

ODO INITIATION RITES AS A PARADIGM OF NONPAREIL ART ENTREPRENEURSHIP
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ENTREPRENEURSHIP**

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ABSTRACT:

The *Odo* masking- a cultural heirloom is a biennial observance and a celebratory umbrella where the dead (masquerade) and the living celebrate and communicate in the same vicinity and a vehicle through which the community exerts and propagate their cultural and artistic heritage. The period creates an explosion of artistic engagements, glut of art works and empowerment opportunities for the teeming youths and adults to lead self-reliant and employment generation. Legion of scholars have written extensively on *Odo* masquerade and masking in various ways but scarcely discussed the entrepreneurial implications of the epoch making events. Therefore, this paper seeks to critically investigate *Odo* masking initiation Rites as a paradigm of nonpareil art entrepreneurship. It focuses on the entrepreneurial implications of the creativity existing in *Odo* initiation Rites and masking. The styles, methods, symbolism, tools and materials for productions will be extensively discussed. Survey design will be employed for the study. Findings reveal that creative potentialities of *Odo* cult members have been reawakened, empowered and became carvers, weavers, painters and craft men after participation. In fact, *Odo* initiation Rites as a paradigm of nonpareil art entrepreneurship should be encouraged and not to be seen with scorn in its entirety as a fetish, frivolous, and benighted cultural art enterprise.

Keywords: *Odo* masquerade, *Aku*, Nonpareil, paradigm, Art entrepreneurship.

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INTRODUCTION

Odo masking tradition is a masquerade festival of Aku Diewa Mgboko Odobo in Igbo-Etiti LGA of Enugu State, Nigeria, celebrated biennially in honour of their ancestors. *Odo* is generally believed and referred to in the study area, as ancestral masquerade embodying the soul of *Aku* community. The epoch making event usually starts from January and ends around August with lavish ritual and secular celebrations and engenders explosion of artistic enterprise. There were evidence of unique initiation Rites which includes in-depth artistic engagements with drawing and painting, textile design, sculpture (carving, installations and metal work) weaving, and body adornments. *Odo* masking is a vehicle for initiation and celebration and a convenient umbrella for recreation and release of great artistic and creative impulses Ukaegbu (1996). This is comparatively and strictly male youths, elderly men and spiritually accredited women affair in production, participation and propagation. The whole *Aku* people within and outside await the biennial return of *Odo masquerades* with common consciousness and a heightened interest to appreciate the obvious explicit and implicit beauty of the *Odo* performance. Tourists from all nooks and cranny of the country absolutely enjoy the aura of the *Odo* masquerade artistic display due to the fact that it appears publicly once in every two years.

Odo masking adepts assert that the first stage of preparation of *Odo* festival involves sacrifice of food and money by the adherents for the *Odo* cult members. These items sacrificed either as votive or solicitation, are expected to sustain the cult members throughout the *Odo* festive period which normally lasts for seven months. *Odo* masquerades are masked in the thick sacred forest called Uhamu in which temporal huts are built with palm fronds and other spiritually related materials, basically for security and to prevent gaze by the passer-by (uninitiated males and females). Permanent *Odo* houses (*ulo-Odo*) are also built at strategic positions in each village square for *Odo* performance. Most of the observed houses, located in the village squares were creatively and artistically decorated in relief sculptures and murals, exhibiting typologies of *Odo* masquerades in different pose and action. Epitome of these wall decorations was located at *Onyagbada* village- the home of *Odoachi*. The researcher learned that the artistic murals and relief- sculptures done on the wall of *Odoachi* were single- handedly executed by a traditional artist. The works were commissioned and sponsored by the chief priest of *Odoachi*- Late Mr. Steven Okpo who died a few days after the researcher's first visit to his house for oral interview. Perhaps, the sitting/placing of *Odo* masquerade hut (*ulo- Odo*) at the center and strategic positions in each village square could be to ensure complete circulation of the *Odo* melodious and ritual music infused and webbed with admonitions across the length and width of the community and beyond. This corroborates the assertions by the *Odo* cult members that, appreciation of *Odo* ritual music is not limited to *Odo* cult members but enjoyed by all and sundry for both social and spiritual purposes. The ritual and melodious music is webbed with strong fibers which tilt to promote and strengthen the people's artistic understanding and interest and also to demonstrate a sustainable conventional belief that their souls are in the hands of *Odo*. Manual works are done with unity of purpose and concerted effort in all villages to ensure that roads, pathway, village-squares, markets and above all, the *Odo* huts are kept in good order for a satisfied *Odo* theatrical display.

