

THE ROLE OF LIBRARIES IN THE EDUCATION OF PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper addresses the relevance of Library in the resolution of peace and conflict in a society caught in the web of multi-ethnic dichotomies. The paper also highlights the role of the library with a view to reshaping Nigeria's national ideology, social coherence and continued co-existence through peace and conflict resolution. Libraries are very significant institutions when social conflicts arise. In research regarding conflict and peace, there is well known theory that conflicts are also based on deficiency of information. In this respect, the librarian's professional ingenuity to propagate proper information for the resolution of peace and conflict to reconcile the differences in our diversified society was also examined.

INTRODUCTION

The study of peace and conflict has become a global imperative due to the mere fact that the two relate to the conditions that define and shape human existence and well-being in the present world. The conditions that threaten peace and security are proliferating, making necessary the need to understand those conditions and the means of transforming them. The conditions for conflict and insecurity appear to have found fertile ground in West Africa and particularly in Nigeria. Shadrack has observed that for a long time, even though African Countries have faced different forms of conflict, peace education and peace research have languished behind, irrespective of the progress recorded in other parts of the world. Thus, African conflicts were studied by scholars from outside with foreign academic and theoretical lenses that did not fit or understand the African experience.¹ The backwardness of peace and conflict studies also means that the resources and institutions for conflict management have remained underdeveloped. These have put Africa in a poor position to respond to her own peace and conflict challenges, thereby creating a dependence on reluctant foreign interveners and their resources or institutions. From the foregoing, the role of library in the education/management of peace and conflict resolution is a fundamental one. The library ought not to be only a depository for requisite resource materials/information (book or non-book form) that may be consulted by users or dispute resolution agencies in the resolution of peace and conflict but its librarian should be an active participator in the education of peace and conflict resolution. Libraries are preservers of and custodians of human knowledge in which history is retained in current form. They play a very key role in all aspect of necessary education. Libraries are very significant institutions when social conflicts arise. In research regarding conflict and peace, there is well known theory that conflicts are also based on deficiency of information.

OVERVIEW OF PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION

Bagshaw notes that conflict is a fact of life, in organizations as well as other areas of life, as people compete for jobs, resources, power etc. Conflict by definition, is an intrinsic and inevitable of human existence. It is argued that conflict has an ontological basis in human needs, and it is the denial which causes violence or re-solvable difference to degenerate to violence.² The concept of conflict, its management and resolution have led to terms

¹ Shadrack, G. (2006) *Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa*, Ibadan: Spectrum pp.10-68.

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such as peacemaking, conflict prevention, third party intervention and the focus on mediation and negotiation, preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping, peace enforcement and peace building. Cases of misinformation, wrong information or simply missing information enhance disparity in opinion and social difference.

The heart of conflict resolution is the management of conflict. The Encyclopedia of Sociology (1992:288) states, "Conflict theory explains social structure and changes in it by arguing that actors pursue their interests in conflict with others and according to their resources for social organization". Inger wrote that "Conflict resolution is a constructive approach to interpersonal and intergroup conflicts that help people with opposing positions work together to arrive at mutually acceptable compromise."³ However, he recognized that several factors underlie conflict. These include issue control, issue rigidity and issue centrality. The more important an issue is to someone (and how much they desire to control it) may ultimately decide how severe the conflict will become. Shadrach holds that conflict should be defined within the context of three related dimensions. The first is the distant past, which may span back to centuries or decades. The second is the immediate past, which shows the deterioration in the relationship among parties. And the third is the current event that remains fresh in the mind of the aggrieved party.⁴

THE NEED FOR PEACE AND CONFLICT EDUCATION

The UNESCO Charter made the invaluable assertion that since wars originate from the minds of men (and women), it is in the same minds that the defenses of peace and conflict resolution can be constructed. This therefore means that deliberate efforts must be made to ensure that everyone is educated and enlightened about peace and conflict resolution and young persons made the vanguards of this course.

