Politics, Violence and Culture: The Ebira Tao Nigeria Experience

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Abstract

Over the years Ekuechi (masquerade) Festival of the Ebira people of Nigeria has drawn undue attention because of violence that often characterized its celebration. This paper examines politics, violence and culture using Ebira Tao as a focus of study. The paper finds that politicians in the course of contesting for political offices often manipulate clannish sentiment and masquerade festival (one aspect of Ebira culture) for their political advantage which often results in violence. This is often exacerbated because the idea of obtaining permit with a guarantor before a masquerade can perform has been discarded. The paper argues that government's threat or imposition of outright ban on the festival as a means of curbing cultural violence is superficial and concludes therefore that there is need to cut down on privileges concomitant with political offices which often made competition for such offices violent-ridden as well as addressing youth unemployment.

Introduction

The frequency of communal violence and its devastating consequences has brought it to the front burner of political discourse in Nigeria. Imobighe, (2003) noted that the situation has snowballed into a worrisome dimension since the beginning of the fourth republic – May,

29, 1999. Notable among the recent ones are; Zango-Kataf in Kaduna State; Tiv-Jukun in Wukari, Taraba State; Ogoni-Adoni in River State; Chamba-Kuteb in Taraba State; Itshekiri-Ijaw/Urhobo in Delta State; Ife-Modakeke in Osun State; Aguleri-Umuleri in Anambra State; Yoruba-Hausa community in Shagamu, Ogun State, Ijaw-Ilaje conflict in Ondo, the intermittent clashes in Kano, Kano State; Basa-Egbira in Nassarawa State; Eleme-Okrika in River State; Hausa-Fulani-Sawaya in Bauchi State; Fulani-Irigwe and Yelwa-Shendam both in Plateau State; and the Hausa-Yoruba in Idi-Araba, Lagos (Elaigwu, 2002, Imobighe, 2003). Recent studies in ethnic relations have however revealed that intra-ethnic differences and sub-ethnic identities are capable of mobilizations as ethnic and inter-ethnic differences, with implications for violent outcomes (Nnoli, 1998).

Ebira Tao people of Kogi State can be said to be a homogeneous ethno-cultural group (Tenuche, 2009). However, violent conflict within Ebira group has assumed a frightening dimension with terrific frequency often involving the use of cocaine, gun running and other dangerous and sophisticated weapons which has led to loss of lives and property, social tension, disruption of family and communal life and general atmosphere of mistrust (Tenuche, 2009). Some of the cases of violent conflict in Ebiraland are: the violence between Ozumi and Idoji street in 2001, the Ihima/Adavi Eba crisis in 2002, the Ohiowan and Emani clannish conflicts that paralyzed Ihima town between 2006 and 2007 and the conflict between Oziogu and Oziomoye with political and clannish dimensions that has paralyzed Okene town since 2007 and has not been

totally resolved (Tenuche, 2009). It is interesting to note that, although violence in ebiraland is often seen as being motivated by culture but a critical analysis reveals that it is more political.

This paper examines politics, violence and culture using Ebiraland Tao as a focus of study. For analytical purposes, this paper is scaled down into the following sections. Section one is on introduction and conceptual discourse; section two focuses on theoretical discourse and nexus among politics, violence and culture; section three considers masquerade culture in Ebiraland; section four examines politics, violence and culture in Ebiraland; while the last section (five) is on recommendations and conclusion.

Politics, Violence and Culture: A Conceptual Discourse

Politics

Politics does not seem to lend itself to any universally acceptable definition. This is because of ideological, cultural and historical contextualization that underpins its several meanings. According to Appadorai, (1974:1) the term politics is derived from the Greek word "polis", a city-state. This definition sees politics from the angle of political organization and the relationship between individual and the state. Marx Weber cited in Bentham (1974) sees it as striving to share power, or to influence the distribution of power either among states or among groups within a state. Weber's definition validates the fact that politics involves power struggle which has intra-national, national and international dimensions.

