Spatio-Environmental Conflicts and Artistic Resolution: Case of Three Nigerian Diaspora Artists

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Abstract
Scholars such as Gombrich, Lim, Marshall and D'Adamo, Puppe et al., and Sullivan agree that art movements developed from contradicting theories and beliefs. But conflict and resolution in art have not been given directional and scholastic attention aside from our inroads into such possibilities. This study, hinged on conflict theory, examined spatio-environmental conflicts and their impacts on artistic practices using three Nigerian diaspora painters - Dayo Laoye, Olu Oguibe, and Victor Ekpuk - as examples. The painters were purposively selected from 29 artists presumably that no matter who is studied, all artists would show practice dynamics invariably linked to spatio-environmental conflicts. Morphological analyses of the pre-Diaspora and Diaspora works and the spatio-environment of the artists were conducted. Qualitative method was used for the exploratory and observational dimension to data analysis. Primary data were sourced from the three painters and their web domains while secondary data were further sourced on spatio-environment characteristics, conflict resolution, art and its practice. Results indicated that intrapersonal and interpersonal conflicts from the artist's spatio-environment: work-space; communities and their socio-political-cultural tendencies; audience and critics; and art materials and the artist's resolution of these conflicts invariably influence and result in changes in and of certain aspects of their art practices. The

paper concludes that, generally, studying art from spatio-environmental dynamics will broaden discourse on conflict resolution, and will, particularly, aid the understanding of artists' practice shifts in the arts.

Keywords: *Conflict and resolution; Diaspora artists; Environment; Nigerian artists; Space*

Introduction

Most artists create their works to spark interest that points in several directions. This interest could be socio-cultural (Kavolis, 1964; Morgan, 2016); economic (Alpagu, 2014; Stupples, 2014); political (Ashton, 1985; Demireli & Altintas, 2012); educational (Murray, 1983; Nanda *et al.,* 2013; Punzalan, 2018); environmental (Daniels, & Sleeman, 2017; Hicks, & King, 2007; Hindiyeh, 2017); and scientific (Athayde *et al*., 2017; Calvert & Schyfter, 2016; Morris, 1939; Sarmiento & Romero, 2018). With different mediums available to artists, they are able to explore diverse themes and contexts in varied forms, styles, and techniques. The immediate, and sometimes extended environment essentially influences whatever art work the artist produces. The environment, in its holistic meaning and in generic usage, will illustrate any spatial or cluster condition that is identified to a society or group of people or things. Therefore, minus the physical environmental space, the space has also been identified as the abstract and imaginary formulations of human knowledge in the expansion of meanings in the arts, science, and technology (Brieber *et al.*, 2014; Cockell, 2015; Qadri, 2015; Zupnick, 1959). Because of space's phenomenal dimension through its several qualifying definitions, it has become commonplace that several disciplines research into what it literally and logically is, scientifically and geographically is, physically and metaphysically is, creatively and rigidly is, and what other it can severally connote to be (Allen, 1986; Bieger & Maruo-Schröder, 2016; Deutsche, 1992; Donkor, Opoku-Bounsu & Anim, 2018; Murrieta-Flores, & Martins, 2019; Parker, 2016; Reiman, 2009; Smythies, 2003; *World Economic Forum*, 2020). Spatio-environment, herein narrowly applied as the spaces and environment identified by

geographical boundaries with some socio-cultural and natural endowments that mark their differences, one from the other.

The creative person who tries to explore innovative means to achieve artistic end will many times battle with intrapersonal conflicts, and in a few times will battle with interpersonal ones. The application of this premise is supported by Lewis Alfred Coser's argument on secondary, minor, internal, or functional type of conflict (Dahrendorf & Collins, qxd, 2006; Fleck, 2013; Lumumba-Kasongo 2017). These conflicts, Coser explained, are non-violent; unlike the primary, external conflicts that mostly exist in conditions of inter-boundary relations (Coser, 1957). Unarguably therefore, conflicts in religious and cultural beliefs, and interpretations, for instance, must have also prompted many different approaches to art practice and theory, as well as application and patronage at different periods of human advancement (Gombrich, 1985; Gombrich, 1988), which aggregative result has tendered positive locations to modern art, creativity, and aesthetic knowledge. Trade, commerce, and information, aided by easy transportation and accessibility to different locations of the world have also, slowly and sometimes unnoticeably, contributed to the influence of socio-cultural and artistic conflicts that are always ladened with possibilities of integrating with other cultures and artistic applications, thereby gaining sometimes live-long integrations and new developments. These integrations and new developments have gained prominence among many nations' characteristics and invariably many practices of the creative citizens. This, for example, is noticeable in Nigeria since the last quarter of the 20th century. As a result, and from a global point of view, a reflection of this can be sensed in the various activities of developing countries colonized by some Western nations.

