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Dance as a tool for Ethnic Integration in Nigeria: A Study of Selected Kalabari Dances in Rivers State

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Abstract
Dance is a powerful tool of man and it provides him an outlet for self-expression and a means for communication. Conflict tends to arise when there is a lacuna in communication, be it between individuals, groups or between communities. Nigeria as a nation is not excluded from this, as she is constantly battered by the menace of inter-ethnic violence, sectarian, religious and tribal wars. The role of dance in resolving conflict cannot be over-emphasized as it has proven to be a powerful means for the unification of man in times of conflict. In Aristophanes’s Lysistrata, after the peace talks between the Spartans and the Athenians, the two factions drank, sang and danced as an indication of the end of the thirteen years war. Dance therefore was not only a symbol of peace and unity, but served as a unifying factor that cemented the reconciliation process between the Spartans and the Athenians. This research therefore strives to examine what constitutes the African dance, examining its characteristics, importance and types. The study would be narrowed down to a Nigerian dance, investigating the use of dance as a tool in the promotion of inter-ethnic co-existence in Nigeria. The focus would be on the Ekine Sekiapu Dance Group and Owu-Aru-Sun Alali Masquerade Dance of the Kalabari people in Rivers State as a case study.

Introduction
Dance as a term is not new to man; it has been present right from the developmental stages of man and this is evident in the fact that unborn babies respond to sounds by dancing in their mothers’ womb. Bakare describes dance as “the rhythmic movement of the human body in space and time to make statements” (1). Dance can also be described as an art by which human movement is used as a means for transmitting messages in the form of ideas, feelings as well as experiences. The art of dance is said to be “as old as man and his desire to express himself, to communicate his joys and sorrows, to celebrate and to mourn with the most immediate instrument: his body” (Sorell 9). It is a universal phenomenon that serves a vital function in human society in an effort to achieve social cohesion or togetherness, causing them to feel a deep sense of communion with one another. As a result, people are liberated from the bonds of individuality (Lange 92).

Man is known to employ dance during his happy moments with a view to express himself and communicate ideas about himself and his environment. Dance further provides an avenue for transferring knowledge and serves as a means of developing communication abilities, problem solving techniques and creative critical thinking skills along with kinesthetic abilities (Minneapolis Public Schools “The Elements of Dance”).

Judith R. Mackrell in her article “Dance”, describes dance as the movement of the body in a rhythmic way, usually to music and within a given space, for the purpose of expressing an idea or emotion, releasing energy, or simply taking delight in the movement itself. She further observes that dance is a powerful impulse, but the art of dance is that impulse channeled by skillful performers into something that becomes intensely expressive and that may delight spectators who feel no wish to dance themselves (Academicroom.com).

In Africa, dance is used in religious, social and cultural activities; it serves a variety of purposes and is woven into the social fabric of the African life. Mackrell observes that Aristotle, in his Poetics, opined that dance is a rhythmic movement whose purpose is “to represent men’s characters as well as what they do and suffer”, this highlights the pivotal role of dance in the Greek era. Hence African dances are imbued with dramatic elements that in themselves not only identify and represent lives of the people, but
also play didactic roles with the aim of ensuring the conformity of individuals within social groups and institutions, as well as the maintenance of social order and stability in the society.

In Nigeria, there exists a lot of dances ranging from traditional to contemporary dances, but the focus of this study will be centred on the Ekine Sekiapu traditional dance of the Kalabari people in Rivers State, and its role in the promotion of peaceful coexistence among the Kalabari people.

