

The Ondo 'Peace Diplomacy': A Disclosure on African Indigenous Conflict Resolution Culture

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Abstract

The paper is a study on African indigenous conflict resolution culture. It zooms in on the Ondos, a sub-ethnic entity among the Yoruba; one of Africa's largest cultural stalks, and discloses the traditional conflict resolution ethos of the Ondo cultural element. Giving the discussions and debates gleaned from received literature, it contends that before colonial ideological infiltrations, there existed home-grown approaches for resolving conflicts within the several but distinct traditional African states. Findings here show that home-grown methods of this sort have proved suitable and effective in the resolution of conflict situations within Ondoland as it were, and are still being used in the settlement of disputes which appear intractable with contemporary western approaches. Meanwhile, the paper attempts a conceptualisation of "peace diplomacy" to situate the application of diplomacy to capture local and indigenous efforts in pursuit of peace, and not just narrowing it to actual conduct of official relations between states. The paper, therefore, presents discussions on how the Ondo cultural people adopt 'peace diplomacy' to address issues of conflict in terms of resolution towards peaceful co-existence within their socio-political environment. Using a blend of sources, the descriptive and analytical methods were adopted in presenting the ideas of the paper. The study established that the emergence and adoption of western conventional methods of conflict resolution in contemporary times have not actually eroded the credibility and effectiveness of the indigenous forms.

Keywords: *Peace Diplomacy, Conflict Resolution, Indigenous African Culture, The Ondos*

Introduction

In contemporary times, the issue on conflicts in Africa and approaches toward resolution has drawn several debates and scholarly research across various fields of study in the humanities and social sciences.¹ This was perhaps necessitated by the

¹Here are some studies on conflict and conflict resolution in Africa, D. Kotze, "Issues in Conflict Resolution", *African Journal on Conflict Resolution*. Vol. 12, no. 2, 2000, 77-86; T. Murithi, "Practical Peace Making from Africa: Reflections on Ubuntu", *The Journal of Pan-African Studies*. 1 (4), 2006, 25-34; S. Samson Wassara, *Traditional Mechanism of Conflict Resolution in Southern Sudan*, Berlin, Germany: (BFPS) Berghor Foundation for Peace Support, 2007, 4-13; R.O Lawal, et al., "Resolving Conflict in African Traditional Society: An Imperative of

indispensability of peaceful co-existence in socio-political and economic circles for progressive and sustainable development. Besides, the trend and nature of conflict occurrences as an unrelenting feature in human history has made conflict resolution culture a central phenomenon in socio-political discourses. Accordingly, it may be of some relevance to situate the subject within the mainstream of some attempts and findings made hitherto.

Arising from some of Africa's indigenous conflict experiences and ethos since the earliest times, there appears numerous discourses on conflict and conflict resolution in Africa. For instance, *Indigenous Conflict Resolution in Africa* was the theme of Bock-Utne's presentation at the weekend seminar on Indigenous Solutions to Conflict, held at the University of Osolo's Institute for Educational Research from February the 23rd to 24th, 2001.² The presentation brought to fore the essence of indigenous methods of conflict resolution in Africa. It was made known that the so-called conventional legal western methods of conflict resolution such as negotiation, mediation, communication, consensus making between parties to disputes, making agreement as well as implementation, are features of the indigenous mechanisms of conflict resolution in Africa. Corroborating Josephine Ntahobari and Basilissa Ndayiziga's *The Role of Burundi Women in the Peaceful Settlement of Conflicts*,³ Bock-Utne recommends the greater participation of women in conflict resolution as they can still have strong moral obligation to reject violent ways. While Bock-Utne adopts a general and all-inclusive approach in discussing the subject, Ntahobari and Ndayiziga engaged a particularity assessment on the theme of African indigenous conflict resolution culture with the Burundi experience, a similar approach the current study explores in perspective of the Ondo cultural people of South-Western Nigeria.

Wassara Samson's *Traditional Mechanism of Conflict Resolution in Southern Sudan* articulates the types and causes of conflict in the cultural context of Southern

Indigenous African System", *African Journal of History and Archaeology*. Vol.4 no.1 2020. www.iiardpub.org (Accessed 13/09/2021); Akin Alao, "Indigenous Judicial Systems, Social Justice and Peace Building among the Yoruba of South Western Nigeria" in B.O Osiyale et al. (eds.) *Historical Scholarship, Society and Educational Development in Nigeria- A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Rasheed Owoyele Ajetumobi*. Ogun: Tai Solarin University of Education Press, 2022, 196-206.

