

ARCHAEOLOGY AND TOURISM AS AVENUES FOR MITIGATING CONFLICT AND INSECURITY IN NIGERIA

Terngu Sylvanus Nomishan

*Department of Archaeology and Museum Studies,
Federal University Lokoja, Kogi State, Nigeria*

Email: terngu.nomishan@fulokoja.edu.ng

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-8275-3134>

Telephone: +2348051065128

Emeka E. Okonkwo

*Department of Archaeology and Tourism,
University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Nigeria*

Email: emeka.okonkwo@unn.edu.ng

ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0652-7746>

Telephone: +2348038103599

Abstract

This paper examines the potential of archaeology and tourism in mitigating conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. Nigeria is a West African country that is rich in cultural heritage and natural attractions. It is, however, faced with various conflicts and security challenges, often rooted in socio-economic disparities, ethnic tensions, and historical grievances. Archaeology, through its ability to uncover and preserve the shared heritage of diverse communities, can promote understanding and reconciliation among different ethnic groups. Tourism, on the other hand, has the potential to generate income, create employment opportunities, and foster cultural exchange, thereby addressing some of the underlying causes of conflict. By consulting relevant documents on the topic and exploring case studies and best practices from around the world, this paper highlights the role that archaeology and tourism can play in promoting peace, unity, and stability in Nigeria.

Keywords: Archaeology, Heritage, Tourism, Conflict, Insecurity, Sustainable Development.

Introduction

Archaeology provides a unique lens for understanding human history and culture. It reveals not only where and when people lived but also how they interacted with their environment and with each other. By studying cultural identities, exchanges, and changes over time, archaeology offers insights into the distinct lifeways of different peoples and societies (SAA, 2022). Unlike history, which relies on written records, archaeology delves into prehistoric eras, reconstructing the lifeways of ancient societies through the analysis of artefacts left behind. This allows archaeologists to illuminate aspects of the past that might remain invisible in written history, such as ancient religions, trade routes, and the lives of marginalised people.

The goal of archaeology is to understand how and why human behaviour has changed over time. Archaeologists seek patterns in cultural events such as the development of agriculture, the rise of cities, and the collapse of civilisations. This knowledge can help predict future cultural shifts and guide more effective planning (PHMC, 2015). In Nigeria, archaeology has uncovered and preserved a wealth of cultural heritage, from ancient artefacts to historical sites, contributing to the country's cultural identity and heritage (Gubam and Nomishan, 2021).

Tourism, meanwhile, encompasses travel for recreational or leisure purposes. A tourist is someone who travels outside their usual environment for no more than one consecutive year, engaging in activities unrelated to paid employment at the destination (Okonkwo and Ikegwu, 2013). Tourism has become a global phenomenon, with international tourist arrivals reaching 903 million in 2007, generating \$856 billion in revenue (UNWTO, 2008, as cited in Okonkwo and Ikegwu, 2013). The tourism industry, dynamic and competitive, is one of the world's fastest-growing sectors. Before the COVID-19 pandemic, it generated \$740 billion in direct travel expenditures (Nomishan, 2020).

The United Nations World Tourism Organisation (UNWTO) reported a 7% increase in international tourist arrivals in 2017, the highest growth since the 2009 economic crisis (UNWTO, 2018). In 2022, the global travel and tourism sector contributed 23% to global GDP, a decrease from 2019 due to the pandemic, but still projected to reach \$9.5 trillion in 2023 (Statista, 2023). The growth of tourism benefits economies, societies, and nations, creating opportunities for economic development and cultural exchange. Nigeria, with its diverse landscapes and cultural heritage, holds significant potential for tourism development.

However, Nigeria lags behind other African countries like Seychelles, Cape Verde, and Mauritius in harnessing these diverse tourism potentials. While travel and tourism

contribute 20%, 17%, and 12% to these countries' GDPs, Nigeria's tourism sector accounts for just 2% (World Economic Forum, 2017). The reasons for this poor performance include poor infrastructure, a lack of government prioritisation, and security concerns. This study seeks to examine how archaeology and tourism can offer innovative solutions to these challenges, promoting conflict resolution, unity, and peacebuilding in Nigeria.