**Dance - A Historical Overview**

The history of dance is difficult to trace since it does not leave behind clear traces of identifiable physical artifacts that last over a millennia, like stone tools, cave paintings etc. It is therefore very difficult to say when dance became part of human culture (Wikipedia: The Free Encyclopedia “History of dance”). However dance from time immemorial has played an important role in ceremonies, celebrations, rituals, as well as entertainments. According to Wikipedia, Archeology delivers traces of dance from prehistoric times such as the 9,000 year old Bhimbetka rock shelter paintings in India and the Egyptian tomb paintings depicting dancing figures from C.3300BC. In the same vein, an early manuscript describing dance is the Natyashastra, on which is based the modern interpretation of classical Indian dance (e.g. Bharathanatyam). The concept of dance is as old as Africa itself. The early man is known to have danced during rituals, so as to effectively charm his game and gain the favour of the gods. He employed dance during the celebration of victories in wars, celebration of successful huntings, and in his happy moments. Today, dance still has its place in the activities of man, as people dance for a number of reasons. Dance today has two major forms: the traditional (which is traditional in characteristics and restrictive), and the Modern, whose origin is traceable to Europe and which allows for more freedom.

Furthermore, Chris observes that the art of dance in most traditional African societies is a communal property. It is assumed that “the whole community contributed to its creation and composition” (x). Hence one cannot accredit the arrangement of the dance-steps to a single individual, while in other cases, someone performs this function, and that is the choreographer.

**African Dances**

Geoffrey Gorer observed in his studies of some ethnic groups in West Africa that:

> Africans dance. They dance for joy, and they dance for grief; they dance for love and they dance for hate; they dance to bring prosperity and they dance to avert calamity; they dance for religion and they dance to pass the time (213).

African dance in this study principally refers to the dances of Sub-Saharan Africa, which developed with the Sub-Saharan African musical traditions. African dances are characteristically polyrhythmic with special prominence given to the articulation of special parts of the body. Wikipedia, in an article entitled “African dance” submits that African dances are saturated with a lot of moral and social values of Africans that help people to mature, work, praise or censure members of the community while celebrating festivals, funerals, competing, reciting history, proverbs, poetry, as well as to encounter the gods. Furthermore, as a result of the communal nature of the African society, African dances are largely participatory and all-inclusive in nature, with spectators taking part in the performance. Wikipedia observes that there are no barriers between dancers and onlookers, with the exception of some spiritual, religious or initiation dances.

**Characteristics of African Dance**

There are no singular characteristics of African dance. Although similar traits and themes may appear throughout dances within the continent, each has its own peculiarities in terms of history, language, song, background as well as function. Dancing in Africa is done collectively and represents the preconceived life of the community than that of individuals.

It is rare to find couples performing a dance together in most African dances, as most communities view this as immoral. In the same vein, Wikipedia corroborates this view when it observes that in most
Yoruba dances, touching while dancing, especially between couples or the opposite sex, is not common except in rare occasions. The only partner dance associated with African dances is the Bottle Dance of the Mankon People in the Northwest Region of Cameroon or the Assiko from the Douala people that involves the interaction of Man and Woman and the way that they charm each other.

Speaking of individual talent, Wikipedia notes that Yoruba dancers and drummers express communal values, desires and collective creativity in their performance. The dances are often segregated by gender, reinforcing gender roles in children. Other community structures such as kinship, age and status are also reinforced. Many of the dances in Africa are performed by only males or females, and this further reinforces community beliefs about what constitutes maleness and femaleness as well as forbidden laws about interaction between sexes.

In Zambia, young girls of Lunda spend months learning and practicing privately for their coming of age ritual. According to Wikipedia, the boys show off their stamina in highly brisk and energetic dances, which forms part of the means for ascertaining physical health and agility. Importantly, Lead dancers and drummers are concerned about the learning of the dance exactly as taught. Children must learn the dance exactly as taught without variation, while improvisation and new variation only comes after mastering the dance, performing and receiving the appreciation of spectators and the sanction of village elders.

Musical training in African communities begin from childhood with cradles and continues on the backs of relatives both at work, festivals and other social events (Wikipedia). Furthermore, African dances are polyrhythmic and the dancers may move the shoulders, pelvis, chest, legs or arms according to the rhythm of the dance. In Nigeria, dancers commonly combine at least two rhythms in their movement, and the blending of three rhythms can be seen only among highly skilled dancers (Wikipedia). Although the drumming represents an underlying linguistic text that guides the dance performance, most meaning come from the nonverbal cues and communication dynamics of the performers.