Few literature materials have discussed issues relating to practice development in art and artists, as illustrated in Gombrich (1988), Lim (2006), Marshall and D'Adamo (2011), Puppe *et al.* (2020) and Sullivan (2006), but without serious attention to conflict as an influential cause, and the resultant development as a resolution. Some of the literatures by prolific Nigerian arts authors like Campbell (2008), Falola, ed. (2018) and Offoedu-Okeke (2012) still do not discuss artists with relations to conflict and resolution in the practice of art in any form. Noticeably, socio-political, cultural, industrial and

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boundary conflicts have dominated scholarship on conflict resolution. This, perhaps, is because such areas involve a mass of people. Conflicts in practice within disciplines usually are not regularly noticed by the larger circle or mass. Scholastic opinions in the visual arts agree that most art movements developed due to contradicting theories and beliefs (Cooper, 2015). These are certainly conflict dimensions in thoughts and practice, the final resolutions of which are the various morphological shifts that exist in art movements and styles, many of which are also positive developments. Shifts also differ, to some degrees, from artist to artist, from space to space, and from environment to environment. Belsky (2015) exemplified all this succinctly from already known conditions of artist(e)s conflicts and successful production:

> Consider the inner conflict of depression for a famous painter like Vincent van Gogh, or the role of a devastating break-up that inspires a career-making album like Alanis Morisette's breakthrough *Jagged Little Pill*. Look anywhere and you'll see it, from Woody Allen's finest films developed during bouts of his depression to Janet Jackson's triple-platinum album *The Velvet Rope* - widely attributed to a battle with anxiety from a failed marriage and a difficult childhood. Creativity is, therefore, nourished by conflict (n.p.). Fleck (2013) reiterated Coser's idea that "regular but minor conflicts can bring forward innovation and creativity… (p. 962)". Interestingly, this important behavioral condition has not been given adequate directional and scholastic attention, aside from our inroads into such possibilities.

> Consequent upon the foregoing, this study was hinged on Coser's social concept of conflict theory, of which positivism resides in functionality. The initial principle of the conflict theory, when it was formulated by Karl Marx, is anchored on the precept that hierarchy, differentiations and inequality are necessary circumstances to advance a society or group (Aziz, 2015; Peet, 1975). Though Rössel (2017) in *Conflict Theory* pointed out that "Conflict theory is a rather fuzzy theoretical paradigm sociological thinking," Crossman (2019), however, emphasized that "conflict theory and its variants are used by many sociologists today to study a wide range of social problems" (n.p.). The variant of conflict theory utilized in this study is "functionality" philosophy of Coser's conflict theory, which states that, "though apparently dysfunctional for highly rationalized systems,

[conflict] may actually have important latent functional consequences" (Coser, 1957: p. 200), which are positive and beneficial[1]. With the elaborateness of Coser on the instrument of function(ality) in social conflict, his concept of conflict theory has been applied discreetly in this discourse of importance of spatio-environment on the creativity of Nigerian diaspora artists.

This paper examines spatio-environmental conflicts and their impacts on artistic practice, and how artists through art have resolved such positive-oriented conflicts. Three Nigerian diaspora painters, Dayo Laoye, Olu Oguibe and Victor Ekpu, have been used as case studies. Having emigrated from Nigeria to the USA over ten years ago, the Diasporic movement and experience of these painters make them good samples for the study[2].

