Ugwu, 2011; Asogwo & Duniya, 2017). The glaring absence of studies on Adada masquerade creates a gap in knowledge that hinders a more robust and insightful understanding of the masking traditions of the Nsukka Igbo people. Taking cognizance of the fact that the masquerade institution is an important contextual frame for appraising the liminality of indigenous African cultures within colonial and postcolonial spaces, the criticality of studying masquerades like Adada within the fields of cultural and postcolonial studies cannot be overstated. In his observations on how Igbo masking traditions have responded to the changing fields of society Gore (2008, p. 60) points out that “innovation and change in terms of iconography, ritual, and dramatic presentation have always been important components to these performances, as well as flexible adaptations and responses to changing social circumstances.” In the case of Adada masquerade, while its iconography strongly highlights the influence of acculturative forces on the socio-cultural life of the Nsukka Igbo people, its prolonged absence from the public space equally underlines the consequential effect of cross-cultural encounters on indigenous cultures.

Of the various acculturative forces that have strongly influenced Igbo people, Christian evangelism and Pentecostalism are believed to have dealt the most severe blow to Igbo cultural institutions (Gore, 2008; Ikwuemesi, 2016). Not only did they achieve remarkable success in convincing members of masquerade groups to see masquerade as a pagan practice, their activities in many places in south-eastern Nigeria also led to the disbandment of famous and long-standing masquerade associations as well as the destruction of masks and costumes (Gore, 2008). That Igbo masquerade institution was able to survive the debilitating and devastating effects of acculturative forces suggests that it contains irresistible cultural ingredients that could not be completely divorced from the consciousness and way of life of Igbo people. Against this background, one is curious to find out the cultural ingredients that enabled Adada masquerade negotiate its space and presence in postcolonial Nsukka Igbo communities for so long before it became moribund. If these culturally rooted resources are transmitted through the iconographic formalism of Adada, what are its defining attributes and significance to the Nsukka Igbo people? Again, how does Igbo aesthetic philosophy impact on the iconographical landscape of Adada? Furthermore, in what ways do the iconographic formalism of the masquerade communicate the influence of cross-cultural encounters in the socio-cultural life of Nsukka Igbo people?

This study seeks to answer the preceding questions by highlighting how the iconography and ethno-aesthetics of Adada masquerade ritualise, anchor and project the cultural identity of the Nsukka Igbo people within the changing fields of society. Drawing on Victor Turner’s theory of cultural liminality which identifies a betwixt and between state in the middle phase of van Gennep’s three-part structure of rites of passage, the study identifies in the iconography and aesthetics of Adada, insightful frameworks that communicate how the Nsukka Igbo people responded to the liminal experiences that frame cross-cultural encounters. The study relied on field investigations carried out in 2014, 2015 and 2018 in three communities in the Nsukka cultural area namely: Ovoko, Leija and Obukpa. Data were collected through participant observation in Adada masquerade performance in 2014 during the funeral ceremony of Ezeja Ukwueze, a well-known personality in Ovoko community. Data were also generated through photographic documentation of the masquerade as well as oral interviews conducted with 17 persons knowledgeable in masking traditions in the three communities. Art historical approach embodying formalistic and iconographic frameworks was used in analysing the forms, motifs, symbols and colours on the Adada masquerade.

2. Adada and the liminality of an evolving society
In some Nsukka Igbo communities, Adada masquerade has been conspicuously absent from the public space for many years. For instance, in Obukpa and Leija communities, the masquerade has not appeared for many decades (A. Arua, personal communication, 8 August 2015; C. Opata,
personal communication, 5 July 2016). Our informant, Asogwa Arua, took us to their village obu (communal ancestral house) where the Adada and other masks such as Ekwe and Okorodo of their village were tucked away in a storeroom (see Figure 2). Saddened by the sight, he intoned, “Such expensive and important masks were rotting away as a result of neglect and abandonment because of a new culture we did not understand.” The uncertainty surrounding Adada’s re-emergence in the public sphere foregrounds the power of acculturative forces in the socio-political, religious and cultural life of Nsukka Igbo people. Okeke et al. (2017) points this out in the liminal experiences of Igbo Christians stating that the problem facing them “are those of a man practicing a new religious system, amid a traditional order that has not yet disappeared” (p. 9).

Victor Turner’s theory of cultural liminality provides contextual grounds on which to explicate the state of ambiguousness outlined above, particularly as it relates to Igbo masquerade institution of which Adada is one of its constituent parts. Turner’s (1967) seminal work, “Betwixt and Between: The Liminal Period in Rites de Passage” offers insight into the liminal experience that describes the middle phase in van Gennep’s (2019) three-part structure of rites of passage. This phase which is ambiguous; a betwixt and between state that has few or none of the experiences of the past or the coming state, is preceded by the separation phase which is symbolic and involves the detachment of the individual or group from a fixed point in their socio-cultural lives. In the third phase which is marked by reincorporation, the transition is consummated and the successful initiate “is in a relatively stable state once more and, by virtue of this, has rights and obligations of a clearly defined and ‘structural’ type, and is expected to behave in accordance with certain customary norms and ethical standard” (Turner, 1967, p. 94). The ambiguousness of the liminal phase opens up contextual spaces that could be applied to other social conditions or experiences. Thomassen (2009) elaborates:

Speaking very broadly, liminality is applicable to both space and time. Single moments, longer periods, or even whole epochs can be liminal. Liminal places can be specific thresholds; they can also be more extended areas, like “borderlands” or, arguably, whole countries, placed in important in-between positions between larger civilizations. Liminality can also be applied to both single individuals and to larger groups (cohorts or villages), or whole societies, or maybe even civilizations. (p. 16)

Against this background and also taking cognizance of Ukaegbu’s (1996) statement that “Igbo society initially ignores, then resists, and fights change” (p. 17), shedding light on how liminal experiences of cross-cultural encounters find visual interpretation in the iconography of Adada masquerade provides a contextual window for understanding the changing fields of Igbo society.
Cross-cultural encounters and its associated liminity approximate to rites of passage of sorts for indigenous societies. However, unlike the liminal conditions present in the middle phase of initiation rites Turner (1969) which occur as a result of individual or group participation in culturally obligated norms, rituals or observances, the liminality engendered by acculturative forces derives from the overbearing pressure of external influences or forces whose proselytising footprints are ideologically configured to recalibrate the socio-cultural structures of the societies it comes into contact with. The liminal conditions present in such encounters are also not necessarily constrained by time or expected to reach a final resolution as perceived in traditional forms of initiation rites. This is because acculturative forces operate outside of the cultural jurisdiction of the respective indigenous societies that they come into contact with and as such, outlines a much more complex process and liminal situations with diverse outcomes. Turner (1974, p. 14) draws a parallel noting that “when one surveys large spans of social processes, one sees an almost endless variety of limited and provisional outcomes.” Mapping these experiential outcomes in an evolving Igbo society highlights how the fate of Igbo cultural institutions are inextricably tied to the experiences of Igbo people as they both negotiate the liminal spaces engendered by acculturation forces. This is understandable given that without the human agency to initiate, animate and sustain these institutions, they are bound to lose their cultural relevance and significance as identity shaping tools. Thus, the fate of these traditional institutions rested decidedly on how Igbo people either as individuals or a group resolve encounters which placed them betwixt and between two or more cultural experiences.

