

Yorùbá Proverbial Metaphor: A Rhetoric tool and Guiding Principle to Conflict Resolution

Emmanuel Oluniyi Ademola

Department of Communication and General Studies

University of Agriculture,

Abeokuta, Nigeria

ademolaoluniyi@gmail.com; niyi_ademol@yahoo.com

Abstract

The Yorùbá are a set of unique ethnic group with peculiar traditions, values and culture. Their cultural practice, heritage is found on the epitome of their proverbial prowess which are formed within the context of their traditional “Yorùbá language and dialect,” and used as a tool for conflict management and resolution. Conflict by Yorùbá belief is inevitable, but not insurmountable as Yorùbá found conflict always positive. To amplify this belief, Yorùbá at different occasions incorporate some of the proverbs that are relevant and applicable to conflicting situations in their attempt to resolve conflicts. This essay examines some of the selected proverbs while synthesized them as a rhetoric tools and guiding principles to constructive conflict resolution in the Yorùbá traditional Society. Suggestions are raised that application of proverbial maxims with Yorùbá perception on conflict and conflict resolution could be useful for peaceful handling of contemporary conflicts that are rampaging the African nations.

Keywords: Yorùbá, Ethnic group, Proverb, Constructive, Conflict resolution.

Introduction

Conflict in traditional Yorùbá speaking society is said to be positive, and as it is positive; so also, its resolution is dramatized. The drama that most audience experienced in the scene of conflicts resolution most times, make them not to hesitate, and burst into laughter. The dramaturgical essence usually involved a systematic condition of all sides (scenes) to the dispute (drama) as the litigants normally resorted to using flash back (mnemonic memory) with

recitational model (Olaoba, 2002). Conflict among Yorùbá ethnic group is found positive it's never seen dysfunctional because there is not always victor or vanquished in resolution process, but genuine reconciliation to restore the existing relationship. This belief, practice and pattern of conflict resolution if adopted would be very useful in solving contending conflicts in the contemporary Africa nations.

Historically, Yorùbá derived their sources of adjudication from wholesome of wisdom and traditional values, the proverbial expression of their forefathers which were always quoted, imported, and even dramatized in relevant conflicting situations (Adémowó, 2014). Proverbs from the Yoruba language style is of performing African legal heritage. They are the wisdom of lore's used in the drama of litigation among Yorùbá (Nigeria), Lugbara (Uganda), the Fante (Ghana) and Barotse (Bechuanaland). The lore's are often verbally dramatized to achieve a desirable purpose, and in ensuring drama. The memory of the audience would be sharpened towards appreciating the gamut of justice portrayed through the keen sense of fair play and the 'palaver' which is usually the concern of adjudicators (Olaoba, 2002). The dramatic experience is found in the eloquent oratory prowess possesses by adjudicators in the tribunal procession on conflict resolution as illustrated by Ajíṣafẹ́: at announcement of the proceeding, such officer in the arbitral court usually proceed in a commanding tone as:

Be civil, be quiet, be dumb. Let the cougher conceal (or refrain from) coughing; let woman with babes take care of their babies (keep them from crying); let everybody close his mouth. The cord that binds humanity is broken, the cord which ties friendship is cut; the cord of family and relatives is also broken, the big men want to tie up the broken cords; and if anyone disturbs them in this work of re-organisation, such individual shall be seriously dealt with (Ajíṣafẹ́, 1946:40)

What most times followed this oratorical expression in these circumstances were silence and tranquility; and while this is not only for the sake of peacemaking, it also calls for a conducive and enabling environment for adjudication. Most of the proverbial saying and its expression in the venue of conflict resolution are not only to appease the conflicting parties, but as a warning statement to make them overcome deep-seated hatred enmity and anger (Adéyemí, 2014). Olaoba in his work affirmed that, in their efforts to resolve conflict; Yorùbá elders would not mind to sit under a tree and deliberate as long as they could until they are agreed on reasonable decision. Hartland succinctly stated that:

African are concerned, have a keen sense of justice, their passion for oratory, the gift of eloquence and power of shrewd cross-examination and he enjoys the dramatic exhibition involved in the “palaver” (Heartland, 1924: 50)

Though, in traditional Africa society and as the case of Yorùbá ethnic group, conflict may ensue whenever and wherever incompatible interest occurred and may result in “win-lose character”. Conflict within a common understanding is not considered as the problem rather, but the inability of the parties to understand how to resolve it. The resolution processes, and management of conflict by the Yorùbá, however, ends in ‘win-win’ situation; the idea of giving a little and take a little with the application of other proverbs. Yorùbá proverbs, more than any other poetic type analyze the rule and the conduct of the game. They state what should or should not be done and lay conditions for certain actions and attitudes. They serve as social charters condemning some practices while recommending others. These statements can be negative, positive, or conditional. The negative statements usually assert what things are not or should not be done. They are embodiment of a moral or practical precept or a rule of conduct (Ọlátúnjí, 1984).