² B. Brock-Utne, *Indigenous conflict resolution in Africa*, a paper presented to the week-end seminar on indigenous solutions to conflicts, held at the University of Oslo, (IER) Institute for Educational Research on February, 23-24 2001, 1-16. <http://www.africavenir.com/publications/occasionalpapers/BrockUtneTradConflictResolution.pdf>, (Accessed on 21, January 2013).

³ J. Ntahobari and B. Ndayiziga, "The Role of Burundi Women in the Peaceful Settlement of Conflicts", in (UNESCO) *Women and Peace in Africa: Case Studies on Traditional Conflict Resolution Practices*, UNESCO, Paris, 2003, 11.

Sudan.⁴ The work shows that the nature of conflicts in Southern Sudan, as in other African regions; primarily evolve between different identities, ownership, and the use of values. Wassara by implication submits that the root of most conflicts in Southern Sudan lay in the increasing scarcity of resources.⁵ Though his opinion might not be a general reflection of what is applicable in most indigenous African societies, yet it presents a perspective on not just the cause of social conflicts, but more, an understanding of the modus operandi to conflict management and resolution through traditional authorities and ethos stocked within African social formation and practices.

The role and involvement of African traditional religion in conflict prevention is the concern of Kasomo Daniel in an article he authored.⁶ His discussions were premised on the prevalence of conflict in Africa, which he regarded as one of the burning social issues calling for apt attention. The article describes the root and ramification of conflict in the African communities in view to proffer workable strategies to nip the situation in bud. In this regard, he recommends the adoption of African traditional religio-cultural values in modern conflict prevention and mitigation in Africa (CPMR).⁷ Although, the roles of traditional institutions in conflict management and resolution in Africa largely declined in the wake of the colonial era, Kenneth Nweke presents perspective on this with the Nigeria's oil rich Niger Delta communities in the post-amnesty era.⁸ Making a critique of the Niger Delta conflict situation, he also recommends the adoption of informal and indigenous methods of conflict resolution relevant to the socio-cultural environment, in place of the western sponsored methods of conflict resolution. These efforts are no doubt rewarding, but the concern of the present study dwells with the need to make available, necessary source material regarding the socio-cultural peculiarities in different African traditional entities, regarding indigenous conflict resolution approaches, such that would be required to implement the genre of Kasomo and Nweke's recommendation. Therefore, the present effort makes disclosures on indigenous conflict resolution culture among the Ondo people of South Western Nigeria in Africa. In this paper, I adopt the descriptive and analytical methods in presenting my discussions. Primary data were obtained from profound interviews with purposively selected resource individuals who are well-informed on indigenous peace processes in Ondoland while useful information culled from

⁴ S. Samson Wassara, *Traditional Mechanism of Conflict Resolution in Southern Sudan*, Berlin, Germany: (BFPS) Berghor Foundation for Peace Support, 2007, 4-13.

⁵ Ibid, 6.

⁶ D. Kasomo, "The position of African traditional religion in conflict prevention", in *International Journal of Sociology and Anthropology*, Vol.2 (2), 2010, 23-28.

⁷ Ibid, 23.

⁸ K. Nweke, "The role of traditional Institution of governance in managing social conflicts in Nigeria's Oil-Rich Niger Delta communities: Imperative of peace-building process in the post-amnesty era", in *British Journal of Arts and Social Science*, Vol.5 No.2, 2012, 202-219.

journal articles, monographs, books, dissertations and internet materials made up for secondary data.

Conceptual Disclosures on 'Peace Diplomacy' and Conflict Resolution

More often, diplomacy is considered an interactive arrangement involving different groups to address issues as conflict, economy, security, welfare and even, technology. Though, it appears more popular and welcomed in discourses on inter-state relationship, its application in 'local-social' settings cannot be undervalued. Perhaps, the concept and practice of diplomacy should not be confined to formal congresses and high-rank meetings, but should intently capture informal, local or indigenous disclosures and efforts in this connection. "Diplomacy is the art and science of maintaining peaceful relations between nations, groups or individuals."⁹ This concept on diplomacy is quite fitting for our understanding as it tends to situate peace as a central offshoot of diplomacy and also presents diplomatic application to inter-group and inter-personal relations. In essence, the introspection on 'peace diplomacy' flagged here draws on the perspective of diplomacy that is conflict resolving and peace sustaining centred. In this view, the application of knowledge and experiences, either historical or modern as well as commitment of relevant actors and institutions at either local or global setting to pursue and find paths toward peace in our society can be termed peace diplomacy.