Spatio-environment is one of the major prompters of conflict, and this can be established in the works and outlooks of many contemporary diaspora artists. The study was conducted with a view to establishing the inescapability of conflict and resolution processes in visual art practices. Conflict situations are propelled by human scenarios needing solutions (Griffin, 2006; Rathus 1996). These happen in almost all spheres of human endeavors and they are usually "interpersonal" conflicts. Silverman (2020: p. 18) further buttressed the fact that "as humanity becomes more complex, intrapersonal conflict goes beyond the mind and takes the entirety of a person into consideration". With insights given to these interpersonal conflict terms, they have been appropriated for "intrapersonal" conditions in this study on practice conflicts. It is noteworthy to stress that conflict and resolution as a focus of critical study in the areas of art and art practice could be said to be in its infancy.

Method

An initial survey conducted in 2013 showed that there were 43 identifiable Nigerian painters living in the Diaspora. These have increased over the years as some other artists have joined the brain drain migration, and some for further studies. Those who relocated over a decade ago are mainly in the United States of America (USA) (over 60% of them), followed by England (over 35%), and then Canada and Germany with a painter each. Out of these, twenty-nine (29) are still actively engaged in painting practice. Primary and

secondary data were used in sourcing information for this spatio-environmental, analytical study on conflict resolution in art and its practice, while highlighting through the example of three Nigerian Diaspora painters in the USA: Dayo Laoye, Olu Oguibe and Victor Ekpuk. A purposive selection was also adopted to establish that, no matter who is studied, all artists would have undergone or would be undergoing positive developmental dynamics in their practice, which could be linked to one or more conflict prompters, especially socio-environmental conflict prompters. The transmutation of levels in conflict, as observed in this concept is close in behavior to the six of eight of the changing levels of Griffin's (2006) conflict types that have been adopted for discourse pattern in this study.

Of the three samples, only Victor Ekpuk attended to the open- and close-ended formatted questionnaire mailed to them. Most information required of all these active Nigerian Diaspora artists are available in public domain, particularly the internet. These statistical data provided firsthand information, which were collated for the similarities and divergences in conflict materials and morphological steps. With the permission of the painters, visual data were sourced from the painters' websites and other internet sources. A qualitative approach was used for an exploratory and observational analysis of the data. Several of the literary information provided access to some biographical data given in this study. From the abundance of visual data available on the works of the three artists, a few were used to emphasize transitions and to aid the researchers on their path of etic-focused perspective to analysis. Five-year gestation period between pre-Diaspora and Diaspora existence was also used in this study to allow for noticeable changes that manifest in the painters' new oeuvres. This will leverage on the noticeable changes emanating from conflict from the before-the-sojourn techniques and moods, to the after-the-sojourn works.

Results and Discussion
Since the 20th century, art has gained appreciable inroads into the discourse of conflict resolution, because of the role of visual history and representation in the documentation of dissenting or opposing views of people and governance in a society. The art of the Soviet Union after the post-revolutionary period is a perfect example. As

conflict parameters expand, so do resolution contexts and avenues continue to emerge. The role of the art disciplines cannot be downplayed in this whole process. One manifesting aspect of the functionality of art and creativity is conflict resolution. Art is now used as a peace or solution provider (Almusaly, 2017; Klink & Crawford, n.d.; Martinez, 2015; Nduka, 2016; Reyes, 2007). Another developing angles are the employment of conflict resolution in the education field (Gibbsons, 2010; Martínez, 2015) and the possibilities in conflict transformation (Doucet, 1997; Wani, 2013). Conflict transformation states that conflict change levels as a resolution is provided; that is, as a conflict is resolved, it creates another circumstance of a problem (conflict) that needs to be resolved. In all of these studies, however, none is dedicated to seeing conflict and its resolution solely from an individual's point of view—from an intrapersonal stance of conflict creation or generation, and providing resolutions personally. Though scholars have discussed these as artistic or creative developments and changes, they have not engaged or interrogated this as a conflict-resolution issue.

