

The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion

Edited by
Ibigbolade S. Aderibigbe · Toyin Falola

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ISBN 978-3-030-89499-3 ISBN 978-3-030-89500-6 (eBook)
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89500-6

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The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

Acknowledgments

The completion of this book could not have been achieved without the contributions of several key participants. Therefore, we would like to thank many colleagues and friends who guided and provided various forms of assistance associated with compiling and reviewing the contributed chapters. In specific terms, we would like to thank Dr. (Mrs.) Olutola Akindipe for coordinating the communications with contributors regarding the invitation, submission, and compilation of chapters and associated materials. Also, we are grateful to Dr. David Olali, Bukunmi Ogunsola, Olumida Ajayi, and Samaria Divine for assisting in converting and standardizing the referencing formats. In addition, Alexis Mulkey deserves special mention for the final review of the chapters.

Our contributors also deserve immense gratitude for their patience in bearing with us throughout producing the book, particularly with our several requests for corrections and submissions of associated materials. We would like you to know that without your contributed chapters, this book would not have materialized. We believe that this project's success would serve as enough compensation for the inconveniences and the amount of hard work you invested.

Finally, Palgrave Macmillan's publication team deserves our special gratitude for being patient and bearing with sometimes unusual logistical difficulties and delays in meeting deadlines. We appreciate the amount of hard work of the team in the successful production of this book.

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CHAPTER 25

African Traditional Religion, Conflict Resolution, and Peaceful Societal Co-existence

Noah Yusuf and Raji Shittu

Introduction

Virtually all human societies are characterized by varying forms of conflict ranging from intra- and inter-group conflict, religious, ethnic, and political conflicts along with disputes generated by prevailing climatic and social realities.[1] The significant sources of conflict in Africa revolve around stiff competition over land, chieftaincy tussle, and discord in personal relationships, disagreements over the inheritance of family property, murder, and matrimonial fallouts, among others. Empirical pieces of evidence have shown that most of the sustained conflicts in Africa are products of the failure of the foreign-imposed legal systems, which revolves around litigation to resolve such conflicts.[2] As argued in the Institute of Chartered Mediators and Conciliators Training Manual, the search for solace within litigation is often disappointing not because the court is indifferent to the problems presented but because the interpretive outcome of such court judgments are often adversarial rather than retributive while such outcome does not optimally promote interpersonal post-litigation friendship but enmity.[3] Such a formal adjudicative judicial process is also overloaded and overburdened with case hangovers because of the delay in the dispensation of justice.

Litigation is also very formal with difficult and technical comprehension challenges for most uneducated Africans to understand and interpret. Due to the above disadvantages inherent in litigation, many conflicts in Africa are now

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I. S. Aderibigbe, T. Falola (eds.), *The Palgrave Handbook of African Traditional Religion*, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89500-6_25

being resolved using traditional African mechanisms of conflict preventic management, and resolution, which started in the pre-colonial days. The tra tional method of conflict resolution has mostly been documented to be effe tive, less costly, mutually benefitting, empathic, and respected, while tl decisions emanating from the traditional method revolves around the conse sus approach of a "give" and "take" resolution outcome that is rooted i accommodation.[4] The traditional method of conflict resolution is willingl binding on all parties not because the parties are being forced to obey the judg ment outcome but mainly because the identity and survival of such individua are linked to the survival of his or her traditional social variables, including thei family, community elders, traditional leaders, and traditional religions as cred- ible agents of resolving conflicts for peaceful societal co-existence. Thus, those who resolve their conflicts through the traditional methods have confidence in the process, and the actors, including the elders, chiefs, and religious priests are ready to submit themselves to the judgment of the above constituted authorities.[5]

Also, in resolving disputes through the traditional African methods of con- flict management, the principles of equity and social justice, which is primarily entrenched in African customs and traditions, are upheld as the main factor responsible for the peaceful social organizations established by the earlier African political and traditional leaders before colonialism while different tradi- tional conflict resolution methods exist with variation across African cultures.[6]

In Africa, some religions, especially Islam, Christianity, and African Traditional Religion, are very central to peace, security, and spiritual advance- ment of the people as the adoption and application of their doctrinal tenets uphold social justice and unite the people for the development of different segments of the society.[7] Religion teaches people to live in harmony with their fellow human beings and to evade greed and corruption. It is also a fundamen- tal pillar for good governance, fairness, justice, and equity in order to promote and sustain peace and security as political leaders are asked to swear by their religious scriptures before assuming offices with the promises of governing with the fear of God while also promoting fairness and equity to all.