Colonialism and Christian evangelism are important experiential sites for understanding the liminality of Igbo people within the changing fields of social relations. The former, for instance, initiated cross-cultural dialogues in which the rules of engagement delineated two distinct class positions: “one being the superogatory and the other the subordinary, with deliberate administrative structure that favoured the former” (Igboin, 2011, p. 101). This perception not only shaped the colonial experience, it also affected its historical narratives (Mudimbe, 1988 as cited in Uchendu et al., 2017). The hegemonic and ethnocentric beliefs put forward by the coloniser that her morals and values were superior to that of the colonised were actively deployed as psychological tools of cultural subjugation. For the natives, negotiating the path to modernity in most cases entailed denouncing and rejecting the cultural practices and belief systems of their forebears and embracing the redeeming light of the “superior” culture. The gravity of this self-effacing act draws a parallel to what Horvath (2013, p. 39) describes as “any situation of incommensurable liminality” which “first of all disrupts integrity and unity, breaking the whole down into its composite elements, and thus—in the correct sense of the term—produces a crisis that must be dealt with directly.” The cumulative impact of jettisoning one’s belief system and cultural values significantly affected the socio-political and cultural foundations of Igbo society. The consequences could be read in the prolonged absence of Adada masquerade from the public space as well as in recorded incidences of destruction of masks and costumes and disbandment of famous and long-standing masquerade associations (Gore, 2008).

Although many aspects of Igbo culture were in decline in the late colonial and early period of Nigeria’s independence in 1960, the desire to express a national identity through the reinforcement and projection of ethnic identity initiated renewed interest in traditional cultural practices. In light of this and buoyed by the oil boom which saw a prosperous Nigeria, masquerade performances, from rural festivals and burial ceremonies to state-sponsored Mmanwu Festival flourished in Enugu, south-eastern Nigeria, during the 1970s and 1980s (Bentor, 2008). These performances mirrored the continuation of earlier patterns in masking as well as the introduction of new elements into the iconography and manner of performance, a practice classified as “invented tradition” (Bentor, 2008, p. 32). These two practices occurring simultaneously illustrate the non-linear trajectory of indigenous cultural practices as they move through liminal spaces engendered by cross-cultural dialogues. The centralising presence of this inverted tradition in Igbo masquerade institution is largely dependent on the liminal experiences framing the historicity of acculturation agents in Igbo society. Thomassen (2009, p. 20) puts this in a clearer perspective:
If historical periods can be considered liminal, it follows that the crystallization of ideas and practices that take place during this period must be given special attention. Once liminality ends the ideas and practices that have become established therein will tend to take on the quality of structure.

The iconographical landscape of Adada masquerade contains visual elements, imageries, symbols and philosophical thoughts that communicate howNsukka Igbo people responded to the liminal conditions engendered by cross-cultural encounters. In this light, Adada’s presence or absence from the public space constitutes an important index for understanding the liminal footprints of acculturative agents in Nsukka Igbo masking tradition. It also offers insight into what have remained unchanged, evolved or become moribund.

3. The world of Adada
Unlike some masquerades like Egungun where wealthy and influential individuals can exercise ownership (T. J. Willis, 2014), Adada masquerade is communally owned. Any attempt by an individual to acquire and own Adada notwithstanding the person’s socio-economic and political status in the community is considered a taboo. According to Ugwueze Nwarua, an elder in Obukpa community,

Harbouring such thought is tantamount to desecrating Igbo masquerade institution and the earth, the source of Igbo life force and fertility, as well as the place to which humans returned in a continuous regenerative process when they die. Furthermore, it is believed that due to the great power it possessed, if an individual is allowed to acquire and possess it, the power of the individual would become obtrusive and hamper the growth of other members of the community. (U. Nwarua, personal communication, 15 January 2015)

Consequently, ownership of Adada masquerade is highly restrictive and strongly governed by prescriptions and prohibitions. For instance, only the direct descendants of the progenitor could commission and own one (Asogwa, 2016). Three persons that were interviewed were reluctant to divulge information outlining what these prescriptions and prohibitions are because they are considered cultural secrets. However, Ezenwugwu Oyima (personal communication, 8 August 2015) disclosed that lineage ranks and other traditional criteria such as consanguinity are serious considerations in its acquisition because of the importance attached to the masquerade as a vital component of the community’s cultural identity. In light of this, it is a privileging act of social distinction for any village group to commission Adada masquerade. Doing so, establishes the identity of the community and also promotes the morale, pride and solidarity of the people that commissions one. It equally elevates them to a social stratum high above other village groups (Denyer, 1978).

Production of Adada masquerade is very expensive because it involves a diverse group of artists and crafts persons. To surmount this challenge, many villages levy themselves greatly to commission and maintain one. As a result, only very prosperous villages could embark on the project of its acquisition. With a sense of nostalgia, Ugwuoke Asogwa Agbedo stated:

In those days, when my village commissioned one, members of our village gathered to witness its first public outing in the village square because the commissioning re-enacts historical links between the living progeny and their ancestors. In-laws, friends and well-wishers from far and near also came to behold the great spectacle, the masquerade’s performance. (Personal communication, 13 March 2015)

In Obukpa community, commissioning or upgrading of masquerades like the Ekwe, Adada, Oshimili, Ekpe and all such masquerades called maa ododo is permissible on Eke market day during the Umu-Iche festival in the Onunu season (Ele, 2017).
Ekwe masquerade (Figure 3) heralds the appearance of Adada. It displays in twos; Oke (male) and Onyenye (female). The masquerades appear during the second burial ceremonies to seek ancestral protection for the deceased as well as to entertain the mourners. The aim is to bring glory to the memory of the dead and his successors. They also help to establish the deceased as a person of rank in the next world and to ensure that he does not lose contact with the land of the living. In essence, a befitting burial ensures the incorporation of the dead to enable them exist as ancestors. In the words of Ezenwugwu Oyima (personal communication, Ovoko, 13 March 2015):

The spirit of a man whose descendants have not given a befitting second burial will not transit to the spirit world but hovers around, stranded. Apparently, it turns into a resentful and aggressive ghost, which, while impatiently waiting for the second burial, would start to cause misfortune to the living progenies. For this reason, Igbo people mortgage or sell their properties, especially land, to be able to perform this ceremony in honour of their deceased parents or relations for them to join their ancestors and pantheons, as well as to avert the wrath of their stranded, hovering spirits.

