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A STUDY OF *FLEKZTIVAL* THEATRE PERFORMANCE OF EKAKPAMRE PEOPLE IN SOUTHERN NIGERIA

ABSTRACT

In recent times, the sacred components of traditional African festivals have been watered down, and it becomes difficult to decipher the significance of these festivals, from mere entertainments. Consequently, this study argues that ritual festivals in Nigerian, have-to a great extent, lost the ritual potency for which they originated. It is explored the transition from festival theatre, to flekztival theatre performance, using Emuodje flekztival of Ekakpamre people of Southern Nigeria, as a paradigm. Periodic festival celebrations in African societies may be categorized into festival theatre, quasi-festival theatre and flekztival theatre. Moreover, flekztivals are products and constructs of modernity, civilization and globalization. Although Emuodje festival had lost its sacred gaze, there is still a lot in it to facilitate a full discourse in traditional African festival.

KEYWORDS: Traditional festival, Flekztival
theatre performance, Emuodje, Ekakpamre

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Introduction

There are metaphysical forces that control the affairs of the living as well as dictate and determine the existence of man. Covenants and oaths, form the nucleus for the continuous relationship of goodwill between these supernatural forces and the living. The regeneration, rejuvenation and renewal of these oaths and covenants between the living and the supernatural beings, is manifested with the medium of festivals. Festivals therefore, act as a bridge-a nexus between gods and the living. Festival is a medium through which the historical is made known, regenerated and rejuvenated.

African societies are delineated with their cultural practices. These cultural practices encompass their mode of dressing, their language with which communication is effected, the kind of food they eat, the system of governance, among others. Beyond the socio-cultural, political and the economic gamut, is the spiritual plane. The spiritual facet does not only control all other planes, it is also manifested in festivals. Festival has the cultural constituents of a people, manifested in it, hence, festival is found in culture as much as culture is found in festivals. The implication of the above assertion is that festival is predicated on the culture of a people. Most festivals in African societies are rich in ritual

aesthetics. Thus, Musa Rasheed in *The theatre of healing: "Ehoro Iba" Masquerade festival of Agbeyeland as a Paradigm* submits that «these ritual festivals are based on the remembrance of some heroes, their deeds and events of immense significance».¹

The ritualization, deification and mystification of the heroic figures being remembered and celebrated, forms the authenticity of traditional African festivals. The originality of traditional African festival, is not far-fetched from the fact that, it is an event created for the communion and reunion between the living and their ancestors and also, it is a periodic occasion, for the meeting of gods and mortals. In fact, rituals nay, the sacred, form the nucleus of traditional African festivals. However, in recent times, the sacred constituents of these festivals have been watered down, and it becomes difficult to decipher the core of the festival from mere entertainment. The secular components in recent times, have become pivotal in traditional African festivals. Consequently, this study, argues that ritual festivals in Nigerian, have to a large extent, lost the ritual potency for which they originated. I further explore transition from festival theatre performance, to *flekztival* theatre, using Emuodje flekztival of Ekakpamre people in Southern Nigeria, as a paradigm.

A Retrospect on Festival Theatre in Nigeria

Flekztival is a portmanteau word for *Flekz* and *Tival* (culled from festival). *Flekz* is a slang in Nigeria and some parts in Africa, and it means enjoy, have fun, amusement or delight in. Our concept of *flekztival* is the secularisation of traditional African festivals. In recent times, the sacred constituents of most festivals in Africa have been watered down, that it is difficult to decipher the core of the festival from mere entertainment value. Festival becomes *flekztival*, when there is a transition, nay, a transformation from its sacred value, to the secular.

