

Farmer-Herder Clashes and the Choreographic Motif of the ‘Emblem of Peace’ Dance Performance

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Abstract

The consistent feud between the herdsmen and farmers clashes in Nigeria has devastating effects on the Nigerian citizens. The wanton destruction of lives and properties, hunger and starvation that are orchestrated by this menace is worrisome and a major concern for academics. Stake holders and policy makers have intervened through different measures to ameliorate these crises to no avail. These crises to the best knowledge of this researcher have led to citizen’s agitation and unrest in many parts of the country. Therefore, there is a need for consistent effort by stake holders, policy makers, theatre institutions and administrators to do more and sit on a round table for continued dialogue in order to address the issue of farmer-herder clashes in Nigeria. In view of the foregoing, this study beams its searchlight on the menace of farmer-herder conflicts in the structuring of dance production which was titled: “The Emblem of peace”. The choreographic motif of the dance appeals for peace to reign between the herdsmen and the farmers’ in Nigeria. The research adopts theory of eukinetics which deals with the art of designing dance sequences in analyzing Godwin Onuche’s dance Production. The comments from the viva-voce of the production reveals that, the dance package was well understood; it offers a unique and powerful form of human expression through body movement and allows one to speak in language that is visceral. This study recommends and concludes that, The Emblem of Peace” like other forms of art, provides a space in which one can experience new possibilities and consciousness that are anchored on peace and tranquility within the ambience of dance choreography in Nigeria.

Key Words: Farmer-herder Clashes, Choreography, Dance, Peace, Performance

Introduction

It is important to note that choreographic structure of a given dance piece is dependent on the initiative of the dance composer and his efforts in arranging the dance from the beginning to the end. Dance like other forms of art (*Drama*) have its own characteristics and choreographic structure if it must communicate meaning. This underscores Rudolph Kansese’s assertion that, “Every Choreographer, dance institution or company is endowed with the choreographic skills to structure dances to achieve their specific forms” (116). Often times, the creative processes and skills of dance choreography are taken for granted. This is part of the reasons why some dances

apart from their entertainment values have little or nothing to contribute to the body of knowledge and society. It is expedient therefore for dance practitioners to focus more attention on the idea, thematic preoccupation vis-a-vis choreographic skills and nuances in dance piece in order to communicate meaning based on the intent of the choreographer. Choreographers ought not to trivialize the creative instinct and impulses that birth to a dance piece. In view of the above, dance practitioners and Choreographers in the Prince Abubakar Audu University are making impacts in structuring dances that will project distinctive dance forms according to individual choreographic ingenuity that will communicate meaning towards addressing prevailing societal issues. Drawing examples from the authors' experimental work in "*The Emblem of Peace*" the paper discusses dance theatre as a shared phenomenal experience, whose sense of immediacy, social content, dynamism and spontaneity can impact positively on national peace and stability. It is imperative therefore to define the *Emblem of Peace* dance production largely as a "*Dance Drama*" symbolizing instrument of peace which employs a lot of abstracts and representational movements to convey its messages. For instance, writing on dance as a creative process for national development, Austin Ovigie Asagba asserts that, "dance scholars and researchers should return to that golden era and trend where dance are practiced as a committed art form, ever refreshing and dynamic" (25-26).

Extrapolating from the above, Onuche's choreographed dance titled: "*The Emblem of Peace*", was a dance piece that discusses contemporary dance as a collaborative and intellectual organic process and activity that is focused on peace and unity in Nigeria. The dance piece was a creative work that has ample entertainment values to sustain audience. The creative piece was set out primarily to interrogate the prevailing farmer-herder conflicts in Nigeria and calls for peaceful coexistence using dance performance as praxis. The production also puts into cognizance some of the creative processes vis-a-vis nuances that involves the conceptualization of ideas, thematic selection, selection of creative characters and situations, synthesis of actions, dance patterns, movements composition, integration of relevant music, songs and the adoption of technical details of production to convey its messages. The process of the dance piece conforms to the Aristotelian dramatic structure that says artistic work must have the beginning, middle and the end if it must communicate meaning. For the purpose of this paper, dance is conceived as a rhythmical body

movement in time and space to communicate social and cultural experiences, occupational attitudes and cultural practices embedded in the culture of a people towards national development.

