



# Culture as a Means of De-escalating Conflict and Maintaining Peace

Akintayo Sunday Olayinka<sup>1,2\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Department of Intercultural Studies, The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso, Ogbomoso, Nigeria; <sup>2</sup>Virtual Visiting Research, Global Affairs and Sustainable Development Institute (GASDI) & Osun State University, Osogbo, Nigeria.

## ABSTRACT

Most works in peace studies concern interventions in conflict situations—such as conflict management and projects seeking to sustain peace after a conflict like conflict resolution and peace education. However, using a peace lens, this paper affirms culture as one of the means the Yorùbá utilize to sustain peace in their society. The paper ascertains the presence of conflict and proceeds to discuss how some features of Yorùbá culture facilitate harmony. This article is based on primary research among the Yorùbá within 2014 and 2020, the bulk of which is from chapter 5 of my dissertation.

**Keywords:** Peaceful societies; Anthropology; Cultural and African studies; Yorùbá; Conflict resolution; Peace studies; Religion and Peace

## BACKGROUND

Culture has been studied in sociology, history, anthropology, religion, and cultural studies over the years. While Bauman [1], discusses culture as concept, structure, and praxis, Susman [2], discusses culture as history. According to Arnold [3], culture plays the role of sweetness and light to human community. Put in another way, Sewell Jr. [4], describes culture as providing meaning for life “the sphere devoted specially to the production, circulation, and use of meanings. To Schein [5], it has to do with long lived experience for problem solving. Williams [6], suggests culture has to do with universal values, intellectual and a particular way of life, the definition that also fits religion. Bagby [7], included race, hereditary, physical, physiological, and plants within an appropriate geographical location as contributing to the make and the culture of a people, which also constitutes the regularities found among them. To this, Bagby adds, “The shape and structure of the human foot serves to limit the possible forms of foot-gear.” So, the needs determine the wear, clothing and other arts that make up a culture, while the available plants dictate the local people’s choices of food, essential jobs, and social interaction. Most people living in riverine areas do sea

related jobs, like fishing among the Epe in Lagos State, and Ogoni people in Rivers State of Nigeria, which shape their culture of living on and around water. This implies that culture has to do with several aspects of human life, needs, practices, and make up. How then does culture speak for peace in human society?

Scholars like Kyrou [8], have examined what it takes to go beyond environmental problems into “the inherent capacities of the environment to inform and sustain peace” described as “environmental peacemaking” or “peace ecology”. Anthropologists have continued to examine Peaceful Societies (PS) (Alabama) that is, some selected tribes and communities who use their potentials within their culture to dissociate themselves from violence and resolve their conflict as quickly as possible. What features do the PS possess that facilitate their peacefulness? Like Kyrou cited above, this paper presents the capacity of a community or people to sustain its peace in the cultural and religious domains, using the Yorùbá people of southwest Nigeria to illustrate this trend. In the rest of this paper, I provide the statement of the problem, methodology, a brief description of the Peaceful Societies (PS) and culture as a cause of peace among the southwest Nigerian Yorùbá.

**Correspondence to:** Akintayo Sunday Olayinka, Department of Intercultural Studies, The Nigerian Baptist Theological Seminary Ogbomoso, Ogbomoso, Nigeria, E-mail: tolayinka@gmail.com

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## METHODOLOGY

### Statement of the problem and methodology

It has been suggested that religious violence is less pronounced in southwest Nigeria when compared with the northern states with reference to the Yorùbá tolerance and culture [9-11]. The aspect of the culture that informs peacefulness requires further investigation. This study employs empirical methods to examine the situation among the Yorùbá on religious and cultural grounds, the political and economic violence that cut across the entire Nigeria as a country notwithstanding. This study employed a survey, Focus Group Discussion (FGD) and interviews among the southwest Nigerian Yorùbá to generate its data. The data was analysed with Nvivo pro 12 to generate various nodes and themes about peacefulness among the Yorùbá, while I used thick description to develop the themes. This is primary research on how the Yorùbá manage their disputes and conflicts whilst sustaining its peace, a promising example of Peaceful Society (PS) in West Africa.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Many societies have been identified as being peaceful across the globe based on the assessments of some anthropologists [12]. 25 of the societies are discussed on the peaceful societies' webpage of the Department of Anthropology, University of Alabama, United States of America (Alabama). Among these PS are the Nubians, Amish, Semai, Batek, Birhor, Hutterites, Ju/'hoansi, Ladakhi, Lepchas, Malapandaram, Mbuti, and Paliyans. Bonta identifies 40 of them [13], while Melko, et al., identified 52, [14,15]. The differences in the figures are based on the dates covered in each study. Similarly, dates and updates are important as a community that used to be peaceful might have fallen from such a status due to some circumstances surrounding them like war and would require a new assessment for peacefulness. Melko, et al., mention a hundred years as required before a review after a community or nation had fallen from their peaceful status to assess if they could be reinstated as PS again [14,15].