The proverb is regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of a people’s wisdom and philosophy of life. There is an analogical function, which is basically cognitive, in the use of proverbs. This analogical and anthropological meaning of verbal communication is what Chilton referred to as “metaphor morphism” (Chilton, 1988). The “morphism,” is about seeing one thing in terms of another or the marking of one script known on to another (Oha, 1998). Other than powerful verbal expression, proverbs have proved to be of great relevance benefit to modern men. Its values do not lie only on what they reveal of compressed or forceful language that make people behave according to norm and values of the land. Yorùbá therefore, use words with proverbs metaphorically, this occurs because to Yorùbá, words are magic and sacred. Words are incantation that can perform different magic in whom is being said to. Yorùbá would always use words with their proverbs all together and this is why they often come with the sayings: *òwe ẹ̀şin ọ̀rọ̀, ọ̀rọ̀ sị̀ nì ẹ̀şin ọ̀we, bí ọ̀rọ̀ bá sọ̀nù ọ̀we nì a fì n' wá a* (Adéyemí, 2009), words are known as the route of proverb, and proverb is the route of words, when there is scarcity of word, proverb can make the source.

One could, therefore, realize that applying proverbs to solving knotty social problems, especially conflicts in Yorùbá land, is most desirable. The reason being that proverbs are short, sacred, ironic, and metaphorical in their formulation, they are often more employed as a rhetorical device to increase the clarity and pragmatic effect of the speaker’s communicative intention to

the listeners. Proverbs are an agent of vitality in the realm of verbal discourse; used to communicate truths that may be abstract and difficult to understand, they usually dramatize and configure the bare truths in the facts of everyday life (Agbaje, 2005).

These truths however, most time become so substantial that they stimulate imagination and challenge our understanding of conflicting situations. The important of these proverbs by the Yorùbá perception of conflict come thus in agreement with different situations seem conflictual and this is reason why Yorùbá in their attempt to illustrate the consequences of conflict between two parties who are entangled over an incompatible interest, resource occasionally adjudged with proverbs as: *Bí a bá n jà, bí i kí á kú kọ*. Literarily means: Even when we are in conflict with someone, is not enough to wishing ourselves death (Fayemi, 2009) or *Òkun kì í hó ruru, kí á fà á ruru*. Meaning: The gravity of our annoyance should not be used to justify our anger. Similar to this are other proverbs, such as the following:

K'èni má bínú kínú; k'èni má baà j'ìjàk'ìjà. K'èni má j'ìjàkijà, k'èni má baà j'èbik'èbi. Meaning: Unnecessary annoyance begets avoidable violent confrontation; avoid every slightest violent confrontation to prevent slightest culpability (Fayemi, 2009)

Órẹ̀ kì í ya òrẹ̀, àjọsẹ̀ ní n' dínkù. Meaning: There is no permanent hostility in friendship; only that there is limitation in affective association.

Bí a ò bá gbàgbé òrò ànà, a kò ní r'èni bá sere. Meaning: Our inability to forget the grievances of the past is the cornerstone of loneliness.

Şemí n bi ó l'òògùn òrẹ̀. Meaning: Seeking cause(s) of discord is the key to conciliation

Inú bíbí ò da nnkan; suùrù baba ìwà; àgbà tó ní suùrù, ohun gbogbo ló ní
Meaning: Indignation does not result into anything good patience is the best of character. A patient elder has everything

The perception of Conflict by Yorùbá cultural beliefs; makes conflict natural, as to the concept of peace contrary to the global or universal conception. The words as expressed in proverbs are all formed the symbolic communicative resources at the disposal of the mediator and are mechanisms of Yorùbá indigenous conflict resolution. More often than not, conflict resolution and harmonization of thoughts in Yorùbá culture require expertise in the people's

oral tradition, good reputation, experience and a measure of objectivity on the part of the adjudicators. Yorùbá have their peculiar ways of conceptualizing conflict. Peace, however, is a permanent structure in conflict resolution in Yorùbá beliefs. This type of conceptualization evolved from a communal cultural philosophy that stress the importance of the whole above the parts; the supremacy of the community over the individual.

The fact is that, the Yorùbá have a wide range of proverbs that can support conflict management process. Coessentially these proverbs promote such values as human cooperation, diversity and warning; this in support that, should the proverbial implications be studied particularly in indigenous languages as showing in the logical structure and implications for conflict management, it would greatly enhance conflict management. Take for instance, in the context of conflict resolution, Yorùbá always appeal to the concept of “reasonableness ‘or give a little, take a little’ which is just simple way of balancing the equation or maintaining the equilibrium. This is a win-win perception and no victor no vanquished formulae employed to pacify the disputants and need to sensitize them for forbearance in order to maintain peace and social harmony (Olarinde, 2010). By this perception, another Yorùbá proverb that underlines the inevitability of conflict come in place: *A kì í mò-òṅ gún mò-òṅ tẹ, kí iyán ewùrà má lẹmọ*. Meaning: Nobody is perfect, attempt to be perfect exposes one deficiency.

