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Cultural Revival in Spiritual Phenomenon: Assessment of Unitary Issues in the Traditional Dances of Bura, Glavda, Kibaku, Kilba, Marghi and Mbula

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Abstract:

The Church of the Brethren General Mission Board gave permission for H. Stover Kulp and Dr. Albert D. Helsler to come to Africa as missionaries. The two men arrived in Lagos, Nigeria, on December 29, 1922. In the early days of 1923, they received permission to settle in Garkida and began mission work (cobnews@brethren.org). They operated mainly among the tribes that speak the Mandara line of languages. These include: Bura, Glavda, Kibaku, Kilba, Marghi and Mbulanations with a single message of reconciling the people to God. To reconcile people to God would require that such nations, tribes and cultures must necessarily also become one, patterned into one baptism, one faith and then one Lord. This unity is the virtue which the missionaries desired most to build a family of believers in the region, to create a forum of understanding and forge a brotherhood in line with the 'brethren' thinking. This paper examines the cultural dances of the five tribes that are mostly captured within the CBM mission work in the North East Sub-region of Nigeria, it tries to identify from the performance techniques of the dances whether or not there are factors of unity, and how these factors could have been valuable in uniting the people of the region. The conclusion points to the fact that the observed cultural dances of the peoples listed, and which were neglected by the earlier missionaries in the region would have contributed to their reconciling effort among the peoples and between God and Man. The central argument of this essay stems from the work of Acquah Francis (2011), that although a large percentage of indigenous peoples under study are converts to Christianity, it is the indigenous beliefs and values which mainly serve as the mediation for their religious and cultural expressions. "This indigenous influence has enhanced harmonious relationships" among these tribes prior to the arrival of the missionaries, but was treated with disdain.

Keywords: African cultures, CBM missionary activities, cultures conflict, cultural revival, reconciliation and unity

1. Introduction

*Time present and time past
Are both perhaps present in time future
And time future contained in time past
If all time is eternally present
All time is unredeemable...
Yet what is the present?*

- T.S.Eliot *Four Quartets*

The links between literature and society have been explored by so many literary critics and writers with emphasis most of the time on the 'relevance of literature to society'. This explains what man stands to gain from his literature – dances, dirges, epic, folktales, proverbs, carvings and sculpture. Villa, et al., (1983) defines culture as one's world view which includes "experiences, expressions, symbols, materials, customs behaviours, morals, values, attitudes, and beliefs created and communicated among individuals," and passed down from generation as cultural traditions. This aspect is so firm especially with oral literature of the Africans. No society ever survived independent of its culture. And literature or art of a people is the feature of its culture that makes that society unique. To remove a people from culture or to remove culture from a people is to make a humanity of no nationhood. This is perhaps an out of space fabrication of a silly science which no theory could actualize. It is on the evidence of this argument that Christians that are of the EYN denomination are perhaps seeking from the time past to know what the future holds for their culture if the present is detached from the past. Eliot has in his *Four Quartets* speculated that "Time present and time past are both perhaps present in time future". This is a challenge to the peoples of the Biu- Mandara languages who as a result of the influence of the CBM Missionaries have been removed from their time past; the embodiment of their culture. If to Eliot, time future is contained in time past, then these peoples under study are endangered having dropped their time past in favour of a strange culture. To the affected tribal groups this dilemma must be unwound. And so, they annually stage performances of their time past (culture which was thrown out in favour of Christianity) to show their children that they had a past like any other race on earth.

The annual performances of cultural dances, the emphasis on the translation of the Bible and use of these languages in Churches are deliberate efforts to bring back what was, assumed to be stolen.

This brings us to the culture conflict theory, also known as cultural deviance theory which suggests that crime is caused due to the clash of values that arises when different social groups have different ideas of acceptable behavior. Jessica Schubert in her Lesson Transcript, (2015) maintains that:

...all over the world, different countries and different cultures engage in different holidays, customs, cultural practices, religions, and more. These differences make-up our diverse world, but also create culture conflict.

And according to Thorsten Sellin in his *Culture Conflict and Crime* (1938) the book clarifies the culture conflict theory and refers to two types of culture conflict; Primary Conflict and Secondary conflict. He presents that Primary Conflict occurs when the clash involves fundamental cultural beliefs. The cases of the CBM Missionaries in the land of the Biu-Mandara people constitute a Primary Culture conflict which according to Schubert (2015) is a crime. These people so affected woke up to discover that they have been shortchanged. Their dances, songs, proverbs and arts are categorized as heathenism and must be put aside for salvation for the message of Christianity to thrive. The performance of these cultural attributes, even during worship hours demonstrate that the initial message they received was faulty. The message of the Gospel was to reconcile men and to God, it was never to assimilate races into another. The aspect that emphasized that our cultures are some demonstrations of our sinfulness is being rejected. The church today sees these cultural features as having great impact on human relations in view of the resurgence of culture and its growing role in nation building.