Research Objectives and Methods

Conflict and insecurity in Nigeria have been persistent challenges in Nigeria since independence. This stems from various factors such as ethnic tensions, religious differences, economic disparities, and political instability. According to Akinrinmade (2013), and Kassahum (2011), cited from Gubam and Nomishan (2021), conflict and insecurity are usually seen (in every nation) when the government is not responding (positively) to the yearning and aspirations of the people. Under such circumstances, political instability becomes the resultant effect (Akinwale and Aderinto, 2011). If not curtailed, this can transform into different forms of insecurity, including electoral violence, youth militancy and/or banditry and kidnapping, and general civil unrest (Gubam and Nomishan, 2021).

In Nigeria, these challenges have resulted in widespread violence, displacement of populations, mutual suspicion, division/disunity, lack of patriotism, and loss of lives and properties, among other consequences. These issues have significantly impacted the socio-economic and cultural progress of Nigeria and its people. To this end, scholars from various fields such as anthropology, sociology, economics, political science, security, law, and history have been grappling with finding effective solutions to these ongoing and potential crises. Numerous practical and theoretical remedies have been recommended with some implemented, yet none have been completely successful. It is crucial, therefore, for archaeology and tourism professionals to engage in the social analysis of these challenges, leveraging their scientific and practical approach to societal issues.

Archaeology provides insights into the historical and cultural underpinnings of disputes, resulting in a better knowledge of the underlying difficulties. Tourism, on the other hand, has the ability to foster peacebuilding, economic development, and cultural preservation in conflict-affected regions. Despite its promise, there is a scarcity of comprehensive research into the roles of archaeology and tourism in alleviating violence and instability in Nigeria. It is from this premise that this paper becomes timely.

To this end, the study adopts a qualitative research design, to explore the potential of archaeology and tourism in mitigating conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. Data for this study has been elicited via literature review and document analysis. Relevant literature on archaeology, tourism, and conflict mitigation in Nigeria and elsewhere has been reviewed. This includes academic articles, books, reports, and policy documents. Relevant documents such as government reports, policy documents, and organisational reports were analysed to understand the current state of archaeology and tourism in Nigeria and their potential for conflict mitigation.

Brief history of conflict and insecurity in Nigeria

Since gaining independence in 1960, Nigeria has been beset by frequent social unrest and upheavals that threaten its peace, security, and cohesion. Following the end of British colonial rule, the country has experienced a wide range of conflicts, including recurrent ethno-religious violence, indigene-settler clashes, tribal wars, communal conflicts, political strife, militancy, insurgency, hate speech, and, most recently, ethnic groups issuing quit notices to one another (Itumo *et al.*, 2017). These persistent challenges are deeply rooted in the country's historical experiences and the complex nature of its statehood.

The transition of Nigeria to independence did not follow the typical path of nation-state formation. Instead, it was the result of an artificial amalgamation of diverse ethnic groups with little in common apart from the colour of their skin. This "mechanical" union ignored the various ethnic, social, and cultural affinities of the country's different groups, which has contributed significantly to its enduring tensions (Itumo, *et al.* 2017).

A number of contemporary conflicts in Nigeria can be traced back to pre-colonial migration patterns, conquests, and territorial domination. For instance, the Hausa-Fulani Muslims carried out raids, enslavement, and the forced integration of many non-Muslim communities into the emirate structure in Kaduna in the mid-19th century. This history continues to fuel ethno-religious unrest in this area, including the Sharia riots that lasted from February to May 2002 (Kazah-Toure, 1995). Efforts to reduce this tension have included the establishment of independent chiefdoms for the southern Kaduna people, separating them from Hausa-Fulani control.