However, the way and manner politics is practiced in Nigeria lends credence to the definition of politics credited to Alexander Birece cited in Pius (1986) that politics is a strife of interests masquerading as a contest of principle, the conduct of public affairs for private advantage. Little wonder that Ujo argues that: if you ask anybody on the street of his views on politics, the answer is likely to be a negative one. At the same time if you ask groups or associations like the Nigerian Medical Association, the Nigerian Bar Association and the Nigerian Union of Teachers of their views about political issues, their answers will give you impression that they do not like politics. He continues:

> Thus, it is commonplace to hear people making the following statements: "don't
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> play politics with this issue keep politics out of the matter."He is above politics",
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> "politics has destroyed him". Politics is therefore seen as a bad thing whose
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> stock-in-trade is blackmails, manipulation, double-dealing, violence and
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> assassination (Uju, 2003:1).

The above definition which sees politics as connoting violence, manipulation, strife for personal aggrandizement while portraying it as public interest will guide the trend of thought in this paper.

Violence

Like politics the word "violence" also defies any precise, commonly, accepted definition. The concept often serves as a catch all for every

variety of protest, militancy, coercion, destruction, or muscle flexing which a given observer happens to fear or condemn (Tilly, 1974). The frequent conceptualization of force and violence tend to confuse the distinction between "legality" "legitimacy" and specific acts. Often, force is taken to mean legal and legitimate use of violence by a government for the protection of the state, while violence is interpreted as illegal and illegitimate acts carried out by a non-governmental individuals and groups. Violence carries an overtone of "violating" that is illegitimate use of force. The state, according to Max Weber, has the exclusive source of right to use violence- all other individuals or associations may use it only to the degree permitted by the authorities (Anifowose, 2006). According to Galtung (1969), violence refers to all institutions, cultural traits and behaviours that limit the development of people's potentials and deny people's aspiration to be in control of their body, their behaviour and their social environment. This definition goes beyond the common use, which is limited to verbal and physical abuse, by including structural (indirect) violence.

However, for the purpose of this paper, violence is defined as the use or threat of physical act carried out by an individual or individual(s) within a geographical enclave against another individual or individuals or property, with the intent to cause injury or death to person(s) and/or damage or destruction to property, and whose objective, choice of targets or victims, and effects have political significance, that is to change the existing power structure to the advantage of the perpetrator/mastermind of such violence.

Culture

The word "culture" has a Latin origin – cultura, the verb being colo colere, connoting "tending" or cultivation" (Alisjahbana, 1966). Culture is often described as the total way of life of a people (Edo, 2005). Tylor (1871) is credited as the first scholar to relate the idea of culture to cultivation and progress (Simpson, 2009). Samovar and Porter (1994) defined culture as the deposit of knowledge, experience, beliefs, values, attitudes, meanings, hierarchies, religion, notions of time, roles, spatial relations, concepts of the universe and material objects and possessions acquired by a group of people in the course of generations through individual and group striving. Thus, culture is defined as that complex whole which includes, knowledge, belief, arts, morals, laws custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of a society. It refers to "information capable of affecting individuals' behaviour that they acquire from other members of their species through teaching, imitation, and other forms of social transmission" (Richardson and Boyd, 2005,). The view of Sperber & Hirschfield (2004) and Kevin (2009) on culture are similar as they both emphasize that the information characteristic of culture is of general relevance to group members and that it is represented in people's minds and expressed in their behaviours and interactions. Culture in its broadest sense is cultivated behaviours; that is totality of a person's learned accumulated experience which is socially transmitted, or more briefly behaviour through social leaning. It also consist of patterns, explicit and implicit, of and for behaviour acquired and transmitted by symbols, constituting the distinctive achievement of human groups, including their embodiments, in artifacts. The essential core of culture consists of traditional ideas and especially

their attached values. Culture system may, on the one hand, be considered as products of action, as conditioning influences upon further action (Hofsted, 1997). Onyekpeze, (2003) listed the following: tradition, dress, music, dance, religion, festivals, greetings, marriage as some of the elements of culture. Samovar and Porter (1994) in another dimension listed the characteristics of culture as follows: it is not innate, but learned; it is transmissible through symbols (language); it is dynamic for it is ongoing and subject to fluctuation; it is selective for it represents a limited choice of behaviour from the infinite patterns of human experience and it is ethnocentric for it allows people to put their own culture and society in a central position of priority and worth. However, the aspect of culture that is relevant to this paper is the masquerade performance culture in Ebiraland.