On the other hand, there is a dire need for the promotion of agriculture (*farming*) as an occupation that will serve as an alternative to oil as a major source of national revenue in Nigeria. A lot of agricultural programs are put in place by government and nongovernmental organizations in order to reduce pressure of over dependent on oil. Due to much emphasis on agricultural production, many people are going into farming, livestock business and cattle breeding in particular. The effect of the agricultural surge is that there is a competition for the available land resources between farmers and herdsmen. This is what often informed a dimensional problem and crises between farmers and herdsmen. The herdsmen's cattle do graze on the farms of farmers, this action normally leads to rancor and in retaliation, there will be a reprisal attacks on the cows of the herdsmen. The herdsmen's attack on farmers often leads to destruction of lives and properties. This is what this choreographer bears in mind as part of his choreographic motif that has informed the dance package titled: "*The Emblem of Peace*".

Theoretical Framework

This study leans on the Rudolf Laban's theory of *Eukinetics*. The theory was propounded around 1920s when Rudolf Laban started teaching dance courses in Germany. His theory delineates the element of kinetic energy and how these elements are organized in dynamic body actions. Laban *eukinetic* theory goes beyond mere description of natural movement to designate harmonic effort. The theory was also designed as a theoretical system aim at increasing the dancer's control of dynamics and expression of movement (<https://www.britannica.com>). Among courses Laban taught and studied as a dance teacher were; the study of gesture, the relationship between physical action, dynamics, and special patterns; and the observation of movement and its notation. The issues of movement, space, time, and rhythm were at the core discourses and practices of dance particularly those concerning with the notion of rhythm and movement. Laban considered dance and rhythm to be the ideal tool for connecting people and communities to cosmic laws, and for activating the remembrance of ancient or primitive gestures, which were stored in the most archaic layers of our involuntary (*collective or personal*) memory that can aid structuring of dance sequences.

Also, Laban's principle conceived the body as a crossroads of many different kinds of rhythms that are related to the universe, which in itself was also seen as a network of invisible forces. By implication, dance was considered as an instrument for experiencing the world and for displaying the unity of all organic matter as an expression of harmony. Rather than been an emotional language, Laban considered dance to be a language of action, in which the various intentions and bodily mental efforts of man are arranged into coherent order. Laban built his theory of dance by highlighting hiding energies through ecstatic improvisation, as well as by analyzing different parameters of bodily movement by way of a research that will last for several decades.

Extrapolating from the above, it is quite obvious that *The Emblem of Peace Dance* was packaged bearing in mind the sequences of the rhythm, music and songs as an instruments for experiencing the world vis-a-vis the menace of farmers and herders conflicts in North central geopolitical zone of Nigeria. The dance package was arranged and used to displaying the unity needed among the farmers and herdsmen in its practical terms. The production dwells on improvisational body movement as a language of action as well as an expression of harmonious co-existence among the farmers and herders in Nigeria.

Overview on Performance

It is quite obvious that performance is derived from the word perform and to perform means to do something such as piece of work, task or duty. In artistic parlance, it is to do something before an audience. It is imperative to note that in the theatre, art forms such as dance, music, drama, mime, and pantomime are usually performed before an audience. This form of performances only attains its fulfillment when performed. In the process of performance, the singer's beauty of voice, his or her sobs, facial expression, vocal expressiveness and movements, gestures, and exhilarating tune of music are often noticed during the actual performances. As advocated by Ruth Finnegan, "Performance Studies Scholars and Choreographers ought to adhere strictly to the nature of these performances especially as it relates to the voice, facial expression, vocal expressiveness, instrumentations, movements and gestures" (5).

Deducing from the above, *The Emblem of Peace* was a dance that was performed with stylized movement, innovative poetry and songs to attract attention of the audience. According to Richard Schechner, Performance studies Scholars see social reality as being constructed by "Doing". If social reality should be constructed by "Doings" then, the need to do it well in order

to communicate meaning becomes sacrosanct. *The Emblem of Peace* Performance was constructed by “doing” because most cultures are shaped (*doings or actions*) that must follow a particular social order. For instance, Shana Komitte avers that;

No aspect of human expressions, religious, artistic, political, physical, or sexual-descends from on high, fixed for eternity. Instead, the various features of a culture’s life are contingents; they are shaped and reshaped in particular social and historical circumstances, in complex and lengthy processes’ (4).

