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TRENDS AND TENSIONS IN  
MANAGING CONFLICTS

SPSP

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Edited by  
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find this difficult to pay. The labour laws should make provision for wage flexibility to reflect time of prosperity and period of meltdown. This will reduce the incidence of retrenchment.

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### Tensions and Consequences of Ethno-Religious Conflicts: The Use of Cultural Aesthetics for Crisis Management in Nigeria

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#### INTRODUCTION

THE use of the community in our environment for influencing communal peace is very crucial. This role has given room to various critical views by scholars and as a result some scholars have devised communal training education. The issue of communal crisis has generated a lot of tension over the years and has led to war, violence and destruction of lives. Tensions are created in man through the years and has led to war, violence and destruction of lives. Tensions are created in man through the inefficiency, self-centredness and greed of these at the helm of affairs. Most societies are not united, therefore, they lack peace and security.

The insensitivity of man towards fellow citizens leads to economic and political



crises. Lack of love is generated from immorality and inequality. The people are kept in perpetual anxiety and stress. The failure of communication aids instability, tension and disaster which is the major consequence of tension-generated problems. One of the issues is that anger leads to reaction and affects individual health and well-being. Once relationships are marred, there is a disarray in the system of governance and this calls for the need to use ethno-religious aesthetics as a therapy for communal oneness in peace continuity and progress. Nigerian audio-visual and verbal art are both functional and formal with a wide audience involved in social interactions as their users. As ethnic aesthetics, ritual-cultural performances generate and promote the common ideals of its people.

It helps its users to project their visions and the ethnic background offers them the metaphor for their vision. Moral revelations are carried out through ritual practices established in the performances.

Traditional dramas at local settings in Nigeria are very theatrical in nature. Performance presupposes the idea of enactment; representative initiations of persons events and actions by actors in open public places at particular times. Performances involve certain elements such as its linguistic content, plot, specialised scenery, music, dance, drum, costume, chants, poetry, incantations, prayers, invocations, cultural artifacts, etc. These elements are the aesthetic elements of tradition used purposely for religious ritualisation function and also for social communication. The concept of performance is better revealed in the following statements of Ruth Finnegan (1968):

Oral performance like all other speech acts is a communicative system in which a social discourse takes place between the performer and the audience it is a human and social attitude involving concrete demonstrations of how certain phenomena are realised in actual situations.

From her summation, it is realised that performance gives instant response of the audience as a result of the stimulus given by the performance. Hence, performance reinforces the cultural reality that is required in the African setting, and in particular in Nigerian societies. Performance gives room for close intimacy between the performer and his listeners/audience. To supplement this, Isidore Okpewho (1979) adds that, "performance in Africa is creative, realised, achieved and even transcendent of the ordinary course of events. Performance is essential to the people who in the process recall tradition".

It is noteworthy that performance activities are made out of the tradition that is a part and parcel of man. Consequently, performance is used as a mode of communication. In performance, an accurate communication is imperative, more so because of the performer-audience collective face-to-face contact. The units of episodes and their interrelatedness plus the composition of the performance itself mean a lot to the people. The significance and effectiveness of performance

is dependent on "its composition, variegated parts of delivery, focal expressions, humour, and interplay of passion, reactions from the audience, beauty of voice, sobs, facial expressions, performer's movement, vocal expressiveness and setting".

Aesthetics is therefore a name concerned with the beautiful, perceived by the senses and which attempts to establish the principles upon which performances are based. All the paralinguistic elements — visual, verbal and audio in the performance acts — are therefore aesthetic categories and, according to Richard, Ogden and Wood (1946), "Aesthetics is that which is equivalent to synaesthetic equilibrium: that is a particular and humorous kind of response in the audience brought about by the stimulus of a work of art". In the same vein, John Hospers (1969) opines thus:

An object is aesthetic only when it holds the audience or the readers attention. Consequently, aesthetic parts include the linguistic, stylistic and the dramatic stimuli that bring about a kind of instant response in the audience, during and after performance. Aesthetics includes the general metaphysics of the lives of a people.

