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THE CHURCH, TRADITIONAL INSTITUTIONS AND PEACE-BUILDING PROCESS IN NIGERIA: THE SOUTHWESTERN (YORUBA) EXPERIENCE

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Abstract

As long as human beings interact, conflicts related issues unavoidably become part and parcel of their day to day experience. This is particularly so because conflict is inevitable in human society and relationships. A society that is made of people from different religious, political and socio-economic backgrounds cannot be expected to reason alike. There must be mutual distrust arising from bone of contentions. Conflicts, in most cases usually begin as a result of misunderstanding before escalating to violent confrontations. Owing to religious tension and other social upheavals in Nigeria, peaceful co-existence has become a mirage and a wishful thinking. The pre-colonial era was known for relative peace among the indigenous people of Nigeria. They had their ways of monitoring, preventing, managing and resolving conflicts among themselves. In fact, there were mechanisms for effecting peace-building and confident building but these unique and effective conflict management and resolution techniques were wiped out with the advent of colonialism. The traditional institutions constituted the nucleus of the political and spiritual architectures of the society, intervening in conflicts and peace-keeping in their communities. The power and influence of traditional institutions and rulers became eroded and relegated to the background with the coming of the colonialists. The paper examined among other things the cultural instruments in peace-building in Southwestern part of Nigeria, the place of traditional institutions and rulers in peace-building process as well as the effectiveness of traditional judicial system in peace-building process in Yorubaland. The work made use of historical method of research. The paper discovered that there were channels of resolving conflicts in the Western region, disrupted by the colonialists. The work recommended that conflict resolution mechanisms of the traditional institutions should be deployed and emulated in other parts of the country. The paper concluded that peace is sine qua none to national progress and development not only in Yorubaland but Nigeria at large.

Keywords: Culture, Peace-building, Traditional Institutions, Yoruba Experience, Church.

Introduction

The Church and traditional institutions in Nigeria, like anywhere in the world are key players in promoting peace-building in any society. The Nigerian societies are synonymous with violent conflicts arising from political differences, irreconcilable ideologies, socio-economic problem as well as ethnicity and political challenges. The complexity of the Nigerian society

arising from the different backgrounds of the citizens explains the inevitability of conflict in human interactions. Invariably, these call for conflict resolution and management mechanism more especially in the process of peace-keeping and keep-building. In the pre-colonial era, conflict related matters were sorted out through the traditional judicial system. In the traditional judicial systems in the Western Nigeria, fines or damages were not usually awarded by the mediators in civil cases. Rather, the utmost aim is to restore peace by settling disputes amicably. In other words, restoration of harmony and peaceful co-existence is what is paramount in the traditional judicial system.

Suffice it to say that traditional institutions have been in existence before the coming of the colonial masters to Nigeria. Yet, the traditional institutions during the pre-colonial Nigeria were many and diverse in composition. The most conspicuous in Nigeria is the Kingship (Oba) institution. It is the apex and the position other traditional institutions are subjected to. Notable among these diverse traditional institutions is the Yorubaland traditional system. However, the emergence of the colonialists to Nigeria ushered in different types of administrations in the government and management of traditional communities in Nigeria. These led to the diminished in relevance of traditional institutions. The socio-political status of traditional rulers have gone from bad to worse with far reaching consequences on conflict and resolution matters and even administration in the country. As such, the country continues to wallow in instability and security challenges that could have been easily resolved by the intervention of the traditional rulers. Despite all these, traditional institutions seem to be the most enduring pre-colonial institution that survived through various forms of administration reforms in Nigeria.

In modern day Nigeria, one of the greatest problems the nation is facing today is absence of peace and instability in almost every sphere of life. No meaningful development and progress can exist without peace, harmonious relationship and unity. It is therefore imperative for the government to harness the traditional political institutions into its administration so as to achieve national integration and peaceful co-existence for the overall development of the nation. At the same time, the critical roles the traditional institutions have been playing in the past time should be acknowledged rather than being grossly under-estimated in the current democratic dispensations. The thrust of the paper is to examine how traditional institutions and the church can aid attainment of peace-building process in the Western region of Nigeria. The work examined the cultural instruments necessary for peace-building, the place of traditional political institutions in the maintenance of peace, the role of the church and the impacts of traditional judicial system in peace-building in Yorubaland.

