



## THE SOURCES AND LITERARY DEVICES OF MASQUERADE SONGS AMONG THE IZON PEOPLE

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### Abstract

This study examines masquerade songs (owu duma) as a form of trado-religious poetry among the Izon people of the Niger Delta. Rooted in the riverine environment and spiritual worldview of the community, these songs preserve history, express belief systems, and communicate moral values. Although they are often discussed in ritual or anthropological terms, their poetic structure and aesthetic qualities have received limited critical attention. Using functionalist theory, the study views masquerade songs as central to social cohesion and cultural continuity. Their composition is understood to derive from spiritual inspiration, as well as apprenticeship and communal transmission. Close analysis reveals the deliberate use of repetition, imagery, symbolism, satire, hyperbole, apostrophe, and personification. The study concludes that masquerade songs are both artistic creations and social instruments, deserving recognition as a significant genre within African oral literature.

**Keywords:** Masquerade Songs, Izon, Literary Devices, Functionalism, Oral Performance.

### Introduction

Masquerade songs (owu duma) constitute an essential aspect of the trado-religious poetry of the Izon people. They are deeply rooted in the social, cultural, economic, and spiritual experiences of the community. In indigenous African societies, oral poetry functions as a repository of history, belief systems, and communal values. Similarly, masquerade songs reflect the worldview of the Izon people and articulate their collective identity. The content of masquerade songs is shaped by the environment and social structure of the people. The riverine setting of the Niger Delta, with its numerous creeks and waterways, has significantly influenced the occupations and sensibilities of the Izon community. Fishing, canoe carving, and farming form integral aspects of daily life and are mirrored in the thematic concerns of the songs. The environment, therefore, plays a formative role in the artistic imagination of the people. Literature has long been regarded as a faithful record of the manners and customs of a society. In this regard, masquerade songs preserve and transmit the traditions and lived realities of the Izon people.

These songs are rendered in the Izon language, a member of the Niger-Congo language family spoken across several states in Southern Nigeria. Although dialectal variations exist, the cultural beliefs, customs, and cosmological outlook of the people remain fundamentally shared. This cultural continuity ensures that masquerade songs, irrespective of dialectal differences, convey similar meanings and reflect a common heritage. Masquerade songs perform diverse functions within the society. They serve as instruments of criticism, moral instruction, social regulation, entertainment, and religious expression. Broadly classified



into social, occupational, and religious categories, they accompany important ceremonies and communal events. Their performance integrates rhythm, repetition, imagery, symbolism, satire, and other aesthetic devices that give them poetic depth. The combination of song, dance, drumming, and dramatic gestures further enhances their expressive quality.

Despite their richness and complexity, scholarly attention has often emphasized their ritual and anthropological dimensions while neglecting their poetic character. Consequently, the literary status of masquerade songs has not been sufficiently examined. This study, therefore, investigates the sources and literary devices of masquerade songs among the Iẓon people in order to demonstrate their poetic qualities and affirm their place within the corpus of African oral literature.

### Literature Review

The metaphysical and aesthetic significance of masquerade songs as trado-religious poetry has attracted interdisciplinary interest, particularly within African oral performance traditions. Central to the Iẓon worldview is the concept of masquerade, which denotes both water spirits and the masquerades that embody them. Obuh argues that masquerade functions as “a mythical representation of particular water spirits, sea creatures, or abstract concepts” (123). Through this dual identity, the masquerade occupies a liminal space, existing simultaneously as a spiritual, symbolic, and performative entity. Masquerades associated with masquerade songs are characterized by attributes of power, aggression, and unpredictability. They are often represented as predatory creatures, including fishes, reptiles, and composite water monsters, bearing names such as Angalapele (Mangrove Cutter), Fanukan (Fence Destroyer), and Ibeze Sonoma (Dolphin Seven). These names evoke underlying themes of conflict, strength, and moral challenge within the performance context. Ogunbiyi notes that masquerade performances are designed to project “certain attributes and qualities of ancestral spirits, power, strength, speed, and knowledge” (135). The symbolic representation of these attributes in performance underscores the ritual and cosmological grounding of masquerade songs.