Various rituals involving sacrifices of appeasement to the gods precede the outing of Adada. These are done to psychological reassure the animator of spiritual protection and also to heighten the mysteries surrounding the masquerade. These rituals are necessary because of the Igbo belief that benevolent and malevolent spirits can intervene in human activities. Therefore, sacrifices are performed to avoid or avert misfortunes that can be inflicted by malevolent spirits during the outing of Adada. Again, the sacrifices help to boost or enhance the dignity of the masked spirit by infusing elements of fear and awe into public’s perception of the masquerade. The added fear for its unknown powers builds up and sustains the fame of a masquerade. Furthermore, sacrifices also

Figure 3. Ekwe masquerade (male), Amụkwọ, Nsukka.
help to reinforce the myths surrounding masquerade institution in the eyes of the non-initiates, women and children.

The institution of Adada reveals a gendered landscape which places women at the margins in the arena of masking tradition. In the first instance, women involvement in its affairs is restricted to the role of spectators. Ugwu Ezugwu Omeinyi (personal communication, May 26, 2015) explained that quite unlike in cases where people see other masquerades that rarely appear in public as commanding strict observances that tend to dominate women and children, Adada is women and children friendly. They are in no way its victims; rather, they are the principal spectators. Overwhelmed by its grandness and benevolent demeanour, the womenfolk chant songs of praises and throw money at Adada. Some of the praise words uttered by the women include Igburukuw adanaa (the great masquerade), Agba bu ego (Adada is wealth), and Enyimenyi (Adada the elephant). They also use expressions like okporo enweg’ onye okwu (the road has no enemy because the good and the bad as well as humans and spirits walk on it). Because of its flamboyance, it is also extolled as akorug’ji, which connotes an aplomb wife whose body is always smooth and plump such that one hardly notices even when she starves; Ayiri yororyoro na-amag’ onye ike gwuru (when people move as a group one hardly notices who is tired). In addition, they also use expressions like Agbo ji kuru ma mbe o dajele (the pumpkin planted by the husband, the head of the household has no bounds. It grows without prohibitions unlike the ones planted by the wives) to extol the magnificent masquerade. All these expressions refer to its greatness, majesty, beauty and splendour. People also conceive its rare appearance as an attribute of greatness, a visual metaphor of social and ritual ideals of the people, a symbol of wealth and greatness.

Ugwuoke Asogwa Agbedo, an elder and masquerade initiate in Ovoko community revealed that in spite of the fact that the masquerade is woman and children friendly, custom ritually prohibits women from closely associating with its activities. He stated that they contribute neither towards its procurement nor towards replacement of its costumes but could only make their own contributions in the form of donations on the day of its display (personal communication, 20 April 2014). A number of reasons have been given for placing women at the periphery of masquerade activities in Igbo land. Amongst these is the rationalisation that women are not physically strong enough to withstand the energetic activities of the masquerade society. It is also assumed that a woman’s maternal instinct makes her mentally unequipped to handle the sight of the lynching of notorious evil-doers and witches by masquerades exercising their function of social control. Again, the rituals involved in the making of charms that sustain a masquerade’ mystical aura is considered to be unsuitable to the mentality of women. Furthermore, it is believed that masquerade institution being a symbolic re-enactment of social structure is exclusively reserved for the male gender and this is what separates men from women (Onyeneke, 1987). Women’s response to some of these reasons border on indifference/resignation to the status quo; cultivated deference to masks out of necessity and the belief that they are manifestations of insecurity in men driven by an unhealthy fear of being dominated by women (Ukaegbu, 1996).

The gendered landscape of Adada speaks to the larger issue of how women are framed in patriarchal cultures; a subject that have engendered robust discourse on matters relating to women’s rights. The practice of siting women at the margins of masquerade tradition in Igbo society is also present in Yoruba masquerade cults like Egungun and Oro (Familusi, 2012; Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, 2000; Ker, 1995 as cited in Erojikwe et al., 2014). Activities of these masquerades, particularly, the Oro masquerade which performs at night, places severe restrictions on women thereby infringing on their fundamental human rights (Okeowo, 2013). In Nsukka Igbo area, masquerades like Onyenewala (the owner of the land), Odoshire (the great odo or war god), Inyikwu (the evil woman), Arikpo Ezimo, and Api Opi, exemplify masquerades that women and children, as well as non-initiates must not behold their appearances. Ugwuoke Asogwa Agbedo (personal communication, 20 April 2014) noted that any woman, either
by omission or commission, who sees any of such masquerades, must collect or eat a pinch of sand as a mark of respect for the earth goddess. This act indicates that she has beckoned on the offended earth goddess for forgiveness, and protection from the wrath of the masquerade, and of the gods of the land whom it represents in the material world. The consequence of not doing so is instant barrenness or madness. He further stated that if any man or woman crosses the shadow of any of such masquerades or the outstretched legs of their priests (Attama), such a person also becomes incurably impotent or infertile instantly. Experiences such as this may have made Reed (1998) to bemoan the strong gender discrimination in Igbo masquerading. She notes that in spite of the fact that taking a closer watch of a masquerade in performance enhances the joy of the spectacle, women must always maintain a reasonable distance, even if they are allowed to behold a masquerade in performance. However, despite this gendered posturing that relegate women to the margins in masking traditions, some studies (Carlson, 2019; Olajubu, 2004) situate women at the centre particularly as it relates to ownership, animating masks and making of masquerade costumes.

4. Architecture and iconography of Adada
Structurally, Adada is morphologically cylindrical. Descending from the base of its super-structural disk-like headgear are panels of free-flowing hang-down appliqué costumes profusely decorated with various symbols and motifs. The symbols and motifs are derived from natural, cosmic and man-made sources. They embody meanings that are culturally associated with the worldview of the Nsukka Igbo, particularly, their belief in the hierarchy of forces and in the continuity of life after death. The assemblage of historical and mythological figures sequentially arranged on the disk-like headgear equally projects the cultural weight of Adada. Holistically, Adada is an embodiment of Nsukka Igbo worldview. It is also a compendium of Igbo cultural history and a storehouse of Igbo knowledge and wisdom. At the performative level, the dynamic movement of the expensive and equally expressive panel-like free-flowing appliqué cloths attached to the headdress imbues the masquerade with majestic presence, elegance, power and royalty.

Adada shares structural similarity with Ijjele masquerade which is much more monumental and expansive in scale. Okonkwo (1981) describes Ijjele as a female mask and likens it to Omabe (Figure 4) of the Nsukka Igbo in elegance and magnificence. However, it is important to note that contrary to Okonkwo’s comparison, the two masquerades are quite different in terms of morphology but can only be compared in terms of visual configurations. With respect to morphology and visual configuration, Ijjele is comparably closer to Adada or Mgbedike (the time of the brave) (Figure 5) than it is to Omabe whose entire morphology is anthropozoomorphic.

Aniakor’s (1988) study of Ijjele enables a closer understanding of Adada masquerade. The most salient significant difference between the two masquerades is in their headdresses. The headdress of the Ijjele mask is hemispherical while that of Adada is disk-like. In his description of Ijjele mask based on type, costumes, headdress and conceptualisation, Aniakor sees Ijjele as “part of generative principle of Igbo life”. He also refers to Ijjele as the symbol of authority and compares it to the village obu at the village square, the hub of a community’s social, religious, commercial, and political activities. The same could be said of Adada masquerade. In this sense, Adada, like Adada symbolises the force that brings Igbo world into a unit and serves as Igbo social narrative.