Children and young persons (youths) have been repeatedly used as instruments to fight wars for reasons which they have very little knowledge about. In many of Africa's conflicts like those in Angola, Mozambique, Liberia, Sierra Leone and back home in the Niger delta Crisis of Nigeria, the phenomenon of child soldiering and youth violence became a menace that needed to be tackled. Galtung asserts that peace education sets out to redress this culture of violence and aggression and to inculcate values of non violent change among young persons and adults alike. It opens up people's eyes and minds to see and understand actions taken and their consequences. Children and young persons have to know that peace is and guard themselves against embracing or being used to create violence⁵. Early peace education is vital in making it life-long for all citizens. Experience is not always the best teacher; children and young persons must not be exposed to war and violence to be able to learn to live in peace. Through peace education human beings could be taught to suppress their instinctive nature of being violent and instead strengthen their spirit oriented nature so that it becomes dominant. Children and young persons are doorways to a peace continuum. Peace education is the deliberate attempt to educate children and adults in the dynamics of peace and conflict resolution skills in homes, schools and communities, using the library and the librarian as pivotal points of learning. Overall, peace and conflict education is an investment in the younger generations, and attests to the fact that by educating younger minds in the virtues of peace and conflict, the skills of conflict analysis and management, identification of conflicts and sources of conflicts, etc, a more peaceable future could be secured for humanity. Peace and conflict education is one means of bringing rational awakening of humanistic, aesthetic and ethical values which are the pre-condition for peace in individuals, family, society, national and international life. Education for peace and conflict resolution sets out to let people know that we do have choices to everyday action. It is possible for us all to live in harmony with one another

LIBRARIES AND THE RESOLUTION OF PEACE AND CONFLICT

If there is an institution one hears so much about so often but which is least understood by what it stands for, it is the 'library'. This fact becomes obvious when one reads from the newspapers the way societies, individuals and proprietors of private institutions, even clubs clamour to build one type of library or the other as part of a

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² Bagshaw, M. (1998) *Conflict Management and Mediation: Key Leadership Skills for the Millenium*, London: Oxford Press.

³ Inger, M. (1991) *Conflict Resolution Programmes in Schools*, New York: Eric Clearing Huose.

⁴ Shadrack, G. (2006) *Peace and Conflict Studies in West Africa*, Ibadan: Spectrum, pp.47-76.

⁵ Galtung, J. (1996) *Peace by Peaceful Means*, London: Sage, pp.5-15.

