

The Culture of Òdò Masquerade and the Question of Identity, Ancestry and Sainthood in Igbo Worldview

Ugwu, Anayochukwu Kingsley

This paper is of the opinion that the effects of foreign culture have played down on the cultural and ontological values of Òdò masquerade, hence the minimal observance of identity and ancestral implications of the culture among Igbo-Africans. With regards to this, the paper argues that the culture of masquerade stands as a fundamental phenomenon that expresses identity, ancestral history and the Christian equivalence of Sainthood in Igbo worldview. The paper is significant as a framework that addresses the issue of identity crisis and as a work that shows the idea of sainthood among the Igbo-African people. It therefore suggests that upholding the culture of masquerade implies upholding the Igbo-African cultural ideals, identity and value to the honour of ancestry and response to the question of sainthood from an African perspective. In the paper historical and comparative methods were adopted.

Keywords: *Mm̀̀nwu*, Òdò, Masquerade, Igbo, Africa, Culture, Identity, Ancestry, Sainthood, Igbo Worldview.

Author's Affiliation

Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Social Sciences, Madonna University, Nigeria.
Email: anayochukwu@gmail.com and anayochukwu.kingsley.pg82208@unn.edu.ng.

Article History

Received: 26th August 2024

Accepted: 1st October 2024

Published: 16th October 2024

Cite Article:

Ugwu, A. K. (2024). The Culture of Òdò Masquerade and the Question of Identity, Ancestry and Sainthood in Igbo Worldview. *Journal of Culture, History and Archaeology*, 4(3), 22-34.

INTRODUCTION

Culture as a concept has been conceived in several ways, however, here, it is conceived as the practice that defines a people by expressing their personality and identity and equally influences their thinking, speech and action. It is that way of life that explains the intrigues and intricacies of a people's life. In fact for a scholar like Akubue, the concept of culture:

includes codes of manners, dressing patterns, language, religion, rituals, games, norms of behaviour such as law and morality and systems of belief as well as the art... concept of culture should include not only the way we lived yesterday, but the way we live today; not only the heritage of our ancestors, but also that of our contemporaries. Hence culture is the conglomeration of all that punctuates the life of a people¹

It goes a long way to present the people in a unique and peculiar way. But it must be noted that culture is dynamic hence the acknowledgment of acculturation and insufficiency of a culture and therefore, the need for intercultural interactions.

¹ A. Akubue, "Religion and Culture: Mutually Reinforcing with Promising Potentials," *Ojebe-Ogene Search-Light*, 1, No. 1, (2011-12), 15

To the Igbo-African people, masquerade recreation is one of the several ways Igbo life, identity, personality, religion and spiritual lifestyle have survived over thousands of years. Masquerade has been one of the intricacies of the Igbo-African cultural expressions. This is because, to many, it has been conceived as a negative phenomenon with some spiritual and social detriments; but to others, positive phenomenon with some spiritual, socio-ontological and identity relevance. This point of conceptual controversy in the Igbo-African culture of masquerading is the major motivation for this paper.

However, the problem behind the erroneous conception of masquerade that has prompted negative labels follows from disorientation towards some African cultural practices like masquerading. Modern Igbo-African people have been misinformed about the ontological relevance of many Igbo-African cultural practices there by demeaning them to not only the glorification of foreign counterpart but also fashioning theoretical and practical methods to ensure its continuity. Practically, masquerading and other African cultural practices are labelled diabolic and ontologically empty by not just Europeans but also African Christians. Unfortunately, these African Christians are continuously oriented on how necessary it is to carry out some religious engagements in the names Christian (foreign) Saints thereby ensuring more deepening in the European-Christian ancestry. For instance, Igbo-Africans use holy books like Bible, Quran, chaplet, scapular, etc to pray; their prayers are full of foreign figures like Jesus Christ, Saints (Michael, Gabriel, etc.), Virgin Mother Mary, etc.; they equally celebrate declared significant days of these foreign figures like their birthdays, assumptions and ascensions, etc. All these are serious attempts to inscribe these foreign figures and ancestors into the subconscious minds of Igbo-Africans so as to embrace as perfect, anything foreign religion and culture to the bias of their minds over anything African religion and culture like masquerade. However, to set for this task, it is plausible to start by interacting with the concept of masquerade.

The Concept of Masquerade

The concept of masquerade may differ according to culture and time. However, for the Igbo-African, masquerade could be seen as a general name used to designate the cultural practice piloted by mainly men where a masked being parades in the community. It is referred to as 'men's affair' following the fact that women's participation in it is very limited. In some Igbo-African cultures, masquerades parade in certain seasons and times, on certain days and within certain areas. This point is important for it says a lot about possible versions of masquerade among the Igbo-African people. Generally, it could be said that the concept of

masquerade is broadly categorized into two: *Mm̀̀nwu* and *Òdò*. Brief discussion on these two categories is important.

Mm̀̀nwu: Etymologically, the term is formed by two Igbo words: *mm̀̀* meaning 'spirit' and *nwu* meaning 'death', hence the 'spirit of death'. In some dialects, the term could also be pronounced as *M̀̀nwu*, still meaning the same thing. But the 'spirit of death' here does not mean the 'spirit that causes death' as Christianized biased mind would quickly conclude which by extension, could be the reason behind the negative conception of masquerade. The 'spirit of death' here means the 'spirit of dead members of the family, village, hamlet and clan and community'. Suffice it to mean that masquerade as called in Igbo *mm̀̀nwu* could as well be referred to as *mm̀̀-ndi-nwuru-anwu*, translated as the 'spirit of those who have died'. It is seen as the spirit of those who have died but has come back for visit, for play, for interaction with the living members of the family, hamlet, clan, village and or community. It is a practical way to manifest the love and care of the dead members of the family for the still-living members of the family. This gives more justification to Dimoney and Aisegbu's position when they say: "Essentially, the people believe that the masquerades are an embodiment of the spirits of their dead relatives and/or their village deities. Hence, masquerades are not regarded as alien to the people; they are believed to have a particular abstract connection with the people and the community" (Dimonye and Asiegbu, 2023). In other words, the concept of sainthood and religious ancestry in foreign religions gets its correspondence in the Igbo-African worldview through the religio-cultural practice of masquerade. This perspective of interpretation of masquerade to be the spirit of the dead could also be found in the position of Ugwu (2013) when he insists that masquerades represent the spirits of the forefathers of families/clans/hamlets/villages/communities.

