

The Roles of Traditional Rulers in Fostering Peace in Nigerian Communities

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ABSTRACT

This paper considered the Roles of Traditional Rulers in Fostering Peace in Nigerian Communities, using precolonial Yoruba Traditional Society and a glance of Igbo traditional Society as a case study. The Paper unraveled the peaceful atmosphere that existed before colonialism and identified the gap in the administration of Nigerian Communities without an institutionalized authority of Traditional Rulers. The paper adopted a qualitative method of information gathering with a documentation method in analyzing the facts. The Paper examined the sanctity of the kingship in Nigerian traditional society should be maintained and institutionalized. The Paper observed, that integrity, honesty and hard work which are the integral attributes of the African race should be upheld at all levels. This could be as a result of individual interest in various legal, professional and financial incapacities. In essence, there is urgent need for adjustment in the African Traditional regimes prompted by the Presenter to end with some possible recommendations in this paper taking points of reference from other systems such as the Inter-American traditional system. The Paper looked at the role of traditional rulers before the advent of colonialism, during the era of colonialism and during the post colonialism in Nigeria. The paper also examined various measures to support peaceful co-existence in Nigerian communities as well as its impediments or the challenges to the effective implementation of various laws in Nigeria. The paper concluded that there is a need for proper institutionalization of Traditional Rulers Council of Nigeria and the reorientation of the whole society to know the implication of their actions and inactions to various communities in Nigeria. The paper was segmented into different segments for the ease of understanding.

Keywords: The Role of Traditional Rulers in Fostering Peace in Nigerian Communities

INTRODUCTION

Afe Babalola¹ observes that the concept of traditional rulership in Nigeria predates the nation's colonial era, forming one of the very cores of governance and administration. Traditional institutions, perhaps being the oldest institution in Nigeria, is deeply rooted in the culture, history and traditions of various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. In ordinary parlance, a traditional ruler is the custodian of the traditions, history and customs of an ethnic group of individuals, and who is appointed by such individuals to rule, govern and administer justice in line with the laid down customs and traditions of the people. A traditional ruler has also been defined as a person who by virtue of his ancestral position occupies the throne or stool of an area and who has been appointed to it in accordance with the customs and traditions of the area and whose throne has been in existence before the advent of the British colonial rule in Nigeria².

Traditional rulers play a significant role in fostering peace in Nigerian communities before the advent and during the period of colonialism. They are considered to be custodians of culture and tradition and as such, have a distinct influence on the social and cultural fabric of these communities. In the pre-colonial era, traditional rulers were the custodians of the people's customs, beliefs, and values. They wielded enormous power and were revered as the embodiment of tradition and culture while during the colonial era, they were retained in

¹ Afe Babalola, The Role of Traditional Rulers –Sanusi The Genius: A Case Study (1) <https://www.abuad.edu.ng>. Accessed on 20 September, 2024

² Afe Babalola, *supra*

governance to achieve colonial objectives. In contemporary Nigeria, traditional rulers have been relegated to the background, with their political influence marginalized. This study will explore powers of traditional rulers during the pre-colonial period, the colonial era and post-colonial era, focusing sternly on the consequences of the exclusion of traditional rulers in Nigerian politics, including its impact on governance and national integration³. This study seeks to highlight the role that traditional rulers play in fostering peace in Nigerian communities, and the prospect of integrating Traditional Rulers into the main stream of Governance in Nigeria. We shall examine Yoruba Traditional Society and a glance of Igbo Traditional Society as case study.

A Panoramic View of the Yoruba Traditional Society

The Yoruba Traditional Society is comprised of the traditional and spiritual-religious concepts and practices of the Yoruba people⁴. Yoruba religion is formed of diverse traditions and has no single founder⁵. Yoruba religious beliefs are part of itan (tale), the total complex of songs, histories, stories and other cultural concepts which make up the Yoruba society⁶. Yoruba traditional religion is a concept that has beliefs in Orisha, which are in various forms with the manifestations of Olodumare in the Yoruba spiritual or religious system as the Supreme Being⁷. Olorun is the manifestation of the Supreme God of the Yoruba pantheon, the owner of the heavens in the Yoruba language. The supreme God is also called Olodumare, the supreme creator, who is the conduit between Òrun (Heaven), and Ayé (Earth)⁸. This religion has found its way throughout the world and is now expressed in practice throughout areas of Nigeria and other parts of the world. While estimates may vary, some scholars believe that there could be more than 100 million adherents of this spiritual tradition worldwide⁹. Every society in Yorubaland is attached to their religion. They founded their roots, basis and origin in the understanding of the gods. These gods protect and guide society respectively on behalf of Olodumare, the Supreme Being.