The application of most of these proverbs cannot be well appreciated by a layman unless he pays attention to the sentence form and the imagery in it. Therefore, Yorùbá perception of peace and conflict and their traditional method of resolving conflicts and sustaining peace revolve round the notion that, the two concepts are relationship resources. For example, in the process of conflict resolution, the “wrong” party may be blamed for instigating the conflict; perhaps the “right” party would not be immune from blame for allowing himself to be provoked beyond patience and reasonableness to report the case to an elder. At a critical stage, especially when it seems very delicate to make final judgement, they make sure that both parties to the conflict receive proportional criticism by which they proverbially come to the conclusion by saying: *Bí a bá bá ẹràn wí, a ní láti bá ẹràn wí*. Meaning: If we blame one who is wrong, we must blame the right person too.

This belief system seems to be at variance with the other international organizations’ notions of poverty eradication, Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) seeking equity and suggested measures to eradicate poverty and inequality in our society (Babatunde, 2017). Base on this positive line of their perception to conflict definition another Yorùbá proverb that makes conflict a normal experience on social relationship wisely said by Yorùbá; *Ahọn àti ẹnu*

n̄ jà, tó bá yá wón á parí è. This literally means there is no permanent in-enmity. This directly presents conflict, a social phenomenon.

Conflict among Yorùbá therefore, is resolvable and it demonstrate the knowledge of their custom, norms, values and their tradition by which the personnel that constituted the authority of adjudicators do use different kinds of proverbial expressions as a confirmatory test of their judgement. It therefore, a common belief by Yorùbá that adjudicators in conflict situations would be more intelligent, effectively rich in the knowledge of Yorùbá prowess thus, well grounded in the use of words and proverbs and for this reason another Yorùbá proverb become applicable here that says: *Amòràn-mọ-òwe ní í làjà òràn.* Literarily means that, he that is informed with proverb, is the one that settles problems.

This particular proverb is commonly used as it comes in agreement with Gluckman assertion of reasonable man; thus, that those characters on the stage of adjudication should learn how to be ‘reasonable’ not just for the fast resolution of the conflict under discuss, but for future occurrences (Gluckman, 1955). This informed that proverb-adept to a situation is perforce a rhetorician and rhetoricians hold the view that any proposition can be expressed in a variety of ways but one of these will be the most effective in swaying an audience on a given occasion, situation with similar meaning.

Conceptual discourse of conflict

The word conflict takes different forms and meanings in African societies; and as a result, conflict is difficult to define from the perspective of the Africans. In fact, it is found to be part of excitement for networking relationship, whether negative or positive. Moreover, conflict takes different forms and dimensions in Africa, and is worthy to emphasize that conflict does not have a single definition from African perspective. It could be a kind of social unrest or relationships; it could as well be positive or negative. Conflicts are in magnitude of rage, rift, and misunderstanding. It can take place at any level, family and market brawls, skirmishes and wars. These kinds of conflicts are very common in traditional African societies. It was recorded that war occurred as a result of broken diplomacy between communities in the traditional African societies.

Principles of Conflict Prevention and Peacekeeping among Yorùbá

Apart from resolving mechanisms of conflicting situation among Yorùbá, many are the principles and rules which serve as laid down procedure for conflict prevention and peacekeeping. The principles are practical common

experience of adjudicator which imported from proverbial expression not only to appease, but to warning parties on the consequence of their actions (Adeyemi and Salaudeen 2014). Thus, explained African jurisprudential thoughts on the concept of justice through a prescriptive exploration of Yorùbá proverbs.

Traditionally, among Yorùbá, local law derives essentially from customs, values and traditions. Thus, while the legal traditions of the Yorùbá were largely unwritten, their preservation and survival were done through performance which make them livelier and more understood easily by the people. For the avoidance of incessant conflict, Yorùbá have their norms and values which are mandatory and obliged for the sanity to prevail in the society, and is become unpardonable for who breach it. Thus, (*eèwò*), taboo works a social organizing principle among the Yorùbá, helping sustain peaceful relationship in their communities. The authorizing agency of *eewo* resides in the belief that certain supernatural forces, curse or power is in it and has capacities for both reward and punishment. Thus, the Yorùbá proverb that says: *Eni tí ó bá ẹ̀ ohun t'ẹ̀nikan kò ẹ̀ rí, ojú rẹ̀ á rí ohun t'ẹ̀nikan kò rí rí*; Meaning: He who breaks a taboo risk suffering incredible consequence.