Masquerade is an aspect of culture which denotes disguise and impersonation through the mask (Ododo, 2006). Ogunyemi, (1997:95) perceives masquerade as "an entity that embodies the spirit of the ancestor as departed spirit of their forebear". Similarly Okoye, (1999:74) sees masquerades as incarnated ancestors who have been reverently dispatched to the general conflation of the ancestral spirit world and manifest as guests to their living communities within which they must be treated with regulated awe, respect and other reverent attitude. Thus, "the ancestors were the all important link between the material and the spiritual worlds, while serving as the source for obtaining other worldly knowledge". Having conceptualized the various concepts, it is necessary to situate the work within a theoretical context.

Theoretical Explanations and Nexus

This study adopts elite theory. The theory is based on the idea that every society consists of two broad categories. The selected few, who are capable and therefore, have the right to supreme leadership, and the vast masses of people who are destined to be ruled, the elite not need be a cohesive group. Vilfredo Pareto (1848-1923); Gaetano Mosca (1858-1941); Roberto Michel (1876-1936) and Ortega Gasset (1883-1955) are the exponents of this theory (Varma, 1999; Mba, 2006). It is necessary to state that, what motivates the elite group to play active role in politics is nothing but power. This underscores the fact that, politics is a game of power. Since the interests of elite may not coalesce, those who gain control of power over the state among them must necessarily suppressed and control their central and local rivals or form collaborative alliance with these other elites. Suppression of rival elites would involve making them politically irrelevant and this at times is done through the instrument of violence. In fact, competition among elites for political power, either at local, state or national level do results into conflict and violence among them and their supporters. Thus, this theory will provide the basis for understanding politics and violence in Ebiraland. It will shed light on how jostling for political power within the available space by the elites determines the nature and means of violence in Ebiraland.

At this juncture it is necessary to reiterate that violence is often associated with the exercise of political power at all levels of political interaction. Thus, Smiths cited in (Anifowose, 2006:1-2) notes:

> Violence has always been part of the political process…. Protest activities of one

form or another, efforts to dramatize grievances in a fashion that will attract

attention and ultimately the destruction or threaten destruction of life and property

appear as expressions of political grievances even in stable, consensual societies… the

ultima ratio of political action is force. Political activity below the threshold of force

is normally carried on with the knowledge that an issue may be escalated into overt

violence if a party feels sufficiently aggrieved.

In the same vein, Tilly, (1969:4) remarks that: "collective violence has flowed regularly from the political process…Men seeking to seize, hold, or realign the levers of power have continually engaged in collective violence as part of their struggle". Nigeria political system exemplifies this character from independence till date. For instance summing up his judgment on the treasonable felony preferred on Chief Awolowo and others, justice Sowemimo noted the increasing tendency on the part of politicians to employ violent means in Nigerian politics:

On the evidence before me, it would appear that politics generally in Nigeria has

been conducted with a certain amount of bitterness. It appears that a person belonging

to a party becomes the enemy of another who belong to a rival party. Political parties

are equivalent… to, warring camps- elections are conducted with party thugs protecting

the campaigners and this state of affairs has been described to have assumed a pitch

that no method would be spared, however, vindictive or extreme by any rival political

party as against another in order to score over one or the other, (Jakande, 1971:8).

The question to ask at this juncture is why is political power so important that people would have to incite violence as a means to pave way for their electoral victory or to express loss of power? The reason is not far-fetched. Political power brings with it many opportunities for attaining wealth especially in African context noted for extreme scarcity and poverty as well as private accumulation. Tangri (1999) noted that to be in key administrative and political position is to have access to the major means of acquiring coveted material resources. Thus, through the state, top office holders controlled an extensive array of resources and could influence their distribution and accumulation often with the eye to political advantage as well as personal gain.

Having seen the relationship between politics and violence, it is necessary to probe into the relationship between culture and violence. To start with, it is necessary to note that the nexus between culture and violence is an aspect of phenomenon heretofore neglected but is of growing interest and importance (Rupesinghe and Rubio, 1994). Reiterating the nexus between culture and violence, Bond (2006) noted that;

> We are taught to love; we are taught to hate. We build, we destroy. We give life, we kill. These human activities are the consequences of culture, our birth culture and the individual translation of that and carry into our future, further socializing those who associate with us.

