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Agbeji Masquerade: *The Unique Female Masquerade of Enugu-Ezike*

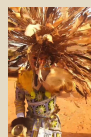
By Idenze Ezeme

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FEATURE
IMAGE

Agbeji Masquerade

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AGBEJI MASQUERADE

Agbeji Masquerade: The Unique Female Masquerade of Enugu-Ezike

By Idenze Ezeme · Cultural Heritage · Ozikoro.com

The Agbeji Masquerade is a very special masquerade from the Enugu-Ezike community in Enugu State, Nigeria. It is unique because it is one of the few female masquerades in Igbo culture. Most Igbo masquerades are male and represent spirits, ancestors, or warriors. However, Agbeji is different. It is feminine, dances gracefully, and is known for its beauty.

During the colonial period, the British called it the “Turkey Masquerade” because its costume had bright, colorful feathers that resembled turkey feathers. Today, Agbeji is still an important part of the Omabe Festival, a big traditional festival in Enugu-Ezike.

01

Historical and Cultural Significance

In Enugu-Ezike, every Umunna (extended family group) is expected to perform the Agbeji Masquerade during the Omabe Festival. If a family does not present Agbeji, it may be punished by the community. This rule shows how important the masquerade is in Igbo culture.

Agbeji represents femininity, beauty, and grace. It is dressed in colorful wrappers, beads, and feathers and moves elegantly and rhythmically. The masquerade is loved for its entertaining dance steps and is often the center of attention at traditional events.

Agbeji Masquerade Costume and Performance

The costume of Agbeji is designed to highlight its feminine features. It is made of:

- Brightly colored fabrics (wrappers)
- Beaded accessories
- Long flowing decorations
- Feathers — which were the reason colonialists called it the “Turkey Masquerade.”

During the Omabe Festival, the Agbeji masquerade performs beautiful dance routines that incorporate traditional Igbo music and drums. The dances tell stories, entertain the audience, and showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Enugu-Ezike people.



Anumabia Oshimiri festival, AGBEJI EZIKE OBA masquerade displaying. Credit ~ Odinala Bishop Nwa Enugu Ezike

03

Comparison with Other Igbo Masquerades

Agbeji is different from most Igbo masquerades, but it shares similarities with others, such as:

- Ijele Masquerade – The largest masquerade in Igbo land, known for its size and importance, is similar to Agbeji in some aspects but with a different costume style.
- Echaricha Mma – Another name used in some places to describe female-like masquerades.

Unlike warrior masquerades, who perform powerful and aggressive movements, Agbeji is gentle and graceful, reflecting the beauty of womanhood.

04

Challenges and Preservation of Agbeji Masquerade

Sadly, the Agbeji masquerade is fading away. Younger generations are not learning about it, and some communities are no longer organizing the Omabe Festival as often as before. If nothing is done, this unique tradition could disappear completely.

To preserve Agbeji Masquerade, the community should:

- Teach younger generations about the masquerade.
- Document performances through videos and pictures.
- Encourage cultural festivals that showcase Agbeji.
- Include Agbeji in modern events, such as Igbo cultural celebrations.

If people work to protect this tradition, Agbeji will continue to be a symbol of Igbo beauty, history, and culture.

Agbeji Masquerade remains a proud symbol of Enugu-Ezike culture.

If steps are taken to revive and protect this tradition, future generations will continue to enjoy and celebrate Agbeji Masquerade for many years to come.

05

Agbeji Masquerade

References:

- Capital Power Multimedia. (2025, January 16). AGBEJI MASQUERADE

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nze is an Igbo history and culture enthusiast with an in-depth passion for exploring the rich cultural heritage, traditions, and historical narratives of the Igbo people. His works is mostly focused on pre-colonial Igbo societies, traditional belief systems, leadership systems, and the impact of European colonialism.



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