Clarification of Terms

Traditional/Indigenous Institution

Literally, tradition refers to age-long, old, customary and established historic ways of doing things while institution means a system or organization that has existed for a long time among a group of people (Omole, 2016: 12). Tradition refers to custom or belief which is a long established action or pattern of behaviour in a community or among a group of people, often one that has been handed down from generations (Adesoji, 2010: 29). Traditions presuppose body of customs, that is, a body of long-established practices and beliefs viewed as a set of values by a culture. Thus, traditional institutions are those social, economic or political organizations or bodies which derive their power from the traditions of a particular people

(Emordi & Osiki, 2008:67). Traditional institutions have been defined to include norms and procedures that shape people's actions (Nweke, 2012: 243). These procedures define practices, assigned roles and as well guide interaction.

Peace

Peace is a condition of tranquilized conflict (Babawale, 2006:15). It is the sum total of all that man may desire, that is, an undisturbed harmonious life. It is a condition required for social, political and economic development and for meaningful administrative effectiveness (Jegede, 2018: 51). Peace, therefore, is a sine qua none for harmonious existence. Without doubt, one can say that nearly all human beings and societies want peace and peaceful co-existence in their communities (2006: 18). Although one may not be sure of the relativity of the term (peace) to them and means of attaining it, but what is certain is that human beings desire peace.

Peace-Building

It should be noted that there are two distinct way to understand peace-building. According to the United Nations (UN) (Boutros, 1995:11) document on "An Agenda for Peace," peace-building consists of a wide range of activities associated with capacity building, reconciliation and societal transformation. Peace-building is a long term process that occurs after violent conflict has slowed down or come to a halt (Lederach, 1997:75). It is the phrase of the "peace process" that takes place after peace-making and peace-building. It is pertinent to observe that many non-governmental organizations (NGO) understand peace-building as an umbrella concept that encompasses not only long-term transformative efforts, but also "peace-making" and "peace-keeping" (Haugerudbranten, 2023:22). In this view, peace-building includes "early warning and response efforts, violence prevention, advocacy work, civilian and military peace-keeping, military intervention, humanitarian assistance, ceasefire agreements and the establishment of peace zones (Reychler, 2001:12). In the narrower sense, peace-building is a violence by addressing root causes and effects of conflict through reconciliation, institution building as well as political and economic transformation.

Culture

Culture is the sum total of a people's life. It is often defined as the symbols, language, beliefs, values and artifacts that are part of any society (Brettel & Sargent, 2009: 29). There are two basic components of cultures, that is, ideas and symbols on the one hand and artifacts (material objects) on the other hand. The first type, called "non-material culture" includes the values, beliefs, symbols and language that define a society. The second type called, "material culture" includes all the society's physical objects such as its tools and technology, clothing, eating utensils and means of transportation (Olaoye, 2012:188).

Church

The word means the total presence of God's people (Christians) in a given location. In other words, it refers to the community of believers (Fatokun, 2001:34). The Greek word is *ecclesia* which is literally translated as church.

South-Western (Yorubaland) Nigeria

South-Western part of Nigeria is one of the six geo-political zones of Nigeria, representing both a geographic and political region of the country's South-west. It comprises of six states namely—Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Osun, Ondo and Oyo States. The zone stretches along the

Atlantic seaboard from the international border with Benin Republic in the West to the South-South in the Est with the North Central to the North. Culturally, the vast majority of the zone falls within Yorubaland—the indigenous cultural homeland of the Yoruba people, a group which makes up the largest ethnic percentage of the Southwestern population (available on https://www.myguidenigria, 2023:04).

Traditional Rulers and Indigenous Institutions in Nigeria

Traditional institutions in Nigeria pre-date the advent of the missionaries who introduced a new form of administrative system to the indigenous people of Yorubaland, more especially in their political system and in the management of traditional communities in general. These institutions had gone through thick and thin in the country's political history right from the pre-colonial time to the post-colonial eras. Before the coming of the Europeans, the traditional rulers held sway as political authority and controllers of their respective territories, and as custodians of history, culture, religion and economy (Adebayo, 2008:125). Prior to the advent of the colonial masters, the traditional institutions in Yorubaland had an effective administrative system that suited the political, social and economic situation of their time, having as overall goal the welfare of their people. However, the intrusion of the European disrupted the system and brought about the imposition of western administration. This incursion reduced the powers and relevance of the traditional rulers and bastardized a once cherished administrative system of the indigenous people of Yorubaland (Makinde, 1988:13). Right from that moment, the traditional institutions in Nigeria were never the same. They have to go from bad to worse.