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community project in the society.⁶ However, the issue at stake is how the library/librarian has been able to organize and interpret the collection of books and other forms of recorded knowledge to impact on the broad and varying needs of the Nigerian peoples. Ranganathan, one of the foremost prolific Indian librarians, puts some measure of responsibility on the librarian through his definition of library: by tasking him to "...convert persons in his neighbourhood into a habitual library goer and reader of books". This presupposes that librarians must champion the clarion call for education in all ramifications that will guarantee development and lasting peace. However, the remarkable objective here is to have ascertained what type of education should have been more beneficial to people with a colonial past fraught with cultural, religious and economic dichotomies. Today, technologically driven education is the vogue all over the world. But for a nation with diverse socio-cultural background brought together by the whims of the colonialist to function as an entity, we believe that a form of education (PEACE AND CONFLICT RESOLUTION) that is aimed at integrating the diverse nationalities of the Nigerian nation should be pursued first and foremost.⁷ That is why it is imperative for the Librarian of this era, not only to concern himself with attracting every person in his neighbourhood to a habitual library goer and reader of books, but must be more abreast and aggressive at writing, based on the dynamics of the multi-cultural and multi-ethnic disposition of the Nigeria nation by laying emphasis on the need for peace and conflict resolution if we must co-exist as a nation. Traditionally, the libraries have been seen as depository of books and therefore the principal means of exhibiting, preserving and circulating the ideas and experiences of fellow human beings.⁸ Nevertheless, the librarian must be aware that the era of 'arm chair librarianship' is over. It is time to make oneself relevant in helping a nation at cross-road to continue to exist. To achieve this, the librarian should see himself as an intercessor, a bridge builder and a mediator between divergent cultures, religious bodies, ethnic and political polarizations through the education of peace and conflict resolution. The integrative role of libraries cannot be overemphasized, the library is one element in the total communication system by which a society is held together. This is quite frank in the sense that a society which does not enjoy good information will definitely suffer bad deformation.⁹ Therefore, to hold the units together into a common fold, minimum consensus is important. And without peace and conflict resolution knowledge, skills and attitudes inculcated into the citizenry, chaos becomes the order of the day whenever there is the minimum difference in opinion in matters relating to religion, politics, natural resources etc. as we have always experienced in the nation Nigeria. Small wonder, Orogun stressed that "the unity of the nation is being threatened by the growing phenomenon of ethnic consciousness."¹⁰ Commenting on the role and relevance of the librarian in the resolution of peace and conflict within the Nigerian polity, Bashim, emphasized that in a multi-cultural society; integration should be based on shared values and expectations to be realized through agreed methods procedures,¹¹ in essence through peace and conflict resolution agreements. The librarian with his wealth of knowledge of these shared values should seek to unravel them through relevant literature with a view to cementing the crack left on our loose political history the unholy merger as it were. Since the focus is on the relevance of libraries as an instrument of peace and conflict resolution, that could serve to disparate cultures within the entity called Nigeria, it would be most appropriate to look into the Federal Government's Policy on the relevance of library in that regard. The place of library and the role it plays in the context of education for national development has been recognized and documented in the national policy on education (1981) otherwise known as the 6-3-3-4 educational structure. It states: "Libraries are one of the most important educational service providers" As much as the Federal government of Nigeria recognizes the role of libraries/librarians in the development of education; so the onus then lies on the librarians in the various institutions to employ their professional ingenuity to write, select and acquire materials relevant to the development of peace, progress and unity which are the ideals of the Nigerian nation. The point being made here is that the fundamental task of the librarian in nation building today, is anchored on the integration of the various religious, sub-national and regional groups, enthusing in them a unified identity through the valued virtues of peace and conflict resolution education. Accordingly, it is against

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⁶ Olatoye, A. O. (1984) "What a Library is and its History", Nigerbibios, Vol. 10, p.74.

⁷ Owushi, E.N. (2003) "Coommunicate", Journal of Library and Information Science, Vol. 5 No.1.

⁸ Nkom, S.A. (1997) *Reflections and Culture and National Development in Culture and Democracy*, Zaria: ABU Press, p.59.

⁹ Amadi, A.O. (1981) *African Libraries: Western Tradition and Colonial Brain Washing*, London: Scare Crow Press, pp.27-30.

¹⁰ Orogun, P.S. (2010) "Resource Control, Revenue Allocation and Petroleum Politics", *GeoJournal* 75:459-507.

¹¹ Bashim, A.S. (1997) *Culture, National Integration and Democracy*, ABU Press, p.136.

this background that, the library is perceived to be a viable social institution of change that could be employed to integrate the various ethnic nationalities to enhance national development through the resolution of peace and conflict. Bashim wrote in this regard that, “Libraries in Nigeria have not been developed in isolation, but as part of an overall social development ...and their evolution has reflected the changing conditions of life and thought of the people”. He went further to reiterate that “it is the responsibility of the libraries to enrich the lives of the people in the society by being purveyors of recorded knowledge in books and non-book materials.”¹² It is on this note that, Amadi emphasized that, “a true African library can become a dynamic force for a pervasive and complete cultural revolution as well as an agent capable of grooming and nurturing the psychosocial renaissance of the individual, the clan, town, community and the entire nation”.¹³ For this to be meaningful, efforts must be made towards discouraging the various ethnic groups from holding firmly to their ideas at the detriment of the national interest by means of peace and conflict resolution education. It is against this background that, the Nigerian Government in 1973 established the National Youth Service Corp Scheme (NYSC). This scheme was designed to make all graduates to have one year compulsory national service in states other than their own state. This was essential to integrate peaceful co-existence attitudes in our youths and parents alike. In the same vein the Nigerian government encouraged the establishment of two Unity Secondary Schools in each state of the federation-one for boys and the other for girls. The idea was to promote peace and unity in diversity through education.