Iconography of Adada offers a contextualised narrative on the socio-cultural life of the Nsukka Igbo people. This is read through the many visual elements that construct its morphological presence. These elements comprise plant and animal motifs (which are either representational or stylised), abstract designs, human figures and colour. The centrality of motifs to the indigenous arts of Africa underscores its importance and significance as symbolic and aesthetic containers that embody each society’s respective worldview, belief system and way of life. Smith (2010) as cited in Nwafor (2019, p. 117) points out that “the enormous mix of intricate symbols, patterns and designs attributed to traditional African forms served as highly codified linguistic signs in the absence of written word.” Among the Igbo, motifs are essentialising aspects of their three-
dimensional and two-dimensional arts. Ukaegbu (1996, p. 28) re-echoes this by stating that “meaning in Igbo society is framed by sacral, social and geographical circumstances and whether symbolic or literal, it is anchored within an ethnographic motif.” He further points out that “Igbo symbols have a life beyond the immediate and do not only provide links to society’s past and present but also, its changing arts and ethics” (p. 9). Several studies (Igbaonuugo, 1972; Diogu, 1979; L. Willis, 1987; Ottenberg, 1997; Ajibade et al., 2012; Bentor, 2008; Fenton, 2015) have engaged this prominent aspect of Igbo arts more especially as it relates to traditional uli art and nsibidi design systems. Some of the motifs and design elements found on Adada masquerade find mutable visual echoes in these two indigenous art forms.

The headdress and costumes of Adada are the major sites for appraising its iconographic formalism. The costumes are embellished with motifs sourced from visually appealing symbolic elements of nature created to please the eyes, and to ideographically record Igbo cultural experiences. Through these motifs, Igbo traditional artists infuse ideals and realities with codified corporeal essence as a way of recording observations and discoveries from physical and transcendental phenomena. The motifs are conceived as models on which the Igbo ideals of achievement, authority, wealth, social status, political symbolism and beauty are developed. Ideas or images that are contextually deconstructed and conceptually reconstructed as motifs reflect the most prominent and accepted aspects of the situation that such ideas or images as well as their relevance/significance in Igbo rituals and lore represent. On the Adada ensemble, the motifs become eloquent pictures of the people’s consciousness. They also represent empirically evolved patterns that have analogous qualities which relate factually or conceptually to dynamic phenomena operating in Nsukka Igbo cosmic and material worlds. In this context, Biebuyck (1969) remarks
that the artforms belong to the artist while their meanings belong to the broader community that makes the demands, sets the pattern, and then uses what the artists are able to produce.

It is important also to point out that the creation of traditional works of art is inspired by ideas generally shared by members of a community. Thus, the artists who create these works ought to be “equipped with the inspiration and knowledge of a variety of traditional legends, folklores, and mythologies” of the people (Fosu, 1986, p. 6). The content of the work would deal with subject matter already familiar within the society and be appraised on the basis of the communicative symbolism within its referent cultural domain. Their meanings, therefore, belong to the particular community that makes use of them and are ascribed in the context of the community’s cultural values. In light of this, deeper knowledge of the source cultural elements of the ideas is necessary in order to facilitate better interpretation and understanding of the meanings of the motifs. This is understandable given the fact that very frequently, single forms or categories of forms could occur in a multiplicity of social and ritual contexts with different complementary meanings attached to them; meanings that are not directly illustrated by the forms but which adhere to them because of traditional associations. Iconographical study of Adada takes cognizance of the contextual frames outlined above and these are discussed under the following headings: headdress, costumes and colours.

4.1. **Headdress**

The Adada headdress (Figure 6), which rests on the animator’s head is disk-like and forms the base on which various sculptural forms are arranged. The assemblage of these sculpted figures depicts the cyclical nature of the universe as represented through the concept of life, death and
reincarnation. While performing in an arena, the masquerade sways side to side. As it turns in its gyrating movement, it presents spectators with different sides of the sculptures on its headdress which serve as visual records of historical events, ritual customs and certain legends in the sociocultural life of the people. The sculptures on the headdress (see Figure 7) consist of a leopard, a python and a group of figures including a flutist, a man brandishing a gun, a woman breastfeeding her child, a double-faced head of a man and a man kneeling with a bible on his laps. Others are a woman playing accordion, a coquettish female figure and figures of standing soldiers.

The representation of the leopard re-echoes the preponderance of animal forms in indigenous African art. In his book, Animals in African Art, Allen Roberts as cited in Nwafor (2019) suggests that the frequency with which an animal appears in African visual arts is dependent on the degree to which it is able to stimulate thought and evoke feelings. The leopard features extensively in Igbo arts and is used symbolically to represent strength, royalty and power. This is exemplified by titular names like Agu no-ech e mba (leopard that watches over a nation) Agu nwadiani (leopard who has a right to the land) and Ogbuagu or Otagburuagu (killer of leopard). The leopard motif appears in nsibidi and uli art forms as communicative and design element. Uli motifs such as agu nwadiani, agwa ka agu (leopard spots) and mbo agu (leopard claws) are seen to validate its relevance in Igbo worldview (Nwafor, 2019).

The two realistically sculpted leopards on the Adada headdress stand on pythons which rest on the heads of the soldiers taking salute. They face opposite directions suggesting a state of vigilance and security. Asogwa Ugwu Asogwa (personal communication, 1 February 2016) narrated that the leopard became part of the people’s cultural life because of intermittent inter-communal wars in the olden days and the need for security. He recounted that at a time in the past, two neighbouring towns always engaged in sporadic warfare. One of the towns, Umuigwe (children of the sky) Ishielu who had the gift of rainmaking and thunder and lightning invocation, smote their opponents with this ability in the event of any communal clash. Similarly, their rival, Udunweagu (the owners of leopard) could invoke the spirit of the leopard in the event of communal clashes. In a clash between the two communities, Umuigwe employed thunder and lightning to destroy crops and properties of the Udunweagu people. In retaliation, their opponent unleashed leopards that killed both the people of Umuigwe and their livestock. Udunweagu community also used leopards to seek justice and fair play. Breathing life to this story, Asogwa Ugwu Asogwa, narrated the story of a woman, Orieti Ugwuja, who was married to a man from a distant place. After childbirth, her husband was not providing her with what a nursing mother required for proper lactation. Out of anger and frustration, she invoked the gods of her ancestors who responded by sending leopard to
give her justice. The leopard, after terrorising the entire neighbourhood, went to Oriefi’s husband’s goat shed and slaughtered a choice goat for “his” daughter. Thereafter, the husband developed a positive mindset and changed for the good.
The python on which the leopards stand on, and which also hems the base of the headdress, is a totemic creature in Igbo land. It is a sacred animal owned by powerful deities in some parts of Igbo land. The Igbo communities surrounding the Idemili River in Anambra State revere pythons very much such that whenever a python visits any household, the people give it a warm reception as they would to an important visitor. In these communities, “the python (eke idemnili), which is a female goddess, is associated with the Ogwugwu and Idemnili deities” (Nwafor, 2019). No one ever maltreats or hurts the python in these communities. Anyone who hurts or kills it, even accidentally, is obliged by custom to appease the gods by making some propitiatory sacrifices called ikpu ani as a way of cleansing or purifying the land. The person is also expected to bury the python in an elaborate ceremony similar to burial rites accorded humans. In many parts of Igbo land, the python is considered a messenger of the gods. Ugwu Omada Ogbene, (personal communication, 12 July 2015) narrated how a heavily “bearded” python that belonged to one of the deities, Ugwueg’ Ulunya in Ovoko community used to come out to dance to a particular solemn music dedicated to invoking its spirit. After the dance, it eats some of the sacrificial items and gracefully glides back to its abode in the shrine amidst shouts of joy by the people that the gods have accepted their offerings. To the people, python symbolises uprightness because it is believed that the gods only accept offerings of people who are upright. Asmah and Okpattah (2013) express similar views of the python symbolism in Yoruba mythology stating that “this sacred totemic creature reveals themselves to those who were believed to be pure in heart.”