Very close to the principle of taboo, (*eèwò*), is the principle of “truth” and has always been the major mechanism of conflict resolution. Yorùbá believe that truth that you will tell before tribunal is before their ancestors and as a result, both parties are in readiness to accept the verdict of the tribunal. The disputants are forced to adhere to the principle of truth and are made to understand that diviners are in the presence to detect truth from falsehood. A plaintiff or he who witness in conflicts made to swear to Ògún, the god of iron by touching his tongue to an iron object while asking Ògún to kill him if he is not telling the truth, he may be asked to drink from ground at Ogboni house while swearing on the oath (Bascon, 1969). With the issue of truth as a guiding rule, it is difficult for people to involve themselves on unwanted and unnecessary conflict. This has gone to do with another Yorùbá proverb that says; *Ejọ̀ ni èniyàn n kó, ẹ̀nikan kí í kó ijà*. Meaning: You can only have the knowledge of the conflict, but not have knowledge of consequence of conflict.

There has always been a perfect communication skill on the part of tribunal to detect who is saying truth and falsehood. For instance, when the disputants are before tribunal, there are signs that come in place as attestation to the presence of their ancestors and which must be respected and obey without subjection. Taken for instance, when you are in the tribunal and there was lightning, it is believing that *Sango*, the god of thunder is in action, therefore, there must be response to this action, since failure to this might follow with a particular sanction. Disputants often take their cases to traditional court as wards and neighborhood mediators' elders otherwise known as *àgbà*. This

tribunal comprises of *àgbà* who by their experience, memory can be depended upon to resolve conflicts with dispatch proverbial prowess of local Yorùbá language, using a relevant standard of words and proverb that are applicable to the conflictual context to support their expression in the process of delivering their judgement. At this level Yorùbá would be very factual in their judgement with proverb like; *Bí ìkà bá ro èjọ́, ìkà kọ ní yóò dá a*. Meaning that: If wicked lodges complaints, it is not the wicked that will adjudicate the judgement.

In addition to this is the use of religion symbols as principle to prevent conflicts. These symbols and objects of their religion performers; *Ògún*, (the god of iron) with iron as its symbol likewise, *Sàngó* (the god of thunder) uses thunder to deal with his culprits and *Sànponná* (the guardian god of the infection and healing of smallpox). The symbols of these gods were used to compel people to be in peace and even tell truth at the period of conflict resolution. This by the Yorùbá belief, is that whenever there is a conflict, its consequence will not be suffered by the parties alone but, by his family even the entire community hence, people are abstaining from conflict or quickly checkmate whoever that tries something contrary to the guiding principles as a result Yorùbá would quickly add this proverbs that says: *Bí ará ilé èni bá n jẹ kòkòrò burúkú bí a ò bá tètè sọ fún un hùnrùnhùrùn rẹ kò ní jẹ kí èniyàn sùn*; (Afe, 2013) Meaning, if your neighbor is indulging in one particular attitude that is bad, if you did not correct him the end result of his attitude may not be comfortable for your living.

Consequently, conflict in Yorùbá society typified with their ethical framework, their religion and its specter of deities, therefore, often offer panacea for conflict and peace related matter (Olaoye, 2010). The religion practice among the traditional Yorùbá society is rooted in polytheism and dependent on deities who are known and seen as intermediaries between the Supreme Being (Olo-dunmare) who is neither known nor seen. The deities include deities as Ogun, masquerade and in this respect, deities are held in awe, and as such people refrain from carrying their wrath in every aspect of activities in life especially the acts that border on peace and tranquility (Dopemu, 2000). It is obvious that religion beliefs touch on spiritual and physical being of average Yorùbá man. In fact, in the realm of spiritualism, religion work in the innate thinking of a man by which Yorùbá referred to “*èrì ọkàn*” conscience, with this, whenever anyone does anything evil, - it is believing in Yorùbá society to draw his attention to his/her conscience that; *kí èrì ọkàn rẹ kí ó jẹ ọ*, meaning; let your conscience judge you. The result of this is that usually, such individual would be forced to confess his sin as a direct way of saying the truth before tribunal while sacrifices will be offered to appease the deities. The application, therefore, on *èrì ọkàn* principle, restrain people in traditional Yorùbá society from

embarking on evil acts. Their belief in their ancestral spirit is formerly rooted in their culture.

It is their beliefs that their ancestors watch from behind on earth. In this way, the ancestor has the power to afflict or plague any unrepentance member of the family who might venture to dislocate peace and order in the family. Such plague ranges from sickness to other as well as calamities. In some family an adulteries husband or wife in the family receive the wrath of the ancestor. In this, the husband, wife, or child may become sick, run mad or end up in a mysterious death if he/she fails to make confession and sacrifices are offered. Barring is another mechanism by which peace is allowed to rain in traditional Yorùbá society. Under this method, offender against the verdict or norms of community is ostracized from that community. The culprit is often publicly molested. Thus, ostracism infuses psychological fear into member of the family or the communities. The fear of being laugh to scorn, mocked, molested and blackmail make people to maintain robust sense of probity in their communities.