It is pertinent to say that one of the reasons Nigeria has not been able to achieve and sustain reasonable peace is the failure to harness the traditional political institution (Adebayo, 2008:125). The traditional rulers control, direct and superintend over traditional institutions, ably assisted by their subordinates like the provincial chiefs, princes, village heads, and ward heads. To a greater extent, their power, authority and legitimacy were derived from traditions. From the Nigerian point of view, traditional rulers refer to the set of the rulers of the various Nigerian peoples and societies before the establishment of Nigeria as a nation (Akinjogbin, 2008:132). In modern day Nigeria, these people include Mai/Shehu of Borno, Emirs rulers in Hausaland, the Oba in Yorubaland, the Attah in Igalaland, the Etsu in Nupeland, the Obi and Eze in Igboland and a host of other communities (2008:132). In the South-West, for instance, the Oba personifies the kingdom and represents the reincarnation of the past ancestors of the community. Therefore, the words of an Oba were orders and their actions were divine and sacred. Until recently, they were hardly seen in public except during important traditional festivals (Rotimi, 2010:4). They are often assisted by a chain of traditional chiefs and loyalists who carry out administrative duties.

It is disheartening to say the least that the traditional rulers and the divine office itself have been relegated to the background in the contemporary time. In Nigeria, for instance, the traditional rulers have been subjected to humiliations of varied degrees (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979:4-5). They have been empowered and disempowered at different times, accommodated or excluded, depending on the interests at stake and incorporated, manipulated and hoodwinked depending on the dispensations or extent of relationship between the rulers and those in government.

Despite the attempts to moderate and subjugate their influences and relevance in the Nigerian society, they still wield considerable influence. This explains the reference to the as *alase ekeji Orisa* (the second in command to the Deity), *iku baba-yeye,* in Ile-Ife and many other kingdoms in the South-West (Yorubaland) of Nigeria. As a result of the sacrosanct position of the traditional rulers and indigenous institutions, Lloyd observes that the Kings (Oba) are sacred kings. They are usually seen as descendants of Oduduwa (Adesoji, 2010:417). It is often said that without the Oba, there could be no town; he was the spiritual head of the town though not a priest. As such, he received blessings of royal ancestors and conveyed these blessings to his chiefs. It was his duties to provide sacrifices to a host of other lesser gods (deities) for prosperities of the town and peaceful and harmonious relationship among his people (Rotimi, 2015: 56). It is also on record that the traditional institutions and rulers are harbingers of peaceful co-existence and conflict managers. Alaafin Lamidi Olayiwola Adeyemi III, for instance, succeeded in maintaining peace and settled conflicts that could have led to loss of lives and destruction of properties in his domain (Rotimi & Adeyemi, 2016:228). Even in matters of religion, the three main religions in Nigeria co-existed peacefully in his palace. In fact, there is a chapel for the Christians in the palace and some of the children of Alaafin are Christians.

Cultural Instruments in Peace-building in South-West of Nigeria

Culture consists of the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow and the "material good" they create (Gidden, 1989:56). According to Altman and Chemer (2009:34), culture:

> Refers to belief and perceptions, values and norms, customs and behaviour of a group or society…. The term is used to indicate that cognition, feelings and behaviours are shared among a group of people in a consensual way….with or without verbalizing their agreement. The term can also imply that these shared values and styles of behaviour are passed on to others, especially children and that the socialization and education of new members of the culture help preserve consensus from generation to the next.

Judging from Gidden's definition and references to others, the values, norm-rules and social life as the culture in this context have something to do with the way in which the Southwestern people of Nigeria respond to crises (Leichtmann, 2009:351). By implication, any community among the Yoruba has its own values and norms which help, to a great extent, in managing and resolving conflicts. The inculcation of good behavioural mien in the child helps such to distinguish between "good" and "bad." By and large, the positive effect of traditional training at an early age helps in fostering peaceful co-existence within the society.