The manifestation of festivals is an indicator of the uniquely laden culture inherent in traditional Nigerian and African societies. In Africa, there is hardly a society without one form of festival, or the other. This is exemplified in *Egungun* culture and tradition expressed in *Egungun* festival. Moreso, some major festivals inherent in Nigeria, are *Oyise-Owhe* Festival in Owhe, Isoko land, *Alapata* masquerade festival in Osun state, *Osun-Osogbo*, *Ogun*, *Sango* and *Obatala* festivals in Yoruba land, *Oramfe* festival in Ondo town, *Obalogun* festival in Iloko, and so on. These festivals are a re-enactment of significant occurrences and feats in a particular culture. While «the annual *Egungun* festival is connected with the remembrance of departed ancestors, *Obalogun* festival is celebrated in honour of Obalogun, a great warrior and a deified hero» (Vidal, 234).²

The foregoing portends that festivals are a salutation, a commemoration a documentation and the historication of the past as Rasheed also notes that «ritual festivals are based on the remembrance of some heroes, their deeds and events of immense

¹ R. MUSA, *The theatre of healing: "Ehoro Iba" Masquerade festival of Agbeyeland as a Paradigm*, «The Abuja Communicator: Abuja Journal of Culture and media arts», 11, 2001, pp. 111-122: 112.

² A. VIDAL, *The drum as a ritual symbol in traditional Yoruba religious ceremonies*, in *Essays on Yoruba musicology: History, theory and practice*, a cura di F. Adedeji, Obafemi Awolowo University Press. 2012.

significance».³ In other words, festivals are socio-historical constructs. They are a basic constituent of the culture of a people. Explicitly, they are an expression of the culture of a people. Hence, citing Jas Amankulor, Anigala defines festival as «a periodic or occasional celebration, merry-making or feast day of special significance in the cultural calendar of the celebrants».⁴ Festival is a periodic event. Every festival is periodic. There is a specific time of the year set aside for every festival. It could be on annual basis in the case of *Emuodje* festival, once in three years or once in every five years in the case of *Oyise-Owhe* festival of the Owhe people in Isoko land. Festivals are rooted in the cultural calendar of a people. Every festival involves celebrants, who are usually the people of the community. «The festival may involve one or more activities is an occasion for general merriment or rejoicing. During most festivals, the celebrants usually throw their door open to entertain visitors and neighbours, as a sign of friendship and goodwill».⁵ In the metaphysical plane, the celebrants are the spirit beings. The spirit characters that are being celebrated, join in the celebration, as it is believed that festivals facilitate a communion between the living and the living dead in course of the celebration and merry-making.

Festivals are also celebrated, either to appease, pacify the metaphysical beings or to remember a heroic deed such as that of Sango, Ogun, Osun, Ifa, Yemoja, *Emuodje* and *Ijakadi* festivals respectively. Here in lies the ritualistic facet of traditional African festivals. Noting the point of divergence between the western and African traditional theatre modes, Enekwe notes that while the mainstream European theatre is syllogistic in form, Asian and African theatres are ritualistic. Specifically, most traditional African festivals and festival theatres are ritual laden. In fact, ritual forms the nucleus of most festivals. Hence, Omatsola⁶ articulates the presence of ritual in his study of *Umale-Ude* (leg rattle masquerade) masquerade festival. He states that «dance is also a ritual drama and theatre». Indigenous Nigerian festivals are embodiment of rituals, these rituals most times serve as a means of salutation to the spirit beings.

Ritual festivals therefore, make the invisibles, visible. These rituals are expressed artistically. In the display of the ritualistic, the theatrical abound. In fact, drama is located in the rituals performed. Traditional African Festivals are a display of various arts. Rotimi submits that «ritual displays that reveal in their style of presentation, in their purpose, and value, evidences of imitation, enlightenment and or entertainment, can be said to be drama». These arts includes character (acting), mime, masks, costumes, dance, story, music and song and performance arena. These features are characteristic of ritual festivals. For every festival, there is a story. «This story is organized on an episodic basis».⁷

Masquerading in traditional African festivals, serve ritual function. Spirit beings are represented with masks. Masquerades are believed to be the spirits of dead ancestors and late heroes. Masquerades abound in most festivals because, festivals «are organized around

³ Quoted in MUSA, *The theatre of healing* cit., p. 79.