Ogunfuwa (2018) focused on art conflict resolution, though from a different contextual undercurrent. It showed that Nigerian diaspora artists modified their artistic practices due to circumstances that present themselves. The discourse focused on the un-learning of the previously acquired mode of creation – freeing themselves of the aesthetic bondage of their pre-Diasporic environment – and opening their acumen to an understanding of a new setting, where artists need to re-learn prevailing human conditions and operations of the Diasporic environment. While Ogunfuwa emphasized in his findings that this new socio-economic, tactical adaptation is essential for most artists changing environment, he highlighted that to survive artistic practice in new domains needs incorporating new ideas, discarding some old ones, so that their works will be relevant, contemporary, and sustainable. The "intangible archetypal" identified as "Idea-in-form", and the "intangible archetypes" identified as "Abstraction, Thoroughness and Self-extension" were the literary angles. Ogunfuwa used the currency of practice of fifteen Nigerian diaspora artists to buttress his assertion.

Conflict in art, therefore, is the conscious and unconscious struggle with the artistic prompters for a creative actualization that is

visually different from what the artist is known to do. What it further infers is that, the existence of a practice conflict might not be obvious and sudden until the conflict resolution, which has many times been identified or recognized by people and the artist as some form of development, that has been exacted, sustained, or concluded. In this study, space and cluster (immediate human environment), which have been hybridified to spatio-environment, are considered essential tools to create art forms. The more an artist is stationed in an environment dominated by some peculiar activities, symbols, or icons, so shall their creative outputs be majorly, or narrowly, influenced by these things (Tanner 2003: pp. 69-76). Moreover, the medium of creative production used by the artist that is available in the spatio-environment, is also, in most cases, freely explored. A highly creative individual will see/imagine almost anything in their environment as a potential design/medium, or context/theme. These behavioral circumstances and patterns of the artist's selection of subject and material/medium interest, which are aspects of the sociology of art practice, alter when the artist shifts spatio-environment. Again, if the artist's knowledge cluster or socio-cultural cluster, for example, changes, so does the creative focus and output. Equally observed is the change in creative focus and output when they leave their established spatio-environment domain for another, particularly a totally new geographical space and cultural background. After many artists are firmly rooted in their new environment and its socio-economic order, their creative output gradually changes. This condition may be traced in the artist's subject matter, form, style, material, and technique. This is a peculiarity with the Nigerian diaspora artists. It may not be different from majority of diaspora artists around the world. Change, thus, becomes a catalyst for creative exploration that is mostly not pre-determined.

These artists strive to get resolutions from the environmental space that housed conflict prompters. For them, it is inevitable to experience several states of outwardly and/or inwardly expressed intrapersonal conflicts before arriving at a satisfied state of personal resolution resulting in a change of certain aspects of their art practice in a given environmental circumstance. Their new-found spatio-environment embraces healthy competition that is commonplace, and highly regarded. However, the way their Diasporic movement and

their new environmental condition have modified their art practice is significant.

This study identified the artistic conflict prompters as the tools used in the engendering of these practice conflicts. The prompters include, but are not limited to, choice of medium, material, theme, time, public, spatio-environment, and the physical state of the artist. The most common form of conflict situation that painters could experience before, during and after breaking the ice of the conflict prompter is that particularly stretched formulation of six conflict types from that given by Griffin (2006). Instead of experiencing one conflict type, the painter experiences several of which one likely leads to the other. The stretched conflict starts with physical and mental *Avoidance* of an intruding concept. This is followed by *Obliging* oneself of the intrusion (and likely several other intrusions or trials), which necessarily makes *Compromise* of this intrusion with the already established concept sometimes inescapable. This leads on to *Integration* with, and an eventual *Dominance* of, the intruding concept. All this finally leads to an *Emotional expression* that wraps up the new visual result that is eventually released for the audience's admiration. When the artist continues the expression in the new visual result, a convincing resolution has finally been made. For example, some painters, at some point in their careers, embrace a particular medium, style, material, form, or concept based on pressures that come from their subconscious thoughts, or from other physical factors. They may also avoid this pressure based on their subconscious thoughts or from other physical factors. When an artist encounters any of these situations, traces of underlining practice conflict begin to manifest.