On the other hand, the popular perception of conflict as a bane to development has nurtured the concept of conflict resolution. It involves the method of resolving conflict situations. Ho-won Jeong presents it as "a reflective process of overcoming negative, mutual emotions and psychology."¹⁰ Wallensteen in his own perception describes it as a "situation where the conflicting parties enter into an agreement that solves their central incompatibilities, accept each other's continued existence as parties and cease all violent action against each other."¹¹ It therefore implies that conflict resolution are processes, methods, procedures, mechanisms and approaches initiated to mitigate or settle frictions and disputes among people, groups and entities toward the attainment of peace.¹² Agricola identified three possible methods to conflict resolution. These are negotiation, mediation, and arbitration.¹³

⁹ National Geographic Society, Diplomacy, Encyclopedic Entry, 21 September, 2022. <https://education.nationalgeographic.org/resource/diplomacy/> (Accessed 17/03/2023).

¹⁰ J. Ho-won, *Understanding conflict and conflict analysis*, London: Sage Publishers, 2008, 99.

¹¹ P. Wallensteen, *Understanding conflict resolution: War, peace and global system*, London: Sage Publishers, 2002, 8.

¹² See, O.P Adebile, "Womanist Sensitivity in Peace and Conflict Resolution in Africa", in Yetunde Akorede (ed.), *African Research, Gender and Cultural Studies*. Masterprint, Ibadan., 2016, 102-115.

¹³ G. Agricola, *Designing conflict resolution education: A literature review*, Published master's thesis Educational Design and Consultancy, Utrecht University, March 2009, 12.

Negotiation could mean a method of conflict resolution whereby parties with overlapping and incompatible concerns engage in dialogue to elicit a compromise peacefully.

Mediation on the other hand, is an advanced process in conflict resolution. It implies the involvement of a dispassionate third party in a conflict situation with the object of ameliorating the negotiation process to ensure corresponding concession for peaceful settlement.

Arbitration is a more complex method of conflict resolution as it also entails the participation of a legally recognized and powerful third party to tender a term of settlement for belligerents which is considered binding. It is important to state that arbitration exerts some measure of authority and sometimes force on disputants.

Conciliation was not included in Agricola's identification. Meanwhile, it is another veritable approach to conflict resolution. In this process, an intermediary is present to propose panacea(s) to conflict, where the belligerents could either consent or disregard the proposal. It is aimed at suppressing the contradictions that gave rise to the conflict as well as reduce confrontational tendencies. Conciliation in order of application should come between mediation and arbitration. It goes without stating clearly that conflict resolution is indispensable for the peaceful co-existence mankind.

Indigenous Systems of Conflict Resolution in Ondo Culture

The linctus to social conflict resides in the appreciating and embracing resolution procedures; that is, mechanisms of conflict resolution. Understanding the systems of conflict resolution among the Ondos will require an evaluation of the autochthonous personalities and home-grown institutions, as well as an outlook on the native mechanism or methods of conflict resolution in the Ondo culture. Consequently, this section unfolds as it categorizes and examines indigenous actors and institutions of conflict resolution among the Ondo cultural cluster.

The indigenous procedures to resolving conflicts in Ondoland involve the activities of certain personnel and specified arrangements. These personnel and arrangements are an integral part of the Ondo socio-political structure.¹⁴ Accordingly, the home-grown institutions powered the activities of these indigenous actors, such as *Àgbà* (elders), *Olóyè* (chief), *Olórí ẹbí* (family heads), and others, as having legitimacy to intervene in conflict situations from the indigenous social

¹⁴ For detailed discussions on the Ondo cultural socio-political structure see, O.P Adebile, "Conflict Analysis Amongst the Yoruba: A Consideration of the Ondo Cultural People of South-Western Nigeria", in B.O Osiyale et al. (eds.) *Historical Scholarship, Society and Educational Development in Nigeria- A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Rasheed Owoyele Ajetumobi*. Ogun: Tai Solarin University of Education Press, 2022, 338-352.

norms. In other words, these institutions of resolution were tailored along cultural norm, values and traditions to alleviate conflicts, facilitate peace and harmony. In essence, indigenous institution expresses the home-grown political arrangements whereby leaders with proven track records are appointed and installed in line with the provisions of their native laws and customs.¹⁵

Socio-Political Institutions for Conflict Resolution

The Ondo element of the Yoruba ethnic affiliation evolved institutions anchored on conflict management and resolution. Obviously, the family as a traditional institution exists as a practical model of understanding familial projection, unification of goals, and forces desirable of positive outcomes.¹⁶ Within this set up, the family head acts in the capacity of a reconciliatory agent between the family members, settling disputes and averting conflicts through mediation.¹⁷ Here, it is important to make mention that the *Àgbà* (elders) represents another agent of conflict resolution in the Ondo socio-political system. From a more general view of the Yoruba, Lawrence Bamikole describes the personality of the *Àgbà*.

