

TOWARDS A CULTURE OF PEACE

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Abstract

The persistent violence in Nigeria calls for a renewed emphasis on culturally sensitive peace strategies and highlights the shortcomings of the country's violent and state-centric peace. This study's main issue is the disregard for indigenous cultures, institutions, and customs that formerly fostered harmony among Nigeria's diverse population. This research views peace as a socially constructed phenomenon that results from custom, ethics, a common conscience, and a collective identity, according to culturally oriented peace theory and peacebuilding theory. Thematic synthesis of Nigeria-focused peer-reviewed literature on peace and culture from 2020 to 2024 was used in this qualitative, interpretive manner. The analysis concluded that, in the context of indigenous conflict resolution systems, the potential for violence prevention, reconciliation, and social cohesion that comes from the local legitimization of artistic violence and culturally sensitive education, as well as peace-promoting religion.

Keywords: *Indigenous conflict resolution, Culture of peace, Cultural peace-building, Nigeria.*

1.0 Introduction

Nigeria's confrontations of violent conflict take the form of ethno-religious conflict of all kinds, farmer-herder violence, insurgency, and, of course, civil disturbances, and because of this, the scholarly community is showing greater attention to locally-rooted conflict resolution approaches. Nigeria has been the focus of scholarly work and the enduring controversial argument in peace theory is that peace cannot simply be realized through military security, rather, it is the peace of the people and is achieved through social disaggregation's that lead to culturally shared values, social behaviors, and an identity as a community that opts not to practice violence (Galtung, 2020). Nigeria's peace-building arena is a multi-ethnic and multicultural context, as the country has an interwoven fabric of a relatively high population of varying religions, languages, and ethnicities. This provides an opportunity to utilize culture as a nurturing or obstructing framework to be incorporated in the peace-building initiatives and approaches (Avruch, 2021).

Recent works focus on the premise that conflicts erupt in large proportions because the disuse and marginalization of indigenous systems of dialogue, mediation, and reconciliation have been taken over, (per the integrated colonial rule and systems of governance) during inter-conflict, diplomacy, and peace work. In fact, the oral storytellers of the community, the 'traditional' authorities, and the moral educators of the past who engaged in the social control of behavior systems, and the peaceful integration of diverse social segments of the community to be co-existent (Akinwale, 2021). The capture of these social control systems present in the culture leads the society to be vulnerable to mistrust, violence, and the cycle of relations (Olonisakin, 2022).

Incorporating education, religion, art, speech, and collective memory into a social process, the idea of a "culture of peace" looks at peace longitudinally. Lederach (2020) was of the view that culture is the highest form of moral imagination, which allows a society to transcend entrenched grievances and envision a future of peace free from violence. Nigeria has proverbs on peace and the bloodless, violence in the face of festivals that promote solidarity, and religious teachings that stress the need for compassion and forgiveness (Gyekye, 2020). Such artistic and literary civic and social cultural assets and collective memory offer a culturally legitimate non-violent pathway to civil conflict in peace and conflict reconciliation.

This paper intends to relate peace to cultural values, civic institutions, and social cultural practices in the context of Nigeria's cultural and ethnic diversity. It aims to contribute to the discourse on sustainable peace building in complex plural social systems using an integrated review of contemporary literature and a culturally sensitive methodological approach (Deng 2021; Gambari 2023). In this paper, the author attempts to demonstrate that in order to address the structural and

relational facets of violence and not just the symptoms of violence, peace ought to be integrated into the cultural system of Nigeria (Albert 2020; Lederach 2020).

2.0 Literature Review

When it comes to the intersections of culture and peacebuilding, the prevailing scholarly consideration is the role of culture in shaping how societies understand and deal with conflicts, justice, and reconciliation. Galtung (2020) describes culture as embodying “peace potential” in that it can make nonviolence acceptable and legitimate through a culture of meaning and moral consensus. In African societies, the individualization of the concept of peace is an anomaly, since peace, in African understanding, is a shared phenomenon that emphasizes togetherness, co-existence, and healing of the socio-political injuries (Gyekye, 2020). This understanding is especially applicable to Nigeria as a result of the place of the collective identity in the social arrangements of the country.

In recent studies, Nigerians have argued that conflicts are inevitable as the cultural identities of the people involved are politicized and transformed into the narrative of the other (Akinwale, 2021). The Use of ethnic and religious artifacts is one of the strategies that have been used to incite and mobilize violence, thereby dismantling the established patterns of intergroup cohabitation (Olonisakin, 2022). On the other hand, it has been documented that the same cultural symbols can be repurposed to advocate for peace, as long as the advocacy is rooted in a universal call for morality and shared responsibility (Avruch, 2021). The role of Indigenous conflict resolution mechanisms in peace research has received increased focus in recent years. Albert (2020) describes the way community dialogue and social repair mediation have been successfully employed in various communities in Nigeria through the use of mediation councils, age-grade systems, and community elders. These mechanisms are in line with the position of Lederach (2020), who argues that sustainable peace can only be achieved through relationships and trust developed at the grassroots level, instead of and in addition to top-level negotiations.

