

**‘LIVE AND LET LIVE’: THE AFRICAN [“IGBO”] TRADITIONAL
STRATEGY FOR CONTEMPORARY CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

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Abstract

‘Live and Let Live’ is a liberal, ethical and political principle upheld in the African traditional society which appears to have been lost through time. It is encapsulated in African culture and is embodied in its songs, proverbs, folktales and poems. This principle involves the existential requirement to live an authentic life, fully and freely, and to allow others live likewise. As an ethical paradigm, it believes there can be no genuine conflict resolution unless the mind is refined and cultivated. And, as a political paradigm, it sees the people as the greatest resource of a country, and critically examines societal values and practices for peaceful co-existence. This paper is concerned with a philosophical exposition of this traditional ethical/political concept which is an attempt at its rediscovery and re-application in contemporary times. It is also a portrayal of African oral ethics as an indispensable tool for inculcating the values of tolerance, non-violence, good neighbourliness and good conduct as panacea for conflicts. The research methods adopted in this paper are philosophical, historical, analytical and expository. This involves the exposition of African oral ethics as it relates to conflict resolution and the application of secondary means of data collection.

Keywords: Live and let live, Conflict resolution, Traditional Africa, Non-violence.

Introduction

Conflict is inevitable, especially in the social sphere due to differences in human goals, aspirations and interests. According to Fayemi, this diversity in human interest accounts

for the ubiquitous nature of conflicts (66-67). For Akpuru-Aja, conflict involves two or more parties in opposition to interests, principles, practices or strategies (15). It is a manifestation of class or group interests and reflects the struggle over goals among individuals, groups, ethnic groups, states or nations.

Africa, today, cannot be described as a peaceful continent because conflicts rage in many regions across the continent. Ofuho notes that Africa profiles the highest statistics of violent conflicts in the world and this take various dimensions, according to Ajayi & Buhari (138–157). The result is tragic loss of life, displacement of millions of people, devastation of lands and properties. All the compromise the hope of harmony and peaceful co-existence. The African world values and cherishes the absence of war, even in the presence of many tribal conflicts; but still, it is very far from limiting the meaning of peace to the absence of war. Traditional African world cherishes harmony which means living in accord with the various spheres or levels of reality. (NhlanhlaSibanda1).

African culture aides the community to live in harmony while upholding the principles of tolerance which helps to maintain a balance of justice. It is, therefore, the main thrust of this paper to show the significance of African oral ethics through the exposition of one of its idioms: “Live and Let Live” as a philosophical principle that will aid in conflict resolution in Africa.

To achieve this, this paper is divided into sections: the first section borders on the analysis of the key concepts used. The second section briefly considers the nature of conflict; while the third is a brief reflection on the various causes of conflict in Africa. Indigenous African conflict resolution is then considered in the last sections with particular reference to ‘Live and Let Live’ as a philosophical principle that could be applied in conflict resolution.

Conceptual Analysis

Conflict

The term “conflict” suffers from lack of a universal definition. It comes from the Latin word *confligere*, which translates: “to clash or engage in a fight” or confrontation between two or more actors (Miller). Many view, study and define it according to the prevailing situations in their environment and their orientations in life which form the sum total of their experiences. Due to the fact that conflict is prevalent in virtually all aspects of human life, the search for its definition includes diverse interpretations in many fields of human endeavour.

According to Fatai, conflict is a phenomenon that is an important part of human existence and a natural part of our daily lives (35). Francis sees it as the pursuit of incompatible interests and goals by individuals or groups (35). It is a struggle over values and claims to scarce status, power and resources in which the aims of the opponents are to neutralise, injure or eliminate the rivals (Coser 8). To Sani, conflict occurs even in the ‘best’ human

societies and includes mutual images of misunderstanding, hostile utterances, actions and responses that seek to put the interests of the one party in a disadvantaged position.

Conflict, then, is a severe or prolonged disagreement between (and among) individuals or groups. The source of conflict may be an unmet need of one or more of the parties involved in the disagreement and is typically worsened when people identify a solution to the conflict that works for them but which does not take into consideration the needs of the opposing group. Often, in conflict situations, opposing sides stick to their own position because of pride, lack of trust, or they do not fully understand the needs of the other group.

