

Anthropology: A Panacea to Indigenous Peace-Building Mechanisms in Nigeria

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Abstract

In the context of the ongoing insurgency, terrorism, conflicts and social tensions in Nigeria, particularly in the northern region, there is an increasing necessity to reassess and reevaluate the indigenous methods of peace building that have fostered harmony within various pre-colonial ethnic communities. The paper examines contemporary strategies for conflict resolution prioritizing state-centric approaches, legal frameworks, and international interventions, these methods frequently overlook the deeply embedded cultural aspects of peace and conflict resolution in the Nigeria societies. The diverse range of ethnic groups and intricate social dynamic, possesses a wealth of indigenous knowledge and practices that have long played significant roles in maintaining peace within and between communities. The paper affirms Nigeria as the home to a multitude of ethnic groups, each with its own distinct customs, traditions, and social structures. These include the Hausa, Fulani, Kanuri, Tiv, Jukun, Nupe, Edo, Yoruba, Igbo and numerous others, each contributing unique mechanisms for peace building. In conclusion, these mechanisms often centre around communal values, reverence for hierarchy and age, dialogue, and collective responsibility, providing alternatives to adversarial and punitive approaches that characterise many modern legal systems. Traditional leaders, such as chiefs, emirs, and village elders, play a pivotal role in mediating conflicts, while rituals, symbols, and oral traditions serve as indispensable tools in the peace building process.

Keywords: Anthropology, mechanism, Nigeria, panacea, peace-building

Introduction

Nigeria is a nation rich in cultural diversity and natural resources that has faced its share of challenges in maintaining peace and stability. From ethnic tensions to religious conflicts and resource-based disputes, the need for effective and sustainable indigenous peacebuilding mechanism is critical (Bassey, 2015). In this paper, peace is not just the absence of conflict but the presence of justice, equality, and opportunity for all. Therefore, the paper puts that the importance of indigenous peace building mechanism in Nigeria is essential for more opportunities to create a more harmonious society. Also, indigenous peacebuilding mechanism is essential for sustainable development. Without peace, communities cannot thrive, economies cannot grow, and individuals cannot reach their full potential. In Nigeria, indigenous peace building mechanism is particularly important because with over 250 ethnic groups and multiple religions, Nigeria's diversity is both a strength and a potential source of conflict., competition over land, water, and mineral resources often leads to violence, especially in rural areas, high levels of unemployment among young people can fuel frustration and unrest and, long-standing ethnic and religious divisions require deliberate efforts to heal and reconcile. The paper shows that indigenous Peace building mechanism addresses these issues by fostering dialogue, promoting understanding, and creating systems that ensure justice and equality for all (Adebayo, 2016).

Also, Ethno-politico-religious sentiments are widespread in Nigeria in which, at times, end up in the disruption of peace and order consequently in the loss of innocent lives and the destruction of properties (Abara,2011). There have been incidences of such cases in Kano, Bauchi, Jos, Maiduguri, Aba, Warri, Owo, among others (Egbule,2019). The incessant incidents of mayhem and violence in Jos, Maiduguri, Kaduna and other parts of Nigeria have been linked to the ethno-religious problem (Bassey,2015). However, religion has been employed to foster national support to justify incidences leading to violence in Nigeria (Deekor, & Maekae, 2015). It is in this respect that the paper condemned the violence in Jos, not as religious but as due to social, economic, ethnicity and cultural differences (The Nation, 2010). This implies that most recently, the mayhem caused by the controlled and unquestioned activities of the Fulani herders, especially in Benue State could be attributed to ethnic-politico-religious differences in Nigeria.

Nigeria's ethnolinguistic diversity has very significant implications in almost every area of the economy. It implies a major investment in educational and media resources to reach a diverse population. Diverse ethnic groups, with varied cultural patterns, have very different levels of social capital and thus differing capacities to enter into the process of proper change. The relative wealth of the country and the large size of some ethnic groups have allowed them to express their ethnicity in remarkable and sometimes problematic ways (Abara,2011). The role of the elders in the indigenous Nigeria family who are usually the most senior member of the family is to preside over matters within the family. The family unit is the first point of call whenever a conflict case arises within the family in Africa and Nigeria in particular. It is noted that whenever an issue arises, for instance in domestic conflict situation, it is first reported to the most senior member of the family or elder, usually a male. He assembles the disputing parties as well as other members of the family to his house where the conflict is resolved amicably between the parties. The scene is usually inside the family house or outside under a tree that serves as a shade in the family compound. There, the parties sit opposite each. Younger people are allowed to watch the proceedings but not to speak. The proceedings start with the family head welcoming everybody with locally made gin called Ogogoro) and/or a keg of palm wine (Egbule,2019).

