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# The Institutionalism of Odo Masquerade and Sustainable Development in Igbo Land

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**Abstract:** Africans' greatest problem was the incursion of the white men into Africa many decades ago, even though many European authors described Africa as darkness before the coming of the white man, the natural growth that had been established in many African kingdoms was aborted as the white men brought and imposed another culture upon Africa. The Odo masquerade cult has outlived the colonial invasion of Africa and is still serving as a worship and as a cultural system. The objective of this study is to examine the relevance of Odo masquerade cult in this present age. The Modernization Theory is adopted as the theoretical framework of the study while content analysis was utilized as research method. The findings include that Odo Masquerade is a cult, a culture, a form of religion and a masquerade. The paper recommends the reform of the practice of Odo Masquerade cult to be relevant in this present age and be a tool for sustainable development. The modernization process is to shield the tradition from all the practice or tenets that are contending and inimical with the present development of today.

**Keywords:** Institutionalism, Odo Masquerade, Sustainable Development

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## 1. Introduction

Odo Masquerade cult is one of the traditions that has defied calls, agitations and contentions for its abolition. Odo masquerade is seen as the reappearance of the spirit of the dead in a form of masquerade to see their loved ones periodically and be with them with the purpose of offering some services which include security, protection, arbitration, entertainment and sanctioning among other intrinsic functions. Originated in ancestral days, and before the coming of Christianity, Odo as a cult served as an object of worship and provided divinations and prophecies to the

worshippers. According to the research [21] Odo masquerade is conceived of as the incarnation of the dead ancestors who continue to take an active interest in the affairs of their living descendants and relations. Some see it as ancestral personalities that are clothed in masked human agents or forms with a view to furthering cultural, religious, political, and juridical or any other function prescribed to by the community adherents [2]. The argument whether Odo is a human being or spirit constitutes one of the main secrecies enshrouded in Odo masquerade, and this is one of the reasons why it is called a cult. This has resulted to the many sobriquets that it is called in many quarters such as Akawo, Maaa, and Inawo among others. Membership usually was

open to male citizens, and no age limit, as low as two-year-old male child can be initiated. For one to be initiated, it involves some periods of preparation, at the end, new members were often sworn to secrecy (Igba-ama) not to reveal the secrets to non-members [15].

Odo masquerade is done by Igbo-Odo mostly found in Udi North, Igbo-Etiti and Isi-Uzo local government areas of Enugu State. However, there are unproved claims that some part of Kogi and Benue also partake in Odo masquerade cult. Odo is a perennial masquerade, this means that it does not run every year, rather it returns and goes either in the odd or even year depending on the locality's tradition. In Igbo-Odo, Odo masquerade differs in their types both at the intra-community and inter community levels [Agu]. In Aku in Igbo-Etiti local government of Enugu State, their types of masquerades include Ovuru-Uzo, Odachi, Okikpe, Ogada, Ani Mpu, Uzu Ekwa, Ekwereke and Gberere, in Ukehe they have Obodike, Ewuru, Odo Ukwueke and Mluamlu. The types of masquerades that run in Egede, in Udi North are; Okwu-Ikpe, Ikeokpu- Nwa-Adaka, Ijali Nwa Umu-Oka, Obute-Okobolo, Nwa-Ugo Na Arua N'Enu and Oriba. In Abor in the same Udi North, there are Ebune-Odo, Amadu-Odo, Evayiku, Okpe-Ekirika and Obunyenwe-Anu among other. In the same vein, Odo masquerade lives in a house called Obu-n'enu (upstairs) and an enclosed enclosure called Ogba. The persistent existence of Odo masquerade till today despite the aggressions and pressures mounted against its existence by Christians and other opponents to the cult practice, remained a surprise to concerned watchers. The destructions these mayhems have caused in many communities have left scars and fear of more damages if nothing is done about it. Despite the entertainment, dances and leisure it offers [12], the destructions Odo masquerade conflicts have caused in many communities have left scars and fear of more damages if nothing is done about it.

## 2. Literature Review: Conceptual Framework

### 2.1. Institutionalism

Institutionalism is the plan to develop shared values and principles with the environment, as to sustain an activity, breath life to a process, create legitimacy, increase resources, and maintain a value process. Dictionary. Com [11] summed institutionalism as an endeavor aimed at establishing a movement, group, program or culture as a permanent and publicly recognized entity for the promotion of a particular cause: It is the commitment of establishing a practice, value or pattern of behavior into existence or life time. Zucker, L. G [26] put institutionalization as a process aimed to regulate societal behaviour within a community or entire societies. Zucker, L. G [26] underlined three actions needed in the process of institutionalization and these include; (a) rulemaking or installment, (b) rule adaptation, or developing best practices, and (c) rule change, or replacing old rules with new ones. Wikipedia [25] writes that institutionalization is

the process of entrenching such concepts such as values, norms, belief, social role, particular acts within a, social system, or society as a whole within a community..