Religion, by nature, detests violence, cheating, and acquisition of wealth through illegal and ungodly means, which promotes conflictive existence. As a matter of fact, religion is the very foundation of societal morality and sustain- able peace. Religion regulates the conduct and behavior of people in society and preaches vital virtues needed in sustaining a nation towards peaceful co- existence. Religious sermons are preached in churches and mosques with spe- cific reference to citations from the Bible and Qur'an to modify the behavior of the people positively to bring about peace and security in society. The mission- aries who brought Christian religion to Africa and Nigeria, in particular, made Religious Education and Moral Education compulsory to all students, and this helped to reduce social vices and crime rates, most especially in the 1950s and 1960s, thus promoting peaceful societal co-existence. However, immediately after the Government took over mission schools in the mid-1970s, moral

decadence such as stealing, prostitution, financial crimes, which undermined peace and security, became very pronounced in Nigeria.[8]

While Christianity and Islam have dominated the doctrinal religious space with many African adherents, African Traditional Religion still permeate most societal activities. It is difficult to divorce major spheres of life, especially politics and dispute resolutions, from religion. For example, a ruler in traditional African society is both the political ruler of his community and the Chief Priest.[9] This phenomenon is particularly noticeable among the Yorùbá community, where the *Oba* (King) is referred to as *Igba Keji Orisa* (*Eledumare*) (Next in rank to the Supreme Being) and he is also regarded as *Olori Awon Awoo* (a leader among the priests).[10] Apart from resolving disputes among adherents, the African Traditional Religion promotes security and good governance by not condoling stealing, injustice, immorality, and dishonesty amongst political leaders. In traditional Yorùbá society, there is the concept of *agogo eewo* (the forbidden gong). When sounded, criminals, evil-doers, adulterers, lawbreakers, and robbers shivered with terror because they expect to die soon.[11]

In pre-colonial African societies, crime was considered harmful to the gods. This collective consciousness was enshrined in the traditional doctrinal laws of public and private crimes. Such transgressions, which were tried by the gods, included certain forms of abuse, incest, witchcraft, and treason while the traditional religious Judicial Council, which is comprised of a council of religious interpreters, interprets the god's decisions on the cases that are referred to them. There is equally the invocation of supernatural forces to expose all forms of criminality with dire consequences of disgraceful death from such gods, including a heavenly strike from the god of thunder. Olaoba Olufemi has shown clearly that oath-taking, which was one of the extra-judicial doctrinal methods, usually assisted the judge or adjudicators in locating the guilty parties in cases referred to them.[12]

This chapter examines the contributions of the traditional African religions to conflict resolution in Africa and its effects on peaceful societal co-existence. The objectives of this study, which relied on secondary data, were to investigate the critical features of conflict resolution mechanisms in African Traditional Religion and examine the methods of conflict resolutions in selected African traditional religions from the Yorùbá, Ibo, and Tiv traditions, which have a rich traditional religious culture of conflict resolution. This chapter also discusses the effects of traditional religious conflict resolution mechanisms on peaceful societal co-existence.

Conceptual Issues

Conflict takes various forms and dimensions in African societies. It is significant to note that conflict is difficult to define from the perspective of the African people. It seems to be part of the excitement for networking relationships, whether negative or positive. Consequently, conflicts are in the magnitude of rages, rifts, misunderstandings, family and market brawls, skirmishes and wars,

public insurrections, and assaults. It also includes chieftaincy and boundary disputes. These storms of conflicts are widespread in Africa.[13] Conflict, as an element of social interaction, has been defined in various dimensions. Some writers note that a conflict situation emerges when two or more parties cannot agree on an issue. The parties to such conflict may not necessarily be the government or nation-states. In an incompatible stage among nation-states, every party involved seeks to achieve specific objectives, such as additional or more secure territories, security, and access to markets, prestige, alliances, and the overthrow of an unfriendly government.[14] The study of conflict in Africa has not always been mindful of the need to consider the interaction of local and international factors in the evolution of conflicts between African nations. African conflicts are not susceptible to prediction, although it can be explained. Overt manifestations of conflict are seldom unremitting, even in relationships between rival cultures.[15] Conflict is a particular relationship between states or rival factions within a state, which implies subjective hostilities or tension manifested in subversive economic or military hostilities.[16] Conflict can be described as a condition in which an identifiable group of human beings, whether tribal, ethnic, linguistic, religious, socio-political, economic, cultural or otherwise, are in conscious opposition to one or more other identifiable human groups because these groups are pursuing what may be incompatible goals.[17] More importantly, conflict arises from the interaction of individuals who have partially incompatible ends. The ability of one actor to gain his end depends, to a significant degree, on the choice or decision that the other party will make. Conflict could be violent, uncontrollable, dominant or recessive, resolvable or insolvable under various sets of circumstances.[18] Conflict is said to be inevitable in human beings' social relationships wherever crucial resources are in contention.