Thus, for Ezirim, in a conflict, there are four theses that are found: there must be two or more parties with distinct interests. There must be struggle by each of the parties to control the object of contention, so each tries to incapacitate the other (16). Conflict could be a form of interaction and a way of achieving unity of some sort, even with the negative objectives of each of the parties against the other. It is in this light that Njoku made a distinction between positive and negative conflict (16). According to him, conflict might be positive when it involves friction in the form of struggles and sacrifices towards an end. This kind is needed for sustenance in the social realm. But when people disagree and the situation degenerates, occasioning mistrust, hostilities, squabbles and fights, it then becomes a case of negative conflict.

While positive conflicts are needed to move the society forward, negative conflicts retard it. Therefore, when conflicts arise in the society as issues to be worried about, one concerns oneself with negative conflict that must be managed, resolved or transformed for the mutual enhancement of all, (Njoku 106–107)).

Conflict Resolution

This involves various non-violent approaches aimed at resolving conflicts. It borders on constructive solutions to the problems that led to the conflict. This is quite distinct from conflict management. Aja views conflict resolution as “agenda setting to assist parties in conflict or dispute to establish a common ground, given certain guiding principles or conditionalities for peaceful co-existence” (32). As noted by Ezirim, “Conflict resolution is multifaceted, in that it refers to a process, a result, and an identified field of academic study as well as an activity in which persons and communities engage every day without using the term” (34). Due to the ambiguous nature of the term, some scholars argue that since conflict is a social necessity, the question of conflict resolution is not attainable. However, what is tenable is the avoidance of violent conflicts and conflicts that may arise between (and among) individuals. It is in this sense that conflict resolution is accepted by most scholars.

African Proverbs/Idioms

Proverb is a collection of moral maxims coded in speech, which after being decoded, reveal the actual meaning. Olagoke defines proverbs as brief, epigrammatic sayings that

have been turned ingeniously into maxims with ethical emphasis. He further stresses that proverbs are short and witty sayings that ingeniously express ideas through skillful means. The literary icon Achebe, drawing inspiration from the way the Igbos eat yam by dipping it in a mixture of oil and salt, considers proverb as the oil with which the Igbos eat speech (5). In Igbo society and in Africa, generally, the use of proverbs or idioms permeates all spheres of life and thought. It borders around the complexity of human existence, conditions and problems—joy, sorrow, fate, wars, human conduct, birth and death. The use of proverbs in speech and in conversations is usually identified with the wise and the aged. In the Igbo society, proverbs are highly regarded as the language of elders who, by virtue of their age and wealth of experience from life and from their familiarity with the customs and traditions of the land, speak efficiently in parables and in proverbs.

Rarely do Igbos bother to explain proverbs, except to children and the uninitiated who ask. They believe that “Onye a tuoroilukowaaya, ego e jiluonneyalaran’iyi” (An adult who asks for the explanation of a proverb is telling his peers that the dowry paid on his mother was a waste!) Listeners are meant to figure out proverbs for themselves, then draw out the moral lessons as they follow the conversation or speech. A mature listener comes out with the message, but interpretations may somewhat vary.

In ‘Igbo–Culture, Tradition, History, the author expressed the view that “the uninitiated could easily get lost in a maze of otherwise familiar clichés knotted with idioms that are designed to impress and or to false-front different agenda” (Enyioha). The Igbos, therefore, take proverbs as witty sayings made exclusively for the consumption of the wise; hence the proverb: ‘a tuoroomara o mara, a tuoroofeke o fenyeisin’ohia,’ meaning: (If you tell the wise a proverb, he comprehends and deciphers it; tell the fool, he flies into the bush).

The Nature of Conflict

Differences in interests and opinions held by the various parties over issues are the chief cause of conflict. The actual level of disagreement might vary, considering the situation that engendered the conflict. Below are some of the various natures conflict can assume:

- a. **Resource-Based Conflict** – Examples of these resources are money, natural resources like land, oil; intangibles as love, esteem, attention, respect, care, e.t.c. (Emezi 46). Resource-based conflicts are interpreted as a process of mirroring needs and values and effective resolution in the process of sharing the resources. Failure to maintain an effective sharing formula of the resources, results into turbulent conflicts.
- b. **Identity-Based Conflict** – This stems from contradictions of ethnic, religious and other communal identities. It involves incompatibility in ways of life, ideologies – the preferences, principles and practices that people believe in. This often has a strong value component, wherein each side asserts the rightness and superiority of its way of life and its ethno-religious system.