### 2.2. Odo Masquerade

Ozor [22] writes that Odo masquerade is an oral tradition of the people of the South Eastern Nigeria, which is passed down from one generation to another. It has become a cultural activity which is used to celebrate the return of the dead as masquerades. Odo masquerade is a cult practice, enthroned and celebrated by men, and performed once in two years and sustained through a system of the people's belief and usually celebrated as a festival of community unification.

Oguamanam, C. C. et al. [18], explained that masquerade is a common cultural feature of the Igbo people. They assert that Odo is a generic name for the various species of masquerades within the Igbo – Odo subculture, usually referred to as Odomagana. It is a tradition where the living maintains a close tie with the dead and this is manifested in the different rituals and spiritual worship which are the main feature of the cult practice. The author [15] put that Odo Masquerade is the ancestral spirit of forefathers that usually visit them once every two years. The activities of the Odo masquerade include a worship process known as igo-mmuo, where pouring of libations, incantations, rituals and clandestine activities are involved. Odo masquerade cult is posited on the belief that Odo as the security apparatus of the society, the avenger of all evil doers, the custodian of all aspects of the people's culture and the giver of all good things and a worship system [5].

### 2.3. Sustainable Development (SD)

One of the goals of sustainable development is to pursue objectives that will reduce the economic hardship of the people and seek for solutions to tackle adverse effects of some of its primordial institutions [3]. The author [16] assert that sustainable development (SD) has become a popular catchphrase in contemporary development discourse. Sustainable Development (SD) goals are a universal call to action by the United Nations and other stakeholders to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure that all people enjoy peace and prosperity by 2030 [8]. Sustainable Development (SD) goals were adopted by 193 countries, and came into effect in January 2016. The fundamental aims of the SDGs, are to foster economic growth, ensure social inclusion and to save the environment. A partnership with major stakeholders such as the governments, private sector, civil societies among others was called by the United Nations to support the plan that ensures that the right choices are made to improve life, in a sustainable way, for future generations.

### 2.4. Theoretical Framework

#### *Modernization Theory*

Modernization theory posits that traditional societies will develop as they adopt more modern practices, this assertion is based on the assertion that modern states are usually richer

and more powerful and that their citizens are freer to enjoy a higher standard of living than the traditional societies. As updated [13], the four essential stages of modernization theory are traditional societies, take-off, maturation, and mass consumption and mass production. These stages were conceived by Rostow. They wrote that modernization theory intended to shape the diverse dimensions of a society in the pursuit of social changes as a result of the universal standards contexts. These society’s dimensions include the social, the political, the economic, as well as the educational aspects. Rostow's theory emphasizes the role of investment, industrialization, and technological progress in the modernization process [23].

The model of traditional society [24] is one in which the economy is specifically based on production for subsistence and exchange by barter, and the universal view emphasizes man’s subjection to supernatural forces, beyond his control. The traditional social structure is marked by inequalities based on kinship ties, hereditary privileges and established authority [7]. The focus for identification for the bulk of the population is at the level of the local community, village or town or city. The traditional society is marked by religious ritual and belief system which the broader political and cultural institutions tend to be peripheral and spasmodic.

Modern society by contrast is a mass society, commercial credit, advanced technology and specialized production underlying an expensive market economy based on mass production and consumption. Modernizations refers to the transition of societies from the traditional to the modern model. It usual must involve disruptive tendency against the traditional values, securities and institutions of ancient cultures [24]. Modernization theory therefore pushes for the shift from traditional cultural norms and standards to the dominant view of modern structures driven by communication and technology. The cultural practices such as Odo cult tradition must therefore dust itself from primordial practices and evolve values that will result to sustainable development.

### 3. Methodology

The study is based on content analysis, where documents were analyzed and important related information was picked based on the objectives of the study and to make some findings upon which conclusion and recommendations were made.

### 4. Discussion and Findings

#### 4.1. Odo as a Masquerade

Odom-Agana as it is fully called, refers to ancestral personalities that are clothed in masked human agents or forms with a view to furthering cultural, religious, political, juridical or any other function prescribed to by a community [2]. Odo Masquerade is said to be the spirit of the ancestors, that wish to play and interact with their loved ones, re-

appearing every two years in form of masquerade to be with their people. The visit of Odo to their living family members lasts for a period of four to seven months depending on the locality or community. Every Odo that appears in public is from a particular hamlet, village or town, this is to say that every masquerade is owned. In Umuavulu-Abor, in Udi North, all the villages and hamlets where the Odo is coming from, just like many other Igbo Odo community, comes out with a planned program for the few months that it will run at each Odo season. The programs are plotted in seasons starting from the preparation of the returning, to the day of its final departure at each perennial year (Affa Odo), this is counted in Igbo week called Izu that is Orie, Afor, Nkwo and Eke, and this is the four Igbo market days. Out of which in Umuavulu Abor, Odo does not run or come out on Orie days, simply because it is the market day.

