

Qua Masquerade in Calabar, Nigeria

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As a summer FLAS recipient, I had the privilege of traveling to Calabar, the capital of the Cross River State of Nigeria in order to study the Ejagham language. The experience exceeded my expectations as I developed conversational skills, and acceptance among Qua (an Ejagham sub-group) communities. With the language training, I was able to communicate—using Ejagham—my interest in learning about their culture and art. In showing my enthusiasm to learn about Qua culture, and as a result of chiefs and elders becoming interested in my research on masquerade, they initiated me into their Mgbe society, historically known as the leopard secret society. The opportunity granted me a firm foundational understanding to Qua masquerade.

In the urban city of Calabar, the Qua face problems of cultural preservation due to historical and contemporary circumstances. Colonization and the slave and palm oil trades has greatly impacted the peoples of Calabar, especially the Qua, who have recently become mindful of the problem of preserving their cultural identity. Qua cultural identity is embedded in visual expression, chiefly their culture is rooted in masquerade. My research

explores how the Qua use masquerade in an effort to redefine and preserve their cultural identity as the postcolonial landscape of Calabar has challenged such safeguarding. My initial findings have led me to pursue research on contemporary Qua masquerade societies and examine the social workings of masquerade in urban settings. This research will move towards an historical construction to Qua masquerade. To this end, my research will investigate the



processes of change and adaptability of visual culture by interpreting the visual, ideological, and functional transformations reflected in Qua masquerade.

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