This Discussion Paper critically examines Zangbeto, a highly revered society among the Egun people in the town of Badagry, near the city of Lagos, in south west Nigeria, that have creatively re-invented tradition to serve multiple purposes. It shows how Zangbeto has in the context of economic crisis and challenges linked to urban growth, adapted its roles to include communal policing, conflict mediation, oral art and entertainment, and the maintenance of communal order. In more ways than one, it captures the essence and multiple identities of Zangbeto within Badagry society.

The involvement of Zangbeto in local policing or 'night watching' provides an alternative to the dominant representation of vigilantism in Nigeria as disorderly violence, sometimes for political or criminal ends. This paper also demonstrates how Zangbeto, drawing upon local Egun culture and traditional practices is able to maintain security and local order at the community level. It is argued that rather than act in an arbitrary and violent manner, Zangbeto operates through the combination of traditional symbolic actions and oral art in mediating local conflicts and preserving social harmony and local order. An interesting point relates to how Zangbeto co-exists peacefully with formal political and security institutions, and operates without causing tensions within Badagry town, where some inhabitants share different ethnic identities and religious faiths.

The study also opens up a humanist perspective to how the aesthetics of Zangbeto cultural tropes of oral presentation, rhetoric and representation act as a powerful force for preserving cherished communal norms and values, and facilitating communication in ways that strengthen social cohesion. In this regard this paper demonstrates the wealth of possibilities that exist within African traditional cultures and oral arts for alternative grassroots-based conflict mediation and security.

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Zangbeto
NAVIGATING BETWEEN THE SPACES OF ORAL ART, COMMUNAL SECURITY AND CONFLICT MEDIATION IN BADAGRY, NIGERIA

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