It must be emphasized that the Yoruba people have unique and rich cultures with robust civilizations which have remained resilient to any other cultural domination. Though, it must be noted that despite the good values displayed in the society, some of the Yoruba cultural heritages had been bastardized; such as losing their mother tongues to foreign languages, respect for elders is fading out, integrity in hard work and other aspects of their culture is no more, owing largely to the colonial influence. The fact that colonialism grouped the Yoruba with other ethnic groups made them realize that they had to share a wider and common identity with other Nigerian ethnic groups. The Yoruba interacted politically, militarily, economically, socially and culturally with the Hausa, Nupe, Edo, Borgu, and others for centuries before the colonial period¹⁰. The richness in dynamism and resilience of Yoruba culture also helped to a large extent in the development and growth of stable administration in Nigeria. In the sphere of religion, the cosmology of the Yoruba has influenced the vibrant interaction between the Christian and Islamic religions, which has identified with some of the local religious practices with a sense of continuity that is established in the mind of the convert¹¹.

Kingship in Yoruba Traditional Society Kingship is a word derived from the term “King”, which is attached to the statehood of the King¹². A king is identified as the most supreme or paramount sovereign in any village, town or city. Generally, he is recognized by his subjects as their spiritual leader and Chief Custodian of traditions¹³. Kingship in Yorubaland has experienced unpleasant changes in leadership and socio-cultural hurdles. Among

³ Transparency International's 2020 Corruption Perception Index, <https://www.transparency.org/en/cpi/2020/index/nga>

⁴ Lillian Trager, *Yoruba Hometowns: Community, Identity, and Development in Nigeria* (Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2001)

⁵ Kola Abimbola, *Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account* (Iroko Academics Publishers, 2005).

⁶ Abimbola “Yoruba Culture: A Philosophical Account”

⁷ Abimbola, *Supra*

⁸ William Russell, *Bascom, Ifa Divination: Communication between Gods and Men in West Africa* (Indiana University Press. 1969), 3.

⁹ 12. Kevin Baxter, *Ozzie Guillen secure in his faith*, Los Angeles Times, 2007

¹⁰ Bode Durojaiye, “Alaafin: Yoruba traditional system of government, one of the world's oldest forms of democracy” Online Sun News, March 25, 2017.

¹¹ Durojaiye, “Alaafin: Yoruba traditional system of government”

¹² Lexicon Publications (Firm), *The New Webster's Dictionary of the English Language*. New York: Lexicon International/Publishers Guild Group, 2004. 549.

¹³ S. O. Oguntomisin and S. Ademola Ajayi (eds), *Readings in Nigerian History and Culture, Essays in Memory of Professor J. A. Atanda*, (Ibadan: Hope Publications Ltd, 2002), 67- 69

these are revolutions, wars and the incursion of British rule¹⁴. In Yoruba kingship, the king assumed total dignity befitting royal office on the day of coronation. The Oba would be imbued with the ritual power along with paraphernalia of royal office. Among these were crown, robes, sceptre, horsetail and umbrella. The crown is the most significant of the royal insignia. It stipulates the sacred royal power of the king. With the loss of political authority in recent times to government policies, Yoruba kings have been struggling for relevance in the scheme of things. The struggle for relevance earned them symbolic or nominal authority because it is believed by some people that the glorious pre-colonial status of the traditional rulers should be scrapped since they are old-fashioned, reactionary and obsolete¹⁵. In essence, the nominal authority has made them ceremonial rulers, not leaders of their communities; worse still, the attainment of this nominal recognition is a herculean task in the light of post-independence political developments¹⁶. However, Yoruba Traditional society is chosen as a case study, because of its political power and influence as we have Ile-Ife for Oonirisa, Oyo where Alaaḡfin is the paramount, Egbaland where the Alake is the paramount ruler to the people

The Administrative System of Yoruba Traditional Society

Generally, kings in Yorubaland were to be accorded utmost reverence by the people whose perception was otherwise acting contrary to the demands of traditions, which could incur punishment from the gods¹⁷. In this theocratic monarchy, reverence is attached to the Oba's authority not because of his temporal standing but due to the spiritual endowment, which put him beyond ordinary mortals. Religion was, therefore, a cornerstone of Yoruba politics. In Yoruba communities, a more reserved way of life remains one that expresses a theology that links local beliefs to a central citadel government and its sovereignty over a hinterland of communities through the monarch. The seat of the king (oba) is responsible for the welfare of its jurisdiction, in return for confirmation of the legitimacy of the oba's rule over his subjects¹⁸. This basic culture and civilization which the Yoruba have built still endured and remained the pivot of the political, economic, religious and intellectual development of the country till today. Yoruba Religion developed a highly sophisticated system of government with effective checks and balances, spiced with a high level of gender consciousness, adding that the Yoruba traditional system of government is indeed one of the oldest forms of democracy in the world with effect to equity and fairness to the sharing of available resources in the land¹⁹. The Integrity of the throne and Kingship in Yoruba Society Integrity is the practice of being honest and showing a consistent and uncompromising adherence to strong moral and ethical principles and values.