By implication, it means that, a group’s alleged “nature” is a series of performances evident in behaviors which are learned, rehearsed and presented over time. It is evident from this study that, cultural values are most fully expressed through indigenous performances. Indigenous dance practices perform important functions in educating the masses on the prevailing issues such as farmer-herder clashes. Juxtaposing the forces and value of performance in African indigenous culture, Fischer-Lichte opines that, “the same forces are at work in performance as in a culture at large: performance thus becomes a sort of laboratory for studying cultural and social forces”(1-10). Also, Schechner outlines seven functions of performance thus: to entertain, to make something that is beautiful, to mark or change identity, to foster community, to heal, to teach, persuade, or convince, to deal with the sacred or demonic” (19). Deduced from the foregoing, the choreographic motif of the *Emblem of Peace* dance performance possesses entertainment qualities, the dance represents a mark of identity between the Nigerian Farmers and herdsmen conflicts. The performance also possesses the quality of healing people (*audience*) who are emotionally depressed. It teaches and ultimately persuades people towards their common goals and the need for a harmonious coexistence amongst the farmers and herdsmen in Nigeria.

The Choreographic Sequence of Emblem of Peace

Movement One (*Light on the Drummers and Dancers*)

The first choreographic movement introduces the song which was composed as a signature tone of the Choreographer. This was to create awareness with the dexterity of musical instruments with all the important personalities and stake holders who spared time to be part of the production. The performance started with the song “*Basiki*” *Don Come ooo oyoyo, oyoyo*”...(2x). At first, the drummers and dancers continued with the music and songs before the coming of the farmers on stage. The lyrics of the opening songs read:

“Basiki” don come ooo ooo oyoyo, oyoyooo (2x). “Basik” has come and is here
 “Basiki” che babawa Basiki is our Father
 “Menegbe” che babawa: Menegbe is our Father
 “Onogu” che babawa Onogu is our father
 Egwemi che babawa: Egwemi is our Father
 Pararara, pararara, pararararaa rarara... followed by exhilarating instrumentations.

The above song was composed and used as an opening glee for the performance. The songs acknowledged theatre arts practitioners and administrators and other members of the audience that were present at the arts theatre for the Performance. This was quickly followed by a farmer’s dance with a song in Yoruba language titled (*Agbe ni mase oo, 2x*). Dancers appeared on stage with holes and cutlasses. At the first scene, they dropped their holes to clear the grasses. The farmers often relaxed for a while to drink gruel while their women dramatically dance to pack the weeded grasses. The men later appeared on stage and cultivated the farm and planted maize and corn. In the midst of all these, there was exhilarating music and songs and the spectators watched with keen interest.

Movement Two

Shortly after the farmers left the farm, a herdsman came with his cows to the farm and fed on the planted crops. The information got to the farmer (owners of the farm) and on reaching the farm; there was a misunderstanding that led to a reprisal attack between the farmers and the herders. At this point, there was a pandemonium which led to a war song by the farmers (*dancers*). The song was sung in *Igala* language. The lyrics of the song read thus: *Awuyaa, Anumaroko kalo (2x)* this implies there is a problem; let us pursue them to the bush. In the process of this war song, there was a fight that led to the killing of hundreds of their cows. It was at this points that a group of dancers dressed in white garments appeared slowly on stage advocating for peace through their songs which was titled: *let there be peace*. The lyrics of the song read thus:

Chorus:

We call for peace in our land
Let there be peace in our land
The fighting should stop
The killing should stop

Soloist: (in Yoruba)

Kalafiyajoba ni nu Nigeria (2x)
Koliredewa ko ma se daru oo
Koro ajewa ko ma se Baje oo (2x)

Chorus:

The fighting should stop
The Killing should stop
We call for peace in our land
Let there be peace in our land
The fighting should stop
The killing should stop
We call for peace.

Soloist:

Yoruba Igbo we are one
Hausa we are one
Igala we are one
We should live in love
Let love lead we call for peace (2x).