In a similar vein is the Yorùbá belief in the principle of *alájòbí*, the familial bond of kinship which is used as peace sustenance. *Alájòbí* here is with a spiritual essence that is connected with the family's ancestral spirit. By the virtue of *alájòbí* principle, member of a family, either immediate or extended, are bound together to maintain unity, trust loyalty to one another without any rancor. It is this principle that comes with notion of human relationship that is in vogue as argued by Akiwowo's with their notions of *àjòbí* and *àjògbé*. Human society (*àsùwádá ènìyàn*) is made up of two primordial forms, *àjòbí* and *àjògbé* (Lawuyi,1990). These are two forms of relationship as *consanguinity* and *co-residentship* respectively. *Àjòbí* relates to the facts of lineage linkage and collateral relationships based upon blood and birth; while *àjògbé* relates to the fact of sharing the same or contiguous shelter whether or not the sharers are related by blood or birth (Akinsola,1983). For The derivative concept *alájòbí* may be defined as that which sustains all kinds of lineal and collateral relationships - *okùn ọmọ iyà* (the thread that binds persons of the same maternal origin together); while the derivative concept *alájògbé* will be that which sustains persons or groups who are living together, under one compound or in contiguous shelters in a community (Akin-Makinde, 1988). The essence of these kinds of relationship is that in situations of conflicts, it means that the cord that binds together *ọmọ-iyá* or *alájòbí* on the one hand and *aláduúgbò/alájògbé* on the other is about to break. The elder's (*Àgbà*) who are in the position to identify and recognize the basis and importance of human relationship would not allow this to happen. On this very circumstance, Yorùbá proverb applicable is; *Àgbà ò ní wà lójá kí orí ọmọ tuntun wó*.

Literarily means, an elder does not look unconcerned when certain things are going wrong around him or her.

While this proverb at time is used to sensitize and awakening the consciousness of elder's around, it is used to protect the cord of kinship. This however, revealed the conservative agent of violent conflict of which negates peace in Yorùbá belief in contemporary societies as "partial third-party" mediation in conflict situations. Yorùbá accordingly acknowledge the positive role of impartial third party in conflict resolution with the proverb which says, *Àìsì eníkéta ni eni méjì fi ń ja àjàkú akátá*, meaning that, it is when nobody else is near that two people fight to death.

The importance of this proverb for conflict resolution among Yorùbá tribe is derive from the relevance placed on good neighborliness in Africa, and neighbors in Yorùbá land are not expected to simply fold their arms while certain things is going wrong in their neighborhood. Yorùbá believe that if the third party would have stridden in promptly, conflict would not have degenerated to a violent situation. Thus, is the Yorùbá concept of *alájòbí*, *aládùngbò* or *alájogbé* can be extended to apply to a modern state in which there are diverse people and groups that live together under the same geographical location. This is also in line with idea of modern-day nation building, and peace-building. Given the fact that the people are not bound together by blood and birth, yet they should find it necessary to live together in peace, what they have to do is to consciously invent a process that defines the basis of their association. The importance of this form of relationship is that members who are in the pact with one another are inspired by their mutual feeling of need for survival to put the public interests over and above individual interests.

The consciousness that *alájòbí* principle pays is normally invoked in the process of dispute settlement and mostly when one is called to witness or swearing an oath in a conflicting situation. At the setting of family among the Yorùbá, there could be an invocation of ancestral spirit to degree that the two parties would begin to make some utterances related to the idea of Yorùbá knowledge of *alájòbí*. Some of these utterances or incantation comes with proverbial discourses and expression to invoke and awakening the spirit of their ancestors for the social concept of *alájòbí* for peaceful relationship includes genuine reconciliation; for this, utterances as the following are made: *Kí alájòbí dá mi l'èjò bí mo bá da ilẹ̀ pẹ̀lú ẹ*. Meaning: May the ancestral bond judge me if I have ever done any evil against you? In other context, other proverbs that are applicable on this situation are as follow: *Alájòbí á dá a, ilẹ̀ á dá a fún ọ*. Meaning: The ancestral bond will judge, the earth will judge you and other as; *Ilẹ̀ didà ló ń pòrẹ, alájòbí ló ń pa iyekàn tó bá da'ni*. This simply means; it is *alájòbí* which will kill the disloyal friend; it is *alájòbí* that will kill betraying kin.

All these proverbs honestly deter people from conflict in Yorùbá traditional society and allow them to keep good social relations. For example, *ilẹ̀ didá* (betraying) in Yorùbá setting is abhorred with fear as a betrayer among Yorùbá is considered as an (*òdàlẹ̀*). The offence of betrayer therefore is regarded as one against the earth as it is the ultimate witness of the sanctity of covenants and the punisher of those who broke these. This is also qualified with another prover as: *Òdàlẹ̀ á bá lẹ̀ lẹ̀*. Meaning: The betrayer would be consumed by the earth.

