



PERFORMING JUSTICE: DRAMATIC STRUCTURES IN INDIGENOUS CONFLICT RESOLUTION AMONG THE ONDO PEOPLE

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Abstract

Conflict is an inevitable feature of human coexistence, particularly within societies that value harmony, moral order, and communal stability as foundations for sustainable development. Among the Yoruba, whose legal traditions were largely unwritten, indigenous systems of justice were preserved and transmitted through performance—integrating entertainment, education, history, and social regulation. This paper examines the performing arts as integral to indigenous litigation and conflict resolution among the Oṇdó people. Drawing on performance theory, the study analyses the dramatic rituals, roles, spaces, symbols, and verbal artistry that structure Oṇdó legal processes. It also explores the cultural and philosophical sources from which Oṇdó legal performance derives its authority and legitimacy. The paper argues that conflict resolution in Oṇdó society constitutes a form of performance in which law is enacted rather than merely pronounced, with the ultimate objective of moral reorientation, social healing, and communal transformation. Beyond entertainment, drama functions as a critical medium for justice, peace-making, and social continuity in Oṇdó indigenous jurisprudence.

Keywords: Performing Arts, Indigenous Legal Systems, Conflict Resolution, Oṇdó, Yoruba Culture

Introduction

The Oṇdó Kingdom represents a culturally homogenous Yoruba polity characterized by a shared dialect, traditions, and socio-political institutions that cut across its urban and rural settlements. While Òde-Oṇdó functions as the most urbanized centre, numerous surrounding towns and villages—including Ìgbíndó, Ìgbadó, Ìgùnshìn, Ìlú-ńlá, Bólórundúró, Bágbè, Lósarè, Gbagénhà, Àsàntán, Olórúntèdó, Orísúnmibáre, Sàṣéré, Fágbo, Omifunfun, Ìrèwà, Òbòtò etc. (Oṇdó Brochure 1987) and others remain culturally unified under the suzerainty of the Òṣemàwé of Oṇdó. This rural–urban continuum reinforces a shared worldview in which law, morality, and social order are deeply embedded in communal life.

Within Yoruba society, law and custom are traditionally perceived as ancestral inheritances, transmitted across generations and sustained by collective memory. Their authority is reinforced by the belief that deviation from established norms invites not only social sanctions but also metaphysical consequences from ancestral and spiritual forces. (Wagner, 1940:2002). Justice, therefore, is approached with seriousness, ritual gravity, and moral caution. Rather than relying exclusively on formalized institutions akin to modern courts, Yoruba societies including the Oṇdó developed flexible, participatory mechanisms of conflict resolution grounded in dialogue, arbitration, and reconciliation. This is reflected in the Yoruba aphorism *a kìì tí kóòtù bọ ká ṣòrẹ*, which expresses the communal preference for settlement over litigation.

Conflict in Oṇdó society is understood as a product of human interaction and social proximity, not as an aberration but as a condition requiring careful management. The central concern of Yoruba jurisprudence has historically been the maintenance of moral equilibrium and socially acceptable conduct, guided by sacred injunctions and communal values such as *ìwà* (character) and *omolúwàbí* (ethical personhood). Justice is thus oriented less toward retribution than toward peace-making, social repair, and the restoration of harmony.

Given the fundamentally oral nature of Yoruba culture, indigenous legal processes are enacted through performance. Legal knowledge is not codified in written statutes but embodied in ritualized actions, verbal artistry, symbolic objects, and dramatic interaction among adjudicators, litigants, witnesses, and the community. This paper investigates the performing arts as they operate within the indigenous legal systems of the Oṇdó people. Using performance theory as its



analytical framework, the study identifies and examines the dramatic elements embedded in Oñdó conflict resolution practices, arguing that law in this context is not merely administered but performed. Through this performative process, justice becomes a lived, communal experience aimed at moral instruction, social cohesion, and sustainable development.

Dispensation of Justice in Oñdó.

According to our resource person Pa Akínmúṣayò Bánkólé aged 80, the entire system of administration of justice in years back – mostly from oral accounts – was predicated on the authority of the Òsemàwé of Oñdó. During war times in those days, justice was meted out, but recalcitrant criminals were either executed or sold into slavery. This is corroborated by (Omojéjé, 2017:151). There was and is a judicial procedure of hearing and deciding cases as well as dealing with serious offences. Since the Oñdó people had realized that administration of justice could no longer be in the hand of an individual and his immediate family alone and since value of judicial emphasis would not only be on retribution and reparation but in peace making; arbitration was solely the aim of peace making. In the past, life of the Yorùbá people is oral, hence, they make use of their oral literature in every aspect of their life. One can boldly say this is one of the social use of folklore in the society. A vital and unique nature of the Oñdó legal culture is its flexibility. It is so fluid and flexible that it is often susceptible to manipulation by such adjudicators who have the mastery of the verbal art. Such acquisition of knowledge of the oral legal data, enhances the whims and caprices of a witty and brave adjudicator, who knows the wherewithal of the indigenous law and the machinery of overplaying or underplaying the issues involved in the dispute. The concept of *Ìwà* (character) and *Omọ́lúwàbí* (well-cultured person) are enshrined in Yorùbá philosophy of law. Reasonability of intention and action do not go unrecognized in Yorùbá legal culture. Parties to the dispute/conflict and their witnesses (where necessary) are always given sufficient time for hearing which is always speedy.

