



## **Roles of Hausa proverbs in peace keeping and conflict resolution**

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### **Abstract**

Conflict is part and parcel of human creation. Man is composed amidst disputes, altercations and misunderstanding, for, the whole history of the progress of mankind has been born on earnest recurrent problems and more importantly, conflict. Such is the reason that compelled one to reiterate time and again that conflict is wrapped round human neuron which reel like sine qua non. Concretizing, however, conflict is like an onion...having divergent wings and thus need dichotomous angles of prevention and or resolution. Be that as it may, proverb served as the precaution and oftentimes, panacea to conflict especially in the Hausaland. Therefore, this writeup surmises that since conflict are found at every stage of life; Hausa proverbs drastically surged forward certain resolutions. The paper conjectures into the concept of conflict and conflict resolution, the role of Hausa proverbs in curbing the conflict among the Hausa people.

**Keywords:** conflicts, conflict resolutions, peace keeping, proverbs, Hausa

### **Introduction**

Conflicts are found at every stage of life; individuals, groups, associations, clubs, societies, local, national as well as international communities experience conflict in one way or the other. That, however, includes religious, ethnic, political and communal among others. Conflicts are features of life. Balarabe, (2013) noted that; "Since the beginning of creation, there have been conflicts between darkness and light and even amongst the first of human beings created on earth." Therefore, conflicts are among the permanent features of life, which humanity have to live and cope with, by means of adjustment and resolution.

The role of Hausa Proverbs in the life of the Hausas can never be over-emphasized. Besides leisure, they give courage, determination and define a better way of life. It touches almost all aspects of life which includes culture, religion, politics, socialization, knowledge, economics, love for one another as well as peace and conflict resolution to mention but a few. The aim of this paper is to analyze some Hausa Proverbs as regards to conflict prevention and resolution- to ascertain their contribution to peace keeping and conflict resolution. Therefore, the paper peeps through some selected Hausa Proverbs that address rosy issues regarding peace and conflict resolution.

### **The concept of peace**

Peace is one of the highest values in every community. Its meaning is multilateral and multi-disciplinary, depending on which notion is central in the determination of "peace" as a concept. The most common use of the concept of peace is in the absence of dissention, violence or war. Peace is also seen as a state of mind in concurrence with serenity: a state of harmony, tranquility, concord and balance of equilibrium of powers. Peace is the opposite of conflict; it abhors violence and war. Peace is also a state of justice, goodness and civil government. Peace can be empirical or abstract, normative or descriptive, active or passive.

There are many perspectives and variations regarding the definitions of the concept of peace. Psychologically, peace

is a state of mind in harmony and balance; invariably, a function of the mindset of an individual or group of people to their state of being; their weltanschauung. What is their environment like? Is it hazardous, unsafe and contaminated? Is there much stress due to lack of basic infrastructures (lack of water, electricity and good roads). Peace has to do with the citizens' mindset and perception of how they see active measures by government in securing life, liberty and property.

The sociological perspective views peace as a value that emanates from just human relationships which enhance social harmony, creativity and productivity as well as prevention of war. The political perspective depicts peace as a broad concept subsumed in a number of ways such as balance of powers or as a civil government. The balance of power is necessary for peace as a social contract underlying certain structure of social expectations and associated social cooperation.

The best concept of peace is when the world, states, societies, villages, families and individuals are not at war and there are no remote sound of war. However, absence of war does not necessarily mean that the individual or the extended social formations is at peace with itself. The meaning of peace has emerged, grown and expanded over the history of philosophy and general human history.

### **Conflict Resolution**

Gaya, (2006) disclosed that; "In nearly all African societies, there is a preference for the peaceful settlement of disputes along the lines prescribed by the situations and values of the community. Violence is normally frowned at". At the international level, there is growing resort to peaceful conflict resolutions. Different methods are adopted at different times and different places. The aim if achieved makes the parties involved feel satisfied with the settlement and the conflict is resolved finally. Approach to conflict resolution in Africa differs from the Western approach. Even in Africa, the approach may vary from one culture to another. For example, "in some African societies, proverbs

are used for smoothing social frictions and dissatisfaction and easing the individual in his attempts to adjust himself in his new setting and fate” (Bascom 1981:62). Some scholars highlight the advantages in the proverb’s function of indirection to smooth the rough edges of communication in a community whose inhabitants wish to live together.

