

## **Proverbs as Panacea to Peaceful Coexistence in Northern Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *The paper examines the deployment of Hausa proverbs in the promotion of peaceful living of people in northern Nigeria and the country as a whole. The paper argues that, the proverbs, though mostly old, can still be used in order to solve the problems of misunderstanding which leads to different crises in the area. Thus, by using the proverbs (in both gatherings and the media), Nigerians will be able to appreciate the values and philosophies contained in the lore and consequently maintain the wisdom. Therefore, the discourse explores the role of some selected proverbs in prevention of crises, its management and resolution. Some stylistic devices built in the proverbs, are also mentioned. Some recommendation have, at the end of the paper, been made.*

**Key Words:** *deployment, proverbs, peaceful living, people, Northern Nigeria.*

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### **I. Background and Introduction**

It is a common knowledge that Nigeria, especially the northern part, is engulfed in different crises for a very long time now. Of course, this has not been the case before, because it used to be a serene, peaceful and united area but reverse is now the case.

When we go particular, we can see that, in Jos, there has been religious, tribal and political crises which are yet unsettled. There are similar happenings and violence in Kaduna. Again, same events take place in Bauchi. Similarly, there is hanging tension in areas such as Taraba, Kano, Adamawa and the home of boko haram crises, Maiduguri. These different crises have resisted different calls by elders, political leaders, religious leaders, opinion leaders and committees set up by, in fact, all tiers of government all in their efforts to restore peace and tranquility to our once peaceful states. Furthermore, thousands have been killed, displaced, arrested and imprisoned.

### **II. Aims and Motivation**

It is in the light of the above that the paper aims at suggesting the use of Hausa proverbs in order to bring an end to the crises. It is our opinion that, since the proverbs can entertain, inform, enlighten, educate and even relax the user/listener/reader etc. then these proverbs can convince, persuade, and make people co-exist peacefully.

### **Justification**

The Hausa who are the largest ethnic group in northern Nigeria, have abundant proverbs. Their language is one of the major languages in Nigeria. In fact, 'it is lingua franca of northern Nigeria...' (Bada. 1995: 27). The population of the Hausa, according to 1991 national census figures, is thirty million (30,000,000). The major religion of the Hausa is Islam which calls for peaceful co-existence with fellow human beings.

### **III. Methodology**

The selected proverbs were presented in their original form and freely translated. The structural functional theory to the study of verbal arts (proverbs inclusive) is used since, according to Yahaya (1978) it lays emphasis on the social significance of folklore in the light of its contextual background.

### **Hausa Proverb (Operational Definitions)**

Proverb, according to Finnegan (393), is a saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense of salt and distinguished by popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it'. Again, Oxford Dictionary (1520) defines proverb as 'a short pithy saying in common and recognized as a concise sentence often metaphorical or alliterative in form which is held to express some truth ascertained by experience or observation and familiar to all'.

### **Analysis of the Proverbs**

In Hausa society peace is considered to be fundamental for any meaningful coexistence. Therefore, Hausa society in particular and the nation in general have a lot to benefit from Hausa proverbs especially in terms of peace and peaceful coexistence. Hausa proverbs have enormous potentiality for conflict prevention and conflict resolution.

#### **Proverb One**

Rigakafi ya fi magani  
Prevention is better than cure

According to this proverb it is always better to avoid conflict than allow it to start. This is because when it gets started, only God knows how it is going to end. It is as a result of this realization that Hausa people say:

#### **Proverb Two**

Fitina kwance take Allah ya la'ani mai tashe ta  
Trouble lies asleep; God curses whoever wakes it up i.e God curses whoever is  
the source of trouble among people.

The proverb is reflection of the Hausa people's philosophy that governs interpersonal relationship with others. The philosophy is rooted in the religion of Islam, which is the dominant religion among the Hausa people. It is also a known fact among the Hausa people that despite this guiding philosophy and its religious inclination, there are people who are fond of igniting trouble. There are people, like politicians who want to take advantage of situation in order to create havoc and unnecessary tension in the society. Such people are frowned at in the society as in the following proverb.

#### **Proverb Three**

Maso fada wawa  
A quarrel (loving person) is a fool.

A quarrel loving person is described as a fool i.e some one who is childish and who cannot reason very well and do what is expected of him. The Hausa people believe that it is only those that don't know what they are doing that could encourage others to flight and cause trouble. In Hausa society such quarrel loving persons stand the risk of isolation from the members of the society. Nobody takes them seriously and in many occasions they are invited or involved in matters that affect members of the society.