At the apex of the administration of the government was the king who was known as Alaaḡfin. He was usually referred to by his subjects as Kabiesi –Alaseikeji Orisa meaning one who no one dare question his authority because he is next to the gods. This impression given to the king by his subjects made the position of the king divinely. Despite this divine tag, the Alaaḡfin was not autocratic. This was because their position and activities as king were checked by some council of chiefs known as the Oyomesi²⁰. Any King that lacks integrity will be shown the way out of the Kingship or the throne. The Oyomesi was saddled with the responsibility of enthroning a king after the demise of the incumbent and also, dethroning any king that was not responsible and violated the regulations attached to his position as king in the empire. Also, the Oyomesi had the authority to dethrone any king that defaults on the being of his sovereignty which included peaceful co-existence, management of wealth and resources in his realm and defending the empire from within and without. Any breach in these sacred functions by the Alaaḡfin or any Oba signifies the beginning of the end of his reign. This is why Yoruba Traditional Religion is unique. The Oyomesi will dethrone the kings by sending an empty calabash to the king,

¹⁴ A. L. Najeem, "The Position of the Chiefs", The Society vol 1, (Ibadan: H.E. B., 1989): 69

¹⁵ S. O. Arifalo and S.T. Okajare, "The Changing Roles of the Traditional Rulers and the challenge of Governance in contemporary Nigeria: Yorubaland in Historical perspective," Monograph series No: 03302, (AAU, Akungba Akoko), 2-3.

¹⁶ S. O. Biobaku, Sources of Yoruba History, Oxford Studies in African Affairs, (Ibadan: University Press Limited, 1987), 206

¹⁷ Akindoye Soyoye, "Governance in Old Oyo Empire", (Feathers Project wordpress.com, September 4, 2014).

¹⁸ Soyoye "Governance in Old Oyo Empire"

¹⁹ Soyoye, supra

²⁰ Soyoye, supra

with some incantation that “the people reject you, the earth reject you²¹.” On receipt of this gift, the king is expected to commit suicide²². This was the case of Alaafin Odarawu and Alaafin Jayin in the 17th century when they violated the regulations attached to their positions as kings. They took their rejection lightly and committed suicide. The council of the Oyomesi was headed by Bashorun²³.

As a result of the strong measure of checks and balances that was present in the system of government of the Old Oyo empire made the activities of the people in governing council be just and fair which brought development to the kingdom and made it grow large to become an empire and a dominant power in the Yorubaland in 17th century A.D50. We can go back to the root and revive some dead principles that brought growth and development to our societies in the past. This principle served as a watchdog that checked the activities of the people in the governing council of these societies. People in the governing council been aware of this measure and the penalty they will face if they violate the regulations attached to their positions as members of governing council made them be just, fair, and accountable to their subjects and also engaged in any activities that will bring satisfaction to the interest of their subjects²⁴.

The Role of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution in Precolonial Nigeria

Traditional rulers are viewed as mediators and conflict resolution specialists. They have been known to resolve disputes that range from land disputes to family conflicts²⁵. In instances where peaceful resolution cannot be reached, traditional rulers are known to advise on the use of feather means of conflict resolution, including the engagement of the legal system²⁶.

The pre-colonial era featured a well-structured system of traditional rulership that was basically centralized. At that period, access to rulership stool was hereditary while in some parts, traditional structures of rulership were more dispersed, or were acephalous. Traditional rulers occupied important positions among the peoples of pre-colonial Nigeria. As noted earlier, their positions were legitimized by the traditions, history and culture of their respective peoples who held them in high esteem and reverence (Amusa, 2010). In similar perspective, traditional rulers cater for the economic, social and political aspirations of their people, and today they have become part of individual cultural heritage. They occupy communal political leadership positions sanctified by cultural, moral and values and enjoying the legitimacy of particular community to direct their affairs. Traditional institutions constitute a body of polity and administration that are respected by the people of such community through their respect for culture heritage and the historical antecedent of the land.

The political institution of the pre-colonial societies included the paramount chiefs, the council of elders, age grade and religious organization. The Ibos at the pre-colonial period did not have a single political authority: even though they were a contingent. Since the Ibos shunned the idea of having a single leader at that time, they operated a lineage system as a basis for political organization in such a way that a man could only lead members of his lineage hence, there were many influential and powerful men, their influence was limited to hamlet, clan and village and at that time, they operated a lineage system as a basis for political organization.

2.1 The Role of Traditional Rulers in Promoting Social Cohesion: Traditional rulers have a key role to play in promoting social cohesion within their respective communities. They are seen as arbiters of justice, and their decisions in disputes and conflicts promote a sense of justice and fairness amongst members of the community²⁷. Traditional rulers also serve as ambassadors of peace, and their words are often taken as gospel truth²⁸.