In the same vein, another feature that facilitates peace and peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationship among the Southwest Yoruba is their use of language. This common language is a feature that has become a binding entity, even when they are far away from their hometowns. Regardless of one's religion, one feels happy seeing or hearing somebody speaking Yoruba while aay from home—Yorubaland. Not only that, Yoruba wise-sayings and music are identified as features for de-escalating conflicts and maintaining peace. Gidden (1990: 78) further submitted that:

> When we use the term in ordinary daily conversation, we often think of "culture" as equivalent to the "higher things of the mind"—art, literature, music and

> painting….Culture refers to the whole way of life of the member of a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits.

The Southwest culture embraces all the areas mentioned above. At a point during the colonial era, they had to struggle for their literature to be published in their language despite the colonial's opposition (Adetunji, 1999:45). They later used their music to combat social injustice, diffuse tension, and uphold their cherished heritages. Some of the Yoruba music and songs express norms that support the unity and peace of the Yoruba people. These musicians help to promote Yoruba world-view and social interaction with their popularity and messages their music conveys to the society. The music helps the masses to retain certain aspects of the Yoruba culture, including its world view on peace, ethics and social life.

Concerning the control and prevention of conflict, certain sayings help to diffuse disputes and prevent its degeneration into violence. Words like, *Yoruba ni arojinle* meaning literally that "Yoruba have deep thought and foresight." The *arojinle* (deep thinking) takes place before an action is executed (Atanda, 1996:37). They think before they act; they think of where and how an activity will end and they are conscious of their roles if the end results are bad. In other to preserve their peaceful relationships, they think of the aftermath effects of such actions on themselves and their communities as well.

Therefore, as a way of maintaining peace and peaceful co-existence, the Yoruba culture makes use of *ifinisun* (reporting) and *ibaniwi* (discipline). The essence of this is to keep the communities safe under the control of the traditional institutions put in place. According to Odu (2005):

> Rebuke often means a verbal and facial expression of discontent with the person's behaviour while discipline may be physical, like being given fine or jobs to do on the farms (that is, the community leader's farms) without pay. Both rebuke and discipline must be followed by apologies from the offender to the offended and the community in general.

Similarly, Odu (2005) epitomizes the idea of *omoluabi* among the Yoruba of Southwestern region. *Omoluabi* concerns the expected behaviour of a responsible Yoruba person, regardless of gender, age, social and economic status within the society. Although the expected qualities of *Omoluabi* are not written anywhere, yet, they are transmitted through Yoruba storytelling, such as the respect for elders, respect for human life, appropriate greetings and honesty, promise-keeping and a host of others (Makinde & Dada, 2017: 34). These cultural instruments are put in place to discourage conflict and enhance peace within the Yoruba society.

It is worthy to mention that in Yoruba culture, a peace building process equally revolves around certain traditional adages and witty sayings like; *ija o dola, oruko nii so ni* meaning literally that "conflict does not make one wealthy, rather, it stigmatizes," *ma roro, agba to roro kii ko eniyan joo* meaning "do not be wicked, an elder that is wicked will not have followers," *ahon ati enu nja, won si npari ija,* meanining that "both the tongue and the mouth do fight and they eventually settle the quarrel" (Akinjogbin, 1996: 52). These wise sayings, like many others form the pillar of peace among the Yoruba people. They are part and parcel of the people's

culture and have become a template for character building for the purpose of peace-building and harmony in their respective communities.

Glimpses of Violent Conflicts in Western Nigeria and Peace Process Mechanism

Like any human society, the Western Nigeria (Yorubaland) experienced conflicts of different sorts. This is not to diminish their efforts in seeking to maintain harmony, especially in the religious sphere. Yet, it is worth mentioning some of the conflicts that the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria have experienced over the years and the peace-building processes that followed. Land disputes are one of the main causes of conflict among the people. Such violent land disputes occurred between Ife/Modakeke, Offa/Erinle and the Saraji/Odo Owa (Oshio, 2000:42). The land disputes that ensued led to call for divorce where their children had inter-married in Ife/Modakeke and Offa/ Erinle people (Ajayi, 1964:52). It is strongly believed that conflicts arose from economic related situations, politics and religion as well as limited land and water resources.