The Agba (elder) are respected individuals identified by age and other qualities, which mark them out in their families, communities, nations, regions and the world. S/he must be fearless person (alakikanju); s/he must be knowledgeable and wise but must be someone who give room for criticisms (ologbon, oloye, afimotielomiran se); s/he must be tolerant (alamumora); s/he must be upright in all ways (olotito, olododo); s/he must not be selfish (anikanjopon).¹⁸

In corroboration to Bamikole's postulation, Kazeem Fayemi notes that:

...the ascription of agba (elder) is not based on physiognomic terms. The reference to physiognomy in defining an agba (elder) is because of the different life experiences that have combined to shape the thought of an agba (elder) as a result of old age. The Yoruba value human experience, which comes by age and that accounts for the proverb – bi omode ba ni aso bi agba; ko le ni

¹⁵ K. E. Orji, and S. T. Olali, "Traditional Institutions and Their Dwindling Roles in Contemporary Nigeria: The Rivers State Example", in T. Babawale, A. Aloa & B. Adesoji (eds.) *Chieftaincy Institution in Nigeria*. Lagos: Concept Publication Ltd, 2010, 402.

¹⁶ O.B Olaoba, *African Traditional Methods of Conflict Resolution*, ed. Remi Anifowose, PCR 731- National Open University of Nigeria (NOUN), adapted from: <http://www.nou.edu.ng>, retrieved on 17th January, 2013, 16.

¹⁷ Oral interview with Pa Patrick Fadegbe, Oka Sawmill, Ore Road, Ondo, (74), 28th June, 2013.

¹⁸ O. Lawrence Bamikole, "Agba (Elder) as Arbitrator: A Yoruba Socio-Political Model for Conflict Resolution", paper presented at The Afolabi Olabimtan Memorial Biennial International Conference held at College of Humanities, Tai Solarin University of Education, Ijebu-Ode, 22nd -25th September, 2008, 12.

akisa bi agba (If a child has material possession as much as the elder has, his life experiences cannot equate that of the elder).¹⁹

As a matter of fact, the *Àgbà* are major actors in conflict resolution among the Ondos, they are found in virtually all strata of the society, and they are regarded as custodians of wisdom of which they engage in mitigating conflict and enhancing peaceful co-existence in the Ondo society.

The palace symbolizes another socio-political institution that aids conflict resolution. The king and high chiefs in the Ondo socio-political formation have their palaces, where conflicts are being adjudicated. It is necessary to underscore that the *Àgbà* is different from the *Olóyè* (chief). While a chief could be an elder, an elder may not be a chief. The socio-political system has a highly developed three-tier government structure made up of the executive, legislature and judiciary branches;²⁰ with the *Osemawe* (king) as the supreme authority, assisted by his *Ìjòyè* (a council of chiefs), to ensure the effective administration of the kingdom. The *Osemawe* (king) together with his chiefs enacted laws to checkmate human excesses, and specifically to limit frictions in the community. The laws were used in the administration of justice between conflicting parties, both in the high chiefs' palaces and the king's palace ultimately.

Significantly, the social institution of *Òtu* or *Egbé* (age-grade), and more recently, unions, associations or clubs are quite relevant to conflict resolution in Ondoland. The age grade system in Ondo culture was organised to capture practically all social categories in the society, such as, hunters, market women and farmers' guild as well as the youth's club. Within these associations and groupings, conflicts between affiliate members were mitigated as the wisdom and diplomacy of nipping extensive conflicts to manageable notches were deployed.²¹ It goes without asserting that, the roles of the age-grade system- associations, unions and clubs toward the proliferation of peace and institutionalization of harmony in Ondoland were immense and worthy of commendation. Thus far, it is vivid that the family, palace, and age grade are central indigenous socio-political institutions for conflict resolution, and these socio-political institutions play vital roles in conflict resolution in the Ondo culture.

Traditional Religion as Institutions for Conflict Resolution

¹⁹ See A. Kazeem Fayemi, "Agba (elder) as Arbitrator: A Yoruba socio-political model for Conflict Resolution- A Review of Lawrence O. Bamikole", in *Journal of Law and Conflict Resolution*, Vol.1 (3), 63.

²⁰ T. Onadeko, *Yoruba Traditional Adjudicatory Systems*, African Study Monographs, 29(1), March 2008, 7.

²¹ Oral interview with Chief Ebenezer Akinkunmi, Ligbon of Ondo kingdom, NO 36, Akinnorla Street, Ondo, (69), 25th June, 2013.

Historical experiences have shown religion to be one of the most influential phenomena in the evolution of human societies. It is important also to understand that a traditional religious institution such as *Ògún* (the veneration of the Iron deity) among others plays an immense role in conflict resolution among the Ondos. Religion is a system of belief that reflects the influence of the supernatural in human affairs, and within this context also embodies sacred cults, shrines and groves where resolutions of conflicts are carried out. It is instructive that the traditional religious institutions in Ondo culture reserves the prerogative on conflict resolution to ancestors, gods and deities.²² This is believed to be effective for mitigating conflicts and facilitating peace in the Ondo society. However, religious cults, shrine or groove were managed by traditionalists who are custodians of the nomenclature of the particular deity or ancestor; these custodians are traditionally known as chief priests.