According to Bond (2006) therefore, culture is profoundly implicated in man's action, and is responsible for legitimizing

violence in the society. In the same vein, Giorgi (2001) asserts that what ultimately defines specific human behaviour is the specific culture to which it is exposed. Thus, culture provides the plausibly structures for the supports of collective violence in human society (Berger and Lukman, 1967). Culture is inextricable from violence as it shapes perceptions, attitudes, behaviours and outcomes. (However, the aspect of culture that is relevant to this study is the masquerade performance culture in Ebiraland.) Agreed that culture and politics has violent undertone but the fact still remains that, the elite are the one behind almost all conflicts and violence. Thus, it has been observed that, all conflicts, no matter what, are started by people of flesh and blood; ordinary people who have worked their way up to the level of the social, political and military elite of their country or region (Soeters, 2005). Suffice to say that, in spite of the chaotic nature of violence, it has seemingly remained a veritable tool of power acquisition and retention among political elite. It is such that has been a continued experience since the 1950s when political elite utilized violence to secure and retain power (Omobowale, 2011; Omobowale and Olutayo, 2007; Tignor, 1993; Post and Jenkins, 1973). The situation in Ebiraland is not different. At this juncture, it will be pertinent to take a prognosis of masquerade culture in Ebiraland.

Masquerade Culture in Ebiraland

The Ebira is a homogenous group, marked out by a fairly distinct language, a similar culture and common origin traceable to Yemen in the Middle East (Salami, 2002, Sani, 1997, Enesi, 1996, Tenuche, 2002, Osaghae, 2002; Tenuche, 2009). They constitute the people of Okene, Okehi, Adavi and Ajaokuta local government areas of Kogi State with a total population of 721,932 people (The National Population Commission, 2006). Ebiraland is a hilly inland area stretching roughly for twenty three kilometers west of the Niger at Ajaokuta and thirty two kilometers south – West of the Niger – Benne confluence. Edo (2008) observed that the area which is about eighty square kilometers with exception of natural barriers like forest reserves has been occupied and what started as tiny villages have joined together as near towns, gradually and progressively expanding thereby presenting an aerial view of one huge settlement with intervening barriers. According to Audu, (2010), the latent and manifest meaning of Ebira is good behaviour. They may also be referred to as Ebira Okene, using the name of the most popular town of the land Okene. Thus, Okene, (2000) notes that, other Ebira groups are Ebira Igu in Kogi and Koto Karfi local government areas of Kogi state; Ebira Toto and Umaisha of Nassarawa (Toto) local government areas of Nassarawa State; Ebira Mozum of Bassa Local Government Area, Kogi State; and Ebira Etuno of Igarra District of Ako-Edo Local Government Area, Edo State. Other Ebira are to be found in Abaji in the Federal Capital Territory and Agatu in Benue State (Ajayi, 1997). However, Ebira Tao is the focus of this study.

Before British colonization, the Ebira had developed a system of traditional administration. A clan chief who was usually the eldest male in the clan headed each clan in Ebira Tao land. Aside the clan chiefs, Warlords and spiritual leaders were held in high esteem. Each clan was autonomous, and none was subordinate to the other (Ibrahim, 2000). Looking at the echelon of authority in Ebiraland above, the clan chiefs, the spiritual leaders and the warlords, the people of Ebiraland believe very strongly in a superior being, the ancestor of the Ebira people whose spirit is represented on earth by the "Eku" masquerade (Tenuche, 2002). At *Eika*, there exists the Ebira ancestral temple (Iregba) from where spiritual contact was maintained with the Ebira Tao ancestor. This temple according to Ibrahim (2000) was the highest place of authority where laws and vital decisions concerning the entire land were taken. The temple was also the medium for the masquerades to rise. Lineage temples which cover the affairs of a group of clans with one immediate ancestor also exist to disseminate laws emanating from the ancestral temple and settle matters that may arise within such groups. The masquerades were therefore a major instrument of social control in Ebira land as they meted out punishment to offenders (Temple: 1965; Ibrahim 2002).