A close study of the peaceful societies shows that many active PS are farmers, fruit-gatherers, fishermen and hunters, sometimes migrating within the forests while some have settled to cultivate farms [16-20]. A few of them are open to modern education but often return to their settlement to practice their valued culture, [21]. Some of them, like Ju'hoansi or Bushmen wear minimal clothing [20], while some others cherish attire they have for social contact or program [22]. The studies cover North and South America, Canada, Asia, Europe, and North and East/Central Africa. It is yet to be seen if there are examples of peaceful societies in West Africa.

It has been observed that peaceful societies often avoid anger, greed, and ostracize any deviants from their communities to retain their peacefulness [23,24]. They recognize greed as among the causes of rivalry that lead to resentment and violence, while some have a hierarchy of leadership to disseminate information, wisdom and resolve conflicts [24]. Although some of the groups or colonies sometimes show a level of deviant behaviour like

homicide [23], they feel disappointed about such and seek to project their strategies to further enhance harmony, tolerance, devalue competition and disputes from leading to further violence [17].

Some themes come out clearly under Peaceful Societies (PS) like the make of peaceful components of a society, leadership and social relations, childhood informal education, control or management of aggression, and the fear of strangers or outsiders. Melko [15], discusses the vital roles the PS leadership (or local government) play in maintaining peace in their societies. Melke [15], describes the features their governments use as:

“Workable distribution of power, establishing one of two religious policies (sic), and form some sort of flexible, permanent government ... peace can be maintained for many decades despite (or possibly because) of mediocre leadership”.

The PS may not take offence at Melke's use of mediocre to describe them; would rather consider how to reach their peace end and have their children live in safety.

What, therefore, are the mechanisms of peacefulness? Considering examples of peacefulness, the Semai are well recognized as peaceful people who are not known for physical violence, fighting, or beating their spouses [25]. When recruited by the British army in a fight against the communist insurgency, the Semai still returned to their peacefulness after the war. They cherish their culture, like the people of Tristan da Cunha, when initially displaced due to volcanic eruption in 1961 demanded to return to their island later, showing their commitment to their non-violence and self-assertion [26]. Willis' study of the Ufipa (Fipa) southwest of Tanzania shows that the Ufipa people were known to be peaceful (even as early as 1880). They became aggressive because of wars at some point preceding the arrival of the Europeans but returned to the peacefulness they had been known for later [27]. Their worldview of what it takes to be human is relevant to their return to peacefulness. The Ufipa, Batek and Kung treat their men and women equally compared to male leadership or hierarchy in some other places [28]. Many Kung women exercise some freedom by working, distinguishing edible food from other desert produces, while the Batek husband and wife make joint decisions whereas in some other groups, the structure makes male authority dominant, (Endicott). Similarly, although the Chewong recognize their boys and girls as being different physiologically, they treat their young equally with no value-related prejudices. Also, according to Lutz, the Ifaluk have learnt to control their anger but permit righteous indignation for correcting an erring member as justifiable, yet without violence. As among the Paliyan foragers, Gardner writes, “Paliyans have a system of institutions that bear upon the avoiding of violence. In the forest and now in settled villages, too, they are able to remain relatively nonviolent' [20]. What constitutes peacefulness among these societies, therefore, ranges from the management of their innate ideas to the valued and promoted culture of the people concerned.

What correlations are there between the PS and a community within a developing nation like the Nigerian Yorùbá? In as much as various conflict theories like conflict resolution and conflict

transformation have caught the attention of many peace scholars and practitioners, more recent works in anthropology like PS are also ongoing to underscore how communities keep their peace. An inquiry into more communities to explore their potential for peacefulness to contribute to peace and conflict studies is worth doing. This is to verify what variants of peace can be found in such communities and how they de-escalate tension, as a guide to reducing conflict occurrences in human societies.

Similarly, some PS have their peculiar problems like poverty, lack of regular electricity supply, and lack of connection with the outside world. Some associated strengths are loose leadership hierarchy, a productive social set-up and a communal lifestyle that discourages greed as mentioned earlier. These societies do not sometimes see some of the acclaimed weaknesses as major problems as non-native scholars often see it. How much of the PS culture correlates with or diverges from the Yorùbá acclaimed peacefulness? The following section provides the findings in the study, the attributes within the Yorùbá culture often utilized to sustain their peace.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

During my interview and focus group meetings for this study, I asked the participants to discuss their views on conflict among the southwest Nigeria Yorùbá. In-depth study of the data generated from this study led to the relevant themes discussed in this paper. The cumulative nodes/sunburst chart from the findings reveals six themes, namely:

- Yorùbá culture
- Family
- Social interactions
- Community life
- Approaches to religions' practices
- The multi-faceted nature of occasional conflicts among the Yorùbá

However, the NVivo Cumulative Hierarchy chart from the same study provides further details of the contents of each of the six themes which are lacking in the previous scholar's works on the subject. Previous studies mentioned culture and religious tolerance [29,30], while this provides what constitutes the culture and tolerance in context as shown in Figures 1 and 2.

