Aesthetics in Eje Festival at Ode Irele

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Abstract:
Eje is an annual performance that is synonymous with thanksgiving and a form of reception for female members of the society who might be married to have a taste of their paternal homes for five days having being away for close to twelve months in the year. The return affords them the opportunity of eating and relating with their siblings where important issues could be discussed and where necessary, interventions might be made by the extended family. The week-long activities afford the siblings the opportunity to entertain their female members every other year by presenting their masquerades three times in a day at the arena. The most memorable of the eje festivals is the one tagged: Eje Agbapo or Eje Omo Okun (Agbapo means many which is a reference to the fact that many people are involved while Eje Omo Okun refers to the festival of the descendants of Okunsanbi, the first wife of Oyenusi). Okunsanbi hailed from Ondo and was the daughter of Jomo-Opehuku. She gave birth to Opetusin, Erinjimokun, Agbogun, Akinyomi and Olanusi. Olanusi alone had nine wives and they gave birth to many stalwarts. That explains why almost everybody other family is involved in the festival because they must have married from there or gave their daughters in marriage to them.

Introduction
Certain desires informed the creation of the comic performer Okoro, and others such as Ogoni, Ilebe and Alegbagba during eje festival at Ode Irele. The first motive may be located within the sociological need of the environment. This may be situated within the need for the preservation of the people from danger. The provision of entertainment is central in this regard. This is so especially when the need to delight and entertain the female members of the society might be considered during the annual eje festival. Within the sociological imperative may be found the necessity for cohesion, easy networking among the female members of the milieu who might be married off as well as the provision of links among such women wherever they might be married. Equally tied to the need for networking is the desire to maintain unbroken link with these women all through their lifetime even when they might be married away. These masquerades represent different characters and they constitute aesthetic objects. They are, therefore, bound to have different aesthetic appeals to the audience.

Definition of terms
Masquerades are decorated characters that take the place of human beings during performances in indigenous societies. They are members of the society but the artistic presentations have stripped them of their human attributes. They are sometimes presented as spiritual beings that possess uncanny knowledge of both physical and metaphysical realms. They are embodiments of supernatural capabilities and these qualities reflect in their activities at the arena such as possessiveness and delivery of true and extraordinary prophecies. They are hardly distinguished from their masks because their costumes are a combination of both masks as well as their costumes. Some masquerades are capable of acrobatic and perhaps magical activities that can hardly be explained. They can be elusive and obscure when they have to do so especially when they want to confound the audience. Specific families are associated with some masquerades in the Ode Irele milieu.

The Origin of Eje Festival
The desire to meet the needs of the people ranging from material to the artistic may have informed the creation of the annual entertainment segment. The reasons are not far-fetched. They may be situated within the search for “happiness” or “human flourishing”. This is in tandem with Immanuel Kant’s idea of a happy life that may not be subject to reason (Thomas E. Hill, 2010: 146). The goal of indigenous people in the Ode Irele milieu may not be
detached from Kant’s apprehension of happiness “as something familiar and attainable” (Thomas, 147). The need to come home annually during eje festival may be situated within time and space. It was fallout of the murder of Madubuwa.

Madubuwa War took place. The war was occasioned by the death of a woman named Madubuwa the daughter of (Chief Gboroye) or Akinyomi. She was married to a man at Erinje. She was murdered by her husband or suitor. At the end of the reprisal attack, the decision was made to allow the descendants of Jagboju and Oyenusi to marry one another in order to put an end to the idea of marrying off their daughters to strange people at the other side of River Oluwa who could be so brutal to their wives. Immanuel Kant quoted in Thomas Hill (2010) situates happiness within three basic necessities such as “preservation, welfare and well-being” (147) and eje festival has amply addressed these in the search for the preservation of the people and protection from matrimonial violence.

Theoretical Framework:
The approach to this study shall be aesthetics. However, the study shall employ a psychological aesthetics in the search for meanings. Critical endeavours have dwelt extensively on philosophical aesthetics. Beardsley Monroe (1958) presents what may be considered a working definition of “psychological aesthetics” and “philosophical aesthetics”. While psychological aesthetics dwells on issues “about the causes and effects of works of art” philosophical aesthetics “resolves questions about the meaning and truth of critical statements” (3-4). The search for the reasons for the artistic objects that may inform recognition or appreciation and the consequent aesthetic emotion may not be limited to the examination of the aesthetic objects alone. The quest may be taken to the threshold of psychology. Aesthetics, according to Immanuel Kant represents a “sympathetic bond between the viewer and the reality behind perceptual experience”. Hegel considers aesthetics to be determined by the mind. The holarchic model “holds the view that behaviour is motivated by the arousal of desires in conjunction with beliefs regarding the capacity and opportunity to satisfy them” (Wonderly, 1991: 314). According to the holarchic interpretation, however, “aesthetics are functional” while Schiller considers aesthetics to be a situation where the “will and desire are brought into harmony” (Donald Mackay Wonderly, 1991: 236).