- C. **Power Conflict** – This occurs when each party wishes to maintain or maximise the amount of influence that it wields in the social setting. It is impossible for one party to be stronger without the other being weaker, at least in terms of direct influence over each other. Thus, there is power struggle which usually ends in a victory and defeat or in a “stand-off” with a continuing state of tension.

Sources of Conflicts in Africa

Conflicts in Africa reflect its different histories, geographical conditions, different stages of economic development, different sets of public policies and their different patterns of internal and international interaction. Some sources are purely internal; some reflect the dynamics of a particular sub-region; and some have important international dimensions. Despite these differences, according to the 1998 report of the UN Secretary General on the sources of conflict in Africa, these conflicts are linked by a number of common themes and experiences.

Historical Legacies

Colonisation – The partitioning of Africa in 1885 during the Berlin Conference led to the entronement of structures designed to encourage local divisions and which made it difficult for unity to be achieved in the continent.

When the **Cold War** ended, Africa was suddenly left to fend for itself without external economic and political support. Few African regimes could sustain the economic lifestyles to which they had become accustomed, or maintain the permanent hold on political power which they had come to expect. As a result, a growing number of states found themselves internally beset by unrest and violent conflicts.

Internal Factors

Dictatorial and Oppressive Regimes - The nature of political power in Africa has heightened the occurrence of conflict situations. Reliance on centralised and highly personalised form of governance, insufficient accountability of leaders, inadequate checks and balances, non-adherence to the rule of law, absence of peaceful means to change or replace leadership, and lack of respect for human rights, all add up to make the stakes extremely high.

Ethnic Polarity – Africa is home to multi-ethnic groups which are racial and divergent in nature. Some of them thought that they were excluded from governance and started to hate other ethnicities which are assumed to have strong ties in governance. This is one of the major factors that direct the intrastate conflicts in various African countries. The political elites use this as a fertile ground for manipulation of ethnic and regional

sentiments, and this has a spillover effect of cultural detachment and the search for identity.

External Factors

In the competition for oil and other precious resources in Africa, interests external to Africa continue to play a large and, sometimes, decisive role, both in suppressing conflict and in sustaining it. "In Liberia, the control and exploitation of diamonds, timber and other raw materials was one of the principal objectives of the warring factions. Control over those resources financed the various factions and gave them the means to sustain the conflict" (UN 1998 Report). "The same could be said of Angola, where protracted difficulties in the peace process owed much to the importance of control over the exploitation of the country's lucrative diamond fields. In Sierra Leone, the chance to plunder natural resources and loot Central Bank reserves was a key motivation of those who seized power from the elected government in May 1997" (UN 1998 Report).

Indigenous African Conflict Resolution

This study considers African value system and conflict transformation systems as viable means of resolving African conflicts today. Since the end of the cold war, Africa has been torn apart by extremely intense conflicts which have resulted in thousands of deaths, and the internal displacement of millions of civilians. The use of western methods of conflict resolution appears to have failed. Peacekeeping operations, which have been conducted in the last few years under the auspices of the United Nations, have allowed for the establishment of peaceful processes only in very few countries such as Mozambique. "More often than not, there have been resounding failures, recent examples are: Somalia, Rwanda and Angola" (Brock-Utne 6). The reason for this, according to Brock-Utne, is mostly because the political, military and sociological realities of these countries were not fully appreciated and comprehended.

Today's predominant pattern of conflict in Africa is proving resistant to the available and accepted tools of conflict management. What is needed is a new range of flexible and adaptable instruments that can take the more subjective, complex and deep-rooted needs and interests that underpin these conflicts into account. Special attention should be given to the valuable contributions from Africa.