The machinery of justice during conflict and except where the security of the state was/is involved was/is in most cases, in the hands of the titled chiefs because of the nature of the political administration of Oñdó. Every titled chief had his own courtyard in his *Uli Oyè* where he adjudicated on issues such as marital rift, land squabbles, petty theft, money/debt matters, property matters, promiscuity matters, chieftaincy tussle, family conflict, conflict between

individuals, conflict within and across families, as well as between families and also between villages and street fighting. Intra-family conflicts were more amenable to management than inter-family and inter-village conflicts which required a more delicate or even diplomatic approach. These courts were by and large, informal and their function was purely that of arbitration for peaceful coexistence, hence the adage *Okùn Omiye le tẹ̀ sùgbón kì í já* (the cord that binds families together may bend but it does not break).

Administration of justice in Oñdó is based on people's custom and usage. Laws were not written down in a single document but it was considered a sacrilege for an individual to break such unwritten laws, especially where the penalty is severe on the culprit. Because of the fact that law never stood alone, traditional judicial administration in Oñdó promotes justice to a certain degree and the role of religion here went, in no small way, in promoting not only conformity but also in strengthening the sanctity of the laws. What we are stressing here is that religion used to foster the potency of law. Like other towns in traditional Yorùbáland, Oñdó had a strong belief in a number of deities which include the spirit of the departed ancestors such as *Eégún, Ifá, Ògún, Orò, Lúyarè, Balùfón* and the *Àìṣẹ̀*. However, secret cults such as the *Ògbóni* and *Orò* play significant roles in handling serious criminal offences and in executing their own judgments. Cross-examination lubricates the engine of equitable justice and fair play. It is the process of adducing evidence and corroborating facts of the dispute in vogue and this is effectively done by the legal officials.

There is a culture of courtesy observable on occasions of conflict resolution which is regarded as legal etiquette. It is similar to procedural constitutionality or conventionality of adjudication in the various indigenous courts. According to (Oḷáṣba, 2008:90), Etiquette is a Yorùbá cultural matrix of development and symbolization of sociator. This legal etiquette is characterized by formalization of the principles and practice of indigenous laws. It is anchored on the demonstration of cultural values and dynamic projection of social symbiosis. Legal etiquette promotes and fosters morality and good mannerism at the various levels of adjudication. It facilitates orderliness and decorum in Oñdó courts. It also enables smooth setting of disputes with speedy dispatch thereby giving participants opportunity to attend to other meaningful activities. There are rules binding on everybody in the Oñdó indigenous courts. There should be silence and decorum so that people i.e. all participants could listen attentively and follow the

trends of argument and explanations of the disputants and the legal officials. Participants in the drama of adjudication must respect the opinion or view of the other person. Interruption is never allowed. Lateness to the indigenous courts is not allowed because it hinders the principles and procedure of the court.

It is worthy of note that the end of justice according to Akiwowo in (Àlào, 2009:11-12) was to enhance the achievement of the five categories of inalienable social values that constituted the purpose and goal of human society. They are:

- (i) *Ire àìkú* (the value of good health till old age)
- (ii) *Ire owó* (financial security)
- (iii) *Ire ọkọ/aya* (the value of intimate companionship and love)
- (iv) *Ire ọmọ* (the value of parenthood); and
- (v) *Ire aborí ọtá* (the value of assured self-actualization).

Àlào, 2009 submission which we share is that:

The Yorùbá believed that justice was all about using the agency of law at whatever level to ensure that human efforts to achieve these goals were not abridged. Law must then be administered to teach human beings the basic moral lessons in behaviour. As stated in one of the chapters of *Ifá, Òfún-sa*,

Òtóró! Ayé já.

Ògbàrà! Ayé là kanlẹ

Bí ayé bá ti ọwọ ẹni bàjẹ

Àì mọ ìwà hù wa ni

Òtóró! The world has flown off its hook into space.

Ògbàrà! The earth is rent asunder to its core.

If the world becomes unlivable in our time

It is because we no longer know how to behave.