Brief Biographical Details of the Artists

(i)   Dayo Laoye was born a prince of the royal family of late Oba Adetoyese Laoye, the *Timi of Ede*, in 1959. Timi is the title of the monarch and traditional ruler of Ede, a Yoruba town in Osun State of Nigeria. For this painter, upholding the traditional values of Yoruba ethnicity gradually became paramount in his professional career, having grown up in a palace. His privileged family background allowed him to start schooling at a very early age in 1962. In 1978, he was admitted into Yaba College of Technology to study Fine Art, his lifelong ambition. By 1985 he had concluded his Higher National

Diploma (HND) in painting. After working in the advertising industry for a while, in 1988 he left for the Diaspora in search of greener pastures. He was first employed as General Assistant at the Circle Gallery, Washington, DC in 1989 and later as artist/curator at African International House, Chicago, Illinois in 1990. His fulltime studio practice began in 1997.

(ii)   Oluchukwu Oguibe, commonly known as Olu Oguibe, was born in 1964. He was admitted into the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, where he studied Fine Art and graduated as a first class student, and the all-round-best of the University in 1986 (Oguibe, 2000-2007). Though he graduated with an exceptional record, he noted that the proposition of running a direct M.A/Ph.D. programme was not eventually approved by the Postgraduate School of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. While in school, he was a student unionist and was once National Secretary of the National Association of Nigerian Students (NANS). Three years after graduation, he came up with a manifesto, *My feet have found the path*, that could be said to have literarily culminated in his visual discourse of Africa's glorification. He crystallized this in 1989 and the collection of works he did during this period, few weeks before he travelled to United Kingdom for his postgraduate programme, was titled *National graffiti*. The contents of this, he said, "provides glimpses of a personal aesthetic that remains evident" till date (Oguibe, 2000-2007).

In two-and-a-half years, he qualified as a Doctor of Philosophy in Art History in 1991 in England. He later moved to the USA to solidify his scholastic career. Thus far, Oguibe has crystallized his creative works and approaches into several categories, some by media, but mostly by derivable contents. He is an Associate Professor at the University of Connecticut, College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, where he lectures in the Institute for African American Studies and also teaches studio practices and art theory in the Department of Art and Art History. Aside these, he is a poet and curator.

(iii)   Victor Ekpuk left Obafemi Awolowo University in 1989 with a Bachelor of Arts degree in Fine Art, majoring in Painting. He joined Daily Times Newspapers (Nig.) Ltd., to start a career and he worked there for seven years. His graphical simplification and abstraction endeared him to many art lovers and critics. Soon, his drawings and paintings became those countable or uncountable, and sometimes

decipherable and undecipherable codes that enchant the subconscious mind into dream and mystery, into the past and the present, and, at times, into the evident and the shrouded. It is this hallmark of Ekpuk that Auslander (2004) characterized as Ekpuk's cutting "across multiple boundaries – between word and image, signifier and signified, secrecy and revelation, encryption and inscription, encipherment and decipherment". The element of Line, as a magic in Space, has become Ekpuk's major creative weapon; the application, formulation and intensity of this tool is what Carlson (2004) said Ekpuk continually refers to as Ekpuk's "scribblings".

The Conflict and Resolution Experience

The biographies thus, given conflict parameters and the resolutions in the practice of these artists, have been analyzed from intrapersonal angle and each of them had also been individually directed. In this study, a painting from before-the-sojourn series and two from after-the-sojourn series, from each of the painters, are used as illustrations.

Laoye's pre-Diasporic experience was wrapped in the fibres of painting, graphic designing, and cartooning. This had a huge influence in the type of impressionistic painting and drawing he was producing. His images were usually sketchy and floating. When Laoye was still an undergraduate in Nigeria, his works were stylistically naturalistic. His creative rendition after leaving Yaba College of Technology was mostly determined by mood. As such, a few abstractions that were flat came to life in some of his paintings (Plate 1). This practice profile followed him to the Diaspora in 1988. He then studied at Howard University, Washington, DC where he learnt more on the scholastic and creative stretch of the "contemporary African-American art, and its search for a link with the past. It was during this time that [he] began to explore the very meaning of the tradition in which [he] was born" (Laoye, n.d.). This was his primary contact with substance of influence, a desire to link with his past, his cultural history, in a new environment where he seeks relevance. It was a knowledge search at first, but later prompted a visual decoding.