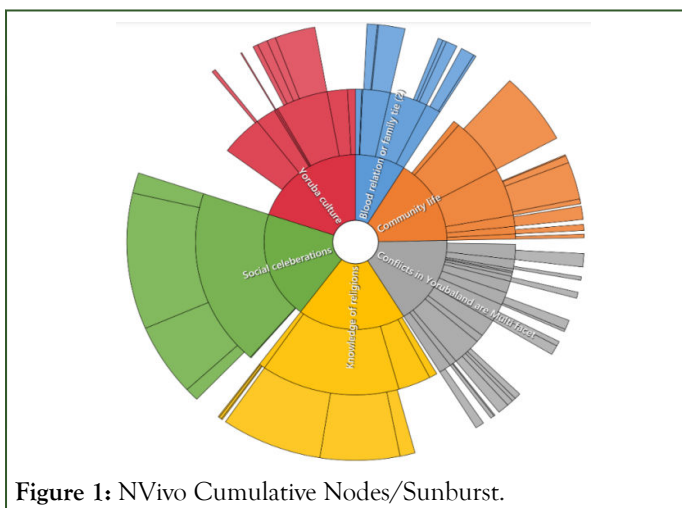


Figure 1: NVivo Cumulative Nodes/Sunburst.

The first five themes suggest what constitute the features that help the Yorùbá sustain their peace and to live in harmony, while they are faced with the sixth theme to work on whenever it appears. This suggests that what constitutes the Yorùbá culture along with some specific related themes like family, social interaction and community life were the cause of their peacefulness. Thus, a failure to handle the occasional conflicts mentioned in the sixth theme leads to violence, unless or until their leaders are proactive on each occasion to manage it to keep it brief. For the Yorùbá, the embodiment of culture often displaying social interactions, community life, family, and religious cooperation and/or understanding are useful ways of deescalating disputes and conflicts to retain peace. The following are the elaborations of the findings.

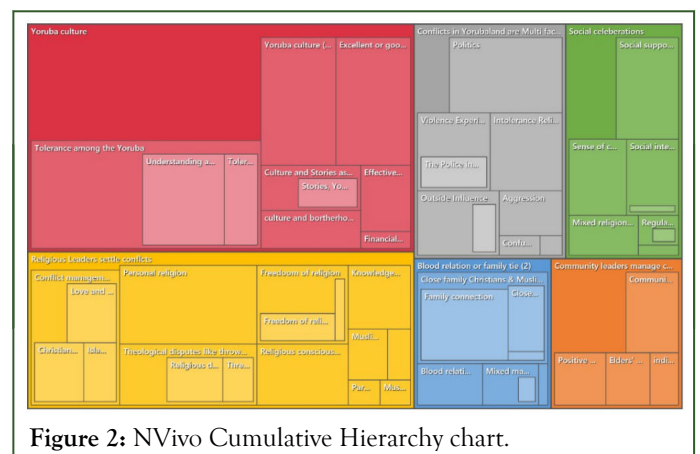


Figure 2: NVivo Cumulative Hierarchy chart.

### Multi-faceted conflict

This research shows that, like any human community, the PS inclusive, the Yorùbá experience conflicts of different sorts. This is not to diminish the strength they have displayed in seeking to maintain their harmony, especially in the religious and cultural spheres. Yet, it is worth citing some of the conflicts they have experienced over the years and few approaches used to deescalate it when possible.

**Land disputes:** Land disputes are one of the main causes of conflict among the Yorùbá. Both Wole and Ifa (FGD3) discussed some of the violent conflicts they were aware off among the Yorùbá such as the town conflicts of Ile-Ife *versus* Modakeke, the Ofa *versus* Erinle and the Saragi *versus* Odo Owa. In a separate interview, Omobo mentions land disputes, such as the Karigi and Ibadan, the Ogunmola and Shodeke, Ikirun and Obaagun boundary disputes, and the Modakeke and Ile Ife. Furthermore, Ifa noted conflicts that arose from economic, politics, and religion related circumstances. He relates economic conflicts to limited land and water resources, where family leaders have key roles to play to mediate to prevent its escalation.

Secondary sources suggest that the inability to meet the economic needs of a people had the potential to cause conflict, hence the PS often discourage greed. Like Ifa's claims on disputes over water and the economy, Grech-Madin, et al. [31], write about water diplomacy: "The maintenance of peace regarding the use of water at the local, intrastate and international levels, ... and across different ethnic groups".

Economic and resources related conflicts are becoming increasingly common in the middle belt, western and southern parts of Nigeria. Ekpenyong's work corroborates Wole and Ifa's argument on the causes of violence in southern Nigeria like disputes over land ownership, resource control, politics and social institutions like chieftaincy and power struggles [32]. Other causes of conflict Ekpenyong mentions are jealousy, corruption, environmental destruction, discrimination, and religious rivalry. PS endeavor to avoid these blemishes that disturb their tranquility, and if they fell into it, would like to regain their peaceful status as soon as possible.

**Women head covering:** A closer examination shows that the Yorùbá hardly ever engaged in violent conflicts attributed to religious differences among them. On a social ground for instance, Yorùbá women and girls wear traditional Yorùbá headgear and neck scarf casually used, and more often at important occasions regardless of their religious affiliations. Head covering of various styles and colours among Yorùbá women are for beauty, social-cultural, religious principle, and a combination of these rather than being a source of conflict. It never caused conflict over the past centuries. To southwest Nigerians' credit, Yorùbá never questioned women's use of the various cultural and religions' head covering in their individual homes, worship centres, and public places. Nonetheless, the peaceful relations on religious grounds waned a bit in some places like Ilorin (Kwara State), Osogbo, Ejigbo, and Iwo (Osun State) and Sepeteri (Oyo State) when some leaders came at the forefront of enforcing their own religion's headgear practice on other people's spaces like schools established by different religion's communities. These were all resolved with time either amicably or through the law court.