Application/Analysis:
Fundamental to the artistic creation of festivals and many social norms in the Ode Irele milieu is the quest for self preservation. There is a “desire” by the people to maintain a secured enclave where the people are not only supplied their needs but may be adjudged happy in the pursuit of their domestic and filial chores. The desire is propelled by “force”. According to Wonderly (1991), “desire, the psychological manifestation of drive, is an affective state having both conscious and preconscious aspects” (193). Imputed to the milieu, the “drive” may be measured in time and space. This is the aftermath of the murder of Madubuwa. This “drive” is equally referred to as “signal” (Wonderly, 1991: 193-194). Desire is also an alteration in the nervous system, “it is infallible and “it cannot err” (Wonderly, 1984). The affective state which is a reference to the emotional reactions can never be the same.

By contrast, belief about desires, or the attaching of a label to the affective state, is not unfailing. Individuals may make incorrect assumptions about why they are experiencing a particular feeling (Wonderly, 1991: 194).

The institution of a performance that can provide an opportunity for networking may be a form of “self-preservation”. It is not unknown to indigenous people that “separation” can lead to “isolation” and of course, “lack of significance” (194). Eje is, therefore, an avenue through which team spirit could be built and dissipated efforts may be avoided. Wonderly (1991) locates the “experienced desire” within “maturation, affective integrity and deprivation level” (194).

The “maturation level” as may be imputed to the consciousness of the people towards arriving at the artistic script may be different in other communities. The preoccupation of the contiguous communities may be the construction of roads to link other villages. Of course, selfish drives may lead to parochial desires whereas the immediate need of the people in Ode Irele milieu, as typified by eje could be the preservation of the vulnerable members from harm and possible extinction and communal collaboration in the orchestration of socio-cultural values as well as devising a simple means of taking the population census of the people through the opportunity that the periodic convergence provides. An offshoot of the quest for self-preservation is the responsibility of mandatory convergence at the family level twice a month. During Oxekanle which comes up every fortnight, and the Osepadhe that comes up every month. Within a space of three months, the community finds a reason to converge for one celebration and another. Ore comes up every July, followed by Ojoyejusu in October, Olojiubogho in October too and eje in October which is celebrated all through October and November leaving just some days before the Christian festival of Christmas.
Can the desire and the attendant manifestation in *eje* be termed a form of torment? Simply put, could the desire that gestates *eje* festival be termed a negative impulse? Is the communal celebration not negating the freedom of members of the community? Complaints are rife by some western-oriented members of the community that the performances are too many and that the period between the celebration of one festival and another can hardly be enough for engagements in positive endeavours. However, negating the preceding negative posture is the understanding that self-preservation is instrumental in the maintenance of cohesion just as a blissful society may be imperative towards any economic engagement.

No doubt, a society that is devoid of rancour is a necessary springboard for further engagements in productive ventures.

The desire in *eje* is the recognition of the potential dangers that exogamous relationship could pose to the existence of the female members of the society. Equally attached to this desire is the fashioning of *eje* as a “conceptual state in which a belief is held regarding the type of deficiency that is causing the uneasiness”. Therefore, “desires” are psychological apprehensions of grave, impending dangers or situations that are geared towards a timely transformation that could lead to a “conceptualised state” that is capable of putting the fear of danger as well as the real danger itself at bay. *Eje* is, therefore, a form of “protective desire” because it is informed by threat.

*They are aroused when the integrity of the individual is at risk. The signal is one of pain or discomfort, and relief rather than pleasure is sought* (Wonderly, 197).

The visible threat to the lives of the female members of the milieu occasioned by the death of Madubuwa may be cited as the threat. Apart from Madubuwa War, the era was characterised by insecurity. The people lived in absolute fear. A mere ruffle on leaves could lead to the desertion of the village by both the king and his subjects. Osokoro War was another manifestation of the “assertive desire” on the part of the strong to enslave and conquer the weak. At Ohunumo, Oyenusi and two of children namely Akinyomi and Awohanma were murdered by warriors from Benin. Jagboju was on the throne then. This development led to the migration from Ohunmo to the present location of Ode Irele. It would be recalled that a similar incident scuttled the people from their original location at Orofun which led to the migration of Orunbemekun to Ohunmo. The fear that such ugly development might be visited on more women was translated into a “conceptual state”. Within the same “protective desire” could be classed “transcendent desire” that “deals with the threat of isolation or the desire to identify with other individuals, or with various forms of institutions. Transcendent desires include the desire for intimacy and meaning, which is critical to emotional adjustment” (Wonderly, 197). *Eje* is, therefore, “protective” and “transcendent” because the situation, if not nipped in the bud early enough could lead to war and possible annihilation of the people.