Soloist: Nigeria! Great People, Great Nation.

Chorus: in (Yoruba)

Nigeria iti gbogbo wani
Koma gbodo baje, tori kosibi omiron ti alelo,
Ajo ole dabi ilee,
Eje ka sowopo ka fimose kan
Gbee kemi gbe

Nigeria is for all of us
It will never spoil
No place like home
Let us join hands and build this nation

The above lyrics of the songs serve as part of the core thematic preoccupations of the dance package. No doubt, the conflict between the herdsmen from the northern Nigeria and farmers in the central and southern zones have escalated in recent years and are spreading southward threatening the country's security, stability and peace. According to Muhammed Yusuf Danladi,

Timeline of Fulani herdsmen in Nigeria as recorded by Gbaradi 2018 showed that Fulani herdsmen killed 3,780 Nigerians in attacks across the country excluding the injured and abducted. On the other hand, farmers have killed scores of cows and

Fulani herdsmen in reprisal attacks for the destruction of farms and farm produce by cows (281).

Danladi Stresses further that, “in 2018, herdsmen invaded 2 villages in *Agatu* L.G.A in Benue State killing 8 villagers allegedly in retaliation for the killing of 112 cows” (281). The implication of these crises may cause food insecurity in Nigeria. This menace further underscores the choreographic motif of *Emblem of Peace* dance Performance.

Causes of Farmers and Herdsmen Conflicts in Nigeria

Nigeria has witnessed and still witnessing avalanche of conflicts among several ethnic and religious communities across the states of the federation. Many scholars have adduced reason (s) for the menace of farmer-herders conflict in Nigeria. It is noteworthy that, since the advent of democratic dispensation in 1999, farmers and herders have coexisted in the past in Nigeria, living in mutual understanding, trading their respective products with each other for economic gain in Nigeria. However, the socioeconomic survival has over time resulted in a state of intolerance displayed by the level of damages caused by the ensuing conflicts over land and land resources in Nigeria.

There has been an increase in farmers and herdsmen clashes in Nigeria. The majority of these conflicts are orchestrated mostly within the Northern region of Nigeria. For instance, Muhammed Mustapher avers that, “farmers-herders conflict has reduced the quality of the social relationship between both the farmers and herdsmen, and resulted in the loss of human life, houses and properties worth billions of naira in the north central geopolitical zone” (17). Mustapher posits further that, “the destruction of farmlands by cattle is one of the major causes of the farmers-herdsmen crises in the north-central zone of Nigeria”. In many of these conflicts, lives and properties have been lost, farm products destroyed, people displaced and governments at various levels (*local, state, and federal*) have spent so much money on setting up either committees for resolutions or settlement camps for the displaced persons.

Similarly, studies have also reveals that struggles over the control of economically viable lands causes more alarm and security hazards as well as violent conflicts among communities. Social and economic factor is parts of what is causing conflicts among farmers and herdsmen. The intensity variations of the conflicts largely depend on the nature and type of the user groups where the pastoralist grazes. For instance, Olayinka Akanle, Gbenga S. Adejare, Adedeji O. Adewusi and Qudus O.Yusuf posit that, “the major cause of the continuous conflicts between herdsmen and

farmers in Nigeria lies in the quest for protection and preservation of secured economic sources of livelihood” (84). They stress further that, just as the herdsmen continue to move from one place to another in search of pasture for their cattle, so also farmers continue to make effort to secure their farmland which is their major source of livelihood. Amongst other factors that causes conflicts between farmers and herders are: climate change, population growth, breakdown in cultural practices and dysfunctional legal system.

Also, Cecy Edijala Balogun declares that, “farmers and herders’ conflict in Nigeria is exacerbated by climate change, disputes over land resources for farming and grazing, blocking of stock routes and cattle rustling” (41). He further avers that, “social capital can be used to manage farmers and herders conflict in Nigeria. His study highlights the need to harness the inherent social capital within conflicting communities as avenues to managing farmers and herders’ conflict in Nigeria”. Balogun also admits that, social networks in conflicting communities could anticipate and dissipate conflict, given that most of the traditional conflict management approaches that are been used are flawed, hence, the persistence of the problem to escalating dimension. It is therefore imperative at this juncture to use dance choreography as another measure and effort in speaking to the minds of people (*Farmers and herders*) to have a rethink and shield their swords. Dance Choreography has the efficacy to communicate in peaceful language through music and songs. It speaks in language that is visceral towards mitigating crises among farmers and herders in Nigeria. By so doing, they will be conscious to build mutual understanding for one another.