Performance Theory

According to Schechner (1998:30), ‘a performance is an activity done by an individual or group in the presence of and for another individual or group’. Goffman (1959) says further that performance is a “quality” that can occur in any situation rather than a fenced-off genre. This indicates that performance is an everyday life. According to Schechner, a performance is called

theatre of ritual because of where it is performed, by whom and under what circumstances. For any performance to be worthwhile, it must possess these basic qualities; a special ordering of time, a special value attached to objects, special performance places and rules. In performance activities however, time is adapted to the event. Levi-Strauss also opines that at all levels, drama include mechanisms for transformation which conflict resolution is set to achieve.

Social Solidarity Theory

Emile Durkheim, in his book, *The Division of Labour* explains the society in terms of social order and societal facts. According to Durkheim, individuals in a society are social actors who are restrained by social facts to stay in society. Social facts are functionalist in nature. They exist only if the society can derive utility or benefits from them. Extrapolating this theory to conflict resolution, as performing art, it is viewed as a dramatic social fact from which society derives some benefits.

The Place of Drama in Conflict Resolution

As submitted by (Onigu and Isaac 2004:IX), every society is bound to experience one form of conflict or the other but what makes a society an ideal polity is the extent to which the conflicting interests and needs are constructively managed so that violence does not threaten its continued existence. Conflict resolution mechanisms provide an avenue for interaction with the concerned parties, with the hope of reducing its scope, intensity and effects, (Anpe 2015:548). In general, conflict resolution provides the opportunity for the convener to interact with the parties concerned. The convener in this sense is the dramatic performance which should be followed by observation and discussion by both parties involved. Conflict resolution acts as a healing balm to the parties involved, no matter the form it takes because it provides the opportunity to explore alternative solutions in restoring normalcy.

According to Onigu and Isaac (2009:9), the essence of conflict resolution is that it “facilitates consensus-building, social bridge reconstructions, and the re-enactment of order in society”. Positively, conflict educates those involved on how the different individuals that make up the social units should be vanguards of reconciliation in their respective societies instead of breaking up societies. In this respect, the practical demonstration of the conflicting situations that give rise to crisis which can escalate into violence, will create an ideal forum for meaningful discussion that can lead to the resolution of real life conflict. Dramatic techniques in various kinds and

degrees are used to bring about peaceful-coexistence, peace-making and peace-keeping to facilitate mutualism which anchors on communalism. The aftermath of this is the cementation of solidarity for unity and consolidation of understanding and welfare for all and sundry in the society.

Indigenous Legal Systems as Performance

It is obvious that conflict resolution conjures drama and society as it plays itself out within a community. Without conflict, there is no drama. Drama deals directly with the socio-cultural aspects of a people in any given society. It is characterized by several elements which include shared language that symbolizes and categorizes events; shared way of perceiving and thinking about the world, agreed form of non-verbal communication; agreed moral and other values, and a system of religious and other allied beliefs. (Anpe, 2015:547). In this respect, the art of drama does not only mirror the life of a people but also suggests how to improve it. Drama can be aptly described as a dynamic and unitary means of entertainment, education, celebration, protest and discovery. These qualities obviously place drama in a vantage position in terms of conflict prevention and resolution. Horst and Birgitte (2005:94) corroborates the above submission that Drama is about the clashes and conflicts of personality, of values, of attitudes, of emotions, of interests both internal and environmental, of philosophy and ideology, of ethics and morals.

Echeruo (1971:30) emphasizes that drama, in its very manifestations, including its virtual manifestations, is very specifically communal in character. Conflict resolution takes the form of performance, which Goffman (1959) defines as “all the activity of a given participant on a given occasion which serves to influence in any way any other participants”. Taking a particular participant and his performance as a basic part of reference, we may refer to the litigants and the legal officials as characters, those who contribute to the other performances as the audience, observers, or co-participants. The various indigenous legal courts are regarded as the places of performance, while various objects used during conflict resolution process as properties.

The pre-established pattern of action which is the unfolded during conflict resolution or legal performance and which may be presented or played through on other occasions may be referred to as plot. Due to the hierarchy personality and integrity of the adjudicators, costumes are used in different styles and degrees. Indigenous legal performance encompasses the total display of culture in different forms. Dialogue is also a major element of legal performance.

It has been observed that the Yorùbá legal system is rather performed than documented. Oláoba, (2008:5), corroborates this thus:

The knowledge of the legal heritage is kept in the mind and memory of the Yorùbá people who select at will and random (depending on the issues involved) for dramatization.

It is worthy of note that some aspects of Yorùbá (Oṅdó) festivals contain elements of legal culture performed along with them. Examples of these festivals include Òràmfẹ festival in Oṅdó Kingdom, Agunlele festival in Itaji Kingdom in Èkìtì State. These festivals enhance morality and deterrence to committing offences. Music is used in these festivals for the purpose of correcting the societal ill, conflict management and enhance social change.

Performing Arts in Oṅdó Indigenous Legal Systems.