Indigenous Conflict Resolution Methods

Indigenous conflict resolution methods offer valuable insights into how communities can address disputes in a way that maintains social order. By understanding and respecting these local practices, one can learn more effective approaches to contemporary conflicts resolution. Over the past five years, three states in Nigeria's Middle Belt-Plateau, Kaduna, and Adamawa- have created peace agencies or commissions, initiated by the executive governors (Adefolaju,2016). These peacebuilding institutions are tasked with addressing long-standing ethno-religious in the host states through direct mediation and other peace interventions; building early warning and early response systems for local conflicts; and, in conjunction with local governments and traditional institutions, developing grassroots conflict resolution infrastructure such as mediation and restorative justice units and processes (Abara, 2011). Budgetary constraints have limited their effectiveness, and perceptions of a lack of independence from the governors' offices have sometimes reduced their credibility, though closeness to a governor may provide needed assistance to an agency's work (Akinpelu, 1983).

All three institutions possess important convening powers to initiate dialogue and larger peace processes. Although the young institutions have faced difficult challenges, they have nonetheless exhibited early promise for stemming violence and insecurity across Nigeria, and their experiences

provide important lessons for other states considering similar institutions (Adefolaju,2016). The paper holds that Indigenous conflict resolution methods emphasize community harmony, restorative justice, and the role of traditional mediators, offering effective alternatives to formal legal systems.

The traditional Nigeria societies are known to hold customs and values and sacred peace-making processes for several centuries before the disruption of colonial administration, and introduction of arbitration and adjudication, which are antithesis to indigenous method. These modern methods of peace building and conflict resolution are rather defective in dealing with the challenges posed by modern conflict in Nigeria. The paper relied on secondary sources and is descriptive in nature. It found that Indigenous Peace Building Mechanism method as practiced in Nigeria society is better than the modern adjudicative method of peace building because it is faster and non-adversarial.

The paper therefore, advocated the incorporation of indigenous method of dispute management and resolution in the modern system because it is cheaper and more friendly. Despite the legal pluralism, most disputants in Nigeria rural communities are less likely to use the formal process to resolve conflict because the process of case adjudication is lengthy, time consuming, and involves a lot of money to retain a lawyer. Since most people in the rural communities are poor and cannot afford the huge expense involved in a legal battle, they prefer using the traditional council because it is cheaper and much closer to the people (Ahima, 2014). Indigenous Nigeria legal anthropological research focused on differentiating between customs and law. For the most part, the absence of written codes or statutes in indigenous (pre-colonial) Nigeria was a major defining characteristic of custom - an immemorial traditional social order, largely immutable and closely linked to the cultural system (Abdubakindo, and Alupse, 2015). The paper puts that indigenous societies dominated by integrated traditions of maintaining peace and order distinguished them from modern state with law (Adebayo,2016). Hence statutes or judicially declared rules or social control - deliberately, respectively, and rationally made by trained professionals- became the essence of justice in both colonial and independent African nation-states. However, persistent and serious problems in the present formal or official (modern) legal system throughout Africa have caused a type of "law nostalgia", a search for rediscovery and adaptation of indigenous African management systems (Adeoye, 2017).

Different community institutions are known is to preserve peace, the customs, cultural heritage of the people and also to manage, settle and resolved dispute/conflict arising within and between the members as well as the residents of the community by the instrumentality of laws and customs of the people in that particular community or society. Community leaders are seen and, in some cases, taken as the custodians of their people's norms, cultural values and practices (Bassey, 2015).

Indigenous Peace Building Mechanism in Benin City Community in Nigeria

The indigenous institutions in building peace mechanism and development in Benin City, Edo State, Nigeria has the Benin traditional council as the power house of traditional peace-construct and cases involving crime and civil conflict (Egbule, 2019), This function has a dynamic role in the maintenance of peace and stability of the city. The traditional council and palace of the Ancient Benin kingdom was very powerful, as it served as arbiter, peace maker and also law enforcer over its subjects. These ideals survived into contemporary Benin Kingdom, as the Palace of the King and other lesser courts of chiefs, still intervene in civil and criminal cases for resolution. However, the role played by the traditional councils and Palace in the resolution of disputes has weakened,

due to the formal adoption of the Western models of conflict resolution, which adopts other methods like mediation, conciliation and negotiation. Benin City and Nigeria in general is being inundated with series of communal violence, and there is dire need for a comprehensive study into the role of traditional rulers in the achievement of peace and development in Benin City, Edo State (Abass, 2012).