The human elements on the headdress comprising the flutist, the man brandishing a gun, the double-faced figure, the kneeling figure and uniformed soldiers, underscore the response of Nsukka Igbo people to the liminal conditions of an evolving Igbo society. Their facial features and attires are decidedly European underscoring the influence of colonialism on Igbo society. In addition to reflecting the unavoidable consequences of cross-cultural encounters and its impact on the creative sensibilities of traditional African artists, the figural elements also symbolically communicate how the Nsukka Igbo viewed colonialism on one hand and how this perception shaped their belief systems on the other hand. These Westernised iconographic elements on Adada headdress are also present on the Ijile. In rationalizing the presence of foreign elements on the Ijile ensemble, Ukaegbu (1996, p. 140) states that “like the Igbo cosmos it represents, Ijile is constantly growing for it incorporates any new experiences and ideas within performing communities.” Against the backdrop of colonial power exercised primarily through military might, Ugwu Omada Ogbene (personal communication, 12 July 2015) revealed that the figure of a man brandishing a gun among the super-structural elements of the headdress is used symbolically to portray masculinity as well as hunting and military prowess of Nsukka Igbo people. In the olden days, the Nsukka Igbo people fought and won wars, driving their enemies further afield and occupying their lands. Judging from the facial features and the uniform which consists of a helmet, short-sleeved khaki shirt and shorts with stockings and boots to match, the figure is modelled after a colonial soldier. Although this goes to show how elements from a foreign culture are domesticated to represent a cultural ideal or phenomenon, in Igbo society as Ukaegbu (1996, p. 17) suggests, “change is never total for a new idea is constantly under observation and can be challenged and jettisoned with robustness whenever it places the community or individual at risk or disadvantage.”

Fluting was one of the major means of communication in traditional Igbo society. It equally played a key role in music making. Whenever there was going to be a communal gathering or labour or the decision of the council of elders that was to be communicated to the people, it was the duty of a village messenger or town crier to disseminate information. In carrying out this errand, he uses a flute (ojia) or other instruments such as metal gong (ogene) and wooden gong (ekwe). In an unflattering sense, the image of a flutist like Unoka, the father of Okonkwo in Chinua Achebe’s African classic novel, Things Fall Apart, is associated with someone who is improvident, lazy, a loafer and weakling. Ugwuoke Asogwa Agbedo (personal communication, May 23, 2014) explained that the depiction of the flutist on the mask satirises people who spend days or weeks away from their homes visiting their female friends in faraway villages while others were engaged
in farm works and other meaningful ventures. It symbolises a lazy man who instead of engaging himself in a useful economic venture, dresses like the white man and loafs about playing the flute. This explanation sheds light on the liminality of colonial experience as rite of passage. It highlights its transformative impact on the socio-cultural life of the Nsukka Igbo both at individual and communal levels.

The double-faced figure mounted on top of the headdress of Adada also vocalises how masking tradition and the belief system of the Nsukka Igbo were shaped by the colonial experience. Although sharing formal relationship with the Janus headdress of the Ejagham people of south-eastern Nigeria, their cultural contexts and symbolism differ. In Adada headdress, the double-faced head caricatures the cunning tendencies of the white man in particular and humans in general. It reveals how elements from a foreign culture are appropriated and reinterpreted by the Nsukka Igbo as new cultural tropes that ideologically embody their responses to cross-cultural encounters. The two faces are identical and realistically rendered. The facial features are also anglicised showing beak-like noses and thin lips. White is used to depict the skin tone. The use of white mirrors the people’s belief then that the whitish skin tone of the Europeans was because they were spirits who emanated from the earth hence they were called “ndma eshushue” (daylight spirits).

As noted earlier, gendered female body is an intrinsic part of Adada headdress. This is expressed through the figure of a woman with a distended breast breastfeeding her child; the figure that plays accordion and the coquettish figure with one arm by her side and the other raised in a beckoning gesture. The figure of the breastfeeding mother, an image that points to the policing of women bodies and gendered roles in patriarchal society, is placed directly in front of the mask head. On the Adada headdress, the image plays dual roles. On the one hand, it symbolises fecundity, alluding to women’s role as regenerative vessels of human life. On the other hand, it communicates the woes of adulterous women through the imagery of the distended breast. In pre-European contact era, the Nsukka Igbo regarded adultery as an abomination that incurred the wrath of the gods and this could manifest through the affliction of swollen breasts. The coquettish figure wearing a patterned blouse, hand bangles made from ivory, jigida and a stylish hairdo makes reference to a flirtatious woman. Ugwueze Nwara (personal communication, May 24, 2016) called the figure, ngweje abere ogodo, an amorous girl who is a symbol of beauty and indecency. It is also a caricature of what girls trained in the ways of the white man symbolise given the prevailing sentiment in the early years of Western incursion and colonialism that sending the girl child to school to learn the aberrant lifestyle of the White man was a waste of time and resources.