²¹ Qba Làmidì Adéyemi, the Aláàfin and Chiefs, Interview by the Sun News, January 30, 2019.

²² S.A. Qlógbènlá, Interview by the Author at 26 More, Ile-Ife on September 21, 2019

²³ Soyoye, Supra

²⁴ S.A. Qlógbènlá, supra

²⁵ United States Department of State, 2020 Human Rights Report: Nigeria, <https://www.state.gov/reports/2020-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/nigeria/>

²⁶ ibid

²⁷ Freedom House, Nigeria Country Report 2021, <https://freedomhouse.org/country/nigeria/freedom-world/2021>

²⁸ A. E. Adegbola, 'The Challenge of the Nigerian Traditional Ruler in an Emerging Democracy' (2005) 4(2) African Journal of Political Science and International Relations 90.

Traditional rulers hold periodic meetings with members of their communities where social issues are discussed²⁹. This provides them with an avenue to educate their subjects on issues of peace, harmony, and coexistence.

2.2 The Role of Traditional Rulers in National Development: Traditional rulers are also involved in national development initiatives. They participate in consultations with government officials and policy makers on issues affecting their communities. Traditional rulers also play an important role in ensuring that development projects are executed in a manner that brings benefits to the people³⁰.

The Role of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution during the Colonial era in Nigeria

The advent of colonial rule in Nigeria occasioned a major paradigm shift in traditional rulership as it was then known. Colonialism restructured the erstwhile well-organized traditional ruling system and incorporated an indigenous system to serve the interest of the colonial state and the metropolitan authority³¹. The British system of colonial administration employed the system of indirect rule, generally in Northern and Western Nigeria. Indirect rule was a British system of ruling her colonies with the use of local chiefs or other approved intermediaries and traditional laws and customs with British officials merely supervising the administration. It has also been defined to mean the taking over of existing power structures, harmonizing them and eliminating flagrant abuses of human rights, otherwise leaving many elements intact. It utilized the existing traditional system of administration and recognized the status of traditional rulers who served as the priests of indirect rule³².

Colonialism ushered in a transformation in the role of traditional rulers. This change was necessitated by the desire to realize the objective of colonialism, which was to exploit the natural resources of Nigeria to meet the industrial needs of the capitalist metropolises. Traditional rulers were used to serve these objectives. The underlying logic of ruling through these traditional rulers was primarily cost and as well as the logistical difficulties of directly governing and administering so vast an area with so few officials. After the conquest of Bida and Ilorin, George Goldie declared *'If the welfare of the Native races is to be considered, if dangerous revolts are to be obviated, the general policy of ruling on African principles through Native rulers must be followed for the present'*³³

The most important role for traditional rulers in the early colonial days was in the area of local administration within the sphere of the new administrative structure established by the colonials – the indirect rule. With the Governor General at the head of the administration, the chain of command continued through the Lieutenant Governors in the Provinces, the District Officers in the Divisions, and the Native Authorities in the Native Administration.

The Role of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution in Post-Colonial Nigeria

Nigerian and indeed, Northern Nigeria has faced longstanding security challenges, including terrorism, kidnapping, banditry, communal clashes, and farmer-herder conflicts. These security challenges have resulted in loss of lives, displacement, and economic instability in the Nigeria³⁴. This paper shall proceed to identify the main causes of security challenges in Nigeria

Attempted Creation of Autonomous Communities as Fourth Tier of Government

In 1976, the Federal Government of Nigeria set up a Local Government Reform Committee headed by Alhaji Ibrahim Dasuki, charged with the responsibility to establish a uniform standard for local government

²⁹ N.T. Ekeanyanwu, 'Traditional Rulership and the Rule of Law: A Nigerian Paradox' (2013) 5 African Security Review 85.

³⁰ Esther Audu, 'Traditional Rulers and National Development in Nigeria: Overcoming the Challenges' (2011) 2(3) Journal of Public Administration and Policy Research 52.

³¹ Afe Babalola, *supra*

³² Afe Babalola, *supra*

³³ Afe Babalola, *supra*

³⁴ Human Rights Watch, "Nigeria Security Tracker," 2021.

administration nationwide. The Committee, in its report, laid down criteria for creating local government council, which it defined as the “third tier of government”, and whose aim was to “bring government closer to the people”. Accepting the Committee’s report as well as its recommendation, the Nigerian Federal Government charged state governments to apply the same system to their constituents in creating local government councils³⁵. In the Igbo-speaking areas of the East Central State (later split into Anambra and Imo States), the government set up a Committee headed by Professor Adiele Afigbo, to advise it on the best way of implementing the Committee’s recommendation³⁶. In its report, the Afigbo Committee recommended the creation of a fourth-tier form of government, called “Autonomous Communities”, with an officially recognized Traditional Ruler for each community. Based on that recommendation, the Anambra State Government enacted the Chieftaincy Edict No. 8 of September 2, 1976, published in the Official Gazette No. 31, Volume 1, of 25th November, 1976³⁷.