A careful study reveals disputes over head and neck scarf use led to violence in some places (EBHS) [33]. My interview reveals that the EBHS case was subsequently taken to court and the EBHS won, retaining its ethos to use only their school uniform in the school premises. The rejection of the use of the other scarves other than their school beret cap was not because of hostility but the disposition to retain the students' outlook while on the school premises. The EBHS authority had been and would continually interact with everyone including their students who on many occasions wear the non-beret caps outside of the school premises after the school hours. The EBHS' choice was defined by the location (their school's premises) but not a rejection of other head covering styles in its entirety. Yet, adult women parents visiting the school can wear any head covering styles without the school querying them but would not allow their students to do same with the reason given above, identity and symbolism. This shows the complexity in the interpretation of concepts and symbols in religions among the Yorùbá. Conflict and how it is handled, thus calls for understanding of those involved and the issue on the ground.

The restoration of peace like Ejigbo, (EBHS) [33], shows understanding from both sides as they understood the problem as, not the clothing, because they all accept the use of head covering of various types but the symbol each brand represents within their community, and different establishments. After the EBHS crisis and the subsequent court verdict, the parents

agreed to take responsibility for any act of vandalism or violence perpetrated by themselves and/or their children and wards on the school premises. While the case was settled in court, the sustenance of the peace to live up to the school's ethos, to abide by the school rules and the official uniform require the support of all parents within their larger community. A similar crisis about head covering in schools took place in Ilorin Kwara State recently, Edward [34], that attracted much attention. The alleged unhelpful role of sectional leaders suggests leaders are responsible for the peace and/or conflict in their communities.

**Indigenous Yorùbá African festival:** The inability to circumnavigate the differences in culture and values can cause disunity and strain. Ifa (FGD3) suggests that inability to adapt to the changes in society and the cultural dynamics have the potential to cause disunity such as a festival prohibiting women's movement at night and sometimes during the day. While my survey identified Oyo town, the interview located Iwo as places with records of conflicts relating to this example, and Ogbomoso had it in the past but now live above such conflicts (FGD1; Anike). Omobo mentioned another example in Ila-Orangun which they were able to resolve quickly.

Community structures have been used to resolve conflicts. The constructive use of language is noted as instrumental for conflict resolution, and peace maintenance through an understanding of one another's values and tolerance among the Yorùbá. Thus, misinformation, misinterpretation, and misrepresentation of other peoples' ideas or values should be avoided, while tolerance must be encouraged in a community that seeks peace or wants to maintain their peacefulness. The communities that can handle information, and understand their neighbours recover from conflicts more easily.

Considering secondary sources to support this finding, it has been suggested that the colonial role had destabilizing effects on Nigerians, especially on their leadership structures, which affects badly the Southwest and Southern Nigerians (the Yorùbá inclusive) [35-37]. Such destabilization affects the flow of authority among their leaders and impairs their sense of judgement. While the Western-educated Yorùbá have tried to salvage the situation, Vaughan [38], argues that there are still a lot of ground to cover. Martineau [39], equally proposes a re-visit of the positive roles of the kings within African societies. Ekpenyong suggests solutions to conflict, like dialogue, forgiveness, promotion of social justice. Programme for Christian-Muslim Relations in Africa has done a lot in conflict resolution training and engagement of African community leaders in dialogue conferences, (PROCMURA).

In short, scholars have identified the avoidance of jealousy and greed as areas of strength exhibited among the established PS. While land disputes, enforcement of other people's religious tradition on private institutions, and weak leadership have caused the people untold hardship, responsible leaders often try their best to manage conflict rather than complicating it. The narratives in this study show that the Yorùbá are not free of conflict or disputes but often display the ability and capacity to de-escalate it to retain their peace in the long run and should be given consideration as a contribution to peace research.



## Culture of tolerance, values and understanding

In the cumulative hierarchy chart shown above, the Yorùbá culture, social interactions, community life, family and religion appear as particularly relevant to how the Yorùbá maintain harmony among their people. The features that support the Yorùbá culture in this study are tolerance, understanding, and respect; storytelling and Yorùbá sayings; effective and good communication; brotherhood; financial support for one another; and good interpersonal relations. These features, when given attention, support the Yorùbá to retain their peacefulness. These are like Giddens' claims [40]:

“Culture consists of the values the members of a given group hold, the norms they follow, and the material goods they create. Values are abstract ideas, while norms are definite principles or rules which people are expected to observe. Norms present the ‘does’ and ‘don’t’ of social life”.

Culture is used variously to capture size and nature of the society, according to Altman, et al., [41], culture represents:

“Behaviors of a group or society ... indicate that cognitions, feelings, and behaviors are shared among a group of people in a consensual way... These shared beliefs, values, and styles of behavior are passed on to others, especially children, and that the socialization and education of new members of the culture help pre-serve consensus from one generation to the next”.