⁴ A. ANIGALA, *Traditional African festival drama in performance*, Kraft Publishers, Ibadan 2006, p. 17.

⁵ *Ibidem*.

⁶ D. OMATSOLA, *Towards the Internationalization of Umale-Ude (Leg Rattle Masquerade)*. *Dance Theatre of Itsekiri of Delta State, Nigeria*, «Dance Journal of Nigeria», I, 1, 2014, pp. 368-400.

⁷ Quoted in O. OGUNBA, *Oyin. Traditional festival Drama*, in *Theatre in Africa*, a cura di O. Ogunba e A. Irele, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan 1967, p. 22.

nature forces, deities, divinities, supernatural events, myths and legends».⁸ Masquerading in most cultures in Africa is patriarchal in nature. In some societies, the women folk are not allowed to see the masquerade, while in other societies, only members of the masquerade cult are allowed to see it because of its ritual potency. Hence, «the pretence of the non-initiate members of the audience, especially the female members, not to know the secret of masquerading can be seen as a ritual theatrical convention that allows for aesthetic distance».⁹ Generally speaking, «masquerading is a cult of the ancestors. During the festivals, most masks of the dead fathers are brought out, using theatrical effects as a means of ritual celebration».¹⁰

Song and music arts are used to communicate in traditional African festivals. There is hardly any festival that does not incorporate song and music. In some cultures, new songs are invented every year. The place of music and songs as elements that aid dramatic realization in festivals cannot be overemphasized. Music and songs could be sung in praise of the ancestors and spirit beings. Songs also transport the celebrants into trance. They could be transported into another plane of existence-the metaphysical plane. Another element of ritual festival, is dance. Dance theatre is a ritual component of traditional African festivals. Some of the dances are ritual embedded. Hence, Traore notes that dance «reproduces the passions and actions of men in order to express a collective emotion, to teach a religious rite or simply to entertain. It can also enact a legend or a story».¹¹

One paramount feature of ritual festival is the performance arena. In a traditional African festival theatre setting, the performance area is the market square, the stream, the forest or in front of the palace. The performance arena is a flexible one. In festivals with sacred undertones, the forest and streams are mostly utilized. Sacrifices are presented by the priests and priestesses to the supernatural beings in the rivers and forests where they reside. In ritual festival, audience participation in the performance is restricted and limited.

From Festival Theatre to Flekztival Theatre

Flekztival theatre performance is one that is devoid of the ritualistic and the sacred. This is a result of demystification and demythologization of the festival process. In a flekztival theatrical performance, the dramatic and theatrical arts of music, dance, impersonation or acting, costuming and masking, properties, performance arena among others, are prone to a transformation. For instance, all through the centuries in Africa, masquerading have undergone a gradual alteration. Nzekwu (133) submits that:

Masquerading has lost most of the religious ideas which brought it into being and sustained it... Unfortunately nowadays masquerading is often scorned and misrepresented by the younger

⁸ ANIGALA, *Traditional African festival drama in performance* cit., p. 17.

⁹ O. ENKWE, cited in P. OGUNDEJI, *Ritual as theatre, theatre as ritual: The Nigerian example*, «Isese monograph series», II, 1, 2000, p. 8.

¹⁰ Ivi, pp. 4-5.