In Umuavulu-Abor, Odo’s first appearance or returning is called Igodo. Odo returns on Igodo day, which is celebrated with all pump and pageantry. Every village is to slaughter a big cow and the strongest will come with the head of the cow at Ani-Igodo. In the olden days, great competition inform of race is done between the celebrating communities and the winner of the race and his village carries the cow head of the loser. At these numerous songs are sang to grace the celebration. Among the popular songs are;

Ibeanyi Ibeanyi.....Aho ha  
 Ibeani.....A a  
 Ibeanyi .....Aho ha  
 Anyi Ewere .....ha ha ha.

As Odo is owned by a hamlet or village, so it comes in different names, types and even surnames, signifying where it come from.

*Table 1. Odomagana and where they live or come from.*

1	Obu, N’ukwu ngwu	Umuavulu, Abor
2	Obu n’akpaka	Umuavulu, Abor
3	Odo Ayika	Umuavulu, Abor
4	Akowo bu N’nweke	Umuavulu, Abor
5	Akowo bu n’ugwu,	Abor
6	, Odo Ayika	Umuavulu, Abor
7	Obu n’offor	Umuavulu, Abor

Source; Field work, 2023.

In Umuavulu Abor, names include; Akowo bu N’nweke, Akowo bu n’ugwu, Obu n’offor, Odo Ayika among others. In Egede also there are Obu N’ukwu ngwu, Obu n’akpaka among others. Either the elder of the hamlet or appointed holder, is in charge of the leadership of the hamlet masquerade called (Igo-Odo).

#### 4.2. Odo as a Cult

The activities of Odo Masquerade solidly reflect many characteristics of a cult group [1]. In many communities, women and the un-initiated are barred from entering the Odo caves, shrines, and houses, and are kept away from the secrets of Odo cult. Okafor, R. C. [19] states that the word cult relates to groups that engage in secret activities and most

of the time nonctural. They are defined as groups of people whose identity are not only shrouded in secrecy but also engage in activities that are inimical to the collective good of the society [19]. Any male that wishes to be initiated into Odo cult will be required to bring some tubers of yams, numbers of fowl, kola nuts, and pepper sauce among others, according to the community requirements. He will be given a bare hair-cut with small hair left in the center of the head as he carries a local food dish along with others in a single file into the masquerade house for the initiation. Sometimes painted, with local nards. The process is called Idu-Nwa-na-Odo. The initiation process may last for a few days. Once initiated, the person now enjoys all the rights and privileges of an initiated member.

#### 4.3. Odo as a Culture

This is the exciting and emotional aspect of Odom-Agana masquerade that has kept it alive from time immemorial. The few months it will stay, is packaged with retinue of cultural ceremonies. Amakulor [4] captures the above view when he states that the festive days designated for certain groups of Odo has remained a driving force for mobilizing a great number of people from far and near to engage themselves in lavish entertainments of all kinds. As the returning of Odo is announced, villages and hamlets task themselves to raise a good amount of money to equip and sponsor good outings during the Odo festivals. Igbo Odo communities have different types of Odo festivals and ceremonies that have been conscripted into the culture of the people. To an extent, some of the festivities have become a tourist attraction waiting for the government to access for the promotion of tourism and culture in the state. Odo masquerade greatly adds celebrations, festivities and attractions to the culture of Igbo-Odo. The melodious odo music (ekwe-odo) and songs cum odo wise sayings, impacted other indigenous music including Qdabara, Ilagba, Igede, Ikpa and Ode, etc. Many indigenous songs are rooted from Odo tradition, [17].

Table 2. Odo Cultural Ceremonies.

S/N	CULTURAL CEREMONIES	TOWN1
1	Igodo	Abor, Ojebe-ogene
1	Igodo	Abor, Ojebe-ogene
2	Nseje Odo	Abor, Ojebe-ogene
3	Nwa uriri ugwu-ogwu	Abor
4	Ife-Odo	Abor, Ojebe-ogene
5	Fiajoku	Abor, Ojebe-ogene
6	Ofufu n'nweke	Abor

Source; Field work, 2023

In Umuavulu Abor, some of the notable Odo cultural ceremonies include the Igodo, Nseje Odo, Oriri Ugwu Ogwu, Oriri Ife Odo, Oriri Obu N'nweke, and Oriri Fiajoku among others. Odo masquerade simply add glamour and flavour to the culture of Igbo- Odo.