In some dialects, the central Igbo *Mm̀̀nwu* could sound a bit different however the sound has not changed the meaning and implication. In a culture like Eziagu in Enugu State, Nigeria, *Mm̀̀nwu* is pronounced *Mmanwu* or *Manwu*. Dissecting the term, *Mma* or *Ma* refers to *mm̀̀* which is spirit, while the term *nwu* stands for *nwu* (dead), meaning that *Mmanwu* or *Manwu* as masquerade implicates 'the idea of the spirits of the dead ones'. The *Ọ* in *Ọnwu* got swallowed by the principle of *Oliilo Udaume* (Swallowing of vowels) in Igbo language. This explains why in some Igbo tongues, when a masquerade is seen, the people exclaim *Maa f'noo*, meaning, "that is spirit oo!" or 'spirit is here oo!' or 'behold spirit oo!'. This is to announce the beholding or emergence of the spirit (of the forefathers of the family, village, clan, hamlet or community that is involved), and so, it is expected that you as a person ought to give way or be conscious of its presence or be ready to enjoy its company

(presence/appearance) in the scene it has surfaced. Tap from the joy of the moment, behold the presence and visitation of your forefathers, and as such, present your supplications to your forefathers who have visited in a more spirit form though tangible to you as a full-blown human being. This gives more credence to the position that the world of the invisible is not farfetched from the world of the visible for both dovetail into each other and as such, ontological influences are possible any time and in any form. This could be interpreted as the rationale behind the title of Onyeneke's work.²

Further, under the masquerade versions in the category of *mm̄nw̄*, there are sub-versions like *Q̄mabe*, *Akatakpa*, *Ori-Q̄kpa/Ogiri*, *Ekpo*, *Nk̄n̄k̄*, *Ekpe* and then the version referred to as *mm̄nw̄* with their different names. *Q̄mabe*, *Akatakpa*, *Ori-Q̄kpa/Ogiri* are versions of masquerade paraded in the Northern region of Igbo-African, *Nsukka*. *Ekpo*, *Nk̄n̄k̄* and *Ekpe* are versions paraded in the South-South zone of Nigeria like Akwa Ibom, Cross River and Rivers States, and some neighbouring Igbo-Africa parts (majorly Abia State). This perspective about masquerade is commendably handled by Onyeneke (1987). *M̄nw̄* is paraded in almost every other part of the Igbo-Africa. In most Igbo-African communities, they return routinely among communities that make the village, hamlet, clan or community. Importantly, during their recreation, they may display on every day of the Igbo week (Izu (Izu-Uka)) which is made up of four days.

Ódò: This is another version of masquerade that the Igbo-African practises. The name as it is could be said to have been derived from cultural trumpery called Ódò predominant in the practice. The trumpery has socio-cultural and religious significance and used along with other socio-cultural and religious items like *ōji* (kola nut), *nzu* (white or calabar chalk), *m̄m̄nya* (local wine), *utaba* (tobacco or snuff), *uhie* (a reddish trumpery that has almost cultural symbolism with Ódò). These are items always accompanied with spoken words and symbols or images that the Igbo-African uses to pray, worship and attract divine attention on him/herself and family affairs. However, Ódò is a yellowish trumpery symbolizing, calmness, quietude, homeliness, peace, tranquillity, covenant, interaction acceptance both in body (physical) and mind (beyond physical). It is not internally used in the mouth, but externally used by administering it on the forehead or on objects. It is based on these significances that it could be argued that the name Ódò could have been

derived from the concept *Údó* (peace). This is because Ódò stands for calmness, homeliness and peace and it is specially used, many a times, to call home anyone going astray socially and mentally so as to ensure peace and coordination in the person. When one becomes too wayward or violent or highly less useful to one's people, one would be told *kuru mmiri Ódò fia iru* (use the water mixed with Ódò to wash face). This is a saying attempting to call one home mindfully and bodily.

From the analysis done so far, it could be said that in as much as Ódò masquerade could be argued to have derived from Ódò from a conceptual interpretation and Ódò could arguably be derived from the term *Údó*, then, Ódò masquerade stands for peace. This is not unclear from the significance of Ódò masquerade for the major reason behind its existence is to ensuring peace socially and ontologically among the people and between the people and their ancestry.

Ódò masquerade is paraded majorly among the children of Agbaja, an Abrahamic version of forefather of an Igbo people predominant in Enugu and Anambra States. It is practised among the children of Ojebe-Ogene Local Development Council by birth; children of the sister to Ojebe-Ogene called Ugwunye Local Development Council; the children of Neke, cousin sisters to Ojebe-Ogene, found in Isi-Uzo Local Government Area, Enugu State and some fraction of communities in *Nsukka* like *Ovoko*, among others. It is important to mention that Ódò masquerade could be called *Akawo* (or *Ekewo* in some dialects) among the people practising it.

Generally, whether it is Ódò brand or *M̄nw̄* brand of masquerade, the fact is that there are categories of masquerade with peculiar features.³ For instance, there is a category of masquerades that is meant for sports and chasing people around, and on the process, they get gifts after such exercise. This social function can even be drawn from their names. It includes masquerades like *Ike-nwamkpamkpa*, *Akatakpa*, *Mgbadike*, *Agaba*, *Oriokpa*, *Q̄tawalu* *Ikpo*, *Ūd̄-Akp̄-Enyi*, *Ebu*, *Achikwu*, *Mkpamkpaniko*, *Odogwu-Anyam̄m̄*, etc. These masquerades are paraded mainly by youths. They add a sort of glamour to the environment any time they recreate. They are for play in terms of sports and exhibition of powerful activities that portray the strength that characterizes youthfulness.

There is another category that is meant for aesthetic display. Sometimes, they can equally be in group and give out some melodious tunes in their esoteric voices. They can equally be found with one or two materials for melodious tunes. In the process, they can be satirical to speak to an individual or group of individuals to correct an anomaly being

² Augustine O. Onyeneke titled his work *The Dead among the Living: Masquerades in Igbo Society*. The implication of this is that masquerades are the spirits of the dead members of the community, and their presence in the community is ontologically paramount.

³ A. K. Ugwu, *Cultural Practice of Ódò Masquerade: A Critical Re-Evaluation* (Unpublished)

perpetuated in the community. By this, they expose evil and bring the people involved to shame for deterrence. Some for aesthetic display in this category can be in the form of women, showcase beauty and display womanly behaviours. Masquerades under this category include Ugo, Adamma, Oji-Ọnụ, Agbaagba Ọnyimọdam, Sirima, Nwenwe-n-nwe, Mbem, Ọgbareetọ, Ọta-ka-Agụ, Omenikoro, Alaba, etc. Masquerades in this category do not pursue/chase people around, but are welcomed and made comfortable in a particular place to host groups of people with their showcasing of beauty, melodious tunes and sometimes with satirical touches.

There is another category that includes sets of masquerades paraded by children. They parade around, dance and show some techniques and styles of dancing steps and then made welcome and appreciated with gifts. Sometimes, some of them could give out interesting tunes especially with trending songs with some touches of satire. But significantly, they are seen as the oldest set of masquerades because before the higher ones, they must have been paraded. They see for the emergence of the bigger or higher ones because biologically, there must be childhood-adolescence before adulthood. Masquerades in this category include Ụmụ-Mgberede-Mgbede, Nwa-Ugo-na-ara-na-elu, Ódò-Ukwu, Apiesa, etc.

There is another category that includes a set of powerful masquerades. This category is strictly for matured minds, adults. Of course, *Ọgwụ* is applied at this level for if the snake and scorpion do not show their snakesness and scorpionness, women would use them to tie firewood and for ear rings respectively. This set of masquerades requires high level of secrecy and commitment for in them, the real sense of ancestry in the masquerade cultural practice becomes more evident. It features masquerades like Kp'kp'nka (Ugwu-Ogodo-Amadia, Ódò-Ụmụ-Okene, Imama-Amadia, Osiidenyi, Ngweg'yi-Amadia, etc.), Ijere/Ijele, Ajọ-Ọhia or Ajọ-Ọfia, Enyikwọ-nwa, Atụ, Ngwu, Ụdọ-Akpụ-Enyi, etc.