These peoples, whose cultures were considered deviant in 1923 by the CBM Missionaries woke up today to discover that they can only understand each other in the English Language, they can only speak English idioms and figures of speech and the proverbs of the English people have replaced their proverbs. Traditional names given to children are now considered 'local names' and their xylophone have given way to the guitar. They are just discovering, not too late though, that the gospel and the manner it was brought to them, did not only preached against sin and idolatry, but have silently overturned their culture and its role in uniting the people. This paper decries the error of the early missionaries in putting aside what could have been valuable in uniting the people and perhaps make reconciliation work a lot easier. We discover in the songs, music, and costumes of the peoples more unitary features, which the Church in Nigeria today, is harnessing not only to revive an aspect lost earlier, but use these elements towards uniting the Nigerian peoples into a rock-hard nationhood. The work also disagrees with the activities of the early missionaries which indicated to the converts that their Christian salvation could only be complete if they did away with their old cultural life (Acquah, 2011.p15). While the missionaries might not have intended this negative result, their actions, nevertheless, led to the eclipse of some, if not all the culture of the converts which tantamount to crime against humanity according to Schubert (2015).

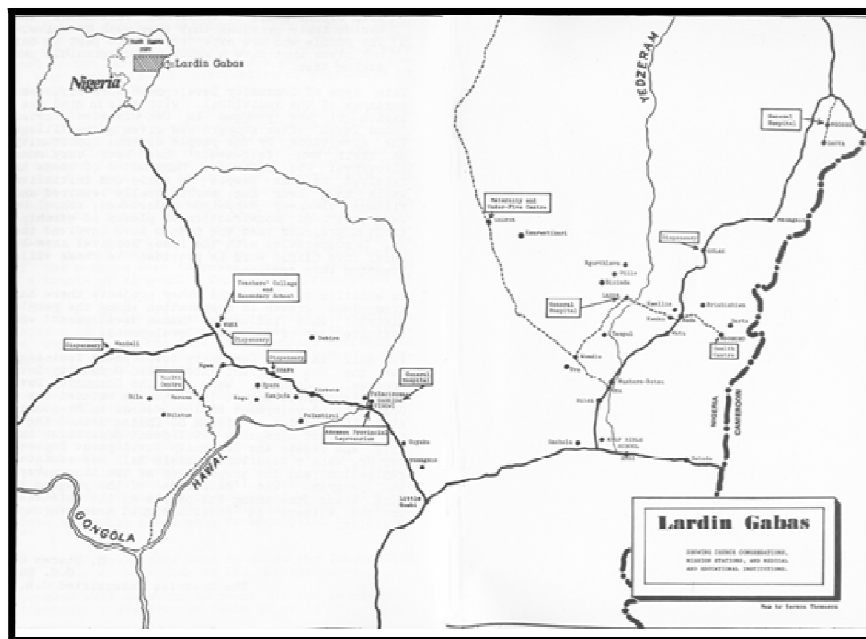


Figure 1: Map of Lardin Gabas, Indicating the Area Covered by the CBM Missionaries in Their Early Mission Work. The Church Established, Eyn Has Since, Like Wild Fire, Spread to All Parts of Nigeria and Her Presence Is Also Visible In Other African Countries Like Togo, Tchad, Niger and Cameroon

<http://www.brethren.org/global/nigeria/history/ladin-gabas-map-1972.jpg>

This study therefore, examines the cultural unity among the Biu-Mandara languages of the North-East region of Nigeria, also known as Southern Borno and Northern Adamawa (Lardin Gabas). These peoples are predominantly

farmers with rearing of animals as additional source of income and meat supplement. They live in huts made of clay and hay roofs. They are egalitarian and individualistic group of people who prior to the influences of Christianity and Islam, had no kings or lords. They operated the family system of kingship where each home has as their leader the head of the family. They paid no taxes to no authority and policing activities were embodied in the customs and traditions of the respective people. Discipline and respect were naturally derived through hierarchy of the family system and ran down to the lowest ladder via age-grouping policy. This made the individual to acknowledge accept the authority of any other person that is older in age. No one questioned such positions and hardly were there any protest or rebellion against the arrangement. Community in roles and activities was prominent, especially in matters of discipline, education, information. The society at large was a master of its own and parental system was highly appreciative.