Closely connected to the aforementioned are the *Babaláwo* (Herbalist or Witch Doctor), they are recognised in the Ondo culture for their supernatural wisdom and magical powers, as such; they become relevant in conflict resolution. They engage their wisdom of necromancy in knowing and revealing secret events and used their magical powers to forestall conflicts and enhance peace between individuals and within the kingdom at large. Hence, it is convenient to posit that traditional religious institutions in Ondoland were akin to the resolution of minimal and endemic conflicts.

Women in Resolution and Peace Culture

Women are indispensable elements in the development of any society; the essence of peace for sustainable development has enlisted women as vanguards of peace, love and tolerance. In real sense, women have imputed to the resolution of conflict in Ondoland, the responsibilities of the woman in the family and society reflect this. The commitment of womanhood to child training and preservation in the Ondo culture is a vital strand of the womenfolk influence to peace. Ondo women are strong and courageous when it comes to child-rearing and training, it is even conceived as the sole responsibility of women to instill in children the core value and norms of the society such as patience, respect, honesty, love, transparency, diligence and courage through fables, folktales, and mythical stories. This discourages egocentrism which engenders conflicts, and ultimately serves as deterrence to conflict which on the long run will make children precursors of peace in the society. Thus, women are peace educators and could be considered as core

²² Oral discussions with Chief Ebenezer Akinkunmi, Ligbon of Ondo kingdom, NO 36, Akinnorla Street, Ondo, (69), 25th June, 2013.

agents of peace in human and social relationships.²³ Ntahobari and Ndayiziga, underscore the point:

Women played the greatest part by far in the education of children, the management and organization of everything connected with the home (property and, to some extent, people). They were regarded as the driving force behind the family's relationship with its neighbours. Seen as the mainstay of the family ...It was primarily the mother that had responsibility for the upbringing of the children. Children, especially when very young, remained with their mother, who would look after both boys and girls until they reached a given age (for boys, until the time when their father took over the responsibility)²⁴.

In the family, Ondo women as wives and mothers play the role of a mediator between the family and neighbours. While appears that women are not active in public, they wield great influence on their husbands in the secrecy of intimacy, in cases of conflict between two families in the daytime, the wife been the most influential guru to her husband behind closed doors of their room at night finds it easier than any other to manage and resolve conflicts situation. Here, the women could be regarded as the de facto while the man as the de jure.

Women with their unflinching influence on children have made it possible for them to pacify their children involved in a dispute within the family, quarter or community. The love and tenderness of the mother toward her child(ren) makes it grim for children to decline their mothers' imploration and appeasement. The point here is that, women in almost all strata of the Ondo socio-political system exercises important role in conflict resolution culture.

Home-grown Methods of Conflict Resolution in Ondo Culture

In Ondoland, the people developed effective home-made mechanisms anchored on resolving conflicts within their social setting. The mechanisms of mitigating conflicts and enhancing peace are also referred to as methods of conflict resolution, these methods have proved indispensable and effective to the purpose in which it is targeted. Some of these methods, based on outcomes of the study's findings, are disclosed in this section.

²³ M. A Chinwe Nwoye, *Role of Women in Peace Building and Conflict Resolution in African Traditional Societies: A Selective Review*, obtained from: <http://www.afrikaworld.net/afrel/chinwenwoye.htm>, accessed on 30th June, 2013, 4.

²⁴ J. Ntahobari and B. Ndayiziga, *The Role of Burundian Women in the Peaceful Settlement of Conflicts*, in UNESCO, *Women and Peace in Africa*, Paris: UNESCO Workshops, 2003, 18.

Consensus Settlements and Intermediate Resolution

This is one of the vital methods of resolving conflicts in Ondo culture, it is known as *Ìwí jó* in the Ondo parlance.²⁵ Consensus settlement engages the parties to conflict in open discussion between them alone in order to settle their differences.²⁶ In this case, either of the conflicting parties should be ready to compromise his/her stand to ensure an amicable resolution of such conflict. Consensus settlements in Ondo kingdom have demonstrated potency in resolving family conflicts between the husband and wife, as well as amidst siblings. While it has proved suitable in resolving family conflicts, it has aided the resolution of social conflict between groups that are ready to make compromise for peace in the community.