According to the edict, a traditional ruler is defined as “*a traditional head of an autonomous community, identified and selected by his people according to their tradition and usages*”. It stated that the government would have no hand in the selection of the Traditional Ruler, though it reserved the right to depose any of them who misbehaved. In South Eastern Nigeria for instant, according to “tradition and usages” as criteria for identification and selection of a traditional ruler, seems to be nebulous since the people never had any traditional chief or something akin to it before the coming of the European colonialist. Membership of the “Council of Elders” that ruled Igbo society was not hereditary, but by achievement. It will be strange where that criterion is to be applied, the selection of a traditional ruler would not have posed any problem. But this was left vague, leading to rancor and acrimony³⁸.

Again, in order to obtain government recognition, the Traditional Ruler, according to the edict, is required to prove “popular support”, and then be publicly presented to the governor for recognition. This has made the traditional institution political since aspirants to the chieftaincy stool would, of necessity, move round the villages to canvass for support, thus putting them in the same shoe with the politicians. And yet, traditional rulers are supposed to be insulated from politics³⁹. In societies with an entrenched kingship system, the searchlight for an occupant to a vacant stool is usually beamed towards the “ruling families” as we have seen in Yoruba Kingship, while in Igboland, it takes a democratic process, in which every member of the community is free to contest for the seat. This puts to question the “naturalness” of Igbo chieftaincy institution, where aspirants to the traditional stool were made to stand election with other contenders to determine the popular choice of the people. In very many cases, this naturally went to the highest bidder, to the one with a very fat pocket⁴⁰.

Before the coming of the Europeans, membership of the Igbo ruling class, the Council of Elders, took a natural order by virtue of one attaining a certain age, holding a particular position, or achieving a particular feat. Nobody crashed into the system by, flaunting some ill-gotten wealth. The Chieftaincy Edict further required an autonomous community to provide a written “constitution” and a “code of conduct” for the Traditional Ruler. This is necessary since this would make for orderly selection of occupants to chieftaincy stools since in most communities, there were no laid down criteria for such selection. Except in some few communities, which claimed that the institution was hereditary, many other communities after a long tussle, produced their constitutions, which provided for the rotation of the Chieftaincy Stool among the constituent units of the area.

With criteria for the selection and recognition of traditional rulers clearly defined, a floodgate of requests for recognition of traditional rulers by government opened in various parts of Anambra State and other states of Nigeria. Individuals of different callings and persuasions, businessmen, contractors and moneybags began to jostle to be recognized and crowned as traditional rulers. In almost every community in Igboland, the Chieftaincy

³⁵ D. Eze, Enugu: (1909-2009): A Century In Search of Identity. (Enugu, Linco Press, 2009).

³⁶ G.N Uzoigwe, "Evolution and Relevance of Autonomous Communities in Pre-colonial Igboland, (J. Third World St. Government Publications, 2004) Anambra State Government enacted the Chieftaincy Edict No. 8 of September 2, 1976, Anambra State of Nigeria Traditional Rulers' Law 1981.

³⁷ G.N Uzoigwe, Supra

³⁸ F. Adegbulu, 'From Warrant Chiefs to Ezeship: A Distortion of Traditional Institution in Igboland?' (Afro Asian J. Soc. Sci., 2011) 2(22), Quarter II.

³⁹ F. Adegbulu, Supra.

⁴⁰ Umeh JA (1999). Igbo People-Their Origin and Culture Area. Enugu, Gostak Printing and Publishing Co.Ltd

Edict sparked off disputes and litigations, pitching brothers against brothers, and which very often resulted to conflicts and confrontations. To deal with these problems, the Anambra State government set up the Justice Agbakoba Commission which visited various parts of the state to sort out contentious issues in the affected communities⁴¹.

On December 14, 1976, the first set of 124 Traditional Rulers was accorded government recognition and were presented with certificates and staff of office by the then Military Governor of Anambra State, Colonel John Atom Kpera at an impressive ceremony in Enugu. This was followed by another set of 84 Traditional Rulers who were equally accorded recognition in February and March, 1977. By October 1979, when the military government handed over to the incoming civilian administration, a total of 405 Traditional Rulers were accorded government recognition in Anambra State alone (Okeke, 1994). Some states of the Federation had fewer or more staggering numbers, including Cross River State which was later divided into two: Cross River and Akwa Ibom states. Interestingly, most of the people who later emerged as “traditional rulers” and accorded government recognition, turned out to be mainly businessmen and contractors. This was not surprising since these were people who had the required cash, necessary to “purchase” the position. Even at that, as businessmen and contractors, most of these Traditional Rulers spend most of their time in the big cities where they have their businesses interests, while sparing some few weekends in their palaces to interact with their subjects. Not only that, some of the Traditional Rulers who were “urban brought up” were not even grounded with the custom and tradition of their people, and so remain alien to the people⁴².