CONCLUSION

From the foregoing, it can be safely said that librarians have the armory to dislodge and combat prejudices in order to portray a positive picture that will invariably enhance peace and development in the Nigerian nation. Libraries/librarians are associated with education and information provision; therefore, there can be no better means of sending positive messages of peace and conflict resolution through massive authorship and creative awareness around and within our environment other than libraries. If they are well articulated and developed, they can go a long way to weld together disjointed and disgruntled communities, groups, disparate cultures into a truly united nation. Public libraries are there to constantly monitor the intellectual needs of society in order to maintain and propagate proper information to enable a culture of peace, progress and unity. The library is seen as a promoter of an intelligent understanding of the economic, political and social. Library collections and services should reflect societal needs and local cultures. To achieve these noble objectives, Nigerian libraries should be above politics, religion and maintain unalloyed professional neutrality in the course of providing services to the nation. Furthermore, librarians of the millennium should challenge themselves by actively participating in creating awareness and sustaining our unity in diversity. In doing that, libraries would either work in collaboration with government agencies such as National Orientation Agency (NOA) etc. Education for peace and conflict resolution sets out to let people know that we do have choices to everyday action.¹⁴ It is possible for us all to live in harmony with one another. Therefore, peace and conflict resolution education can be incorporated into the school curriculum and taught within many school subject areas including religion, history, science, social studies, literature, drama, music, art, etc. In peace and conflict education, the following programmes are suggested.

1. **Knowledge-** Since the saying goes that, ‘knowledge is power’ students should therefore know the following:
 - a. **Ourselves and others:** We should learn about our own society and culture and our place within it. Knowledge help us gain insight into the life style of others and thereby help us appreciate diversity and learn to live with others.
 - b. **Rich and poor:** All fingers are not same; so also is the distribution of wealth to the different strata of our society. Power, for instance, is another area where there is disparity of distribution. Such inequality have been the major causes of conflict in many areas within and between countries. Governments of countries have the responsibility of ensuring that power and wealth are shared equitably as much as possible.

¹² Bashim, *ibid* note 11 at 135-136.

¹³ Amadi, *op.cit.* note 9 at 1-30.

¹⁴ Ikelegbe, A. (2005) “The State, Ethnic Militias and Conflicts in Nigeria”, *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, 39(3), 490-516.

c. Our environment: Knowledge of our basic history, geography and ecology of the earth is very important as a source of world peace.

d. The world tomorrow: The youths as the leaders of tomorrow have a responsibility of investigating and reflecting on a variety of possible futures of peace.

2. Attitude: Positive attitudes are very necessary for the attainment of peace. Such attitudes affect our responses to conflict and the ways we look at and do things.

a. Human dignity: All religions value human life. Students should have the sense of worth for their own lives and that of others. Do unto others as you would want them to do to you, is the general rule.

b. Curiosity and appreciation of other's culture: Students are expected to be educated as well as in finding out more about issues related to living in a multi-cultural society and interdependence world.

c. Empathy: Knowing and feeling what others feel is the hallmark of peaceful co-existence.

d. Justice and fairness: Genuine democratic principles and processes should be put in place for a more just world. The relationship between injustice and conflict, and the fact that we all love justice, and should allow others to also enjoy justice is inevitable for peace.

3. Skills: Peace is built over time, through processes of encounter and reflection that address not practical issues of conflict but also deeper issues of relationships, human development and structural realities. Peace and conflict resolution education requires that the youth acquire skills which will equip them to be peace builders.

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