On the other hand, intermediate resolution in Ondo cultural language is referred to as *Àrówà*. This method is another effective indigenous mechanism used in the resolution of conflicts among the Ondos. It usually takes the involvement of an intermediary, who in most cases is an *Àgbà* (elder) within the family, quarter or kingdom at large. In cases where concession settlement (*Ìwí jó*) was unable to enhance the settlement of a dispute/conflict, it will entail the involvement of an elder (family head, quarter head or chief) to facilitate the resolution process. The elder involved will engage both parties in discussions and try to understand the sources and nature of the conflict, after which he/she will pacify the belligerents and offer a term for the resolution of the conflict.²⁷ Further, it is important to mention that the elders in Ondoland are not used to taking bribe from disputants, it is against the cultural orientation of the land; rather, they are respected for their astuteness and credibility in analysing conflicts and apportioning faults. The uttermost interest of an elder is to ensure the resolution of the conflict under his/her tutelage peacefully.²⁸

These methods have always proved effective because the Ondo people largely reserve respects for their elders, whatever the elder proffer are usually accepted to be appropriate for the resolution of conflict moored to them. Within the above premises, conflicts have been resolved through the involvement of elders (*Àgbà*). It is significant to underscore that these methods of conflict resolution are capable of resolving any profile of conflict in Ondo.

Proverbial Rhetoric

²⁵ From discussions with Chief Ebenezer Akinkunmi, Ligbon of Ondo kingdom, NO 36, Akinnorla Street, Ondo, (69), 25th June, 2013.

²⁶ Gilbert Adegule, NO 40, Ota Osun, Ile-Oluji Road, Ondo, (65), 30th July, 2013.

²⁷ Patrick Fadegbe, Oka Sawmill, Along Ore Road, Ondo, (74), 28th June, 2013 and Gilbert Adegule, NO 40, Ota Osun, Ile-Oluji Road, Ondo, 30th July, 2013.

²⁸ Lawrence Akinbi, Tutogua of Ondoland, NO 65^A, Ife Road, Ondo, (73), 24th June 2013.

This method of resolving conflict is closely linked to the above, it is generally believed among the Yoruba and Ondos alike that *Owe* (proverbs) are the handmaids of elders. Proverbial rhetoric has also manifested itself as a significant method of resolving conflicts in the Ondo culture, it evolved from the involvement of elders in the mediation of conflicts. Elders are known for engaging appealing traditional proverbs while resolving conflicts to appease aggrieved parties.²⁹ A useful traditional proverb that lends credence to the ability of proverbs in resolving conflicts says, “*Òwe leshin òrò, tí òrò bá sọ̀nù, òwe la n fí wá*” (Proverb empowers dialogue, if misunderstanding arises, proverbs are used in settlements). The import of this proverbs to the resolution of conflict lies in the fact that when issues are misunderstood, proverbs are important to put things right.

The place of forgiveness and overlooking offenses by opposing parties is considered central in the resolution of conflicts in the Ondo culture, without forgiving and forgetting, such offences may eventually relapse into another phase of conflict. In this view, Adeyemi Adegoju considers two traditional proverbs that depict what he conveys as the spirit of large-heartedness and “forgive and forget”. According to him:

The first virtue is expressed in the proverb, “Bí a bá fí owó òtún bá omo wí, à sì tún fí owó òsì fà á móra” (If we chastise a child with the right hand, we should draw them near ourselves with the left). The use of the if-clause in this proverb is instructive. It typifies the use of conditional statements in the rhetorical discourse of conflict resolution. This sentence form, we must note, is commonly used to create a rhetorical effect in Yoruba proverbial discourse by balancing two arguments in seemingly contrasting situations... [The second] which touches on the spirit of “forgive and forget” also admits the gravity of the wrong the other party may have done, but argues that an attempt to retaliate will cause no little harm, hence it says, “Bí a bá rò dídùn ifòn, a ó hora dée egun” (If one considers the irritation of an itch, nothing will restrain one from scratching to the bone). This proverb preaches a high level of tolerance arguably reinforced with the image of reacting to the sensation of an itch to the point of being tempted to scratch to the bone. Scratching to the bone then becomes a metaphor for seeking revenge in a conflict situation to the point of threatening social fabric.³⁰

²⁹ Gilbert Adegule, NO 40, Ota Osun, Ile-Oluji Road, Ondo, (65), 30th July, 2013.

³⁰ See A. Adegoju, “Rhetoric in conflict-related Yoruba proverbs: Guide to constructive conflict resolution in Africa”, in Africa Study Monographs, Vol.30 (2), 2009, 65-66.