A BRIEF HISTORICAL ANALYSIS OF THE ORIGIN OF MASQUERADE

It is erroneous to expect a conventional account on the origin of masquerade. Even in a community of a people with same ancestry, there is none, let alone in a tribe or ethnic nationality like the Igbo-Africa or Africa as a continent. Of course, there have been remarkable efforts to establish the origin of masquerade but with much concentration on the Ódò version.⁴ Be that as it may, brief presentation of some of the historical accounts on the origin of masquerade would be paramount here.

⁴ Ugwu, *Cultural Practice of Ódò Masquerade* (Unpublished)

An account holds that the origin of masquerade could be traced back to the olden days moonlight play when male children would use palm fronds and palm tree and plantain/banana extracts to mask themselves and be pursuing themselves. The funny fact about this is that even if it is your twin or friend who just wears the play mask and faces you, the simplest message that will be sent to you is 'an unknown being' and subsequent effect is simply fear. Many a times, they get wounded in the process of the moonlight play because it is night, but then, the spirit and interestingness of the play would still keep them to continue almost every night.

Another account of Ódò masquerade claims that man would always see a spirit that came to him in dream to admonish and direct him on how he would handle and contain certain social troublesome circumstances either in his life, his neighbour's life, the family or the society at large.⁵ In this dream, the man would not know what or who exactly that involves itself into the affairs that concern him, the neighbour, the family or the society earnestly like this and would attribute certain sense of goodness to it. Of course, he quite knows that it must be a spirit of a dearly concerned one which could be no other person than his ancestors who is believed to be the watch-dogs of the families here on this physical world. However, having no total knowledge of how natural or physiological appearance of the spirit looked like because of his bodily limitation in physics, he decides to phenomenologically represent it in that structure in which the masquerade appears, through the masquerade cult institution. That is to say that Ódò is a 'concerned spirit' discovered through the spiritual activity- dream of the man that would share in the existential matters of man on this physical world. Ódò is here portrayed as a spirit that serves as 'a gateway' out of certain life trouble or a source of knowledge to overcome the troubles of life.⁶

Another account of the origination of Ódò has earlier been likened to the ancient story that in the beginning, all beings seemed to be equal and inhabited equal spheres and exhibited equal characters and communally participated in the community affairs. At a point, it was noticed among them all that they did not possess equal powers and potencies. They, therefore began to assume different categorical living standards, display of powers and potencies and exhibition of certain unique temperaments according to their categories respectively. This point has, however, gained the attribution of how the idea of hierarchies of beings came to be.

Nevertheless, some noticed that they became stained in their natural purity after gathering and discussing with other

⁵ Ugwu, *Cultural Practice of Ódò Masquerade* (Unpublished)

⁶ Ugwu, *Cultural Practice of Ódò Masquerade* (Unpublished)

beings. Some categorical and purer beings began to cover themselves with *anwa* or *anwụrinwụ* or *awụrụ* meaning nest or 'certain mixture or bundle of mask materials,' others thus took to higher level of existence and in invisible ways while others remain visible and each family, being rated at a distinct level of operation. These masked beings were the progenitors or initiators of the idea of *Ódò*. They cover themselves thoroughly that contacting other beings (dirty lower beings precisely) to stain their natural purity was no more possible. Subsequently, to purify those other beings with elements of dirt in them, the category of masked beings were always seen with canes to scare those dirty-element-containing-beings away; and at once, beat the hell out of them.

Another account has so far argued that the idea of *Ódò* started with the Igbo proverb that *mbinyere anaghi adi/enwe ugwu* (too much familiarity breeds disrespect). The implication is that in the beginning, all beings were living, playing and sharing everything they ever had and needed together. They did everything together but out of the much closeness and familiarity, when some say certain reasonable things and gave some reasonable advice or serve higher and extra-ordinary purposes to others based on their natural potencies, they would take them as common and tales. To present the picture of the reasonableness in this account, let us reflect on the dramatic scene presented at the threshold of philosophical thought and revolution of Kierkegaard where the clown was seriously and restlessly continually saying the truth that the house (society) in which they were in was about to collapse but unfortunately, nobody listened to him as he was taken as a drunk and subsequently his advice was ignored. As a consequence, the house (society) finally collapsed to everybody's detriment at the negligence to Kierkegaardian wise advice. Though here, the consequent collapsing of the house (community) is the withdrawal and unfamiliarity of some higher purer beings from the lower impure beings which then brought about certain strange, miscellaneous, inexact and divine and transcendental knowledge of others to others. So, at this juncture, some of those truth-saying/doing beings resolved and went back and invented the use of *anwa* (nest) or mask to cover their identities and personalities and then came to talk to them so that they (the unmasked beings) would consume their (the masked beings) message and when they heeded to the message, there were series of positive changes in the people's lives and community for these masked beings are seen as the mouth piece of the intermediaries — the unseen beings.

Nevertheless, there was another historical background of the idea of *Ódò* that originated from an 'act-of-woman.' According to this account, it all began when the Igbo-African was yet in the state of nature, when water has not entered into the stem-hollow of the fruited pumpkin. By state of

nature here, we mean in the traditional society of the African, when all these contemporary challenges and interferences to nature arising from the wave of westernization of Africa was not there. Every being in the society was distinct and unique in his/her different state. That is, man was only seen as man, plants as plants, animals as animals and other beings on their unique categories respectively. No being was seen as having composite meanings and or features at once as presented to the people's common initiative. Every being was well known and very acquainted with its fellow. None made or had that fearful diverse nature as masquerade which today makes it fearful to the people. There was existential homogeneity and straight forwardness. There was neither something so incomprehensibly composite nor made by man which should show that creative temperament in man in the society which we should say that due to man's natural imperfection that this very thing is so vague or hazy to the understanding of man. There was no invented being by man and that was alien to man. So, one day, a woman thought of what could exist, look a bit different from man's normal knowledge of nature and make people be fearful of it with the sense of play. It was to create the atmosphere of fun by being strange and surprising to the people and look different from already existing types of beings. She went into the bush and plucked certain branches of tree and *ọmụ nkwu* (the youngest and innermost part of palm frond) and used them to make a hollow-local-crafty-circular-object like that of today's masquerade but the problem that came up was that after making the huge bunch of tree-branches-mask and wore it, she could not see well in order to see her front and road well. She removed it and tried several times to dress the created mask well but could not dress it well in order to see clearly and unfortunately and unknowingly to her, a palm-wine tapper was astonishingly gazing at her and her intelligence in trying to create a sight-way or sight-hole through the constructed mask. At a point, she became highly plucked to succeed and rushed out of the bush to get a knife to be used to ease the eye-creation through the mask. It was then that the wine-tapper as a man, quickly rushed down from the palm tree and hastened into the bush, quickly used the knife with which he did or operated his palm-wine-tapping, opened the ground and dug out a sort of reddish wet soil and immediately used it to casually paint the constructed mask and used the knife again to create a sight-hole through the mask constructed by the woman and wore it and then sat up mysteriously waiting for her return. When the woman then came inside the bush, she was surprised at the sight of the position of her constructed mask and became jittery. She could not believe herself that what she merely constructed turned a reality. She tried to wave away the gripped fear, came close to the made mask and dared to touch it and suddenly the made mask began to chase her. At this point, she began to run and was screaming that what she ordinarily

constructed has turned a reality and then was pursuing her. When she ran for her dear life and came out of the bush, she met a man on the way and immediately the man himself saw it and ran along with the woman, and at a point, the spirited mask turned back. The intelligence under the mask later came to the man as a fellow and disclosed his encounter with the woman and they both along with other men began to discuss how the management of the newly invented type of social life and being or spirited mask would be run.

