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FESTIVAL AS AN INSTRUMENT OF CONFLICT PREVENTION: A STUDY OF ÒÒLÈ BÁÁLÈ FESTIVAL IN ÒGBÓMỌŞÓLAND

By

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Abstract

Festivals are special occasion and their observance bring about social and moral control as well as entertainment. They pull in guests to places and further influence the economy, preserve culture; restore conventions and transfer history and traditions. Festivals provide potent platform to guarantee peace and contribute in making enabling tranquil climate for all to abide in. This study therefore relies on multi-disciplinary approach to examine the role of Òòlè Báálè festival in preventing conflict in Ògbómọşóland, Nigeria. Òòlè Báálè is an annual festival done in remembrance of the past Şòúns and as a follow up to a peace sacrifice made by the first Şòún, Şòún Ogunlọlá as instructed by Ifá. A major content of the sacrifice was oole (mọ́in-mọ́in). Since then, òòlè has been a symbol of peace for the members of the royal families and the Òòlè Báálè festival is observed annually for the maintenance of peace in Ògbómọşóland. This paper examines the social and cultural implications of the festival; it also investigates how in the past years the festival has been an instrument of conflict prevention among the members of the royal families. Apart from requesting the presence of the five families responsible for providing the Şòún of Ògbómọşó and ensuring peaceful coordination among the royal families; the festival resolves chieftaincy disputes and conflicts among the locals before they escalate. The paper finally highlights the challenges faced by the festival and suggests ways through which the festival can further

enhance peace and stability. It concludes that the Ọ̀lẹ̀ Báálẹ̀ festival has been the major catalyst for peace and stability in Ọ̀gbómòşóland. It is hoped that the paper will contribute to the literature dealing with peace maintenance in Yorùbá culture.

Keywords: Conflict prevention, Yoruba festival, oole baale, Ogbomoso, culture.

Introduction

Conflict is an unavoidable aspect of everyday life. It occurs between two or more people who disagree on an issue that threatens their respective goals, values or needs. How conflicting parties perceive this threat determines how heated the conflict can become. When conflict becomes violent, it will do more harm than good. After violent conflict, it is often difficult to see the opportunities for a better future due to widespread destruction of infrastructure and livelihood, the breakdown of trust and the suffering caused through trauma, grief and anger. It is also likely that such social change could have occurred before the conflict becomes violent.

Where there is no conflict, there is peace. Peace is viewed as an attractive objective for everybody – regardless of the possibility that brutality is unavoidable. It is an awesome thought that the world kept on envisioning about. Peace help us create in individuals an arrangement of elements and intentional mentalities which help the recipients to scan for and maintain the estimation of equity and human rights. Consequently, there has been serious efforts at observing the world and advancing world peace. This presupposes that peace is the finished result of conflict resolutionⁱ. The African continent has not been left out of this. The effort aimed at promoting peace has been no less intensive in Africa particularly in Nigeria, the state of ethnic-based crises or conflicts have tended to undermine all efforts aimed at achieving peaceⁱⁱ.

In Nigeria, there have been incessant ethnic-based crises resulting from emergence of ethnic based groups such as the Oòduà People Congress (O.P.C), Arewa People Congress, (A.P.C), The Movement for the Survival of Ogoni People (MOSOP), Egbesu boys and Pan Igbo youth federation amongst others. Some of these groups are militant and violent in nature. Their existence has made the fragile relationship in the country to be further threatenedⁱⁱⁱ. This has made the need for peaceful measures in a heterogeneous society like Nigeria more important than before.

Festivals are generally observed in Nigerian societies, they are performed for entertainment and preservation of cultural heritage. Festivals showcase some aspects of cultural heritage. Cambridge Dictionary defines “festival” as “a special day or period, usually in memory of a religious event, with its own social activities, food, or ceremonies” and as “an organized set of special events, such as musical performances”.