Isaac Olawale Albert has argued that there is nothing wrong with conflict; it is a critical mechanism by which the goals and aspirations of individuals and groups are articulated.[19] It is a channel for a definition of creative solutions to human problems, and a means to develop a collective identity. The repercussion of conflicts between person-to-person, group-to-group, community-to-community, state-to-state, or nation-to-nation rarely ceases with the termination of overt hostilities. However, conflict can solve contentious issues between nations, or it can further exacerbate them. In any case, the consequences of conflicts are usually felt for some time after a war ends.[20] Wadama Wadinga described African conflicts as a phenomenon that is frequently brushed and dismissed as being chaotic or worthy of some vague pity or humanitarian concern, but rarely of any in-depth political analysis. Wadinga added that the divide and rule policies of colonial administrators assured the docility of different ethnic groups, and this shielded them from the menace of insurrection.[21]

Review of Relevant Literature

Essentially, conflict resolution in traditional African societies provides an opportunity to interact with the parties concerned while promoting consensus-building, social bridge reconstructions, and enactment of order in society[22] The most typical methods for this purpose include, among others, the use of the council of elders, kings' courts, and open market assembly. Other traditional conflict resolution techniques include mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, negotiation, and cross-examination. Rather than offering ineffective resolutions such as those achieved in litigation settlements in a court of law, these traditional techniques provide superb support for peaceful co-existence and harmonious relationships during post-conflict.

As discussed by Adelodun Ibrahim in the traditional African society, conflict may generally exist whenever or wherever incompatible events occur and may result in a win-lose outcome.[23] The resolution, transformation, and management of conflict may, however, produce a win-win situation too. Truth is a covenant logo that disputants or parties in conflict must not miss. In contemporary African society, nobody cares about the truth. If Africans have to put the falling apart together, their original values must be revisited. Conflict is as natural as the concept of peace contrary to the global or universal conception. Africans have particular ways of conceptualizing conflict. Traditional definitions of "conflict" regard it as a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power, and resources in which the opponents aim to neutralize, injure or eliminate their rivals[24]. However, conflict may generally exist wherever or whenever incompatible activities occur and may result in a win-lose outcome. The resolution, transformation, and management of conflict may also produce a win-win situation.[25]

It is important to emphasize that conflict management in general and conflict resolution, in particular, are almost entirely determined by our understanding of the composition of a conflict and not only by symptoms.[26] In some African societies, indigenous law is derived essentially from customs and traditions. Unlike some Western societies, literacy was not strictly defined by knowledge of written word but included verbal art and remembrance. While the Yorùbá's legal traditions were typically undocumented, these traditions were preserved and survived due to continuous performance.

The traditional society presented an atmosphere conducive for enduring performance.[27] As posited by the author, the Yorùbá people derived their sources of adjudication from the wisdom and traditional knowledge of their forebears, which were always dramatized. Olaoba confirmed that the elders sit under a tree and talk until they agree; the elders (old age or seniority) are considered as the force behind order and decorum in traditional society.[28] This indicates that elders, within the Yorùbá culture, are the powerhouse of wisdom and knowledge. Cases of fighting among adolescents or young people were in the past accorded an impromptu settlement by the passers-by who normally ensured restoration of peace and harmony.[29]

There existed various community associations and guilds saddled with the responsibility of maintenance of peace and order in marketing operations, including stealing, debt, and fraud. In certain circumstances, gods and ancestors (the living dead) are called upon, their spirit invoked, and everyone, especially the disputants, are reminded of the aftermath of their wrath if they refuse to tell the truth. In the markets and the palace (court), a spirit is present. The spirit could be malevolent or benevolent.[30] In Africa, there were levels or phases of conflict resolution; there were dispute resolutions at the inter-personal or family level, the extended family level, and village or town level (chief in council). These tiers represent the political units making up the community. The smallest unit called *Idile* (nuclear family) is headed by a Baale. The next unit is the *Ebi* (extended family headed by Mogaji), the most influential or usually the eldest person in the Ebi. The extended family includes all people who have blood ties. The last tier of the units is the quarter, which comprises several family compounds headed by a Baale (the chief-of-ward/quarter) while the head of the household includes the man's immediate family of wife or wives and children[31] cases resolved by Baale include conflicts among co-wives, brothers and sisters, truants, and street fights involving his children and his foster children or dependents. Conflicts solved immediately include minor issues, such as scolding the troublemakers and appeasing whoever was offended. The Baale is required to visit the offended person, even to thank him/her for accepting a peaceful resolution of the conflict. It is the duty of Baale to call together his household and warn them to desist from making any more trouble.[32]