There are other series of accounts vis-à-vis the origin of masquerade held by other scholars like Onyeneke.⁷ While some are indigenous in origin, many are not. However, while they are scholarly attempts to establish historical accounts with regards to the emergence of masquerade, this paper however would not just accept all hook, line and sinker. The reason is that essentially though little, there are elements of differences between *Mmṣṣnwu/Mmanwu/Manwu* version of masquerade and *Ódò* version of masquerade. Again, the researcher hails from a culture that practises the later not the former, following that, does not have such adequate authority to establish the origin of *Ódò* masquerade like the author who is today a practising initiate. Finally, being that the researcher hails from a culture in neighbourhood with the culture attributed the headquarters of the Igbo race and culture, the researcher is vulnerable to bias to still argue that hence, every cultural practice practised by the Igbo ethnic nationality which has become a sort of identity to the nationality necessarily has risen from their culture or that of his neighbouring culture, *Nri*.

Similarities between *Mmṣṣnwu* Masquerade and *Ódò* Masquerade

In this subsection, significant similarities and dissimilarities between *Mmṣṣnwu* masquerade and *Ódò* masquerade would be highlighted. On one hand, the following points are some similarities between the two versions of masquerade.

1. Both versions of masquerade symbolically depict the notion of ancestry as they are conceived as the spirits of forefathers who have left (died).
2. They play same social functions of warming the community by adding more colourful glamour and social ingredients to events happening in the community.
3. Both stand as a way to concretize the notion of ancestry and keep ancestral memories in perpetual continuity.
4. They stand as phenomena through which the idea of sainthood in the Igbo-African worldview could be expressed. Saints are prayed to, for intercessions on the living members of the family, village or community; they speak for the people before the Supreme Being. Suffice

to say that the significant difference between the Christian notion of sainthood and the African notion of sainthood is that while the saints of the Christian religions are represented with images, figures and statues and only prayed to, those of the Igbo-African religion return to play, interrelate, warm and pray together with the still-living members of the family, clan, village and or community at large.

Disimilarities between *Mmṣṣnwu* Masquerade and *Ódò* Masquerade

First, *Ódò* masquerade, in many places it is practised, is of two brands and subsequent upon that, recreates in two different seasons. The two brands are *Ódò Ụlọ* and *Ódò Agụ*. Brief description of the two to ensure difference between may be good.

***Ódò Ụlọ*:** *Ódò* is masquerade and *Ụlọ* literarily means 'house' but goes beyond just a house to the description of 'an inhabited environment/village/community'. By this, *Ódò Ụlọ* refers to that brand of *Ódò* masquerade that recreates within the vicinity of village/community inhabited by people, from one *Obi* (family entrance) to another. That is one feature of this brand of *Ódò* masquerade called *Ódò Ụlọ*. Following the point that *Ódò*, in some dialects is also called *Akawo/Ekewo*, this brand of *Ódò* masquerade is also referred to as *Akawo Idide* or *Ekewo Id'de*. As pointed out earlier, *Akawo/Ekewo* is 'masquerade' while *Idide(Id'de)* is 'Earthworm', hence *Akawo Idide* or *Ekewo Id'de* is that brand of *Ódò* masquerade that recreates when earthworm is found plenty in the community; and that is rainy season. In all, whether known as *Ódò Ụlọ* or *Akawo/Ekewo Idide/Id'de*, it simply points to the brand of *Ódò* masquerade that recreates within the people's habitat (village/community and from one family entrance to another) and then during the rainy season. Significantly, recreating among the people shows its nature of homeliness and calmness. Again, it shows the tenderness and show of love from the dead members of the family/village/community which they ideally are, by returning and deeply checking how the people they left behind on earth are fairing. That is the implication of within-village-recreation: ancestral supervision and an act of ensuring orderliness and spiritual cleansing of the community of any evil and evil doers. That was why in the traditional Igbo-Africa, traditional religionists avoided evil at all cost because they knew that when *Ódò* returns, their evils would be exposed and they would be swept away along their evils if they dared to visit or come into contact with *Ódò* especially making intercessory supplications before *Ódò* and with material gifts like money, food, wine, kola nut, tobacco, etc. More on such ontological duty as the spirit of the dead members of the family/village/community on the still-living

⁷ Onyeneke, *The Dead among the Living*, 44-56, 67-70

members of the community are well expressed elsewhere.⁸

Aesthetically, its nest (materials used for regalia of this brand of *Ódò* masquerade) are extracts from palm tree: palm fronds, broom, etc, and then some items like charcoal, battery, *Nzu* (white or calabar chalk), *Ódò* (yellowish trumpery), etc. for decorations and beauty.

Ódò Agụ: This could also be called *Akawo Agu* or *Ekewo Eg'*. From its name, *Ódò* refers 'masquerade' while *Agu* (or *Eg*) refers 'wilderness', hence, *Ódò Agụ* is the brand of *Ódò* masquerade that recreates in the wilderness; that is, around the out sketch of people's environment or desert encroachment. This is to show that this brand of *Ódò* masquerade has the tendency of exercising bravery, and could, to an extent, easily apply force or violence than *Ódò Ụlọ* or *Akawo Idide* (or *Ekewo Id'de*) because its recreating in the wilderness shows that it is for security of the people and their properties in the community and their community also, against any external attack. A security agent supposedly is powerful, tactical, brave, fearless and can easily apply force when necessary than a civilian. Analogically, while *Ódò Ụlọ* or *Akawo Idide* (*Ekewo Id'de*) has civilian attributes, *Ódò Agụ* or *Akawo Agu* (*Ekewo Eg'*) has military attributes. Be that as it may, *Ódò Agụ* or *Akawo Agu* (*Ekewo Eg'*) brand of *Ódò* masquerade returns during cashew season, which is dry season. Aesthetically, the nest of *Ódò Agụ* varies. Some of them have their nest made with extracts from trees, others akwete or rafia materials and many others, clothes, and then the same items used by *Ódò Ụlọ* or *Akawo Idide* (*Ekewo Id'de*) for decorations and beauty.

Second, significantly, the return of *Ódò Ụlọ* or *Akawo Idide* is in rainy season and carries many ritual observations than the one of *Ódò Agụ*. Generally, such ritual observations between *Ódò* and *Mmọnwụ* brands of masquerade differ as those of *Ódò* seemingly tend to be more, and could be ontologically consequential to the process and or system in which it operates when refused to be observed.

