

Chapter 6

Cultural Rituals and Symbol as a Paradigm for Conflict Intervention and Peacebuilding in Africa: Experience From Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The complex relationship between art, culture, conflict, and peacebuilding in contemporary time has opened a gap in knowledge too difficult to grasp. This is because culture is implicated in nearly every conflict in the world. This is corollary to the fact that the biggest challenge confronting societies today is not about how conflicts occur, but how conflicts can be completely resolved whenever they occur. Nonetheless, despite the prevalence of such conflicts and the fact that culture has been identified as a driver and a major transformer, scholarly investigation into the intentional use of arts and culture especially within the realms of rituals and symbol for conflict resolution and peace-building has regrettably been modest, disproportionate, and largely unexplored. This study, therefore, is an attempt to respond to this thesis that the deployment of rituals and symbol as an instrument to symbolically communicate commitment toward peace is a viable alternative for peacebuilding.

INTRODUCTION

In the current conflict scenarios around the world, arts and culture have emerged and continue to be important areas of research. This is sequel to the fact that not only are the arts either in an expressive or performative fashion carriers of culture and resilient even in the midst of devastation, they are arguably the most reliable conduit capable of healing wounds created in the aftermath of war, violent conflicts and/or

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massive damage, but they have the capacity to produce a countervailing force in conflict resolution and peace-building process in any society (Verdeja, 2009). In spite of the fact that arts and culture constitute an important aspect of efforts toward the transformation of destructive conflicts into more constructive social processes in many societies, arts and culture continues to be a neglected aspect of conflict resolution. What culture is and how culture matters in conflict scenario is contested and regrettably unexplored. There is the paucity of knowledge that arts and culture are inextricably linked and embedded in every conflict situation throughout the world (Wise & Family, 2012). This however explains why African conflicts for instance are exerting the biggest challenge toward conflict management and peacebuilding. The devastating results of failed conflict resolution in numerous parts of the world especially in Africa have validated the imperative of involving arts and culture in conflicts resolution and peace-building. This is corollary to the fact that the biggest challenge confronting societies in Africa today is not about how conflicts occur, but how these conflicts are completely resolved whenever they occur. This is also particularly relevant given the frequency of conflicts that have continued to occur throughout Africa since the beginning of the 21st century. Nonetheless, despite the prevalence of such conflicts and the fact that culture has been identified as a driver as well as a major conflict transformer, the role of arts and culture remains largely unexplored and/or underutilized. Existing research however, tends to focus more on the standardized approaches to conflict resolution which contemporary conflicts are far beyond its reach. This work therefore, intends to demonstrate that many continuing conflicts around the world today especially those in Africa are rooted in culturally engrained prejudices and biases against the other, therefore, scholars, practitioners, and peacebuilding actors require insights into the positive role of arts and culture in conflict resolution and peace-building.

CONCEPTUAL CLARIFICATION

Given the continued evolution in the field of conflict and peacebuilding, certain concepts are yet to be settled and properly understood. This is apparent due to the reason that some of the concepts are overly flexible and holistic in characterization which leads to fragmentation of efforts and lack of selectivity in the prevention and intervention processes. A lack of consensus on the classification of some the concepts can create confusion and forms a barrier toward the harmonization and/or the co-ordination approaches. Therefore, reaching agreement on the proper description of a number of concepts would help harmonize policies and approaches toward peacebuilding and conflict resolution. Some of those concepts are as follows:

Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding as a concept has become an overarching term for an entire range of actions designed to contribute to building a culture of peace. The term peacebuilding became part of the policy vocabulary through the United Nations Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peace Making and Peacekeeping of 1992, and has evolved considerably among practitioners, policy makers and the general public over the past decade (Ndumbe, 2001). The mid-1990s witnessed a rapid increase in peacebuilding activities by a variety of actors, ranging from international and regional organizations (the United Nations, the European Union, the African Union) to academic institutions, foundations, civil society groups, social movements, business groups, and the media. Peacebuilding has often been described in the post-conflict

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