Following the return of democratic governance in the country in 1979, the “Anambra State Chieftaincy Edict” was modified in 1981 by the State House of Assembly, which passed the “Anambra State of Nigeria Traditional Rulers’ Law 1981”. In the new law, only government recognized Traditional Rulers were entitled to bear the title of “Igwe” or “Obi”. In Imo State, the Traditional Rulers were recognized as “Eze”. *The law however forbade Traditional Rulers as “impartial fathers” of their communities, from engaging in partisan politics.* But if they would want to enter politics, they had to renounce their recognition. Traditional Rulers were however free to confer honorary chieftaincy titles on deserving individuals to be known as “Chiefs”⁴³. Today, the said recognition is for the mere purpose of receiving stipends from government without executive or administrative authority recognized by law.

The Role of Traditional Rulers in the First and Second Republic

The State Chieftaincy Edict did not provide any role for the Traditional Ruler beyond his community. This is contrary to what was obtained in the First Republic, when some first-class traditional rulers were appointed members of the “House of Chiefs”, and thus legislated for the entire region⁴⁴. Traditional rulers are the custodians of the people’s culture and tradition. They are however to be “consulted” in all land matters. This means that the Igbo Traditional Rulers, unlike his counterpart in the northern and western parts of the country, have no power to alienate any community land without the consent of his subjects. As “impartial fathers” of their people, Traditional Rulers are to engage in peace-making within their community as well as in conflict with their neighbours. This is so because all the families in their communities are known by them and they are highly respected by their people. They are to promote community development, and in consultation with members of their cabinet, organize local consensus. The Anambra State Traditional Rulers’ Law of 1981 further encouraged Traditional Rulers to “cooperate with the local government council” and assist them “in the collection of taxes”. All these functions are no easy task, which means that any genuine Traditional Ruler must be fully committed to his role and responsibility. Unfortunately, many of these Traditional Rulers, as businessmen and contractors, are hardly in their palaces, thereby leaving many of their functions largely unattended to. In point of fact, Traditional Rulers as people at the grassroots of the administration, have the responsibility to attend to the endless streams of visitors that daily throng their palaces with one problem or the other. They are to arbitrate in both

⁴¹ I.R. Okeke, *The Chieftaincy Institution and Government Recognized Traditional Rulers in Anambra State*. (Enugu, Media Forum, 1994).

⁴² Harneit-Sievers, Axel, *Igbo Traditional Rulers': Chieftaincy and the State in Southeastern Nigeria*. (Afr. Spec. 1999) 33(1):57-79

⁴³ I.R. Okeke, *Supra*

⁴⁴ G.N Uzoigwe, *Supra*

local and external disputes, such as land matters and other sundry issues. They are to help mobilize their subjects for community development in consonance with the Town Union. These functions require patience, perseverance, and a good knowledge and application of human psychology. However, many Traditional Rulers complain that they are not usually supported by government. According to them, government does not give Traditional Ruler any “security votes” with which to deal with security issues that daily confront them. This means that many of these Traditional Rulers have been carrying on these responsibilities with their meagre resources. It is only recently that the Enugu State government, for example, has started paying stipends to its Traditional Rulers, otherwise those of them with no visible means of livelihood, have been living from hand to mouth, which is very demeaning and embarrassing⁴⁵.

Many of today’s Traditional Rulers, not just in Igboland, but in Nigeria as a whole, are no longer the “antiquated, archaic and uneducated yesterday men”, who were only good in breaking the kola nuts and pouring libations to the ancestors. Among these Traditional Rulers are retired technocrats and administrators, educationists, diplomats and international businessmen. In that wise, government could tap on their wealth of experience by giving them positions of responsibility such as membership of boards and parastatals, setting up a National Council of Traditional Rulers where some Traditional Rulers could meaningfully contribute to national development.

Exclusion of Traditional Rulers Root Cause of Security Challenges in Northern Nigeria

5.1 Insurgency and Terrorism: The root cause of Boko Haram insurgency in Nigeria is the displacement of traditional institutions in Nigeria. Boko Haram is one of the primary causes of security challenges in Northern Nigeria. Since 2009, the group has carried out numerous attacks, resulting in the killing and displacement of thousands of people. The insurgent group has targeted schools, places of worship, and public places, causing widespread fear and insecurity⁴⁶. It is interesting to know the meaning of “Boko Haram” which is foreign education or affiliation is evil. In other words, the progenitors of Boko Haram do not see Nigerian Leaders as indigenes but foreigners who are not fit to be their leaders.