The term *indigenous* refers to that which is inherent, innate and instinctive to a given society. When we allude to indigenous approaches to peace and conflict resolution, we refer to a process that is inherent to a given society following years of tradition and which is also generated and systematically reproduced by such a society. The indigeneity of this process highlights the value in promoting order and stability.

Ajayi and Buhari highlighted various traditional African approaches to conflict resolution which include mediation, adjudication, reconciliation, arbitration and negotiation (cited in Onu 205 – 206). **Mediation** involves a non-coercive intervention of mediator(s), an external party(ies) who help(s) to foster the settlement of differences between (and among) the conflicting parties. The mediator, according to Udegbonam, must be trustable, unbiased, intending to be neutral and unfamiliar to the conflict (33). The conflicting parties must all agree to the mediator(s) whose job it is to reestablish good communication between (and among) them, not by imposing judgment, but by nudging them towards peaceful resolution. The elders in the African setting play this good role of mediators because they are considered trustworthy and full of wisdom and experience (Brock-Utne 11).

Adjudication for Olaoba involves bringing the disputing parties to a meeting held either in the village square, palace court or the chambers of the family heads. Here, series of deliberations and dialogues ensue in a bid to resolve the conflict situation in question (cited in Onu, 206). **Negotiation** is the recognition and use of non-violent approach of dialogue as a strategy for conflict resolution. According to Akpuru-Aja (39), negotiation works better when there is free flow of communication which helps to guide against misperceptions, rumours, assumptions and fears. The aim of negotiation is to harmonise the interest of the parties involved in the conflict. **Reconciliation** – This process marks the end of adjudication and involves the transformation of lingering animosity among parties previously engaged in conflict. Compensation may be paid to parties that have suffered from the conflict situation; and this involves the oppressors' acknowledgement of their actions through expressions of regret and remorse all of which help in the restoration of peace and harmony.

The Role of Customs and Norms in Conflict Management in Igbo Traditional Societies

Most African Societies have historically been patriarchal, hence the dominance of men and the exclusion of women in decisionmaking. The societies are also communal in nature and this subjects the individual to collective values, norms, customs and practices embodied in what the Igbo calls the *Omenala*. Literally *Omenala* means 'as it is done in the land'. As the ordinance of the common good, it exemplifies the laws and customs of the land. Obiora and Edozien maintain that *Omenala* is linked with the ancestral cult which is surrounded by the earth-spirit known as 'Ala' (59). It reflects the cosmic order without which the society would not exist, and also ensures social stability, harmony and peace. This makes it a practical instrument for social control and a foundation and source of the dynamic changes in the tradition and custom of the people (Nwala 78).

A breach of the *Omenala* known as taboos (*nsoala*) is considered a serious issue and this affects three major dimensions of the Igbo world: the land, the spirit world and the domain

of the living. In other words, a breach is considered an assault to the earth goddess 'Ala', a disrespect to the living dead (the ancestors) and an offence against the living members of the community. Acts regarded as taboo include homicide, suicide, murder, stealing, altering the boundary of a piece of land, and others. The punishment includes, according to Obiora and Edozien, "death, in various forms, to loss of one's possessions, in an attempt to pacify the earth goddess" (41). The Omenala, therefore, assists in regulating interpersonal relations by imposing taboos on various crimes. This helps to reduce the incidence of conflicts, thereby maintaining harmony and mutual cooperation for collective survival and happiness.

'Live and Let Live' as an Indigenous African Conflict Prevention and Resolution

As oral societies, traditional Africans have used folklore such as tales, idioms, riddles and proverbs to deliver their views on conflicts and their resolution mechanisms. These genres are instrumental in conveying what to do and what not to do for harmonious coexistence and encourage people to adhere and strive for good societal moral values which in a way help them to be tolerant towards one another" (Moumakwa 42).

This idiom 'Live and Let Live' is built on the principles of solidarity and complementarity. It reminisces the music of Oliver de Coque, a Nigerian Highlife musician, entitled 'ibirikammhiri,' which means: 'live and let me live'. "This aspiration of being considerate of your neighbour as one lives and executes one's projects, runs deep in Africa. It is a sense of responsible living and cohabitation, and a reminder that we need one another in life" (Ibuout, 214).

