

PEACE EDUCATIONAL PRECEPTS IN TRADITIONAL YORUBA GOVERNMENT

Segun Adenipekun Olanibi

Abstract

One of the contemporary issues in Nigeria today yearning for attention and education is the vexed issue of social peace challenges confronting the nation. Enemies of peace like armed-robbers, kidnappers, insurgents, religious extremists and ritualists unleash terror on innocent and defenseless Nigerians almost at regular intervals. In the light of these disturbing trends, this paper takes a look at the traditional government in Yoruba society as models of checking these monsters. The principles inherent in the focused order which include information, community policing, decentralization of power, border monitoring and the like are exemplified as incorporable complementary panacea in Nigeria's quest for social peace.

A peaceful society is the desire of both the governed and the governors in any human community. In Nigeria today, enemies of peace abound unleashing all sorts of terror on the citizenry. The peace challenges being perpetrated by insurgents, armed robbers, kidnappers, ritualists and other evil inclined people deserve solutions from all ends which necessitated this paper.

The amount budgeted for peace and security this year is a testimony to the fact that the issues of peace challenges bedeviling Nigeria are enormous. According to Hassan (2012) in the *Daily Trust Newspaper* (2012) "the Federal Government is to spend a total of N1.005 trillion next year on security according to the details of 2013 budget, representing an increase of N135 billion over what was appropriated for the sector this year".

The thrust of this paper therefore is that there is a need to incorporate the strategies used by traditional Yoruba government into modern Nigerian security settings as complimentary panacea to peace and security challenges tormenting the nation. The political settings in traditional Yoruba society are brought to the fore with the intent of foregrounding the peace and security aspects as models for Nigeria.

To achieve this aim, the paper is delineated into various parts starting with the introduction after which the major concepts germane to the study are exemplified. In subsequent sections, an overview of peace and security challenges in Nigeria are given before dealing with issues inherent in the focused society which spurred a conclusion that the precepts can serve as peace and security models for modern Nigeria.

Conceptual Exemplification

The identified key concepts in this paper, "peace", "education", "Yoruba", and "Yoruba traditional government" are examined thus:

Peace

The Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary (2005) defines peace as "a situation or a period of time in which there is no war or violence in a country. In the same vein, *The Free On-line Merriam*

Multidisciplinary Journal of Research Development, Volume 22 No. 2, July, 2014

Webster Dictionary (n.d) also defines peace as “a state of security or order within a community provided for by law or custom.

The foregoing definitions reveal peace as a setting of security and orderliness where violence, war, and crimes do not reign.

The Yoruba

Gbadegesin (1991: 174) states that:

While the Yoruba can be found in different parts of the globe, a thriving Yoruba culture can be found in South-America and the Caribbeans, especially Brazil and Cuba where the descendants of the unwilling immigrants to the new world have been able to maintain their identity and preserve their cultural heritage.

The Yoruba is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria who occupy the South-western states of the country (Ogun, Lagos, Ondo, Oyo, Osun and Ekiti states) mainly and some parts of Kwara and Kogi states in Northern Nigeria. Apart from Nigeria, the Yoruba are also found in sizeable numbers in the South-Eastern parts of the Republic of Benin and Togo in West Africa. (Balogun, 2009:1).

The geographical descriptions of the Yoruba, whose traditional government is a reference point in this paper, are foregrounded in these definitions.

Yoruba Traditional Government

Having given the description of the Yoruba, the remaining concepts in this three worded concept are defined thus: Tradition is a belief, custom, or way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people (*Oxford Advanced Learners' Dictionary*, 2005: 1569). *The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (2006: 58) also defines tradition as “any human practice, belief, institution or artifact which is handed down from one generation to the next.”

The concept, government is defined by *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (2006: 182) as “that central agency or complex totality of interrelated organizations exercising control over a society or a territorially delineated sub-division of a society. These definitions reveal Yoruba traditional government as that system of control being exercised over Yoruba communities before the advent of the present modern government.

The Yoruba traditional government is a monarchy which is headed by a king or queen. According to Johnson, (1921: 198) “the government of Yoruba is an absolute monarchy. Fadipe, (1974: 198) also corroborates this thus: “The prevalent system of government of sovereign political units in Yoruba land is monarchical. Expatriating further, Ogunsina (2006: 77) offers that “one of the significant features of the traditional society was its monarchical organization. At the highest level of the Hierarchy were the *Oba* supported by the chiefs, household heads, and finally the common people.

Education

According to *Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (2006: 125), “Education means the transmission of knowledge by either formal or informal methods. The Latin word, “educatum” means to train from inside and to draw out, to lead out or to bring up. All these translate to drawing from within (Sigh, 2007:4).