The court imposed no fine. However, appeals could be made from one court to the second court, which is the court of the ward-chief (*Ile-ejo ijoye Adugbo*). This court tried civil cases. It could not try the criminal cases, but it had the authority to conduct a preliminary investigation into criminal cases before transferring them to the king's court (*Ile-ejo Oba*).[33] Baale (chiefs) also controls the relationship between members of his family and outsiders. Such cases can threaten the survival of the entire lineage or ward. Once the matter is resolved, the emphasis is placed on how good neighbourliness can be achieved and preserved. Land disputes, lack of good care for women and children by the husband, infidelity by the women, and disputes over inheritance are the commonest in this category.[34]

However, dispute resolutions by the Chief-in-Council (*Igbimo Ilu*) in Yorùbáland were the highest traditional institution. In the pre-colonial era, the Council had the power to pass a death sentence on any offender brought before it. The Court of the King was the highest court. It was also the last court to which appeals could be made, but among Egba and Ijebu, however, the Ogboni court seemed to be the last court of appeal.[35] A woman is traditionally expected to be on her knees and to offer the traditional greetings unless the chief instructs her to stand up. A man has to start by prostrating, which is a way of offering a traditional greeting. Whatever judgment is given is accepted. In the traditional judiciary system in Yorùbáland, fines of damages are not usually awarded by the mediators in civil cases. The utmost aim is to restore peace by

settling disputes amicably. As such, restoration of harmony is what is paramount in the traditional judicial system. Sometimes, however, mediators award simple fines as a deterrent to the occurrence of particular anti-social behavior. This may be demanded in the form of kola nuts or local gins, both of which have ritual significance. Some of the kola nuts are broken and passed around for everyone to eat to celebrate the resolution of the conflict. The drink is also passed around for all to taste. If no gin or palm wine is available, ordinary drinking water can be used. In some traditional settings, the palm wine or gin is used to pour libation to the gods and ancestors of the people involved in the dispute. These actions help to reinforce the terms of reconciliation.[36]

Chibuzor identified the methods of conflict resolution in the traditional African societies as follows: mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration and negotiation, and employing extra-judicial devices and usage of legal maxims to persuade or convince the disputants about the implication or otherwise of their behavior.[37] These methods have been effective in traditional African society. Mediation is an old method of conflict management surrounded by secrecy. It involves the non-coercive intervention of the mediators(s), called third-party either to reduce or go beyond or bring the conflict to a peaceful settlement. Olaoba (2002) described mediation as a method of conflict resolution that had been so critical to traditional society. The mediators usually endeavoured that peace and harmony reigned supreme in the society at whatever level of mediation. This is also usually couched with the dictum of "no victor no vanquished," as buttressed by the maxim,[38] *Bia ba be'eran wi K'a si tun beran wi*. If we apportion blame to the guilty person, we must do the same to the other party in a conflict. Mediators are sought from within the communities or societies of the parties concerned. Due to their cumulative experiences and wisdom, elders are regarded as trustworthy advisors all over Africa. Their roles depend on traditions, circumstances, and personalities accordingly.[39]

These roles include pressurizing, making recommendations, giving assessments, conveying suggestions on behalf of the parties, emphasizing relevant norms and rules, envisaging the situation if an agreement is not reached, or repeating the agreement already attained.[40] In traditional African society also, adjudication involves bringing all disputants in the conflict to a meeting, usually in the chambers or compounds of family heads, quarter heads, and palace court as the case may be. The dialogue was linked with the adjudicatory processes in traditional African societies.[41] Reconciliation was the most significant aspect of conflict resolution. It is the end product of adjudication. After the disputants have been persuaded to end their dispute, peace was restored. This restoration of peace and harmony has always been anchored on the principle of "give a little and get a little," an indication for the disputing parties to give concessions. A feast was usually organized to confirm the readiness of the conflicting parties towards reaching points of compromise.[42] As a characteristic of traditional African society, the conflict resolution method uses arbitration. Authority figures are the ones allowed to practice the reconciliation function and form binding judgments when they are mediating between opposing

parties; however, the aim is not to simply render a judgment, but to bring about reconciliation between the two parties.