¹¹ B. TRAORE, *The black African theatre and its social functions*, Ibadan University Press, Ibadan 1972, p. 2.

generation who decry it as a mere fraud, a device of the man desiring to terrify and dominate his womenfolk.¹²

This implies that flekztival theatre is entertainment (and sometimes, information and education) situated. In this instance, the society, and not only the chief priest, determines the plot and direction of the flekztival as Anigala copiously avers that «traditional festival dramas are products of their society. It is only to be expected therefore that the style of presentation should be determined by the society whose experiences it enacts».¹³ Flekztival theatre therefore, is as a result of innovation, globalization, cultural convergence and advancement, to satisfy the taste of man in a postmodern society. In a Ph.D thesis on the secularization of Mmanwu festival, Okwudili notes that «in the modern period, the old religious ideas which gave the Igbo Mmanwu its life and sustained its social function, have all but disappeared».¹⁴ Hence, «Mmanwu has acquired a new albeit, a secular image, one that is redefined and have been given another identity. For this reason, the great awe and request attributed to the old Mmanwu's image has been lost».¹⁵ Although many reasons could be attributed to this transformation from festival theatre to flekztival theatre, «the transatlantic trade was more instrumental. Other reasons for this change include the pursuit for material wealth, social polarization of town-states and the coming of alien religion and colonial rule».¹⁶

The outcome of this transition from festival theatre to flekztival theatre, is the de-ritualization of ritualized theatrical elements in festivals. Dance is an integral component in festivals. «Dance in itself can be given an artistic life and within its traditional limits be expected to reach a high level of achievement. While it may involve the repetition of familiar movements and gestures, yet, the rich elaboration of a basic story may evoke a genuine aesthetic experience».¹⁷ With the de-ritualization process, the metaphysical level is not attained while the essence and sacred utility of dance is expunged. Hence, what there is, is the entertainment functionality. In flekztival theatre, «songs function as a link for dramatic transition from one event to the other».¹⁸ The composed songs enhance dramatic characterization, intensify dramatic mood, propel the action, enhance plot narration and encourage audience participation. The songs explain the themes and enhance dramatic action. It also facilitates plot development. Songs also serve as a nexus between the episodes in the dramatic enactment.

In flekztivals, performances take place in the market square or in front of the traditional ruler's palace. Oftentimes, the theatre in the round also known as arena stage is utilized as this facilitates the actors-audience rapport. Hence, a theatre of communion is created. In a constructive appraisal of the above assertion, Anigala posits that the

¹² O. NZEKWU, *Masquerade*, in *Drama and theatre in Nigeria. A critical source book*, ed. O. Yemi, Nigeria Magazine, Lagos 1981, p. 133.

¹³ A. ANIGALA, *Traditional African festival drama in performance*, Kraft Publishers, Ibadan 2006, p. 25.

¹⁴ O. OKWUDILI, *The development of the Igbo masquerade as a dramatic character*, PhD Thesis submitted to the Department of Theatre Arts, North Western University, Evans Illinois, 1981, p. 168.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ *Ivi*, p. 112.

¹⁷ ANIGALA, *Traditional African festival drama in performance cit.*, p. 35.

¹⁸ *Ivi*, p. 84.

performance arena is «where spectators watch the dramatic action as it is performed. The space arena or designated spot of performance is effectively utilized by the actor or performer to convey his message». ¹⁹ Flekztival theatre also facilitates communal cohesion. Indeed, festivals «still continue to constitute important events by which people living in the same geographical orbit are brought together» (Vidal, 227). ²⁰ In other words, flekztival theatre performance creates an enabling environment for socialization.

A Retrospect on Emuodje Festival Theatre of Ekakpamre People

Emuodje festival of Ekakpamre, is a tale of war and victory. Various versions of the origin of *Emuodje* festival abound. This is attributed to the absence of adequate documentation of the festival. However, two theories are held sacrosanct due to their originality and authenticity. In the beginning, there was Irikrakpoamre, the defunct name of Ekakpamre. In a personal interview with Mrs. Joan Shaba (2015), she states that:

Emuodje festival cannot be separated from the soul of Irikrakpoamre. Irikrakpoamre was a woman whom the community was to be named after later. In those days, Uvwi, a warrior who hailed from Antledja, a part of Agbarho, terrorised Irikrakpoamre community. ²¹