In considering masquerade songs as poetry, extant scholarship foregrounds both aesthetic form and social function. Michael defines poetry as “a sort of inspired mathematics which gives us equations not for abstract figures, triangles, spheres, and the like, but equations for the human emotions” (84). This definition resonates with the structural and affective dynamics of masquerade songs, which transform communal experiences, beliefs, and emotions into patterned verbal musical expressions. In African oral cultures, poetry is not an isolated literary artifact; it is embedded in performance genres such as praise singing, ritual incantations, work songs, and mourning chants (Okpewho 44). These forms map emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions of community life onto verbal soundscapes through repeated performance and collective participation.

Foundational theories of poetic inspiration further illuminate the metaphysical dimension of masquerade songs. Plato’s assertion that poetry emanates from divine transmission positions the poet as an intermediary for supernatural communication. As Adam explains in his reading of Plato, “God takes away reason from poets and uses them as his ministers. . . that God himself is the speaker and that through them he is addressing us” (431–432). This model parallels Iẓon conceptions of water spirits as the ultimate source of song composition. Among the Iẓon, the creative impulse is believed to originate metaphysically, with the composer serving as a conduit for spirit inspiration. This conception converges with Wordsworth’s Romantic idea of poetry as “the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings” that arise from profound emotional and environmental experience (51).

Osundare’s description of poetry as “a life spring” that galvanizes thought and stirs collective action reinforces the idea that poetic performance articulates social consciousness (3). Such functions are evident in masquerade songs, which not only entertain but also educate and admonish listeners. Onuekwusi contends that poetry embodies both material and non-material cultural heritage, carrying resources for



expressing “feelings, thoughts, beliefs, philosophies, values, and histories of the people” (80). In this respect, masquerade songs operate as repositories of communal memory and moral philosophy.

Oral tradition scholars emphasize the role of cultural preservation in sustaining the life of poetic forms. Anigala asserts that traditional expressive forms, whether oral or written, ensure the transmission, continuity, and refinement of cultural practices across generations (12). Masquerade songs, transmitted through oral performance and community participation, exemplify this process. Music and poetry in African contexts are inseparable. Ekpe defines music as poetic and instrumental sounds integrated into structured rhythmic patterns that function as historical commentary or cultural indicators (42). Masquerade songs embody this synthesis, using melody, rhythm, and language to communicate collective identity. Research on the sources of masquerade songs highlights both spiritual inspiration and social transmission. Spirit revelation, often occurring during dreams or trance states, is widely understood as the primary source of composition. If a revelation is forgotten upon waking, offerings are made to ensure that the inspiration returns and remains in memory. Scott-James observes that “for the poet...there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and...is out of his senses” (38). This view aligns closely with the *Izon* belief in the supernatural bestowal of creative power. The composer is seen as an instrument of divine will, a notion echoing Awoonor’s observation that poets traditionally pour libations and pray to gods of poetry before performance (115).

In addition to inspiration, apprenticeship and imitation are fundamental to the transmission of masquerade songs. According to Okpewho, training under master singers confers confidence and authority on younger practitioners (44). Apprentices learn verbal structures, rhythms, and performance gestures through sustained practice. Wewe’s ethnographic account of water spirit masks indicates that masquerade dances were observed and imitated by early performers, giving rise to both mask forms and song repertoires (7). This dual process, spiritual revelation and social transmission constitutes the functional ecology of the masquerade song tradition. The social embeddedness of masquerade songs is further underscored by scholarship on African oral performance. Akparobaro posits that song poetry permeates African life, marking rites of passage and communal ceremonies (313). Ojaide further argues that audiences retain the strength of poetic imagery long after performance, demonstrating the communicative power of oral poetry (51). In this way, masquerade songs serve not merely as entertainment but as mnemonic vehicles that encode cultural values and spiritual sensibilities.