As observed earlier that conflict resolution could be seen as a performance. It is pertinent therefore, to identify and analyse the dramatic elements or the arts in the dispensation of justice or conflict resolution in the Oṅdó culture. A good performance takes place when there is a proper co-ordination of performers and other performance factors to effectively portray the characters and communicate its messages effectively.

Schencher (1971) is of the view that a good performance must have an interplay of all the elements of performance. The dramatic elements which make up the performing arts of the Oṅdó legal system include performers, audience, plot, performance space, costume, properties, Dialogue, and suspense.

Performers

Performers in the process of conflict resolution are regarded as the pillars of justice. They can also be referred to as actors and actresses. There cannot be drama without performers. These people are dedicated to perform particular roles. (Ògúndèjì, 2005:22-223). The entire system of administration of justice in those days was predicated on the authority of the Òṣemàwé of Oṅdó who was considered the owner of his kingdom. He was assisted by a college of chiefs of different grades. The Òṣemàwé was the ultimate source of resolution of disputes; hence all intractable disputes ultimately ended with him. In cases involving murder or death of a citizen or resident was the duty of the Òṣemàwé to decide on a suspect's culpability and pronounce punishment.

The Ìwàrèfà chiefs in turn had the kingdom divided among them for the purpose of superintending the affairs of land, resources and people inhabiting the areas over which they wielded influence. The Ìwàrèfà chief assists the Òṣemàwé including the Èkùlè, Èlégbé, and the Ìjámà. As pointed out earlier, justice dispensation and administration of peace revolved round the king and Òṣemàwé-in-council i.e. the Ìwàrèfà. The three arms of government – the executive, the legislative and judiciary were responsible for justice dispensation and administration of peace. The Òṣemàwé-in-council is the highest tribunal in Oṇdó before the advent of the British rule. The council deals with disputes between chiefs, between parties belonging to different wards and with cases appealed from lower courts. They also deal with criminal cases or what might be called indictable offences such as murder, treason, burglary, arson, unlawful wounding, manslaughter, incest, witchcraft and sorcery.

Next to the Òṣemàwé in council are the village heads appointed by the Òṣemàwé but answerable directly to the Ìwàrèfà in matters of accountability. They have the duty to maintain law and order in their respective domains. The quarter chiefs and elders in the community are not left out. Elders of high integrity are usually engaged to settle disputes amicably. Other actors or performers that could be identified are the Baálè (village head), Òbí (parents), aláṣòbí (members of the same blood), aláṣògbé (membership of compound who are not related by blood). Both parties involved in conflict are also regarded as performers in the drama of litigation. All the category of people mentioned above except the warring parties act as judges who must possess attributes of good character. They must be able to show deference where necessary and tell the truth even when powerful people's interests are affected. Witnesses are also regarded as performers. Traditional healers, diviners, herbalist, seers are not left out. Messengers/ court officials of the various courts are also performers.

Audience

During conflict resolution, interested community members and village committees exist to support and compliment the dispute resolution process. The parties may call their relatives during the hearings and their relatives participate in the dispute resolution process. Community members are always allowed to come and learn from other people's mistakes thereby serving as audience during disputes resolution. They are not to partake in the judicial process, but they are just observers. They can also applaud the judges and the warring parties when crisis or dispute

might have been settled amicably. They also appreciate what they watch during the process of conflict resolution because it reminds them of so many occurrences in the past.