In the quest for supremacy, Uvwi terrorized Irikrakpoamre. «Due to the casualties incurred by Irikrakpoamre, the people decided to make a pact with Uvwi by giving a woman to him in marriage». Inter-tribal marriage was a medium through which conflicts were resolved. Irikrakpoamre's beautiful daughter was given to Uvwi, to pacify his quest for blood and wealth. However, the reverse was the case as the giant continued to terrorize the community. Nevertheless, Irikrakpoamre's daughter had a mission. Like the biblical Delilah, her mission was to find the source of Uvwi's strength, and report it to her people to facilitate the killing of Uvwi. After two attempts to persuade him into telling her the secret behind her power, he finally disclosed the source of his strength to her on the third occasion.

Having known his secret, the wife waited for a good opportunity to fulfill the real reason for which she married Uvwi. Some days later, Uvwi went to war and the wife brought out a mortar, the source of Uvwi's strength. After some time, she discovered the mortar moving. She quickly sat on it. The mortar continued to shake vigorously, but she refused to stand up. Suddenly, the movement stopped and news reached Antledja, that their warrior was dead. The wife, who was never suspected, ran to Irikrakpoamre to relay the news of how she sat upon the mortar. There was jubilation and merriment and the wife was celebrated. Hence, the annual celebration of *Emuodje* festival. *Emuodje* means «let us run and celebrate it anyhow». It also means «without proper co-ordination». Like most festivals in traditional African societies, *Emuodje* festival of the Ekakpamre people is a festival that is celebrated for the heroic deed carried out by a woman. From its inception till date, it is

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 37.

²⁰ A. VIDAL, *From ritual music to theatre music: A Case study of the development of music through the theatre* cit.

²¹ Personal interview with Mrs. Joan Shaba on 7th October, 2015.

celebrated between the months of August and September. Furthermore, beyond the re-enactment of the Uvwi escapade, in the festival, the gods of the land are being propitiated and appeased before the festival commences. It has «spiritual relevance for both actors and spectators».²² It is from the festival, that *Emuodje* festival theatre performance emanates. Ekakpamre people play the role of gods to portray that the gods are present with them. In other words, *Emuodje* festival facilitates a communion and creates a bond between ancestral spirits and the Ekakpamre people. In its inception, *Emuodje* festival incorporated the performance and sacred elements listed below.

Ritual Aesthetics of Uvwi Ese

Mythologization and deification holds sway in *Emuodje* festival. Uvwi, the warrior defeated by Irikrakpoamre's daughter, was deified after his death. Hence, the chief priest, known as *Osuvwi* is appointed to call or invite the spirit of Uvwi before the festival begins. The process of inviting Uvwi is known as *Uvwi Ese*. The *Osuvwi* or the priest must be righteous, pure and blameless. He is like a sacrificial scapegoat who carries the poverty of the community to Uvwi. It is characterized with the concept of the carrier in traditional African cosmology. One of such *Osuvwi*, was Warri Dafiohwo, who executed this responsibility for a long time before his death. Tradition has it that every *Osuvwi* hailed from either Ekroghen or Ekenewharen quaters in Ekakpamre.

The potency and efficacy of *Emuodje* festival is evaluated with rain. When *Emuodje* festival begins, it is conventional for rain, a sacred component to accompany it. When it does not rain, a rainmaker is called upon to make it. The presence of rain symbolizes the acceptability of the festival by the supernatural beings (ancestors and gods). When it does not rain, it is believed that the propitiations and sacrifices had been rejected by the gods.

Songs are integral part of traditional African festivals. Apart from being a medium of communication, it is also a medium through which interaction is effected between the living and the supernatural forces. For every festival, there is a story. The stories of traditional African societies are embedded in the songs sung in the festivals. In fact, citing Kwabena Nketia's on African gods and music, Ofosu notes that «African gods are music loving, who manifest themselves when their special music is performed. This possibly explains that religious music in Africa is culture and cult specific, and unless the right kind of music is performed worship will have no impact on the devotees».²³ In *Emuodje* Festival, songs plays ritualistic function as well as accelerate spiritual communion. Below is one of such song:

URHOBO
Anya vwa Whedjo
Uvwi ooo
Uvwi ooo

ENGLISH
The gods are coming
Uvwi is coming
Uvwi is coming

²² J. CLARK, *Aspects of Nigerian drama*, in *Drama and theatre in Nigeria* cit., p. 57.