Scholars of literature and performance define the poet as the voice of society with the capacity to perceive and articulate communal needs. Thomson notes that the poet awakens individual and group consciousness, making audiences more aware of self and environment (198). Perrine’s criteria for poetic merit, emotional urgency, thematic clarity, and social relevance also highlight poetry’s role in celebrating beauty and critiquing social anomalies (Chinaka 25–30). These models reinforce the argument that masquerade songs function as poetry because they reflect, critique, and shape communal life. However, despite this body of work, a gap remains. Much of the scholarship has emphasized ritual, anthropological, and performance dimensions, with limited attention to the poetic structure and aesthetic features of masquerade songs. As a result, these songs are often treated as ancillary to performance rather than as distinct literary compositions deserving close textual analysis.

This study addresses this gap by examining masquerade songs (*owu duma*) among the *Izon* people from a literary perspective. It focuses on their sources, stylistic devices and poetic structures, thereby demonstrating that they function not only as ritual expressions but also as artistic forms within African oral literature. In doing so, the study contributes to ongoing scholarship by foregrounding the literary qualities of masquerade songs and affirming their place as a significant genre of oral poetry.



## Theoretical Framework

Functionalist theory provides a useful lens for understanding the masquerade songs of the Iẓon people as trado-religious poetry. Drawing from sociology and anthropology, functionalism argues that every cultural practice serves a purpose within society, contributing to social stability and cohesion (Malinowski 33; Radcliffe-Brown 45). In this view, masquerade songs are not just artistic expressions; they are central to the transmission of values, norms, and shared memories that help maintain the community's social fabric. Masquerade songs, performed during masquerade events, illustrate the functionalist idea that cultural practices carry both social and moral significance. According to Obuh, these songs communicate cosmological concepts, guide proper behavior, and teach lessons about ethics and communal responsibility (123). They celebrate virtues, warn against wrongdoing, and provide instruction, blending entertainment with education. Through music and dance, the songs ensure that cultural values are remembered and passed on to younger generations, supporting social continuity.

Functionalism also highlights how culture meets the practical needs of society. The participatory nature of masquerade song performances, with drumming, chanting, and dance, fosters community unity and strengthens social bonds. These events create shared experiences that link individuals to the wider group. As Malinowski observes, cultural practices are inherently practical, offering solutions to social challenges while reinforcing collective identity (50). Furthermore, functionalist theory helps explain the dual role of masquerade songs as expressive and regulatory tools. Beyond providing enjoyment, the songs preserve historical knowledge, reflect communal experiences, and reinforce social hierarchies. They act as both mirrors and guides for society. Radcliffe-Brown argues that cultural elements maintain social equilibrium by connecting individual actions to broader communal expectations (48). This principle is clearly seen in the social and moral significance of masquerade performances.

Using functionalist theory allows this study to examine masquerade songs not only as poetry but also as instruments that support cultural continuity and social cohesion. The songs sustain identity, communicate moral lessons, and express spiritual beliefs. This approach situates masquerade songs within a larger cultural context, showing their importance as both artistic expression and vital social practice.

## Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design with ethnographic and literary approaches to oral performance. It focuses on masquerade songs (owu duma) among the Iẓon people in selected communities within Kolokuma/Opokuma Local Government Area of Bayelsa State, where masquerade traditions are actively practiced. Data were collected through field observation of masquerade performances, oral interviews with key informants such as performers, elders, and custodians of the tradition, and participant engagement during festivals and ritual events. The primary instruments used for data collection were audio recording devices and field note journals, supported by a semi-structured interview guide. The recorded songs were transcribed from performance contexts and translated into English where necessary, with attention to preserving repetitions, tonal features, and performance elements.