Peace Educational Precepts in Traditional Yoruba Government

Based on these definitions of education, it means that this paper intends to draw knowledge from security strategies in Yoruba traditional government for the purpose of transmitting the knowledge to both the leaders and the led on their roles and duties in maintaining a peaceful society.

An Overview of Peace and Security Challenges in Nigeria

For space economy, attempts are made in this section to cite some examples of peace challenges as reported in some Nigerian newspapers.

Of all the peace challenges, the insurgents using religion as a cover-up seem to be the most deadly which spurred president Goodluck Jonathan to declare state of emergency in three North-Eastern states of Borno, Adamawa and Yobe states. *The Daily Trust Newspaper* of May 15, 2013 quoted Mr. President on the insurgency that “Nigeria is at war”.

The armed-robbers are also unleashing their reign of terror on Nigerians. An example of their deadly attacks in *Daily Sun Newspaper* (2012) goes thus: “Rambo – Style Robbery”, why we shook Lagos”. Another caption from the same newspaper says; “Evil-banker; Female cashier sends robbers after customer, gang snatches N5m from victim”.

Kidnappers are also contributing their deadly quota to the peace menace in Nigeria. A report of kidnapping incident goes thus: “kidnappers invaded our lodge like commandos, seized our colleagues – corps members” (*Saturday Punch Newspaper*, 2013). Another similar happening is reported thus: “kidnappers of Edo teachers drop ransom to N5m (*Nigerian Tribune Newspaper*, 2013).

Ritualists and cultists are also thorns in the flesh of Nigerians. An headline report of *Daily Newswatch Newspaper*, 2013) says: “police arrest 7 cultists.” The case of *Ombatse* deadly cultists in Nasarawa State where the state security service (SSS) men were murdered recently came to the fore when *Daily Trust Newspaper* of July 30, 2013 quoted the parents of the slain men lamenting and demanding justice. The paper captioned it thus: “Nasarawa cult killings, parents of slain SSS men demand justice.”

All these reveal some of the peace challenges confronting Nigeria. The next sub-heading is on the thrust of this paper.

Methods of Maintaining Peace and Security in Traditional Yoruba Government

Information: The adage, “Information is power” aptly describes the attitudes of the citizens in traditional Yoruba government as expressed in this Yoruba maxim:

Ògiri létí
Èyàn ní jé bẹ̀
Etí oba nílẹ̀,
Etí oba lóko

The walls have ears
Human beings are so called
The king has his ears at home,
The ears of the king are also at farms

This aphorism depicts that security information gets to the king who is the chief security officer easily which spurred the metaphoric usage of walls having ears meaning that the ease with which security information gets to the king is so vivid that people with skeleton in their cupboards have nowhere to hide. Another adage on security information goes thus:

*E rójú olè
E ò mú ni,
Omo yín ò sàgbàfò
Ó ñ káso wálé*

You have seen a thief
But you refused to catch him,
Your child is not into laundry business,
But brings clothes home

This satiric song reveals that those hiding criminals are seriously reprimanded as it is the norm that a parent should not even condone a child- criminal. Interestingly, Nigerians of today are also into this method of checking criminals. In a report captioned, “police arrest six robbery suspects in Osun” by *Daily Trust Newspaper* of July 23, 2013, the potency of information is brought to the fore thus: “Commissioner of police in Osun State, Mrs Dorothy Gumba... said they were arrested in various locations in the state following tip off (underlining, mine) from members of the public. The same Newspaper reported a similar incident thus: “The command hereby appreciates the good people of Ogun State for their collaboration and sharing of information (Underlining, mine) that make the police proactive in prevention of crimes and criminality in the state”.

Decentralization of Power

The society under focus decentralizes power to a level of recognition of family heads, *baálé* as parts of government. Followed by the *baálé* in ascending order are the quarter/ward/street chiefs. The town’s chiefs are next in this order who work in close tandem with the king and all other chiefs for the peace and security of the society.

The salient points here, is that citizens are closely monitored right from the family to the expanded society. A strong weapon utilized in this system is the importance attached to personal and family names. Members of families are warned to desist from any act capable of soiling the family’s names. Every ruler from the home to the extended society is held responsible for the action and inaction of his/her members.

Community Policing: The societal reference point in this paper uses this strategy of forming groups for the purpose of policing the community against criminals. Laying credence to this method, Fadipe (1970: 25) states that, “... the hunters were collectively charged with the duty of guarding against invasion”. This method is fondly tagged: “*Ìgbimò ojú lalàkàn fì ñ sórí*” literally meaning the crab protects its head with its eyes. The groups move in groups especially at nights to arrest criminals and hand them over to the appropriate authorities.