There are different mythical versions regarding the origin of masked cultural performance in Ebiraland, however various version agreed that masquerade performance in Ebiraland is as old as when Ebira settlements were founded and that masquerades in Ebiraland symbolizes the reincarnation of the ancestral spirits (Adinoyi-Ojo, 1996, Ododo, 2001:3

& Sani 1993). A Common characteristics of the masked festival in Ebiraland, is the exclusion of the female gender. As noted by Nzekwe, (1981:132):

> Masquerading and its secret are the prerogatives of the men-and initiates at that. Women have been excluded from sharing in the secrets for they are weak and fickle and are therefore not fit to take part in them. They are also mysterious and sometimes unclean. They cannot therefore approach these ancestral manifestations, whose character is diametrically opposed to their own. Any meeting between them would have adverse effects on both parties. Much harm would come to the women and masquerades would lose something of their virtue. Apart from this fear, there is the desire to avert the wrath of these spirits whose condescension to visit mankind in the form of masquerades is a great honour which must not be abused.

Similarly, Ogunba, (1978:42) documented that:

> Women are not admitted into the secrets of the masking art; indeed, they are often the favourite target of masking and satirical ridicule, the assumption being that they live a more poetical life than menfolk, have secret powers, are more of spirits than human beings, and therefore an object of fear or veneration.

Some of the masquerades in Ebiraland include: the eku ana ki ise which divines and heals; eku-echichi-cane wielding masked entertainers; the highly revered sac-like eku-oba which opens the masking season; the eku-ananyi-eze which dances and thrills; the eku ahere, the farm-based rehearsal mask; the akatapa, the jester which pokes fun at people; and the eku-ahete, which clears and cleanses the way for all other performers (Adinoyi, 1996).

With the passage of time, it became a spectacle and acquired a definite pattern and structure, which graduated into a communal celebration of all Ebira ancestors. In fact, masked performances have become the most important calendrical event in the social life of Ebira people. There are three major festivals specifically dedicated to masked performances every year. They are Ebe in March; Echeane in May or June; Ekuechi in late November or early December. Ebira people believe that eku has the power to cleanse the community of evil forces and impurities; Ebira culture either at school or state-sponsored cultural extravaganza is showcased through eku performance. At other time eku outing may be to commemorate historic events in Ebiraland like the end of a war, electoral success of favourite's sons and daughters of Ebiraland. It is also performed as part of the ritual to bring an end to national disasters like drought, locust invasion, floods, fire etc, (Adinoyi, 1996). It is necessary to state that masquerade festivals in Ebira is often violent ridden.

Politics, Masquerade Festival and Violence in Ebiraland

Sani (1993) notes that, politics is synonymous with the total way of life of Ebira people. This is because all aspects of life of the people are coterminous with politics. In fact, when an average Ebira man talks on any subject matter such a talk is heavily laden with politics. When he drinks he drinks politics. Even the way he eats food is dictated by political considerations. The political activities of the people are fought on clear ideological lines between two distinct and antagonistic groups, the haves and the have-nots, otherwise called the rich and the poor. This

distinction may also be commonly described as one between the ruling class and the subject class. The ruling class is composed of members of the ruling dynasty or the aristocracy, while the subject class is the rural peasants, workers and the toiling masses. This class character was entrenched in the Ebira politics of the early fifties between the then ruling aristocrats and the masses.

Sani (1993) observed that, the Igbira Progressive Union, (IPU) led by the late Atta's proxy Alhaji Umoru Adabara (president of the party), was essentially a conservative with capitalist instincts as quite distinct from its rival the Igbira Tribal Union (ITU) which was a mass oriented party whose ideology was to free the suffering masses from the perceived tyranny of the ruling class.

Tenuche, (2009) argues that violence which characterizes electoral politics in Ebiraland today has its origin in this period (1950s). Then, the struggle for control of the NA between the ITU and NPC/IPU resulted into violence in which both parties engaged the youth to perpetuate violence. The ITU had the "Boma" boys while the NPC/IPU youth groups, were known as the "cow boys". The old divide between the ITU and the NPC was again repeated in the politics of the second republic (1979-1983). A good number of those who were strong opponents of the Attah and the NPC joined the Great Nigeria People Party (GNPP), while the NPC supporters formed alliance with the National Party of Nigeria (NPN).