The relationship between the authoritative figures and the community is cushioned by community representatives who advise them.[43] The secret of negotiation is to harmonize the interests of the parties involved. Thus, even when the conflict involves a member against his or her society, there is an emphasis on recuperation and re-insertion of errant members back into their place in society. The recovery of a dissident member can just as well be seen as the restoration of the harmony and integrity of the community, the assertion of value consensus, and social cohesion so that the management of the conflict favours the concerns of both parties.[44] In traditional Yorùbá society, peace was negotiated. An apology for wrongs done to individuals and the entire community was a feature of negotiation. Such apology was channeled through the Yorùbá elders, compound heads, and chiefs of high caliber in society. It was done on the representative level or through quasi-representation. The *Babaogun* (patron) played the role of a representative in the sense of conflict resolution.[45] Conflict resolution provides an opportunity to interact with the parties concerned, with the hope of at least reducing the scope, intensity, and effects of their disputes. During formal and informal meetings, conflict resolution exercises permit a reassessment of views and claims as a basis for finding options to crisis and divergent points of view. Those who organize conflict resolution exercises or meetings usually constitute a third party in a triangular arrangement and consist of traditional rulers, such as kings and chiefs. Conflict resolution in plural societies can be quite complex, principally because of the determinate effects of culture and language symbolism.[46]

According to Kevin Avruch and Peter Black, "it is quite dangerous to relegate culture to the background in conflict resolution."[47] Although culture is a marker of social differences, it should be regarded as an obstacle to conflict resolution in multi-ethnic/multi-cultural societies. Cross-examination is an important mechanism employed in the process of conflict resolution in traditional African society. It was a means of weighting evidence through cross-checking, and corroborating the facts of the conflict.[48] In the Yorùbá maxim, a good sense of justice is associated with cross-examination, which is expressed as follows: *Agbejo enikan da, agba osika* (wicked and iniquitous is he whose judgment is based on the evidence of one party to a case). Consequently, in traditional African societies, particularly Yorùbáland, in conflict resolution, undue favour toward the disputants was discouraged. The extra-judicial methods took the form of ordeals and the invocation of supernatural forces to expose all sides of the conflict. Olaoba has shown clearly that oath-taking, which was one of the extra-judicial methods, usually assisted the judge or adjudicators in locating areas of weaknesses in the conflict. Aside from the iron object (sacred to the god of iron) used for oath-taking, the Yorùbá people also use an *apasa* (weaving instrument), *iru* (chiefly scepter), royal shrine, or religious sanctuaries. The wrath of the gods is used for eliciting facts of the dispute. Such gods as *Sango* (god of Thunder), *Yemoja* (goddess of the river), and *Ayelala* (guardian of

social morality) are used to ascertain the veracity of the story told by disputants.[49]

Ardeloju discusses the level of interaction and inter-religious harmony between the Christians, Muslims, and African Traditional Religions, describing them as being very cordial during their early years.[50] As noted by the author, the African religion exhibited a high degree of accommodation and hospitality to the adherents of other religions. This assertion is justified by the tolerance of the Aerialists society to the Christian and Muslim missionaries despite the intimidation manifested in the missionaries' disdain for rejection of virtually anything associated with African religions.

Adigun finds mutual relationship and cooperation between the Muslims and Christians than their bilateral relationship with the traditional African worshippers, especially in the South-Western part of Nigeria.[51] Some of the harmonious relationships are noticeable in the area of social celebrations as religious differences are often put aside by both adherents when it comes to celebrations like naming ceremonies, house-dedications, marriages, funerals, and burial rites whereas both Christians and Muslims dine together and exchange gifts and pleasantries despite their diverse religious affiliations. Christians and Muslims also enjoy mutual tolerance and co-operation in business transactions where both adherents freely patronize each other. The author notes further that there is tolerance and expression of inter-religious harmony during the observation of major Christian and Muslim religious festivals as families, friends, and neighbors of the two religious affiliations celebrate with one another. In some families, both the Christmas and Ramadan festivals often serve as avenues for a family reunion irrespective of their religious differences while inter-religious marriages between Christians and Muslims are common especially in South-Western Nigeria, thus extending the bond of cordiality among the adherents of the two religions. Despite their cordiality in Nigeria which has largely promoted inter-religious harmony, the two religions are intolerant in the area of doctrinal understanding as the adherents of both religions often provoke one another by openly condemning each other's religious beliefs and practices, especially in sermons, thus, leading to inter-religious disharmony in many instances. The review of relevant literature herein finds that there are advantages of the traditional methods of conflict resolution in Africa which include accommodating, pleading, compromise and collaboration, as well as bargaining, and restorative justice, which mends rather than destroys cordial relationships.

Theoretical Framework

This study relies on the Conflict Transformation Theory as its basis for explanation. As posited by Morgan, the conflict transformation model represents the transformation of conflict issues from confrontation to collaboration by transforming human thoughts and mindsets towards greater positive understanding, especially amongst the warring parties[52] Such a transformation

strategy is also tilted towards building the culture of permanent peace in the minds of the conflicting parties. The conflict transformation state is thus a process of changing incompatibility to compatibility, hatred to love, disharmony to harmony, amongst others. There are about five stages of conflict transformation processes to achieve peace.[53] These are actor, issue, institutional, legal, and structural transformation stages. The transformation strategy for conflict actors focuses on the positive changes in the behaviour and the attitude of such actors in order to drop their confrontational attitudes for collaboration to bring about peace in a troubled community. Issue transformation processes focus on transforming conflict issues from their point of disagreement to compromise by changing their hard-line positions on conflict issues and interest for softer and consensus bargaining processes.