Oral history has it that *Odo* masking demands collective conscious efforts of the *Odo* cult members to exert their cultural and artistic heritage hence every man (initiate) is involved in the making of *Odo* masquerade but traditionally, all the activities are supervised and directed by the

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cult adepts and elders. The most creative cult members within the group and the elders dictate the designs usually with metaphoric and symbolic objects that have connection with the *Odo* spirits, such as yellow palm-leaves (omu) and others that are inevitable. It was observed that the most creative cult members learned the art of installation, carving, weaving and painting of *Odo* masks and its accessories with different symbolic objects and motifs at the early stage of life. The impartation of artistic knowledge is, either through artistically gifted cult members in the initiation spot, parents, relations or peers. The most outstanding technique in the production or making of *Odo* masquerade is the installation of which Palm-fronds dominated all other production elements. Intangible symbolic motifs observed, such as star and moon are stitched, Painted, and drawn on some *Odo* masquerade's costumes. *Odoachi* has symbolic motifs such as tortoise, chameleon and guinea fowls painted or embroidered on it. The dictations of traditional pattern of making *Odoachi* masquerade by the elders and the artists as earlier mentioned, extends to other prominent *Odo* masquerades such as *Okikpe* and *Odoegwu* (*odo* variants). Conventionally, the patterns used must be in conformity with the distinctive characteristics or the anticipated actions of the supernatural being represented by the tangible spirit (masquerade). Dominant motifs are derivable from geometric shapes such as triangle, circle, square, rectangle and cone, mostly rendered in appliqué and wood carving. Most of *Odo* headdresses are sculptural forms fashioned out of wood, palm-rachis/mid rib, palm-leaves, plant-seeds, fiber, corn-husk and others. Strips of palm-leaves are creatively placed to hang from the shoulders to cover the impersonated person's body in full or half way. Clustered Strips of palm-leaves used in the production of *Okikpe Odo* usually stops at the thigh of the person that donned the supernatural being but for Authority *Nwankporogwu Odo*, it reaches the ankle of the wearer. All these demand absolute participation by the youths and adults during initiation Rites into *Odo* cult and fortunately it develops and propels them to entrepreneurs' guild

Entrepreneurship in this context refers to the teaching and learning (formal or informal) of the needed art skills and knowledge that equip youths and adults to become self-reliant individuals in the field of art. Awoleke (2010) in Opara (2021) sees entrepreneurship education as comprehensively planned effort undertaking by individuals or institutional agencies to develop competence in people intended, to lead self-employment generation and or short term training. From the same perspective, Ikem and Onu (2006) assert that entrepreneurship is the effective manipulation of human intelligence as demonstrated in a creative performance, choosing to assume risk, identifying business opportunities, gathering resources, initiation, actions and maximizing opportunities. Therefore, an entrepreneur is one who demonstrates creativity and propagates such creativity to everyone that comes across them. Entrepreneurship is evident in *Odo* masking period hence youths and adults become established artists and infused with a heightened bravado and impetus to lead the employment generation after participation in the *Odo* initiation Rites.

Typologies of *Odo*

In Aku Diewa Mgboko Odobo, *Odo* varieties are many and few of them that were observed and surveyed are – *Odoachi*, *Okikpe*, *Odoegwu*, *Nwangbuda*, *Atunabaraogu*, Authority *Nwankporogwu* and others.

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Aspects of Art Taught in *Odo* Initiation Rites.