Every extended family has a number of masquerades. The comic character is known as *Okooro* in all the quarters. *Okooro* is the sole dancer but his wife is believed to be left behind in the unexplored realm of the spirit because of the big sore on her leg which has existed for many decades without any hope of ever being healed. The sore is reputed to be about a medium size calabash. The knowledge of the sore is rife as many people talk about it but no one has ever seen neither the sore nor the wife. *Ogoni* is another masquerade and walks in pair. They are agile dancers and could demonstrate their agility to the admiration of the audience. They are swift and dexterous in all ramifications. They detest the sight of fowls and would throw their decrepit cutlasses at them whenever they saw any within the arena. No one may take them to task for such an action while the festival lasts. Their dance steps are usually enthralling, entertaining and aesthetically pleasant to members of the audience.

*Ilebe* are unusual masquerades and they are both male and female. They adorn long masks and colourful dresses. Their buttocks are usually big and depict the body of a well built personality whose economic prowess can hardly be disputed. They are reputed to be drawn from the spiritual realm mainly to entertain the female visitors that are home for the festival. They seldom dance and people are eager to watch their performances. The case is that members of the audience may transcend the people in the immediate environment as people from far and near come to the arena to savour the unparalleled display of the masquerades.

The last but most important of the masquerades is *Alegbagba*. This masquerade has no follower as he protects the other masquerades from danger. He plays the role of security to other masquerades and would chase people around the streets of Ode Irele in order to administer canes on erring members of the audience that would insult him by chanting: *Alegbagba oko o* (meaning: run *Alegbagba* to the bush). This call is a challenge on the masquerade to be prepared for a race through the streets of the town. Whatever the conflict might be between *Alegbagba* and the youngsters, while the performance lasts, may be considered to be another artistic device in the search for fun and entertainment during *eje* festival. Youngsters look forward to another festive season when they could display their dexterity at running.
The focus of this paper is, therefore, geared towards investigating the reasons for the freshness attendant on the masquerades even when they have existed for many generations. The study has uncovered the reasons behind the artistic endeavour. The quest was informed by the peculiar needs of the folk in the environment at a particular period in their agrarian society even when it may be considered a unique feature of the people. Equally certain was the possibility of universal correspondence in the personality of Okooro and other similar characters that display uniformity of performance over the years with slight modifications in the costumes, gestures, and nuances. Could the personality of Okooro be a mockery of the human situation that keeps revealing similar behavioural traits in all ages? Human behaviours are conscious endeavours no doubt that are capable of affecting the knowledge of the listeners/audience in two definite ways, by informing as well as conditioning them thereby making relevant appeal to their intellectual essence and this may be drawn from the environment through native intelligence and an equal appeal that such inferences could arouse in them in their social and cultural endeavours.

Okooro masquerade performs every other year in the month of October. It is staged during eje festival which doubles as a thanksgiving ceremony as well as a reception for female members of the town. It equally serves as a means of computing the population of female members that may be married within and outside the community. As a reception, eje becomes a means of networking among siblings in order to come to their rescue in case of any grave challenge that may beset members such as dearth or illness. The role of Okooro is to provide the needed entertainment for the visiting female members of the milieu. The importance of the performance may not be removed from the need to make their stay worthwhile and the sages recognise that material provisions alone might not be enough to meet the entertainment of the visitors and an atmosphere of peace and conviviality may not be divorced from the overall happiness of the people.

Even when happiness may be subjective and difficult to compute or measure, the response that the interactions between Okooro and the people, especially the atmosphere of clapping, dancing and catharsis that may be found through tears and laughter, may be pointing towards the satisfaction of the audience and the necessity for staging the masquerade every other year. The fixture may be necessitated by the fear of monotony especially the need for suspense as well as the desire to whet the appetite of the audience. The case is that many visitors throng the festival when the staging of the masquerades would take place. In this wise, the goal of the artists is adjudged to be successful. This is tied to the fact that members of the audience have feelings and could react to aesthetic objects around them. The business of Okooro is to arouse the latent aesthetic feelings in the audience. It becomes comical that unusual life’s experience could be brought to the stage and made an artistic ingredient; a script that could evoke laughter or what Aristotle considers to be catharsis or purgation of emotion. The attitude of the comic character named Okooro is trivial, mundane, flexible and dynamic. What may constitute a source of disequilibrium to the majority is accepted with philosophical calmness by the character and this solid state of mind is taken as a trait that can hardly be cultivated except by some rare, superhuman members of the society. The truth, therefore, is that challenges are not the exclusive preserve of human beings since Okooro who inhabits the spiritual realm could discuss freely the big sore on the leg of his wife that has defied treatment over the years.