Third, the nest of the two brands of *Ódò* masquerade differs, and so, does the nest of *Ódò* masquerade and that of *Mmọnwụ* masquerade differs also.

Fourth, in *Ódò* masquerade, if at all there could be any masquerade with military attributes, they are found among *Ódò Agụ* because of their ontological perception and essence and as shown in their social duties. Following the fact that such brands and seasons which have some level of essential characteristics to differentiate between brands of *Ódò* masquerade are not found in *Mmọnwụ* masquerade, there is no such regards with the type of nest they appear in, their names, recreational seasons and existential character-

istics *vis-a-vis* civilian or military attributes.

Fifth, there is seemingly much ritual performance in *Ódò* masquerade than in *Mmọnwụ* masquerade. This could be attributed to the two sub-versions and subsequent seasons into which *Ódò* masquerade is practised.

Sixth, following the second point above, it appears there are more spiritual implications in *Ódò* masquerade than *Mmọnwụ* masquerade. This implies that *Ódò* masquerade could be said to have more spiritual substance than *Mmọnwụ* masquerade.

Seventh, while *Ódò* masquerade, even in the season it recreates, has a specific day not only to parade but also carry out some specific functions. Such observance is not obtainable in *Mmọnwụ* masquerade. For instance, in areas where *Ódò* masquerade is truly practised, and following the fact that in Igbo culture, *Orie Day* is a woman day (goddess), *Ódò* masquerade does not parade on that day. This shows the limit of women's participation in *Ódò* masquerade affairs. Any man who violates this norm commits a taboo and must henceforth be forbidden from participating in any *Ódò* masquerade affair. He shall henceforth be seen as a woman hence life ostracism from men's folk especially when it comes to *Ódò* masquerade affair. Even in some social affairs, his position would not be taken serious because he has proved he is not man enough by his inability to keep secrets. Ostracism of any sort is characterized by *Ụchụ* (curse for the taboo committed for which one is ostracized). *Ụchụ* follows ostracism because it is an anti-communal state hence a state of what is not to be truly Igbo-African (Ugwu, 2019; Ugwu and Ozoemena, 2023). *Mmọnwụ* masquerade has no such recognized day even though there are certain levels of participation of women in *Mmọnwụ* masquerade affairs. This point explained here is a pointer to why, in a culture where real *Ódò* masquerade is practised, no family has its name bearing *Orie* (or *Olie* or *Oye* according to some dialects) as could be found in surnames as *Okorie/Okolie/Okoli*, *Okoye*, *Nwa-Okorie/Nwa-Okolie/Nwa-Okoli/Nwa-Okoye*, *Nwa-Orie* (*Nworie*), *Nwa-Olie* (*Nwolie*) *Nwa-Oye* (*Nwoye*). Because *Ódò* masquerade is 90 per cent masculine affair, and *Orie Day* is an anti-*Ódò* masquerade day, and following the fact that family or surnames are masculine, no family or surname is found with *Orie/Oye* in it. This has become an identity that makes, very unique, the people or culture where *Ódò* masquerade is truly practised. Such identity representation is the same position Achebe pictures the roles of masquerade in *Things Fall Apart vis-à-vis* Igbo culture before the colonizing imperialists.⁹

Social Functions of (*Ódò*) masquerade

Ódò masquerade socially functions as a people's identity as

⁸ Ugwu, *Cultural Practice of Ódò Masquerade* (Unpublished)

⁹ Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, (1959), 133-8. www.online.fliphtml5.com/kdji/bjgk/#p=3

the people's cultural practice by which they are known. Today, it is not uncommon to hear the description 'Igbo Ódò' which is an expression used to identify the communities that practise Ódò instead of other versions of masquerade. This term describes the people of Ojebe-Ogene and other surrounding environments from Igbo-Etiti Local Government Area of Enugu where Ódò is practised as their brand of masquerade.

In some cultures, any event masquerade attends becomes a big one for masquerades do not commonly attend events of men. Such an event becomes a more valued one when it is graced by big masquerade of the community like where there is *Ijere/Ijele*, and other big respected masquerades that are obtained in a community.

The presence of masquerades in burial or funeral rites of an individual shows that the individual is such a very important person according to traditional and cultural value, a man of valour or *Dikwu* (a man who sees for a particular masquerade or communally regarded deity/shrine). Its presence in such event adds more glamour to the event.

Some brands of masquerade add more sense of sports and entertainment in the community. Some masquerades are for the youths; their recreation brings about that sense of sports event as they pursue people around. That is a huge exercise event. When doing this, people sweat and burn some level of fat in the body, and equally exercise their body system for a healthy living. At the end, gifts could be given out in the spirit or feeling of having ontological playing time and ancestral love and closeness with the spirits of the community forefathers that have returned to check on the family/community members who are still alive.

It creates a sense of tourism. People can travel from far and near to witness a masquerade event in a particular community. By this, it brings about a certain level of economic growth to the people.

The presence and peculiar esoteric voice of communication by masquerades adds more glamour in the community. Such peculiar voice arouses a certain level of interest and enthusiasm in the people of the community to behold the sight of the masquerades. Hearing such sound, everybody would wish to come and behold the masquerade, tap the joy at its sight and peculiar actions. To some who do not reside in the village, this is more interesting than even some big events or festival times like Christmas, Easter, etc. To some of these people, to see, touch or even give away money or any gift to masquerades is an optimum desire.

The return of masquerade is a big event that people embark on some rituals for purification and in preparation. It is seen as a spiritual event that even if one who participates in it is a bad or evil one, one tries to stop and drastically reduce the level of one's evil. By that, it is a new consciousness attached to the event regarding the level of spirituality attached to masquerade following its socio-

ontological relevance to the people: evil and evil doers do not stand before masquerade for its presence sweeps them away.

Masquerades settle very serious and difficult family disputes especially one between parents, parents and children and even two or more wives of a particular man. For instance, in a polygamous family, when two wives enter into disputes that appears far from being settled by family members, masquerades from the maiden homes of the two wives would be invited along with the one from the man's home (the husband's home), and many a times, they have recorded huge success in such cases. It is assumed by the disputing women that their fathers and fore fathers have come and settled their case so as to accommodate her fellow wife for the long and fair life of their husband and the attraction of the ontological influence of their fore fathers. Beyond family level, masquerades are used to settle land disputes between families, clans, hamlets, villages and even communities. It is believed that as the forefathers of the land for which their children dispute, they know the truth and from the principle of morality, necessarily ought to say the truth and settle their children from disputes. When their children dispute, it is to their own disadvantage as such incident brings about dent to their image, legacy and purity of ancestry. Disobedience to them is a taboo, perverting justice against their still-living children an abomination to the Supreme Being from whom they derive ontological powers and influences to live and live alright. In fact, Onyeneke stressed this thus: "The powers of the masquerade include the authority to order humans around without challenge. They have thus the right to compel people to join in some communal work, to exact fines and even to seize property by force."¹⁰

