



Silencing the Guns: African Traditional Proverbs and Aphorisms for Peace and Security in 21st Century Africa.

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Abstract

Africa is yet entangled with some Western modernity responsible for their political crises and incessant insecurity. Insecurity in Africa has historical roots from pre-colonial to post-colonial periods. The continent's hosting of the seventh United Nations Peace Support mission and over 60 percent of the UN Security Council's agenda addresses African insecurity underscore the urgent need to tackle these challenges. This paper examines insecurity in Africa and advocates for reviving African traditional methods to restore peace, utilizing proverbs and wisdom. Through analysis, criticism, and prescription, it explores the inherent insecurity problems and argues that African proverbs offer valuable insights for fostering unity. The study compares Western crisis resolution methods with African approaches, concluding that traditional African means are a more effective alternative. It highlights Africa as a potential solution to its own insecurity while recognizing the benefits of Western methods. The paper concluded that Africa has strong indigenous values and security systems capable of addressing insecurity even before colonialism. The paper recommended that African traditional security outfits are more efficient and better considered as alternative measures to solving the problems of peace and insecurity in Africa rather than adopting the Western war-war method.

Keywords: Peace, Security, Africa Philosophy, Legacy, Crisis.

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INTRODUCTION

The questions that arise from the title of this paper are: why does Africa need peace? Is the continent not united by the organizational structure and will of the African Union, its socioeconomic system, and the synergy between its Sub-regional groupings? Truly, these aspects of the African Union have reconnected the Africans, but unfortunately, they have not secured their unity, especially with the experience of the incessant intra-war crises. What Africa needs most during this crucial period is peace and security to fortify and consolidate its union. The threat of war and insecurity jeopardize political bickering, ethnocentric attitudes, nationalist interests in religious beliefs, neo-colonial tendencies, political ideologies, authoritarianism, economic imbalances, diverse conflicts, injustices, wars, and many more in Africa. As Calthres (2000) points out, effective intelligence gathering and surveillance are critical in addressing these security challenges by enabling states to monitor threats and respond proactively. Moreover, the African Union's Agenda 2063 emphasizes the importance of peace and security as foundational to sustainable development across the continent (African Union 2021). The Peace and Security Council of the African Union is crucial in facilitating timely responses to conflicts and crises, which is essential for maintaining stability (African Union 2021).

The present conflicts in Africa are a challenge to the black race in making a difference between peace and war. Where there is no peace, the people cannot be secured. It is only in an environment of peace and tranquility that people can enjoy security in their daily transactions. African-led peace operations have become increasingly vital in addressing these challenges, as they allow for rapid deployment and adaptability to local contexts (African Center 2021). The African Union (AU) has demonstrated a commitment to enhancing peace and security through initiatives like the African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA), which provides a framework for conflict prevention and resolution across the continent (European Court of Auditors 2018). However, these efforts often face significant hurdles, including funding shortfalls and operational limitations, which hinder their effectiveness in maintaining stability (United Nations 2023). Moreover, addressing the root causes of conflicts is essential for sustainable peace in Africa. As highlighted by various scholars, military solutions must be complemented by development policies that ensure adequate public service provision, thereby

reducing the appeal of violent extremism (United Nations 2023). The success of initiatives like Mozambique's Maputo Accord illustrates the importance of national ownership and inclusive dialogue in achieving lasting peace (United Nations 2023). Additionally, regional organizations such as ECOWAS have shown that a combination of diplomacy and military readiness can effectively resolve crises, as evidenced by their intervention during Gambia's 2016 presidential election crisis (European Court of Auditors 2018). Ultimately, fostering an environment conducive to peace requires not only immediate conflict resolution strategies but also long-term commitments to socio-economic development and community engagement.

This paper attempts to adopt the horizon of traditional African proverbs to restore peace and security in Africa. It analyses the concept of proverbs in African Culture with the view of showing its relevance for peace and security before the advent of modern warfare of mass destruction introduced by the colonialists to the African continent. Conceptual clarifications are made on the four key concepts: philosophy, proverbs, peace, and security. Efforts are then made to justify their relevance in procuring peace and justice among the African nations. The paper concluded that traditional African proverbs and aphorism are embedded with classical ideas rich enough to secure peace and tranquillity in Africa. That Africa has enough traditional heritage which captures their identity and essence to understand their problems and resolve their crises even before the advent of the Western world.