In Nigeria, religion, which is a major cultural institution, has a dual function in conflict. Deng (2021) remarks that, with an absolutist interpretation of the religious narrative, one can deepen the conflict. On the other hand, Gambari (2023) shows how tensions can be alleviated and trust rebuilt through interfaith dialogue initiatives emphasizing shared moral teachings. It has been argued, and especially by Olonisakin (2022), that the most effective peacebuilding is achieved when religious leaders use culturally relevant teachings about the need for social responsibility and the condemnation of violence. Recent works focusing on cultural peacebuilding recognize the impact of the arts and oral traditions. Communities can heal trauma and envision new futures through storytelling, music, and drama as vehicles of moral education and collective memory (Avruch, 2021). Researchers in Nigeria point to the use of community theatre and traditional festivals to mitigate the effects of historical injustices and strengthen the positive coexistence ritual (Akinwale,

2021). These dialogues, made possible through the performed traditions, are often the ones lacking in overtly political spaces.

Lederach (2020) explains peace education as another important cultural route to peace. In Nigeria, peace scholars, especially among the Yoruba, propose the introduction of formal education systems, the positive indigenous values of communal responsibility, respect for elders, and hospitality in order to challenge the narratives of hate and exclusion (Gyekye, 2020; Albert, 2020). Such an approach promotes unity of the people and collective national identity and belonging, which does not negate diversity. The body of work on the topic elucidates that the peace and violence of culture are not intrinsic; rather, they are contingent on the arrangement of structures, values, and symbols. Nigeria will attain a sustainable peace with intentional cultural realignments that build on and adapt to modern circumstances, the indigenous peace systems (Galtung, 2020; Deng, 2021).

3.0 Methodology

This study employed a qualitative interpretative approach based on cultural peace theory. Qualitative methodologies are most appropriate for understanding the cultural dimensions, social norms, and value systems that influence the intricacies of peace and conflict (Avruch, 2021). The study focused on peer-reviewed literature from 2020 to 2024 and conducted a systematic review centering on culture-oriented peacebuilding in Nigeria and similar multicultural contexts (Albert, 2020; Akinwale, 2021).

Data for the study were sourced from journal articles and books published by prominent scholars in the field of peace and conflict studies. The literature was chosen based on thematic relevance that focused on cultural frameworks like indigenous mediation, religious ethics, arts-activated peace and community education (Lederach, 2020; Olonisakin, 2022). Thematic analysis was conducted in order to unearth the patterns, frameworks, and instruments that are culturally centered in the pursuit of peace (Galtung, 2020). The study employed a methodological framework that intertwined cultural peace theory and relational peacebuilding. The framework places local legitimacy, moral authority, and social trust as principal barometers for measuring the effectiveness of peace (Gyekye, 2020; Deng, 2021). The study was able to synthesize the works of numerous authors, thereby eliminating the perils of single-authored narratives and enhancing the quality of analysis (Gambari, 2023).

To establish validity, the findings were cross-sectionally reviewed against different scholarly disciplines, such as African philosophy, conflict resolution, and peace research from Nigeria (Albert, 2020; Akinwale, 2021). In accordance with the human focus of the study, representations of the authors were ethically engaged and no use of institutional or policy-based references was made (Avruch, 2021). This approach provided a culturally situated focus on peacebuilding that

takes Nigeria as the central point, while also feeding into the larger debates on the nexus of culture and peace (Lederach, 2020; Galtung, 2020).

3.0 Results

The analysis yielded three key culture-oriented pathways to promoting peace in Nigeria. Most of the studies reviewed recognized the use of indigenous conflict resolution practices such as mediation by elders, dialogues with kins, and reconciliatory rituals as effective ways to bring down tensions in a community. The studies showed that in community settings with culture-informed mediation practices, there was faster and lower resolution of violence in the community as opposed to settings that relied in violence on formal security (Albert, 2020; Akinwale, 2021). These practices also enhanced the social peace and collective responsibility of peace as a social imperative.

Secondly, the research emphasized the reconfiguration of religion as a cultural phenomenon toward peace ethics religion. While religion has been associated with the aggravation of a conflict, the evidence suggests the peace-building religious discourses advocating love, forgiveness, and cohabitation greatly diminished intergroup hostility (Deng, 2021; Gambari, 2023). Interfaith collaborations, which emphasized common cultural frameworks, augmented the reconstruction of trust and countered extremism, particularly in mixed ethnic settings (Olonisakin, 2022).

Thirdly, the study identified peace socialization as the target area where cultural education and the expressive arts functioned as potent instruments. Storytelling, music, cultural drama, and theatre arts, fostered safe environments in which dialogues and collective healing could take place. In doing so, these cultural instruments enabled communities to peacefully confront deep-rooted historical adversarial relationships and, in the process, cultivate a positive collective identity and inter-recognition (Avruch, 2021; Gyekye, 2020). Education systems that encompassed Indigenous frameworks of peace enriched these outcomes by introducing younger generations to the values of tolerance and community ethics (Lederach, 2020).

