CULTURE: THE PANACEA FOR NATION PEACE AND BRANDING

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Abstract

Africa, a continent with diverse cultures and traditions have a people who are peace loving and hospitable. These diversities however have in recent times been a source of conflicts resulting in lack of peace and unity in the region.
The authors in this paper proposes the return to indigenous cultures and traditions as the probable panacea to the problem of conflicts and social problems which has made it quite impossible for the region to have a good brand.

Keywords: indigenous cultures and traditions, conflicts, panacea, social problems and good brand.

Introduction

Africa is a continent with diverse cultures and traditions, her people are peace loving and hospitable. However, the continent has been undergoing a lot of challenges which has resulted in conflicts and consequently fighting, maiming, and large scale killings. These conflicts range from domestic (sibling rivalry and marital conflict) to armed conflicts (ethnic groups, religious conflict among the different religions such as Muslims against Christians and traditionists against Christians, trade and political conflicts).

Otite (1995) opined that these conflicts are as a result of differences in interests, goals and aspiration by individuals and, or groups in a society. Where changes in the social environment such as contestable access to political positions,

or perception of new resources arising from development in the physical environment are basis of conflict.

In the early 1990s, the continent recorded several conflicts which necessitated international, continental and private organisations sending emissaries to several areas for peacekeeping. In 1993 and 1997, the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) sent representatives of the Secretary–General to Congo and Zaire, while in 1990 and 1997, The Economic community of West African States (ECOWAS) sent a military monitoring group known as ECOMOG to Liberia and Sierra Leone respectively.(Zartman,2000)

However with all that has been done by the international, continental and private agencies peace is still elusive in the continent. What then can be the solution to this unpleasant situation which Africa has found herself? Peace brought about by a return to the place of tradition (culture) where everyone was his brother's Keeper, where peace and harmony were the guiding principles of all societies. A place where desire was for the good of the community and not for individuals. Where the fear of God (*Olorun*) was in the heart of everyone and men sought to do the will of *Olodumare.* In the view of the African (*Iberu oluwa ni ipilese ogbon)* the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom. This concept was a guide in any relationship which was the basis for the peaceful coexistence of African communities.

Peace therefore in the continent is the only remedy to branding and re-branding Africa. For any nation to have a good nation brand she must possess longetivity which extends beyond election cycles and special interests by taken into consideration the essence of a country and its people and what they offer the

world by engaging citizens and national organisations at home, while also winning recognition and respect abroad.

Peace through culture might seem unrealistic but it is achievable by a total resocialization of the people, by giving the nation a distinctive character other than what existed in the past. This distinctive change in character is known as nation branding.

The solution to conflicts in Africa is more African than Western, this is because the various models from the West by scholars and opinion leaders have not been effective in resolving most of these conflicts since it has not take cognizance of African culture, while most of the crisis are by their nature and causes intrinsically bound in the culture and history of Africa.(Zartman, 2000)

The African culture is composed of African beliefs, religions, languages and custom. African belief in the supremacy of God who is known and referred to as *Olorun Olodumare* by the Yoruba, *Inkosi yaphezulu* by the Zulu, *Asis* by the *Nandi* of Kenya and *Onyame* by the *Asante* of Ghana.

The belief in the supremacy of God was the basis of the African traditional religion where deities such as *Sango* (god of thunder), *Osun* (goddess of the sea) and many others were worshipped as agents of the one supreme God whom must be feared so as to be blessed by him as well as not to incur his wrath. This reverence for God was a guiding force in the peaceful co-existence of Africans.

Although languages differ but nevertheless they served as means of communication which brought about unity despite the diversity. These languages

were the means through which ideas, knowledge and practices were transmitted from one generation to another, such that the transferred information was usually used to modify the lifestyle of the people. These perceived differences in language, religion, ideas and customs are the mark which distinguishes one from the other and makes each a different brand of the same nation.

In Africa, communalism or group cooperation reinforced the culture of peace, tolerance and hospitality, where the group needs or community needs takes precedence over individual needs. This does not in any way make an individual irrelevant but instead it fosters the spirit of unity and oneness which is fundamental to development.

Olaoba (2002) stated in his work on Africa Legal culture that "law in the African society is never defined in a vacuum as it necessarily puts on the gown of culture for optimum performance". Likewise for security and peaceful co-existence in Africa, culture is an essential factor which must be considered, as culture is the engine and wheel that drives the vehicle of the society.

Globalization which according to Marshall (1998) is the structuration of the world into a whole is perhaps, the continents major problem because it has been a process through which unafrican cultures, values and information such as individualization and urbanization has been passed on to the people. This has affected the lifestyle of the people by eroding the values which were the bedrock of their existence and also the mark of distinction which was paramount to the sustainenance of peace in the society.

Therefore one of the major ways through which peace can be restored in the continent is through the process of SOCIALIZATION and RESOCIALIZATION, such that there is a return to values such as communalism

instead of individualism, hospitality instead of hostility and tolerance instead of intolerance.