Unflattering views of the White man’s religion and culture during the era of colonisation also find visual interpretation in the kneeling figure with a bible on his laps. The figure is a mockery of the “church” people who Achebe, 1958, p. 101) referred to as “efulefufu, worthless empty men”; men whose words were not heeded in the assembly of the people. Ogbueze Oshigo (personal communication, May 23, 2016) hinted as much, explaining that when the Portuguese came with their own religion and education, it was only loafers and obdurant children that were given out to the white men because they were considered incorrigible and a disgrace to their families. The figure is depicted wearing a helmet-like hat and a shirt, obvious references to acculturation influence of Western culture as well as the abandonment of traditional values and way of life. Virtually all the people represented on the headdress of the masquerade wear stockings. In reference to this, Ogbueze Oshigo (personal communication, May 23, 2016) narrated that the White men (colonialists) always wore stockings and shoes, the people believed that they had no toes. To the natives, anyone who covers his or her feet is regarded as “ndma eshushue” (daylight spirits) and suffers from “eshi ocha” (leprosy). The natives also called the White men daylight spirits because of the way they spoke which to them was unintelligible.
4.2. Costume

The costume of Adada masquerade is two-layered. The one underneath called ekpọto is either milky coloured or hand-dyed by batik method in monochromatic black with fan blade-like motifs. The costume on top (Figure 8) is made up of various panel-like hang down appliquéd cloth with various Igbo motifs and symbols. Both are attached to the disk-like framework that serves as the base for the sculptural figures that make up the headdress. As the masquerade performs, the dynamic movement of the voluminous layers of expensive and elaborately decorated hang-down appliquéd cloth creates a breathtaking picture that imbues Adada with aura of majestic power and royalty. It also amplifies the physical presence of the wearer, projecting a transcendental quality that anchors its perception as spirit manifest and incarnate representation of the ancestor. From the hang-down appliquéd costumes, the face of the masquerade is recognisable by the eight circles on the upper part representing its eyes. The circles represent the full moon and stands for care, calmness and tenderness. No matter how brightly the moon shines, it is never harsh on the body. Its phase serves as the traditional Igbo calendar which is synodic or lunar and measured as a time between two full moons. One Igbo month has 28 days, which differs from the 28 or 29, 30, 31 days of the Gregorian months. Any phase of the moon announces Igbo ritual, social or economic activities.

Adada costume is replete with motifs and symbols (See Figure 9). The use of motifs and symbols derived from certain animals such as python, snake, lizard, chameleon and snails in decorating domestic and ritual objects as well as masquerades underscores their significance in the mythological beliefs of the Nsukka Igbo. The significance of the sculpted python in the headdress of Adada has been discussed earlier. Presence of snake is also discernible in Adada costume. Eight concentric circles arranged in two columns (four on each side) represent the eyes of the masquerade. The four concentric circles in each column represent the four market days (Eke, Orie, Afo, Nkwo) that constitute the Igbo week. Concentric circles are used symbolically by the Igbos to represent the cyclical nature of human existence; it neither has a beginning nor an end but continues cyclically through birth, death and reincarnation. Flanking both sides of the masquerade’s eyes is the symbol, ije agwo, representing the meandering movement of a snake. In Igbo folklore, this movement is used negatively to refer to an unreliable and dishonest person whose character is not easily discernible.

Figure 8. Adada masquerade costume (Front and back views).
Directly under the snake symbols are geometric motifs in the form of the letter “V” and its inverted image. The motif represents ọkwa ọjị (wooden kola nut bowl) used in Igbo land to present kola nut (ọjị) and traditional chalk (nzụ) to guests. The kola nut and traditional chalk play significant roles in Igbo culture and are used to show hospitality. They also symbolise peace and purity. Lizard and snail motifs also adorn Adada costumes. Lizards are very common in many households in Igbo land. It can fall from a height and withstand the shock. This ability finds didactic usage in Igbo proverbs where its personality is used to “equally understand and validate human experiences” (Nwafor, 2019). Thus, in Igbo culture, the lizard is used as a symbol of resilience, perseverance, endurance, as well as swiftness of movement. The motif is conspicuously positioned on the front of the masquerade costume in the upper left and right segments of the crossroad motif. The presence of snail motif in the costume undergirds its symbolic significance in Igbo culture. Because it goes about with its shell, Igbo people see the snail as signifying inseparability. Its slow movement is used to teach morals about patience and steadfastness of character. It is also a symbol of peace, humility and tranquillity. Masquerades that are women and children friendly like Adada usually carry snail shells or their motifs as a reminder of the need for peace, humility and tranquillity.
Manila motif also features in Adada costume. Two motifs are depicted in each of the four square segments that partition one of the hang-down appliquéd cloth at the back of the masquerade. Manila was used as currency in the olden days before the introduction of coins and paper money. Presently, it is widely used in the Nsukka Igbo area as a ritual object. Ezenwugwu Oyima (personal communication, 20 February 2015) revealed that if the object is infused with magical powers and driven into the earth in a man’s onu chi (shrine of his personal god), the man can live longer than he is destined to live. Once this is done, the person can only give up the ghost after the gods are appeased and the object known as akéré is removed from the onu chi. In Adada, the motif is representative of wealth and longevity. The crossroads motif decorates the lower part of the front segment of the hang-down appliquéd cloth. Crossroads is very symbolic in Igbo culture and is viewed as sacred spots where different spirits from different directions meet at midnight. People usually drop sacrificial objects (øjá) meant to propitiate the spirits at the crossroads before midnight so that the spirits consecrate them as they pass by.

Akara aka motif represents the grooved lines on the palms and symbolises destiny. The general belief is that no two persons have identical lines on their palms. In Igbo worldview, palm lines are undeletable and marks out one’s path in life. Therefore, no mortal can delete the lines or either delay or stop someone’s destiny. The concept of akara aka connects to such other concepts like Predestination’ or Pre-ordination’ or even Fatalism (A. K. Ugwu, 2019). In spite of viewing the individual as the maker of his own fortune, Igbo people also believe in predestination and are of the opinion that one’s luck is directly linked to his Chi (personal god) which is associated with his destiny. Thus, “what the person is going to be has already been preordained before he came into the world. This destiny can be written on his palm and palmists can interpret this destiny” (Ikeneg-Metuh, 1972 as cited in Okeke et al., 2017). In Igbo worldview, powerful spiritual forces as encapsulated in the Igbo myth of the water goddess, Nne Mmiri (Water Mother), can change one’s destiny. According to Nwoye (2011, p. 316)

… the Igbo ‘water mother’ or Nne Mmiri or water goddess, controls the entry and exit into and from this world. She is the goddess of crossroads. Before one is born, he or she must cross a river. There, the Nne Mmiri or water goddess confronts the individual. She challenges the pact of destiny, akara aka, made between one’s body, ahu, and one’s soul, Chi, witnessed by the Supreme God, Chi-Ukwu. One’s destiny can be changed with the help of the goddess. But if the goddess helps a person to change his or her destiny on earth, for example, to become wealthy or successful in life, rather than merely a housewife and mother, then that person must be the goddess’s worshipper. If this is not recognized on time, or if the person so assisted by the goddess before birth later refuse her calling, then the goddess can cause madness, misfortune, or premature death, either of the individual or beloved ones.

This myth underscores the symbolic connection between one’s destiny (akara aka) and the crossroads in Igbo worldview.