According to Wikipedia, the character of dancing observed by travelers to West Africa in the 19th century depended on context, the people, and the gender of the dancers. In general men used large body movements, including jumping and leaping, while women danced smaller movements with much use of “shuffle steps”, with the body in a bent position with “crooked knees”.

**Types of African Dances**

African traditional dances are not performed in isolation, but are part of a broader cultural event. Wikipedia observes that African traditional dances range from Warrior Dances; which are imbued with war themes, to Dances of Love; which are performed on special occasions such as weddings anniversaries, Rites of Passage and Coming of Age Dances; which are performed to mark the coming of age of young men and women, Dances of Welcome; used to honour and show respect to visitors, and Dances of Possession and Summoning; which are common themes in African traditional religion, and share a common characteristics: a call to a spirit. These spirits can be the spirits of Planets, Forests, Ancestors or Deities.

Ojuade Jaleel Olasunkanmi, in his article “The Nigerian Dance and the National Question”, observes that there were specific dances tailored to specific occasions in Nigeria. Every major stage of human development such as Birth, Growth and Death had dances which however were not performed in isolation (8-10). These dances were associated with ceremonies, rites and festivals which characterize such stages. These dances are grouped into five categories:

1. Religous ritual dances: These are associated with worship procedures and form an essential part of it. It also serves as a communication link between God and man. An example is the Mai Bori possession dance, where healing rituals are regarded as the conclusive evidence that the communication gap between the worshipped and the worshipper has been bridged. Another is the Abore in Orise-Nla dance of the Yorubas, where in an effort to sacrifice to the god of purity, the people use dance as a medium.

2. Rites of passage dances: These dances serve as a medium of welcoming and inducting new members into an existing group. It can also be used to expel the spirit of the departed and serves as a purifying
factor for the remaining members of the group. An example is the Nkim Nkat maiden dance of the Calabar people in Cross Rivers State, and Obitun dance performance of the Ondo people.

3. Vocational dances: These dances test and encourage the requirements and favourable conditions of service. The Boat regattas and water plays of the Warri people in the riverine and coastal areas reflect the predominant economic pre-occupation of the people, which are fishing as well as rowing.

4. Recreational dances: Here, Age and Social status are already established dances which provide diverse forms of entertainment within the community. Age group contemporaries aspire to communicate through their dances, the vigour and vitality associated with their age-bracket. Examples include the Ijilegha dances performed by a group of Uromi teenagers in Edo State, Atilogwo and Mpokiti dances performed by young Ibo males, which expresses the discipline and agility of Ibo youngsters. While the dignified mellowness associated with old age is evidently captured in the slow calculated steps of Ewo dance or Ijo Agba of the Yoruba people with Dundun (hour-glass) accompaniment.

5. Political dances: These are dances imbued with political messages. They are usually performed by status and groups. These dances reflect the political as well as the hierarchical order in the society. Examples include Obirenjowu dance parade of the people of Ijebu-Ode, and the Tiridada dance of the Hausas (8-10).

Dance and Its Function
Dance has a major role to play in our contemporary world. Amidst the problems and challenges facing humanity, ranging from wars, poverty, starvation, communal crisis, tribal/ethnic wars (ethnic cleansing), to issues bordering on terrorism and threats to national security. Dance has served as one basic means for self expression, education, enlightenment, unifying people as well as entertainment.

In Nigerian, dance performs a lot of functions as evident in the various purposes for which we employ dance, and this has led to the establishment of the National troupe as well as the State Councils for Arts and Culture so as to promote our socio-cultural heritage and celebrate our rich culture and existence as a people.