Data shows that *Odo* masking tradition has created a new and unequalled interactive space for celebrations with evidence of multifarious and multifaceted artistic engagements in art teaching and learning. These numerous artistic engagements enable *Odo* masking traditions to excel and involve almost all the aspects of visual arts and quite a lot are learned from this culturally organized drama. Therefore, it is paramount to discuss in detail certain artistic aspects of *Odo* which have shown their teaching and learning potentials in the field of visual Arts. Such aspects of visual arts as earlier mentioned above include drawing and painting, sculpture, pottery, textile design, body adornment and others

Drawing and Painting and body adornment

Drawing and painting are aspects of traditional Art Education practiced individually and collectively during *Odo* masking tradition in *Aku* community. Drawing and painting is evident in the body adornment, wall painting, painting of masquerade head-pieces, materials, props and musical instruments. Body painting is predominantly done by women folk in *Aku* during *Odo* masking tradition though very few numbers of men indulges peripherally in body painting. These men were mainly the shrine priests (*attama*), and the other spiritually accredited and engrossed *Odo* participants (*cult adepts*).

Body adornment is a technique of manipulating design motifs over and over on the body surfaces with “uli” stains, aided with quill- feather/ pointed thin stick. This is popularly known as “uri design” (*Ide uri/ ise uri*) in *Aku*. During masking tradition and initiation Rite, adepts in uri design extract the stain from the uri/uli pods of local plants or moth stain and creatively draw on the desired body surfaces either to heighten their body beauty or to exemplify spirituality. As earlier said, drawing of uri/uli patterns on body parts (*ide uri/ise uri*) is usually done in the study area by women folk. Uli/uri designs on body surfaces are generalized within the cultural sphere as an apparent means of attracting young men to young girls for close relationships that could turn into serious marriage engagements after the epoch making event.

Women with special social and spiritual status in the community also adorn their bodies to expand the boundaries and differentiate their status from the non-initiates. These special and spiritually accredited women also have the impetus and capabilities of adorning male cult adepts like the priests and some masquerades when the need arises. They manipulate uli/uri design elements with locally produced or improvised tools like quill feathers or pointed thin sticks used as drawing pen (*aziza uri/ uli*), a small forged knife (*nma uri/okpekpe*) for cutting the uri/uli pods and a wooden vessel or container for uri stain (*okwa uri*). Sometimes, the body is primed with *ufie* (red cam-wood) and *Odo* (yellow cam-wood) before the uri decorations. Unfortunately, this ideal cultural artistic rendition is rapidly declining in almost all the villages in *Aku* and in the entire *Nsukka* communities though most of the artists have veered into modern body- adornment enterprise.

Traditional painting during the *Odo* festive periods did not stop at body adornment. It extends to painting of shrine houses, private houses, costumes, mask pieces and musical instruments. In *Aku*, surface embellishment of shrine or private buildings is highly upheld hence houses made of red mud walls are painted lavishly with metaphoric signs and symbols. Decorations on the walls can either be entirely representational motifs or abstract and the painting is generally done with earth pigments available in the Community markets or at the banks of streams. The improvised earth colours are white, red-brown, and yellow which are

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derived from rocks. Recently, *Odo* maskers supplement these improvised earth colours with imported colours. Other areas where painting is done are in the dyeing of fabrics, raffia and some synthetic fibers (melon bags), though not much of dyeing was observed. In mask painting, symbolic, bright raw colours are used. Blending and grading of tones of colour are not considered necessary by the Aku traditional mask painters. Within Aku cultural sphere, masquerades that portray and play feminine character are painted with light and bright colours while aggressive and theriomorphic masquerades such as Atunabaraogu are mostly painted with charcoal or any black pigment that heightens their offensive aura and suggest the anticipated theatrical actions and spiritual essences.