This proverb or idiom 'Live and Let Live' is not originally Igbo. It is speculative and derives from an analogy of another Igbo proverb: *Egbebere; Ugobere* (let the kite perch; let the eagle perch). According to Kanu, the Igbo principle of *Egbebere; Ugobere* (let the kite perch; let the eagle perch) re-enacts the contents and significance of belongingness as the essence and hermeneutic core of reality. Pantaleon said he believes that what a being is, is its activity of perching (belonging):

To perch is to be. To be is to perch. To be is to belong and to belong is to be. When *Egbe* perches and *Ugo* perches, they come face to face with each other. They are with each other. They are present to each other. They relate to each other deeply and directly as well as have relationships with other inhabitants of *Uwa* (world). To relate is to share something: to give and take. They have common projects, needs and desires. Together, they struggle to overcome their difficulties and share their joy (cited in Kanu, 119).

Reiterating this Igbo proverb and relating it to the arbitrary use of power in the society by the oppressive group that wields it and on normalising justice in the society, Opatá stressed

on the addendum to Egbebere; Ugobere: *nkesiribeyaebene, nkukwaya* “Let the kite perch as well as the eagle. Any that refuses the other to perch, let the wing break” (Opata, 45). This addendum serves no other purpose than to normalise the arbitrary and dictatorial use of power. Stressing on this, he gave further clarification on the proverb:

In the original phrasing of this proverb, it is mandatory that both the kite and the eagle should allow each other a perching space, their differential powers notwithstanding. Indeed, the enshrined principle of accommodation is not negotiable; it is an absolute imperative, and sanctionable, should what it posits fail to be. Thus, there is a posited curse on the offender: let its wings break. Any bird whose wings break loses its bird-hood, its essential state of being (Opata 45).

In recent times, this proverb is reframed as: *Egbebere; Ugobere, nkesiribeyabena, gosiyaebe o gaebe*. The sanction is now removed and the power of allocation and dispensation is now given to the stronger one. But the essence of the sanction is to prevent the stronger one from appropriating and concentrating power on itself. “It is highly improbable that the strong ensconced in its vantage point would assign another equally vantage point to the weak. Those propagating the change in the proverb know that this cannot be true.” (Opata, 46). Opata explains that the strong knows that the weak would be unhappy with his new position and so may conceive ways of inflicting vengeance on the strong.

It is the recognition of this possibility that has led to a further modification of the proverb to: *Egbebere; Ugobere: nkesiribeyabenagosiyaebe o gaebe, kamaobekwara, yaatanankeozomgbashi*. The process of normalisation of injustice is now complete. The weak should accept its assigned place and not do anything that would change its position or inflict injury on the strong one. (46)

This application made by Opata paints a picture of perpetual injustice against the poor and the weak by the strong who will always have their way and keep them under. But this, if it is the case, implies that there can never be anything like peace building in Africa because the strong will not allow it.

Kanu gave a beautiful rendition of this proverb. According to him, the idea of Egbe (kite) and Ugo (eagle) speaks of a variety of positions, personalities, creeds and cultures. The Egbe has no more right to existence than the Ugo, for both must coexist. The Egbe has fundamental contributions it must make to the being of the Ugo and likewise the Ugo to Egbe. Therefore, when one begins to put the other down or to deny the other existence, it ends up alienating itself. They both need to dialogue and make room for each other for the world is such that differences would always exist and to try to destroy the other is to

destroy oneself. “To end the variation in reality is to end reality itself for reality is by nature variegated, (Kanu 87-98). The Egbe and Ugo, therefore, have the option to either relate by harnessing their energies towards achieving common goals, desires and projects, thereby becoming an insurmountable force in the pursuit of their common project or be in perpetual discord, hence alienating their being in the world.

Applying this principle of solidarity and complementarity to our everyday living will help curb the problems that arise from ethnicity, religious conflicts and the desire to put others down because they are not the same as we. Rather, it will help to unite, even in the midst of differences and variations, and to accord the other what is due to him. Iroegbu aptly summarised this thus: “‘Isiokwubu Egbebere; Ugobere. N’ihinaoweghionyeekerekananiyabirin’uwa’. That is, ‘the central thing is live and let live for none is created alone in this world’ (378).