From the above, it is clear that Hausa people love and cherish peace. They do everything to avoid conflict and thus sustain peace and peaceful coexistence. They employ cultural and religious dimensions to fight not only the perpetrators, but also the instigators of conflict. The Hausa people abhor conflict in all its ramifications so much that they believe:

#### **Proverb Four**

Tashin hankali yana kawo tsiya  
Lack of peace (conflict) brings poverty, lack of economic prosperity.

According to the above proverb, conflict and economic prosperity are incompatible. It is not possible to get economic prosperity as long as conflict prevails. Therefore, it is imperative that for the attainment of any economic growth and meaningful development, peaceful atmosphere must be created. According to Bada, (5) "with this Karin Magana one can understand why 'mafitini' (trouble maker) and 'maso fada' (quarrel some person) have no respect in Hausa society".

From the above we can conclude that there is the need for people to know how to live together in peace and harmony as well as understand, respect and appreciate one another's point of view. People should, as well, understand and respect one another's interest, values and aspirations. Once such understanding is reached, peace would prevail. In appreciation of this Hausa people strongly believe that:

#### **Proverb Five**

Zama lafiya yafi zama dan sarki  
Living in peace is better than being a prince.

Some Hausa people even hold the strongest belief that

Zama lafiya yafi zama Sarki  
Living in peace is better than being a king (himself)

The proverb attests to the fact that Hausa people cherish peace. In Hausa society even the leadership always needs peace in order to dispense justice and equity, as well as enjoy the pleasure and grandeur of their throne as in "sarki baya takama yaga bala'I za ya fada ma gari". (the king will not walk majestically when he sees

calamity befalls his town). It must be remembered that in Hausa society, according to Bada (19) “the government is centred in the person of sarki (king) and his family ...the throne is not meant for every Hausa man to compete”. However, it is ironic today that the kings no longer have such powers as the kings are expected. Constitutionally, they receive directives and take instructions from their local government chairmen.

Despite this unique position, the occupant of the throne is ready to sacrifice his pleasure and desires in the interest of peace. Consequently, the quest for peace requires the concerted effort of both the talakawa (ruled) and sarki (ruler). It is a collective responsibility for all and sundry. As a matter of fact, in order to avoid conflict and thus to promote peaceful coexistence, the Hausa man advises one to take precaution even at the point of buying a house, as indicated in the proverb below:

Proverb Six

Za bi makwabci tun baka sai gida ba

Choose your neighbor (even) before you buy your house.

In Hausa society neighborhood is very important. The choice of neighborhood is therefore crucial. By tradition, a Hausa man is expected to defend and protect the interest and well being of his neighbor. This attitude also gains its root from the Islamic injunctions, which enjoin all Muslims to live in peace and harmony with their neighbors. In fact, according to the Islamic injunctions, one is not allowed to eat and keep the ruminants for the following day, while his neighbor is hungry. So, in order to ensure peaceful coexistence and in fact, prevent conflict, the proverb advises that before one buys a house, one should carefully study and make sure that one understands the people they are going to live with.

### **Truth**

To Hausa people, sincerity is a very important instrument for the maintenance of peace and peaceful coexistence in the society. Most of the conflicts witnessed in the country are largely due to suspicion, lack of confidence and mistrust. There is no doubt that these vices have pervaded the Nigerian society. The atmosphere of mistrust dominates not only the individuals, communities but also relationships between the rulers and the governed. Air of mistrust as well, pervaded relationship among religious leaders and their followers. The situation is bad that it has put a lot of question marks in the minds of the people on whom and who they should trust or what and what should they accept as the truth. Hausa people are fully conscious of these worries and therefore warn:

Proverb Seven

Komi zaka fadi, fadi gaskiya

Whatever you are going to say, say the truth

Some even go further to add:

Komi zaka fadi, fadi gaskiya komi taka ja maka ta biya

Whatever, you are going to say, say the truth no matter what it will cause you.

This proverb shows that people should tell the truth without any fear or favour. They should learn to tell the truth and should not be threatened by any body regardless of his position in the society. Not should they refuse to tell the truth for the fear that it might adversely affect their friends, relations or clique members. This is in line with the Islamic injunctions, which enjoin Muslims to tell the truth. One of such injunctions is Qur'an chapter 23 verse 10 which states “We have sent them the truth; but they indeed practice falsehood”. In fact, for the attainment of peaceful coexistence, it is necessary that we are frank to ourselves and honest in all our dealings. After all it is said, honesty is the best policy. The Hausa people's vehemence in telling the truth is clear and categorical in the following proverbs:

Proverb Eight

Gaskiya mai korar karya

Truth is the conqueror of lies

From the above proverb truth should be the people's watch word. This is particularly important because even if one tries to cover up the truth, the truth will eventually emerge. Once any body is understood to be a liar, they will lose respect from the members of the community and will have no place in the society. The Hausa peoples' insistence in telling the truth is not that they are unaware of the difficulties faced by people in their effort to tell the truth. They are fully aware that the path to truthfulness is thorny, rough and shrouded with difficulties and uncertainties. This is particularly so as people nowadays are up and against truth. This fact notwithstanding, the Hausa people still insist:

Proverb Nine

Gaskiya mugunyar Magana  
Truth is bitter

According to this proverb, even though telling the truth is considered to be a difficult task, as people detest being told the truth, yet we have to endure and say the truth. We should be frank and straight forward in whatever we do. Refusal to tell the truth leads to regret when the truth finally emerges. It is known fact that even though people detest telling truth for fear of the outcome it will bring, when the truth emerges and the outcome becomes apparent they will like to associate themselves with it. This is echoed in the Karin Magana,

Proverb Ten

Gaskiya a ki ki a so ki  
Truth, the rejected, and the beloved

The message carried by the above proverb is that even though people are troubled in telling the truth (because in the face of it people may not like it and consequently they may lose certain privileges and rights for daring to tell the truth), in the final analysis when it is pursued and utilized very well it is a sort of respite to all and sundry.

The outcome will be a successful and happy one. The outcome, however, will be the opposite, if people decide to act otherwise as in the Karin Magana.

Proverb Eleven

Karya fure take bata 'ya'ya  
Falsehood blossoms but never yields fruits

This proverb informs us that falsehood only appears to be attractive to the listener but certainly it does not yield any positive result. In Hausa society, when one engages oneself in telling lies one will not earn the respect of their people with the passage of time. People will lose confidence in them and thus disassociate themselves from the liar. In a society that believes in communal style of life no one can imagine the kind of life one would live if isolated from the community. The aim of taking such stand by the Hausa is to discourage people from telling lies on one hand and encourage people to tell the truth on the other. In order to encourage their people to tell the truth, Hausa people often assert:

Proverb Twelve

Mai gaskiya ya na tare da Allah  
A truthful (person) is with God

According to the proverb the Almighty Allah (SWT) is always by the side of those who tell the truth. Oh! What is more comforting than the awareness that God is behind one and will protect and support one as one tells the truth? There is nothing as assuring, so with such convictions, the Hausa feel confident and obliged to tell the truth fearlessly.

Forbearance

Forbearance is very important for the avoidance of conflict and sustenance of peaceful coexistence. It requires members to be restraint, patient and tolerant in their behaviours. This is necessary because even after taking all necessary steps to guard against conflict, one day one might be provoked by another person. So in this kind of situation the Hausa people expect the provoked person to react responsibly. Immediate reaction due to provocation leads to regret, as "two wrongs cannot make a right". The following Hausa proverb succinctly earns.

Proverb Thirteen

Ba'a rama gayya da fushi  
'you' don't avenge a malicious conduct when angry".

From this proverb we can understand that it is wrong to react to provocation. This attitude is also in line with the tradition of the Holy Prophet of Islam, Muhammad (PBUH), which advised the Muslim believers not to react in annoyance. According to the tradition if one is provoked while he is standing, he should sit down and if he is sitting down he should lie down. To the Hausa people, forbearance is necessary because it is only foolish people that can give in to provocation and eventually do and say things that may worsen the already bad situation. Still on the subject of patience, the Hausa people believe that,

Proverb Fourteen

Hakuri maganin zaman duniya  
Patience is the universal remedy

By this proverb, therefore, we are supposed to exhibit some sense of tolerance in our everyday dealing, individually and collectively. It is a known fact that Nigeria is a multi-ethnic nation – diverse in language, religion and culture. It is therefore imperative, that since we are destined to live together, the question of patience and tolerance among us becomes absolutely necessary. Another proverb reminds us that,

Proverb Fifteen

Kowa ya yi hakuri shi ke samun riba

Any one who is patient; is one who makes profit.

According to this proverb, after all considerations, it is certain that those who are patient and tolerant will derive the benefit. This is because in the content of this paper, they will live peacefully among their people. This is in contrast to those provocations. In Hausa society, any body who is patient is accorded great respect. He is praised and honoured. In the philosophy of Hausa people “ba a gajiya da hakuri”. (there is no tiredness in patience) it is believed that there is no limit to patience. For the Hausa people, no matter the level of a problem or difficulty one is expected to forbear. One is often reminded that,

Proverb Sixteen

Mai hakuri yakan dafa duste, in mai izan wuta ya daure

A tolerant (man) can successfully cook stone if the fire wood pusher endures

This proverb means that as long as people develop the attitude of patience and tolerance they will overcome all the difficulties and hurdles on their ways and they will live happily in the society.