METHODS

Conceptual African Philosophy. Mbiti defines African philosophy as "the understanding, attitude of mind, logic, perception behind how African people think, act or speak in different situations of life" (John S 1999). Orika, in his book, "Trends in Contemporary African Philosophy," argues that African philosophy is "the work dealing with specific African issues, formulated by indigenous African thinkers or by verbs in African Cultural life" (Oruka 2021). Momoh opined that African doctrines or theories are embedded in the creator, the elements, institutions, beliefs, and concepts in it (Chimakonam 2019). Additionally, Wiredu (1996)

emphasizes the importance of conceptual decolonization, arguing that African philosophy must engage critically with both indigenous traditions and Western philosophical thought to establish a distinct philosophical identity. This perspective aligns with Hountondji's (1996) critique of ethnophilosophy, where he asserts that genuine African philosophy should transcend simplistic notions of collective thought and embrace rigorous individual analysis. Furthermore, Oluwole (1999) highlights the role of oral traditions in shaping African philosophical discourse, illustrating how these narratives provide a rich context for understanding ethical and existential questions within various African cultures. Adesuyi opined that since philosophy is sometimes seen as the critical examination of life, African philosophy should then be seen as the critical examination of life (Adesuyi 2014). From the foregoing, this paper agrees with the scholars that Africa has a philosophy that explains its reality and is relevant enough to solve its problems (Nwoye 2016).

Proverbs are short, well-known sentences or phrases that state a general truth about the life and experience of the people, which give advice or caution without actually being exhaustive in their meaning. Proverbs are generally considered a form of trust for enhancing verbal expression and enriching the oral delivery of individuals so that they can employ their usage in conversation (Adegboyega 2027). Adegboyega espoused that proverbs are believed to be 'conversational condiments' used to flavor speech, taking into consideration their cultural and moral impact.

It is a safe assumption that the use of proverbs imbues the user with the edge to make his/her expression more ornate, acceptable, and culturally relevant. Thus, proverbs are considered the pongs which are used to analyze situations. Consequently, proverbs are philosophical (Adegboyega 2027). This perspective is supported by Buja (2018), who states that proverbs encapsulate cultural values and wisdom, serving as a means to convey important life lessons and societal norms across generations. In his own concept, Oduaran defines proverbs as a source of figurative language and metaphor and as the "core of verbal interaction in Africa": it is the palm oil with which words are eaten (Yankah 1989). The nature of African proverbs allows for different interpretations as the situation demands to either advise, educate, or warn the people. African proverbs are used to pass on rich cultural traditions, transmit folklore, and communicate codes of behaviour.

Peace: The meaning of peace is in relation to how it is conceived in our mind. Ordinarily, peace denotes the absence of conflict. Pazhayampallil argues that

“Peace is the tranquillity of order.” It is the right relationship between God and the people and among the community themselves. This right relationship consists in the observance of love for one another (Pazhayampallil 1984). Peace is a great value of humanity, but it has not yet found a formula to achieve it on a permanent basis. It is a necessary ingredient for security and meaningful development. Oguntomisin aptly captured peace in his statement, “Peace is sine qua non to political stability, socio-economic development, and societal well-being. It is the greatest desire of all human communities at all times” (Oguntomisin 2014). Peace here is not peace of the graveyard or that imposed by an autocrat or despot. Peace here does not just refer to a situation where there is no crisis, tension, commotion, confrontation, or war, but the presence of order, Law, and tranquillity which buttresses a conducive social, political, and economic justice, fairness, the fear of God, social harmony, and love for one neighbor (Adewale 2014).