Here, another proverb is considered to reflect the resolution of conflict, it is expressed thus, “*Bí a bá dijú kí èniyàn burúkú kojá, a oní m̀ògbàtí ẹni rere á kojá*” (If the eyes are closed for the bad person to pass, we will not know when one’s benefactor will pass). This proverb also exhorts on the need for forgiveness, tolerance and harmony amidst oppositions. In addition, Proverbs have a deterrent effect on wrongdoing. If a man is tempted by his desire or by the suggestion of an evil friend and in the process remembers a proverb, he would desist immediately.³¹

These proverbs among other several ones have aided the resolution of conflicts in Ondoland without tendencies of conflict reoccurrence as opposing parties are reconciled with each other, burying all aggression, grievances and reservation against themselves. Therefore, proverbial rhetoric has indeed demonstrated its effectiveness in resolving conflicts in Ondo culture.

Adjudicatory Proceedings

Adjudication in itself is a method of conflict resolution that had existed in the socio-political fabric of the Ondo group. In cases where conflict persists despite the involvement of the elders, it is transferred to the jurisdiction of the palace for the king and his council of chiefs to rule a verdict after considering the positions of both parties.³² Litigation under the traditional adjudicatory arrangement is carried out based on traditional laws which had been enacted by the king (*Osemawe*) and his council chiefs. It is however necessary to mention that the adjudicatory process is an important method of conflict resolution in Ondoland and the chief in council and those involved in the administration of traditional laws had taking oaths never to be influenced by prejudice or sentiment of any kind in their administration of justice.³³ After judicial consultation had been properly carried out, the paramount ruler-*Osemawe* will examine the reports and recommendations of his chiefs and then declare his judgment.

Essentially, the main objective of adjudication among the Yoruba and some other African cultures is to reach a decision that would be accepted as fair by both parties, so that the dispute could be resolved.³⁴ In situations involving the king’s verdict, it is usually strictly binding and must be adhered to; this most certainly will bring an end to the conflict. Conflicts on land ownership, inheritance allocation, infidelity and child ownership are dominant cases of conflict that had been handled

³¹ L. Sewanyana, *The Use of Traditional Communications in Conflict Management: The Case of Uganda*, Foundation for Human Rights Initiative (FHRI), Kampala, Uganda. 51

³² Discussions with Olori Anike Adesanoye, Road 9, Funbi Fagun, Ondo, (70+), 24th June, 2013.

³³ Chief Ebenezer Akinkunmi, Ligbon of Ondo kingdom...

³⁴ T. Onadeko, *Yoruba Traditional Adjudicatory Systems*, African Study Monographs, Vol. 29(1), March 2008, p18.

with the traditional judicial outfit.³⁵ It is instructive that in Ondo culture adjudicatory system is an active and dynamic feature of indigenous conflict resolution.

Consanguineous Method

This has to do with the involvement of the unseen family ancestors, traditionally regarded as *Alájobí*. Consanguinity describes the strong relations that exist between members of the same lineage. Notably, *Alájobí* as an indigenous method of conflict resolution in Ondo cultural formation is a veritable mechanism of mitigating conflict within the family and extended family unit, it implants fear and anxiety in members of the family; this is because everyone believes in the traditional dictum that says, “*abiamo kí gbọ ẹkún ọmo ẹ komá ta dide*” (the mother will not hear the cry of her child without reaching out or reacting). The statement presupposes that the ancestors who are the forefathers of the living will usually respond promptly to fight and vindicate whoever is dishonest and truthful respectively.

When such expression as “*alájobí á da larin èmi ati ẹ*” (the ancestors will judge between you and me) is pronounced, the ancestors had already been called to take charge of the situation. The ancestors are known for immutable trustworthiness in their intervention and judgment; as such, nobody likes to be handed over to the family ancestors to judge.³⁶ The fear of the ferocious judgment of the ancestors alone has led to the resolution of several family-based conflicts including chieftaincy tussle and even land ownership.

Nevertheless, oral testimonies reveal that the Ondo people in recent times hold a opinion, that *alájobí* takes time before executing judgment. This is expressed in another cultural saying, “*kílè tó pa òsìkà ohun to da ti baje*” (before the ancestor kills the wicked, precious things would have been destroyed).³⁷ Here, the point is that the ancestor appears to give the unjust a long rope to pull before implementing its judgment and perhaps, wrath. The challenge of the perceived slow action of *alájobí* and the impatience of the supposed aggrieved, often results in the adoption of a more prompt but usually devastating method, which will be examined subsequently. However, this does not by implication undermine the effectiveness of *alájobí* in conflict resolution in Ondoland.

Oath Taking or Swearing

³⁵ O.P Adebile, discusses the nature of social conflict in among the Ondo cultural people in a earlier study, “Conflict Analysis Amongst the Yoruba: A Consideration of the Ondo Cultural People of South-Western Nigeria”, in B.O Osiyale et al. (eds.) *Historical Scholarship, Society and Educational Development in Nigeria- A Festschrift in Honour of Professor Rasheed Owoyele Ajetumobi*. Ogun: Tai Solarin University of Education Press, 2022, 338-352.