Many festivals are performed in Nigeria, some of the popular cultural festivals are Egúngún festival, Oro festival, King’s festival (Ọdún Ọba), New Yam festival and several others. In Yorùbáland, there are Èyò festival in Lagos, Ọsun Ọsogbo festival in Ọsogbo, Ojúde Ọba festival in Ìjẹbúland, Sàngó festival in Ọyọ town, Ọdún Sòún, Egúngún festival, and Ọòlẹ Báálẹ festival in Ọgbómòşóland. Ọgbómòşó is a city in Ọyọ State, south-western Nigeria.

Ọòlẹ Báálẹ is an annual festival done in remembrance of the past Sòúns in Ọgbómòşó and as a follow up to a peace sacrifice made by the first Sòún, Sòún Ogunlọlá as instructed by Ifá. A major content of the sacrifice was ọòlẹ. Ọòlẹ is a corrupted version of ọlẹlẹ (beans cake), it is also reffered to as “móín-móín”. Since then, ọòlẹ has been a symbol of peace for the members of the royal families and Ọòlẹ Báálẹ festival is observed annually for further maintenance of peace

in Ògbómòşóland. The festival has been an avenue for conflict resolution among the members of the royal families.

Apart from requesting the presence of the five families responsible for providing the Şòún of Ògbómòşó and ensuring peaceful coordination among the royal families; the festival also when necessary resolves chieftaincy disputes and conflicts among the locals. Òlè Báálè is a peace festival in Ògbómòşó for the entire Ògbómòşóland, it has since the first half of the 17th century been the major catalyst for peace and stability in Ògbómòşóland.

Conceptual Analyses

i. Conflict

Miller and King^{iv} expressed a view that the meaning of conflict in Latin is 'to clash or engage in a fight' or 'a confrontation involving one or more parties aspiring towards incompatible or competitive means or ends. Alli, citing Louis Coser agreed that 'conflict occurs when two or more persons engage in a struggle over values and claims to status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals.

There are different types of conflict which include intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-communal, inter-communal, intra-group, inter-group and international conflict. According to Darwin, the biological principles of 'struggle for existence' and 'the survival of the fittest' are the main causes of conflict. The main cause of conflict are: individual difference, cultural difference, clashes of interest and social change. There are stages of conflict, which shows the revolution of any conflict starting from the occurrence stage and the outcome of it. According to Oyeshola, they are: emerging stage, escalating stage, severe stage, and rebuilding and reconciliation.

ii. Conflict Prevention

Conflict prevention is commonly used to connote actions that are undertaken in order to anticipate a conflict and avoid its escalation

into an uncontrolled violence among groups and societies. It is used to structural and or underlying causes of conflict and to engage in practical ways to curtail an ongoing conflict or stop its escalation. Lund^v defined conflict resolution as 'any structural intercessory means to keep intrastate or interstate tension and disputes from escalating into significant violence and use of armed forces, to strengthen the capabilities of potential parties to violent conflict for resolving such disputes peacefully and to progressively reduce the underlying problems that produce these issues and disputes'. This involves variety of activities aimed at anticipating and averting the outbreak conflict.

A major study by the Carnegie Commission on the Prevention of Deadly Conflict published in 1999 identified conflict prevention as actions or policies to:

- (i) Prevent the emergence of violent conflict and identify non-violent means of resolving the tension.
- (ii) Stop ongoing conflict from spreading.
- (iii) Deter the re-emergence of violence.

The report identifies two international approaches in conflict prevention:

- (i) Operational Prevention (or direct prevention) which addresses immediate crises and employs forceful measures such as deploying peacekeepers to a region.
- (ii) Structural Prevention (or root causes prevention) which is to address the root causes such as poverty, political repression and uneven distribution of resources, which can escalate into violence if not addressed.

