## THE ROLE OF CULTURE IN PROMOTING PEACE AND HARMONIOUS RELATIONSHIP IN NIGERIA

BY

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**Abstract**

*At present, Nigeria as a country is confronted with peace threatening issues like insurgency, armed banditry, kidnapping, political vendetta, ritual killings, and assassination. These traumatic and horrific experiences have brought disorderliness and restlessness to the populace, consequently culminated in a breach of peace in the country. Hence, this study is fundamentally set to examine the place of cultural values in promoting peace and harmonious relationship in Nigeria. It is a complementary effort to various researches that clearly unveiled how power of culture can make or mar society, community or a country at large. The study stressed and emphasised that culture constitutes a powerful mechanism of controlling and regulating individuals' behaviour, attitude, action and relationship in the society. Also, it was discovered that culture has great influence on socio-economic development of a nation. Similarly, peaceful co-existence and harmonious cohabitants are entrenched in Nigerian cultural values. The study concluded that there is need for aggressive public enlightenment campaigns and awareness on cultural norms, ethos and values that promote peace and harmony among the people. As suggested in the study, musical jingles and theatrical skit are advised to be adopted for impactful and monumental sensitization. Government should facilitate peaceful and harmonious relationship in order to achieve progress and advancement in all ramifications.*

**Keywords:** *Culture, peace, Harmonious relationship, Society*

**Introduction**

There is no gainsaying about the fact that the power of culture to make or mar any given society, community or even a nation cannot be overemphasised. This is because the experiences of man over the ages have undoubtedly demonstrated this assertion. History books were replete with examples of the impact of culture, both positive and negative, on human beings. Wherever the power of culture had been correctly used, it often leads to coherence, happiness and progress among the people (Balogun, 1991). Before the contact with "West", Africa had maintained a pristine identity. The identity was symbolised by the corporate value of traditions, customs and general ways of life of the people of Africa. Over the years, this value, which was co-terminus with the people's culture, had been the basis of life of the African man. However, at the point of contact with "West", the culture basis of life in Africa began to crumble. The result was that, new culture was introduced into the African society which was of fundamental effects on African culture (Aberle, 1990).

Nigeria as a country has been passing through different problems ranging from political instability, religious bigotry and riots, armed banditry, post-election violence kidnapping, assassination, etc. These crimes tend to dehumanise people, since most often, loss of precious lives, maltreatment and disrespect for fellow human beings are involved. The resultant psychological effect on Nigerians is loss of confidence in people, lack of love for one another, anarchy and tension. There exist ethnic grudges against one another, herdsmen and farmers clashes, religious fanaticism, and boundary disputes. However, Nigerian cultures are neither cultures of violence nor cultures of disunity as experienced today but it is rather cultures of peace and love for one another. All of the reasons mentioned prompted this paper to examine the role of culture in promoting peace and harmonious relationship with reference to Nigerian society.

**The Concept of Culture**
The concept of culture is a relative term that attracted different meanings from different scholars. The sociologists, humanists, anthropologists, and musicologists have different views on the concept of culture. Mussen (1993) defined culture in terms of reservoir of knowledge that is characterised with the ways of thinking, feeling, attitude, aspirations and ideas in the society. Ciroma (1982) is of the opinion that culture in its broadest sense encompasses all of human activities. Gidden (1989) described culture as consisting of the values which members of a given group hold, the norms they followed and the material goods they created. The concept of culture is that of complete whole and other capabilities which include knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom and any other capabilities that acquired by man as a member of society which are socially transmitted from one generation to another (Tylor, 1871). Bruce and Tearly (2006) defined culture as the totality of its shared beliefs, norms, values, rituals, language, history, knowledge and social characteristic. Akpabot (1986) viewed culture as a way of thinking, feeling and believing in any given society resulting in a behavioural pattern which gives that society a distinctive identity.

Joel (2019) explained culture as aggregate beliefs and customs of a particular society that influence their way of thinking, behaving and working. Culture captures all the inherited musical activities like singing, dancing and acting. As people participate in the tripartite, cultural iconographies are evidently showcased. Akpabot (1986) pointed out that one method of finding out about the culture of a people is to examine how they conceptualise their music. Culture is the total way of life of people in a particular society. Culture by its nature and practice is fundamental to human existence. Obafemi (2003) opined that culture offers meaning, purpose and value to the social, economic, political and aesthetic ethos of the society. Moreover, culture includes the collection of ideas and habits which they learn, share and transmit from generation to generation.

One of the common characteristics of the above definitions include the fact that culture is learned, acquired, and transmitted through contact from one generation to another and from one society to others. However, man learns culture through the process of socialisation, imitation, indoctrination, teaching, musical activities and personal experiences. The learning of culture is a lifelong process which continues from cradle to the grave. As a person grows and assumes new roles, man continues to learn the ways of life which fits his status in the society.