However, the concept of peace is defined differently by different scholars and policymakers. There is no universal definition of peace accepted by all. Most analysts have defined peace as the absence of war, fear, conflict, anxiety, suffering, and violence. However, this conception of peace has been criticized by many scholars as being inadequate for understanding the meaning and nature of peace. To overcome these limitations in the prevailing definitions of peace, the peace theorist Johan Galtung, who is undoubtedly one of the leading experts on the issue of peace, has distinguished three types of violence that can help to understand the concept of peace. These are: First, he considers the issues of direct violence. Direct violence is manifested by physical, emotional, and psychological violence. Second, it talks about structural violence. Structural violence comes in the form of deliberate policies and structures that cause human suffering, death, and harm. Finally, and thirdly, he discusses cultural violence. Galtung (1996) further elaborates that positive peace goes beyond merely the absence of violence to include social justice and equality, emphasizing the need for societal structures that promote cooperation and harmony. This perspective aligns with Leckman et al. (2014), who argue that peace encompasses not only external conditions but also internal dispositions towards empathy and respect among individuals. Moreover, Galtung's framework highlights that understanding peace requires a comprehensive approach that

addresses both individual and systemic factors contributing to conflict (Galtung 2000). Thus, a holistic understanding of peace necessitates recognizing these various dimensions to foster a more enduring and meaningful state of tranquility.

Cultural violence involves cultural norms and practices that create discrimination, injustice, and human suffering. In addition, outlines two dimensions of peace: The first is what he calls “negative peace”. Negative peace, according to him, is the absence of direct violence, war, fear, and conflict at individual, national, regional, and international levels (Ditta et al. 2021).

Secondly is the “positive peace.” Positive peace depicts the absence of unjust structures, unequal relationships, justice, and inner peace at individual levels. The obvious implications of findings and conclusions are that any useful conceptualization of peace must therefore; go beyond the narrow focus on the absence of war, fear, anxiety, suffering and violence. Also, attempted to offer a comprehensive and holistic conception of peace. Furthermore, it links it directly to the issue of sustainable development. Peace as a process involving activities that are directly or indirectly linked to increasing development and reducing conflict, both within specific societies and the wider international community.

Security: The definition of security, just like the one of peace, is equally contentious. Security has been defined “as the condition or feeling of safety from harm or danger, the defense, protection, and preservation of core values and the absence of threats to those values.” (See Also 2014) However, within the context of peace, security and sustainable national development, the concept of security, that is usually applied and therefore, more relevant for consideration here, is the one of “national security”. This makes the state or government the key actor or stakeholder in the process of actively seeking peace, security, and sustainable national development of the country.

National Security: The concept of security has assumed a great dimension in recent times. This is not unconnected with the incessant security challenges currently experienced globally. Security issues have become a dominant concern all over the world (Diatia et al. 2021). The concept of national security is very difficult to define because the term remains a controversial concept. In other words, security has yet to universally acceptable definition due to its nature arising from the ideology surrounding it and the timeframe as well as the focus of analysis (Seseer 2017). Contemporary international debates have also raised the border

concept of security as the struggle to secure the most basic of life: food, fuel, medicine, and shelter. Broader human security is important for attaining physical and national security, and the overall peace and development of the society, as social unrest arising from the absence of such basic human security can lead to security problems and conflicts (See Also 2014).

Before a more detailed insight into the root of the problem, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by the concept of “security”. Buzan clearly defines security as “the pursuit of freedom from threats”. Gwaro Audu defines National security as “freedom from hunger or from threat to a nation's ability to protect and defend itself, promote cherished values and interest, and enhance the well-being of its people”. Calthers declares that internal security is the sum total of a nation's equilibrium state, which needs to be maintained so that the nation can carry out its normal functions without unnecessary interruption from anywhere (CDPC 2001).

This concept was supported by the conflict Peace and Development Co-operative Network, which viewed the National security concept in its contemporary features as an all-encompassing condition in which people and communities live in freedom, peace, and safety, participate fully in the governance of their countries, enjoy the protection of fundamental rights, have access to resources and basic necessities of life, and inhabit an environment which is not detrimental to their health and wellbeing (A.T. Usman 2013). This perspective is further supported by Grizold (2000), who emphasizes that modern national security encompasses not only the protection of citizens from external threats but also the promotion of socio-economic development and the well-being of individuals within society. Additionally, Khan (2022) argues that contemporary national security must address both traditional military threats and emerging non-traditional challenges, including social and economic factors that impact citizens' safety and quality of life.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Relevance of African Traditional Proverbs to securing Peace and Security.