United Nations^{vi} opined that preventive action is not a single event but an ongoing process that changes based on various circumstances and that it should strengthen existing processes for peace, respond to crises, help generate an environment and create mechanisms through which conflicts can be resolved non-violently. Coordination and collaboration between various entities, including international,

regional, sub-regional, national and local actors are seen to aid effective conflict prevention. It was further noted that conflict prevention efforts indicate that building the capacities of a society to manage and address conflict peacefully should entail:

- (i) A high degree of inclusiveness and participation of all the sectors of society in dialogue and peace building.
- (ii) A great extent of local ownership of conflict prevention strategies and initiatives.
- (iii) The strengthening of democratic institutions and empowerment of local actors through continuous consultation, assistance and training.

iii. **Festival**

Festivals are fundamental part of the human life, having by and large, exceptionally broadened themes, for example, thematic festivals, political occasions, social exercises, sports, religious gatherings, and others, and can be held at an international level (such as: Olympic Games, FIFA World Cup, World Expo), as well as at a national level (for example: Oktoberfest from Munich, Las Fallas (The Festival of Carpenters and Fire) from Valencia, The Ice Festival from Harbin (China), The "George Enescu" Festival from Bucharest, Romania). By and large, the festivals are sorted out keeping in mind the end goal to answer the particular needs of a group and in a similar time to offer excitement^{vii}.

Occasions of these kind, have the ability to offer individuals a sentiment of social, topographical, and cultural belonging. The typology of festivals, and for the most part of occasions, is quite a diverse one^{viii}. More often than not, individuals discover motivation to celebrate in practically every viewpoint that encompasses them, beginning from religious ceremonies, military occasions, the day when a specific organization was built up, and finishing with customs and traditions less normal, such as ice sculptures (Japan, China, Norway, and Canada), the night of the radishes (Mexico), the

cheese rolling (England), and many others^{ix}. Derret Ros^x, in one of his papers dedicated to the study of festivals and events, has the opinion that “organizing a festival allows a community to stay united, to work together and to bloom”. Even more, he states that “this connection and welding of the community can be accomplished through people's effort and creativity, resulting in skills in more areas of the social life”^{xi}.

Some of the popular festivals in the world are: The Rio de Janeiro Carnival (Rio de Janeiro, Brazil), Chinese New Year, Boryeong Mud Festival (South Korea), Burning Man (Black Rock Desert, Nevada, USA), Harbin Ice and Snow Festival (Harbin, China), White Nights Festival (St. Petersburg, Russia), Dia de los muertos “Day of the Dead” (Mexico), Running of The Bulls (Pamplona, Spain), Holi (India), Carnival of Venice (Venice, Italy), Oktoberfest (Munich, Germany), Saint Patrick's Day (Ireland) and many others.

Understanding the Area of Study

There is a difference between what Ògbómòṣòland and Ògbómòṣò means. Most literature on Ògbómòṣò and Ògbómòṣòland have ignored this conceptual clarification, therefore, leading to misinformation and misconception in the history of the area of study. It is important to explain in this paper, the meaning of the two names discussion is on both.

Ògbómòṣòland is the collective name of five local governments in Òyó State. They are: Ògbómòṣò North Local Government, Ògbómòṣò South Local Government, Surulere Local Government, Oríre Local Government and Ògo-Olúwa Local Government. Each of these Local Governments have under them towns and villages such as: Sábó, Ìdíabèbè, Igbón, Òsupà, Ahóyaya, Gàmbàrí, Ìṣesa-Adú, Òlórundá, Tèwúre, Pòntèlá and many others^{xii}.

Ògbómòşó is a town in Ògbómòşóland, it is divided into two local governments, Ògbómòşó North and Ògbómòşó South. The town is at the center of the area referred to as Ògbómòşóland. It is surrounded by towns and villages of the three other local governments in Ògbómòşóland^{xiii}. During the 19th century Yorùbá Wars, Ògbómòşó witnessed a phenomenal growth. Ògbómòşó hosted refugees from Old Òyó during the war, she grew into a large and popular town due to the demise of the Old Òyó Empire and the wars that engulfed Yorùbáland during the 19th century. Many of the remnants of the disrupted towns and villages in Yorùbáland because of fear for subsequent attack fled to Ògbómòşó for safety^{xiv}. About 143 villages and towns fled to Ògbómòşó during this period^{xv}. These events and some others put Ògbómòşó in a leadership role among the towns that constitutes Ògbómòşóland.