5.2 Ethno-Religious Clashes: The North has also witnessed inter-communal clashes between different ethnic and religious groups, resulting in massive loss of lives and destruction of property. These clashes have been fueled by various factors, including land ownership disputes and religious differences⁴⁷. To some of the perpetrators of these dastardly acts, there is anarchy in Nigeria as long as there is no Native authority who understand how to contain their excesses.

5.3 Farmer-Herder Conflicts: The clashes between farmers and herders over grazing lands and water resources have escalated and resulted in the deaths of many people. The depletion of arable land, climate change, and the loss of natural resources have exacerbated this problem⁴⁸. The Fulani/Hausa farmers wander into the Hinterland like sheep without Shephard since the dethronement of their traditional leadership. They are let lose without control as the Government of Nigeria are seen as colonial imposters and criminals.

5.4 Unemployment and Poverty: The high levels of unemployment and poverty in Nigeria and particularly, in Northern Nigeria have caused frustration and desperation among the youth, making them susceptible to recruitment by criminal gangs and insurgent groups. Unemployment and poverty have also caused an increase in social vices such as drug abuse and other forms of criminality.

5.5 Weak Security Institutions: The weak security institutions in Northern Nigeria have contributed significantly to the security challenges in the region. The police, army, and other security agencies are often ill-equipped and lack the capacity to deal with security threats effectively⁴⁹. The security challenges in Northern Nigeria cannot be attributed to one single factor, but rather a combination of factors such as insurgency and terrorism, ethno-

⁴⁵ I.R. Okeke, *Supra*

⁴⁶ United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), "Nigeria Human Development Report," 2020

⁴⁷ Council on Foreign Relations, "Boko Haram in Nigeria," 2020

⁴⁸ Institute for Security Studies (ISS), "Unpacking the crisis in Nigeria's north," 2020

⁴⁹ World Bank, "Economic analysis of northern Nigeria," 2018

religious clashes, farmer-herder conflicts, unemployment and poverty, and weak security institutions. Addressing these underlying causes requires a comprehensive approach that includes addressing the root causes of each problem through policies that promote economic development, socio-cultural integration, and peaceful conflict resolution mechanisms. Traditional rulers and institutions have played a significant role in the governance and social organization of societies in different parts of the world prior to the advent of modernity.

5.6 Traditional Rulers without Executive, Judicial and Legislative powers: Before the coming of colonial powers, most African societies were ruled by traditional Chiefs who exercised political, judicial, legislative and religious powers. These chiefs were regarded as the custodians of culture and tradition and played a crucial role in maintaining social order and community cohesion⁵⁰. They resolved disputes, enforced laws and regulations, and mediated conflicts between individuals and clans. However, during the colonial era, they were involved in governance but traditional rulers during the post-colonial era were reduced to traditional relics and stools for educational and historical tourism. Moreover, traditional institutions served as channels for the transmission of cultural traditions, values, and beliefs from one generation to another. They performed religious and spiritual functions, organized social events and ceremonies, and provided a sense of identity and belonging for members of the society⁵¹.

However, there were also limitations to traditional rulers and institutions. For example, traditional Chiefs were often hereditary and maintained their power through a hierarchy of birth and seniority rather than through merit or popular support. This could lead to the entrenchment of power and corruption, as well as exclusion of marginalized groups such as women and minorities from decision-making processes⁵².

Challenges Faced by Traditional Rulers in Fostering Peace:

Traditional rulers face several challenges in fostering peace in their respective communities. One of the major challenges is the issue of limited power. Traditional rulers are not recognized as official law enforcement agents, and as such, their powers to enforce peace are limited. Traditional rulers also face the challenge of poverty and inadequate resources⁵³. Inadequate resources make it difficult for traditional rulers to implement conflict resolution programs that require financial resources. Nigeria is often touted as a democratic nation, having held numerous elections and transitions of power since its independence in 1960. However, despite this veneer of democracy, the country has struggled to establish a truly democratic system of governance, marked by corruption, fraud, and limited political freedoms.

One of the key indicators of Nigeria's failure to establish democracy is the prevalence of corruption within the government and political system. Nigeria ranks among the most corrupt nations in the world, with politicians and public officials frequently using their position to enrich themselves at the expense of the general public. This pervasive corruption severely undermines the trust and legitimacy of the government and the democratic process.

Furthermore, the Nigerian political system is widely regarded as being heavily influenced by money and patronage networks, which often trumps the will of the people. The country's political parties are often dominated by powerful individuals who make key decisions and allocate resources, further marginalizing the role of everyday citizens in the political process. In many Literatures, it is concluded that money politics has led to the collapse or failure of true democracy in Nigeria.