Indeed, it was in the second republic that another dimension was introduced into party politics in ebiraland with the intense political mobilization of sub-ethnic identities. A seat into the Constituent

Assembly in 1977, was fiercely contested between Adamu Atta (a son of Ibrahima Atta) and Obatemi Usman. Being from Oziogu clan, Obatemi appealed to their sentiments when he lost to Adamu Atta, accusing the Aniku sub-clan of Adavi to which Atta belonged, of occupying most of the public offices in Ebiraland.

Beginning from the second Republic politics in 1979, the zoning of public office (at local, state and federal) along clan line increasingly became entrenched in the body politics of Ebiraland. Meanwhile, the clan head play a decisive role in who is put forward to contest for an office zone to the group. With the passage of time, the position of clan head became politicized. The politicization of clan heads has a negative effect on the entire community as the struggle for such position became fiercely fought, leading to violent and conflict evidence in the conflicts between Upopuveted and Aniku sub-clans of Adavi local government.

Political alignments along clan line made it convenient for politicians to manipulate clan sentiments in furtherance of their narrow ambitions. The consequence is that, inter-clan conflict which was hitherto unknown among the Ebira has become a recurring problem as exemplified in the incessant violent conflict between Okengwe districts (Tenuche, 2009).

The fact that politicians in ebiraland are fingered for perpetrating violence in the area till the present dispensation can be deduced from the arguments of (Sani, 2009; Abdulkarim, 2009 and Olorunmolu, 2008). The prominent role played by the youth in the circles of violence in ebiraland is attributed in part to unemployment.

Tenuche, (2009) observed that youth perpetrators of violence are unemployed and hungry, and out of desperation, constitute themselves

into groups referred to as "Aduvusu" (I'm ready to die) or "Ozomateyisu" (one cannot hide from death). They tend to be more violent under the cover of masquerades. This is in line of argument of Omobowale, (2011) that, the Nigerian polity is replete with a mass of poor majority, with restricted access to basic needs and survival, the political class therefore, has access to a pool of underprivileged human resources, out of which willing individuals may be recruited as "foot soldiers" to cause violence in order to acquire and sustain power.

Another dimension of violence in Ebiraland is the manipulation of masquerade festivals by the elite for political end. Before 1979, the institution of masquerade was under the control of farmers and the rural folks, who arranged festivals when there were no much farming activities. Since masquerades were considered as the representatives of the ancestors' spirits on earth, the emergence of a masquerade was only possible following the death of a powerful clan elder or clan chief. Initially, masquerade institution could only be identified with specific households or individual, who could be held responsible for any violence during festivals. During the colonial era, singers and masquerades could only perform after request for permit, with a guarantor who could be held liable for breach of peace (Tenuche, 2002). The reason for this may not be far-fetched because some of the masquerades appeared violent. Adinoyi, (1996) noted for instance that some of them wield cane to flog, while some drink water others prefer palwine, beer or local or imported liquor. Obviously, eku that drinks beer, local or imported liquor will misbehave. A particular Eku (masquerade) is noted for strapping cutlass around its body to mow down anybody who stood in its way. A

masquerade called eku-echichi at times succeeds in getting past the restrainers in order to beat spectator-participants. Some eku-echichi (masquerade) mostly made up of boys move around the town or village on their own looking for people to beat (Adinoyi, 1996).

Tenuche, (2002) noted however, that things changed as time went by due to a combination of many factors which included the politicization of clan identities, and the democratization process associated with the first Republic that followed. Cultural festivities like masquerade began to tow party lines. Socio-political group like Igbira Tribal Union (ITU) and Northern People Congress (NPC) in the fifties started using masquerade cultural festivals for campaigns, unleashing terror and witch-hunting political opponents. As noted by Tenuche (2009), the strained relationship between the ITU and NPC were exacerbated as each party was determined to get a man of its own appointed chief of Ebiraland, leading to the introduction of thuggery, arson and other forms of violence into the body politics of the land. The masquerade institution became instrument of violence as masquerades were divided along party lines. The traditional belief among the people in the powers of the masquerades as representatives of the ancestors on earth was demystified. Masquerades and singers who hitherto entertained during cultural festivals were now aligned with the different political parties thus turning such festivals into an arena of conflict and violence (Ododo, 2001:3 & Sani 1997).