## Source of Owu Songs

The sources of Owu songs as trado-religious poetry of Ijaw people come through various ways. The sources are inspiration and imitation. Owu (water and land spirits) visit individuals during bedtimes to teach the songs which are in most cases learnt along with the dance steps. People to whom the spirits reveal these songs are made to rehearse them over and over again by the Owu until the correct songs are perfected. Sometimes, the Owu (spirits) may threaten to kill when the devotees refuse to sing the songs. Owu songs sometimes manifests through physical encounters with the masquerades on the river or in the forest. On certain sacred days, mostly *Ekenbai* (Market and sacred days) these water spirits are seen by those they possess. This position is buttressed by Wewe in his "Apoi Water-Spirits Masks" thus:



The sights of human beings caused the water-spirits to dive into the river. Because of the observation that these spirits would always perform their dance in the open on sunny days, the people hide themselves to watch and copy their performance. Therefore, shapes and these water-spirits were carved in wood and their dances imitated. (7)

Another source consists of the elders who handed down these songs from generation to generation. The learning of these songs takes place through imitation and apprenticeship. “In various performances the essential legacy which training under a master-singer bestows on the younger practitioner is confidence and authority” (Okpewho, 44). Aganaba, an elder in the Owu poetic tradition has this to say:

Kenì oronii, bei duma mō bo-emi orōbì. Tolu moye mō nii kosu otu mo  
duo bo-emiye mō. Ma sei buo mōmō, Eze mōmō, duma mōkigba emi.

**Translation:**

One source of the songs is learning from the elders, and the dance-steps depend on the songs, and the songs correlate with drumming (oral source, September, 2018).

A versatile elder in the Owu poetic tradition and chief priest of the clan’s deity (Opokuma Egbesu) Tony Korobotei maintain that; Ari Owu duma mō, Orubiri bo nimi tubii, Ari siiya kurai kumō bai weri

Owu ÒgbÒ bō suomi.

**Translation:**

His good knowledge of the masquerade sung – poetry in Orubiri is on account of his apprenticeship under the masquerade dance group, right from the age of twenty (oral source, February, 2018).

Owu songs as trado-religious poetry are sometimes revealed to the performers in sleep, but when they wake up they forget what they received in sleep. If this happens, they know that they must make offerings to the spirits who will see to it that when the muse comes again the poetry will not vanish but remain in the memory of the song composer. “For the poet is a light and winged and holy thing; and there is no invention in him until he has been inspired and is out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: when he has not attained to this state he is powerless” ( Scott-James, 38).

The ability to create song, the Ijaw people believe, is a gift from the water-spirits. The song composer is only an instrument in the hands of the gods. “Every poet who has a god of songs must pour libation and offer prayers to his god before he appears in public to perform” (Awoonor, 115). “One of the divinities known to provide artists with personal fortification was Uhanwha the god of music and creativity [...] of a personal shrine dedicated to the worship of Uhanwha [...]” (Shaka:513). Also, Uyovbukerhi, support this view as he states that, “[...] No poet or musician worth his salt can practice his art without the inspiration and active support of Uhanwha [...] commune with his god or divinity, Uhanwha” (94). An Owu songs composer does not start making a new song after a process of logical reasoning and conclusion. The songs and expressions come spontaneously, sometimes when the composer is on a long walk in the forest path or on a river bank during a fishing expedition. The Owu song composer may burst into utterances which form



the beginning of composition. The Owu song tradition attributes composition to water-spirits, but still believes in the creative efforts of the song artist. The songs are like other forms of verbal compositions which are composed before performance. There is “improvisation and memorization”. In oral literature, there is composition-in-performance, rather than exact memorizations, constitutes the rule” (Okoh 100).

