

as fanning the masquerader or carrying the trunk of protective medicines, a stool, or other objects.

Of this group the *zo-nyno*, glossed here as Mask Guardian, is the most important and most frequently seen. *Zo* refers to a person with expert knowledge, implying a knowledge of medicines (either *so* or *zo* is used in Canton Boo). Translated directly, this term means Expert Medicine Woman. The *zo-nyno* belongs by birth to the lineage of the masquerader and receives her calling along with her knowledge of medicines in the same manner as a male masker, that is, through dreams or trembling trance. Her freedom from devious intent is indicated by her white robes (Fig. 14). She knows and carries medicine that protects the mask against sorcery. Some of her medicine is placed on a white plate she holds, to protect the gifts given the masker during its performance.

In daily life, other women know that she is a *zo*, but no one must mention it or make inquiries about a masker in front of her. This rule applies also to the male guardians. However, unlike the male attendants, these women cannot enter the inner sanctum of the camp where the masker resides. In the dance clearing, while the all-male guardians perform actively, translate the masker's sounds, give orders to the crowd, the *zo-nyno* and other female aides remain silent on the sidelines. The money gifts offered to the masquerader are divided among attendants including the *zo-nyno*, but it was not possible to inquire further into these amounts. If she is married into another village, she returns to serve the masker.

5) *Oudoué*, Female Dancer

It is a distinctive and unusual feature of the Wè/Guére groups that women organize a festival featuring a costumed woman dancer, the *oudoué*. Its principal procedures are similar to the men's masked festival (see Adams 1986): its central focus is a costumed dancer who appears at intervals surrounded by a group of (female) guardians, and it culminates in a final meat feast. Like the male masker, the *oudoué* wears an elaborate headdress and a body-covering costume. (In Canton Boo, two types of headdress are worn, both similar in form and name to the men's: the *bhlaa*, "ram," and the *tuli*, "bull.") However, the woman dancer is not permitted to wear a wooden mask; her face is painted in black and white with touches of color, and she maintains an immobile mien throughout her dance intervals (Fig. 15). Her short bulky raffia skirt differs from the men's only in that the leaf stripes are cut finer and some are tinted. She emerges from the bush or from a "granary," that is, the attic, in a woman's round house near the bush. People exhibit the same attitude toward her as to a male performer, that is, the dancer is referred to as "it"; one cannot talk about the activity freely nor identify a woman as the *oudoué*.

Through dreams or trance, she acquires knowledge of medicine to protect herself, and sorcery powers to catch people who want to do harm. Thus her powers are identical in kind, but not degree, to those attributed to men's masqueraders. An important difference from men's masking is



Fig. 14: Masker and guardians, including the female *zo*, dressed in white and holding a white plate in order to protect the masker (Diboke village, 1985).