The action of Borno youths of recent lays credence to the imperative of this method, as it is reported that having been fed up with the deadly activities of insurgents, they formed themselves into community police group to check the evil perpetrators. *Saturday Punch Newspaper* of June 29, 2013 reveals the nomenclature of this group in this caption: “Civilian JTF takes fight to *Boko Haram*”. The

Peace Educational Precepts in Traditional Yoruba Government

soldiers deployed to fight insurgents also known as *Boko Haram* in Borno are known as Joint Task Force (JTF). Apparently, the community police are also given this name in recognition of sameness in the objective of the duo.

Border Monitoring: Yoruba traditional border and immigration issues are taken seriously that a slight breach is quickly noticed. The borders are strongly protected by having security walls in place. For instance, Johnson (1921: 381) describes a Yoruba town border thus: “The walls of Ilesa were very thick, high and slippery”. A chief weapon among other forms of weapons used to monitor illegal immigrants is the use of tribal marks. Since every citizen has tribal marks on the face, a particular tribal mark instantly reveal the identity of the bearer.

While noting the use of walls in border as outdated and the obsolescence in the use of tribal marks for identification purpose, the objectives inherent in the strategies can be modernized and well utilized. For instance, the productions of national identity cards are very potent alternatives to tribal marks. The purpose inherent in the use of walls has also been modernized by having strong border monitoring agents in place.

The recent happenings in Nigeria lay credence to the fact that illegal immigrants should be watched as many of the peace challenges are either directly committed by these illegal foreigners or aided by them. A report in the *Daily Sun Newspaper* of June 27, 2013 says: “Kano arms seizure: F.G. arraigned three Lebanese”. The paper reports further: “The Federal Government yesterday arraigned three Lebanese being held over alleged terrorist activities...”

In a similar issue, the *Daily Sun Newspaper* of June, 21, 2013 quoted President Goodluck Jonathan as lamenting the devilish acts of some non-Nigerians against Nigeria thus: “... The president said the development had confirmed government position that the insurgencies witnessed in the country had nothing to do with religion but activities of internationally backed terror groups determined to destabilize the nation.”

Many other reports which space do not permit abound on this vexed issue of outsiders unleashing terror on Nigeria, which reinforces the need to spiritedly monitor the borders and the immigration officers to put in more efforts.

Conclusion

Attempts have been made in this paper to draw security knowledge from traditional Yoruba government for the purpose of informing the leaders and the led in Nigeria on the need to join hands together and check criminals giving Nigerians sleepless nights.

Recommendation

Based on the findings in this paper, the following recommendations are suggested: Nigerians should be proactive in giving security information that can check criminals. A realization that the security agents cannot be everywhere, every time should be realized.

Contemporary Nigerians should learn from Yoruba traditional society by being keepers of peace and security in their families. An undeniable fact is that the criminals do not descend from heaven but belong to one family or the other.

The law enforcement agents responsible for border and immigration issues should intensify efforts in prevention of illegal immigrants and importation of crime weapons into the country.

Legally formed community police also known as vigilante groups to check criminals should be encouraged. However, they should operate within the ambit of the law.

References

- Balogun, O.A. (2009). In defence of the “living dead” in traditional African thought: The Yoruba example. *Philosophy of International Journal of Philosophy*. 36(1) 10-12.
- Fadipe, N.A. (1970) *The Sociology of the Yoruba*. Ibadan: Ibadan University Press.
- Daily Newswatch (2013). Police arrests 7 cultists. *Daily Newswatch*, Friday, July, 12. Pg 9.
- Daily Sun (2013). Kano arms seizure: FG arraigns three Lebanese. *Daily Sun*, Friday, June 21. page 6.
- Daily Trust (2012). Budget: Security vote shoots up to N1 trn. *Daily Trust*. Friday, October 12.pg 3.
- Daily Trust (2013) Insurgency: Nigeria is at War- President Jonathan. *Daily Trust*, Wednesday, May 15. front page.
- Daily Trust (2013) Police arrest six robbery suspects in Osun. *Daily Trust*, Tuesday, July 23. pg 6.
- Daily Trust (2013) Nasarawa cult killings: Parents of slain SSS men demand justice. *Daily Trust*, Tuesday. July 30.pg 4.
- Gbadegesin, S. (1991) *African philosophy, Traditional Yoruba Philosophy and Contemporary African realities*. Chicago: Gateway.
- Johnson, S. (1921) *History of the Yoruba*. Lagos: CSS Limited.
- Ogunsina, B. (2006) *Sociology of the Yoruba Novel: An Introduction*. Ilorin: Integrity Publication.
- Sigh, Y.K. (2007) *Philosophical Foundation of Education*. New Delhi: APH Publishing Corporation.
- The Free On-line Merriam Webster Dictionary (n.d) Retrieved on August 4, 2013 from www.merriam-webster.com/./peace.
- The Oxford Dictionary of Sociology* (2006). New Delhi: Academic (India) Publishers.