Sewell Jr. describes culture in the context of “learned behavior which includes myths and customs. Going by Giddens’ definition and reference to others, the values, norms-rules, and social life described as the culture relate to the way in which the Yorùbá respond to crises. While these could be applicable to any other human society, the crucial thing is the content of these norms and what social life implies, which often differs in detail from one culture to another. To this Giddens argues:

“A culture has to be studied in terms of its own meanings and values—a key presupposition of sociology. In sociology, we have to ensure that we remove our own cultural blinkers in order to see the ways of life of different peoples in an unbiased light”.

I noted the meanings and values; and avoiding the imposition of the researcher’s culture on the subject. Meaning as an embodiment of culture complements Sewell Jr.’s description of culture. Meanings and values are found in the day-to-day life expressions of the subject, which I attempt to clarify. However, the issue of the imposition of a foreign researcher’s culture does not apply, as I am indigenous to the culture and speak the language of the research participants.

I want to bring up some examples from the Senegalese context:

“Three Senegalese professors explain to the UW-Madison group several reasons for the peaceful relations between the country’s religions. First, there is the culture of Teranga, or hospitality, a deeply engrained Senegalese value taught at home and in school, said Badara Sall ... added Khadidiatou Diallo “you don’t see that person as an enemy, but as a brother who at least shares the same culture” [42].

To the Senegalese, Teranga, (hospitality) is the key factor for mutual love to sustain peace in their communities regardless of

their social or religious affiliation [43], all portraying the common Senegalese Teranga virtue. To the Yorùbá, cultural and communal life expressed in the form of tolerance, respect, effective communication and brotherhood or family (Èbi) among the Yorùbá sustain their peacefulness. Likewise, financial support for family and neighbours has social and economic relevance. Culture with all its embodiment, therefore, is a key to the Yorùbá’s peacefulness.

## Linguistic heritage, literature, music, and storytelling

One of the features of the Yorùbá culture that facilitates peacefulness is their use of language. This common language has become a binding entity, even when they are in a foreign land as Ope in the Focus Group Discussion 3 (FGD3). Giddens describes:

“cultures” as equivalent to the “higher things of the mind”—art, literature, music and painting ... Culture refers to the whole way of life of the members of a society. It includes how they dress, their marriage customs and family life, their patterns of work, religious ceremonies and leisure pursuits”.

The Yorùbá culture embraces all the areas that Giddens suggests in the above quote, like literature, music, painting and even more. Thinking of literature, publishing in Yorùbá language did not come on a platter of gold. The Yorùbá were faced with opposition from the colonial masters by strongly warning them to desist from publishing. While the Christian missionaries helped with literacy, the colonial masters opposed the citizens publication in their language. They did many protests before the missionaries (Christian Missionary Society) eventually intervened to support the Yorùbá to publish in their own language, their first publication being a Newspaper, [30,44,45]. This is separate from the translation and publication of the Bible in the Yorùbá language supervised by the missionaries.

**Music:** The Yorùbá used music written in their language to combat social injustices, diffuse tension and uphold their cherished heritage. Adasa Blessing at a radio station in Ibadan suggests that certain music and songs express norms that support the unity of the Yorùbá people. Some of the artists are well respected for their social, moral, storytelling, funeral, and praise songs. These musicians include King Sunny Ade, Ebenezer Obey, Kayode Fashola, and Orlando Owoh. Kayode Fashola and Ogundare Foyanmu produced music on social life and ethics, while Fẹ̀la Anikulapo Kuti concentrated on justice and politics [46]. Kuti is a well-known Yorùbá artist, a humanist and a musician who confronted exploitation, injustices, and other forms of maladministration in politics and religion across Africa and globally.

These musicians promote the Yorùbá worldview and social life with their popularity and the messages their music conveys. The music helps the masses to retain some aspects of the Yorùbá culture like its worldview of peace, ethics, social life, and courage. These songs are accepted amongst most Christians, Muslims, and the Isese Yorùbá religion's practitioners, and are used at social functions such as wedding, naming ceremonies,

dedication of new houses, and birthday parties with social commentaries and moral lessons.

**Deep thoughts:** Concerning the control and prevention of conflict, certain sayings help to defuse disputes and prevent its degeneration into violence. Wole (FGD3) points out some which are utilized by the Yorùbá to preserve their peaceful relations, like, Yorùbá ní àròjinlẹ̀, meaning “the Yorùbá have deep thoughts or foresight”. The àròjinlẹ̀ takes place between the thoughts and the action; before an action is taken. According to Wole, ‘They think of where and how an activity will end, and they are conscious of their roles if it is a joint activity with somebody else. They ask, “Should I be involved in this?”’

To illustrate this, Wole gave an example of an incident in Ibadan of how he was confronted by a man and a woman that he was disturbing them by his early morning (short) call for prayers. He apologized and reminded them of how they also disturbed him with their weekly (long and loud) worship program. The three showed understanding and amicably resolved their intolerance, and since began to be thoughtful and considerate in their interaction within their community.

This is an example of how the Yorùbá people use deep thoughts and seek opportunities to resolve disputes amicably before it degenerates into conflict. Such incidence could have ended in violence if it occurred among intolerant groups. This positive handling of provocation resembles the comments I received from Odu in an interview. It also illustrates Ade’s example of the Yorùbá youth’s protest at the Oyo State governor’s office in Ibadan about the Fulani that led their cattle to eat up their farm produce rather than taking the law into their own hands.