The institutional transformational stage of conflict represents a positive alteration of the performances of social, institutional structures that provides services to the public from their previous poor performance ratings for better and optimal performance. The legal transformation process refers to rules transformation, which removes the obnoxious laws that made people rebel. The structural transformation of conflict represents a credible transformation of each of the transformational stages but with a special interest in their inter-stage collaboration for effective conflict transformation owing to the observation that conflict might not be adequately mitigated even where a particular stage had been successfully transformed while neglecting other stages. The conflict transformation theory is very relevant to this study because the essence of the traditional African methods of conflict resolution revolves around collaboration, a consensus approach to peace-building, and plea bargaining, leading to restorative justice and peaceful co-existence in society.

Features of Conflict Resolution Mechanisms in African Traditional Religion

A typical African religious conflict resolution mechanism is typically distinguished with the principles of equity and justice, and is customs ingrained in the fiber of African customs and traditions. Thus, while the Western countries relied on the police to detect crime through torture during the pre-colonial period, several African societies relied on oath-taking and divination to curtail crime.

The core platforms and key features of conflict resolution mechanisms in African traditional religions include a religious shrine, oath-taking, religious festivals, truthfulness, and sanction. The shrine is the center of reconciliation, mediation, and appeasement of African traditional religion, while simultaneously providing a medium of arbitration. When a person threatens the life of his neighbour or has injured him, the two are brought to the shrine, where conciliation is carried out within the confines of restorative justice, and the wounded party is treated with medicines at the shrine.

The masquerade also constitutes a reconciliation platform between the ... puting parties because whatever is his pronouncement, it is considered to ... come from the heavenly god since the masquerade himself is considered ... traditional indigenes of the world beyond. The intervention of the masq... ades aids villages in regulating their concerns because they are also involved ... cases relating to spiritual matters, such as witchcraft and poisoning. Oa... taking is another central character of conflict resolution through the traditio... African religion to establish the truth and discourage dishonest attitudes a... evil actions. Additionally, African traditional religious societies commonly pr... vented, managed, and resolved conflict through oath-taking, mostly at ... shrine of a powerful deity, over an instrument that acted as a medium for co... tacting the deity. Moreover, to avoid shame or even death, the repercussions ... taking on oath on fabrications was widely taught and known. The celebratio... of religious festivals serves to foster peace, solidarity, harmonious living, a... respect for others among the people. The festivals usually involve rituals a... sacrifices offered to the deities and ancestors for peace and security. Reciproc... equally fostered peaceful co-existence and, consequently, eliminated the like... hood of conflict and wars.[54] Sanctions and punishments are also a critical fe... ture of African traditional religion towards conflict resolution: Erring individu... and families who contravened religious tenets and traditions are sanctioned ... with appropriate punishments. This measure was meant to prevent all anti... social misconducts such as stealing, willful murder, incest, abuse of elders, wil... ful damage to property, lying, bearing false witness, poisoning, and rape. It wa... also largely believed that deities could inflict sanctions through accidents, sick... ness, death, famine, poverty, misery, barrenness, and loss of children, in addi... tion to societal exile, ostracism, fines, compensation, restitution, and the ... rendering of an apology.[55] The mediator, arbitrator, and judge must also be ... truthful before the god, while the presence of the ancestral forces may coerce ... or force the offenders to tell the truth.

Methods of Conflict Resolution in Selected African Traditional Religions

The methods of conflict resolution in African traditional religions are very ric... and effective. Some examples are provided through the instrumentality of th... Yorùbá, Ibo, and the Tiv traditional religions in Nigeria. Among the Yorùb... peoples, who live in the South-Western part of Nigeria, indigenous religious ... law derives essentially from customs and traditions. Although the religious ... dogmas of the Yorùbá are largely unwritten, their preservation and survival ... were done through practical applications to make them relevant and easily ... understood. Thus, the Yorùbá people derived their sources of adjudication ... from the wisdom and traditional knowledge of the forebears. In certain cir... cumstances, including the exposure of the criminals, gods, and ancestors (the ... living dead) are called upon, their spirit invoked, and everyone, especially th...

disputants, is reminded of the aftermath of their wrath if they refuse to tell the truth. As mentioned earlier, in the markets and the palace (court), a spirit is present, and such spirit could be malevolent or benevolent.[56] Occassionally, mediators distribute small fines in the hopes that this would dissuade specific anti-social behavior as demanded by the gods.