The flexible demeanour of the character named Okooro may not be easily cultivated by the younger generation. This is a result of the fact that life’s contradictions may not be accepted as indispensable components of existence. This explains why recourse to suicide is very rampant among them. This attitude negates the philosophical calmness of the aged whose experiences must have made very familiar with the negative side of life and may therefore not be easily troubled as to seek recourse to suicide in the face of life’s debilitating challenges. In this regard, the sages of the Ode Irele milieu could be said to be propelling a philosophical or ideological understanding of life which may not be easily internalised by the younger generation except it is deployed through the medium of art. Yeats W. B. (1965) may be considered apposite to the exhibition of the latent inspiration and ideological thrust of the characters that feature during the festival of eje at Ode Irele and through these performances, the sages may have exhibited the philosophical and ideological values of the society and directed the moral goal of societies through their art.

And it has often been this philosophy, or this criticism, that has evoked their most startling inspiration, calling into outer life some portion of the divine life, or of their buried reality, which could alone extinguish in the emotions what their philosophy or their criticism would extinguish in the intellect (61).

The recognition of the contradictions or ambivalence of life may not be the sole aim of the sages of indigenous societies. Rather, the underlying intention may be the maintenance of decorum in the society. This quest could be achieved through a combination of informal training through exposition to proverbs, folktales, riddles, myths and
periodic performances of festivals. The means through which these may be perpetuated could be found in repetition, regularity of convergence at the arena and collective orchestration of performance. Far-reaching summations may be made from the character of the comic personality called Okooro. The display at arena is meant to inculcate two important attributes in the audience. The first borders on the need for virtue. Aristotle considers a virtuous person to be “someone who tends to avoid the extreme of over-reacting or failing to react in particular situation” (Gerald Jones et al 2010: 96). Indigenous art, therefore, becomes a compendium of moral and artistic education. The recourse to the arena as a means of sensitising the people may not be out of place in view of the fact that there was no formal means of acculturating the younger generation except through the periodic convergence at the arena. Therefore, each script is carefully prepared in order to harbour as many moral and intellectual scripts as possible. It is this concern for the total education of the people that informed the parade of the different masquerades such as Okooro whose gentle demeanour is in sharp contrast to the belligerent nature of Alegbagba as his functions range from entertaining the younger generation to the provision of security for the vulnerable members such as Okooro and Illebe. The race through the streets of Ode Irele with the ferocious Alegbagba and the cane in his hand pursuing them may amount to another form of entertainment in the field of sport. This exercise may also build their physical and intellectual framework. Indigenous people have long understood the fundamental ingredients of happiness to be the sum total of development of the mind and body as well as exposure to some natural truths about existence. Eje is, therefore, synonymous with what the Ancient Greeks termed eudaimon which simply means “to be happy, to flourish or to lead the good life” (Gerald Jones, et al 2010, 97). To the artists in the Ode Irele milieu, being virtuous may not be removed from the absence of fear of conquest, exposure to unhindered entertainment and relationship with the people with who they had lived originally. Eje is a form of excursion to the roots, networking with people from the same origin who might be living within the same matrimonial environments with them. Embedded in eje, therefore, are “morality” and “reason”. The moral lessons may be viewed from the fact that great advantages could be found in networking and collaborative efforts. This also explains the importance of filial bond in the Ode Irele setting. The periodic performance of eje may be considered a necessity and the gains therefrom far outweigh the financial commitment to the performance. Therefore, the reasons for the performance are genuine and it has become generally acceptable to the people in contiguous people around Ode Irele such as Ajagba and Ode Omi who have also borrowed the performance in view of the advantages or “affective conviction” in it. The truth is that every daily experience is theatrical but it requires the touch of art to make it amusing, relevant and factual. The jest on life’s contradictions becomes a dramatic ingredient when the supposed victim turns such a predicament or situation to a source of pleasure. This is artistic because the beholders or audience could not easily understand how a torn in the flesh may be treated with triviality as if the situation does not constitute a source of trauma. This is potentially funny. And members of the audience cannot help expressing their apprehension of the unusual. The goal of the sages of the Ode Irele milieu may not be divorced from the provision of happiness for all members of the society. This informs the artistic provision of the segment for the annual entertainment of the female members of the town when attentions are showered on them and further assuring them that they are not forgotten. The tradition is that the male members would provide sumptuous meals for their female relations all through the five days. Well-tailored dresses would be procured and members could dance once a day in a procession through the streets of Ode Irele. The morning segment would witness the performances of Okooro, Alegbagba (who serves as security to the other masquerades), Illebe and Ogoni at the arena. While Ogoni and Illebe could dance in the same location, Okooro’s gentle demeanour does not permit him to perform in the same arena with them lest he is injured and the deafening noise from the crowd reduces his own performance to insignificance. The same development is instrumental in eje festival. The wisdom behind it is that it would provide an opportunity for the “preservation” of the people. The decision to allow the descendants of Jagboju and Oyenusi (who were born by the same father and mother) to intermarry may be a form of preservation. Eje too becomes a means of caring for women who constitute the vulnerable members of the society. It is imperative that the female members of the Ode Irele milieu come home annually during eje festival and absentees are easily recognised when their names are conspicuously absent in the family’s register. Absentee for two consecutive festivals may soon be sanctioned. In the first place, she may soon be a hostess to some unexpected visitors. Some delegates from the nine families may pay her an unscheduled visit. Where grave health matters may be involved, the nine families could send some fierce-looking men to retrieve her and bring her home. This is a form of welfare and the attachment of the larger society to the well-being of the least member of the milieu beyond marriage. The dance that accompanies the visitation for the period of five days is geared towards re-enacting the milieu’s values that connect the visitors with their background.
The same desire to preserve the life of every female member may also be measured through the necessity for burying every married female member in her paternal home at death. This is to prevent the possibility of her being murdered by her husband. As soon as a female member is ill, members of her family must be informed so that proactive measures could be put in place. Where the husband cannot foot the medical bill, members of the extended family would immediately come to his rescue. It becomes a matter of litigation where a member dies without the foreknowledge of her relations. It could also be compounded when the husband has not fulfilled all marital obligations relating to the woman. He may be forced to pay the bride price there and then. A delegate of the relations comprising mature women would be saddled with the responsibility of examining the corpse in order to ascertain the possibility of being murdered.