#### 4.4. Odo as a Religion

This aspect has remained the controversial side of the cult.

As enshrined in many secrecies of rituals, incantations and fetish practices, speculations are still high that the Odo cult is a pagan religion [9]. Many practitioners are pagans and do not attend to church as Christians. The process of initiations, as in Idu-Nwa, the starting of its short break called Nfeko-Ogba and the weekly run of Evayiku Masquarade called Ise-Odo are some of the activities of Odom-Agana cultural practices that sends strong signals of its worship syndrome. In some communities, the cult still retains many of the pagan and ritual practices of the olden days up to this digital age. Many families are known up till today as Odo worshippers. Many Christians still partake strongly more than the pagans in the following of Odo cult practices. It is still warfare in many communities as the Christians and Odo supporters clash over conflict of interest and crossing of lines in their exercise of their faith. Odo as a cultural practice in many communities has turned into a horrible nightmare to the people as they have eluded the originality of its institution which was for entertainment and unification [2]. It has turned into witch-hunting and violence in the name of culture, roads are blocked, beating and extorting of money from the passerby, burning of houses, maiming and sanctioning of uninterested community members, imposing of illicit dues and killing of opponents.

## 5. The Institutionalism of Odo Masquerade and Sustainable Development

One of the goals of sustainable development is to pursue objectives that will reduce the economic hardship of the people and seek for solutions to tackle adverse effects of some of its primordial institutions [3]. The practice of Odo masquerade cult has brought both negative and positive impact on the people, therefore there is need to seek areas where solutions could be proffered to bring satisfaction to the greater majority of the people.

#### a) Removal of harmful practices

The Odo masquerade was introduced to be an object of entertainment, to offer the men a leverage over the women in terms power relationship and to protect the people against external aggression [20], there is need to sieve the aspects of the cult that is secret out of the present-day Odo masquerade. This will be a point of departure from the ancestral practice of Odo masquerade where enemies and opponents are spiritually and physically dealt with. It will be out of place in this era of globalization for the vision of the people to be blurred by fetish practices that have never been used to improve the living standard of the people. Since development is linked to socio-economic practices that will improve the freedom and productivity of man, the practice of Odo masquerade should be positioned towards the areas where it can be of comparative advantage to the people, which fundamentally, is culture and tourism.

#### b) Transformation into an object of cynosure

It will be healthier and profitable to see the cult aspect of

Odo masquerade totally scrapped. It will be a total credit and a giant leap to bequeath on the future generation a practice devoid of adverse effects where Odo masquerade will be a beacon of unity, a strand of joy and artistic creativity [1], and a source of entertainment and reckoned in the tourism industry as unbeatable international attraction. The cult aspect has outlived its usefulness, the goal of any cultural practice is not to create fear, nightmares and disunity on the people but to enhance the people's recreational strength [10].

#### c) Viable local economies

The fecundity of the locality depends on peace and unity of the environment which a reformed and complaint Odo masquerade will bring about. The mandatory holidays given mostly to women and sojourners on the pretense that dangerous masquerades are running or rituals are being performed will no longer be an issue, as people will go about their lawful duties to pursue viable and productive ventures which will bring about, local economic growth and attract development in their communities [6].

#### d) Security

The incessant clashes between supporters of Odo masquerade cult and Christian groups has remained a great challenge to Odo cult tradition [5, 10], when the community stakeholders join hands form strong agreement of maintaining peace in the community. In some communities where the reforms of such cultural practices are headway, the clergy even join to celebrate those cultural festivals, as high mass is used to kick off such festivities. Peace and security are among the main ingredients in achieving sustainable development goals [14]. When peace and harmony rather than fear and disunity prevail, the reform becomes complete.

## 6. Conclusion

The Odo masquerade institution may not freeze away by mere wishful thinking. It has survived many generational threats and has continued to be propagated and promoted with great emotional power and strength especially by the youth and the rich. The viable option now is to adopt reformatory measures, to make it important instrument rather than a cog in the wheel of development. The potentiality of Odom-Agana masquerade to unleash a global tourist interest is a particular agenda to be pursued by the custodian of Odo culture. With the right committee and strong support, it could be steered away from its fetish practices to be in the rank of the popular carnival in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. This is a great assignment for those who want to make history, to redefine Odo as a culture with fundamental responsibilities; therefore, there is room for reform to give the people an ultimate culture to be proud of, a tradition that unites the peoples and a forum for community development.

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