The Choreographer and His Creative Muse in the face of Crises

The responsibilities of a choreographer as an artiste are enormous within a socio-political system. One among his numerous duties according to Kunle Abogunloko is to “gauge the society’s temperature and ensure it is constantly regulated” (140). This implies that, the peak sales period for the artiste to effectively ply his trade is the period of crises when everyone seems to be confused and the only antidote perhaps may be artiste(s) with objective(s) and proactive approach to his creative constructs. Therefore, this period of crises is a time for choreographers to ply his trade in dance composition as a creative process that can help in mitigating crises in Nigeria. This is parts of the creative instincts of the choreographer in composing the *Emblem of Peace*. Writing on dance as a creative process for national development in Nigeria, Asagba asserts that,

In the practice of creative industries in Nigeria, a missing gap at discourses is the failure to investigate and focus on issues of the creative process in dance, drama, and theatre. At best, it is taken for granted that a dance piece metamorphosed from a conceptualized idea before blossoming into full-fledged dramatic and theatrical work (24).

The implication of the above assertion is the failure of scholars and theatre arts practitioners to investigate and focus on issues of creative process in dance and drama. One often ignores and trivializes the creative instinct and impulse that gave birth to the finished work. This to the best knowledge of this researcher will not pave way to the creative ingenuity of choreographers in Nigeria. For instance, drawing example from author's experimental work, the crises between the Farmers and herders was x-rayed through the creative muse and instinct of the choreographer. This is because no one creates in a vacuum. The mysteries, vicissitudes and vagaries of everyday life provides artistic ingredients for the creative artiste to make statements on man, including his actions and decisions. It is therefore time for choreographers to treat dance as a committed art form ever refreshing and dynamic towards contributing to national issues. When this is done, dance with all its cultural potentials can be explored as a creative piece that can contribute to peace and national development in Nigeria.

Conclusion

Dating back to history and ancient civilizations, dance has always been used in various ways. Today, we are in a war of different kind and dance and music are gradually becoming a common way to bringing people together. From the foregoing, it is established that conflict is inevitable in human existence. It often leads to havoc, loss of lives and properties, it is hoped that this study will raise the consciousness of everyone to be proactive at maintaining peace and tranquility especially among the farmers and herders in Nigeria. Dance as a creative endeavor has been able to play its part in addressing and advocating for peace in order to mitigate the menace of farmers and herders in Nigeria. This was captured in a production which was titled *Emblem of Peace* in Prince Abubakar Audu University Arts Theatre on the 13th- 14th of October, 2021. The destruction of farmland by cattle is one of the major causes of the farmers and herders conflict in Nigeria. Every individual does witness or encounter conflict either in one way or the other but the major issue is finding a possible outcome in which such a particular conflict should be resolved.

Drawing from the above, the conflict between farmers and herders especially in north geopolitical zone of Nigeria is worrisome and needs urgent and proactive measures in addressing the situation. Theatre arts practitioners, arts managers and choreographers should try their best possible to use their creative platforms to constantly proffer possible ways in mitigating these crises. Effort has so far been made in this study through dance choreography in speaking in language that is visceral through rhythmic body movement, songs and music as encapsulated in *The Emblem of Peace* dance performance

. Recommendations

This study recommends that, dance choreography ought to be sequentially structured in order to address societal issues. Dance should also be treated as a committed and dynamic art form towards conflict resolution. Government should not be the only body that will play roles in conflict resolution in Nigeria. It is the duty of every Nigerian, scholars and institutions to contribute in one way or the other at resolving Farmers and Herder's conflict in Nigeria. There is need for tolerance among both parties as this may give room for peaceful negotiation and proper settlement between the warring parties. Above all, government ought to put measures in place to deal with whosoever engage or cause unnecessary violence between farmers and herders in Nigeria.

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