Female member’s regularity during festive periods determines her acceptability when she dies. Apart from this, the same regularity will be instrumental in the communal burial of her parents. Acceptability is tied to the financial participation as well. Of course, the family register will determine these. Where the deceased’s financial performance is considered out of place, it may be mandatory for the children to offset such indebtedness before she could be considered worthy of burial by the extended family. The culture during eje until lately was to prepare sumptuous meals by every female member and these would be deposited at the Uga (palace/meeting place) of the family on the eve of the festival. However, the system changed when it dawned on them that they could hardly finish the food and that most of the pounded yam would be wasted. The system was replaced with financial commitment. What could have been spent on food would now be paid in cash. It is from this financial pool that cash could be drawn whenever they had any financial commitment. Thomas (2010) provides insight into the reasons for meeting the need for happiness by the sages in the Ode Irele milieu.

Similarly, when happiness is increasing a person’s contentment, promoting happiness must be understood as increasing a person’s contentment or subjective sense of well-being. The aim of promoting someone’s happiness, understood as a practical aim, cannot be that the person will achieve total satisfaction of desire or uninterrupted contentment for a lifetime (147).

As much as the sages could not meet the total need of the people for happiness, there is recognition that a fulfilment of filial bond and cohesion within the family setting could engender happiness in other areas of human endeavours. Therefore, attempts are made to entertain, create an atmosphere of annual convergence where other members that may be married off and would not have met would have the opportunity to converge once in a year. The artistic and filial consciousness that would be aroused may better be imagined. This study is wary of tagging the performance a carnival. It is an artistic fulfilment of the need for convergence that could engender welfare and well-being of the people and the ultimate happiness of all. The performances of Okooro, Ogoni, Alegbagba and Ilebe may be considered to be geared towards meeting the aesthetic need of the people. Thomas’ (2010) position may be adjudged relevant to the artistic and moral innuendoes that are latent in the periodic performance of Okooro masquerade at Ode Irele.

It is human nature to seek happiness for oneself. Moreover, we tend to pursue it for its own sake, not merely as something good as a means to other things. (148).

The female participants, whose roles are limited to singing, dancing, clapping and chanting the praise songs of the masquerades, may be considered to be directed towards seeking happiness. The period they spend at home during the festival may amount to a holiday when they are excused from the monotony and drudgery of daily life and the performance may be seen as having intrinsic values. The desirability of women at the arena during festivals is situated within their ability to transfer their knowledge to their children who may in turn pass the same experience to their descendants.