Religion and political conflicts are other types of conflicts identified in the Western region (Yorubaland) in Nigeria (Lloyd, 2004:25). Although religious violence is not very common, yet, religious tensions have been reported recently. For example, the hijab controversy in Kwara and Osun States where students were mandated to use hijab in Christian schools, founded by missionaries. The hijab tension was institutionally motivated. The Yoruba women and girls wear traditional head-gear and neck scarves at home and even for important occasions (Aboyeji, 2019:201). These outfits have never caused conflict until recently among the Shaki in Oyo State and a few residents in Ejigbo and Iwo in Osun State. The Osun State hijab tension is traceable to the State government enforcing the wearing of the hijab by Muslim students in schools established and ran by Christian communities.

However, the restoration of peace shows understanding from the two religious faiths. Though it is generally affirmed that:

> When the government took over many (mission) schools in Nigeria, it was well understood that the culture of each school would be maintained by each school, but they began to impose the idea of hijab on our schools, which we do not agree with (2019:219).

The parents agreed to take responsibility for any act of vandalism perpetrated by their children and wards. The alleged unhelpful roles of the Osun State politicians during the era of Governor Rauf Aregbesola in the hijab crisis also suggests leaders are responsible for peace-keeping, peace-building or conflict in their communities (Alana, 1993:200).

Conflict Resolution and Peace-building in the Traditional Yoruba Political System

The Yoruba people are located in Yorubaland. Yorubaland consists of several scores of chiefdoms, some of which, such as Oyo, Egbaland are particularly large, while others are relatively very small. Though all the Yoruba people regard the *Oni* (king) of Ile-Ife as their traditional head and father, there is no cohesive political machinery uniting all of them since they are in several subgroups such as the Egba, the Oyo, the Ijebu, and a host of others and each sub-tribal group has its own traditional *oba* or King (2019:220). Besides having their own localized traditional rulers, they also have different social structures.

The traditional political and governmental systems of the Yoruba have a pyramidal structure, with the *Oba* (king) at the apical end of the institution while the lower strata of the system are occupied by the various grades of traditional chiefs and the rest of the population. The *Oba* is selected from only the royal household; next in line to him on the political structure are the kingmakers and chiefs who all form the Council of Chiefs and the commoners (subjects) occupy the lowest level (Schein, 2012:23).

Each Yoruba kingdom has its own bylaws handed down from and sanctified by ancestors long departed and these regulations are sacred and irrefutable. The institutions of Oyo-Mesi, Ogbonis, Esos, and Ilaris in Oyo Empire, for instance, often maintained checks and counter-checks both against the Alafinate and within themselves in order to sustain peace and stability of the kingdom (Onah, 2023:24). What is done to resolve conflict and build-peace at the apex of the political authority is replicated at the other layers of the authority. The Village Head (*Baale*), the titled chief (*oloye*), ward, family and women head (*iya lode*) have their respective duties calved out to them in the society in the maintenance of peace and harmonious relationships. It is the duty of the king's subordinates to arrest disputes and conflict related matters in their domains.

At the domestic level, issues are handled by the head of the family and where he finds it difficult to handle such, the matter will be taken to the next layer of authority. In the event of difficulty, the dispute will be brought to the attention of the apex authority. At this level, all conflicts related issues are permanently resolved (Olawale, 2006:71). At this stage, those involved are examined and cross-examined and the guilty one is punished, usually to work on the farms of the village head (*Baale)* without pay, or in form of payment of fine like oil, wine, fowl, and goat depending on the gravity of his action (Oguntola, 2002:465). Thereafter, such a person will be warned to desist from such acts that can bring shame to him and his family and that can disrupt peaceful co-existence of the community.

African Traditional Religion and Peace-building Process in Yorubaland

African Traditional Religion could be described as a religion derived from the culture and traditions of the indigenous people (Igwubor, 2020:43). Among the Yoruba people of Western Nigeria, the religion offers panacea for conflict and peace related matters. In fact, one of the major tasks of the traditional deities is peace-making and peace-building (Damoye, 2019:69). Across the Yorubaland are deities like *Ogun* (god of Iron), *Sango* (god of Thunder), *Oya* (god of water). Yet, there are few others like *Obatala, Moremi, Osanyin, and Obalufon.* These deities are held in high esteem and people refrain from incurring their wrath in every aspect of life including the one that borders on peace and stability. Kagema (2015:1-9), while examining the role of African Traditional Religion and her religious functionaries submitted that:

> Prior to the coming of the new religions and foreign cultures in Africa, human life was relatively stable with African Traditional Religion greatly influencing the lives of the people where it gave meaning and purpose to all aspects of thoughts and actions….It helps to create an atmosphere where justice, reconciliation and peace prevailed at all cost.