Plate 1: Dayo Laoye (1985). *Unity*. Watercolour, Pen & Ink.
Size not indicated. Courtesy of the artist in 2014.

After postgraduate studies, his image presentation, particularly human, became rotund with round edges (Plate 2), unlike the straighter ones of the pre-Diasporic era. The joy of traditional linkage then crept steadily into visual pronouncements. An urge to express his new-found ideology could not be avoided in his creative outputs, including his dressing that has changed ever since then. Laoye eventually compromised his old formal and thematic expression for new ones, based on a newly acquired knowledge, conviction, and identity. "Although I was academically trained, my work now is stylized" (Plates 3), Laoye had further clarified. His works are now boldly caricaturized with dashing brushstrokes. By this time, his integration of new context has gain prominence in his artistic formalism. This change, through his acquaintance with the literature on African arts and tradition, was a prompter on the one hand; and the hydrodynamics of movement, which he learnt while at Howard University, was another on the other hand. Time and space have played a very vital dimension in the determination of Laoye's curvilinear strokes. Emotionally, a resolve has been maintained to propagate Africaness in his forms, while the sketch-like quality of the pre-Diasporic era is still retained till date. It is also noteworthy that Laoye did not waste time in resolving his practice conflict, which became evident since the late 2000s.

Plate 2: Dayo Laoye (2013). *Lovers.* Watercolour,
Size not indicated. Courtesy of the artist in 2014.

Plate 3: Dayo Laoye (2013). *Elegance.* Watercolour.
Size not indicated. Courtesy of the artist in 2014.

In his own case, just before he moved out of Nigeria on his diasporic sojourn, Olu Oguibe made some paintings that were serialized and titled the series *National Graffiti* (Plate 4). They were done on mats. His message was political, and, as usual, satirical. Oguibe has always been particular about his medium and the context of his literary and visual statements, being a poet. He once said about African painting traditions and the context in which he developed his form:

> Among the most interesting facts about African painting traditions is that in most cultures painting remained decidedly abstract and purely formal without resort to social or figurative content. In most instances, painting almost always concerned itself with only line, color, space, luminance, the delicate balance between saturation and emptiness, and the logic of translation from nature to sign (Oguibe, 2000-2007).

Plate 4: Olu Oguibe (1989). *National Graffiti* (2 of the 8 panels). Acrylic on mat. Sizes not indicated. (Olu Oguibe, 2000-2007). By permission of the artist in 2013

When Oguibe became a Diaspora, his dynamic posture remained, but his expressions started getting global, his scope widened. He started compromising his earlier artistic mediums and began to embrace critical innovations to medium, theme and serialization. *Game*, which is an installation (Plate 5), *Three seasons*, and the *New work* series are good examples. His old stylistic and contextual modes have been compromised for his constant search for new, critically challenging possibilities of expression. This search for medium, global context,

were met with endless possibilities as he relocated. Commonly, the Diaspora has been an incubator of creative ideas for those ready to integrate. Oguibe's mats were compromised; clay, wood, steel and glass; mountain, road, river, park, and even the human psyche (for example, *Serenata* an outdoor performance in Monterrey Mexico in 2005), were now used as platforms of visual expressions. A new consciousness dominated his identity. The diasporic space has been a fertile ground to release his hitherto caged emotion and thwarted creative impulse of the pre-Diaspora environment. His texts were turned into visual collages of metaphorical statements, mostly political, and sometimes socio-cultural. A sort of visual poetic syndrome now re-vibrates in his structuralist's frame and deconstructionist's hands. A single painting cannot encapsulate his loaded idea on a theme; so he sometimes employed serialization strategy (*Women of Substance: A Canon in Progress*) (Plate 6), and monumentality (*Okwu Muo: Seat for Ala, Anyanwu and the Three Virtuous Monks*) that is erected on Mt. Samsung in Korea become glaring models. This new sense of expression dominates his cultivated hands and mind. Managing mediums and limiting themes are now past; abundance and vast expression now dominate Oguibe's preoccupation in his current Diasporic visceral, and visual engagements: aside from being a scholar, he is a painter, poet, curator, sculptor, performance artist, installation artist, ceramist, and more.

