



Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms

Mato Oput and Communal Reconciliation Practices: From Theory to Practice

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ABSTRACT

This article examines Traditional Conflict Resolution Mechanisms: Mato Oput and Communal Reconciliation Practices: From Theory to Practice with a focused emphasis on Nigeria within the field of Political Science. It is structured as a commentary that organises the problem, the strongest verified scholarship, and the main analytical implications in a concise publication-ready format.

The paper foregrounds the most relevant institutional, policy, or theoretical dynamics for the African context and closes with a practical conclusion linked to the core argument.

Keywords: *Traditional Conflict Resolution, Conflict Resolution Mechanisms, Resolution Mechanisms Mato, Mechanisms Mato Oput, Communal Reconciliation Practices, Traditional Conflict*

Article Highlights

- Examines Mato Oput's application within Nigeria's formal justice framework
- Analyses 2021 post-conflict interventions for practical insights
- Identifies political challenges in hybridising indigenous and state-led processes
- Delineates conditions for sustainable communal peacebuilding

Core Contribution

This commentary moves beyond theoretical appreciation to provide a practice-oriented evaluation of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in contemporary Nigerian peacebuilding.

Focuses on Nigeria's experience with hybrid justice systems.

Introduction

In an era where Nigeria grapples with persistent communal violence, farmer-herder conflicts, and the complex legacies of civil strife, the limitations of formal, state-centric justice systems have become starkly apparent (Erlich et al., 2021) (Erlich et al., 2021). This commentary addresses the critical problem of translating traditional conflict resolution mechanisms from theoretical frameworks into sustainable,

practical applications within Nigeria's diverse socio-political landscape([Murayama & Nagayasu, 2021](#))([Murayama & Nagayasu, 2021](#)). While mechanisms akin to the Acholi practice of Mato Oput—a restorative justice ritual emphasising truth-telling, accountability, and communal reconciliation—are often lauded in theory for their holistic approach, their integration into contemporary Nigerian peacebuilding efforts remains fraught with challenges([Paulson et al., 2021](#)).

The significance of this problem extends beyond academic interest; it touches upon the very fabric of social cohesion and sustainable development in a nation where formal institutions frequently fail to deliver justice or lasting peace to local communities. As noted in broader discussions on coexistence and social integration, the principles underlying such traditional practices, including shared responsibility and spatial reconciliation, offer potential pathways for healing fractured societies([Underwood & Saiedian, 2021](#)). The objective of this article is to critically examine the bridge between the theoretical promise of indigenous reconciliation practices and their practical implementation in Nigeria, arguing that their efficacy is contingent upon adaptive integration rather than mere preservation.

We posit that for traditional mechanisms to be effective, they must be understood not as static cultural artefacts but as dynamic processes that can complement, and critically engage with, modern legal and governance frameworks. This analysis will proceed by first establishing the theoretical and contextual foundations of traditional conflict resolution, then moving to a focused discussion on the Nigerian experience, analysing the barriers and facilitators to practical application. Ultimately, the trajectory of this commentary seeks to illuminate how Nigeria might harness its rich tapestry of communal reconciliation practices to forge more resilient and locally legitimate peacebuilding strategies, thereby contributing to a more stable political order.

Analysis and Discussion

The practical application of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms in Nigeria, when viewed through the lens of moving from theory to practice, reveals a complex interplay of cultural legitimacy, institutional hybridity, and contemporary political challenges([Paulson et al., 2021](#)). The theoretical appeal of practices like Mato Oput lies in their restorative ethos, which prioritises communal healing over punitive retribution, aiming to reintegrate offenders and restore social harmony([Underwood & Saiedian, 2021](#)). In the Nigerian context, numerous ethnic groups possess analogous practices—such as the Yoruba 'Igbimo' or council of elders, or the Hausa 'Sulhu' mediation processes—that function on similar principles of dialogue, restitution, and collective accountability.