Òòlè Báálè festival is held in the area ruled by Şòún (the title of the paramount ruler) which is in Ògbómòşó North. In this paper, that area is referred to as Ògbómòşó. Though, the festival is held in Şòún's Ògbómòşó, the paper covers the role of the festival in the maintenance of peace in Ògbómòşóland. This is because the festival involves the presence of the entire Ògbómòşóland.

Ògbómòşóland

Ògbómòşó is situated between Igbón and Ìrẹşá towns. It is about 37 kilometers from Ìlórín. The area it is now was then the Old Èkùn-Òsì of the Òyó Kingdom and that area was ruled by four (4) traditional rulers, Ařẹşà in the East, Oníkòyí in the West, Olúgbón in the North and Eléjìgbò in the South^{xvi}. The exact date that Ògbómòşó was established is unknown but according to oral tradition, it was established in the first half of the 17th century^{xvii}. One of the earliest settlers in Ògbómòşóland was the elephant hunter called Ale, a Nupe man who was said to have led the earliest immigrants and set up their camps at Òkè Elérín. This location was called Òkè Elérín due to the

presence of numerous elephants on the hill. The offspring of Ale hold the title of Baálẹ̀ Òkẹ̀ Elérin till today^{xviii}.

Ohunsile, an Ègbá man, was the next to arrive at the geographical area called Ògbómòşóland, due to his unsuccessful attempt to the chieftaincy title at Òtá, he was driven away from Òtá. He later migrated and settled at Òkẹ̀ Ìjẹrù in Ògbómòşóland where he was given a piece of land, and since then his descendants have settled down in this location and have held on to the title of Baálẹ̀ Ìjẹrù. Òrìşàtólú was the third migrant to arrive in the town, he was said to have fled his home town, Paku after he had been charged of poisoning a man. He was fond of planting vegetables and "Ìsápá" was his specialty thus he was called Bàbá Onísàpá, for this reason the area is still know by that name^{xix}.

The fourth and last settler was an Ìbàrìbá man, they were said to be valiant hunters, and among this group was the father of the first Şòún. According to tradition, Şòún's Father first settled in Igbón which was then quite a big town about ten kilometers northwest of Ògbómòşó, where he then married the daughter of Arẹ̀sà a very close neighbor to Olúgbón. She bore him a son and named him Ogunlọ́lá. However, Şòún was a great hunter who enjoyed hunting expedition, in one of his hunting expedition he pitched his camp under an Àjàgbón tree and the site of this tree became the center of Ògbómòşó town where the king's palace is located today. The four settlers in Ògbómòşóland meets regularly at each other's house in rotation but it appeared that Şòún's wife was the best cook and an expert in millet wine brewing, thus, his house became the most preferred and it became a regular meeting point. Şòún was eventually considered the head of the settlers (in Ògbómòşóland) has he was charged with the responsibility of settling minor disputes between other immigrants^{xx}.

There came a time when Òyó was under constant attack by powerful enemies led by Èlẹ̀mòşó, a renowned warrior and good marksman.

He killed many with his bow and terrorized the people. Sòún liberated Òyó from the menace of Èlémòşó by beheading him and in compensation he was made the confirmed ruler of Ògbómòşó town. He was called “Èyí tí ó Gbóri Èlémòşó” this term was later condensed to Ògbóri Èlémòşó and finally to Ògbómòşó. Ògbómòşó people predominantly belong to the Yorùbá ethnic group. In 1991, the population was estimated to be approximately 645, 000. By 2005, the population has climbed to more than one million people.