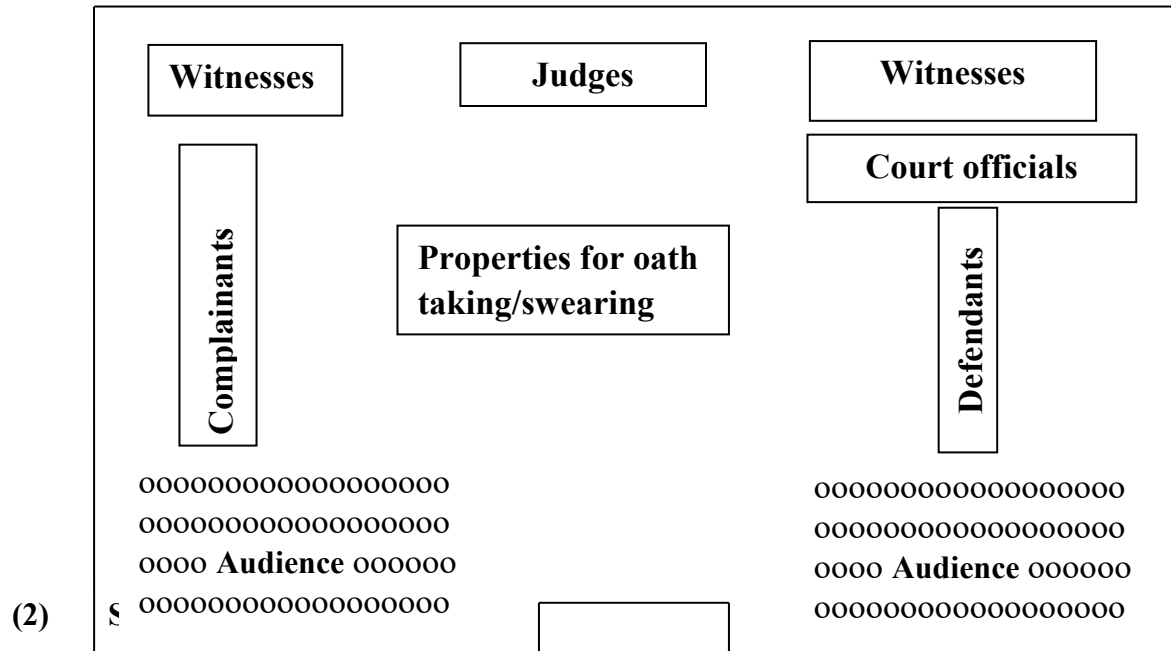
The performers refresh the memory and also draw the attention of the audience to salient issues in and around the society. The audience who is also aware of its environment understands and grasps the issues, ideas and thought expressed by the performers. According to Adeleke (1995:49-50), the relationship between the actors/actress and the audience is interactional. The audience can react in a positive way to the actors by giving an ovation if it is pleased. This is the nature of the audience/performers relationship in indigenous African performance.

Performance Space (Stage)

Performance space/arena is very important to drama. The places of performance could be likened to stages in contemporary drama. A stage is defined by (Derek Bowskill, 1976) as the area occupied exclusively by the select-elect of the drama. A stage can, therefore, be regarded as any place where performance can be displayed. In this paper, stages are likened to the different indigenous courts in Oñdó Kingdom. They include: the Òsemàwé's court, Lóbùn's court, Sàşéré's court, Lógbòşéré's court and Jomu's court.