The paper focuses on some African proverbs locating East Africa and West Africa containing some proverbs, aphorism and philosophical words galvanised

with ideas and knowledge relevant to securing peace and security in the contemporary Africa states.

Bamasaba of Uganda

Nga shukana kama aya, wora inimbo

If you do not want war, burn the fighting stick.

Litere litwela hirira inda taa.

One fingernail does not kill a louse; if we were united, the enemy cannot penetrate.

Butwela niko kamani

Unity is strength, Unity brings peace (Cisternino 1987)

Kamba of Kenya

Kau ndwakaa musyi

Fight does not build a family; quarrels disintegrate a family (Steve, 2013).

Ghana Proverbs:

The study picked some Akan proverbs in Ghana as they are found to be rich and weighty with wisdom and also embedded in philosophical, socio-cultural, and moral significance that can be used to achieve continental growth in peace and security development in Africa.

Below are some of the relevant proverbs.

Twi: B99nu soa a, emmia.

Many hands made labour light

English: The sharing of responsibilities makes tasks less tedious and faster to complete.

Security values: Security is everyone's task for the effective policing of communities

Twi: Nnua a egbe na etwie

English: Trees that are near to one another rub against one another.

Literal meaning: People living or working together are bound to brush against each other.

Philosophical meaning: Human beings are enjoyed from a distance, and the closer you get to them, the more you take note of things you don't like about them.

Peace values

The proverb is used when setting a dispute between two parties who usually live or work together.

Twɪ: Akokonini boro nsa a,na ne were afiri Asansa

English: When the cocker gets intoxicated, it forgets the falcon.

Literal meaning: Cockerel is prey for falcons and hawks, but when the cockerel gets drunk, it forgets about its enemies. The cockerel then goes strutting around in a false sense of security.

Philosophical meaning: if one gets power–drunk, one tends to behave improperly to one’s superiors and later suffer for it.

Peace values

The proverb is used to counsel people to be sober when they are provoked to anger, or when they rise to a position of power and influence.

Twɪ: Se esono betutu nnua nyinaa a, ennye abe.

English: If the elephant can uproot all trees, it cannot uproot the plant tree.

Literal meaning: The elephant is the biggest and strongest animal in the forest and it can uproot any tree when it gets angry. But it cannot pull down the oil palm tree because of the toughness of its stem and the high tenacity of its rooting system.

Philosophy meaning: It is almost impossible for the wind or elephant to pull down a mature oil palm tree. In African tradition, the palm tree is used as a symbol for strong warriors or great nations. The proverb is thus used to warn assailants that may have defeated previous enemies, but they cannot defeat this great nation because no one has ever done so.

Socio-cultural values

The proverb is used to warn goal-blinded persons to look before they leap.

Twɪ: Obi nni esono akyi mmoro hasuo.

English: No one follows the elephant in the bush and gets wet in the morning dew.

Literal meaning: When you follow the elephant, it shakes off ahead of you, and the wetness of the morning dew from the plants as it walks through them due to its large size.

Philosophical meaning: The elephant symbolizes a powerful or prominent person in society who gets you out of trouble if you associate with him.

Socio-culture values

The proverb is used in reference to a benevolent person of prominence, and also to insinuate that no one befriends great people in society for nothing.

Two: Ani bere a, ennsa gya.

English: If the eye gets reddened, it does not catch fire.

Literal meaning: The full saying is: Ani bere a, ennsa gya. Na yede nsuo adum no.

When eyes go red, they do not start a fire that may be quenched with water.

Philosophical meaning: When a person gets angry or finds himself in some unpleasant situation, naturally, the eyes turn reddish or bloodshot. Yet, no matter how red the eye gets, it cannot start a fire.

Socio-cultural values

The proverb is used to advise people to calm down no matter the situation in which they find themselves.

Se mi mbi o l'ogun ore

Translation:

Offend me, and I'll question you. It is the medicine for friendship.

Lilo: *Imoran peki a ma wa Alafia pelu gbogbo enia; bi ore tabi ojulumo eni ba se ni, ki a bi I nipa be ko ni si ija.*

Use: The best way to maintain friendship is to question one another when there is a misunderstanding.