These societies had their marriage formalities, hunting periods and rules, planting and harvesting regulations, policies of art, music and paintings. They had their proverbs and idiomatic expressions, and times for their folktales. Crime and criminal acts were condemned from families to even the dance squares. The people were unique nations and independent, revolved on unwritten laws. Military roles, policing activities, customs and duties, security functions were like in all other African society's communal responsibilities.

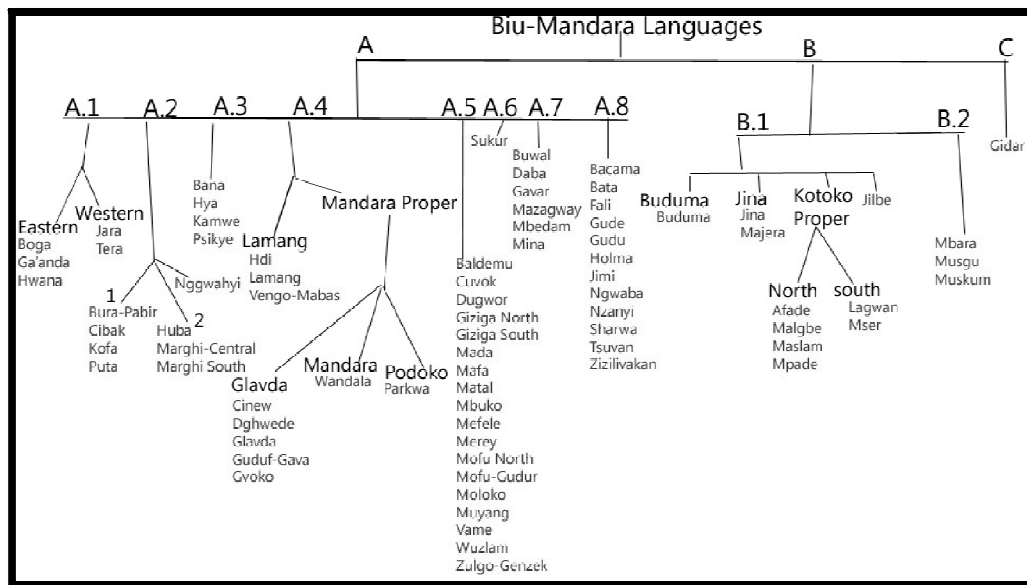


Figure 2

<http://www.thefreedictionary.com>

According to EYN history, the missionaries that came to the region were young men with zeal for evangelism and without any political inclination. Unfortunately, they had little or no experience of what the cultures of the people were like. Indeed, the salient and silent feature of their message had been the classification of the cultures of the people as heathenism. And so, the earlier native Church clergy that took over from their white predecessors 'joined' to condemn the peoples' dances, dirges, certain practices in marriage and transformed the peoples' songs into gospel songs. They gladly condemned things they considered ills to humanity and the religion they brought, but in so doing they threw away 'the birth water with the baby'. They destroyed elements of the people's culture that could have been valuable in furthering the message of reconciliation they brought. That was a gross miscalculation with detrimental result to the vision of unity which they sought to forge. They underestimated the role of these diverse cultural activities because they did not take time to study the root of the people nor the involvements of fetishes in these activities. They regarded the costume of the people as heathenism and asked that these 'things' must be put aside to enable the people run the Christian race.

One hundred years after, the church in Nigeria today "has been concerned with African life" Kilam (1973) and wants to prove that she has not turned her back on African cultures, rather on the ways of sin. It is possibly, in realization of this flaw in the missionary work, that members of the Church today stage traditional dances during Christmas celebration every year for the performance of various forms of the cultural dances of the people. The sudden passion for the African culture, which was beaten into unconsciousness may be, in the words of Ola Rotmi (1991:5-6) "for the integrity of the Black man". With the church now in the city, EYN DCC in Maisandari area of Maiduguri in her annual convention of 2017 tried to have a look at the spiritual revival in cultural phenomenon, with a view to observing whether or not there are elements that could forge unity in our 'home traditional dances' to this end, traditional dances of the peoples; Bura, Glavda, Kibaku, Kilba, Marghi and Mbula were staged. It is the on-the-spot assessment of these dances staged one after the other that this paper analyses.