Indigenous art is a reflection of human behaviour. As an offshoot of the values that may be held sacrosanct by the people over the years, art remains a cultural force that could be enforced in the maintenance of cohesion and may be equally directed towards inculcating specific behavioural patterns in the audience. In this light, performance exhibits artistic, emotive and cognitive imports because of the creative ingredients latent in the scripts and are capable of conditioning the audience towards forming basic cultural norms and conventions in the milieu. The artistic dexterity
of indigenous composers may be viewed against the backdrop of the registration of mores and values that are the bedrock of society over the years especially at a time when writing was not in vogue. What may have sustained the performance of Okooro over the years may be located within the fact that the aesthetic object or personality is desirable, good or “valuable by virtue of being the object (s) of rational willing, and what is rational to will is not a question that can be settled entirely by empirical means or by intuition” (Thomas, 2010: 149). The first reason for the sustainability may be located within the fact that it is acceptable to the majority of the people. It is doubtful if the festival would have lasted this long without the collective acceptability of the majority as an artistic force that could meet the need of the people for entertainment, fulfillment of cultural and social values in the milieu. The vulgar outlook of the Okooro too reveals an exaggerated human trait and this is particularly funny to the extent that his personality and presentations could induce laughter that he becomes a beloved of the people who query him about the state of affairs in his family in the world beyond. The big sore on the wife is of particular interest to the audience and he has no moral scruple or restraint in revealing every bit of information about the sore to his audience.

While happiness or the search for happiness may be a virtue, the delivery of the ingredients from which happiness is made by Okooro may not be considered to have offended the sensibility of the audience. If it did, members of the audience that throng around him every other year would have sought another means of fulfilling entertainment. However, the fact that the performance has intrinsic aesthetic values in it makes it attracts aesthetic emotion to itself and the consequent aesthetic experience consequent upon aesthetic satisfaction. Equally salient to the performance is the excitement that may be associated with the performance that can induce excitement from the audience as the performance gathers momentum.

**Eje and Festival Songs**

Okooro also known as eje lumeru is a memorable masquerade during eje festival in Irele. Kids could not but dote on him. His mythical wife is said to be having a big sore that has lasted several decades and would not heal. The sore is reputed to be the size of a big bowl (ugbadoko). All these information he would reveal to the delight and amazement of the audience. The feeble performer would parade the streets crawling and singing:

*Mo boke yi re,*  
*Eye o abenu takoloma,*  
*Mo boke yi re,*  
*Eye o abenu takoloma,*  
*He, he he,*  
*Eye o abenu takoloma*

*I face this way, oh bird with a peculiar beak.*

Okooro is an amiable personality. The audience is usually delighted to refer to him as eje: eje-lumeru (whatever that may mean) and would tease him exceedingly about the sore and other intimate questions about his family in the world beyond would be asked. His popular song depicts movement. He is always on the move:

*Mo boke yi re,*  
*Eye o abenu takoloma*  
*Moboke yi re,*  
*Eye o abenu takoloma*  
*He he he,*  
*Eye o abenu takoloma*

*I face this way, oh bird with a peculiar beak.*

While Okooro is singing and dancing, Alegbagba will be protecting him. Alegbagba is the dreaded masquerade during eje festival. He is so ferocious that he chases young people all over the town with whips. He is so agile that he could run throughout the day chasing the audience all over the town. Youngsters would be singing:

*Alegbagba oko o.*  
*To the bush oh Alegbagba.*

He is like the police to the masquerades. He would carry Okooro because of his frail nature and could restore Umale Lila (the big masquerades) to normalcy while dancing. Ogoni too displays his spectacular performance during eje
festival. He is the smart performer that would kill any fowl that ventures on the streets during the performance. The audience would taunt him with songs:

_Ogoni koko a pa ediyi lediye je, Ogoni koko_Fearful Ogoni that would eat people's fowls._

He holds a decrepit cutlass with which he could kill fowls by throwing it at them. At the peak of his dance, the _owe sese_ song would be introduced. The song has a trans-cultural implication. It must have been introduced to the milieu because of the significance of the meaning as well as the rhythm. It probably originated from the Ijaw tribe of Niger Delta. This development is not surprising. This is because of the proximity of the Ode Irele milieu to the Ijaw. Of course, they share boundaries with each other and this proximity could engender linguistic and cultural dispersal. Again, exogamous relationship could also be a valid reason for the transfer of festival song from one tribe to another. Equally tied to the dispersal theory are trade link and diplomatic ties between the two tribes. The song takes the dancers to the peak of their performances.