Africa has recorded a number of problems ranging from tribal /communal wars, sectarianism, genocides etc. These problems are still prevalent in Nigerian as we still continue to witness violence; tribal wars, religious intolerance, terrorism, militancy, discrimination on the basis of tribe; gender etc., these issues continue to challenge us and threatens our cultural heritage and existence as a nation.

The place of dance amidst these problems becomes very pertinent, because deeply rooted in the African culture is the art of dance. According to *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Judith R. Mackrell, in her article entitled “Dance” defines dance according its functions and observes that dance performs a lot of different functions including the religious, the military and the social. In the same vein nearly all cultures have had, or still have dances that play an important role in their religious activities. Most dances involve the spectators and performers working themselves into a trance in order to transcend their ordinary selves so as to receive the power of the gods, or like the Indian temple dancers, where the performers enact the stories of the gods as a way of worshipping them. She further notes that in some early Christian communities, processions or formal dance patterns formed part of the prayer service. It is even possible to look at modern military matches and drilling procedures as offshoots of tribal wars and hunting dances. Dance has always been an integral part of the African culture and the world by extension, Mackrell observes that the use of weapons and fighting movements in the training of soldiers help prepare them emotionally and spiritually for battle, and these are descendants of the war dances. Furthermore, our ancestors performed dances that involved them dressing in animal skins and imitating the movements of their prey, thereby acquiring the skills of the animal in question and gaining dominion over it through sympathetic magic.

Dance also plays a number of social functions especially in celebrations, courtship recreational activities and entertainment. Courtship dances allow the dancers to display their vigour and attractiveness as well as to engage in socially accepted physical contact between the sexes, an example is the “waltz dance”; these dances usually have fertility motifs. Dance has been part of our everyday life;
accompanying practical activities and religious rituals. Mackrell observes that “only when more complex social and economic structures began to emerge and a leisure class or caste came into existence did people begin to see dance as a source of pleasure.” Later as societies began to develop, many of the early dance forms like the religious, work, and hunting dances, lost their original significance and developed into recreational folk dances while still retaining many of their original motifs. However dance continues to be an important means for social cohesion and a means of displaying political/social strength and identity. For example, in Greece, citizens were encouraged to attend dance dramas as part of one’s allegiance to the City-state. Also, in the 19th century, Hungary revived its national dances as a way of promoting a strong sense of national identity (Mackrell, “Dance”).

Dance can be used for much more than entertainment or for expressive purposes. Dance can play a lot of diplomatic functions especially in fostering better understanding and better relationship between and within ethnic groups, people and persons. In the same vein Aondo and Tsevende in a paper entitled “Nigerian Dances and Cultural Diplomacy”, observes that the first Nigerian Festival of Arts and Culture, held in Lagos in 1970, was a cultural event designed to bring the then 12 states together after the civil war, in a celebrative mood. It was organized with a view to assist in cementing relationships amongst the various ethnic nationalities in Nigeria. As a result of its success, the then Head of State, General Yakubu Gowon, directed that it should be an annual event with the motive of using it as a unity forum.

The National Festival of Arts and Culture has evolved as a creative tool that unites the nation and a veritable medium for cultural exchange and marketing. Among the objectives of NAFEST are: an avenue for talent hunt, an avenue to display creativity, an avenue for the exchange of ideas, an avenue for skills and techniques development, an avenue for celebrating the best of our collective heritage, as well as an avenue for promoting our cultural values of common understanding, peace, love and national unity. Participation is drawn from the 36 States of the Federation and the Federal Capital Territory; all geared towards maintaining its main objective of promoting national unity. Aondo and Tsevende notes that the first four editions of NAFEST were devoted to dance and music, this is evident in the theme of Lagos 1970, Ibadan 1971, Kaduna 1972, and Kaduna/ Lagos 1974.

Dance functions as an expression of social organization, it safeguards the traditionally established social and political hierarchy and equally emphasizes the standard of behavior, it instructs on moral within the society. Such examples are dances meant for the royal personalities (royal dances), elder dances and age dances. These are usually performed by groups or team of dancers, which clearly states their status in the society; it may also be a part of a festival performance or simply for entertainment (Olasunkanmi 7).