‘Live and Let Live then as a philosophical principle promotes:

- a. **Peaceful co-existence, solidarity and complementarity.** ‘To live’ in the African context is to be with others in the community of beings. To be with others is the modality for being in African ontology. Mbiti succinctly highlights the community determining the role of the individual when he wrote: “I am because we are and since we are, therefore, I am” (108). This encapsulates the African traditional ethics which is based on the notion that man is never alone. Thus, the society is a series of interrelationships in which each one contributes to the welfare and the stability of the community, and avoids anything that is disruptive or harmful to the community’s life, (Opoko, 168).

The following African proverbs shed light on this: “Rain does not fall on one roof alone”. “A single stick may smoke, but it will not burn”. “One finger cannot pick up louse from the head”. “A single bracelet does not jingle”. In all the aforementioned proverbs, *a single stick*, *one finger*, and *a single bracelet* are metaphors for an individual member of a community. It shows the individual’s inability to survive alone. Traditional African communities advocate the benefits of cooperation in resolving conflicts. The moral lesson conveyed through the proverb is that the impact of an event on an individual, be it good or bad, has a certain impact on the other members of the community as well. With this understanding, the family or community is accountable for the offence committed by its member. By the same token, the family or community is expected to defend a member who is a victim.

This communal nature of African ethics is further summarised by Udo:

African ethics is based on communal living in the sense that it fuses the society into one big whole. “In African Traditional Society, there is no ‘me’ but ‘us’; no ‘my’ but ‘ours’”. It is within these perspective and context of no ‘me’ but

‘us,’ no ‘my’ but ‘ours’ in a given traditional African society that African ethics have been formulated” (95).

Since the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately, every member of the community is expected to act in ways that will enhance the good of the entire society. Whatever happens to the individual is believed to happen also to the entire group and whatever happens to the group happens to the individual (Udoh, 6). This is why, according to him, “as character makes for good social relations, it is laid upon every member of the community to act in such a way as to promote always the good of the whole body”, (6). Ethics in traditional African society then is what a person does in accordance with the established norms of the society, which eventually contributes to the welfare of the whole community. Every evil conduct, however, can bring calamity to one’s immediate family, extended family, lineage and the entire community (Opoku, 168). To avoid the shame that such conduct brings, every member of the community tries to live a good life, and this helps to minimise frictions in interpersonal relationships which, in the long run, aids in the reduction of conflict situations.

- b. **Justice.** There are different senses of justice in traditional Africa which ‘Live and Let Live’ as an idiom underlies. Firstly, justice is seen as the equality of opportunity and also points to the equality of all human beings. When one lives authentically and allows others to do the same, this sense of justice is communicated. There are other proverbs in Traditional Igbo that underscore this idea of justice: *Yabaraonyebaraonye* (Let the advantages or opportunities equally come to all); *Isi ntutu a karoibeya* (None is greater than the other). Secondly, this idiom communicates the idea of justice as the consideration for the need of others. Other proverbs that share this sense of justice are: *Obiarabe onyeabiagbulaya, O ga-anamkpumkpuapunaya* (May the peaceful guest go home without a hunchback”); *Onyeawuna ma ibeyaefuna* (let nobody die nor let his neighbour get lost), *Onyeilo m diri ma m diri* (let my enemy live and let me also live). It also underlines the idea of justice as penal to those who oppose the community norms and goals and to those who trample on the rights of others.

The following Igbo proverbs throw light on this: *Isi koteebuebuagbaya* (It is he that attracts the bee that it will sting to death); *Ochunwaokukunweada* (He who pursues the cock or the hen will experience a fall); *Okpansinaokpaaja, aka nsina akaajabayaonu* (May the perpetrator of injustice and disharmony be a victim of his very action). Finally, it has a sense of justice as the promotion of individual rights in spite of the community consciousness of the African. ‘Live and let live’ is like a plea from the individual to be allowed to enjoy the rights and privileges that accrue to him as a member of the society and not be entirely subsumed in the ‘we’. The following proverbs lend credence to this:

Nke m bunke m, nkeanyibunkeanyi (Mine is mine; ours is ours); *Nkeonyediriya* (Let each man enjoy his right); *Nrikanankeogbunam* (May I not die from living communally).