_Owe sese, e owe_Owe sese, e owe_Owe sese, e owe_Owe sese, e owe_Owe sese, e owe_A great dancer is on the dance floor_Dare him if you can_Come to the dance floor._

The relationship between the Ijaw tribe and Irele people has spanned two centuries. It is on record that they had encounters with each other when the people of Ode Irele settled earlier at Orofun. They had to migrate from there to Ohunmo because of the menace of the people who would ravage the land from time to time. That did not settle the incursion of the Ijaw tribe to the Ode Irele-Ilaje enclave. While at Ohunmo, they also had reasons to settle scores with each other during the weekly market. No wonder then that borrowing must have taken place in the course of such encounters. It would not be out of place too for people from these two communities to have visited each other in order to attend the periodic festivals. _Ilebe_ is a well-decorated masquerade from _Gboroye_ family. Her majestic dance would attract audience. She plays with kids. The following popular song is associated with her:

_Ilebe o, eri o.E ba onode sere._
_Ilebe o, eri o._

_Ilebe, oh water_He loves children_Ilebe, oh water_Ilebe and _Ogoni_ have curative powers and children that are susceptible to convulsion would be brought to them. They would carry them in their arms as the children express their fear of the masquerades. The belief is rife that such an encounter could put paid to the ailment. The performance of the annual _eje_ festival at Ode Irele is always colourful, sociological and dramatic. It is colourful as the movements of the groups from their family arena (_Uga_) to the major streets where pleasantries are exchanged amid emphasis on the importance of female children as more instrumental in the development of the family setting:

_Awa omobinrin, awa o somo ju_Awa omobinrin!_The female members are more important_The female children!_Beardsley (1958) lends a plausible voice to the claim “that the flow of music bears striking resemblances to the flow of meaningful human discourse” (318 - 319). The song is a pointer to the relative importance of women to the
recent time among the sages of the town whether or not female children should not be considered more responsible than the male counterparts in view of the emotional attachment that such women usually attach to their parents beyond marriage. While their male counterparts may not care a hoot about the welfare of their parents the moment they are married, female children may be more instrumental in the welfare of their parents.

Thus arises the view that music has not only qualities of its parts and whole, but a meaning, a semantical dimension, like words and gestures (319)

Apart from the structural arrangements that may be latent in the songs, they also possess qualities that could elevate the spirit beyond the level of reality. That explains why songs are considered to possess uncanny emotional qualities that can hypnotise, sensitise and indoctrinate. The emotional attachment of the audience may make such songs memorable and significant. The performances of festival songs are in consonance with the tonal linguistic qualities of Yoruba language through a harmonious blend with the human organs, by arousing affective qualities, relaying vital information and inferences bordering on morality and the people’s worldviews. These songs depict and exhibit diverse human situations and activities ranging from birth, death, and religion to diplomatic references. It is inherent in the performances of festival songs in Ode Irele for the frequent references to landmarks such as the eternal triangle crises on account of the beauty of Lobimitan (the mother of Jagboju and Oyunusi whose beauty was a source of conflict. She was married to two monarchs at different times. At the death of the second husband and it dawned on her that she was about to be bequeathed to the third monarch who was the younger brother of the last husband, Lobimitan declined and vowed that three monarchs would not marry her in a lifetime. She chose to be single.

Okooro is an object of interest. It is this interest that has sustained its relevance over the years. It must be capable of making an appeal to the aesthetic sensibility of the audience in order to retain its artistic aura. Therefore, Okooro must be latent with aesthetic aura that could arouse aesthetic emotion in the audience. The inherent aesthetic emotion may have conditioned the resultant aesthetic experience in the audience. The spectacle alone may not be enough to induce aesthetic emotion and the consequent aesthetic experience except the artists have succeeded in equipping the aesthetic object with the needed qualifications that can induce the necessary emotion in the audience. Negating Bell Clive’s (1969) claim about the necessity for the presence of aesthetic emotion prelude to the emergence of aesthetic experience, this study can claim emphatically that the spectacle alone may be instrumental in engendering aesthetic emotion especially where the needed artistic ingredients are present in the aesthetic object (93). The mask of Ogoni for instance may induce the audience to the level of almost making summations about the mythical, spiritual parallel even when such has not been seen before. Therefore, emotion may be aroused as a result of the recognition or appreciation. If the claim of Bell were so, it would be difficult therefore for any summation to be made by any critic or the audience where an aesthetic object is being confronted for the first time.

The masks of Ogoni and Ilebe may be considered to have significant form and this may be salient to all aesthetic objects in inducing the needed aesthetic emotion. In this wise, the masks are capable of diverse interpretations from the audience and this may be responsible for the different aesthetic experiences that members of the audience are likely to have at the end of every appreciation of any aesthetic object. It is not true that emotion precedes experience or appreciation. Art is like music and no matter the language of composition, the proper arrangement laced with the artistic rhythm may conjure the appreciation that can tend on emotion.