Spatio-environmental practice conflicts for Oguibe look perpetual, because he resolves his challenge to execute his creative works by breathing positive air into any medium he sees as providing the leeway to resolving his creations. Again, resolving to be different with every creative output puts him in constancy with changing psychological states. His causality prompter rests on his flexibility to create his own challenges and conflict situations at any time, with the ultimate possibility of resolving them. Stifling conditions would have made this state of creation impracticable, or unimaginable before his migration.

Plate 5: Olu Oguibe (2002-2003), *Game* (Installation). Clay.
Sizes: Varied (Olu Oguibe, 2000-2007). By permission of the artist in 2013.


Plate 6: Olu Oguibe (2000 to date). *Women of substance: A panon in Progress*.
Driftwood and tyres. Sizes slightly varied (Olu Oguibe, 2000-2007). By permission
of the artist in 2013.

Victor Ekpuk's symbolism and style have persisted from his pre-Diasporic period to the present. The originality of his style has become immutable. Akatakpo and Filani (1993: p. 9) noted that, "The calligraphic organicism of his textured paintings conjure diverse African origins such as the Egyptian hieroglyphics, Akwaba Monoliths, Yoruba decorative motifs and Uli (Nsibidi) linearity" (Plate 7). Akatakpo and Filani's observation was made before Ekpuk left for the Diaspora. This seemed to be what the constellation of symbols of Ekpuk was. He also engaged himself in what he referred to as the "manuscript series," where he used what the Hausa and Fulani people called *Walaha*[3]. Ekpuk started using this wooden tablet as an

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"artistic medium" in 1995 when he first came in contact with it. *Walaha* refers to wooden or metal slate commonly used for Arabic inscriptions in Nigeria and across West Africa. However, looking at Ekpuk's diasporic paintings and drawings, one notices a systemic development, advancement, or a further growth that could be considered a result of practice conflict, which basically stemmed from relocation to another enabling environment. Ekpuk has obliged himself more symbols and signs into his pool of symbolism. He has extensively juggle his old and new signs and symbols, which have been creatively integrated into patterns, meanings, and sometimes just for pure aesthetic realization.
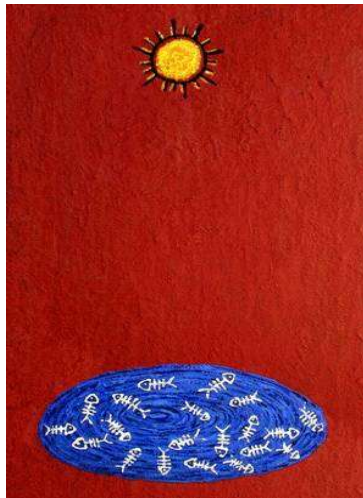
Plate 7: Victor Ekpuk (1993). *Fish pond*. Acrylic on paper. Size not indicated. Courtesy of the artist in 2014.

Consistently, Ekpuk's reservoir of patterns, motifs, signs, and symbols flourishes (Plate 8). But the conjectures of some motifs, signs, and symbols are aided by his native background, his affiliation with *Ona* movement, and other personal, psychological, emotional, and/or spiritual standpoints. *Ona* artistic movement started as an important creative source formalized by a group of Yoruba, intellectual artists from the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria. Ekpuk, being one of their students and a close junior associate of these movement