Next to be discussed is the Igbo traditional society. Apart from the iron object (sacred to the god of iron) used for oath-taking, the Yorùbá people also use *apasa* (weaving instrument), *Irù* (chiefly scepter), royal shrine, or religious sanctuaries to seal the judgment as pronounced by the gods. The wrath of the gods is used for eliciting facts of the dispute. Such gods as *Sango* (god of Thunder), *Yemoja* (goddess of the river), and *Ayelala* (guardian of social morality) are used to ascertain the veracity of the story told by complaintants.[57]

The Igbo traditional religious institution for conflict resolution is called *Agbara* (local deities or oracles). Warnings of impending dooms for any recalcitrant disputants are often received through the chief priest of *Obinze*, the messenger of *Alunlwn* (big Earth deity), saying that they see an impending blood flow, insisting that there must be no bloodshed and that the dispute must be settled peacefully. Disputes are eventually resolved through oath-taking, which centers on the declaration of no more war, a peace treaty, and the performance of a cleansing ritual called *Ikomue*. Most communities do come with their respective representatives and local deities (oracles) to be sworn to in the presence of gods and all people present. The oath, which is binding on every indigene of the participating communities, was taken to the effect that the contracting parties accept peace, and there would be no more war and bloodshed between the warring communities. Violators of this oath face the wrath of the deities and the ancestors, who, in the presence of god, constitute the source of moral sanctions and peace guarantors. This first oath-taking process usually relaxed tension in the war-torn area and paved the way for their processes that brought about final peace.[58]

After the first oath process, a second oath takes place, in which the disputants are invited to the deity shrines, where the representatives of each community arrive with a big he-goat, some kola nuts along with a symbol of their own community's deity and its chief priest (*Ezemmoo*). After reading the oath's contents, each community appointed one representative to take the oath on its behalf and in the presence of its deity.[59]

Tiv is an ethnolinguistic group or nation in Central Nigeria. The 'Swem' Oath or Covenant is the traditional religious method of conflict resolutions among the Tiv. It revolves around the Swem, which is an Oath or Covenant. The name 'Swem' refers to the "past transitional habitation of the Tiv ethnic nation."[60] However, "the Tiv Swem oath or covenant was the highest oath of faithfulness and truth and the demonstration of one's innocence in the ancient Tiv nation."[61] As succinctly put by M. Msue, the "Swem oath was a Covenant of faithfulness and truth and nothing but the truth."[62] Therefore, U Bumun Swem or U Hemben Swem, both represented the ways of swearing upon the

Swem Oath. U Bumun Swem was to swear upon the Swem Oath, to stand fo and tell the truth and nothing but the truth. U Hemben Swem, on the oth hand, was to demonstrate disputants' faithfulness, truthfulness, and innocen before the whole world by releasing the Swem pot to drop and break in pieces. To swear to a Swem oath or to break the Swem pot was not a casual joking exercise, but a most solemn and serious undertaking and a matter of li and death.

From the above examinations, the features of traditional religious conflic resolution in Nigeria are largely characterized by spiritualism involving incanta tions, curses, witchcraft, and oath-taking. It also involves sacrifice and libatio brought before the traditional and spiritual leaders, including the fetish pries custodians of deities, herbalists, and soothsayers. For example, one party ma invoke a curse by using the name of a river or a deity to harm another perso for perceived wrongdoing. Once the afflicted party realizes, through divina tion, that they have been cursed, the accused is requested to reverse or remo that curse by performing the necessary rituals at the appropriate fetish/shri and going through the necessary religious purification. It is also common to invoke an oath during conflicts. A litigant may swear an oath to support hi her claim. When that happens, it is expected that the other party, if innocen will also swear an oath against that claim. In that case, the contending parties having sworn the oath have to go to the paramount chief, fetish, river, amon others to perform the necessary rituals and settle the dispute. However, failur to respond to an oath is perceived to be an admission of guilt until reversed b the custodian of the oath (e.g., chief/fetish priest).[63]

Traditional healers, diviners, herbalists, and spiritual healers/seers also pla an important role in the traditional religious conflict resolution mechanism a the individual, family, and community levels. They are a medium between th living, the ancestors, and God.[64] Traditional/spiritual healers may use her animal sacrifices, and water to perform rituals to resolve conflicts between th living and their ancestral spirits. Traditional healing may be a strictly priva family affair or an open community function, depending on the issu involved.[65] Conflicts arising from witchcraft are usually resolved between th traditional healers and the affected parties. A person may choose to revenge th evil that has been done, or just strengthen/protect themselves against simil fetish attacks in the future. Traditional healers are frequently sought on criti issues, including various kinds of conflict in the community. Thus, the role traditional religions, especially in helping to identify suspected criminals an resolving conflict, cannot be over-emphasized.[66]