Also, pre-colonial migration patterns may have influenced modern identity conflicts in Nigeria even more than pre-colonial conquest and subjugation (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). Historical migrations, often driven by wars or natural disasters, have also left a legacy of violent disputes, as original inhabitants have long discriminated against newcomers. Examples include the 18th-century migration of Oyo Modakeke people to Ife, fleeing Oyo empire conflicts; the migration of the Tiv people from northern

Cameroon into the Middle Benue Valley around the 15th century, the Hausa merchant settlement in Zangon Kataf in the 16th century; and the Jukun-Chamba migration from Cameroon to present-day Taraba State, among many others (Isumonah, 2003; Mustapha, 2000).

The introduction of colonialism in the late 19th century and the amalgamation of northern and southern parts of Nigeria in 1914 further spurred migration, particularly due to new economic opportunities in colonial urban centres. One significant example is the early 20th-century migration of southern Nigerians, particularly the Igbo and Yoruba, to northern cities like Kano, Kaduna, and Jos. However, instead of fostering integration, this movement heightened divisions, partly due to the territorial consolidation by the Muslim rulers in the North after the 1804 Fulani jihad and partly due to British colonial policies (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). The colonial policy of creating "sabon gari" (strangers' quarters) in northern cities to segregate southern migrants mirrored similar arrangements in southern cities like Ibadan and Lagos, where northern Muslim migrants were housed separately. This spatial separation became a foundation for conflict, fostering identity-based discrimination (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). Given this complex colonial history of ethnic tensions in Nigeria, it is unsurprising that the first major instances of inter-ethnic violence occurred during this period. In 1945, amidst widespread strikes and food shortages, violence broke out in the mining town of Jos between Igbo and Hausa migrants, triggered by competition over residential and commercial space (Nnoli, 1978). This violence foreshadowed further ethnic clashes, such as the 1953 riots in Kano, where Hausa and Igbo clashed over southern political parties' attempts to demonstrate in support of Nigerian independence. At least 36 people were killed, with over 200 injured (Feinstein, 1987). This event reflected northern resistance to the independence movement, driven by fears of southern dominance in a post-colonial Nigeria, and the Hausa community's resentment of Igbo economic success in Kano.

The 1953 Kano riots were a precursor to the widespread ethnic violence that would follow, particularly the anti-Igbo massacres of 1966, which contributed to the outbreak of Nigeria's civil war. In essence, colonialism laid the groundwork for the violent identity conflicts that have plagued Nigeria since independence, creating an enduring challenge to national unity (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005).

Overview of the Current Situation

The ongoing conflicts and insecurity in Nigeria are deeply rooted in the legacy of British colonialism, which laid a foundation of mistrust among the country's diverse ethnic groups. Political struggles, ethnic-religious divisions, and resource disputes have repeatedly escalated into violence. Early postcolonial conflicts, such as the Tiv riots

(1962-1964) and the 1966 secessionist attempt by Isaac Boro, explained ethnic minority dissatisfaction with unequal regional integration. Ethnic-regional federalism also contributed to the political turmoil of the 1960s, including the 1962 Western Region state of emergency, census disputes, and the 1966 military coup that led to the Biafran Civil War (Osaghae and Suberu, 2005). While the end of the war in 1970 brought temporary peace, the 1987 Kafanchan-Kaduna riots reignited inter-group tensions, sparking ethno-religious and economic conflicts across Nigeria.

Today, leadership failures—driven by corruption, nepotism, and greed—have exacerbated insecurity. In recent years, Nigeria's conflicts have shifted from political, economic, religious and ethnic clashes, to insurgency, banditry, kidnapping, and herder-farmer disputes, resulting in widespread loss of life and property damage (Gubam and Nomishan, 2021).

Mitigating Conflict and Insecurity in Nigeria via Archaeological Intervention

Archaeology plays a crucial role in mitigating conflict and insecurity by helping communities understand socio-political and cultural conflicts, especially in the face of state repression and social justice issues (Lindskoug and Martínez, 2023). Its role is multifaceted and can be viewed from several dimensions.