### The Hausas

Hausa is a name of language by which a group of peoples who shared common beliefs and cultures are known. They dominated Northern Nigeria and the Southern Niger. They are also found in other countries especially within Africa. Adamu, (1978) explained the concept of “Hausa” as:

*The name by which the people of the Hausa ethnic group call themselves, and are understood as such by many other people, though of course different peoples had different local names for them. Hausa is also the name of the language of the people, and in their literature they have no other word for their country but {asar Hausa, the land of the Hausa people/language (Adamu, 1978:1).*

The Hausas are predominantly Muslims with minute number of Christians and Pagans (The Maguzawa). They are about half of Nigerian population and speak Hausa language, though different tribes among the Hausa have local languages. However, the origin of the Hausa people is still controversial among historians. The Bayajidas legendry traced the origin of the Hausas into two distinct groups: Seven original and seven non-original Hausa. With this, we can come to the conclusion that Hausa is a language that unified a great number of people who have different values rather than a common term denoting a nation or race. Musa, (1991:221-234) noted that: “It is a lingua-franca to many people in West African countries, in spite of their cultural diversities. These people use Hausa as their vehicle of communication in their day-to-day activities and it serves as a common factor that binds them together.”

### Definition of Proverb

There are variant definitions of proverb. As an instance, Aristotle has the opinion that, proverb is a remnant an old philosophy which on account of their brevity or aptness had been preserved in countless destructions or general wreck and run. However, the concept has been defined in Oxford English Dictionary Vol. III (1933:1520), as; “a short pithy saying in common and recognized use, a concise sentence often a metaphor or alliterative in form which is held to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation and familiar to all”. Similarly, Bland (1914: xi) sees proverb as; “a short figurative expression or sentence currently used, commending or reproving the person or thing which it is applied, and often containing some moral precepts or rule for our conduct life.”

### Hausa Proverbs and Conflict Prevention

There are quite number of Hausa proverbs that are thematically built to promote peace and conflicts resolutions. Such proverbs either discourage conflicts or encourage peaceful coexistence. They usually ascribe a form of nemeses- as to those who disrupt a peaceful process or initiate conflict. This part of the paper, therefore,

discusses such proverbs' viz:

*Fitina kwance take, Allah ya la'ani mai tayar da ita*  
**Trouble lies asleep, God curses whoever wakes it up**

The proverb is a reflection of the philosophy of the Hausas governing interrelationship. Trouble is compared to a sleeping dog, and that which whoever wakes it up is curse by God. This is equally rooted in the Islamic religion which is the dominant religion among the Hausas.

However, the Hausas are not unaware of the nature of some people who usually look for trouble. Such people are frowned at. They are described as fools; as indicated by the following proverb:

*Maso fada wawa*  
**A quarrelsome person is a fool**

A quarrelsome person is described as a fool in the aforementioned proverb because such action brings disarray in the community. Nobody supports foolhardy. Therefore, all act of violence are rendered null and void and could never be entertained.

The two aforesaid proverbs are clear indications that Hausa people do all they could to avoid conflict in their society and even outside their society. They get involved in conflicts only when it becomes absolutely unavoidable. They invoke both religious and cultural injunctions to warn the instigators of conflict to keep off. For, they believe that:

*Tashin hankali yana kawo tsiya*  
**Conflict brings poverty**

According to the proverb, peace is directly related to economic prosperity. Only with a peaceful atmosphere would there be an economic growth. The belief is that, without a peaceful environment, there could not be sustainable economic development. A similar proverb emphasizes on the significant of peace to socio-economic development.