The sun (enyánwu, in Nsukka Igbo dialect) represented by enyánwu motif (See Figure 9) is very significant in Igbo cosmology. Prior to contact with Western civilisation and the modern system of keeping time, Igbo people relied on the sun to determine time by judging the shadow length of humans and objects. In the religious life of the Nsukka Igbo, some people personify, deify and domicile it in a shrine called onu enyánwu, which is usually situated at the entrance gate of a household for protection. The cult of enyánwu as the sun god is universally acknowledged throughout Igbo land (Mboaegbu, 1997; Ukwamedua & Edogiaweri, 2017). Because it is believed that enyánwu is the son of God, it is called upon to intercede between God and man in times of sickness. It is also seen as being “receptive to both man and spirit because he is the communication link between the world of man and that of the spirits (Mboaegbu, 1997, p. 368). Enyánwu is considered more benevolent than malevolent in relationship with the people and is regarded as the bringer of wealth and good fortune to the people (Ukwamedua & Edogiaweri, 2017). It is also associated with truth and honesty.
Lining the base of the front costume of Adada is a piece of frayed fabric that represents ukwu njiji (multiple legs of the millipede). Because of its many legs and very slow movement, the millipede motif is used as a symbol of plenitude, peace and diplomacy.

5. The colours
Most of the colours identified on the masquerade evoke definitive associations in the minds of people in the Nsukka Igbo cultural area. Appropriate knowledge of the associations of these colours with the cultural values of Nsukka Igbo people enhances understanding of their symbolic undertones and ethno-aesthetic grounding. The colours are derived from both synthetic and natural sources. For example, in the headdress, the sculptural elements are painted using enamel paint, which in addition to its durability and quality of surface finish, offers a wider range of colours than the traditional Igbo palette. Introduction of enamel paint also highlights how cross-cultural encounters shaped colonial and postcolonial masking experiences in Igbo land. Colours derived from minerals, animals and vegetable components sourced from the immediate environment are also used to decorate Adada masquerade.

The dominant colours that feature in the costumes are red, yellow, black, green and white. Red is derived from a plant known as ọlọ nlé. The seeds are harvested, pounded and the juice extracted. This is used to dye the costumes. It symbolises energy, vitality and life. According to Ugwu Ezugwu Omeinyi (personal communication, May 26, 2015), the red colour alludes to good feeding. He also stated that among the people, red symbolises danger and death. To highlight this, he asked a rhetoric question, ‘who sees where blood is spilled and does not suspect danger or death?’ Yellow hue is obtained from a plant substance known as odo. It has similar function as the nzu (white chalk). Like the nzu, priests, masquerade escorts, and people who had gone to welcome a newborn baby daub it on their bodies. It symbolises the presence of supernatural forces and joy. Black is derived from soot or charcoal mixed with egg albumen. It suggests two opposites: the mother earth, which symbolises love and care, and black-mindedness, a symbol of wickedness.

White is obtained from many sources. These include lime, plant ash, china clay, eggshell, and traditional chalk (nzu). Omabe spirit maskers daub it before they cast off their human form and transfuge into eworo (a slough). As earlier stated, people who go to welcome a newborn baby also daub it. It symbolises purity and divinity. Green, which suggests vegetal life and newness, is obtained from leaves. When something is referred to as being oyiri oyiri, it means that it is tender, young or fresh. Green, therefore, is a symbol of new life and tenderness. These colours are introduced into the costumes via three methods: dyeing, direct application unto the fabric and through appliqué method.

6. Ethno-aesthetics of Adada
Aesthetic value and judgment rely on the ability to discriminate at a sensory level. Igbo symbols are not allegories intended to represent; rather, they are intended to evoke particular states of mind. Across Igbo land, masking traditions and masquerading provide key contextual sites for appraising aesthetics in Igbo arts and culture. According to Ukaegbu (1996, pp. 36–37),

Igbo theatre belongs to this genre of cultural activities bound by sacred time and space, and its sacralising factor is the presence of masks, performers, and participants in a sensitized space. Its aesthetics can only be appreciated in the context of Igbo religion, the concept of time and space, art, meaning, and symbols.

The innate aesthetics of the different cultural ingredients embodied in Adada masquerade contribute to its overall aesthetics. These elements, particularly through their symbolic function, anchor or express meanings that are intrinsic to the cultural values and belief system of the Nsukka Igbo people and thus infuse an ethnic bias to the aesthetic appeal of the masquerade. This ethno-aesthetic signature finds validation in the statement that “given the predominance of symbols and the
celebrative motif of Igbo theatre, the evaluation of performances requires a culturally relevant index whose meaning is found within the same cultural matrix that shaped it” (Ukaegbu, 1996, p. 21). In other words, to study aesthetics, it is necessary to engage the art objects with a general knowledge of ethnography, understanding of factors that frame the critical consciousness of members of the society that created the art, and a general knowledge of comparative aesthetics (Ukaegbu, 1996). Symbolism plays a critical role in Igbo people’s perception, experience and dramatisation of life as well as aesthetic judgement. Ukaegbu (1996) reveals as much:

Igbo art is symbolic and for this reason, form and language are often encrypted and coded. Its understanding demands a careful decoding and an appreciation of the thought that informed and produced it. It combines the past, present and future within a mystic atmosphere, which testifies to the society’s constant tussle with the surrounding world of spirits and nature forces … A true appreciation comes with an interpretation of the symbols, the encoded story, the total performance, and not just the spectacle. (pp. 7–8)

Aesthetic value and judgment among the Igbo derives from the critical engagement of both the intrinsic and extrinsic worth of the object/subject under consideration. Willis (1989) as cited in Karickhoff (1991) notes that the three realities that occur in Igbo aesthetics are experienced at the physical, spiritual and abstract levels. Igbo worldview of life and art is believed to be the same. In this context, movement, dynamism and flux are valued in the totality of experience such that energy (ike), is an embodiment of life. This predilection to celebrate aesthetics of motion finds sublime manifestation in dance and consequently positions masquerade festival as an intrinsic part of a community that considers energy so vital (Karickhoff, 1991). The value attached to movement, dynamism and flux in Igbo culture is dramatised in masquerade performance where the audience moves in response to the movement of the masquerade to enjoy and maximise the viewing experience. We also experience this dynamism in traditional uli art, a form of body and wall decorations practised essentially by women in traditional Igbo societies. The lyricism and poetic essence of uli art derives from its formal attributes, which include brevity of statement, directness of execution, linearity, interplay of positive and negative spaces and asymmetry. Beyond the painting supports highlighted above, uli lines were also used to decorate Igbo carved doors, textile and masking costumes. As Ikwuemesi (2016) observes, “even where the linear configurations on such items were named in accordance with their geometric or organic significations, meaning did not necessarily supersede aesthetics.”

In Igbo culture, beauty is rarely expressed as a monolithic concept. Rather, it finds diverse interpretations and applications through a wide range of perceptive conditions/factors that could complement, enhance or offset the resultant outcome of aesthetic judgement. For example, in appraising the aesthetics of the human body, Igbo people are known to evaluate the human form in parts and thus it is common to hear terms like mma iru (beauty of the face) or mma aru (beauty of the body). They also employ aesthetic referencing that uses such concepts as internal beauty, beauty of character and beauty of the human heart to validate or invalidate physical beauty (Nwankwo, 1984). The use of vegetal and animal attributes to express beauty is also widely practiced in Igbo land. It is not uncommon to hear praise names like achala ugo nwanyi (a beautiful woman associated with the majesty and splendour of the eagle), oji ugo (expression of rare beauty using the rarity of the eagle kola nut as symbolic reference), akwa nwa (beauty as delicate as an egg), and asa nwa (as beautiful as Asa, a fish admired for its smooth skin), among others.