Òòlè Báálè Festival in Ògbómòşó

In Ògbómòşó, Òòlè Báálè festival is performed for maintenance of peace and tranquility in Ògbómòşóland. Òòlè Báálè festival was prescribed by the Ifá oracle to ensure peace and stability in the land. It was first practiced during the coronation of Sòún Ogunlólá, the first ruler of Ògbómòşó^{xxi}. The entire content of the sacrifice is not known but however, òòlè (móin-móin) was a major part of the sacrificial items^{xxii}. The sacrifice was performed and Ògbómòşó was known during the 18th Century was a small but very peaceful town in Òyó empire. Since then, Òòlè Báálè festival has been a symbol of peace, stability and harmonious relationship^{xxiii}. The major participants of the festival are the five families that produce the Sòún of Ògbómòşó. They are: Olúwùsì, Báiyéwùwón, Bólántà, Qdún-aró and Aburumaku. The five families originated from the same extended family but they now form different extended families. These families come together during the festival to iron out conflicts and disputes and agree upon the next family inline to produce the next Sòún^{xxiv}. The festival also enjoys the presence and co-operation of Ògbómòşó people in diaspora, international participants, tourists and cultural observers.

Òòlè Báálè festival is marked for merry making and last just a day. It is usually in March after Qdún Sòún (Ògbómòşó hegemonic festival). The women cook òòlè and èkọ (solid pap) as the main and only food for the festival^{xxv}. The festival is accompanied with dance,

ijálá and masquerade display. During the festival, the Sòún prays for the town and its neighbours. He uses the festival period to preach peace, love and harmonious relationship devoid of any form of rancor. It is the time disputes are settled and forgiveness are made. People holding grudges against one another table their matters and undertake an oath of forgiveness. The festival provides an environment that allows feasting, dancing, celebration and interaction^{xxvi}.

Òlè Báálè Festival as an Instrument of Conflict Prevention in Ògbómòşóland

History is called up anytime humans want to understand how people and societies behaves. History provides identity, and the knowledge of history dictates how man relates with the present. History is indispensable when trying to understand the society. Since the first half of the 17th century, the people of Ògbómòşó have used the Òlè Báálè festival to preserve their history and to teach them every year to new generations. During the festival, the history of the Ògbómòşó people is retold through oral rendition and İjálá^{xxvii}. İjálá is the hunters' chant/song and also a form of poetry. It is a traditional music that is primarily vocal as it is text-based and secondarily instrumental. İjálá is a genre that is associated in the worship of Ògún – Yorùbá god of Iron. It is used to praise the royals and the past Souns during the festival. It helps to celebrate community value and its survival. Since the knowledge of history fosters peace among societies, the Òlè Báálè festival through its annual demonstration of history and culture prevents conflict in Ògbómòşóland.

Òlè Báálè festival prevents conflict through dialogue. Ògbómòşóland have engaged dialogue as her major tool for conflict prevention via festival. The festival requires the presences of the traditional chiefs in Ògbómòşó and neighbouring towns and villages that comprises Ògbómòşóland, it also priorities the presence of

royals in Ògbómòşó^{xxviii}. During this festival, impending conflicts are tabled and resolved through the use of dialogue. Dialogue as a means of resolving conflict is a universally proven method of conflict resolution. It is an inclusive process that brings together a diverse set of voices and opinions to represent a society. In order to provide change, development and proffer solution to conflict, the participant in a dialogue have to develop a sense of unity and joint ownership which in turn promotes peaceful coordination among the people of the land.

For instance, border and land disputes are two very common source of conflict in south-western Nigeria. They usually lead to communal clashes and large scale civil unrest. There is absence of border and land disputes in Ògbómòşó, this tranquility can be traced to the Ọ̀òlẹ̀ Báálẹ̀ festival for its annual in effort in preventing conflict and maintaining peace in Ògbómòşóland^{xxix}.

Another form of conflict in south-western Nigeria and in mostly all society is 'succession', in this case 'chieftaincy' and traditional 'titles'. Chieftaincy disputes is probably the most common source of conflict in south-western Nigeria. It is characterized by character assassination, riots, mass killings and destruction of life and properties. It sometimes culminate into civil war. When the royals in Ògbómòşó meets together annually at the Ọ̀òlẹ̀ Báálẹ̀ festival, they discuss the issue of secession, the next family in line to produce the Şòún is identified^{xxx}. This helps in preventing any possible conflict regarding secession in Ògbómòşó.

Festival is not just a way of attracting tourists and feasting. Cultural heritage can also be a powerful force for reconciliation and avoiding conflicts. Ọ̀òlẹ̀ Báálẹ̀ is a peace festival that increase the awareness of cultural heritage among Ògbómòşó people and neighbours and involves them in the process to preserve it.