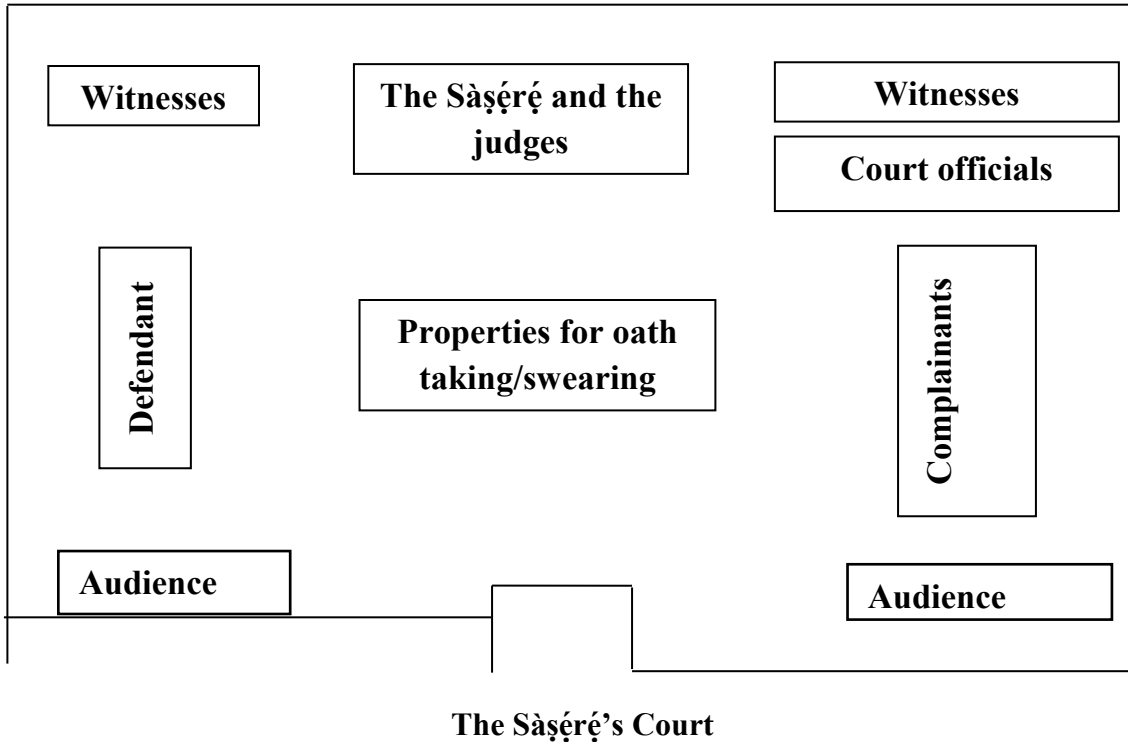
Lóbùn's Court

The Lóbùn is a female king in Oñdó kingdom. By virtue of her position, she operated a kind of tribunal that was principally meant for women and market related squabbles. The Lóbùn's tribunal, unlike that of the other high chiefs, was the court of first and last instances. Cases tried in her court cannot be appealed against. Her judgements were final and her pronouncement was accepted as the verdict of the goddess of wealth. The Lóbùn operated with a cabinet of female chiefs who supported her. The Lóbùn courts sit every market day. The court is located at Otaşòrà street, Odòjomu inside Lóbùn's palace. It is a faultily big hall with demarcations. The judges sit at the upper stage (podium), the complainants sit at the right side of the floor while the defendants sit at the left side of the floor. Witnesses sit very close to the judges. The audiences sit at the back of the hall.



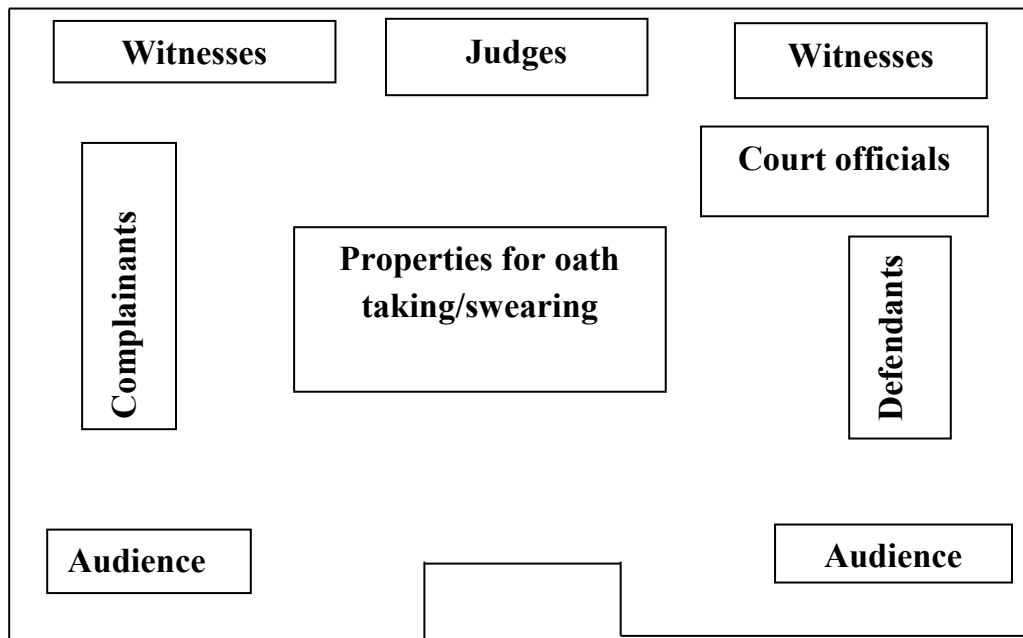
The Lóbùn's Court

The Sàşéré was a high chief and a prominent member of the state council. He is next to the Òdunwò in hierarchy. He took care of the Odòtù quarter and had the Lógbòşéré as a collaborator. He also operated a special court that was meant for strangers and treated cases that were based on business related issues. Sàşéré's court is not a regular court, and in most cases, it is meant to support non-indigenes of the town. Cases involving non-indigenes were usually transferred to his court on request.



(3) Lógbòşéré's Court

Lógbòşéré, by status, is the most senior of the chiefs and the head of Òtù chiefs. As such, he presided over a judicial court which heard all cases prior to their reaching the highest court, which was the Òşemàwé's court. Although, the Lógbòşéré's court was not a court per se, however, it was a review tribunal, which ensured that cases brought to the palace of the Òşemàwé was worthy to be presented to him, thus, this presupposes that cases which were not worthy of hearing by the Òşemàwé were treated by the Lógbòşéré. The Lógbòşéré's court is built in his title house (Ilé Oyè) compound. It is a hall or auditorium where people sit comfortably during conflict resolution. The judges sit on the podium, the complainant sit at the right side of the judges on the floor of the hall, the accused normally sit at the left side of the judges on the floor of the hall. There exists a demarcation between witnesses who sit very close to the judges and the audience. The audience sit on the floor of the Auditorium facing the judges (elders). A place is designed for both the complainant and the defendant to state their cases in turns.