- c. **Tolerance.** ‘Live and Let Live’ asserts that each way of life has its own legitimacy to be valued on its own terms, and that its differences with other ways of life ought to be tolerated. It is an ideal of respecting inclusivity and allowing differences coexist in harmony with one another. It upholds the principle of the golden mean which is: “Do to others as you would want them to do to you” (Ihemadusiibeyaemelaya, yaemelandiozo). Tolerance is like the oil that lubricates human relationship, enabling peaceful coexistence and harmony in the society.
- d. **Non-Violence.** This proverb teaches that everyone in the community is quite important and very significant. Hence, no one should be oppressed or pressurised by another. No one should harm another person in order to attain personal peace, order, and progress. Rather, there should be tolerance, harmony and tranquility in order to enhance the development and growth of everyone in the scheme of things. Thus, when the elders say, “May the kite perch, and may the eagle perch; whichever does not want the other to perch, may its wings break,” we can easily notice the principle underlying this proverb. It is the principle of non-violence, collective peace and unity of a people. It forbids anyone from doing injury or injustice of any kind to another, irrespective of the situation. It teaches one to be law abiding, non-violent and respectful to both friends and foes. It helps to scare away the sense of insecurity in people.

Live and Let Live and the Conflict between Science and Arts/Humanities

Today, we live in a world dominated by science, which is considered far more than a body of knowledge and facts. It is seen as a way of thinking about everything, a method of seeking ultimate truth and the true order of things. Harold explains that “most people working in the sciences define science as a method of objective investigation with the purpose of describing and interpreting in exact and qualitative terms” (99–100). Science deals with knowledge that has been gained through observation, experimentation, classification and analysis. Its aim is to eliminate the personal or subjective element in knowledge, as far as possible, and this is what earns it its superior status. The Arts and Humanities, on the other hand, are considered to be of little significance and are measured and valued that way. In other words, any body of knowledge that yields significant result must be science; but if the yield is insignificant, then it is certainly Arts. Another beautiful thing believed about Science is that it is not dogmatic and it is relatively well-defined. This is in contradistinction to the Arts, which are seen to be dogmatic and too vague for definition.

However, this tension between the Sciences and Arts/Humanities is totally flawed because one needs the other for survival and relevance. The ‘Live and Let Live’ principle could be applied in this situation in order to resolve this tension. Each of these bodies of knowledge is legitimate, useful and ought to be valued in their own terms. Tolerance is needed as a lubricant and will help make for inclusivity by allowing differences in these realms of knowledge to coexist in harmony with each other. Each should complement the other. While the Sciences explore the empirical, Arts/Humanities should explore the abstract and the imaginary. Science should give answers and then allow Arts/Humanities to provoke questions. This is owing to the fact that these bodies of knowledge are quite distinct from each other. Although Science is objective and aims at one universal truth, it should tolerate the Arts/Humanities in their subjectivity, diversity, variety and unorthodoxy, which altogether make for wholesomeness. The claim of superiority by Science is unfounded since ‘Live and Let live’ as a principle reveals that none is greater than the other (Isi ntutu a karoibeya). Science should, therefore, give fair ground to the Arts/Humanities in line with the demands of justice. As an eagle, Science should allow the Arts/Humanities (the kite) to perch also; after all, it does not have all the answers.

Conclusion

“Live and Let Live” is both an ethical as well as a political African indigenous principle that can help in preventing and resolving conflicts in the society. It is most communicated through idioms, proverbs and, in fact, through African oral ethics. Upholding this ethical principle helps to promote our value system as a viable means of resolving African conflicts today. Its emphasis on justice, peaceful coexistence, solidarity and complementarity, tolerance and non-violence helps in the rebuilding of social trust, healing of social divisions, and in the redress of the exclusions and inequalities that exist in a given society and, in the end, make for strong governance and a peaceful African society. This same principle could help arbitrate the conflict between the Sciences and Arts/Humanities by mitigating the stricture against Arts/Humanities, thereby creating room for inclusivity, collective peace, unity and harmony among these bodies of knowledge.

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