Hence, the traditional compositions of some Nigerian performances will reveal the aesthetic qualities of the settings and the functional use of these values for a communal communication, understanding, agreement, unification and codification. Findings from the data collated in various Nigerian settings and the interview revelations have shown that oral traditional components evident in the performances are for the socialisation, and regeneration of the Nigerian communities and also for the hybridisation of the individual member of the collective community.

#### THE COMMUNICATION ETHOS AND ETHNIC PERFORMANCES

Most ethnic performances have processes and procedures. And these procedures are entirely the religious rituals of the people in a given community. For instance, the Yoruba *alarinjo* festival performance, which became bound to the *egungun* cult through ancestral worship and the participation in *Egungun* and *Oro* festivals of most of Yorubaland in Nigeria. So is the Igbo 'Mbom-Ama' and 'Odo' festivals which also have ritual purification functions, and a ritual is a culturally patterned symbolic action. The Hausa 'Bori' is a spiritual medium that constitute beliefs and dictates the dos and don'ts for its people. And this can be seen in the content, structure and dramatic enactment of trance, a circumstance from which the performative activity derived its name 'Bori'. Even among the Ibibio, J.C. Messenger observed two major types of dramatic organisations: the 'Offiong' and the 'Ekong' — and confirmed their functional basis for the progress and regenerations of the Ibibio society. The Nupe regatta festival cannot be left out as it serves as riverine contact and a forum for interaction between the river goddesses, the living and the dead ancestors.



One of the basis for the Nupe regatta festival is to appease the goddesses, the providers of the farms and the rivers serving as the major elements of sustenance. And collectively the people gather together in unity and peace to celebrate their existence and significantly adjudicate, divinate, invoke and perform fertility and passage rites. These acts are also done in Ogoriland of Kogi State during the 'Oviesese' annual festival.

These festivals are developed out of existing ritualistic and mythical beliefs of the people, and together in it the people of a community flourish. The unity and stability of the people is expressed by the subsequent applause from the crowd after the ritual performance. The crowd is a group of people under a common ancestry. The festival therefore becomes a bond for the followers and a reinforcement of a social and collective solidarity in preparation for coming to terms with death, in the process of transition into the superordinate world. All societies pass through a non-linear and parallel stages of social and cultural evolution. And emphasis is usually on the stabilisation and maintenance of the current order of things in a given society.

Man's existence in time and space is determined by the happenings around him, hence metaphysical forces and myths play prominent roles in the sociological and cultural formations of the society used to enhance the peaceful co-existence, unity and stability of the groups in Nigerian settings. Marian Smith (1961) accentuates this in the following words:

As experiences overlap, cultural expectations come to be integrated so that art is inevitably linked with other aspects of life. With morals, the depths of religious feelings expressed is in beautiful forms or realities of family affections, law and order. Appreciation is thus rooted in the social heritage and even fashioned in art, thus keeping social factors intact.

Hence, despite the destabilising tendencies of globalisation, the ritual activities and ceremonies that hold the people together are still made intact and strong through performance practices. Thus, the functions of the performances within our communities categorised as follows:

#### (a) Religious Ritualisation of Societies

Rituals and sacrifices are used as crucial objects of performance to reborn the society. The necessary traditional rites are performed to strengthen communal linkage and to cleanse, purify and propitiate the society against befalling calamities.

#### (b) Moral Edification of the Citizenry

Societal injunctions are moulded in the performance procedure that involves incantations, chants, prayers, invocations, etc. and this spiritual atmosphere gives room for individual internal peace, good co-existence, faithfulness, uprightness

and solidarity. Taboos, are for instance, accentuated and used for social and moral regulations.

#### (c) Cultural Artifacts as Self-identity and Security

The costume used during the performance is one of the artifacts. Artifacts and the festive theatre serve as a promoter of a common culture and identity. All the artifacts used, like masks, clothes and native utensils are said to aid communion between man and his supernatural source, according to George Plekhanov (1983). Performances in traditional Africa are not only a means of asserting the union between man, the mortal and the immortal powers, a testimony of the continuity of life, but also the means through which man provides himself with entertainment, and relaxation, thereby achieving a balance between the known materials world and the unknown supernatural world.