The opinion expressed above is an indication of the relevant of African Traditional Religion to peace process without which no meaningful development can take place in any society in

Yorubaland and Nigeria by extension. This fact is buttressed by Rweyemamu (1989:370) when he opined that:

> In African Traditional Religion, the peace-maker represents divine power on the one hand and social harmony on the other. In his person, he expresses the divine origin of peace that is associated with the virtues of loyalty, honesty and trust in God.

In Yorubaland, traditional religion touches on the spiritual as well as physical being of man. In the spiritual realm, the religion works on the innate thinking of a person in what is called *Eri-Okan.* Therefore, whenever anyone does anything evil, *eri-okan* (conscience) will continue to hunt his spiritual being. The result usually leads to confession on the part of the person involved. To this extent, traditional religion through the instrumentality of *eri-okan*, serves as an inquisition restraining evil acts (Alagoa, 2001: 32). This, in a way also serves as a medium of peace-building and peaceful co-existence in the society (Olaoye, 2010:190).

Another provision of the indigenous religion for peace-making and harmonious relationship is tolerance (Abdulqadir, 2016:28). Tolerance as used in this context refers to ability of a man, politician or people from different ethnic groups to give allowance for the opinions, beliefs and practices of others. Unlike other religions, African religion has been able to tolerate and accommodate alternative religious cultures (Nwanaju, 2005:51). With reference to the indigenous religion, it is apparent that Nigeria has been witnessing only Muslim/Christian conflicts since independence and this gives an impression that there are no traditional worshippers in Nigeria and Yorubaland(Adepoju, 2020: 194). This is simply because the religion (Afrel) has been able to adapt to excesses of other new religions in the communities. According to Dime (1993:146):

> One of the greatest virtues of African Religion is its religious tolerance. There is hardly any religion in the world that teaches religious tolerance as does African Religion. It teaches, not only by precept but also by practice.

It should be mentioned that the spirit of intolerance was a strange phenomenon in African religion because the indigenous religion did not engage in any sort of proselytisation activities. In the word of Mazrui (2005:822):

> Indigenous African religion has not sought to convert the whole of humanity. The Yoruba do not seek to convert the Ibo to the Yoruba religion—or vice versa—and neither the Yoruba or Ibo compete with each other for the souls of a third group, such as the Hausa. Because they are not proselytizing religions, indigenous African creed has not fought with each other.

Thus, if the adherents of other religions can emulate the indigenous worshippers in the area of tolerance, peaceful co-existence that will aid national development and integration will be the order of the day.

It is also believed that the local deities are potent media of conflict resolution and peace-building process more especially among the Yoruba people. Ogun, that is, god of Iron, is never treated with levity. The anvil and iron hammer in the blacksmith's workshop are not to be toyed with because they can bring instant punishment on whomsoever commits wrong-doings. The agitation for the use of Iron for oath-taking among the public office holders is connected to the proven efficacy of "Ogun" in producing instant judgment and result. In this

context, the fear that "Ogun" would strike back and with dire consequences in the event of bad acts will go a long way in ensuring a peaceful society (Awolalu & Dopamu, 1979:84).

Progress and unity can only thrive in a peaceful environment and this, the traditional religion has been able to promote. The socio-cultural values of the traditional religion often displayed during its numerous festivals can only attest to the flexibility of the religion. This is well demonstrated during the Oke Ibadan Festival in Oyo State. During the festival, indigenes of Ibadan, regardless of their religious affiliations participated actively. The Osun Osogbo Festival brings all people of diverse cultural and religious backgrounds to the Osun Groove to promote not only Yoruba culture but also national unity, peace and harmony. These festivals are good examples of building religious peace and national tourism in Southwest, where all strata of the society meet, interact and relate in an atmosphere devoid of ethnic, tribal and religious tensions and sentiments.