³⁶ Seviatu Mimiko, Osemawe Market, Sokoti, Ondo, (80+), 28th June 2013.

³⁷ Gilbert Adegule, NO 40, Ota Osun, Ile-Oluji Road, Ondo, (65yrs), 30th June, 2013.

Oath taking or Swearing (*Ìbúra*) is a conventional method of resolving conflicts traditionally; it is an arrangement whereby parties to a conflict make severe pronouncements to affirm the truth about a conflict situation or pledge a person to certain obligation, this method has to do with some sort of enchantment and necromancy which often involves the witness of a deity. As in other African cultures, *Ìbúra* as a mechanism of conflict resolution operated in the socio-cultural fabric of Ondoland. In the first place, oaths are used to seal up agreements in traditional conflict resolution, in cases where reconciliation bothers on mutual obligatory agreements between conflicting parties, to ensure appropriate implementation of the arrangement, parties are to swear allegiance to the terms of agreement before a god or goddess. By tradition, anyone who defaults in the peace obligatory arrangement will be faced with calamities of different shades and death ultimately. A traditional adage lends currency to the above, it says, “*èni to bá dalè á baleḡ*” (anyone who defaults an agreement will die).

On the other hand, oath taking and swearing are adopted when a conflict situation looks intractable. In this case, parties to conflict are to take oaths in the presence of a deity to identify the delinquent and the innocent person amidst the oppositions. Here, it is important to state that this approach of swearwords before powerful deities carried prompt and grievous nemesis on the delinquent. In essence, it is commonly the last resort of resolving intractable conflicts in the Ondo culture.

No doubt, there are several acclaimed active gods and goddess in Ondoland, few among them are used for oath taking and swearing, notable ones for this purpose are; ‘*Aio Yo Dudo*’, ‘*Ogun le ri*’, ‘*Ogun a se ho*’.³⁸ ‘*Aio Yo Dudo*’ was regarded to be the second Osemawe of Ondo kingdom. The first Osemawe, Pupupu was a female and was succeeded by her son *Aio* who is regarded as the real founder of Ondo kingdom (*Aio O dudo*).³⁹ He was considered a villain; probably, because of the heat of his leadership clout and sadistic tendencies. Thence, after his death, his tomb situated at the Osemawe’s palace was commandeered a shrine of oath-taking and swearing.

‘*Ogun le ri*’ and ‘*Ogun a se ho*’ are traditional religious deities in Ondo kingdom, their shrines are located in the *Ijomu*’s palace and *Idimalo* respectively. These deities among others are known for prompt judgment on the obstinate delinquent in a conflict situation. Usually, oaths are taking in Ondo culture with ‘*obi aláwé mēta*’ (kolanut with three swivels) which will be divided into three, one of the parts will be placed in the shrine of the god or goddess, while the other two parts will be given to the two conflicting parties respectively.⁴⁰ It is traditionally believed that not too long

³⁸ From discussions with Chief Ebenezer Akinkunmi, Ligbon of Ondo kingdom...; Chief Lawrence Akinbi, Tutogua of Ondo land... and Madam Osutade ...

³⁹ A. Aderoba. Adeyemi, *Cultural Renaissance and Development in Ondo Kingdom*, a public lecture delivered on Ekimogun Day Silver Jubilee, held November, 2012, pp.7-8

⁴⁰ Omoniyi Toyin, NO 6, Lotogbe, Ondo, (50+), 1st July, 2013.

from the day the swearing or oath was taken; the deity will expose and punish the obstinate delinquent.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it is evident that peace diplomacy and conflict resolution exists in the Ondo culture, as it were in the various African indigenous cultural formations. The existence of home-grown institutions anchored on conflict resolution and the involvement of indigenous personalities in resolution processes is an attestation to the vibrancy and effectiveness of conflict resolution in African indigenous civilizations. It could be deduced that the indigenous political, social and religious institutions evolved as multidimensional structures. As it addresses specified matters of direct relevance to its existence, it also functions to facilitate peaceful co-existence in the society by resolving conflicts covertly and overtly. Nevertheless, necessary attention must be drawn to the involvement of the woman element in conflict resolution; though, relatively silent in social and political engagements, but profoundly influential in the sustenance of peace in the society.

In sum, this paper has unveiled the ability and effectiveness of indigenous methods of conflict resolution, it has also shown that the adoption of western conventional methods of conflict resolution in contemporary times have not eroded the credibility and utility of the indigenous forms, but have proven its flexibility and strength despite changes and continuities in African indigenous cultural experiences and the Ondo culture in particular.