There are operational similarities in the three traditional religious metho of conflict resolution examined above as they all showcase the importance an contribution of religion to peaceful societal co-existence. Thus, the proces focus on reconciliation, stability, harmony, and safety while it attempts to re oncile individuals and groups based on traditional doctrinal norms and pr tices. Thus, the traditional religion has become part of the modern governan and administration systems. Though enshrined in the indigenous cultures, th

function as regular parts of national governance and are recognized and accepted and used by the governments as many government officials do swear at a shrine to be loyal to political godfathers, while disputes resulting from non-fulfillment of promises between the two parties are sometimes resolved at the shrine.

In contemporary times, there is high respect for the traditional religious authorities and institutions. Generally, in many instances, the conflict resolution process is transparent, publicly performed, and the evidence, discussions, and solutions are open to all. More so, the affected individuals and families find a traditional healer to either reverse or protect them against any curses that may have been pronounced on them by their enemies. However, in Ghana, traditional priests are allowed to hear and resolve spiritual conflicts, and their decisions are respected.[67] The major difference between the traditional religious methods of conflict resolution is the peculiarity of their traditional weight.

Effects of Traditional Religious Conflict Resolution Mechanisms on Peaceful Societal Co-Existence

In the typical African conflict resolution through the religious mechanism, the principles of equity and justice, which are entrenched in the customs and traditions of the people, are upheld, thus promoting peaceful co-existence. It is a general belief in traditional African society that there is no award for winning an argument. As such, the result of conflict resolution is to accommodate all parties involved in the dispute through genuine collaboration by all, in the search for effective compromise. In doing so, unnecessary competition is avoided because the ultimate aim of conflict resolution is an amicable settlement by persuasion, mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration, and negotiation, not necessarily reverting to the use of force or coercion.[68]

In typical African traditional society, religious socialization through festivals, such as the Osun Osogbo festival in Nigeria is an important factor in conflict resolution, as those settled at the riverbanks end up being friends rather than foe. African children are raised to consider that a quarrel or a fight with others is a quarrel or a fight between blood and ancestral relations. Thus, it becomes imperative to avoid injury and harm, as well as avoiding situations of always trying to win at any cost, thus promoting oneness and unity of the society. The African traditional religious conflict resolution mechanism performs a healing function in African societies as it provides an opportunity for the examinations of alternative positive decisions to resolve differences. Conflict resolution through the instrumentality of the African traditional religions promotes consensus-building, social bridge reconstructions, and the re-enactment of sustainable peace and order. The traditional religions take into account the cultural setting and the social context of every dispute in order to find a lasting solution based on the prevailing customs. It looks at the history of preceding events that led to the conflict. And while concentrating on the conflict itself

and the process of resolving it, it takes optimal interest on how such resolu outcome would promote peace in the society. A wider interest is taken one which just includes the disputing parties; possible consequences for o in their families and social network are also taken into consideration whil potential effects of such relationship and interests are envisaged to not un mine social cohesion.[69] It was also found that the traditional principles of to ance, accommodation, fairness, the sanctity of human life, abso condemnation of the spilling of human blood, genuine apology and for ness, justice, humility, a culture of peace, true reconciliation, agape love, im tiality, neutrality, and trust-building were deeply ingrained in the Af traditional religious methods of conflict resolution. Conflict resolution me nisms within the confines of traditional religion perform a healing function African societies. It provides the service of restoring such society to its ori state of piety and crime-free entity and a pure state of sanity in which the w was created. Moreover, the essence of dispute settlements and conflict reso tions through the African traditional religion is to remove the root-cause the conflict; reconcile the conflicting parties genuinely; to preserve and ens harmony, and make everyone involved in the resolved conflict happy and be peace with each other to set the right milieu for societal production and dev opment; to promote good governance, law and order, to provide security lives and property, and to achieve collective well-being and peaceful existence within the African societies.[70]

Conclusion

The traditional religious method of conflict resolution has remained a credi mechanism with a fantastic outcome for the people of Africa. Such an outco is largely premised on restorative justice, which mends rather than destr relationships between the disputants while promoting society's peaceful existence among Africans. As mentioned earlier, it is a general belief in tr tional African society that there is no award for winning an argument. As su the end-result of conflict resolutions through the African religious doctrin to accommodate all parties involved in the dispute through genuine collab tion to search for effective compromise. In doing so, unnecessary competit is avoided because the ultimate aim of traditional religious-induced con resolution is an amicable settlement by persuasion, mediation, adjudicati reconciliation, arbitration and not necessarily reverting to the use of force coercion at all costs, or at any cost.

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