²³ J. OFOSU, *The role of kirimomo in the indigenization of church music in urhoboland*, «Ethiopo Research: Abraka Journal of the Arts, Law and Social Sciences», I, 2, 2004, p. 41.

The above song is accompanied with *Egbada ele* or rowdy dance procession. While this song is being sung, leaves are being held in the hands of the celebrants to commemorate the victory of Ekakpamre over Uvwi of Antledja. Therefore, this song is sacred and sacrosanct. Dancing in Africa transcends the physical. In fact, Akpughe notes that «dance being the connection between man and his supernatural, brings about proper edification of man's spirit and body».²⁴ Dances done by masquerades, in the context of the metaphysical or the transcendental, could be termed, *dancequerade*, because of its spiritual connotation. However, *Emuodje* festival is not a *dancequerade* festival. Dance is a major feature of *Emuodje* festival. The fundamental characters that comprise of the Osuvwi and the performers all dance. Suffice to state that dance is the most integral element in *Emuodje* festival. *Emuodje* dance is a dance of victory. In fact, the term *Emuodje* in the Urhobo language means «Let us run it any how or Let us carry it and run». Thus, *Emuodje* is synonymous with dance. Dance also facilitates characterization in *Emuodje* festival.

Ritual Aesthetics of Properties and Performance area

One predominant sacred property in *Emuodje* festival, is the leaf. The use of leaf in the festival is imperative. A personal interview with Mrs. Joan Shaba²⁵ (2015) reveals that there is a ritual of using leaves in celebrating the festival and at the end of the day, there is a ritual of throwing the leaves into the market square, which is also a sacred setting or place in the festival celebration.

Emuodje festival utilizes a lot of performance area. The most paramount, and ritual embedded performance area, is the market square. Ekakpamre market is replete with two tabernacles arranged and dedicated to the gods and these altars are called *Ogwan Edjo* or the home of the gods. These houses are reverend and as such, sacrifices are being carried out in them, to pacify the gods and also, to make supplications. The crescendo of *Emuodje* is characterized with all the performers converging at the shrines with the *Osuvwi* with propitiations, being made to the gods. Here, prayers are conducted. The performance area also serves as a place for the propitiation of ancestors or *Esemo*. The spectators or co-performers crowd around him in an arena setting.

Costumes are physical covering and adornment worn by performers. The acceptability of a specific costume for *Emuodje* festival as tradition demands cannot be overemphasized. The festival incorporates the use of rags. The originality of the use of these rags is predicated on the fact that from the genesis of the festival, celebrants have always used this. «Even though the masquerade art is more than mere costume, costume remains the cornerstone upon which all other elements of the masquerade hinge».²⁶

²⁴ A. AKPUGHE, *Dance a medium of transportation from the physical to the metaphysical. Igbe religious dance as case study*, «Dance Journal of Nigeria», I, 1, 2014, pp. 122-135: 125.

²⁵ Personal interview with Mrs. Joan Shaba on 7th October, 2015.

²⁶ A. ASIGBO, *Transmutations in masquerade costumes and performances. An examination of Abuja carnival 2010*, in A. Ameh & I. Stephen (Eds.), *Arts, Culture & Communication in a Postcolony. A festschrift for Lawrence Olanrele Bamidele*, Alpha Crownes Publishers, Kent 2013, p. 4.