The above narrative shows sincerity, understanding, and the use of complaint procedures, good leadership, and empathy. The dispute was resolved due to the respect the complainants had for an elder within their community. The elder’s ability to handle the complaint, addressing other co-leaders is gratifying. The incident did not degenerate to reporting to the police, an illustration of an Alternative Dispute Resolution (ADR) among the Yorùbá.

Landlords’ association take similar leadership role to resolve disputes and discuss developmental projects in Yorùbá communities. The landlords’ association activity is like the community leaders’ meeting buttressed by Wole, Odu, and Ade in Ilorin (FGD3). However, the Sepeteri town community meeting ceased to be held (FGD2) prior to this research’s fieldwork in 2016, the probable reason for the collapse of the harmony in Sepeteri within that decade.

**Kind words:** Another example of Yorùbá’s strategy for keeping the peace is effective communication. This is seen in the Yorùbá saying, *peḷe lakò, o labo* loosely translated as apology could be said in an acceptable or unacceptable arrogant way, the idea shared in Dayo’s narration (FGD3). This implies that one can apologise in a genuine way or in an arrogant and unacceptable way. This reflects thick description, relevant to the Yorùbá worldview. Ade, a radio station manager discusses the wisdom sayings which basically inform the Yorùbá’s readiness to tackle problems before it escalates. These include *o nbo loke, awon la*

*n dee de*, translated loosely as “when an object is falling from the top or from the roof, the net should be set to collect or catch it”. That is, when you have privileged information about an impending problem or danger, you must prepare to tackle it. This saying prompts the Yorùbá to get ready for any danger they are warned of, such as a plan to cause harm. In support of this, the FGD1 emphasizes the role of the elders in settling disputes, with Taiwo (FGD1) citing community interventions and their leader’s cooperation to intercept some reported invaders from entering their town.

Ade confirms that the Yorùbá seek to know their neighbours and describe them by their name, house, compound, and town. If in doubt, they will ask, *omo ile bo ni o*, meaning: “which house are you from?” According to Ade, if you know the family name of a young person initiating a conflict, the youth will be careful of continuing in such track. The Yorùbá say, *eni ti mọn iya ati baba re, agara daa*, meaning, “permitting a troublemaker know you have identified them, and their parents’ houses can curtail their misbehaviour”. The Yorùbá are proactive in challenging troublemakers and reorientating them to seek peace. Family connections and knowing people by name in each community help to curb violence and inappropriate behaviour.

The Yorùbá use *ojù kàa mò*, meaning “he/she has been identified”, *ifinisùn* meaning reporting, and *ibániwí*, meaning discipline to keep their communities safe under the control of their responsible community leaders. Reporting to elders or a designated leader, a form of complaint’s procedure, is followed by a rebuke or discipline by a body of elders. Odu suggests:

“Rebuke often means a verbal and facial expression of discontent with the persons” behaviour, while discipline may be physical, like being given a fine or jobs to do on the farm (the community and leaders’ farms) without pay ... offences often have negative effects on the community’s good name (Interview)”.

Equally, Odu suggests the concept of *omọluàbí* is cherished among the Yorùbá. *Omọluàbí* concerns the expected behaviour of a responsible Yorùbá person, regardless of gender, age, social, religion or economic status. Even though the *omọluàbí* qualities are seldom written, they are transmitted through Yorùbá storytelling, such as the respect for elders, respect for human life, appropriate greetings, and honesty, promise-keeping, good financial responsibility, caring for children and the elderly, truthfulness, shamefulness of identifying with a thief, industriousness, and love for neighbours. These qualities are reflected in the primary school Yorùbá literary texts titled *Alawiyé Apa Kinni titi de Apa Kẹfa*. Which numerous Yorùbá pupils have used for many decades. This literature could help to promote these ideals in the early childhood education and ethical development of the children thereby making further contributions to peace culture and peace education in a broader context.

**Proactive intervention and prevention of violence:** On whether the Yorùbá express their feelings as they seek to maintain a harmonious community, Ade suggests that they have the right to

express their feelings and do so often. He discusses scenarios in which some Yorùbá protested at the Ogbomoso FM Parrot Radio Station and at the governor's office in Ibadan about the Fulani (Bororo sect) who led their cattle to eat up their farms. The elders took the initiative to report and protested Bororo's invasion of some Ogbomoso farmlands. In a later telephone conversation with a resident of Ilorin, there was another report of a similar Bororo invasion of farmland where the farmer was unable to challenge the invaders for the fear of being attacked or killed. Non-settler Fulani herders have been accused of violent crimes against many local farmers in Nigeria. These violent Fulani are known to be different from the already settled Fulani who have been living among the Yorùbá for many decades.

In contrast, Saratu, a secondary ethnics in Ilorin (FGD3), contested the Yorùbá's harmony, declaring it as timidity because she was cautioned for rebuking a woman who allegedly lost her child through carelessness. The FGD3, however, suggested that the Yorùbá were not timid as much as Saratu has suggested but were rather considerate and thoughtful with the *omólúàbí* and *alàròjìnḽ* attributes, being sympathetic with the bereaved mother rather than cause her more pain or sadness through criticism.