Sculpture (Wood Carving)

The production of various domestic, ceremonial and ritual art objects from wood within the study domain is an art practiced extensively during *Odo* masking tradition. This art form is practiced exclusively by men folk just as body adornment, pottery and weaving are dominated by women folk. Carving involves the making of mask head-dresses, musical instruments, symbolic traditional ritual stools, carved saucers or receptacle for cola nuts and “Uli” stain, walking sticks, ivory, gourd (calabash) containers for palm wine, and statuettes. Carving skill is transmitted from parents to children, professional artist to apprentice (during and after initiation) or by cross-cultural influence. The researcher found out that the main material for carving is wood of different varieties and the most commonly used woods are Okwe and Egbu for wood carvings whether seasoned or not. Previously, the wood carvers fell trees themselves for carving but now the trees are felled by timber contractors / dealers and the log sold to the wood carvers. According to the traditional carver in Aku, Mr. Inya, buying already felled and cut log is cheaper since most of the traditional carvers could not afford to buy tree cutting machine. Most of the carved masks studied are either anthropomorphic or theriomorphic in a simplistic or super structural appearance. The much completed masquerade headdress is assembled as in some masquerade headdress such as *Odoachi*, *Odo-egwu*, *Okikpe*, and *Imodioda* (*Odo* variant)..

Another carved masquerade head-piece was found at Eke market, Aku Diewa and it is popularly called Atunabaraogu. According to *Odo* cult members, Atunabaraogu is highly powerful, mystic and the most dangerous of all *Odo*. It is grotesquely created in soft wood and painted with locally produced dark pigment to heighten its mystic and offensive aura. It's revered and generally conceived as a charm carrying and deadly *Odo* in every community of Aku. Atunabaraogu, Nwangbuda and Authority nwankporogwu are simple masquerades with carved head pieces, carved out of soft wood such as Okwe or Egbu. Its simplicity is evident in the lack of super structural elements/ figures and appendages. The face is dehumanized to exert its symbolic and functional meaning during performance for the overwhelmed audience or spectators. Surprisingly, the dehumanization of Atunabaraogu's head piece does not hamper public notions and reverence for being beautiful in its ugliness. In line with this assertion, Sorell (1973) affirms that masks can be beautiful and ugly, but because of their heightened expression, their dehumanized and often overemphasized humanness, they are beautiful in their ugliness. Almost all the musical instruments are carved in extremely hard wood. Musical instrument such as the traditional *Odo* xylophone (ekwe), wooden -drum (both big, middle and small) wooden gong and the beating / playing sticks and others are fashioned out of hard wood. Therefore, the productions of all the aforementioned art forms fosters nonpareil art entrepreneurship for adults

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and the teaming youths which invariably expands the economic status of the individuals and the community in general.



Odoachi Masquerade from Aku Diewa
[©Researcher Arua J.E., 2015]



Atunabaraogu
[©Researcher Arua J.E., 2016]



[©Researcher Arua J.E., 2016]



Authority Nwanporogwu
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Approaches, Materials, Tools and Styles Employed by the *Odo* Mask Makers to Foster Art Entrepreneurship.

The *Odo* institution Rites constitute a dynamic culture which is transmitted, sustained and propagated through a limited number of pedagogical artistic approaches. Young *Odo* initiates are introduced and exposed to new knowledge by the master artist directly and within the cultural orbit, it appears that the initiates begin to learn in conscious effort by observing the demonstration of the traditional master artist. Often, these youths come to learn to make masks, costumes and other traditional art objects by hanging around the master artist while working and observe how things are done and after a while, are allowed by the master artist to practice on their own volition. In some cases, they are compelled to reciprocate this gesture by doing some domestic chores for him (master artist).

In the case of dance and music, the children are allowed to dance or strum on musical instruments as the master dancer / player directs by demonstration. They keep learning until they are certified as having perfected the art by the master artist. This teaching technique does not demand formal training / apprentice agreement. It is an informal way of teaching in an informal setting. No year is stipulated for graduation and also money is not demanded by the *Odo* cult adepts or the master artists for the teaching. Their primal aim is to transmit and propagate the culture to the next generation since almost all traditional cultures are ephemeral in nature. Most times, uninitiated young boys imitate adult mask makers by producing mask on their own with improvised tools and materials.