*Zama lafiya ya fi zama dan Sarki (ko ma Sarkin)*

**To be in peace is better than to be a prince (or even the king)**

The proverb here is a testimony of Hausas love for peace. To them, peace has the greatest value, even greater than being a prince or a king. In the Hausa land, the government is centred in the person of Sarki (king). The throne is not meant for every Hausa man to compete with. Yet, this occupant of the throne and head of government is ready to sacrifice and be sacrificed for the sake of peace.

*Allah ba mu lafiya da zama lafiya*  
**May Allah give us health and peace**

There is no doubt that Hausa value peace to greater extent and do their best to avoid conflicts. That was why they often time repeat this proverb as a prayer for Allah to give them health and peace. They believed that everything one possesses in this life whether wealth, children or any position, peace is the raison deter for its enjoyment.

Therefore, one is advised to be cautious when purchasing a new house.

*Zabi makwabci tun ba ka sayi gida ba*

**Choose your neighbour before you buy a house**

Neighbourhood is very important in Hausa society. Your neighbour is like a blood relation. Any conflict with him can make living together almost impossible. If you want buy a house, you should study and understand the people you are going to live with. This will help in preventing the possible occurrence of conflict.

### **Hausa Proverb and Smoothing Social Frictions**

Certain Hausa proverbs are employed to smoothing social frictions and dissatisfactions, thereby easing the task of the individual in his struggles to adjust himself in his new situation. The most important to Hausa is to take all precautions to avoid the friction. After taking all precautions and yet one has some frictions with his friends, relations or neighbours he is quickly reminded that;

*Akan saba ko tsakanin harshe da hakora*

**Friction does happen even between the tongue and the teeth**

The proverb draws the attention of the friends, relations or neighbours that it is normal for friction to take place among even friends and relations. What is not normal is to allow the friction to escalate into a major conflict. In the proverb, however, metaphor is used to show how close the individuals in reference are to each other just as tongue is to teeth. Just as tongue and teeth have to live together despite occasional frictions, so also friends, relations and even neighbours should learn from tongue and teeth. They should desist from escalating simple misunderstandings into major conflicts

*Kada a mayar da kurji gyambo*

**Don't turn a boil into an ulcer**

Metaphor is also used in the above proverb to warn against pushing minor misunderstanding to major dispute. Minor misunderstanding should be seen as normal situations in complex societies. When they happened, they should be seen as intricacies of human existence. This is very important for, the major conflicts and disputes happened in the history of mankind have had their origin from simple dispute that transformed into heinous conflict.

The Hausas believe that no individual is perfect. Every person has his/her own credits and minors. Therefore, every peaceful co-existence involves more than one individual. Individuals shouldn't only respect their differences but emphasize on those aspects that unite them firmly together.

*A rufe tutu a ci tuwo*

**Let's cover human excrement and eat food**

The proverb above suggests that minor misunderstanding and past misdeeds which ever away shouldn't be waged into disputes. That is to say, the individuals involved should let bygones be bygones. It uses metaphor to bring out its point and give illustrations. The images of human excrement and food are brought together to draw the attention of the reader

the difficulty involved. Yet, there is a way out, if one has to eat food. How does he do it? He should cover the human excrement so as to eat his food. Similarly, for the sake of peace the individuals involved in minor dispute should forget their differences and concentrate on things that unite them together.

If, inevitably, conflict occurs, what you should next is the theme of the following proverb:

*Fitina tun tana karama ake kashe ta*

**Troublesomeness is resolved when it is small**

The proverb warns that dispute or misunderstanding should immediately be addressed and resolved amicably. It becomes the responsibility of every member of the Hausa society to make sure that "fitina" (troublesomeness) is not allowed to degenerate into major conflict. It is addressed immediately it occurs and resolved immediately. The proverb indicates that there is no conflict free society but just like other societies, the Hausa address the issue of conflict resolution with dispatch. It's resolved before it escalates. For example, in the following proverb, they warn:

*Kada allura ta tono galma*

**Let not the needle dig out a hoe i.e Don't allow investigation of small matter reveals a large one**

Even though, the Hausa believe that small disputes should be addressed immediately with the aim of resolving them while they are small, they want wisdom to be applied in doing so. They don't discourage discussions that will lead to the roots of the conflict (dispute) in order to resolve it once and for all. However, they warn that small matters might turn bigger ones. Therefore, the aim should be stated right from the beginning. Once everybody is committed to the resolution of the conflict while it's at its smaller stage, the problems are already identified.