Emuodje as Flekztival Theatre

Festival becomes flekztival, when there is a transition or a transformation from its sacred value, to the secular. In this context, Ogunbiyi's notes that «a ritual becomes entertainment once it is outside its original context or when the belief that sustains it has lost its potency».²⁷ This implies that, when ritual leaves its unique or original framework, the real reason for which it is performed, it becomes entertainment. Beyond the trans-Atlantic slave trade and so on, religion-the proliferation of Pentecostal churches also formed the nucleus to the secularization of *Emuodje* festival. With the influx of Pentecostal churches in Ekakpamre, the ministers saw the festival as fetishistic. They saw it as an act of worship instituted by the devil. Hence, their members were warned to desist from participating in diabolical processes as festivals. To fully serve God whole heartedly and in spirit and truth, one must not associate oneself with traditional festivals. Erring members were sanctioned, suspended or expelled from church activities. The proliferation of Pentecostal churches, coupled with its adherents in synthesizing the traditional with secular, led to a gradual and significant secularization of *Emuodje* festival. *Emuodje* festival, thus in its present state, has become a flekztival theatre performance.

In addition, celebrants especially the young folk, celebrate the festival in bars and restaurants. *Emuodje* festival has also become a venture for money making. The male folk wait along the road, requesting money from pedestrians and vehicles. Un-cooperating pedestrians are either drenched with dirty and muddy water, or harassed. This change became inherent in the theatrical and dramatic components of *Emuodje*. Theatrical elements such as properties, costumes, music and dance, mime and so on, yielded their ritual components.

Flekztival Aesthetics of Properties and Performance area

From the arena or theatre in the round utilized in *Emuodje* festival, *Emuodje* flekztival, now use the streets as its performance area. After the declaration of the opening of the festival by the *Osuvwi*, the performers begin to exhibit their performances along the road. The streets in recent times, serve as an area for the celebration of *Emuodje* flekztival.

Costume is an essential component of traditional African festivals. In *Emuodje* flekztival, costumes play a vital role. The major costumes worn by celebrants are made from rags. However, there have been a change in this trend. Contemporary *Emuodje* celebrants in recent times have made contrary the ethical use of rags as costumes. Young men and boys have incorporated the use of new jean trousers, new shoes and new long and short sleeve clothes. While men are dressed in the aforementioned attire, women and young girls dress in European culture. It has turned into an avenue for exhibiting and showcasing new clothes. The originality of the rags had been secularized because of various reasons. Perhaps, the incorporation of satiric drama pieces, helped in its promotion. The performers portraying the characters been lampooned, wear the exact clothes that fit the characters they

²⁷ Y. OGUNBIYI, *Nigerian theatre and drama. A critical profile*, in Id. (Ed.), *Drama and theatre in Nigeria. A critical source book*, Nigeria Magazine, Lagos 1981, p. 3.

portray. Hence, for believability to be achieved the exact costumes are used, and the rags discarded.

Another emerging trend is the switching and swapping of clothes among male and female folk. In other words, women dress in men attire while the male folk dress in women attire. *Emuodje* festival from its inception never incorporated the use of swapping of costumes in its celebration. This swapping of costume which is a recent phenomenon, is an attempt to lampoon the opposite sex. This explicates the poetics of gender polemics even in traditional African societies and *Emuodje* flekztival in particular.

In Ekakpamre and most African societies, powder symbolizes victory. Based on the victorious event, which is the thrust of *Emuodje* festival, *Emuodje* flekztival has substituted powder in place of rain. Powder which is a recent phenomenon in *Emuodje* flekztival, is a symbol of victory. However, it is an introductory ingredient in the flekztival.