The Lógbòséré's Court

Jomu's Court

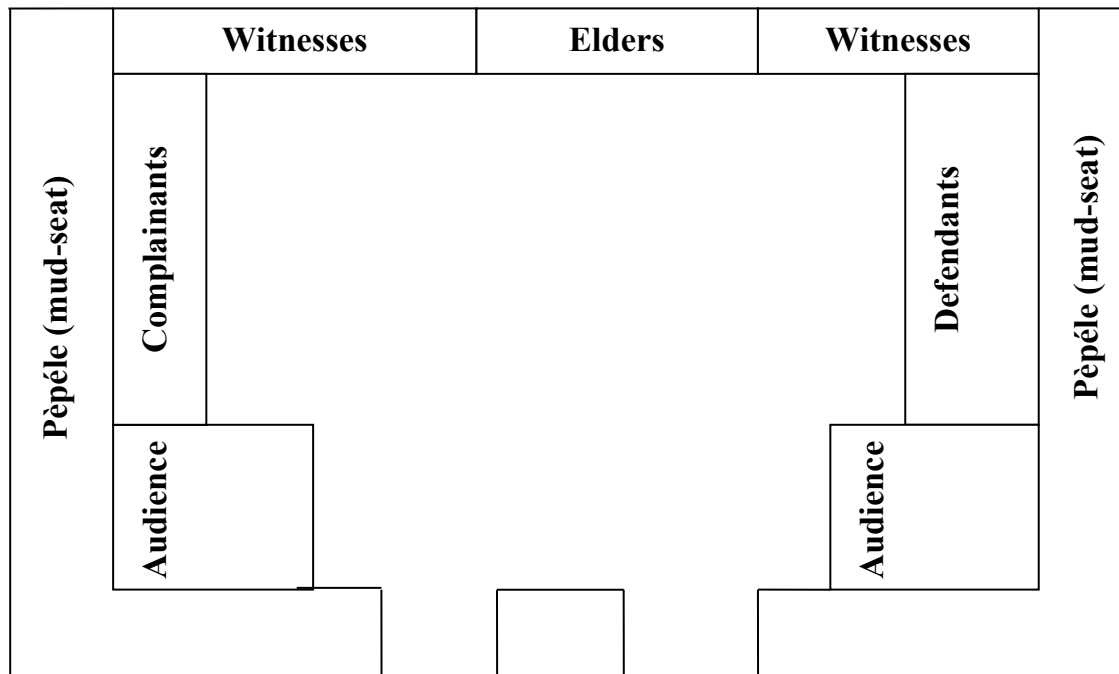
The Jomu's court had been established and was in full operation along with the Oba's court before the introduction of native court in Oñdó in 1915 (Omojéjé, 2017:159) These two courts were the major judicial institutions the colonial administrators met on ground when they arrived. In this court, Jomu was not the only court personnel involved in the process of justice dispensation, he had a panel of adjudicators and personnel. Members of the panel were chiefs under his authority. Traditionally, there were twelve chiefs under the Jomu, each of these chiefs was in charge of each street within the Jomu's quarter. But in judicial matters, the Lotu Jomu who was the prime minister of the Jomu's quarter, the Láyégbó was the administrative chief secretary. Kúlájolu and Legho were the four chiefs that made up the panel of adjudicators in the Jomu's court. The panel of arbitrators was usually of higher social status than the disputants. Members of the panel hold their position by virtue of their age, inherited status or influence within the community.

Ògún and Àìṣ Shrine: Oath-taking procedure is always the last resort when all other forms of dispute resolution had been exhausted. Ògún and Àìṣ were deified and held in awe hence they

were not taken for granted. Their shrines were located within the quarters of Jomu and Oba's palace respectively. In the presence of elders and the audience, the parties concerned would be asked to take the oath at the shrines. Each party to the dispute would take a piece of kolanut, a cock or any other thing that might be prescribed. A condition is always attached to the oath-taking. For instance, any of the parties who died within a specified period or befell by a mysterious calamity would be deemed to have lied or that if the person who took the oath could survive after one year, such a person would be vindicated. In most cases, a person who knows that he was lying would decline to swear by the shrines because sanction would be between him and the spiritual forces.

Village Court

These courts were usually located/held in the house of the head of the village. The courts are mini-square that could occupy some people for meeting purposes. The seats there were actually made of mud (clay soil) and permanently attached to the building. It is called *Pèpèle* in Onòdó dialect. Some still exist in old chieftaincy houses till date. The sitting of the elders were usually open to interested members of the immediate community.