According to Kivulinitrust.org, in Niarobi, Kenya, the Halcha women of Sakuyye community use dance to promote cultural expression, peace and livelihood in Shaba. The Sakuyye is a minority Oromo speaking community that has lost much of its culture and livelihoods through assimilation, conflicts and social discrimination. The Halcha women group strives to utilize their community’s cultural heritage as a resource for self-expression, social recognition and to benefit from ecotourism and for economic development. Bounded with the objective of showcasing and preserving Sakuyye cultural heritage through participation in the Isiolo Cushitic Cultural Festival and to promote peaceful co-existence with neighbouring communities; the Halcha women group hopes to promote the transmission of indigenous knowledge and the perpetuation of cultural identity through songs and dances that demonstrates the community’s admiration for their domestic animals and relationship with their environment.

**Nigerian Dances: A Theoretical Expose**

Olasunkanmi asserts that dance performance in Nigeria is a primary site for the production of knowledge, where philosophy is enacted and a means by which people reflect on their current conditions, divine and re-invents themselves and their social world (5). It follows therefore to say that the nature of dance in Nigeria, considering the ethnic configuration of the country fits into the category known as ethnic dance, which is also known as traditional dance.
Looking at the concept of dance, which is an art, a profession and a discipline, Umukoro asserts that..."like theory and praxis, are merely two sides of the same coin meant to complement, rather than compete with each other" (qtd. in Olasunkanmi). Olasunkanmi theorizes dance in Nigeria as follows:

(i) Theory of identification – This as a process involves combing the rural, local areas or the grassroots for dance performances. Such example is the Ori Olokun’s experience in the early 70s in Ile-Ife.
(ii) Theory of transfer – It involves the efforts of scholars, dance practitioners, ethnographers, Arts Councils in search of dances from their base or groove for onward transfer to stage performances. Such experience is what the State Art Councils have been doing in organizing competitions, so as to harvest our rich cultural dances.
(iii) Unifying theory – This is the attempt at the Federal level, where dancers from all walks of life are brought together at the National Theatre, this is to foster national unity, as experienced in the 1980s till date.
(iv) The theory of exposition- This is an experiment at the National level, aimed at bringing together representatives from different parts of the country in order to showcase our dances to the international community occasionally (5-6).

Olasunkanmi further observes that most Nigerian dances develop out of ritual and religious sources, and this regulates the relationship between the members of the society and the supernatural powers, which are believed to control of human activities. Some examples of festivals known to showcase dance performances are the Osun Osogbo festival dance, Olojo festival dance in Ile-Ife, Sango (god of thunder and lightning) worship, Obatala worship, Egungun (masquerade) festival dance etc. Dance plays a central role in these festivals or ceremonies, as it is seen as an act of worship for the members of a particular religious cult group, and the dance is usually performed by the newly initiated and may include the leading members of the cult.

Ekine Sekiapu Dance Group and Owu-Aru-Sun Alali Masquerade Dance and the Promotion of Peaceful Co-Existence among the Kalabari People

According to Maplandia.com, in an article titled “Ekine Sekiapu Square, Bakana”, observes that Ekine Sekiapu is a Cultural Dance group that admits only males as its members. The Ekine Sekiapu also serves the function of a traditional court as it mediates and settles disputes between individuals, groups and communities.