From 1979 there was an increase in the sense of attachment to clan which invariably led to dividing prominent masquerades along clan lines.

The Achewuru masquerades for instance have the support of the Omoye clan while Okeverse masquerades have the support of the Oziogus clan. Similarly, the rivalry between politicians from Oziogu and other clans reflected in the pattern of support for the two prominent masquerades in the second Republic. Suffice to say that the partisan divide in Ebiraland as reflected in the second Republic between the Unity Party of Nigeria (UPN) and the National Party of Nigeria (NPN) equally provided the platform for division among the masquerades as each political party financed the activities of rival masquerades and also provided political protection for those that perpetrated violence. The idea of protecting masquerades against arrests for violent crimes, led to the creation of masquerades that were not backed by guarantors who could be held responsible for offences of masquerades (Tenuche, 2002). Although there are no statistical records of the number of casualties, however, Adinoyi, (1996) averred that masked rituals have become very promiscuous, rough, and violent and continue to threaten the peace and stability of a once relatively cohesive society. The chains of violent conflicts have impacted negatively on the socioeconomic organization of Ebiraland. The victims of violence are mainly the women and the children; several women turned widows with added responsibilities of children upbringing in addition to industrious women having their wares destroyed when properties and markets are torched by irate youth's groups (Kogi State of Nigeria, 1997). Furthermore, the gory that attend the Ebiraland masquerade festivals have the implication of socializing youths into a culture of violence and other forms of delinquent behaviours. As Adinoyi (1996) further noticed, the control of

masquerade institution by young gangs has led to its use as instrument of unleashing terror and fomenting troubles. The acrimony, thereby, forcing successive governments in both Kwara and Kogi states to enact laws banning the *ehane* festival celebration (Adaba, 2010:1). As Tenuche (2009) noted however, since 1979, none of the celebrations of the annual Ekuechi festival has been devoid of violence. This shows that imposition of ban on the masquerade traditional festivals such as ekuechi, echane, ebe, etc is not the answer to curtail violence that has now found a hiding place in the masquerade cultural festivals in Ebiraland. Such threat and imposition of ban by the government will not yield any positive result. This is because youth violence under the façade of masquerade festival in Ebira land is perpetuated by unemployed youths and manipulation by some powerful community leaders who use such avenue to perpetuate selfish political aggrandizement.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Communal violence and its devastating consequences have snowballed into a worrisome dimension since the beginning of Nigeria's fourth republic. It has a frightening dimension with terrific frequency often involving the use of cocaine, gun running and other dangerous and sophisticated weapons which has led to loss of lives and property, social tension, disruption of family and communal life and general atmosphere of mistrust. This gruesome act has been characteristic of Ebira Masquerade festival, a culture which was once an institution of social control among the Ebira people.

This study reveals that the struggle for political powers provides an arena of elite exploration and manipulation of culture such as masquerades festival and clannish sentiment to unleash violence in the society for political gain. This study argues that the imposition of ban on the masquerades festival in Ebira land will not yield any meaningful results on less the high rate of unemployment among the able-bodied and hungry young men who are the controller of the cultural festival and who are often exploited for political gains are addressed. It is therefore recommended in this study that privileges associated with political office be drastically reduced to make it less attractive. Government should embark on aggressive drive of job creation for the youths. In addition, through socialization process, the culture of antiviolence, avoidance and self-restraint be inculcated in Ebira people. Parents should inculcate in their children nonviolent thinking through child training. Children should be taught the right way to live through love and patience.

Parents should set good examples for their children through their own behavior. There is need to socialize children from childhood to restrain expression of anger. The idea of requesting masquerades and singers to apply for permit before outing, with a guarantor who could be held liable in case of violence should be re-introduced. Armed policemen should always be on ground whenever there is festival celebration in Ebiraland to arrest whosoever may want to foment trouble. There should be community enlightment campaign through which the various clans in Ebiraland, will be orientated to emphasize things that unite them rather than things that divide them. Singers whose songs have tendency to incite one clan against another should be ban. Inter-clan committee

should be set up to promote unity among the various clans. There is need for cultural regulatory device to govern the conduct of masquerade performance in Ebiraland. In short, culture of peace and conflict prevention should be evolved.

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