In Yorùbá traditional society dignity as prestige by the individual is well protected. People count much to their dignity in fact; it is a pride which is guided jealously, and this go a long way to sustain peace and a guiding principle from deadly and unnecessary conflicts. Every community in Yorùbá societies has its own cultural value which is used as an instrument to inculcate good behavioral measure in their children as well as adult. These were found in communalistic accepted values in Yorùbá society which serve as principles. In Yorùbá societies, cooperation and mutual understanding are known as the moral and value standard highly considered and enjoined as essentials.

It is from moral ground in Yorùbá traditional society for a worthy father to give instruction proudly and authoritatively to his immediate family on what he wants or what is good as the moral standard, discipline which his household must abide. With this, Yorùbá fathers would often tell their son axiomatically; *rántí ọmọ ẹni tí ìwọ n se*, that is, remember the son of whom you are. This proverbial statement apart from serving as warning statement to deter such individual from embarking on act that could stained the image of his parent or entire family, it serves as a protective measure for the family integrity as no one would want to have anything to do with family that has its name soiled. It addresses knowledge around aspects of the Yorùbá cultural beliefs as it employed in rural African communities to ensure child discipline, and consequently social control among all members of family (Dauda, 2017). What is important about this proverb is that a child cannot avoid to soil the reputation or name he bears, because the name he answers not just for himself, but because the whole family stand to lose or gain base on the kind of habit, attitude or behaviour he exhibits. Even while a child is indulging in certain habit, the parent and family member continually given warning words in proverb as; *Ì-jàkùnmò kì í rìndé ọsán, ẹni tí a bí ire kì í rìnde ọru*; that is, “Character determines personality”.

This proverb is to prevent conflict and guide people from what can make a nuisance to the peace of society. Thus, Yorùbá cultural heritage is involving around several of their traditional practices but from these proverbs as a conflict resolution mechanism, and as well as deterrent of preventive mechanisms. More often than not, Yorùbá with their belief of conflict as natural and which

is resolvable whenever it occurs would further their prowess as; *Ìjà ò dọlà, orúkọ ni ó n sọ'ni*. Meaning: Conflict not bring wealth, instead, it stigmatized. At time warning statement might be proverbially singing to the ear of belligerent as; *Má rorò, má rorò, àgbà tí ó bá rorò kì í kó ènìyàn jọ*. Meaning: Do not be wicked for a wicked elder do not have followers.

Both orally and practically, the proverbs basically formed the pillar of peace and conflict prevention and peacekeeping in Yorùbá society. These proverbs though are unwritten, they are part and parcel of peacekeeping among the Yorùbá ethnic group as different of it are applicable and imported to the circumstances of conflict and peacekeeping processes. They remained a veritable template for molding attitude and character for the purpose of conflict prevention, peace and harmony among Yorùbá (Olatunji, 1984).

Institutions for Conflict Resolution in Yorùbá Traditional Society

Fundamentally, the Yorùbá speaking people of southwestern Nigeria have long been adjudicating disputes in their traditional courts. Oguntomisin identified this in ascending order, three types of courts which are relevant to facilitating administration of justice. There were different hierarchy or stages of conflict resolution; there were dispute resolutions at the inter-personal or family level under the control of (family head or Baálé), the extended family level and village or town level under direct control of (Elders or Baale). There was other like, age group, masquerade, the Ogbóni secret society and the rest. They comprise certain personalities who rule out the principle for peace. They are established institutions that enforce peace through many processes which could be physical or metaphysical. It is physical when it involves constitutional authorities while become metaphysical when it involves spiritualized methods which could be inform of extra judicial divorcees (Oguntomisin, 2004). To maintain peace and harmony within the family circle, as the smallest hierarchy in conflict resolution that is between husband and wife; Yorùbá people do adjoin with the proverb as: *Ọbẹ́ tí baálé ilé kì í je, iyálé ilé kì í sè é*. Meaning: Compliance begets peace.

This proverb comes in place in most time to keep husband and wife in cordial relationship and unity within their family. Also, decision of *Baálé* within his family circle is law but he must first of all be found responsible to his responsibility that is, possesses the capacity to provide for his family.