Once you are able to convince one of the parties involved in conflict to exercise more patience, the other party will have no option but to give peace a chance, because:

*Kalangu guda ba ya amo*

**One drum does not make noise i.e It takes two to make a quarrel**

According to the proverb, party A cannot quarrel with itself, it needs party B to get involved. And if party B is convinced to ignore party A, then resolution will be easier. The proverb itself is metaphoric. Although "Kalangu" is specifically mentioned, the speaker is not referring to "Kalangu" as such. He is using a metaphor to tell the listener that a person cannot quarrel with himself.

When a person is provoked, the Hausa expect him to respond responsibly. Foolish action when matched with similar response can lead to dispute and even major conflict. The following proverb advises:

*Ba a rama gayya da fushi*

**Don't avenge a malicious conduct when angry**

According to the proverb, angry reaction may cause contrition and remorseful action. Foolish people act hastily and therefore add insult to injury. The proverb also, can be used to nip in the bud a dispute that may likely escalate

because of awkward action by one of the parties in the dispute.

The next proverb encourages people especially those with common identity and goal not to allow any dispute or conflict to divide them. They should remain united because of the saying of the following proverb:

*Sai bango ya tsage kadangare ke samun wurin shiga*

**Only when a wall cracks, the lizard gains entry**

According to the proverb, discord breaks up families. It reminds members that unity is strength. People should do their best to maintain unity among themselves. The proverb is metaphoric. Although lizard is specifically mentioned, the speaker is not referring to lizard as such. He is using metaphor to tell the listener that mischief maker will not succeed among people with common identity and goal unless they create the opportunity for him.

The following proverb is still on unity to prevent dispute or conflict:

*In ka ga gemun dan'uwanka ya kama da wuta, kama masa a kasha*

**If you see the beard of your relation (person) on fire, help him to put it off**

The aforementioned proverb uses metaphor to stress its point. Beard being part of the human face, the proverb symbolises that once it (beard) is on fire, the face is likely to bear the pain. Fire in the proverb represents trouble or major conflict. Therefore, if one's beard is on fire, all hands should be on deck so as to put it off, otherwise, the detriment would be upon the entire society.

After taking all precautions to avoid conflict, the Hausas put more emphasis on patience. They believe that patience is the greatest weapon for everlasting peace and conflict resolution. They believe that.

*Hakuri maganain zaman duniya*

**Patience is the universal remedy**

Patience is apparent especially in a complex world where people have divergent differences; for instance, cultural, religious and tribal altercations become obvious that people must in one way or another persevere and exercise patience for at least togetherness sake. The following proverb also reminds people that:

*Kowa yay i hakuri, shi ke samun riba*

**Anyone who is patient, it is he who profits**

What profit in this world is important than peaceful co-existence among people of diverse background? This is what the proverb means by *shi ke samun riba* (it is who profits) in the context of this paper.

## Conclusion

According to the data collected in this paper, it is clear that proverbs are traditional answers to recurrent problem. They provide an argument for a course of action which conforms to community values, they arise in the midst of a conversation and are used by speakers to give a "name" to ethical problems confronting them and to suggest ways in

which it has been solved in the past. The folklore of any society is very important in understanding the society. To ignore its folklore, so is to ignore the essential ingredient of that society. Hausa proverb must always be taken into account thereby the assessment of the Hausa society could be a balanced and not an incomplete one. Certainly, the use of proverb is intimately and squarely connected with Hausa's way of life. They employed proverb as a major vehicle in examining causes of conflict, prevention and resolution.

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