It is imperative, therefore, to investigate whether or not eje performance violates moral requirements. Far from imposing any stern rule that could be considered an impediment on the evolvement of the people, eje does not impose any moral rules. The uncoordinated scripts are explicated by members of the audience depending on the nature of the aesthetic appeal that individuals may garner from the spectacle. Even when morality seems to be embedded in the performance, it is far from being emphasised. Yet, the cohesion and atmosphere of peace that permeate indigenous societies may be traced to these periodic performances as well as the moral summations that individuals can derive therefrom as result of their regularity during festive seasons. The primary goal is the entertainment of the audience and this explains why the masquerades are not staged annually. If the morality in the performance were the ultimate, the artists would have enforced a rule that makes it mandatory for the masquerades to, as a necessity, accompany the annual festival of eje. The periodic performances of the masquerades, therefore, fulfill the need for aesthetic satisfaction. And they become memorable as experience may have been gained and knowledge acquired.

The preservation of the people may be the underlying reason for the festival. This may be understood from the fact that the people were faced with the possibility of annihilation as a result of incessant warfare from neighbouring
people who ravaged the land in search of slaves. The era was particularly crude because the people lived in uncoordinated communities and exercised rules that were peculiar to them. Fair play was far from them and it did not matter if members of the communities were killed or enslaved by the marauding warriors. The most vulnerable were the women who could be forcefully taken for the purpose of marriage and such people would be scuttled from their people permanently. The need to devise a means of consolidating the society became imperative. It, therefore, became the vogue to enact a performance that could bring the people together periodically. The performance amounted to a means of taking the collective destiny of the people in their hands.

**Masks and Costumes of the Masquerades**

Omosule Segun 2012 recognises the gulf between the scripts and the intention of the artists in indigenous societies in any attempt at unravelling the semantic imports in performances. According to the study, “the critic is befuddled by the inability to rely on a specific tool of analysis to the exclusion of others” (199). This is because of the fact that meaning may not be apprehended through a single critical endeavour which makes eclecticism the only hope in the search for meaning that may be latent in the spectacle.

*Within such spectacles are symbols, signs and codes that reflect the religious, philosophical sensibilities of the milieu that may be achieved through boundless inspiration and power of graphic representation of artists especially when these costumes harbour both sexist and political references. And obvious myth is salient to the emergence of the costumes as well as the mask taken as a comprehensive whole (201).*

The masks have many sides to them. They are physical and spiritual, which means they have components that exist in the physical realm while another form exits in the spiritual realm. The spiritual side is hardly seen but it is much talked about. The physical component is fashioned after the spiritual parallel and many myths surround them. The masks may also be natural and unnatural which makes the masks of Okooro, Ogoni, Ilebe and Alegbagba the natural reflections of the unnatural equivalent which people believe may be found intermittently during a stray within the enclosure of the sea-nymphs. Masks may also be secret ideograms or hieroglyphics that require much deconstruction before their meanings may be decoded. Masks are of course codes and signs that are informed by their sculptors and they may reflect the deep imagination of their carvers. Within the same search for meaning, masks may be situated within *langue* and *parole*. The metaphysical congruence is believed to be instrumental in fashioning the ordinary masks that masquerades in the Ode Irele milieu adorn. The realm of *langue* may be found in the limitless imagination of the artists who explore this repertoire each time the need arises for the composition of a new mask. The costumes are reflections of the cultural sensibilities of the milieu and according to Omosule (2012), costumes can hardly be detached from the sense of aesthetics of the people and “any artist that is operating within the environment must be attuned to the values inherent in it” (203). It is not known whether the artists have any formal training in decoration which might not have been so in view of the fact that such an opening did not exist at the time.

**Conclusion/Recommendations**

*Eje* is considered beautiful in the Ode Irele milieu because it fulfils the need of the people for aesthetics. It helps in the preservation of the people from a possible extinction over the years even when insecurity was rife and the fear of the unknown almost reduced the people to mere shadows and psychological images of themselves. While relying on Wonderly (1991), the study concludes as follows: the aesthetics in *eje* fulfils the holarchic’s claim that aesthetics must be found to be “functional” and the fact that whatever is seen to be beautiful, even when culturally influenced must have “value as an instinctive or learned need” (Wonderly, 237). *Eje*, therefore, fulfils the need of the people as “instinctive forms of life” because it “relates to their ostensible need value”. It leads to a “profitable activity” mostly because it meets the need of the people for “stimulation, relaxation (serenity), or other less obvious urges”. It also helps the people to “prevail” and there is a referent in history that informs the emergence of the aesthetic object. It is obvious that the performance will endure for a long time because of the inherent aesthetic qualities and fulfilments inherent in it.

**References**


**Endnote:**

*The eje festival under examination took place in October 2013 at Ode Irele, the headquarters of Irele Local Government of Ondo State, Nigeria, West Africa.*