Another factor contributing to the failure of true democracy in Nigeria is the lack of political freedom and press freedom. Freedom of expression is frequently violated, with many journalists and human rights activists subjected to threats, harassment, and intimidation by government agents. The ability of citizens to openly challenge the government or engage in peaceful protest is also limited, with many demonstrations being met

⁵⁰ John Iliffe, *Africans: The History of a Continent* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁵¹ Mammo Muchie, "Role of Traditional Institutions in Fostering Sustainable Development in Ethiopia," *Journal of Sustainable Development in Africa* 12, no. 1 (2010): 80-95.

⁵² Emmanuel K. Akyeampong, "Traditional and Modern Ghanaian Governance: Toward a New Model of Reform," *Africa Today* 47, no. 3 (2000): 21-42.

⁵³ Abdullahi Yusuf Babangida and Isiaka A. Ismail, 'The Role of Traditional Rulers in Conflict Resolution in Nigeria' (2018) 3(4) *Journal of Politics and Society* 1, 2

with force or disruption. while Nigeria may appear to be a democracy in form, it has yet to establish a truly democratic system of governance. Corruption, political patronage, and violations of political and press freedoms have all contributed to subverting the ideals of democratic governance. Until concerted efforts are made to address these issues and establish genuine political accountability and transparency, the prospects for democracy in Nigeria remain uncertain.

CONCLUSION

Traditional Rulers and Institutions played a significant role in the governing and social development of African societies before the advent of colonialism, where they were seen by their people as God's ordained leaders for them but indigenous people of Nigeria today regard their leaders as imposters and criminals who cannot be trusted with their mandates. A thorough appraisal of these issues is necessary for us to understand the history of traditional institutions, and to form an understanding of their current position. We shall proceed to recommend as follows:

1. As declared by British Colonial overlord, George Goldie thus: *'If the welfare of the Native races is to be considered, if dangerous revolts are to be obviated, the general policy of ruling on African principles through Native rulers must be followed for the present'*, traditional rulers must be involved in Nigerian governance if dangerous revolts are to be obviated. They should be involved in conflict resolution, promoting social cohesion, and national development initiatives. The government should recognize the role of traditional rulers in fostering peace and provide them with the necessary support and resources to carry out their duties effectively by creating State Council or House of Chiefs in every State of the Federation.
2. The exclusion of traditional rulers in governance has led to a decline in traditional values, norms, and practices. Traditional rulers play an essential role in preserving the culture and heritage of their people, and their exclusion from politics has resulted in a loss of cultural identity and values⁵⁴. Their role in governance has been limited, thus denying the society effective representation and leadership when needed. Government should strive to sustain the tradition of the people.
3. The traditional rulers were often the intermediaries between the government and the people, given their closeness to the grassroots level, their inclusion in politics could have promoted accountability, transparency, and good governance. Excluding traditional rulers from politics has disrupted this arrangement, and the distance between the government and the people has widened, leading to a disconnect between the masses and their leaders⁵⁵. The role of the traditional rulers as intermediaries should be restored by the government by the creation of autonomous communities as fourth tier of government in Nigeria.
4. The exclusion of traditional rulers has led to a lack of national cohesion and integration. Traditional rulers often straddle various ethnic groups, promoting cultural understanding and unity among them. They are respected and revered as fathers of their respective ethnic nationality, and their inclusion in politics would have provided a platform for the proper representation of distinct interests and perspectives⁵⁶. The marginalization of traditional rulers has, unfortunately, contributed to ethnic tensions, increased conflicts and led to disputes between Nigeria's various ethnic and cultural groups.
5. The exclusion of traditional rulers weakens the institutions that uphold traditional institutions, as over time such institutions became weakened, destroying the generational traditional values passed from one dynasty to another. It has also led to the politicization of the traditional institution, with traditional rulers being used as political tools by the government, thus eroding the trust of the people they govern.

⁵⁴ F.I. Oni, "Nigeria: Traditional Leadership - An Endangered Institution?"

⁵⁵ O. Igbuzor, "Traditional Rulers and Democracy in Nigeria"

⁵⁶ M. Nurudeen, "The Role of Traditional Rulers in Nation Building in Nigeria"

6. Since in times of problems government would always rush to the Traditional Rulers to help stabilize the system, during peace time, government should as well set up a standing committee made up of experienced Traditional Rulers that would constantly advise it on sensitive national issues. That is where a constitutional role for Traditional Rulers in the country comes in.

The consequences of the exclusion of traditional rulers from Nigerian politics are far-reaching, adversely affecting the growth, development, and stability of the country. The federal government should consider recognizing the role and importance of traditional rulers and take decisive steps to ensure their inclusion in the country's political space, as it will lead to better representation, encourage national cohesion, and promote traditional values.

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