Next to *Ìdílé* is the *Ẹbí*, (extended family headed by Mógàjí otherwise known as *olóri ẹbi* is the well experienced eldest man and influential within the family circle (*Ẹbí*) especially, the (extended family). Among Yorùbá, Mógàjí is known as law giver and magistrate of *agboolé* (extended family

unit). The extended family includes all people who have blood relations or links. Mògàjí therefore, sees to the relationships within his extended family and those between his own and other families. As a matter of emphasis, while the position of the Mògàjí is by virtue of age and the membership of a particular extended family, the authorizing influences of his office reside in the exemplary conduct of the one holding position. This is where the concept of àgbà (elder) come in place according to Bankole (2013). In indigenous Yorùbá mechanism of conflict resolution and the connotation of àgbà refers to certain noticeable attribute in a person no matter the age. It is important to know that for the Yorùbá, the title, àgbà (elder) is not based on physiognomic terms. The reference to physiognomy by Bankole in defining an àgbà (elder) is because of the different life experiences that have combined to shape the thought of an àgbà (elder) as a result of old age. It must be articulated that Yorùbá value human experience, which comes by age and that accounts for Yorùbá proverb that says; *Bí omọdẹ bá ní aṣọ bí àgbà; kò lẹ̀ ní àkísà bí àgbà*; Meaning: “Experience is the best teacher”

The elders in the traditional Yorùbá societies are not necessarily chiefs as of modern society; whose positions are political, but hereditary and experience. They are embodiment of wisdom and experience because they act as arbitrators and reconcilers when disputes occur in order to restore peace and maintain harmonious relations between conflicting parties. Àgbà suggest the quality of being reflective in pros and cons and asking question (Cross-examine) about the motive of person who present a case or made a complaint and the possible consequences which the complaints might have. This becomes necessary not for you to have accepted the complaints or reports from a party through hook and similar but put into the court of “reason.” Here intelligence is adopted with the ability to follow matters coherently, identifying interconnections between matters as arise, and having the ability to arrive at a correct conclusion from many given circumstances and propositions and the ability to come into a reasonable conclusion to solve life problems. In addition to these are also emotional qualities like; tolerance, courage and moral qualities such as truthfulness and selflessness, kindness longsuffering. Within indigenous and even contemporary Yorùbá society therefore, a person who possesses these attributes is referred to as (àgbà) elder.

Àgbà as elderships is concerned is a Yorùbá socio-political model for conflict resolution, and it is a third-conflict handling style that is responsible for effective conflict resolution in traditional Yorùbá societies. In traditional Yorùbá culture, àgbà (elders) were usually relied upon as arbitrators and agents of conflict resolution in view of certain qualities possessed by this category of human beings. “Àgbà (elders) are respected individuals identified by age and other qualities, which mark them out in their families, communities,

nations, regions, and the world. For one to be recognized as an *àgbà* (elder), he must be fearless person (*alákíkanjú*); he must be knowledgeable and wise but must be someone who gives room for criticisms (*ológbón, olóye, afimò ti ẹ̀lòmíràn ẹ̀*); he must be tolerant (*alámùùmóra*); he must be upright in all ways (*olótítò, olódodo*); he must not be selfish (*ànikànjopón*). To this end, conflict reconciliation among the Yorùbá is usually seen as a social responsibility by the elders. And on this account Yorùbá proverbially say: *Àgbà ọ̀ níí wà lójá kí orí ọ̀mọ tuntun wó*; Meaning that; Experience is the guide for life.

An elder who watches while tension mounts between children, adults, groups and any warring parties is not worthy to be regarded as elder and consider socially irresponsible. This social responsibility is voluntarily done, and as well as, institutionalized in different ways. The reason why these attributes are important for leadership is also connected with Plato's belief in many of his "Dialogues" that emotions have the tendency of blurring the vision of the mind to reflect the forms, which is the domain of wisdom and all things that are excellent. As applicable to this discourse, we can find applicable of another Yorùbá proverb which says that "Let the *agba* who wants to resolve conflicts first of all put his own house in order."

This is in consonance with the Yorùbá proverb that says; *Ilé la ti n' kó ẹ̀sọ̀ rọ̀de*; meaning, charity begins at home. Home or house here may stand for family, community, nation, or region. This means, if a man wants to mediate in conflict at the community level, he should put his family in order first. An elder who wants to resolve conflicts at the national level should also put his community in order; likewise, an elder who wants to resolve conflicts at the regional level must put his own nation in order; and lastly an elder who wants to reconcile differences at the world level should have put his own region in order.

Furthermore, the eldership model in Yorùbá land has an internal mechanism of ensuring that conflicting parties actually oblige to the terms of judgement upon which the resolution was based. This they do through administering metaphysical oaths of the spirit of the gods and other primordial entities among the conflicting parties in order to ensure compliance to the voluntary terms of adjudication which the reconciliation is based. Reconciliatory and metaphysical nature and character of justice, as well as the goals of punishment and the character and nature of a desirable judicial system in African thoughts are reference to African jurisprudential thoughts on the concept of true justice through a prescriptive exploration of Yorùbá proverbs. The metaphysical condition of conflict resolution is adopted as a method used in discovering the truth especially; whenever is observed that any of the conflicting parties is concealing wholly or partly, the truth of the matter. It is also important to note that its use symbolize the interpretations of myths in the process of

conflict management. The ability of the elders to manage conflict in traditional Yorùbá society was a function of some principles.