The invasions of various farmlands by strange herders and the killing of farm owners were high during the fieldwork of this study and data processing from 2016 till 2020. Wole Soyinka (a Nobel Laureate) disclosed the readiness of the Yorùbá Ogun state local hunters to defend their people in case of future trespassing and attacks in their communities, [47]. However, three years later, some Ogun State people became refugees in the Republic of Benin neighboring country [48], implying the gravity of the attack on the Yorùbá in their homeland by foreign herders. The southwest governors thus launched a joint local security unit called "*Amotekun*" to support the police to secure their people [49]. The ability of the Yorùbá to resolve their conflicts and retain peace has to do with their understanding, values, leadership, and the linguistic heritage of their culture. Elders' initiatives and proactive leadership are essential to curb violence and injustices in every community, while a lack can degenerate to loss of life, unplanned migration, and violence or self-defence.

Considering secondary sources on language in a sociological context, Giddens writes "No one disputes that possession of language is one of the most distinctive of all human cultural attributes, shared by all cultures". The harmony observable among the Yorùbá in their day-to-day community interaction has to do with their understanding, values, and use of language in their culture, which also link to their tolerance of religious differences in their society. Similarly, the Yorùbá's understanding and the idea, of family, with their expressions concerning *Ẹbí* (family) support harmony and conflict de-escalation, thereby affirming Akinjogbin's family theory [50]. However, this research takes the *Ẹbí* theory further by unlocking other linguistic features that have contributed immensely to the unity of the Yorùbá.

Wenden bases his argument on the "theories of critical linguistics", arguing that linguistic factors should be considered while handling problems associated with social and ecological violence.

"Viewing language, not as a neutral medium for the description of reality but as actively shaping and giving meaning to human experience. It argues that the linguistic factor is taken into account in the analysis of and prescription for problems deriving from social and ecological violence that challenge contemporary societies. To that end, it outlines the components of a linguistic framework that illustrates how language communicates ideologies, which shape group attitudes and justify social practices that sustain the use of such violence", (Wenden).

Also important is how "language communicates ideologies", which in turn has a direct impact, positive or destructive on society. The findings in this study complements Wenden's, showing how the positive use of language in day-to-day communication and in music has influenced the peace-sustaining culture of the Yorùbá over the years. Wenden suggests:

"Despite the multifaceted role language plays in promoting direct and indirect violence, activities that would develop the linguistic knowledge and critical language skills for understanding how discourse shapes individual and group beliefs and prompts social action are conspicuously absent from peace education" [51].

Wenden's [52], work is relevant to this study, arguing for the inclusion of what shapes an individual and group beliefs, which have roles played in peacefulness and peace education. The positive use of language to promote peace and de-escalate tension should be given consideration and further explored in peace studies.

Types of Yorùbá sayings to support peace are not exhaustive. They are useful for understanding Yorùbá's thoughts, worldview regarding disputes, de-escalation, and how they sustain peace in their community. These restrain the Yorùbá's response to conflict, to maintain harmony and more potent when passed on to the younger generation through oral traditions and *via* the Yorùbá literature used in schools, the evening moonlight (or bedtime) stories, and the media. An example of how language is used to promote peace is found in the Yorùbá *Ẹbí* theory.

### ẸBÍ as a family bond

The idea of family bond or *Ẹbí* is used amongst Yorùbá in many ways, biologically as well as in social contexts and sometimes with the aim to pacify them in a time of conflict. Akinjogbin [53], puts forward the *Ẹbí* theory into academic debates, and the subject has been discussed widely by many scholars [54-56]. The clue behind *Ẹbí* is that the Yorùbá view themselves as a family, an idea which permeates their society with potential to ease tension in times of conflict. Lateef suggests: "There are hardly any large extended families in Yorùbáland without mixed religions". His brother follows a different religion from his and get on with each other very well, as reported in an interview. Lateef's case is one of a biological connection, a good example of the Yorùbá religious freedom and tolerance. Many examples of such were provided by Iya Wasiu, Kunle, Lanre and Omobo in the interview and the focus group meetings.

The situation differs in the northern part of Nigeria, where religious conversion is tagged "apostasy" and could attract an



informal, illegal mobbing/death sentence. Illegal, as such violence against a convert is not officially approved by the Nigeria Judiciary or legal system. Similarly, according to the FGD3 and Lateef, differences in religion among the Yorùbá of the same parents do not lead to physical violence and there is no evidence of apostasy-related violence among the Yorùbá.

The Yorùbá claim to see themselves as *Ẹbí* (family) or siblings and would seek to resolve disputes amicably or the elders involved in dispute resolution would call their attention to the family bond to seek reconciliation and peace. The idea of the family kept Lateef and his brother in harmony after his brother's conversion to another religion. This is an incredible relationship when viewed from a global religious context. A higher education in religions has not been found to impair the peacefulness of a people rooted in peaceful cultural system.