Indigenous Peace Building Mechanism Tiv Community in Nigeria

In Africa, there were various levels of indigenous peace building mechanism such as dispute resolution at the interpersonal or family level, the extended family level and village or town level where the Chief in Council presided. These tiers represented the political unit that makes up the community (Aji, 2014). Conflicts were effectively resolved at these various tiers because disputants considered themselves as part of a larger community where matters are resolved. For instance, the Tiv like other Nigerian societies have their religio-cultural beliefs and practices that influence the resolution of conflicts. These approaches are the *ijir* (moot), *ikyuryan* (covenant), *ibumun* (oath), which emphasis consensus, reconciliation and communal unity (Aliyu,2015).

Bassey (2015) added that peace building practice is considered to be indigenous if they have been practised for an extended period and have evolved within Nigerian societies rather than being the product of importation. The peoples' religion and culture form the basis for local decision making and action in their various spheres of life, which includes the choice of crop rotation in agriculture, traditional medicine as evidenced in healthcare services and undoubtedly, conflict resolution. Thus, Okeke, (2014) state that Africans have their indigenous, dynamic ways of settling disputes and resolving conflicts. An important aspect of dispute and conflict settlement among them is dialogue, talking, negotiating, clapping, humour and shouting are social therapies in peace building mechanism. They constitute interactive variables which skillful brokers, negotiators, and acclaimed philosophers and spokesmen apply to reduce tension and resolve conflicts through negotiated settlement. And when parties in conflict decide to take their case to indigenous court, the emphasis of the judges-elders is not on punishment or imprisonment (Akevi, 2014).

In African tradition, the emphasis is placed on objective discovery of the truth followed by recompensation, restitution, and reconciliation, the focus is on the restoration of harmony and consensus while realizing the frequent occurrence of conflicts in the family, ward, town, or between section of polity or kingdom (Adefolaju, 2016). However, the imposition of external peace building mechanisms and initiatives has largely side-lined creative home-grown (indigenous) peace building strategies. However, in some societies, conflict resolution is not always identified or supported by formal institutions but are nevertheless binding in their own religio-cultural ways. (clan) disputes by apportioning blames and punishment to the guilty party. The council settled.

Age Sets

This was also a very useful institution in resolving conflicts in African society especially using the covenant approach between individuals and families as well as between particular section, or one clan and another (Okeke, 2014). The age grade was constituted- on the basis of those born within the same age range. For instance, between twenty and thirty or thirty and fifty could form age grade as the case may be. Among the Tiv, an age set was formed when a particular age member identifies those who fall in the same age set and initiate a meeting on a given day. The organiser would entertain the members with food. Leadership positions were assigned to members based on district

or clan as the case may be, Tor u kwav (head of the age grade) was selected and was assisted by the smaller utor (chiefs). From each ipyaven (segment) as the case may be. An elder who was very much older, knowledgeable and experienced in kwav practice, was selected as their teacher who was always with them. He was called Igba kwav. Among the Tiv people, an age set member can marry the daughter of another member as Asenge in oral interview explained, when an orkwav sees that, his friend has no wife while he has a matured girl to give in marriage, he will, out of sympathy, give his daughter to the other kwav member as a wife out of sympathy. The wife knew all the age mates of her husband. Age mates supported themselves financially and as a result, they always have regular financial contributions among members which may be weekly or monthly (but mostly monthly).

Elders and the Kindred Council Elders of several compounds whose membership depended on close blood relations led by the most senior elder made up the kindred council. They had close family ties. Political, social and religious problems beyond the orya (Compound head) council were referred to iye-ingyor (Kindred) council. The increased quest for ethnic exclusivity in recent times in Nigeria has continued to polarize the country with the attendant adverse consequences on development. Adefolaju (2016) asserts that this enduring agitation is caused by the socio-economic imbalance in the country, while Chief Gbenga Daniel believes that Nigeria's heterogeneous status is problematic arising from the reality or perception that access to the commonwealth is unequal and far between (Deekor, & Maekae, 2015).