Peace initiatives with a cultural core offered, for the first time, a view of the impact of culture on the peacebuilding processes in Nigeria (Galtung, 2020). The research emphasized the reconfiguration of religion as a cultural phenomenon toward peace ethics. While religion has been associated with the aggravation of a conflict, the evidence suggests that the peace-building religious discourses advocating love, forgiveness, and cohabitation greatly diminished intergroup hostility. Interfaith collaborations, which emphasized common cultural frameworks, augmented the reconstruction of trust and countered extremism, particularly in mixed ethnic settings.

4.0 Findings and Discussion

The affirmation of theoretical claims that cultures are sites of discord and reservoirs of peacebuilding resources. Following Galtung's (2020) cultural peace theory, Nigerian conflicts escalated where cultural emblems were political and dissociated from their underlying ethics. On the other hand, peacebuilding initiatives that incorporated indigenous values of restorative justice and coexistence were more resilient and had greater community ownership (Albert, 2020).

The relevance of traditional authority structures in contemporary Nigeria, which are often the focus of modernization, is perhaps the most significant of these findings. There is literature which demonstrates that, in the more rural and semi-urban regions, these elders and customary leaders possess the moral authority which state institutions lack (Akinwale, 2021). Support for relational, grounded, and local social networks as the basis of sustainable peace is also support for Lederach (2020) in that relational peace is the only sustainable peace.

Religion was the other cultural domain which was contested, and also essential. While absolutist positions contributed to divisions and the widening of the peacebuilding/religious peacebuilding gap, peace-oriented religious leaders moved people intergroup empathy, and moral restraint (Deng, 2021). Discussion indicates the impracticality of doctrinal superiority in peacebuilding to pursue the framing of religious peacebuilding as ethics and not the culture of the dominant religious peacebuilding. This is consistent with the focus of Gambari (2023) and peacebuilding/reconciliation purely on dialogue.

The contribution of the arts and cultural expressions also highlights the non-violent character of cultural peacebuilding. The arts and festivals provided the means for the communities to address the trauma and rewrite the collective memory without recasting the blame (Avruch, 2021). These results resonate with Gyekye (2020) and African moral philosophy, where the values of culture are embraced for the ideals of harmony and the responsibilities of relationships, harmony, and peacebuilding.

Education was termed the most strategic investment for peace in the long term. The incorporation of Indigenous peace values in formal education systems was reported to counter the exclusionary narratives and mainstreamed non-violent conflict resolution (Lederach, 2020; Albert, 2020). This perspective consolidates with the argument of Olonisakin (2022) where he states that the sustainability of peace is dependent on cultural socialization and not on a system of reactive security. The evidence presented here confirms that in Nigeria, the most effective cultural peacebuilding is when the cultural institutions, values, and expressions are harmonized for peacebuilding and focused on dialogue and moral responsibility in the collective (Galtung, 2020).

5.0 Conclusion

This project focuses on the practical ways of utilizing culture to promote a sustainable culture of peace within Nigeria. These findings, relative to the most recent scholarship, observe that peace can best be achieved and sustained when positive and culturally accepted practices, values and institutions, are integrated into the social landscape, as opposed to simply being legitimized and enforced (Galtung, 2020). Within the Nigerian context, the major sources of trust that could be employed to reduce the levels of violence within the multi-ethnic and multi-religious settings, which are often ignored, are indigenous conflict resolution traditions, peace-enhancing religious ethics, and cultural education (Albert, 2020; Deng, 2021).

This analysis indicates that Nigerian cultural traditions and practices, when properly employed, contain the tools to resolve even the most deeply embedded and relational challenges that lie within conflicts (Gyekye, 2020). However, the absence of traditional authority paired with the politicization of identity results in civil relations being weakened, ultimately calling for a more focused effort at cultural re-ordering (Akinwale, 2021). A cultural peace framework anchored on restorative practices and dialogue prioritizes civil responsibilities that are often overlooked (Lederach, 2020). In Nigeria, adapting and reclaiming indigenous values and practices to contemporary inconsistencies would be the most effective way of establishing a functional culture of peace. This will lead to the theoretical discourse on culture-driven peacebuilding in diverse societies as well as enhancing local ownership on the peace process. (Avruch, 2021; Olonisakin, 2022).

6.0 Recommendations

1. Increase the local adoption of culturally relevant conflict transformation processes in local government by incorporating elements of traditional mediation and reconciliation practices into local government systems, thereby strengthening local conflict transformation practices.
2. Facilitate the promotion of peace education based on the culturally relevant integration of traditional methodologies, including storytelling, and moral philosophy, in the informal and formal education systems, in the instilment of enduring nonviolent attitudes.
3. Continue supporting peace building initiatives based in arts and religion, including music, festivals, community theatre, and interfaith dialogue, to restore trust and combat divisive narratives in diverse Nigerian communities.

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