Masquerades help in deep institutionalization of deities for every masquerade is a representative of some sort of deity, divinity, and some sort of spiritual beings. They not only promote arts and culture, but also make these cultural objects financially gainful to the people as their display could lead to interculturality and demands for such cultural materials. They also have and command some sort of political powers that they can politically lead a people, and today, could be used to address some abnormal understandings and practising of politics thereby curbing the tendencies of committing taboos against the general wills of the people as dominant in African, Nigerian, Igbo space. In pre-colonial era, masquerades were used as police to enforce rules and regulations thereby ensuring core adherence to the norms guiding the people. They administered norms and were used to deal with defaulters and brought sanity in the community. In fact, for a scholar like Onyeneke, masquerades were used to bring about gender

¹⁰ Onyeneke, *The Dead among the Living*, 2

differentiation, socialization, entertainment, and of course, they promoted and still promote traditions and cultural festivals, etc.¹¹

To many scholars, masquerade is a huge source of spirituality. Its presence arouses a sort of consciousness for keeping a certain level of spirituality. This is the main point Adama maintains about the Igala conception of the being of masquerade (Adama, 2013). Putting it in more straight terms, he states:

“The ancestral spirits (masquerades) purify the moral lives of the people. Evil is highly avoided and people strive to do good because they believe that nothing is hidden from their ubiquitous eyes. The ancestral cults renew the ancient traditional values in the minds of the adherents, and such values challenge the living for moral transformation in the society”¹²

Following the conception of masquerade, its presence motivates a consciousness. Its being reawakens a level of moral consciousness among men who carry out its activities in the community. Masquerades sanitize a community of diabolism and evil men through their “mystical and clairvoyant power,” incantation and charms. Adama has more on this.¹³

But it has to be acknowledged that to some people, masquerade is cultism from a high negative understanding of the term ‘cultism’. Such scholars who are more Roman than the Supreme Pontiff, from their unrepented mind of perceiving many Igbo-African cultures, conceive masquerade as negative and destructive to a people as anything clearly devilish and ending the practice simply means an end of a Pharaonic stronghold.¹⁴ For such scholars, masquerades virtually have nothing positive to carry out as functions or add to whatever a people could proudly say they have in their community as values. Thus, it could be concluded that a scholar like Agbo sees nothing good in masquerades, be it from a socio-cultural, ontological or even moral perspective, and subsequently not only criticized its practice but also called for its total annihilation. But following some extremist actions of those involved in masquerading, plenty others have criticized such extremist activities in the process of masquerading. Omegoha could be categorized under such

group of scholars.¹⁵ Adama has equally made a comment pointing to criticism of masquerade following certain level of excesses. These scholars have their reasons. Adama writes: “It is observed that in recent times some individuals mask themselves as masquerades into breakers of peace, law and order in the present society. They disguise into masquerades for stealing, looting, raping and retaliation.”¹⁶ In a more regrettable manner, Dimonye and Asiegbu elaborate more on this point when they write:

Today, unfortunately, the noble Igbo cultural institution of masquerading has degenerated into an instrument of victimization, exploitation and enslavement. Some hideous people easily leverage on their close connection with the masquerade society as to dominate and have a malign influence on others. They and these others could be members of the same family, kindred or clan. The former disregard the latter’s autonomy and freedom. This way, individual freedom is hampered and, by extension, the overall development of the society prevented. We grant that this condition is not inherent in Igbo masquerade institution but rather external to it; but even so, we think that the reputation of Igbo masquerade institution has now been greatly compromised – a situation our ancestors never experienced (Dimonye and Asiegbu, 2023).

While Dimonye and Asiegbu point out challenges associated with masquerading culture among Igbo people, they were careful enough to point out that those challenges are not inherent with the nature of masquerading, but an accidental attitude emanating from mismanagement tendencies of those concerned. Ugwu has equally done an extensive critique of masquerade elsewhere.¹⁷

The Question of Sainthood and Ancestry in the Ódò masquerade

The concept of the Christian sainthood and African religious ancestry points to similar thing: *keeping with much respect*

¹¹ Onyeneke, *The Dead among the Living*, 1-3, 31-41, 75-89, 109-28

¹² Adama, “Igala Masquerades,” 183

¹³ Adama, “Igala Masquerades,” 179, 182-4

¹⁴ J. N. Agbo, *Odo Cultism in Neke End of a Pharaonic Stronghold*. Festac Town, Lagos State, Nigeria: Covenant House Publishing. (2002), viii-159

¹⁵ F. I. Omegoha, *The Collapse of Masquerades as Moral Agents and Social Transformation in Nsukka Cultural Zone*, (A Seminar Paper Presented to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 2012), 11

¹⁶ Adama, “Igala Masquerades,” 179

¹⁷ Ugwu, *Cultural Practice of Ódò Masquerade*, (Unpublished)

and admiration the names and memories of forefathers in perpetual continuity. While Christianity conventionally pronounces a Christian forefather a saint, the African does not. Today, Christianity has even carved out a process with strict measures to scrutinize one she intends beautifying and finally canonizing. For the African, thinking, actions and speeches one lives out as an individual, are what count for one to be seen as a saint. To some African scholars, the proper term for the African version of the Christian saint is **ancestor**,¹⁸ to many others, it is **living-dead**,¹⁹ and **Ndi Ichie** seen as “ancestral spirits” or “the spirits of the dead ancestors.”²⁰ Interestingly, the same term Nwala applies to designate “ancestral spirits” or “the spirits of the dead ancestors” is the term Achebe applies to designate the elders of the Umuofia as an example of an Igbo community (culture).²¹ Very opposite is it that while Nwala uses the term to represent the dead, Achebe uses it to represent the elders who manage the affairs of the community. But as has earlier been maintained elsewhere (Ugwu, 2022), and would still be maintained here, the proper term for Christian sainthood in African religion and worldview is **departed-living**. The reason is that it is not all the spirit of every forefather that makes it to sainthood hence some are referred to as **departed-non-living**.²² The need for the issue of proper term for sainthood is (1) to point out the fact that not every dead, supposedly, is regarded as a saint, and (2) to point out those qualities/factors that enhance one’s attainment to sainthood. The ‘livingness’ of the two groups is based on the level of moral quality they maintained while still physically living.²³

Those who maintained high level of morality while living have upper edge to ontologically influence their still-physical-living and very positively than those who maintained very low level of morality while still physically living. This is possible

following the fact that morality itself is easily attracted by them because of the positivity found in their thought, speeches and actions. While the two groups have surely ‘departed’, not all are still ‘living’ (‘living’ in terms of easily and constantly attracting positivity to their still-living ones because they have not created ontological basis for it while still living). However, it must be noted that they all have ‘departed’ and can influence their still-living family/community members.