Village Courts

Properties

These are objects used by the performers during the process of adjudication to aid their actions and complement their performance. Examples of these in the art of indigenous conflict resolution in Onòdó are the *Igbá omi títù* (calabash filled with cold water), *Ùànkèkèkò* (summon horsetail), *pákò àşę* (chewing stick of authority), *Òpá àşę* (the King's staff of office), *Obi àbàtà* (kolanut), a bottle of drink, *Òbò* (sasswood), *Àkùkò Adìyẹ* (cock), *irin* (iron implements) and *Agogo* (Iron Gong). The use of *Igbá omi títù* was a simple but dreaded process in those days which served as serious deterrence to dishonest people (Adégbèhìngbè 2013:147). Water from the calabash would be poured on the floor in small and calculated drops in the form of libation. Someone will be chewing the *pákò àşę* (chewing stick of authority) "Whenever water was poured on the floor, the man chewing the stick would spit on the water and say *àşę* (amen) to the curses or prayers that were being uttered by the people around or the person pouring the water in the calabash on the floor. Kolanut, cock, iron implements and drink are used to swear at the Ògún and Àìò shrines. *Ùànkèkèkò* (summon horsetail) is used to deliver summons to any person who was charged to court or witnesses who had a role to play. The process is known as *Ukòjòmò*. The king's staff of office is also used in this wise. They are usually feared because the repercussion of declining such summon was great, as it would be seen as an insult to the King and the Jomu. *Agogo* is used to maintain silence whenever there is noise and uproar in the courts.

Dialogue

The use of dialogue between two or more performers in the courts (stage) is a subtle means of communication and, or negotiation that can serve as a balm in conflict situations. The use of language here is very crucial. The judges must be able to employ language to plead and persuade the parties involved in conflict. Members of the audience can easily identify with the problems presented and contribute actively in finding fresh alternatives to solving them through discussions. These discussions usually provide opportunities for the participants and members of the audience to exchange useful ideas and suggestions that can lead to solving the problems raised. In a nutshell, discussing the problem raised with others, agreeing with others to do something about the problem and learning from other information the skills needed to solve such problems are seen as dialogue in this regard. During oath-taking procedure, the kind of dialogue that ensues between actors and audience are restricted dialogues in terms of questions and

answers or statement and response and responses to prayers and songs at different stages of performance during conflict resolution. It is only through effective dialogue that conflicts could be managed effectively. Hence, the Yorùbá proverb “*òrò rere a máa yọ obì lápò, òrò búburú a máa yọ idà lákò*’ Good words bring about peace and bad words bring about conflict.

Basically, there are three stages of dialogue for the settlement of conflict as noted by Adémowò (2015). The first stage is the stage for persuading parties to a conflict to bring their case to the “palavar”. The second stage has to do with the ‘speech or hearing’ stage where parties to the conflict confront each other. It is also, the stage when the elders will be given the opportunity to hear the full history of the conflict, known as the fear and concerns of the parties and the fundamental issues involved in the conflict. The last stage is one in which the elders, after hearing the facts of the conflict from both sides, take a decision and later drop their verdict.

Plot

This is the sequence and order of events in conflict resolution. The structural stage by-stage of conflict management are as follows: Expectant tension, Exposition, rising tension, emerging dramatic action, the crisis revealed, climax (the tension peaks, cathartic understanding, happy ending, open ending or compromise and reflection.

Suspense

Suspense in the art of litigation ensues at the point of delivering judgment by the elders or court officials. Both parties in conflict would be expecting a favourable judgment but the fact remains that there must definitely be a winner and a loser. There is also suspense on the part of the audience who does not know what will happen next and the outcome of the ongoing action.

Costume

The appearances of the performers make them different from the audience. Costumes also communicate to the audience in ways words cannot achieve. The king, chiefs and the elders are always in their *Aşọ Òfì* or *Agbádá* of different types and styles. They also wear beads of different types on their necks. The king holds his horsetail as props. The audience appear in their beautiful outing dresses of any kind and styles. It is not uncommon to find a culprit without a cap in the judgment hall. However, if anyone is invited to the palace, he or she must look good.

Conclusion

This study has demonstrated that conflict, while inevitable in human society, is culturally mediated and creatively managed within the indigenous legal systems of the Oñdó people. By examining the structures, rituals, and symbols of conflict resolution, the paper establishes that Oñdó jurisprudence operates fundamentally as performance. Legal proceedings are enacted through dramatized interactions involving adjudicators, litigants, witnesses, audiences, and sacred objects, all situated within culturally significant spaces. These performances do not merely resolve disputes; they educate, caution, reconcile, and reaffirm communal values.

The analysis reveals that drama occupies a central position in Oñdó indigenous litigation, serving as a medium through which law is made intelligible, authoritative, and morally persuasive. Through dialogue, costume, ritual objects, suspense, and symbolic action, conflict resolution becomes a collective process of meaning-making and social healing. In this sense, justice is not abstract or distant but visible, participatory, and deeply rooted in Yoruba cosmology and ethics.

Beyond entertainment, the performative nature of Oñdó legal systems underscores their broader cultural and developmental significance. By fostering peace, reinforcing moral conduct, and strengthening social solidarity, indigenous legal performance contributes to communal stability and sustainable development. The study thus affirms the relevance of indigenous African jurisprudence as a site of intellectual inquiry and suggests that future research could further explore comparative perspectives on performance, law, and conflict resolution across Yoruba and other African societies.

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