The origin of the Ekine Sekiapu Dance is woven around the myth that many years ago, in the days of Elem Kalabari, before the beginning of slave trade, before oil exploration activities began that led to the pollution of the water bodies. A beautiful young woman name Ekineba (daughter of Ekine) was playing by the river when she was suddenly apprehended by water spirits and carried away into the mangrove swamps. The spirit mother on learning this became angry and ordered her sons spirits to return Ekineba back to her family. Before they returned her, they taught Ekineba many different spirit plays. Ekineba on returning back home, performed these plays entertaining people, drumming, singing and dancing. The people learnt these dances and their bodies danced like the waves of the ocean. The dancing and plays continued but all was not well for Ekineba and the Elem Kalabari. The water spirits became angry because the men did not follow the rituals of the plays and Ekineba was eventually taken by the spirits. The people became sad and wept because their daughter had been taken. They now resolved that the only solution was to make Ekineba live forever; and so Ekineba was venerated and worshipped as a spirit and a goddess by the Elem Kalabaris. This was how Ekine Sekiapu dance was founded and the spirit continued to dance up till today. Hence, when the Ekine Sekiapu dance is performed, it is believed that it is the spirit Ekineba that is dancing.

Furthermore, Allafrica.com records that Prine Tonye JTJ Princewill, in an article entitled “Nigeria: Owu-Aru-Sun Festival-the Fulcrum of Kalabari Culture”, while tracing the origin of the Owu-Aru-Sun festival, observed that Owu-Aru-Sun festival had previously been celebrated in Buguma city in 1908, 1927, 1973 and 1991 by the Ekine Sekiapu, under the leadership of Opu Edi.
More so, the Ekine (its’s original name) and Sekiapu meaning dancers, are the custodian of the Kalabari customs and traditions. The Ekine also forms the nucleus of the traditional Government of the Kalabari people, which includes the maintenance of law and order, including matters of arbitration where offenders are punished according to the laws of the land.

The Owu-Aru-Sun Alali, which are a series of masquerade dances, is performed by the masked players, who are representatives of the water spirits (Owu), to whom the Ekine ministers. After the dance, the Owu are said to return to the ocean, where they recide. While some of these masquerades are owned and performed by the entire community, some are owned by particular chiefs and compounds.

The major masquerades are played during the dry season with about three plays annually. After the last group of masquerades has performed, the Ekine Sekiapu, through the town crier, informs the people of the need for preparation of the next Owu-Aru-Sun Alali. After this, the town crier (kpo kpo la bo), consults with the head chiefs of the various canoe houses and compounds who own masquerades on how to put up their best performances.

Two days before the celebration, a series of sacrifices are made to appease the deities, so as to ensure total peace and prevent evil forces from obstructing the procession of water spirits. On the eve of the Owu-Aru-Sun, the head pieces of all masquerades are set up in the ancestral shrine of the various owners, where the chiefs and members of the group perform the necessary purification and sacrifices. On the performance day, all colourfully dressed masquerades of the various groups and compounds line up in front of their ancestral halls and are escorted to the town square where each masquerade is greeted by the chief drummer (Akwa Alabo) and shows a display of its distinctive dance steps before taking a bow into the Ekine hall.

After all the masquerades groups have gathered at the King Amachree square, the patron goddess of the masquerades (Ekine Alabo) pours libation to Amatemeso on the completion of the series of plays of the water spirits and the journey back to the ocean and an assurance of their return in the next festival. After this, Akwa Alabo summons the masquerades and the Sekiapu for a final procession with the Ikikroko drum. The procession moves around the Amachree square in an anti-clockwise direction, after which they return to the Ekine meeting house for a rest, having completed the third round of the dance.

Prince Tonye further observes that at intervals, the comical trickster, Ikaki (the tortoise masquerade) entertains the spectators, keeping the arena lively. After the twenty to thirty minutes rest, the masquerades line up in procession for another three rounds of display, after this, the chief drummer changes the rhythm of his drum to the “sending down of the spirits drums” (Owu Iderima Akwa). Here, the purification priest takes the lead of the procession with an egg on his left hand and an iron purification horn on his right hand; he backs off from the procession and heads quickly to the waterside (Owu Sera), with a group of young Sekiapu rushing ahead of him with their canes, driving women away.