First, archaeology uncovers shared heritage, fostering empathy and reconciliation by revealing common historical connections between groups. This deepens mutual understanding and encourages communities to confront past grievances and injustices, promoting a willingness to address difficult truths (Lindskoug and Martínez, 2023). Through this, archaeology fosters empathy and encourages conflicting parties to view each other's perspectives, paving the way for mutual acceptance, reconciliation, and resolution of misunderstandings. Archaeology also promotes open dialogue, improving communication between opposing groups and helping dispel myths and stereotypes. This nuanced approach fosters trust and encourages effective conflict resolution (Gubam and Nomishan, 2021). It supports reconciliation efforts through symbolic gestures like memorials, which help heal past wounds and promote long-term, sustainable peace (Bloomfield et al., 2003).

Furthermore, archaeological research reveals long-term patterns of human interaction and conflict, offering valuable insights into the root causes of current tensions. By safeguarding archaeological sites and cultural heritage, archaeology helps preserve the identity and history of conflicting groups, preventing the erasure of cultural significance during conflict. Engaging local communities in archaeological projects also fosters dialogue and collaboration, reinforcing a sense of ownership and pride in

cultural heritage. This involvement can reduce insecurity, promotes peacebuilding, and fosters tolerance, contributing to conflict prevention and resolution in Nigerian society.

Overview of Major Archaeological and Heritage Sites in Nigeria and Their Contributions

Ile-Ife Archaeological Complex: Since the early 20th century, the artefacts discovered at Ile-Ife are unique to West Africa. A German anthropologist, Leo Frobenius conducted the first excavation in 1910, revealing the significance of antiquities such as the Olokun brass head, symbolising Ile-Ife's illustrious past. Modernisation in the 1930s led to more discoveries, notably the Wunmonjie brass heads, which reshaped Western views of African art. The creation of a museum in 1953 and systematic excavations led by Bernard Fagg revealed evidence of an advanced civilisation in Ile-Ife. These archaeological findings promote national pride and unity by showcasing Nigeria's rich cultural history.

Ancient Kano City Walls and Associated Sites: The Ancient Kano City Walls, with a 14-kilometre radius, were built between the 11th and 16th centuries to protect the city's growing population. Notable associated sites include Dala Hill, an ancient settlement dating back to the 10th century, Kurmi Market, a historic centre of trans-Saharan trade, and the Emir's Palace, built by Muhammadu Rumfa in the 15th century. Together, these sites reflect Kano's historical significance as a hub of trade and culture, fostering a shared heritage and identity among communities.

Sungbo's Eredo: This massive earthwork, covering 16,000 km, dates back to the 8th century and stretches across the Benin rainforest. The site reflects socio-political development in the region, with its 15-meter-deep earthworks extending to Ijebu-Ode. By emphasising the long history of human settlement and cultural exchange, Sungbo's Eredo promotes continuity and interconnectedness among diverse communities.

Nok Terracotta Figures: Discovered in 1928 by Colonel Dent Young in Kaduna State, the Nok Terracotta figures date from 500 BC to 200 AD, marking one of Africa's earliest centres of ironworking and figurative sculpture. Archaeologist Bernard Fagg initiated systematic excavations, uncovering hundreds of terracotta artefacts, which provide insight into ancient Nigerian craftsmanship and cultural heritage. These artefacts promote pride in Nigeria's artistic traditions and foster respect for its ancient civilisations.

Oyo-Ile: Oyo Ile, the capital of the Old Oyo Empire, flourished in the 18th and 19th centuries, serving as a major cultural and political centre in West Africa. The site

reveals the historical achievements of the Yoruba people, fostering a shared identity among Yoruba-speaking communities.

Sukur Cultural Landscape: Sukur is a UNESCO World Heritage Site known for its terraced fields, traditional ironworking, and its sacred landscape. Located in the Mandara Mountains, the Sukur Kingdom played a central role in iron production and trade (Nomishan *et al.*, 2023). The Sukur Cultural Landscape demonstrates a history of cooperation and peaceful coexistence in a diverse region. By promoting heritage tourism and intercultural understanding, the Sukur site can contribute to reducing tensions, particularly in the volatile Northeast region plagued by Boko Haram insurgency.

Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove: Another UNESCO World Heritage Site, the Osun-Osogbo Sacred Grove, is a forest sanctuary dedicated to Osun, the Yoruba goddess of fertility. It is an important site for Yoruba religion and culture and features a festival that attracts thousands of worshippers annually (Nomishan *et al.*, 2023). The site exemplifies religious tolerance and cultural diversity, crucial in mitigating religious conflicts between traditionalists and adherents of other religions. The annual Osun-Osogbo festival brings people together from diverse backgrounds, fostering unity and understanding.

Ancient Benin Kingdom: The Ancient Benin Kingdom is famous for its bronzes and sophisticated political structure. The ancient city was the centre of the powerful Benin Empire, which thrived from the 13th century until British colonial conquest in 1897. Efforts to return the Benin bronzes and preserve the city's heritage can play a role in reconciliation and addressing historical grievances, particularly concerning colonial injustices. The recognition of Benin's cultural heritage can also promote a shared understanding and foster inter-ethnic unity in the country.

Ogbunike Caves: The Ogbunike Caves are a sacred site for the Igbo people, playing a key role in religious and cultural rituals. The caves have a long history of being a place of refuge, having sheltered people during wars. This unique role of the caves as a place of refuge and protection symbolises peace and safety. Engaging local communities in the preservation of this heritage can promote unity and reduce tensions rooted in resource or land conflicts.

The above represents a very small portion of the archaeological potential in Nigeria that can contribute to mitigating conflict and insecurity. Other archaeological heritage resources in Nigeria *inter alia* include sites such as the Lokoja complex, Turunku, Kabitu Hills, Katsina-Ala Basin, Ibinda and Tse-Dura Complexes, Wo-Mondo, Kpe Hills, Da'ama, Birnin-Kudu Rock Painting, Iwo-Eleru Rockshelter, Erijiyan Dufuna

Canoe Site, Postsherd pavements, Ikom Monoliths, Ancient Ile-Ife, Old-Oyo Kingdom, Olumo Rock, Idanre Hills, Ogbunike Caves, Ancient Benin Empire, Arochukwu Long Juju Shrine, Igbo-Ukwu, and Akwanshi Stone Figurines, inter alia (see Tubosun, 1995; Folorunso, 1981; Tubosun and Andah, 1983; Andah, 1983; Shaw and Daniels, 1984; Okpoko, 1984; Igirgi, 1984; Mangut, 1986; Ogundele, 1990; Okafor, 1989; Mangut, 1990; Jemkur, 1992; Gundu, 1999; Ibeanu, 2000; Aremu and Odofin, 2002; Ndera, 2009; Chikwendu, 2002; Babalola and Ajekigbe, 2007; Chia, 2014; Nomishan 2021).

Moreover, these sites serve as tangible reminders of Nigeria's rich cultural heritage and history, fostering a sense of national pride and unity. By showcasing the ancient civilisations and achievements of Nigeria's diverse ethnic groups, these archaeological sites promote a shared sense of identity among different communities. This shared heritage can help bridge cultural divides and promote understanding, which is essential for conflict resolution.

Furthermore, these archaeological sites serve as educational resources, providing insights into Nigeria's past civilisations and the development of human societies. By understanding and appreciating the complexities of Nigeria's history, people are more likely to value peaceful coexistence and mutual respect. Also, these sites have the potential to boost tourism and economic development, especially in regions that have been affected by insecurity. The preservation and promotion of these archaeological sites can therefore contribute significantly to the reduction or end of insecurity in Nigeria, by promoting a sense of national identity, unity, and economic prosperity.

Tourism as a Pathway for Conflict Mitigation and Peacebuilding in Nigeria

Tourism has the potential to make a significant impact on host communities in Nigeria, not only by boosting the economy but also by preserving cultures, reviving traditions, and preventing cultural stagnation. It can act as a grassroots approach to conflict transformation, offering people a way to challenge societal restrictions driven by religious, political, or ethnic divisions. Sustainable tourism plays a critical role in fostering tolerance, inspiring cultural exchange, and laying the groundwork for stable, peaceful growth (da Silva et al., 2021).