The songs belong to a distinguished group and are performed by members of the group. “Song poetry permeates all activities of life in the African world. Indeed, poetry permeates all activities of life in the African world. The different stages in the life of man in Africa are marked by ceremonies whose major elements are songs” (Akparobaro, 313). The artist has to undergo a process of training in which his birth, occupation, talent, and age are not seen as barriers. Thus, the artist has to perfect himself through continuous practice. Many people go to the performance to listen to the poetry of the songs. “It is the words, the strength of the images that people who attend a performance remember long after it is over” (Ojaide, 51). The prosperity and recognition of the song composer depends on the entertainment function in which the audience is participatory in African folk literature. This enables a prompt reaction from the audience because they are aware and also part of the performance activity. It is in this light, Olajubu avers that:

[...] a very good entertainment will urge the audience [...] by giving the artists gifts of money and materials according to the strength of the purse, the quality of the rendering [...] the personality of the individual and the importance of the occasion. (79)

The singer becomes conscious of the behaviour of the masquerades, learns the words for describing and praising each masquerade according to his status, temperament, and attributes. For instance, in the following songs:

(2) **Iberegha**

Ibere nii bere eee  
 Ibere nii bere eee  
 Uguberi sei owu  
 Wo dudu erigha bibei iberegha  
 Ine bolou sei duo nii

**Translation:**

Celebrity  
 Long, long time  
 Long, longtime  
 Ugueberi, ugly water spirit  
 We have not seen for a very long time  
 It is as a result of your wickedness.

The masquerade, Uguberi is blamed since he is troublesome and nobody wants to identify with him. The point needs to be made that, while the Owu song composer learns the songs by heart, he is inspired to sing by the spirits. The means of communication is oral and what the composer learns are the salient fact that the artist identifies by listening to the elders of the tradition. In many instances, Owu songs as trado-religious poetry employ onomatopoeia to reinforce meaning.



(3) **Iberia deri**

Kpe Kpe Kpe deri mini arau’o.  
 Kpe Kpe Kpe deri mini arau’o.  
 Akumo wari bo ere  
 Zinibo mani wari bo eregha.

transliteration

*Translation:*

**Celebrity Laughter**

Kpe kpe kpe — the sound of laughter  
 Kpe kpe kpe — the sound of laughter  
 She is the only wife in the house  
 There is no other woman in the house.

The care given role of men in Ijaw (Kolokuma/Opokuma) tradition is prominent in this song. “The different care roles that men or husbands face in Ijaw land place so much burden on them. It is for this reason Ebizimor advises men in Ijaw land to marry only one wife, if they would like to marry [...] The more women a man marries, the more the care functions he would perform. For most men in the towns, villages and fishing settlements [...] marrying more than three wives is a redistribution of poverty and misery” (Asuka, 331). The song connotes that a monogamous home is filled with happiness, while a polygamous home breeds hatred, jealousy, strife and violence as a result of competition among mates. The expression “Kpe Kpe Kpe” is onomatopoeic. A sound produced by laughter, it has no definite meaning but is suggestive of a happy moment for the house wife. The poetic expressions are replete with evocative and topical allusions. There are frequent allusions to the spirits.

Below is a song:

(4) **Opu Uluma**

Uluma zigei yo, zigei yo  
Uluma, zigei yo  
 Abadi toru opu uluma, zigei yo zigei yo  
Uluma, zigei yo idau gba premini kpo nagha.

*Translation:*

**Big Cat Fish**

Cat fish, shake, shake  
 Cat fish, Shake, shake  
 Ocean big cat fish, shake a place, shake  
 Cat fish, shake a place, I never listen to my father’s advice.

In this song, “Abadi-toru” is an allusion to the Atlantic Ocean while “Opu-uluma” refers to a big shark, a whale, or even a dolphin. The Ijaw people embellish their songs with stories (egberi) which portray events in the lives of water-spirits and mirror aspects of the culture. “It is believed that these beings who have their abode in the waters could be married to earthly women and men as the case may be. Such beings are believed to be sources of various kinds of blessings to men and women. Thus, they are thought to deserve veneration and worship among the Ijaws. Wrestling skills, wealth, children, good harvest, prophecy and fame are believed to be given to earthly men and women by these beings that inhabit the waters” (Asuka,



14). These stories, which the poetic expressions (songs), dance-steps, and drumming portray, serve as social criticism. “The plots are quite simple and assume the audience’s familiarity with the situations portrayed. Although highly entertaining, they can convey social criticism or instruct people on proper behavior” (Alagoa, 155).