African views and thoughts on ontology and cosmology support their moral attitudes towards the conservation and preservation of their immediate society and the unity of all Africans (Olajungu, 2008:125). Their view of the cosmos is holistic, comprising of humanity, spiritual beings, animals and plants, and they are seen as interconnected continuum which must exist in harmony. This belief shapes their world-view and it is the guiding principle upon which they relate with others peacefully in the society (Meleki & Osaji, 2017:68).

The respect African Traditional Religion has for other religions does not only benefit the religion but also helps in peace-building within the society because humans must interact with one another regardless of one's religious affiliation. Therefore, mutual respect, religious understanding and tolerance have been the pillars holding and sustaining the continual existence of Afrel in the modern society. For instance, history has it that the *Ifa* corpus was said to have supported the coming to Abeokuta of a certain Shehu, a Muslim Mallam from Ilorin, Kwara State and enjoined that he be allowed to settle and for missionary activities. The Egba were to give him wives and allow their daughters and sons to join him in the practice of his religion (Awolalu, 1979: 48). The ethics of traditional Africans is that every human action which maximizes human interests must be encouraged and supported. This is the basic reason it places emphasis on practical living instead of doctrines that reinforce exclusive claims to truth and beliefs like Christianity and Islam. It prefers to avoid competition and conflicts with other religions but rather play complementary roles with them in other to ensure religious harmony, peaceful co-existence and relationships (Kanu, 2014:4-12).

Role of the Church and Traditional Institutions in Peace-making Process in South-West (Yorubaland) of Nigeria

The indigenous institutions and its leadership are held in high esteem in Yorubaland of Nigeria. Traditional rulers, for instance, are often referred to as *iku baba yeye, Alase Ikeji Orisa* literally means "the owner of death, the second in command to the deities," among the Yoruba people of South-west because of their prominent positions in the society. The traditional rulers are the leaders and custodians of the culture and tradition (Cookey et al, 2010:54). As such, they are highly revered by people within and outside their domains. Their words are laws to the people and their pieces of advice and opinions on issues are well respected and accepted by all and sundry. This is made possible because they are seen as hears and eyes of the gods, as intermediaries between the people and the ancestors (Makinde, 1988:1-3). Owing to their

influence within their respective domains, there is the need for government to partner and collaborate with them for the sake of peace-keeping and peace-building so as to foster harmonious relationships among her citizens (Ajayi & Buhari, 2014:138). Government can support and encourage the traditional rulers and institutions to talk to their people to shelve violence and every disruptive tendency that can destabilize the peace of the society, just as the government did in the Niger Delta through the intervention of Pan-Niger Delta Forum (PANDEF) which persuaded the Niger Delta militants to shelve all actions of militancy in that region.

The Church, on the other hand, is the "manufacturing industry" where "wild human beings" are processed and refined into "children of God" (Fatokun, 2012: 12). The origin of Church is often traced to Jesus Christ whom the Bible describes as the "prince of peace." Therefore, the Church as the "assembly of the redeemed" people through Christ has the responsibility of sensitizing their members through their teachings on the importance of peaceful co-existence with others who are not of their religious faith.

In Southwestern part of Nigeria, church leaders have often been seen mediating disputes, promoting peace and reconciliation and providing humanitarian assistance as displayed through communal clashes between Ile Ife and Modakeke, two prominent towns in Osun State owing to land dispute. On several occasions, the Church had acted as a trusted institution, offering its platforms for dialogue and negotiation and leveraging its influence to foster harmony and understanding among warring parties (Unumeri, 2009:45).

It is also interesting to note that one of the used by the church leaders in curbing violent and conflict management in Southwestern part of Nigeria is the continual consultations with government at all levels, to handle the social and economic indicators that make their communities vulnerable to conflict. Some of these indicators are poverty, political rivalry, religious intolerance, and general insecurity situation. At the same time, the inclusion of conflict and peace studies in the curriculum of seminaries, Bible Colleges and church leadership training has gone a long way to build consciousness of peacemaking in the minds of the priests, pastors and church members (Miall and Woodhouse, 2004:11). These education and information on peace building will make those individuals involved to become peace ambassadors. Through this lifelong education and information on peace-building, people will be more conscious of maintaining and building a sustainable peaceful society.