Like the Igbo concept of beauty, aesthetics of Adada is not just expressed through its physical appearance, which in itself is beautifully wrought, but also through the iconography and symbolic essence of its formal elements as well as the dynamism of its alluring movement at the performative level. From the realistically rendered sculptural elements that decorate the disk-like head-dress down to the elaborate and heavily appliquéd costumes rendered in vibrant and expressive colours, Adada masquerade is an awe-inspiring spectacle infused with uncommon beauty, splendour, and majestic presence. Compositionally, the sculptures on the headdress are strategically
arranged in such a manner that not only emphasises symmetry and structural balance, but also invite direct visual and aesthetic conversations with the audience during the masquerade performance. The figures are positioned facing outwards. Their body language, gestures and state of kinetic suspense seem as if they are under the influence of two opposing forces; a centrifugal force that pushes the figures outwards and a centripetal force that holds them in preventing them from proliferating from their assigned positions on the headdress. As Adada performs, the sensation of seeing different views of the sculptural element on the headdress as the masquerade works the arena evokes a secondary theatrical drama that complements as well as enriches the totality of its aesthetic ambience. Faithfulness to the innate attributes of the human figures, animals and objects on the headdress provides both formal and aesthetic counterweights to that of the stylised and abstract forms that extensively feature in the costumes.

Vegetal and animal attributes used as aesthetic frameworks in Igbo concept of beauty play decorative and iconographic roles in the costumes. Whether appearing as abstract or stylised representations of Igbo experience, they embody design elements and attributes that reinforce the aesthetic richness of Adada. Geometric shapes including circles, squares, rectangles and triangles are extensively used in designing the costumes. These are creatively and strategically arranged depending on their function as decorative or symbolic elements. For instance, the eight circles, arranged in two columns of four each standing side by side, identify the front of the masquerade. The circles symbolically reference the cyclic nature of life in Igbo philosophy. Their arrangement also highlights the Igbo belief in duality expressed by the word, ihe di abwo abwo (things come in twos). This concept is also reinforced by the two lizard motifs in the lower segment of the hang down appliqued cloth. The symbol of crossroads, which divides this segment into four sections, boldly expresses the significance of crossroads in Igbo worldview as a determinant of human destiny.

Line also plays important roles as design element in Adada costume. The interplay of horizontal, vertical, diagonal, wavy and curvilinear lines creates rhythmic and dynamic patterns some of which are repetitive and thus, project homogenous zones that are aesthetically pleasing. Often times, these lines demarcate segments and colour zones as well as delineate boundaries between shapes within segments. They also reinforce contrasts between negative and positive spaces. The geometric patterns and shapes in Adada costume recall the designs found in Igbo carved doors. They also establish connections with the design aesthetics of Igbo ụli art, which uses rhythmic lines as denominative index of its expressivity. The colours found in Adada costumes, applied either boldly or intricately, also reminiscences the earth tones prevalent in Igbo ụli art. Interplay of the two approaches creates colour fields that are sensual, dynamic and visually expressive. Viewed as a whole, Adada embodies all that is edifying about the Igbo concept of beauty. Its iconographic formalism and conceptual framework ritualise the importance of life and art in Igbo culture and provide grounds for identifying its ethno-aesthetic qualities.

7. Conclusion
Adada masquerade is an embodiment of the Nsukka Igbo people’s ideals and mythologies. It is also a conundrum of paranormal technology and a meeting point of several Igbo artistic enterprises such as architecture, theatre, drama, music and dance, and minstrelsy, among others. The masquerade creates the imagery of a mobile museum replete with historical sculptures and socio-cultural symbols that communicate the Igbo experience in the changing fields of society as well as links the living to their dead ancestors. The colonial experience was a difficult time for indigenous African societies as their culture and way of life were vigorously attacked, disrupted and cast in derogatory and negative terms. That Adada, along with other Igbo masquerades and masking traditions survived the liminality of colonial experience which caused much damage to the traditional values and institutions (Tamuno, 1966) attests to the resilience of cohesive Igbo culture with over five millennia of historical dynamism (Fosu, 1986). Other reasons why foreign influences could not gain a decisive dialectical victory over masking tradition as Ukaegbu (1996, p. 20) suggests, had to do with the “fact that the seasonal nature of performances and the presence of masking mysteries expose only a few aspects of the theatre to attack at any given time.” He equally states,
Secondly, the differences in theatre practice among communities meant that to be roundly successful, Christianity and colonialism had to employ enough weapons to match the diversity of performances, community differences, cults and stagecrafts. Christianity and colonialism were neither able to diversify their approach nor did they understand the theatre enough to destroy it. (Ukaegbu, 1996, p. 20)

In addition to these reasons, the study revealed that the cultural ingredients embodied in Adada which encapsulate fundamental attributes of Igbo worldview and belief systems of the Nsukka Igbo people helped it navigate the liminal conditions of colonial and postcolonial spaces. These cultural tropes, expressed through art, architecture, dance and music, provided both physical and symbolic sites for the renewal of bonds between living progenies and their dead ancestors as well as between members of the community. In ritualising the Igbo concept of the ancestor, Adada masquerade theatre promoted the spirit of communitas among the Nsukka Igbo people and granted access to the aesthetic foundation of their cultural identity. In this sense, Adada provides insightful reading of a community’s application of the general aesthetic philosophy that governs Igbo art forms. The study also showed influences of Western culture on the formal attributes of some of the sculptural elements that adorn the Adada headdress. This re-affirms the idea that the “main characteristic features of Igbo masking aesthetics are its flexibility and its progressive expansion and incorporation of new ideas” (Ukaegbu, 1996, p. 39). In appraising the iconography of Adada within the changing fields of Igbo society, it is obvious that the colonial experience more than any other acculturative agent had the most visible impact on its iconographic formalism and aesthetics. The deafening echoes generated by its prolonged absence from the public space have more to do with the liminal footprints of Christian evangelism, urbanism and modernism.

Given the moribund nature of Adada masking tradition, it is obvious that its significance in the socio-cultural life of the Nsukka Igbo people is not as strong as it used to be. Like other indigenous Igbo masking traditions, Adada’s passage through the liminal spaces engendered by acculturative forces have left it bruised, weakened and confined to the margins of the changing landscape of Igbo socio-cultural experiences. Whether Adada reclaims its position in the socio-cultural life of the Nsukka Igbo people is strongly dependent on how the people either as individuals or as a group are willing to either mortgage or preserve their cultural and artistic identity as the navigate the liminal spaces of a constantly evolving Igbo society. Only time will resolve the outcome of Adada’s cultural dilemma.

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