**Unity**

Besides forbearance, one other subject which is very important for the promotion of peace through prevention of conflict is unity. There is no how people can have peace if they are not united. Conflict will set in as soon as people become divided. The following proverb warns people not to allow themselves to be divided.

Proverb Seventeen

Sai bango ya tsage kadangare ke samun wurin shiga

Only when a wall cracks, the lizard gains entry.

The proverb encourages people to live harmoniously with one another. They should not allow anybody from within or outside to set them apart. They should work in unison as discord breaks up families. The next proverb is still on the subject of unity as mechanism for conflict prevention.

Proverb Eighteen

In kaga gemun dan’uwan kaya kama da wuta kama masa a kashe

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

According to this proverb, if you find your friend, colleague or fellow human being in trouble or problem, try the best you can and assist him get out of it. Otherwise, when you allow him to be drowned or consumed by it, you could be the next victim. For this reason, the proverb urges people to remain united and show kindness and concern in other people’s trouble. Thus, people should put a united front in addressing issues that affect other members of the society because if allowed to spread it might engulf them as well. Similar message is given by the following proverb.

Proverb Nineteen

Abinda ya ci doma ba zai bar awai ba

Whatever consumes Doma will not spare Awai

The above proverb encourages people to be united and thus be their brother’s keepers. One should not rejoice seeing his friend or relation in problem. Instead, he should show interest and committed in helping the person to resolve the problem. By so doing, one is not only helping the person concerned, but also himself.

These proverbs underlie the strong desire of Hausa people for progress and development as well as the awareness that it is only when peace prevails that people will improve its lots and thus live long enough to enjoy the benefit of their labour and the labour of their heroes past. Again, at the beginning of reconciliation, a Hausa elder may advise,

Proverb Twenty

A rufe tutu a ci tuwo

(Let’s) cover human excrement and eat food

The proverb wants individuals involved in minor misunderstanding to stop digging up past misdeeds, which can lead to the escalating of the dispute. Instead, the individual involved should let bygones be bygones and start a fresh. The individuals involved should forget their differences and concentrate on those that unite them.

Similarly, in order to guard against the escalation, degeneration or spread of conflicts which is common feature of African society, the following Hausa proverb warns:

Proverb Twenty One

Ka da a mai da kurji gyambo  
Don't turn the boil into an ulcer

The Hausa People are conscious of the fact that unnecessary arguments as those concerning minor family or community well being could degenerate in to serious and uncontrollable stage. Therefore, in order to avoid worsening conflict the proverb urges the individuals involved should forget about the minor issues and concentrate on more positive issues that could wax them stronger. In this way,. The Hausa people resolve conflict amicably and with dispatch. It is also important for the parties involved in a dispute to understand that,

Proverb Twenty Two

Akan saba ko tsakanin harshe da hakori  
Friction does happen even between tongue and teeth

This proverb draws the attention of all parties concerned in a dispute that friction is normal and part of every day life. It is not strange to find friction and misunderstanding among friends and relations. What is odd, however, is to allow the friction to degenerate.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

From the analysis of the proverbs it is evident that Hausa proverbs contain sufficient ingredients for the establishment and sustenance of peaceful coexistence not only in Hausa society but Nigeria in general. Thus, if the philosophy and wisdom of Hausa proverbs are employed very well, by all Nigerians, Nigeria will be a more peaceful place to live in despite differences in culture, tribe, religion, region and party. This is so since among the major and important topics contained in Hausa proverbs (truth and unity) have ben noted.

#### **V. Recommendations**

The paper recommends that in addition to applying the lessons contained in Hausa proverbs,

1. People like General Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida (former Nigerian Head of state, who married and lived with a non Hausa should be emulated).
2. Atiku Abubakar (GCON) (former Nigerian Vice President, who is married to Titi Abubakar, a Yoruba, I believe, should be emulated).
3. Amina Alfa (a Tiv Woman) who married a Hausa (see Sunday Trust of November 25, 2012) should be copied.
4. Jamila Hassan (an Idoma and Christian lady) who married a Hausa (see Sunday Trust of November 25, 2012) should be imitated.
5. Zainab Alfa (a Nupe Woman) that married a Hausa (see Sunday Trust of November 25, 2012). Should be commended, admired and emulated. In fact, she believes and concludes that, such marriages promote peaceful coexistence among people of different cultural backgrounds and religious affiliations.
6. People should take words of wisdom from elders, leaders and other people in general.
7. Government should tackle the problem of unemployment in the north and Nigeria in general.

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