The Owu songs which revolve around the taming of troublesome spirits are common themes that comment on the need to control aggressive individuals in the society. The songs composer complements the verbal efforts with dramatic action, gesture, facial expressions, dramatic use of pause and rhythms and receptivity to the reactions of the audience, while performance is going on. “Rhythm leads to movement, making the dance pattern or steps peculiar and significant as an expression of the people’s culture” (Ogunbiyi, 144). “Movements in [...] dance can be restricted in most cases to the body and to one spot. The ability to carry out this as described above in dance is one other feature that is peculiar to African dance [...] A study of the energy concentration of the different dance steps that make up the dance in Ijaw land” (Abraye 223). It depicts the cultural ideals of the people. For example, each masquerade has a rhythm with which it is associated and by which its devotees are identified. The following song is a call on the masquerades to identify their individual rhythms and dance-steps.

##### (5) **Seibuogba**

Miē miē magha  
 Owu bii muni nde nabuo sei  
 Owu bii dein momo dein momo  
 Owu bii muni nde na buo sei

##### **Translation:**

##### **Dance Steps revelation**

Something worth doing  
 The masquerade should dance its steps  
 The masquerade has won, and dominated  
 The masquerade should dance its steps

However, such a rhythm as “Oki-doo-doo” is associated with a Shark masquerade. The dance rhythm is aggressive, fast-paced and wild. “Ededeyan nanangha” is linked with a female masquerade which loves babies and to be somewhat alluring, elegant and full of grace. Praising the physical beauty and grace associated with young unmarried girls during their public presentation rites. According to Arnoldi in her work entitled; *Playing with Time: Art and performance in central Mali*, “are for grounded here and linked to the masquerade through [...] rhythm for its performance (65). The (Kolokuma/Opokuma) tradition and custom regard “Oki” (Shark) as a great spirit living in the waters, but fishermen are eager to kill it. Therefore, the Oki-doo-doo rhythm is an invocation to the masquerade. Alagoa attests that:

The masquerade capitalizes on the comic aspects of the situation by staging the hunt on land: Oki’s canoe parades along the waterfront while songs and drums repeat the fishermen’s invocation to come out to play at ebttide. When he comes ashore, he alternately chases after spectators, with a cutlass and dances in the arena. (139)



The dance-steps are an integral parts of the performance process. The non-verbal communications together with the costumes of the artists, are all the prevailing mode at the moment of performance. All these, add to the meaning of the Owu song poetry. Therefore, the performance of Owu song poetry is more than mere verbal creations. These verbal creations are therapeutic. “The literary medication which the creative writer provides after a careful analysis and accurate diagnosis of the society’s ailments. The artist is thus a healer” (Nwahunanya, 354).

### **Literary Devices**

Masquerade songs use various literary devices to communicate the way of life of the Ijaw people. These devices are the prevalent modes that qualify masquerade songs as poetry and establish meaning. The literary devices that emphasize ideas and make an impression include repetition, onomatopoeia, imagery, hyperbole, symbolism, satire.

### **Repetition**

Repetition is a dominant device in masquerade songs, involving the deliberate recurrence of words, phrases, or lines to emphasize meaning and enhance memorability. For instance, in songs 1, 2, and 3, expressions such as “Ibere nii bere” (long, long time) and “Dere mini arau” (the laughing woman) are repeated within performance contexts. This repetition creates rhythmic continuity and reinforces emotional intensity, while also aiding oral retention and audience participation.

### **Imagery**

Imagery is used to create mental pictures that represent physical, spiritual, and psychological realities. In songs 4 and 6, vivid imagery is presented in lines such as:

Abadi toru opuu uluma zigei yo zigei yo

Idaugba premini kpo nagma

Obiri you you mo ongolo sei

Keni yenghi dau fii kpo ari mo yougha

Translated as: Ocean big catfish shake a place, shake a place

I never listened to my father’s advice

Dog has cried until dehydrated

He has seen the death of a half sister or brother and did not cry

These lines produce visual and emotional images of struggle, stubbornness, pain, and resilience, reflecting both human and environmental experiences.