More so, negotiation is another veritable tool of mediation the church has successfully used on several occasions in resolving conflicts or disputes among warring parties in the Southwestern Nigeria. It is often used to initiate a peace accord between parties so as to establish peaceful co-existence and cease-fire as the case was between Eri Ile and Offa, two towns dividing Osun State and Kwara State. The Christian bodies in Nigeria are governed by the Christian Association Nigeria (CAN) and Pentecostal Fellowship of Nigeria (PFN). These two bodies have been part of peace negotiation, members of arbitration panels and conflict resolution committees in Nigeria.

Similarly, the traditional rulers and church leaders can easily reach the people involved in acts of terror within their communities in Yorubaland and call them for dialogue (Ajayi & Smith, 1964: 52). Those concerned, that is, the aggrieved party, have the confidence of the traditional

rulers, thus, can trust them not to betray them. At this point, government should empower the indigenous institutions like the kingship to open up the channel of communication with the people, where they can easily understand their grievances and proffer solutions to such problems (Babawale, 2006:15). The church leaders and traditional rulers can negotiate or even initiate the peace-process on behalf of the government so as to achieve maximum peace for sustainable development.

At the same time, the traditional rulers and institutions in Yorubaland are often harbingers of peace-promotion, foster cohesion and contribute to the political system of government. The traditional rulers, in ensuring peaceful co-existence in their domains, ensure that the security of the area is guaranteed. This fact is well supported by Erezene (2011:76) when he opined that, "no responsible country plays with its security." This is because security is the basic factor in the existence and survival of the society and the nation at large. Therefore, as the traditional rulers in Yorubaland promote peace and peaceful co-existence in their domains, they are playing a major role in the promotion of national security (Onuzulike, 2009: 163). In this regard, government must, as a matter of urgency, support them by way of helping to provide modern security apparatus and training of the neighbourhood vigilante when the need arises.

Church leaders and indigenous institutions also serve as major force of stability in moment of change. They can serve as intermediaries to ensure that change occur in an orderly and familiar way. In doing this, they display an impressive flexibility, adapting to measures that will help meet the needs of the people in order to ensure that there is peace, stability, progress and development in their communities (Ejizu, 2023:27). They lead people to adapt to the observed changes in spite of the consequences and challenges.

It is imperative to submit that the Church and traditional institutions are a great force in the unity of their respective domains. This is because they are a great force in the communities and by extension among their neighbours in ensuring peace. They mediate on conflicts and crises that arise from time to time, ensuring that amicable resolution of the crises are achieved as soon as conflicts rear their ugly heads (Omotoye, 2012:4). As intermediaries between gods and the people, the traditional rulers and other indigenous institutions remain impartial on issues and in conflict management as they answer to the gods for their actions. It is in search for impartial arbitrators that the traditional rulers were looked up to, for the adjudication of cases and resolution of conflicts. They have done this effectively in the settlement of Ife/Modakeke crisis in which the Oni of Ife led the Yoruba Chiefs and other traditional rulers to intervene in the crisis (Adepoju, 2020: 187). This form of intervention usually takes the form of trying to establish "a truce of understanding on the need by an appeal not to continue in the part of conflict." However, it should be stated that the efforts of the church leaders and traditional rulers may not resolve the conflict totally or permanently; they nonetheless remain potent in the peace-building process of the crises.

Presently, one cannot assume that there is an absolute peace across the Southwestern parts of Nigeria despite the efforts of both the traditional institution and church leadership in the Southwest. This is due to ever-increasing rate of violent clashes among warring communities across Yorubaland alongside with other vices like land disputes, kidnapping, ritual killings and more recently, the menace of Fulani herdsmen.

Conclusion

In as much as conflict is inevitable in any human organization, peace-building and keeping also have a role to play in sustaining such societies. Through the efforts of the indigenous institutions and church leadership in Yorubaland, maintenance of security was in the forefront of the responsibilities of the Church and traditional rulers. Before any meaningful development can take place in any society, peace and cordial relationships among its inhabitants is paramount. The flexibility of the traditional institutions in discharging this role was well accentuated in this paper. They did not just serve as kings over their respective domains; the traditional rulers also serve as harbingers of peace by way of settling disputes and managing conflicts when necessary. They could easily do these because they are well respected and revered as the custodians of the people's culture, tradition and wisdom. Owing to this vintage position, they stand a better chance of playing the role in the maintenance of security and in peace-building process not just in Yorubaland but in Nigeria as an entity.

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