

ABSTRACT

Among the peoples of Kenya, there has been a cultural and religious revival and all means are being sought to propagate it. In certain circles, there is even a revival of ethnic rites, religious rituals and customs, and there are national efforts to preserve and take pride in ethnic cultures. Councils of elders are being treated with respect and honour as custodians of these cultures and religious beliefs. Generally, there has been a resilience of African Traditional Religion (ATR) and traditional religious institutions and practices in Kenya in the embodiment of councils of elders as seen in the case of Njuri Ncheke of the Ameru. Njuri Ncheke has been resilient in the face of modernization, even in the context of a dynamic society with a modern judicial system, new constitutional laws and new religious structures. In spite of this apparent resilience of Njuri Ncheke in Meru County, there has not been any systematic investigation to unearth the phenomenon. The broad objective of this study, therefore, was to investigate the contributions of councils of elders to the resilience of African Traditional Religion in Kenya and in particular, the Njuri Ncheke of Meru County. The specific objectives were to identify the resilient practices and activities of Njuri Ncheke in relation to (ATR) in Meru County, to examine the sources of the influence and authority of the council in contemporary Meru community, to analyse the nature of the relationship between Njuri Ncheke and Christianity in the County and to assess the relevance of Njuri Ncheke in the context of a modern dynamic society. The study was informed by functionalism theory of religion as understood by Emile Durkheim, Talcott Parsons and Robert Merton. This was a qualitative study that sought to describe and analyse the resilience of traditional religious institutions in Kenya with Njuri Ncheke as a case study. The study involved a sample size of 200 respondents who were purposively selected. These were mainly Njuri Ncheke elders, clergy and religious leaders, and ordinary people. Data was collected using semi structured questions and structured interviews. The collected data was analysed using both qualitative and quantitative methods of data analysis in line with social sciences. The findings of the study are significant in making an important contribution to better understanding of councils of elders in Kenya and their role in ATR, understanding the role of religious and indigenous institutions in devolved system of governance, the basis of their influence and authority and their rightful place in a modern dynamic society.

Keywords

Councils of elders -- African traditional religion -- Njuri Ncheke