### **Onomatopoeia**

Onomatopoeia refers to words whose sounds imitate their meanings. In masquerade songs, expressions such as “kpe kpe kpe” suggest laughter, while “woki woki” imitates the sound of birds in flight, particularly weaver birds. These sound patterns enhance performance realism and auditory engagement.

### **Apostrophe**

Apostrophe occurs when absent or non-human entities are directly addressed as though present. In songs below, masquerade spirits are addressed directly:

“Ofin yan arau” (sweeper of the arena)

“Orubiri sei buo gbadi owu ama” (Orubiri masquerade speaks through dance steps)

“Tememo meni beni duo bo” (the spirit should come from the water)

Here, invisible spirits are invoked as active participants in performance, reinforcing the sacred dimension of masquerade songs.



### **Symbolism**

Symbolism is the use of objects or expressions to represent deeper meanings beyond their literal sense. Titles such as “Igburuku” (troublesome) and “Lolo” (warlike) symbolize aggression and conflict. Similarly, “Toru ingbese” (river blockade) and “sei owu” (wicked masquerade) symbolize danger, social disorder, and warfare.

### **Hyperbole**

Hyperbole is the deliberate exaggeration of ideas for emphasis or dramatic effect. In song 4, “opuu uluma” (big catfish) exaggerates size for comic and expressive effect. In song 12, “opuu toru duo bo you kpo numugha” (the big eye did not come from the mystical realm) intensifies emotional and dramatic impact. Song 31 also uses rhetorical exaggeration:

Tuba ki ifiri mo wari kori ma egere

Tuba ki ifiri mo wari kori ma oki

(Who sent you to build a house, crocodile?

Who sent you to build a house, shark?)

### **Satire**

Satire is used to ridicule social vices and correct moral behavior. Songs 30 and 33 critique prostitution and drunkenness while promoting hard work and moral discipline:

“Ama weni” (whore)

“Wani Igbira oweri ye Tubo” (let us leave it at prostitution)

“Koro pin owei bein bo” (the palm wine taper should come)

“Bou uru lagha” (drinks are not enough)

These expressions ridicule excess and immorality while encouraging social responsibility.

### **Allegory**

Allegory presents meanings beyond literal interpretation through symbolic narrative. In:

“Bere owou meni pelei ye” (children produced out of marriage, be happy)

“Ikiya owou zi arau” (the woman who bears children out of wedlock)

These lines represent broader moral commentary on social class, legitimacy, and societal judgment regarding marriage and childbirth.

### **Personification**

Personification attributes human qualities to non-human entities. In song 14:

“Ari itolumo bolou seidou” (you taught me to be wicked)

“Enigha kpo, tin bara bo isolu bo be ine dioko wei” (if you hang me on the branch of a tree, you become my enemy)

Here, objects such as the sweet potato are given human emotions and relationships, emphasizing moral tension and social interaction.

### **Conclusion**

Masquerade songs among the Izon people represent far more than ritual accompaniments to performance; they constitute a vibrant and sophisticated body of oral poetry grounded in the spiritual, social, and environmental realities of the Niger Delta. This study has shown that their composition emerges from both metaphysical inspiration and communal apprenticeship, reflecting a dynamic interplay between divine revelation and cultural transmission. Through the deliberate use of repetition, imagery, onomatopoeia,



symbolism, satire, hyperbole, apostrophe, allegory, and personification, these songs achieve aesthetic depth while performing vital social functions. Viewed through the lens of functionalist theory, masquerade songs sustain moral order, reinforce communal values, preserve historical memory, and strengthen collective identity. Recognizing their poetic complexity not only affirms their place within African oral literature but also underscores their enduring relevance as instruments of cultural continuity and artistic expression among the Izon people.

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