On arrival at the waterside, the priest performs some rituals reminding the gods of his previous request of a safe journey to the spirit world, he pleads with the spirits to escort them safely to the ocean. He throws the egg into the river and passes the ivory horn anti-clockwise round his head and dips it into the water. He repeats this action several times so as to drive any evil force among them that may disrupt the journey of the spirits to the spirit world.

After this rite, the masquerade players strip themselves off their headpieces and costumes, and one after the other they dive into the water. Signifying return of the water spirits back to their memorial halls with cheers, where they change into their regular attires.

The Owu-Aru-Sun festival plays a pivotal role in creating the avenue for the various compounds, groups and villages to meet, while the Ekine Sekiapu dance group further strengthens this fellowship through the masquerade dance, as each group, compound, and community produce their own masquerade who in turn performs with other masquerades, thereby cementing the bond and unity that exits among the different communities that make up the Kalabari Kingdom.

More than just uniting the people of Kalabari, the Ekine Sekiapu cultural dance group also serves the function of maintaining law and order among the Kalabari people. This it does by settling disputes between conflicting individuals, groups, and warring communities, thereby promoting peaceful co-
existence among the Kalabari people. The Sekiapu cultural dance group symbolizes peace and as the custodians of the laws and customs of the Kalabari people, it is involved in the interpretation, maintenance and the transfer of the laws and traditions of the Kalabarics, thus, ensuring the preservation and transfer of the traditional values of the people from one generation to another.

Conclusion
Nigeria is a multi-ethnic country with over two hundred languages representing the various ethnic groups that make up the country. Each of these ethnic groups have traditional dances that are peculiar to them and that identifies them. And just as football sports unites Nigerians irrespective of whether you are from Ijaw, Hausa, Yoruba or Ibo. These dances can be developed and promoted to the point national relevance. And as Nigerians tend to unite when the country’s national team is playing with other international countries, national dance festivals aimed at showcasing the different pockets of rich cultural dances of the various ethnic groups in Nigeria can be organized, with the sole aim of uniting Nigerians and emphasizing unity in diversity as well as the need to be our brother’s keeper.

Furthermore, these dances can be developed and promoted to the level of attracting tourists and international visitors into the country during such dance festivals and celebrations. Thereby bringing returns to the country.

Nigeria as a nation can also borrow a leaf from the Halcha women group, irrespective of the existence of the National Troupe, States Councils for Arts and Culture and other governmental and non-governmental programmes, aimed at promoting peaceful co-existence through dance like the National Festival of Arts and Culture, Carniriv, Abuja carnival etc. The governments in rural communities should partner with traditional rulers in creating inter-community or ethnic dance festivals that will encourage healthy dance competitions among ethnic groups and this would improve their relationships.

Nigeria is still challenged by constant ethnic/tribal crisis and clashes as a result of ethnic discrimination and religious differences. An example is the constant religious-ethnic crisis in Jos, Plateau State. In an attempt to help solve this problem the government at the Local and State levels should organize dance festivals that celebrate our common values; stressing and teaching the need for tolerance, respect, love, peace and unity as well as the preservation of our shared cultural identity as a nation. Dances that preach unity, love should be created and organized between ethnic groups and neighbouring communities. If such festivals are put in place, some of the constant communal clashes that we currently experience would become history, and like the Halcha women in Shaba, it is high time community leaders, government and individuals come up with dances that would foster peaceful co-existence among Nigerians as well as promote our cultural identity through songs and dances.

A lot of dances exist that preach unity (unity dance) but these are either sponsored by organizations or payed performances. This study therefore calls on the government and traditional rulers to look in the direction of creating festivals where dance-celebrations and competitions between neighbouring communities will be encouraged with a view to improving the existing relationship among rural communities in Nigeria, especially in areas prone to communal crisis, borrowing a leaf from the Ekine Sekiapu Dance Group and Owu-Aru-Sun Alali Masquerade Dance and their role in the promotion of peaceful co-existence among of the Kalabari People.

Work Cited


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