The Tiv traditional institutions involve local actors in decision making mechanisms in resolving conflicts within and between communities. These institutions were the mbatamen (elders), kwav (age grade) which operated under four councils or levels of various lineages of socio-political units. Therefore, the Tiv system of government was gerontocratic and operated through the council of elders and the relationship between the elders and the non-elders was one of status and not -class. The political power in traditional Tiv Society belongs almost exclusively to the elders. At each level of social and political organisation, government was carried' out through constitution between the representatives of each subordinate unit who were normally the oldest men in the society. Decision making was a collective affair which was based on their deep fear of tsav (witchcraft). Thus Torkula pointed out that, right from ya (compound) to tar (super clan) levels, the political organisation rests with the elders who are members of a kinship based on consanguity.

Conclusion

The indigenous method of peace building and conflict management involves all the process of modern mediation, except that the process is non-retributive and is aimed at a peaceful and amicable resolution of conflict between disputants. The family head presides over family disputes, while the paramount ruler mediates into conflict amongst members of the same community and disputes with other neighboring communities. It is usually a win-win situation and the goal is to heal and bring the disputing parties together. The central role of the traditional council ruler in dispute resolution in Africa communities is paramount. It can handle various matters ranging from land dispute, dissolution of marriage, murder, spousal abuse, theft and other cases brought before it. Sometimes, the traditional council can approach a court to withdraw a case for resolution, particularly where the community's name will be brought into disrepute if the matter is resolved formally.

Generally, Nigerians see themselves first as members of one cultural or ethnic group or the other, and secondarily as Nigerians. The cultural divergences of the ethnic groups in Nigeria are manifest

in all areas of their cultural life such as language, legends, occupation, oral literature, ways of marrying.

Recommendations

Given the aforementioned challenges posed by cultural diversities, as well as its usefulness, the paper recommends some workable strategies towards positive utilization of our diverse culture, aimed at achieving peaceful coexistence within diversity for a strong, united, virile and democratic society in Nigeria. The study recommends that:

- i. There is need for government and conventional institutions to recognize and encourage the role of traditional institutions in peace and conflict prevention and resolution efforts as a way of building and maintaining peace in African society.
- ii. Traditional institutions should play honest roles of arbiters in resolving conflict thereby building confidence in parties entering into covenant in the course of resolving conflict.
- iii. There is need for the integration of positive African traditional approaches in school curriculum and the encouraging of ethical values in institutions of learning. If the indigenous African moral values and covenant making in particular should be taught in various stages of an individual's physical and moral development, the high rate of crimes and immoralities would be radically reduced and the need for rehabilitation centres eliminated. Since the traditional methods of resolving conflicts are less expensive, simple, flexible, and easy to understand and apply, they should be encouraged and practiced.
- iv. Massive cultural education should be embarked upon by relevant agencies (e.g. National Institute for Cultural Orientation (NICO), National Council for Arts and Culture (NCAC), Centre for Black and African Arts and Civilization (CBAAC)), the National Orientation Agency (NOA) to take pride in the strength and plurality of Nigeria.
- v. The people and government of Nigeria must rise to the challenges posed by the pluralism of the Nigeria Federation to accommodate groups (especially the minority) and guarantee access to power and equitable distribution of resources.
- vi. The diversity in the nation should be used for strength and not for political polarization and ethnoreligious conflict.
- vii. All stakeholders in the culture industry (ministry) to take advantage of the unique opportunities of the mass media in their quest for the promotion of patriotism and Nigerian cultural heritage.
- viii. The mass media should be highly responsible in their reportage, especially in their use of language.
- ix. Responsible journalism should be the media practitioner's watch word. While the movie industries should project more of Nigerian culture, which has the potency of integration.
- x. Nigeria needs bold, vibrant and articulate leadership to manage her diversities, promote national integration and development, as well as enhancing peaceful coexistence. It is pitiable and pathetic to note that Nigeria has been less fortunate in its leadership. Ethno religious conflicts in Nigeria have continued because Nigerian elites are corrupt and split along lines of religion and ethnic chauvinism. This has resulted in ethnic rivalry, suspicion, witch-hunting and hostility among leaders.
- xi. Government should organize public enlightenment campaigns through the National Orientation Agency (NOA), NYSC orientation camps, seminars and workshops on the ways of promoting tolerance, especially among non-students.

- xii. Member States of UNESCO and respective governments to ensure the development of new and viable institutions and mechanisms to champion the Sustainable Development Goals agenda.

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