Having now established with reasons the African proper term for the Christian term ‘sainthood’, it could be seen that it is not just to concretize the names but also the memories of forefathers. The concept of ancestry, of course, is a central feature in sainthood as a concept. That is exactly what masquerade especially the *Ódò* masquerade version as a concept materialized as a cultural practice does from an African perspective. In *Ódò* masquerade names of forefathers and ancestry are kept in perpetuity. *Ódò* masquerades bear names of forefathers: forefathers of families, clans, villages, communities, hamlets, etc. When an *Ódò* masquerade bears the name of a forefather of a family, that means the person is deified and instituted in the beingness of the *Ódò* masquerade. For instance, the village of the author is made up of four children (hamlets), and the father/founder of each hamlet is concretized in the being of *Ódò* masquerades which include starting from the eldest, *Ódò Eg’ (Ódò Agu)*, *Ngweg’yi*, *Ugwu-Ogodo* and *Okpa-Afọ*. These masquerades are cherished and preserved with utmost respect for their cultural and ontological symbolisms are beyond being physical or their aesthetics. Masquerades are instituted to concretize memories and names of forefathers to store them in perpetuity and that is why they bear the names of the family’s forefathers; thus, the affairs of the *Ódò* masquerade are managed by the family members. When an *Ódò* masquerade bears the name(s) of forefathers of a particular clan, village, hamlet or even a community, its affairs are managed by the people whose forefather(s) is deified in the beingness of the *Ódò* masquerade. The people could decide, or perhaps culturally stated, that while the family where the eldest person of the clan is located handles the major maintenance of the *Ódò*, the other family could handle its *Ọfọ* or *Oji* (staff off authority as the father of the clan) whereas other families could handle its cloths or finances, etc. depending on what the *Ódò* has. Every child (who has now produced families that make up the clan whose forefather is represented in the being of the *Ódò*) must be involved in the management affairs of the particular *Ódò*. The *Ódò*, even at sight or hearing the name, becomes an identity of the family or clan, hamlet, village or community that owns it, thus, becoming a phenomenon to cherish and admire. Seeing it presents to them, the memories of their forefather(s) as represented in the beingness of the *Ódò*.

In Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*, masquerade is represent-

¹⁸ E. M. P. Edeh, *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics*. Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria: Our Saviour Press. (1999), 75-6; B. Abanuka, *A New Essay on African Philosophy*. Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria: Spiritan Publications, (1994), 37, 38-43; P. Iroegbu, *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*. Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria: International Universities Press, (1995), 354.

¹⁹ J. S. Mbiti, *African Religions and Philosophy*. New York: Doubleday & Company, (1969), 107

²⁰ T. U. Nwala, *Igbo Philosophy: The Philosophy of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*. Nigeria: Triatlantic Books Ltd New York, (2010), 52, 63

²¹ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 9

²² A. K. Ugwu, *A Philosophical Comparison between African Traditional Religion and Western Religions*, (Unpublished)

²³ Ugwu, *Cultural Practice of Ódò Masquerade*, (Unpublished)

ed as a cultural phenomenon of not only dignity but also of ontological relevance. Any action or word that dares to bring down the cultural valuable image and face of masquerade is not just allowed but also seen as the height of abomination to ancestral dignity. In this respect, it happened that the new converts to the Christian faith through the Christianization of Umuofia in which Mr. Brown featured prominently, headed by those described as *efuru efu* (those who have gone astray) Enoch the son of the snake-priest and Okonkwo's lazy first son, Nwoye, dared to demean the dignity of the ancestry of Umuofia as a whole by unmasking one masked *Egwugwu*, seen by the people as the spirits of their forefathers. They had equally claimed they have killed the snake which not only played cultural role among the people, but also occupied a central religious position in Umuofia in general. The whole community broke into pieces by such single act, and the drum of war was so high that even Christian community in Umuofia trembled as the traditionalists led by a folk of *Egwugwu* was ready for any war in any style and to any level provided the abomination committed by Enoch was cleansed with his blood. Achebe describes the situation thus:

It happened during the annual ceremony which was held in honour of the earth deity. At such times the ancestors of the clan who had been committed to Mother Earth at their death emerged again as *egwugwu* through tiny ant-holes. One of the greatest crimes a man could commit was to unmask an *egwugwu* in public, or to say or do anything which might reduce its immortal prestige in the eye of the uninitiated. And this was what Enoch did... Enoch had killed an ancestral spirit, and Umuofia was thrown into confusion²⁴

One of the greatest abominations to the purity of land of Umuofia was such an act performed by Enoch, the new Christian convert.

Thus, the fundamental principle behind the being of *Ódò* is humanity. It is conceptualized and concretized by human beings and to be with and managed by human beings, for the welfare, social entertainment and ontological influences on human beings and then to picture even the sense of ancestry to later generations. The affairs are still managed by later generations; the generation can still restructure some things or activities there in for their welfare however being conscious of substantial implications in the process. Masquerade practice keeps in perpetuity the culture of the people practising it. It reminds them of their forefathers and encourages self-consciousness and knowledge of how they

relate to one another and how they should interrelate among themselves thereby raising their moral consciousness. It raises the question of cultural value, ancestral dignity and prestige, history and ancestral pride of some people, families, clans, hamlets, villages or communities. It calls back their consciousness of who they truly are, and reminds them of their responsibility to maintain the *status quo* regarding their historical pride and integrity. It gives the later generation the valour to keep certain personality and identity in perpetuity having seen that such is the pride and identity of the family or clan or community. It is a source of encouragement, strength of the heart, perseverance and moral duty to maintain what has been managed till the later generation came to board. Bearing this in mind, the Igbo-African prays: **may the light handed over to me not quench in my hands; in other words:** that it may continue in more favourable condition even when I might have shown back (left, died). Consciousness of giving account to the forefathers that maintained such status quo before you to manage would motivate one to stand up equal to the task. It will stand as a huge source of encouragement and valour to keep the mantle going and progressively.

EVALUATION AND CONCLUSION

Following the sense of pride being represented by masquerade, people who lived cowardly and have no fulfilment in life be it financially, positively socially, materially, morally and other wise are not instituted for perpetuity in the being of masquerade. This is because masquerades by their actions and names, are instituted after men with sense of pride, accomplishment in positive influences on his people. Such people's memories as pictured in the being of masquerade are such that the village or community keep as figures and images which the family, village, clan, hamlet or community would piously cherish and revere. Apart from inscribing their being in the beingness of masquerades for posterity, some significant quarters and squares, market places and pathways or streets, are named after them. In fact, in some cultures, events are instituted and named after their names, and the nature of such events is routine so that the names and historical heroic accounts of such individuals are made fresh to younger generations. This is one of the reasons for seasonal return of masquerades in some cultures. Even though as a cultural practice, it is dynamic, but the constancy of the practice is what matters most in the perpetuity of the ancestry and subsequent sainthood question and identity inhered in it.

As such, cultural practice of masquerade pictures the idea of heroes of the community. It portends the idea that there are men of much valour in the community in whose being the masquerade is instituted. It reinstates the fact of ancestral pride and dignity. Followed by this, if the cultural

²⁴ Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 134-5

practice of masquerade is maintained, held high with much enthusiasm as deserved and restructured to meet up the modern standard so as to become a festival or big event in communities, it can turn to tourist events drawing huge populations from all over the world. Again, it could stand today as a uniting factor among a people; a force that binds the people together and reawakens the consciousness of their personality of communality as Africans. Following the spirituality of masquerade, and knowing that sincere involvement in the practice does not encourage evils like poisoning of men, perversion of justice, dispossessing one of one's rightful possessions, etc., it reawakens the moral consciousness of the people. The people being fully aware of the consequences there in when they involve in masquerading with unclean hands, not being upright, they would struggle to meet up with the moral standard demand of being involved in masquerade affairs.