Art Apprenticeship

The apprenticeship methods of informal art teaching holds sway for the greater part of the time. It is the process by which a learner is made to learn art skill under an established artist with the condition to serve and learn the art for certain years before establishing or performing as a master artist. In traditional setting, sometimes money or material things are involved. Habila (2008) in Opara (2021) describes apprenticeship as “Sitting and Nelly”, a term that admirably denote the casual and unsystematic learning of skills by a trainee, who merely watches and imitates another worker. This conscious imitation mode of learning gradually metamorphosed into apprenticeship system of learning. This free learning style is not generalized in the study area because some established artist collect money or material things The trainee is expected to give out money or material things before or after the completion of the apprenticeship. This reciprocating condition is dependent on the principles of the established artist (the trainer). The researcher observed that up to 67% of the trainee are trained free of charge even though some claimed to have paid indirectly through the domestic services or chores rendered to the master artist. This group is quite different from those that learnt the art through family member. For the group that learnt the art through family member, carving and other art practice has been in their families for generations and so they also grew up to learn the art hence there is no specific period and charges for the training. The trend is that you keep on learning until you are certified as having perfected the art by the master artists, usually the father, or an uncle. Many traditional mask makers in Aku under- went the apprenticeship system with an established artist,. (Onye enya-oka) It usually begins with lessons from the early age of ten and most of the established artists in the study area only work in one particular material such as wood and very few traditional artists were found being versatile in the use of different art materials.

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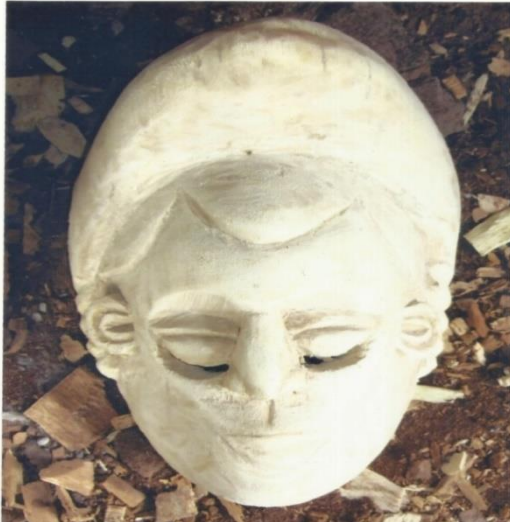
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Creative procedures for wood carving in Aku

As informal as wood carving and other traditional art practices are, there are laid down procedures for executing each given art form. Some of them are;

Wood -blocking / shaping

Traditional carvers in Aku engages in different carving procedures such as wood-blocking/ Shaping which is in this context referred to as the shaping of a log of wood to bring out the form(s). The adze (locally produced) is used to chop and demarcate the various parts and straighten the faces of the billets to make them roughly parallel and in line with the conceptualized imagery. The carver, consciously swings the adze (anyu nko) with a sharp, chopping movement while holding the log with the other hand. This single block carving style ensures that the amount of wood chopped off at a time can be measured and controlled to accomplish the desired form.



Mask carving under process
[©Researcher Arua J.E., 2016]



Wood for Mask Carving
[©Researcher Arua J.E., 2016]

Designing

According to Mr. Nsude (2017), a traditional carver in Aku, there is no preliminary designs done on the wood before the forms are cut out. The anticipated forms are conceptualized by the traditional artist and made manifest through skillful carving and adze is also the tool in use to chop off various areas to bring out the forms

Detailing / Ornamentation.

Detailing/Ornamentation refers to the skillful actualization of the conceived intricate features or details of form through carving with appropriate tools. Detailing/ornamentation in carving demands mostly two tools, chisels and gouges (nkpo and nko) which are used to remove unwanted areas and bring out the intricate details of the expected image or form. This stage also

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demands that the carver utilizes great imagination, experience and dexterity to carve abstract, realistic, symmetrical and symbolic features. Fortunately, all these are mainly done by the youths during and after initiation into *Odo* cult which propels them to become entrepreneurs

The Finishing Processes

The process of finishing in wood sculpture after detailing includes smoothening, (nkpucha), sanding with rough leaves (anwarinwa) or imported sand paper and polishing with vegetable dye or white clay. Sometimes, imported paint is applied with less interest in grading of tones. At the process of smoothening, the smoothening knife is used in the process to remove small pieces of wood to attain an evenly smoothened tactile quality. The knife is usually locally produced and comes in different sizes depending on the size of the work in progress. The work is then smoothened or sanded to give it a perfect smooth surface and finally polished or painted with local dye or white clay (nzu) or imported paint.