Ogbon ologbon ki ije ki a pe agbalagba ni were

Translation: Other people's wisdom does not allow us to call an elder a fool

Lilo: *imoran pe ki a gba aba ati imoran agba nitori agba ri iriri*

Use: An elder's advice should be regarded as important because of the elder's experience

'Ng o wo o ka igbo', ehin re ni ifi lana

Translation: I will drag you through the forest' clears a path with his own back.

Lilo: *Imoran pe ki a sora nitori eni ti o pinnu lati je eni kan niya, le towo ninu iya na.*

Use: A person who decides to inflict suffering on another must be prepared to face some suffering himself.

Ki a ja, ki a re, ko dabi ere apilese. Apa ki ijinna ki o dabi eran ara

Translation: A broken friendship may be soldered but will never be sound. Quarreling and making it up is not like the first friendship. A scar cannot heal so as to be like sound flesh.

Lilo: *Imoran pe ki a sora ki a ma ba ore eni ja nitoripe enia meji ko le re timotimo bi iti atehinwa lehinti nwon ja.*

Use: It is best for two friends to avoid quarreling because though they may be reconciled after a quarrel, their friendship will no longer be perfect.

Ile mi ni mo ngbe ki ijebu ejo

Translation: I was inside my house and did not get convicted in court.

Lilo: *Imoran pe o san ki enia wa ni ile re ju ki o ma sofofo oro-oloro tabi seke kakiri.*

Use: It is better to remain in one's house rather than go gossiping from door to door.

Gba mi l'asiko ojo, ki ngba lasiko erun

Translation: Help me during the rainy season, and I will help you during the dry season.

Lilo: *Imoran pe ki a kun fun ore sise nitori ore ki igbe; bi o ba ran eni kan lowo loni, iwo na yio ri eni ran lowo l'ola.*

Use: One should give reciprocal help. He who helps others will himself receive help.

Ibinu ko se nkan, suru ni baba iwa

Translation: Anger does not accomplish anything; patience is the chief virtue.

Lilo: *Imoran pe o sanfani ki enia kappa ibinu re; eni ti o ni suru ohun gbogbo l'o ni.*

Use: A man who is easily annoyed should try to curb his temper, as he is likely to get into trouble if he is not patient in circumstances demanding patience.

Ifi ohun we ohun, fifi oran we oran, ko fi oran jin.

Translation: Quoting examples and making comparisons do not lead to easy forgiveness.

Lilo: *Imoran pe bi a ba fe ki oran kan pari patapata ki a ma sofintoto mo nipa re.*

Use: If you want to forgive it is better not to compare situations, nor make comparisons with those concerned in similar incidents in the past.

Ibi gbogbo ni iro adaba l'orun

Translation: The dove finds everywhere comfortable. (The dove is noted as a bird of peace)

Lilo: *Imoran pe ki a je eni Alafia aati enia rere nitori ibikibi ti eni rere ati eni Alafia lo ire ni yio ma tele e.*

Use: A peaceful man is likely to find peace wherever he goes; it is the state of his own mind and thoughts which determine the situation in which he is likely to find himself.

The epoch of African philosophy as depicted through proverbs, among many African communities, manifests a rich culture before westernisation which can be restored for continental peace and security in 21st century Africa.

CONCLUSION

In the light of the foregoing discussion, this study observed that African traditional proverbial expressions carry ideological expressions rich enough to secure peace and security in Africa. It denies the contention that African philosophy's proverbial components are irrelevant and useful to capturing substance to resolve conflicts in Africa. The need to restore African traditional proverbs, aphorisms and sages for a peaceful co-existence and security in the continent cannot be over-emphasized. The paper further posits that solutions to global crises cannot be restricted to Western and Eastern cultures alone. African proverbs and traditional thought systems are also very relevant and valuable as much as the West can if Africa can also enjoy support from NGOs, IDP, and the peacekeepers in the global campaign. This position corroborates Isaac Olawale Albert's peace agenda of the "African solutions to African problems" and the fact that Africa was no longer the centre of peace for the superpowers since the end of the Cold War. Because of the above, restoring African traditional proverbs, aphorisms, and sages is exigent and should be re-vulcanized and re-awaken as a model for peace and security in Africa and the world at large. This recommendation shall go a long way in revisiting our roots and ancient knowledge embodied in the African traditional thought system.

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