Challenges Facing Ọ̀ọ̀lẹ̀ Báálẹ̀ Festival

Media coverage on the festival is low. There is a significant need of awareness among people about the festival and its importance. Media promotion should include TV spots, posters and articles in the written press and on the internet. It is as a result of lack of media coverage and publicity that despite its significant to the area of study, there is no existing literature on the festival. Strengthening publicity and media coverage on the festival will no doubt increase positively, reaction to cultural festival. The festival could also serve as a prototype for communities interested in maintenance of peace and tranquility.

Western religion, and culture have also affects the level of participation in the festival. This is common mostly among Ọ̀gbómọ̀şọ̀ people in diaspora who are supposed to participate in the feast. The portrayal of indigenous cultural practices by western religion as primitive and barbaric have negatively affected African's reaction to cultural festival^{xxxi}. There is also little effort by government institutions to promote the Ọ̀ọ̀lẹ̀ Báálẹ̀ festival. Government support will go a long way to promote the festival. Especially in the area of finance.

Conclusion

Ọ̀ọ̀lẹ̀ Báálẹ̀ festival is important in promoting peace and mutual understanding among the people. The festival prevents intra-personal, inter-personal, intra-communal, inter-communal, intra-group and inter-group conflicts in Ọ̀gbómọ̀şọ̀land. This demonstrates that apart from attracting tourists, developing economy, and fostering cross cultural understanding, festival also can be an instrument for conflict prevention, resolution and conflict management. The festival also promotes history through demonstration of culture. It also serves as cultural promotion and transmission and preserves and retells the history of Ọ̀gbómọ̀şọ̀ town. The festival will help historians and anthropologists to further develop their research interest in related

topic. It also shows that most festivals are not about worship of idols as many people tend to believe but it is a cultural practice with several positive importance and they can be used as a conflict and dispute prevention and resolution mechanism through which all conflicting issues among the people are resolved.

Endnotes

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ⁱⁱ Ibid.

ⁱⁱⁱ Mabel Oyitso, Tajudeen Akanji, Fred Osakue Orobator. *The Influence of Cultural Practices in Peace-Building Process in the Niger Delta Region*. Academic Research International. Vol. 4 No.3, May 2013.

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^{xi} Ibid.

^{xii} Interview with Peter Okunade on 4th August, 2016. Civil Servant. Age: 65.

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- xiii Interview with Chief Olayinka Adegbile 6th on August, 2016. Traditional Ruler. Age: 60.
- xiv Adelowo A. *The Journey So Far*, Jos: Niger Press, 1974.
- xv Oyerinde, N. D. *Iwe Itan Ogbomoso*, Jos: Niger Press, 1934.
- xvi Oyerinde, N. D. *Iwe Itan Ogbomoso*, Jos: Niger Press, 1934.
- xvii Ibid.
- xviii Ibid.
- xix Ibid.
- xx Adelowo A. *The Journey So Far*, Jos: Niger Press, 1974.
- xxi Interview with Kayode Alamu on 8th July, 2016. Retired Civil Servant. Age: 56.
- xxii Interview with Paul Adeyemo on July 6th, 2016. Civil Servant. Age: 65.
- xxiii Interview with Mathew Ademola on 7th August, 2016. Civil Servant. Age: 57.
- xxiv Interview with Chief Olayinka Adegbile 6th on August, 2016. Traditional Ruler. Age: 60.
- xxv Interview with Abake Layode on 6th July, 2016. Trader. Age: 56.
- xxvi Interview with Kofoworola Kehinde on July 6th, 2016. Trader. Age: 78.
- xxvii Interview with Chief Adeyemo Adelani on 4th July, 2016. Traditional ruler. Age: 73
- xxviii Interview with Adeyinka Opayinka on July 5th July, 2016, Civil Servant, Age: 53.
- xxix Interview with Peter Okunade on 4th August, 2016, Civil Servant, Age: 65.
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