The sector creates jobs, particularly for women and ethnic minorities, and offers skilled employment opportunities for Indigenous people (Adeleke, 2021). By providing alternative livelihoods, tourism reduces the economic drivers of conflict and generates revenue through foreign exchange, taxes, and investment returns. This supports government and private sector initiatives and stimulates economic growth, particularly in conflict-affected regions.

Moreover, tourism promotes cultural exchange, reduces stereotypes, and encourages dialogue between different groups, contributing towards mitigating conflict and insecurity. Tourist sites can serve as neutral venues for discussions, helping to bridge divides and foster reconciliation (Zhang, 2022). Furthermore, tourism supports environmental and cultural conservation by preserving historical, archaeological, and religious sites, thereby safeguarding cultural heritage, which often becomes a target during conflicts (Nomishan, *et al.*, 2023, 2024).

Tourist Attractions in Nigeria and Their Conflict-Mitigation Potentials

- *Yankari Game Reserve*: Located in Bauchi State, Yankari's vast biodiversity and natural beauty attract visitors and promote ecotourism. The reserve offers jobs and fosters cultural exchange, contributing to peace by reducing resource-based conflicts.
- *Obudu Mountain Resort*: Situated in Cross River State, this scenic resort supports tourism-based livelihoods, enhances local economies, and fosters intercultural interactions, reducing poverty-driven tensions.
- *Sukur Cultural Landscape*: A UNESCO World Heritage site in Adamawa State, Sukur promotes cultural understanding and indigenous heritage preservation, fostering community pride capable of reducing conflict of interest.
- *Olumo Rock*: Historically a safe haven during tribal conflicts, this site in Ogun State fosters historical awareness and local tourism, promoting unity and reducing resource dependence.
- *Aso Rock*: A symbol of national unity in Abuja, Aso Rock serves as a platform for peaceful protests and dialogues, promoting patriotism and national identity.
- *Ogbunike Caves*: Located in Anambra State, these caves hold spiritual and historical significance. They support cultural tourism and community-based tourism initiatives, reducing intergroup disagreements.
- *Kainji National Park*: This national park promotes eco-tourism and environmental conservation while providing alternative livelihoods, which reduces resource-based conflicts.

Similar to the rich archaeological and heritage sites, Nigeria boasts a wide array of tourist attractions. However, this work offers only a brief overview to buttress the key points. Thus, by promoting cultural and environmental conservation, economic growth, and intercultural exchange, tourism can help mitigate conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. The development of infrastructure and the preservation of cultural heritage sites will foster peaceful coexistence, unity, and long-term stability in the country.

Conclusion

This study examines the critical role that archaeology and tourism can play in addressing the ongoing challenges of conflict and insecurity in Nigeria. Archaeology, by uncovering and preserving cultural heritage, not only fosters a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural roots of conflicts but also promotes reconciliation and unity among diverse communities. It reveals the shared histories that can help bridge divisions, dispel myths, and contribute to long-term peacebuilding efforts. Engaging local communities in archaeological endeavours strengthens a sense of cultural ownership, thereby reducing tensions and promoting societal cohesion.

On the other hand, tourism, with its potential to stimulate economic growth and foster cultural exchange, can be a powerful tool for conflict resolution. Sustainable tourism initiatives that prioritize cultural preservation offer opportunities for economic development, intercultural understanding, and social harmony. By leveraging Nigeria's rich cultural heritage, tourism can attract global attention and investment, helping to alleviate poverty and reduce economic disparities, which are often drivers of conflict.

However, for these benefits to be realised, there must be strategic interventions that integrate archaeology and tourism into national efforts to mitigate insecurity. This requires improving infrastructure, addressing security concerns, and implementing policies that prioritize the protection and promotion of Nigeria's cultural resources. The study suggests that through the combined efforts of archaeology and tourism, Nigeria can foster a more peaceful and unified society, harnessing its cultural wealth to resolve conflicts and build a more secure future.

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