2. Observable Issues

From the dances staged, one notices not only the rhyme and rhythm of the dances, the performance techniques, and hilarious acceptance by the audience, but much more the similarities in the performance, uniformity in the costume

and role of respondents in enhancing the performances. The costumes and techniques that are observable and which occur in all the dances of these tribes include:

the black and white (japta in Bura) wrapper tied across the breast to the knees, long beads, a fastening of head gear not so big enough to cover the head, bare foot (no shoes), the dancers display weapons; like sharp edged sword, spears or quiver, bow and arrow lead vocalist raises the song and the fellow dancers respond in chorus. The vocalist could be from the group of dancers or one of the drummers. Sometimes, the instrument leads the song. The dancing is in a single file, a moving queue often curved into a ring with head and tail, the lead dancer always at the head the songs vary from praise of individuals in metaphorical presentations, the person praised is often compared to the crocodile, the lion, sun, the moon and the rain. Virtues of courage, love, strength, hard work, gallantry and heroic deeds are applauded, while debased behaviours are condemned. More often the audience responds with head nods, shift of body, stamping of feet to the rhythm of the music. As the performance reaches climax, in some cases the audience metamorphosed into performers.

3. Analysis

From the five-point observations, one can infer the factors of unity in the dances which were either overlooked by the missionaries or deliberately neglected based on euro-centric view of Africa as a heathen nation, and so nothing good could come out of her civilizations. These neglected areas, no matter the reasons, are the elements the paper intends to highlight. Unity is a cardinal message of Jesus Christ, with emphasis on his oneness with the God head. He taught, instructed and placed a premium expectation that the virtue of unity should be key among his disciples. By so being that the disciples will be identified.

4. Unity of costumes

All the five groups of dancers have a common costume; the black and white handmade wrapper and the style of tying are identical from the breast to the knee. This is often accompanied by a fastening of head gear not so big enough to cover the head, bare foot (no shoes), the dancers display weapons; like sharp edged sword, spears or quiver, bow and arrow. This communicates to an observer a community of people who were once a tribe and a nation. One would have expected the missionaries to raise the question as to the relationship of these people who could not speak the same language immediately, but who are in the same spirit fashioned in dressing as one people. They did not see the colour of costume –black and white as expression of unity of God's creations. They were too inexperienced to see the weapons the dancers carry as acknowledgement of their strength to achieve a collective goal. As the people danced bare foot, the message is passed across to the observer certain communication with mother-earth, an indication of dust to dust which is in the scripture of the Whiteman, but which prejudices could not allow him to see. When the people dance, they lift up their hands in ululation to heavens and at that moment they are often carried away in ecstasy beyond remembrance of enmity. The dance-costume of these people speaks a lot of their unity and enhances the communal spirit of the black race. The beads across the neck, the calabash on the head or held up in hands, the paintings of the body are not symbols of fetishes but symbolic application of God's rainbow among men.

5. Unity in Leadership of Vocalization

The dancers are responsible to the lead vocalist, they do not question the songs he/she raised, which in most cases they have common understanding of the issues of the song. The songs are corrective measures against deviants of the society or applaud of praise worthy roles of certain models in the society. They have an arrow-head as a singer who could be the lead dancer in the dancing arena or among the banners, or still in some instance the xylophone or flutes the song and the chorus give the words. This is leadership in art and music, leadership in the performance techniques of the people. The chorus expresses unity, joy of togetherness and accompanying ululation spirit of encouragement to sing and dance on. The process is so fast with lyrics and music culminating into rhythm that tells the soul to participate. And more often one sees the audience join in the chorus unconsciously. This is unity, of the spirit of one and the other which could have been studied and harnessed for the good off the baby church. There is no better expression of the joy of man than is noticed in the dancing area, a joy compared to when one gets baptism and sees himself free from world of sin. The moment of dancing is a moment of freedom from all thoughts and anxieties.

6. Unity of Staging

The dancing is often staged in single file with the lead dancer at the head of the queue leading a ring of dancers. The line is not determined by any social status or age, not even degree of expertise, but as mutual desire to be close to each other, so anyone can come and he join the line. Another notable point in the ring is the mixture of one man after one woman, without any deliberate body contacts. It has also been noticed that no man is offended because his wife is dancing near another man. There is communal purpose in the joy of the dances that no one is thinking of himself alone, no one is imagining any evil at least from the outlook of the dancers and audience. While the dance progresses to climax, the ululation rises to the top with accompanying musical instruments. The environment charges with a hilarious tempo, everyone talking to each other as if they are all of the same family.

7. Unity in the Meaning of the Songs

The songs are sung in highly condensed metaphor of the tribes, signaling the arrival of the rain, love songs, war songs, dirges, and peacetime song. In the song's moral lessons, like in the songs of most African countries, they condemn