Thus, there are some essential canons or principles that form the basis for resolving the fundamental disagreements and conflicts in daily discourse in traditional Yorùbá society. The elders are quite conversant with these principles, which guide them in the arbitratative and reconciliatory processes. These ideals are like that of communalism, human personality, human rights and responsibilities, proverbial prowess, truth, justice, covenant keeping, impartial umpire and the willingness of defending the community brotherhood and humanity in one hand and keeping the prosperity of the cultural heritage on the other, are the motivating forces that facilitated the *agba* (elders) ingenuity for conflict management in traditional Yorùbá society.

The last court under traditional Yorùbá society is the court of King; (*Ilé ejó oḃa* or *palace court*). Yorùbá palaces since ages have always been adjudged an institution for governance and administration of justice (Olaoba, 2004). It is significant to note that Yorùbá palaces were court of “arbitration” with robust mechanisms for managing conflict. Palace court in Yorùbáland was adjusted the best model and a good example to look up to in cultural development. It served as machinery for peace initiative and orientation. It also facilitates peace and harmony. Indeed, the court yards had served as the supreme court of justice in Yorùbá society. To make sure that there is a good justice, cross examination is applied in the *Obas’ court* presided by *Oba* and his chiefs in his palace.

The significance of cross-examination in fact gives credence to the fact that Yorùbá speaking people respect truth and abhor falsehood. Sentiment and emotion have no root in the process of cross-examination, differentiation of truth from falsehood. It requires a robust sense of wisdom, bravo and ancestral support among the Yorùbá. It is no doubt a difficult process in Yorùbá jurisprudent tradition. It has a metaphoric sense of usage which replete in cross-checking and corroborating facts and evidence through adequate questioning. The cross-examination has the responsibility of weighing evidence not only with a view to finding fault but also for fine-tuning the legal culture (Olaoba, 2000). This is done without prejudice to cross-examiners and judicial proceed in *Obas* court. Therefore, it is an anathema to hear one side of the dispute or fail to cross-check and corroborate facts of the dispute as Yorùbá often proverbially state it; *Agbó ejó ẹnìkan dá, àgbà òṣìkà*. Meaning: Wicked and iniquitous is he that based his judgement on the evidence given by one of party to a case. Very similar to this prover is another one that says: *A kì í fá orí léyìn olórí*. Meaning: No one gives verdict to a case in abstention.

In fact, adoption of cross-examination is most time signifies the trend of dispute resolution among Yorùbá speaking group. Within this, it does not take

time for both the victor and the vanquished to understand the direction of verdict awaiting the dispute. Indeed, it is the guilty party, who after being struck by the quick wits of cross-examiners, inwardly believes in the hopelessness of his baseless argument. This acceptance as action of the guilty party has been couched with another Yorùbá proverb which says: *Tí ẹlẹjọ bá ti mọ ẹjọ rẹ lẹbi, kò ní pẹ lóri ikúnlẹ*. Meaning: Early acceptance of a litigant's flaws speeds up the process of adjudication and makes guilty not suffer for long. Conflict resolution in Yorùbá land is superhumanly established. This is reason while joint rituals and sacrifices are at times are conducted by the disputants. This occurred when both parties are compelled by Obas court to cook food, bring drinks which are shared together to zeal the verdict of the judgement by the king. Also, is to affirm that conflicts as well as war do exit in Yorùbá land however, they are not fought to extinction.

Conclusion

Conflict in Yorùbá society is found to be positive; its resolution is dramatized since conflict is said to be resolvable. Thus, like every other traditional societies, the traditional Yorùbá communities have conscious desire to maintain solidarity of the group, and an unconscious acceptance of whatever is customary, indigenous and the norm. It is thus a truism that an average Yorùbá man or woman throws his/her weight into the enforcement of traditional codes expressed and encoded in proverbial wisdom and anybody that flout the social norm faces the social correction and sanction. These methods and principles which were very effective in the past are into extinction today by the forces of colonialism, including their apparatus that are left behind and use in replacement of traditional means. This of course has resulted in instability and retarded African and their development.

It is pertinent to borrow a leaf from Yorùbá traditional approach because, the essence of dispute settlement and conflict resolution in traditional Yorùbá societies is mainly involved the removal of the root-causes of the conflict; reconcile the conflicting parties genuinely; to preserve and ensure social harmony, and make everybody involved in the resolved conflict happy and be at peace with each other; this mainly required getting at truth; to set the right value for social production and development; to promote good governance, law and order, to provide security of lives and property and to achieve collective well-being and happiness. There is a need to visit Yorùbá communities, towns, and villages to see that there are still *agba* and that people are still related to one another as *omọ-iyá*, *alájọbí*, *aládúúgbò* and *alájọgbé* for establishing sense of harmonious living. With no doubt the acceptance of Yorùbá perception of conflict and its adoptions to all levels of social and political

organizations in our world for the prevention and resolution of conflicts will be of good help to ameliorate if not stopped the incessant conflicts that is ravaging African continent.

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