Hence, artifacts are signifiers and symbols that help to enrich the visual aspect of communication, as if to say our culture is well and remains good and the need for more unity and sanity in it has come. The artistic drawings of scorpions, fearful reptiles are rebellious symbols of cultural dynamics. Therefore, in rhythmic fast movements, dancers of culture vigorously shake their body in their costumes in order to express the essence of their culture now and beyond. Reflections in Nigerian performances are in totality, derivations from the peoples collective experiences.

### A DESCRIPTIVE EXAMINATION OF THE OSUN OSOGBO FESTIVAL OF OSUN STATE, NIGERIA AS FOCUS OF CULTURAL STABILITY

The Osun Osogbo festival is one of the significant aspects of Osogbo culture. The festival involves the entire people of Osogbo and the Osun goddess as the central object of focus. The mythical deeds of the goddess is the aim of the celebration. The festival is a 12-day event involving the following proceedings: preparation by the entire community involving cooking, feasting, drumming, dancing and drinking; magical displays; communion at the shrine; Ifa consultation, etc. Physical and ritual cleansing is done from the palace in a public procession to the Grove with the royal horns blowing trumpets in a pandemonium mood.

The general populace put down their contributions to and support of the festival in forms of money and food. The next day is given to masquerade appearances and performances. They add to the excitement by flogging passersby on this day. Palm oil is soaked in cotton wicks and used as native candles for the night performance when Osanyin the Yoruba deity of healing is expected to heal the sick. After this the Osun bowl carrier *Arugba* is seen dancing round the lamp, three times, followed by the king's dance to the market. Other acrobatic dances



follow before the warnings and predictions of the Ifa priest is announced. The ceremony becomes more elaborate in culture-coded chants of the praise names of Osun goddess in order to appease her and receive her blessings collectively. The festival ends with a sacrifice carried out by the Osun priest at the Ojubo shrine where the Osogbo audience is addressed.

Beyond its pragmatic functions, the festival embodies the people's perception of their collective existence. The festival serves as a symbolic embodiment of the Osogbo culture. The main purpose of the festival is to communicate with the people and at the same time, amplify and affirm their traditional norms and values, which must be upheld for a collective survival. And also, it is meant to uphold a collective survival. And to uphold this communal wholeness, aspirations and collective sensibilities, the performance in the festival operates within a multi-functional and multi-media expressions using the language that the Osun understands.

### CONCLUSION

The established religious structures of Nigerian society form the foundation for dictating the laws, the political system and the general ideology for a peaceful co-existence among set the people in it. These structures are codified in the people's performances.

Part of the findings of this article is that the ethno-aesthetic forms of Nigeria performances are culture-codified elements used for the enhancing unity, peace and stability. Performances in Nigeria function as socio-cultural and religious visions of the diverse settings of the country. The cultural world views, aspirations and philosophies of Nigerians are signalized in their cultural and aesthetic practices.

From Nigerian festivals one can reconstruct aspects of Nigerian culture and beliefs as all festivals are based on archetypalism; the reoccurrence of past events, places and actions in present times. The communities produce festivals and transmit them according to their dictates. Most of the materials deduced from festivals are not only geographical and socio-cultural but also religious and mythical. Hence, festivals serve communal communicative functions of direction and reshaping its people's psyche. The forms which are recreated and regenerated through performance show the interconnection between man and his ecology. Performance materials in Nigeria are iconic and highly functional, meant for correlative and re-establishment purposes. Aspects of Nigerian culture and codes of conduct, mannerisms and practices become more glaring from the analysis of their production modes. William Morton (1964) sums up this in: "It is the occasion of the presentation of performances that varies from one ethnic group to the other. Generally, performance, are held during festivals annually or seasonally and are true of all groups and societies.

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