Iyabo mentioned the hospitality she received during her travel to another part of Yorùbáland for her university admission examination. Her host did not know her prior to her arrival yet she spent the night with the host like a family, enjoying free accommodation and feeding for the night. Mufu (FGD3) thus, suggests *om̩ iyá kanna*, the idea of treating neighbours as they would if they were of the same mother is rooted in the Yorùbá tradition. This predated the advent of Islam and Christianity, but the two religions have similar teachings about love for neighbours, so they acclimatized easily among the Yorùbá. The three religions: the Yorùbá religion, Islam and Christianity have retained the concepts of *om̩ iyá kanna* and *Ebi* theory as potent uniting forces for harmony and to resolve disputes. Mufu suggests a similar concept as *om̩ bàbá kanna ni wá*, meaning we are children of the same father. The concepts are used same way as *Ẹbí* family theory for conflict resolution to pacify the aggrieved party to see the other as family and accept reconciliation.

**Evolution of other related concepts:** Some everyday Yorùbá sayings contribute to harmony building and peace maintenance. The idea is used in many Yorùbá communities to pacify people in conflict and to bring an end to disputes, reminding the aggrieved of their common parenthood and the need to resolve their conflicts. This household conflict de-escalation and management strategy is also effective among Yorùbá Christians and Muslims, as they interpret motherhood and fatherhood in connection with Adam and Eve in their religions traditions. They both adopt biblical Eve as the mother in the Yorùbá *Ẹbí* theory. FGD3 in Ilorin town and FGD1 in Ogbomoso highlight this connection. When the Ilorin FGD3 refers to Eve as the mother in *Ẹbí* theory, I challenged them (for a thicker description) to explain how the idea of Eve as a primordial mother comes into their conflict resolution mechanism. The use of Eve by both Christian and Muslim Yorùbá complements the Yorùbá *Ẹbí* theory as it is both relevant and useful in reconciliation and peace talks. The idea of family is not the only concept used in conflict resolution among the Yorùbá but is the main one the academia employed in the debate. The community elders seek other relevant concepts of relationship they can use to persuade parties involved in a conflict to resolve it amicably. In that sense, a shared fatherhood is affirmed to persuade those with same father but different mothers to resolve their conflicts.

The peacemaker can affirm the common household to dissuade those raised in the same large/compound house from conflict. In a similar way, *Ẹbí* (family ties) is used either biologically or primordially. Peacemakers seek a relevant connection to affirm to help people in disputes see what they have in common and regain their harmony.

**Childhood education among Peaceful Societies (PS):** How does family life look like among peaceful societies? The answer to this question is found in their ability to pass on their cherished values and knowledge to the younger generation. Bieseke, et al., [57], study among the Kung hunter-gatherers identify older people (often illiterates) as sources of knowledge, values, and culture for younger people, (the grandchildren). The older people provide an informal leadership role as mentors, make economic contributions by providing the knowledge of the local flora and fauna, and various skills needed for adult life [57]. The Yorùbá also teach their young morals, prohibitions, family related skills like drumming, crafts, farming, palm and groundnut oil production, petty trade, and weaving. The Kung diverts the attention of children to other activities whenever they are quarrelling to diffuse the situation, (Draper) just as many Yorùbá do [58-61].

Fry's study among the Zapotec communities in Oaxaca in Mexico substantiates the indispensable roles of adult in the upbringing of the young in a communal society [8,62].

"The Zapotec children of San Andrés and La Paz imitate the behaviors of their elders, especially their parents. They increasingly engage in behavioral patterns that are accepted, expected, and/or rewarded by other community members" [24].

Fighting among adults corresponds to the children's attitude to fighting. San Andrés children watch their adults fighting on various occasions and the children and teenagers also fight. On the contrary, fighting is unacceptable among the La Paz adults, hence their children also shun fighting with one another:

"If they should become involved in a physical confrontation, they are likely to separate of their own accord. Husbands in La Paz tends not to beat their wives. La Paz men treat women with greater respect and are not nearly as jealous or possessive as San Andrés men on several other occasions, I heard La Paz parents telling children to cease play-fighting" [24].

Parents play a major role in mentoring children for peacefulness. So, it is that early childhood education and role modelling by parents or community, mostly informally, play a role in the formative years of a child, their value formation and future attitude to peacefulness [63-68].

## CONCLUSION

This paper provides an illustration of peaceful societies from a West African culture among the Yorùbá of southwest Nigeria. It is an elaboration of previous scholars' works that identified the Yorùbá as a tolerant people. Those earlier studies mentioned culture as contributing to the Yorùbá's tolerance although never associated it with any established peaceful societies.



A use of thick description in this research to further study peacefulness and culture reveals among the Yorùbá certain aspects of their culture as useful means of de-escalating tension and keeping the peace. The relevant embodiment of the Yorùbá culture that enhances peacefulness are the dynamism in the use of the Yorùbá language, their values, family connection in the form of an expanded *Èbí* theory, children up-bringing, songs, complaints procedures and reporting of offences. These form the epitome of good manners, a manifestation of the expected virtues within the Yorùbá community.

Whereas peacefulness can be sustained by several connected features and values taught sometimes informally as demonstrated among the established PS, a constant watch to overcome obstacles to peace is necessary to retain such status. How a society like the Yorùbá respond to outside aggression, and violence on their community is an area that can be further researched.

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