**The Concept of Peace**
Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2013) defined peace as a state of freedom from war or from civil disorder. Also, the word "peace" has been defined differently by many scholars. Oke (2004) defined peace as a state of perfection. Peace, according to Akinbade (2004), is the absence of hostilities, a condition which is conducive for realisation of political and social economic objectives. Peace is also a political condition that ensures justice and social stability through formal and informal institutions, practice and norms (Adediran & Lijade, 2011). Also, peace is an occurrence of harmony characterised by the lack of violence.

From all the definitions, it is obvious that the word "peace" could be seen as a state in which there is no war or disagreement and where there is mutual understanding and cordiality. Ibeanu (2006) explained peace as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict both within specified societies and in the wider international community.

**Importance of Culture in the Society**
Cultural value, whether material or non-material, is important to the human society. Eken (1989) summarised the basic importance of culture as:
• guiding the behaviour of members of the society and acts as an agent of social control;

- giving appropriate interpretation to the action of others and meaning to the behaviour of man in the society;
- helping to reduce conflict and prompts peaceful coexistence among the people;
- helping to preserve the society from one generation to another; and
- providing the basis for social cooperation and solidarity among the member of the society.

**The Role of Culture in Promoting Peace in Nigeria**
Despite the various measures taken by the Federal Government of Nigeria to curb the incessant threat to security, the security situation appears to be endemic and disastrous as a result of negligence of culture by the citizens. It should be noted that the Nigerian traditional cultures frown at anything that can bring about insecurity in the community as the traditional systems have their various organs who checkmate the excesses of people's beahviours in their society (Aluko, 2008). Nigeria traditional culture celebrates integrity, honour, hard work, selfless service, etc. Sanctions are used to regulate people's behaviours in the society. For example, any erring member of a particular community may be banished or excommunicated.

In the traditional society, people participated consciously or unconsciously in, especially, activities that involved musical performance. For example, Akpabot (1986) noted that it is not unusual to find musicians in an African village gathering together after supper to make music in the moonlight just for the fun of it. On such occasions, music may be used as background for a wrestling contest, a general sing-song in which everyone present takes part by singing and dancing. It is this cooperate activity that brought people together to work together in harmony. Furthermore, values are broad cultural principles comprising ideas about what most people in a society consider to be desirable. Norms are definite principles or rules which people are expected to observe. Simply stated according to Gidden (1982), norms represent the "dos" and "donts" of social life. Culture refers to the totality of peoples way of life as it constitutes the content of life that naturally available to the members of a society. This has to do with their traditions, customs, knowledge, beliefs, values, and norms. Culture contributes to the economic development of different places in Nigeria and promotes peace and harmony and reduces conflicts as results of inter-ethnic marriages.

Family also plays a major role in this aspect of peace promotion in Nigeria. The family teaches discipline and inculcates good moral values into the society. Nwabueka (2004) saw family as strength of a nation. In other words, the values of a nation depend upon the structure and content of the values the family in it can maintain. A nation therefore, loses its potentials if people fail in their family duties and rights. The popular axiom in Nigeria applies: charity begins from home. Family is highly cherished in Africa especially in Nigeria. Since children receive their first lessons from home, then parents have greater influence on children when they are still tender. At this stage, inculcation of cultural values and norms can be done without much stress. It is unfortunate seeing young boys and girls on the television screen and pages of newspapers who claimed to be Boko Haram killing and maiming innocent citizens in Nigeria. If the family can rise up and catch the children young, the future co-existence of people will be secured without fear.

Today, it is observed that the society is more religious than being godly. Religious leaders seem to speak more of religion than godliness. The fear of God is no longer in the hearts of people as we have it in those days in the traditional religion. For example, because of fear of the gods (like Ogun and Sango) people moderate their behaviours. Hence, there was relative peace in the society.

**Conclusion**
Nigeria is a peace loving nation, yet the country at the present is facing war, which includes insurgency, armed banditry, political assassination, herdsmen/farmer crises, etc. The trauma and horrors resulting from these disorders have culminated in a breach of peace. Peace is relevant in the home, school, society

and nation at large. Also to promote integration and harmonious relationship in Nigeria, federal government has put in place various measures or programmes in place which include establishment of unity schools otherwise known as Federal Government Colleges in each State of Federation, the National Youth Service Corps, adoption of the principle of federal character in the recruitment into the public services, quota system of admission into federal educational institutions, etc. All these evolved to give every Nigerian a sense of belonging to the nation.

## Recommendations

The following suggestions are therefore put forward as recommendations to this study:

- There must be public enlightenment campaigns on the need to promote a culture that promotes peace in Nigeria. This can be achieved through well packaged musical jingles and screened theatrical skit.
- Informal education in the homes should be encouraged by the three tiers of government, as family is the important agent in the process of socialisation of children into the right values in the society.
- There must be justice and equity among the various ethnic compositions that make up an entity Nigeria.
- Government should facilitate peaceful cohabitation and co-existence among the people.
- Finally, Nigeria should developed visionary leadership. Such leaders will help to mould the contending ethnic and religious groups into harmony and help to remove the perceived mutual distrust among the people.

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