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pioneers, propelled his creative energy and resource from this movement's stylistic orientation. Nonetheless, his artistic practice conflict resolution has been his free use of symbolic elements, which later became diverse and repro-dynamic for formal and symbolic assemblage (Plate 9). He now employs scores of these elements, whether as background, as forming patterns to a work, or as the body of the work itself. In most of his later works, the fusion of elements and figure have been largely separated, unlike before when they interweaved. Again, in this compromise, colour became reduced on his canvas to mostly one or two, unlike the pre-Diasporic era when his canvas was lavished with bright colours. The transition interference period of the conflict prompters and their resolutions, basically between Ekpuk's old artistic expression and a new artistic styling, has been seamless and may not be easily determinable in periodic terms. What is easily determinable of his visual expression is the unhindered freedom to conjure signs and symbols at will, which he embeds in the repository of older ones. Themes seem not to be made out of the use of the symbols, since they cluster repeatedly on almost all the works, but they become sometimes interpretable through the overall design. Such is the new formation in the complexity of the constellation of signs and symbols of Ekpuk. This dominates many of his recent oeuvres. Contextual form drives meaning in some (such as in Plate 8), and spiritual or mystical form controls meaning in others (such as in Plate 9). The language of symbolic ordering has captured Ekpuk's thought that his new environment has created possibilities of diversification of sign and symbol applications. This is buttressed in many of the scholarly contributions in Falola's (2018) *Victor Ekpuk: Connecting Lines Across Space and Time*.
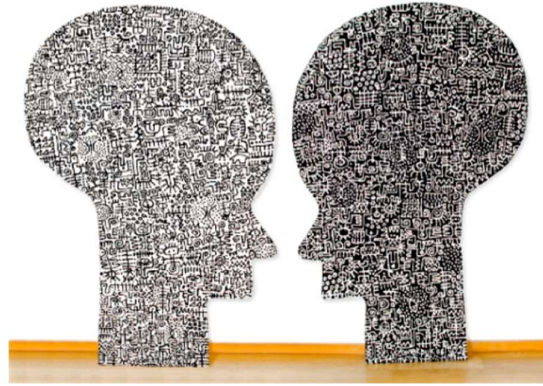
Plate 8: Victor Ekpuk (2006). *You Be Me, I Be You.* Acrylic on wood, diptych. 144cm x 182cm. Courtesy of the artist in 2014.

Plate 9: Victor Ekpuk (2008). *Sanctuary*. Graphite and pastel on paper. 127cm x 127cm. Courtesy of the artist in 2014.

Conclusion

Significantly, this study has assisted in the search for those orderly-manifested conflicts, and identified those ever-occurring conflicts that could be constant in the lives and works of Nigerian Diaspora artists. Creatively tapping into the endless possibilities that abound in the Diasporic environment is what is observable in these three painters. The study has shown that self-conflict determination and resolution is also part of arriving at the upliftment, or the defragment of the human creative acumen. But aside of this, conflict in artistic practices usually involves the interactions of the emotional state of the artist, with the mediums of artistic inputs, and with the conditional status of the environment. It is against this premise that a conceptual and definitive platform of conflict and resolution in artistic practice is given, in order to guide and serve as a base for scholastic understanding and applications of conflict forms and concepts in creative practices. This will be achieved through a logical crystallization of the several 66resolution and management strategies that have been employed by the creative person through the use of what can be described as artistic conflict prompters, curtailments, managements, and resolutions.

One indispensable and recurring, conflict-inducing factor in all the illustrations given is the space-environment. For the artist, the environment includes the immediate and extended working space, the community that the artist lives, the intended audience of such work, possible collectors and critics, the sources of art materials, and the socio-political and cultural feelings that could be summed in the artist's area. One most important thing about the artists, however, is that, they strive hard to get resolutions from the environmental space that housed conflict prompters. For these artists, it is inevitable that there would have been a particular or several states of outwardly and/or inwardly expressed intrapersonal conflicts before arriving at a satisfied state of personal resolution resulting in a change of certain aspects of his or her art practice in a given environmental circumstance. Nonetheless, incontestable factors from the foregoing is that the three painters studied contended with pressures to change, and pressures to make art that would be noticed and appreciated in both their immediate and extended spatio-environments.

Endnotes
[1] For more literatures on Lewis Coser, his personality, and some of his contributions to (and on) the theories of (social) conflict, and the development of variations in sociological precepts and deductions, read Coser (1957), Fleck (2013), Jaworski (1991), Laluddin (2016), Lumumba-Kasongo (2017), Morrow (1978), Sica (2014), Turner (1975) and Wani (2011).
[2] Except Oguibe who combines academics with painting, the other two are full-time practicing artists.
[3] The *Walaha* is an Islamic cleric writing tablet, or board, or slate that is also known as *Aduaze* or *Allo*; and as *LawH* in Arabic.

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