Culture as an Organ of Peace

Culture, the totally of a person is the integrated systems of learned patterns of behaviour; ideas and products characteristics of a society. It consists of the material and non-material aspects where these aspects to a large extent determine the quality and style characteristic of a people.

Nigeria as a multi-cultural nation has a diversity of people who are different in their ways of life; with the Yoruba, Ibo and Hausa been the predominant tribes. Differences are evident in their material and non-material cultures such as the dressing styles, languages, beliefs, feeding and their architecture. These perceived differences have often resulted in several ethic conflicts (Otite *et al*, 1993), this is because similar behaviours and ideas sometimes have different meanings for each tribe. However, these differences are the mark which distinguishes one tribe from the other and makes each a unique brand of the same nation.

However, despite all these differences, the integrated systems of learned patterns which have been developed over years for the smooth cohesion of the society as remained potent. Hence, as stated by Avruch and Black (1993) "Although Culture is a matter of social differences it is also the process through which conflict can be resolved because interpretation is usually given to social action and social reality through indigenous conception and knowledge. This is further buttressed by the "ethno conflict theory" which is the decoding of cultural

grammar to resolve conflict as culture determines the information processing as well as the use of metaphors and language in the beginning and debating process.

Adedeji (1993) inferred from an old saying that "culture to a people is the centre of their existence as it breeds self-confidence, self-reliance, positive change and stability and that a people without their culture is good as dead and forgotten". The importance attached to culture extends beyond what can be easily tossed aside by recent developments initiated by the advent of globalization. Since a peoples culture binds them socially, emotionally, politically, economically and psychologically.

Peace based on culture was the prerogatives of most African pre-colonial societies as was evident in the so many mechanisms for conflict prevention, management and resolution. These indigenous conflict resolution, prevention and management mechanisms included traditional rulers, council of elders, age sets, chiefs, ancestral cults, religious beliefs, local deities and many others. These mechanisms usually employed different methods and styles of administration which were all geared towards peaceful co-existence of members.

For example among the Yoruba people of south west Nigeria *Itun-bi-inu-bi* is a popular conflict resolution method employed in settling disputes between warring parties. The concept means settling conflicts without acrimony. This involved the elders that are held in high esteem and believed to be sincere, just and who had integrity of character that could be trusted within the society. They are the council of elders in the different communities and they usually have a designated area of meeting and in some instances the village tutelary god are always placed at their meeting point (*Idi Igi-Oda*n), hence It is believed that whatever is discussed in the meeting is acceptable to all while the people believed

the god of the land is also involved in the peace process. However, Itun-bi-inu-bi

process is done in a way that both parties went home satisfied, without recourse to

traditional court of indigenous judicial system which may be inconsequential.

This notion was supported by Hakeem Harunnah, when he asserted that

> "all African indigenous cultures, customs,
> traditions and civilization had emphasized
> not only the value and significance of peace
> in the society, but also the necessity of
> having to ensure that there was peaceful co-
> existence and harmony among the various
> groups that lived in a community and
> between them and their neighbours"

Therefore for peace to be maintained and sustained on the African continent,

culture which is rooted in tradition should be used so that the need for

development and progress will not end in failure (Kabede, 1994).

Nation-Branding dependent on Peace

Distinctiveness is the mark of branding, for any nation to sell itself out

peace is an essential and an all important criterion. According to experts, nation

branding is a field of theory and practice which aims to measure, build and

manage the reputation of countries. However, Africa in recent times has been

bedevilled by a lot of conflicts both internally and externally. These conflicts

range from ethnic to religion, political and economic and this to a large extent has

affected its development and progress in so many ways that branding can only be

achieved if measures are taken to put a drastic end to these conflicts.

Branding of a nation or a place is the process where by a nation through

deliberate pre-determined programme(s) create a unique and competitive identity

for itself with the objective of positioning the nation internally and externally as a good place or country for trade, tourism and investment. (http://nation-building info). Therefore branding will only be achievable in the continent Africa if leaders are willing to execute the so many laudable projects and programmes which are usually presented to the people but which otherwise are not realistic taking cognisance of prevailing economic, political and social situations in the continent. For example the seven (7) point agenda by the former late President Umaru Musa Yar'Adua and the Re-branding Nigeria project by her former information minister are some of such projects which are in themselves good but not actually appropriate for a country whose largest population live below the poverty level. This is inherent in the popular saying that "an hungry man is an angry man".

Conflicts however are not the only problems faced by African countries, other social problems like corruption, tribalism, lack of social and basic amenities and religious fanaticism have left terrible brand marks on the countries wherefore making them quite unattractive, hence the need for branding and re-branding thereby creating an enabling environment for developmental process.

If conflicts and other social problems are therefore the militating forces against branding in Africa , what then is the possible solution ? The solution lies in getting to the foundation of the problem, where the root cause has severally been linked to the inappropriate acceptability and use of foreign cultures and also consequent return to the indigenous cultures and values which aided discipline, peaceful co- existence and unity in previous times.

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