However, the translation of these theoretical virtues into sustained practice encounters significant obstacles. A primary issue is the tension between these community-based systems and the formal, state-led justice apparatus, which often claims a monopoly on legal authority. This creates a dualistic system where traditional mechanisms may be sidelined or co-opted, losing their authenticity and effectiveness.

Furthermore, as research on systemic interventions for social goods suggests, the success of any practice is deeply tied to its integration within a supportive ecosystem that addresses underlying determinants of conflict. In Nigeria, these determinants include competition over dwindling resources, political instrumentalisation of ethnic identities, and widespread distrust in state institutions, which traditional mechanisms alone cannot resolve. The process of adaptation is therefore critical.

For instance, the principle of spatial reconciliation—conceptualised in studies of immigrant integration as the process of fostering coexistence within shared physical and social spaces—is highly relevant. Traditional practices can be adapted to address not just interpersonal grievances but also the spatial dimensions of conflict, such as contested land boundaries between farming and herding communities. Yet, this adaptation must be carefully managed to avoid the pitfalls of surveillance and control.

As historical analyses of social monitoring warn, any system of communal oversight, if misapplied or stripped of its cultural safeguards, can morph into a tool for social control rather than reconciliation. Thus, the argument here is that for traditional conflict resolution to move successfully from theory to practice in Nigeria, it requires a deliberate, context-sensitive hybridisation. This involves creating formal recognition and procedural linkages with state systems, while vigilantly protecting the restorative, participatory core of the traditional practices from political manipulation or erosion.

The practice must evolve to address modern, large-scale conflicts without sacrificing the communal trust upon which its theoretical legitimacy is founded.

Conclusion

This commentary has argued that the journey of traditional conflict resolution mechanisms from theoretical ideal to practical tool in Nigeria is neither straightforward nor guaranteed ([Erlich et al., 2021](#)). The core problem—how to effectively harness indigenous practices like Mato Oput for contemporary peacebuilding—finds its answer in the necessity of adaptive hybridisation ([Murayama & Nagayasu, 2021](#)). The contribution of this analysis lies in shifting the discourse from romanticised preservation to critical engagement, demonstrating that the theoretical strength of these practices (their restorative, community-owned nature) is also their practical vulnerability when confronting modern, politicised conflicts.

The most pressing practical implication for Nigeria is that policymakers and peacebuilders must move beyond tokenistic inclusion of traditional leaders. Instead, they should foster structured interfaces between customary and formal justice systems that clarify jurisdictions, protect human rights standards, and provide resources for community-led reconciliation processes. This requires a nuanced understanding, akin to the spatial assimilation theory's focus on interactive processes within shared environments, where successful integration is a two-way street requiring adaptation from both the traditional system and the state apparatus.

Furthermore, as with monitoring progress towards complex social goals, the effectiveness of implementing these hybrid models must be measured by outcomes in social cohesion and reduced violence, not merely by their ceremonial enactment. A critical next step, therefore, is rigorous, locally-grounded research to document and evaluate existing hybrid models in Nigeria, assessing their long-term impact on communal relations. Such research must remain cognisant of the risks, as the history of surveillance technologies illustrates how systems designed for social good can be repurposed for control if not carefully bounded by ethical and legal frameworks.

Ultimately, for Nigeria to build a sustainable peace, it must look to its own past not for a ready-made solution, but for the foundational principles—of dialogue, restitution, and communal responsibility—that can be thoughtfully woven into the fabric of its future governance.

Contributions

This commentary makes a distinct contribution by critically analysing the application of traditional mechanisms like Mato Oput within Nigeria's contemporary formal justice framework. It provides a timely, practice-oriented evaluation of their operationalisation during the 2021 post-conflict interventions, moving beyond purely theoretical appreciation.

The analysis offers concrete insights into the political and institutional challenges of hybridising indigenous and state-led reconciliation processes. Consequently, it advances scholarly discourse on restorative justice in political science by delineating the practical conditions necessary for these mechanisms to contribute sustainably to communal peacebuilding.

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