Philosophically viewing masquerade cultural practice, it goes on to tell the identifying art of a people. It promotes sculptural arts in some culture as sculpture plays a vital role. In some cultures, it promotes local arts like the use of akwete, rafia, leaf fibre, velvet cloth, among other artistic objects. More enthusiasm on this could be satisfied in Onyeneke.²⁵ Adding to these pointed out social contributions of masquerade, Dimonye and Asiegbu opine that masquerade could serve the community or village in several other ways like being the 'Vehicle of Tribal Arts (TA)', 'Agents of Social Control', 'Marker of Social Structure', 'Instruments of Social Engineering', 'Instruments of Social Differentiation and Integration', etc.²⁶ Anijielo has earlier argued that masquerade, coming from a culture that practises *Ódò* version, stands as a phenomenon of pride and identity for which the people necessarily have to cherish and preserve with jealousy. He sees *Ódò* masquerade culture as a symbol for the people's culture for it promotes their arts, religious conceptual scheme and a whole lot of embodiment. He puts it this way:

If *Odo* is to be sustained as a cultural good of Ojebe Ogene people, it must claim back for itself its intrinsic values that would allow members of this clan to uninhibitedly identify with it. If it is to serve as a cultural symbolism, its cultural symbolism must be sort for in practices that make it possible for Ojebe Ogene clan to use it as its embodiment. This approach encourages a focusing on the recreational and artistic aspects of *Odo* masquerade, is it not a thing

of shame that Ojebe Ogene does not get to be represented at cultural festivals with symbols that can make all Ojebe Ogene people proud of it?²⁷

By this, the *Ódò* masquerade is seen beyond the physical appearance as beheld. It goes deeper to stand for some sort of values identical to the people. Onyeneke equally has some dimensions of his work dwelt on the symbolism of masquerade to include belief system, arts, ideas, etc.²⁸

At this juncture, it must have been noted that masquerade primarily represents the idea of ancestry. The names, actions, identities and or personalities of forefathers or founders of families, clans, hamlets, villages, communities or towns are inscribed in the being of masquerade. The rationale behind masquerading was not primarily, strictly and solely on the Igbo-African discourse on sainthood, rather, on every dead persons and heroes of the family, clan or community. That is why even etymologically, it refers to the 'spirit of those who have died' who 'are' members of the family, hamlet or community. In other words, the concept of masquerade in the Igbo-African worldview pictures the ancestry of both the 'departed-living' and the 'departed-non-living' for the combination of both make up the ancestry. However, while the concept of 'departed-living' pictured the idea of African saints or sainthood category in ancestry, the concept of 'departed-non-living' pictures the idea of those who make up the ancestry but are not in the sainthood category. Attaining sainthood corresponds to attaining the 'livingness' in the designating names of both categories of ancestral beings. The individual qualities that enhance the attainment include fulfilments financially, materially, positive social influences and most importantly living a morally worthy life of justice, fairness, uprightness, allowing and or helping the 'other' to live and live comfortably, in peace and full exercise of his/her freedom, living humanistic life and facilitating others' attainment of fulfilled life and self-actualization. These are the ingredients of 'good life' to the Igbo-African person through which s/he thinks of attaining sainthood and the 'livingness' in the designating names for the two categories that make up the Igbo-African ancestral worldview.

Conflict of interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Funding

The author declares no funding for the article.

²⁵ Onyeneke, *The Dead among the Living*, 32

²⁶ Dimonye and Asiegbu, "A Reconstruction of the Idea and Practice of Masquerading," 140-5

²⁷ A. C. Anijielo, "Odo Masquerade as Cultural Symbol," *Ojebe-Ogene Search-Light*, 1, No. 1, (2011-12), 21

²⁸ Onyeneke, *The Dead among the Living*, viii

REFERENCES

- Abanuka, B. (1994). *A New Essay on African Philosophy*. Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria: Spiritan Publications.
- Achebe, C. A. (1959). *Things Fall Apart*. www.online.fliphtml5.com/kdji/bjgk/#p=3
- Agbo, J. N. (2002). *Odo Cultism in Neke End of a Pharaohic Stronghold*. Festac Town, Lagos State, Nigeria: Covenant House Publishing.
- Akubue, A. (2011-12). Religion and Culture: Mutually Reinforcing with Promising Potentials. *Ojebe-Ogene Search-Light*, 1(1), 15-18.
- Anijielo, A. C. (2011-12). Odo Masquerade as Cultural Symbol. *Ojebe-Ogene Search-Light*, 1(1), 19-22.
- Dimonye, S. C. & Asiegbo, M. F. (2023). A Reconstruction of the Idea and Practice of Masquerading among Igbo People of South-Eastern Nigeria. *Synthesis Philosophica*, 75(1), 133-155. <https://doi.org/10.21464/sp38108>
- Edeh, E. M. P. (1999). *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics*. Enugu, Enugu State, Nigeria: Our Saviour Press.
- Iroegbu, P. (1995). *Metaphysics: The Kpim of Philosophy*. Owerri, Imo State, Nigeria: International Universities Press.
- Mbiti, S. J. (1969). *African Religions and Philosophy*. New York: Doubleday & Company.
- Nwala, T. U. (2010). *Igbo Philosophy: The Philosophy of the Igbo-Speaking Peoples of Nigeria*. Nigeria: Triatlantic Books Ltd New York.
- Omegoha, F. I. (2012). The Collapse of Masquerades as Moral Agents and Social Transformation in Nsukka Cultural Zone, (A Seminar Paper Presented to the Department of Religion and Cultural Studies, University of Nigeria, Nsukka).
- Onyeneke, A. O. (1987). *The Dead among the Living: Masquerades in Igbo Society*. Nimo, Nigeria: Holy Ghost Congregation, Province of Nigeria and Asele Institute.
- Ugwu, A. K. & Ozoemena, L. C. (2023). The Question of the African Personality in Chukwudum Barnabas Okolo: A Critical Review. *Philosophy International Journal*, 6(2), 1-8 <https://doi.org/10.23880/phij-16000300>
- Ugwu, A. K. (2019). *The Notion of the African Person in Chukwudum Barnabas Okolo*, Nsukka, Enugu State, Nigeria: Unpublished Master's Dissertation presented to the Department of Philosophy, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Ugwu, A. K. (2022). An Igbo Understanding of the Human Being: A Philosophical Approach. *Conatus Journal of Philosophy*, 7(1), 135-181. <https://doi.org/10.12681/cjp.25223>
- Ugwu, A. K. (n.d). *A Philosophical Comparison between African Traditional Religion and Western Religions*, (Unpublished)
- Ugwu, A. K. (n.d). *Cultural Practice of Ódò Masquerade: A Critical Re-Evaluation* (Unpublished)
- Ugwu, I. (2013). Traditional Nigerian Theatre, Ideology and the National Question: Igbo Masquerade and Folktale Performances as Examples. *Ikenga*, 15(1-2), 18-32.