Stylization

The field works revealed that there are different styles employed by *Odo* cult members or artists (dioka, or onye anya-oka). These styles are guided or influenced by two forces. These two forces are (a) the traditional style that is dictated by the *Odo* cult members and (b) the individual creative vision of the artist (dioka, onye anya-oka.) The artists in the study area do not try to create perfect representation of their subject. Although some realistic masquerades are made, others celebrate more abstract qualities like aggressive, humility, beauty, courage, mischief and humour. They create an idealized version emphasizing those elements that they consider most important which is evident in the use of clothe that resemble leopard skin and others.

In Aku Diewa, Okikpe and Odoegwu are symmetrically composed and have elongated and assembled headdress which is almost full length of the wearer in height. Different imported brightly coloured and uncoloured fabrics, palm fronds, metal gong, corn-husks and carved wood are assembled to create an elongated super structure as the head piece. Moving down from the neck area to the knee location, are carefully woven palm leaves (Omu). Another variant of *Odo* masquerade known as Imodioda, is a conically shaped supernatural being built wholly from cut-out petiole (igbegiri) of palm fronds. Smoothly scrapped and flattened petioles of Palm fronds are artistically and continuously coiled to form the conical shaped *Odo* masquerade. The coiled petiole is intermittently perforated to hold strips of fresh palm leaflets that seem to be inevitable in the production of Imodioda masquerade and others. The rachis (akpara) of palm fronds are also used in the installation of armature for head-dresses of various *Odo* masquerades. According to Herbert and Aniakor (1984) most of *Odo* masquerades are woven baskets- works. Basketry cone tied with palm leaves(omu) with attached kola and sacrificial chicken feathers as its main “decoration”.

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Imodioda Odo

[©Researcher Arua J.E., 2014]



Okikpe Odo

[©Researcher Arua J.E., 2014]



Odoegwu masquerade

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Tools and Materials

Aku mask makers (dioka / ndi-anya-oka) make judicious use of tools and materials which to a great extent determine the finish of the masks, costumes, props and others. The tools are usually produced locally and they include Adze (anyu- nko) gouges (okpo- utu) cutlass (Ogbuadula) u-adze (anyu aga nko) needle (ntutu/ aha) scraper (nko) and others.

Major materials are wood, palm fronds (yellow palm leaves) raffia, chrome buttons, feathers, furs, cowry metal bells (local and imported) corn- husk wood fabrics etc. All these are used by

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the cult members and traditional artists either separately or in combination with the aid of appropriate tools to produce masks in different styles that exert varied symbolic and spiritual meaning and functions within the culture that informed them. Consequently, *Odo* masking activities have become suitable vehicle through which youths of Aku ease their tensions and a paradigm of nonpareil art entrepreneurship



Anyu Ike (Adze) Local Carving tool
[©Researcher Arua J.E., 2016]



Anyu Ike & Utu (Axe and Mallet)
Local Carving tools
[©Researcher Arua J.E., 2016]

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Conclusion and Recommendation:

The revelation of the research findings emphasizes that in-depth engagements in all the aspects of visual art with multifarious pedagogy and nonpareil paradigm of art learning have deeply empowered the teaming youths and adults of the *Odo* initiation participants. Hence they have become entrepreneurs in the art orbit, with potentialities to lead a self-reliant and employment generation. Over the years, their manual and impressive dexterity in traditional visual art practices have improved and sustained their economy, artistic awareness status within and across their cultural boundaries.

The cultural heirloom in all facets from the threshold, has exposed the economic, Art Education, archaeological and historical values of the community to the outside world for academic research and documentations. This may assuage the perspective of the innumerable indigenous and foreign scholars who only delved deeply into masking engagements with zero or little interest in the entrepreneurial implication of *Odo* initiation Rites.

Odo initiation Rites should be encouraged by all and sundry in so far it has benefited great numbers of youths and adults in terms of artistic empowerment. Consequently, participants have become established artists and entrepreneurs who have demonstrated zero or minimal interest in engaging with white- cola-jobs.

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