It is true that songs are an integral component of *Emuodje* festival. Sacred songs are used to adore and pacify the supernatural beings, and also to aid communication with them. However, the sacred songs have been expunged and secular songs introduced. These songs have no sacred undertones in them. A good example of such songs is:

URHOBO	ENGLISH
<i>Toto rush water too much</i>	<i>Vagina drips water too much</i>
<i>Toto rush water too much</i>	<i>Vagina drips water too much</i>
<i>Toto rush water too much</i>	<i>Vagina drips water too much</i>
<i>Toto rush water too much</i>	<i>Vagina drips water too much</i>

The above song tells us that a woman's private part drips too much of water. The lampoon made of a particular is called *Omesuo* in the Urhobo culture. This song is basically for the male folk, since it is critical of the female anatomy/body. Women on their part, have songs with which they satirise the male private part as well as the song below posits:

URHOBO	ENGLISH
<i>Osho whuru oooooooooo</i>	<i>Penis is dead oooooooooo</i>
<i>Osho whuru oooooooooo</i>	<i>Penis is dead oooooooooo</i>
<i>Osho whuru oooooooooo</i>	<i>Penis is dead oooooooooo</i>
URHOBO	ENGLISH
<i>Soldier Dwu Umukoko</i>	<i>Soldier made love to Umukoko</i>
<i>Mi mrere</i>	<i>I saw it</i>
<i>Oduro</i>	<i>He made love to her</i>
<i>Mi mrere</i>	<i>I saw it</i>
<i>Pastor Duro</i>	<i>Pastor made love to her</i>
<i>Mi mrere</i>	<i>I saw it</i>

The above song satirizes adulterous men and women. In fact, the names of erring victims are included in the song as Umukoko is included above. This satirical song makes Ekakpamre people, better people as nobody want their names to be used as a paradigm in the festival. It is believed that these songs instill discipline in married men and women.

Thus, the festival serves as a watch dog and a societal police. A good example of another song, is:

URHOBO	ENGLISH
<i>Ohwo ro muo siona</i>	<i>He who prevents the rain</i>
<i>Amerohoro koyin hwere</i>	<i>Will die from water dripping from vagina</i>
<i>Ohwo ro muo siona</i>	<i>He who prevents the rain</i>
<i>Amerohoro koyin hwere</i>	<i>Will die from water dripping from vagina</i>

The above song satirizes rainmakers who use rain to disrupt ceremonial activities such as weddings, burial ceremonies, birthdays among others. In Ekakpamre and the Urhobo society in, rainmakers use rain to disrupt parties to act as a blackmail with which money can be siphoned from the celebrant for them (the rainmakers) to put a stop to such rain. Hence, this songs are used to lampoon this popular trend initiated by rainmakers. Nobody takes an offence from the songs composed. Every year, new songs are composed by celebrants. For pedophiles, a song such as the one below is sung:

URHOBO	ENGLISH
<i>Umukoro Odwimi tete</i>	<i>Umukoro one who makes love to little children</i>
<i>Umukoro Odwimi tete</i>	<i>Umukoro one who makes love to little children</i>

The above song is sung by the women folk whenever the men sing the vagina song. Sometimes, they use a stick to portray the penis, putting it between their legs to depict the picture of a phallus. Present celebration of *Emuodje* is characterized with erotic dances. There is the display of orgy as women roll their waist erotically while the men give them the dance step of lovemaking. Sometimes, the women wrap their legs firmly around the waist of the men as the men mime the act of love making with the women moaning. This politics of sexuality in the festival, demystifies, deconstructs, bastardizes and demythologizes *Emuodje* festival.

Conclusion

Although *Emuodje* festival (now a *flekztival*) had lost its sacred gaze, there is still a lot in it, to facilitate a full discourse in traditional African festival. This study reveals that periodic festival celebrations in African societies may be categorised into festival theatre, quasi-festival theatre and *flekztival* theatre. I also discovered that *Flekztivals* have become popular in African societies and most parts of the world. *Flekztivals* are products and constructs of modernity, civilization and globalization. I conclude that although *Emuodje* festival had lost its sacred gaze, there is still a lot in it to facilitate a full discourse in traditional African festival. Consequently, I recommend that in the light of cultural convergence, authenticity and originality of traditional Nigerian festivals, should not be fully discarded.

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Interviews

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