PROVERBS
As a Language of Sages in African Culture
Focus on Didactic Sentences among Luo People

Bonifácio Tchimboto

Working Paper
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1. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROVERBS RESEARCH

It is obvious that in Africa, as elsewhere, the oralities participate in the construction of identities, personalities, and world-view of the people. They base the universe and provide the symbolic universe, the cultures and social values. They manage the human being in his life and his destiny. Proverbs, as a feature of African culture, are more than a literary genre, they are the expression of culture itself. On account of that, I believe the contemporary African thinkers may not ignore the wise patrimony of the proverbs (cf. Wanjohi, 1897, 92), unless they, in a sort of unconfessed intentions, are working for somebody else outside of Africa.

1.1. Proverbs: concepts and delimitation

1.1.1. Names and definition of proverbs

Proverb, which is also known as paremy, is all phrase fruit of human thought and experience, quoted to express a wise judgment, a didactic teaching, and a meaningful warning. Therefore, the proverb is moreover an unquestionable statement, transmitted by tradition from one generation to another generation. It is believed that proverbs are inherited from the ancestors and used to communicate a dogmatic wisdom (App. H, 2). One cannot create proverb, rather inherits and uses it. And its value is priceless.

Paremiographers often point out some distinctions between proverbs and sayings. Names as maxim, saying, adage, aphorism, judgement, thinking, principle... are certainly synonymous.
All of these names, therefore, will be used in this paper somewhat indifferently. In fact, their semantic extension is very interchangeable. All of them are useful:

to criticize, prohibit, admonish his/her society. The proverb is a tool to teach people to practise ethical values, aesthetic indications and sociable behaviours. You can say, as the sentence testifies, that: 'maxims are like numbers which comprise large amounts in a few signs' (A. B. F. Mimoso 2008: 157)

1.1.2. Ethnolinguistic delimitation

This study was born from the field work carried out in Nairobi and in its surrounding areas, among the Luo people, especially the elders and sages. Luo, represented by my informants, «is a Nilotic group of people. They are around the gulf of Lake Victoria from close to the Uganda border to the northern parts of Tanzania. They form the third largest tribe in the whole of East Africa» (Othieno-Ochieng’ 1968, p. 1). Furthermore, the Luo are the second largest tribe in Kenya, where they are established mainly in the three districts around the shores of Lake Victoria. Geographically, the three districts can be divided into two zones, the high rainfall zone and the savannah of the lakeshore (cf. Ongong'a 1983, p. 8).

The Luo are very committed to child and youth education. A basic and, sometimes, professional education is given to the young generations. What Kenyatta (1965) says about Kikuyu can be applied to Luo people: «the child has to pass various stages of age groupings with a system of education defined for every status in life» (p. 96). People speak Dholuo, the second largest language of Kenya. Dholuo is very rich and proud with its genres: fables, songs, proverbs... Although it is not bantu but nilotic language, Dholuo occasionally borrows words from Kiswahili, as Kiswahili has a larger vocabulary from it.

1.1.3. Thematic delimitation of the Research
The item of proverbs is wider than I can embrace in the current paper. Their size does not fit in the purposes of this work. For an Africa whose people have mainly oral literature, the proverbs constitute one of the privileged deposit of popular wisdom and philosophy. They are also the «library» of general African culture. As we know, there are sayings for all occasions and for all social and cultural purposes: religious rites, rites of passage, judicial speech, school purposes, etc. My focus, at primary interest, will be just about some didactic sayings of Dholuo language. But, doing so, I do not want to comprehend whole methods and technics of Luo teaching, because I cannot cover all didactic functions of proverbs. I decided to limit my research to educational sayings, on ethics and religious matter.

1.2. The proverb as linguistic and narrative issue

In the symbolic universe of human being several modes and forms of expressing can interfere. One of them (perhaps the most important) is the verbal language, oral or written. The proverbs enclose thought and verbal expression. Therefore, literatures will deal with them. Their beauty is conferred by metaphorical use of language, by the alliterations, by the language of virtuosity, by the elegance of style, by the sharpness of reasoning. But they include also the humour and some kind of entertainment. Because of its idiomatic features, the opacity of its images, proverbs require a cultural and rhetoric competency to access their meaning, always contextualized. Context and cultural environment are presupposed as conditions to introduce a person in the symbolic universe of specific people. The narrative metaphor, therefore, structures the social life and contributes to give the persons own symbolic universe (cf. White 1993, p. 36). All of us, from our childhood, were told stories that shaped our lives and provided us with a mind-set.
Among the Luo, 'Sigana' or 'goyo sigana', storytelling brings members of a family together to share in the creativity of the community... Many times, stories were told as an overture to sleep (Miruka 2001). A grandmother may out of her volition or after request tell stories to her grandchildren in her hut. The children may also later tell the stories they have heard to other members of the family and in case they lose the plot, then they are rectified by the other older member of the society (Wenje et al. 2015, p. 3).

Therefore, only when people acquire or grow up within a specific culture and language, can they understand and use the proverbs properly. The proverbs, in fact, are stories or summarised stories that we internalized from our childhood. Often the proverbs remember real facts or imaginary tellings that belong to common oral and cultural legacy. As Mbiti (1984) witnesses,

stories are, to a certain extent, the mirror of life: they reflect what people do, what they think, how they live and have lived, their values, their joys, and their sorrows... So there is a very wide variety of objects appearing in the stories, all combining to form the kaleidoscope of life. The stories are also means of articulating man's response to his environment, e.g., his observation of Nature, his speculation about life and death, and his judgement upon human relationships (p. 31).

On writing about Kimbundu language of Angola, Chatelain (1894) pointed out that proverbs have connection with some stories, so much that many times the stories are illustrations of the proverbs themselves (cf. p. 21). Says the Nyanja proverb: «Python killed the francolin». There is a summarised story in which the francolin is refered to that came to ask help from python. But the francolin, in return, was eaten by python (cf. Finnegan 1988, p. 391).

**1.3. Justification, Objectives and Methodology of the Research**

**1.3.1. Justification of Research**

The interest of this research is to know the human being as a product of a culture, and as
producer of his culture too. This human being is in constant interaction with its geographical area and its dynamic and interactive culture. Its is through the customs, behaviours, gestures, oralities, writings, and all artistic or aesthetic expressions of soul that act on his social life and can change his existential environment.

On may opinion, Africa claims for a change, for a development. This development can be found in African wise philosophy whose better deposit are the proverbs. The African seeking for development must come from Africa, otherwise it will be unusefull. Hence the remote warning from S. Augustine: «noli foras ire, in te ipsum redi; in interiore homine habitat veritas» (do not go out, come back to yourself; the truth dwells in the human being). One of the motivations why I choose Luo people is the purpose to oppose my research against Ruth Finnegan who doubted and denied proverbs to the Nilotic and Nilo-Hamitic languages (cf. Finnegan 1988, p. 389).

On the other hand, the choice of Luo proverbs as the site for the current study was motivated by the fact that the first Kenyan I met in Angola, my country of origin, was a Luo. Secondly, for my accommodation in Nairobi, I was welcomed at Tangaza Hostel by the Daughters of the Divine Love. Between them I met a wise and helpful Luo nun. A part from these happy facts, my field assistant was Luo too. All these signs of providence conducted me to choose the Luo people, crossing their language and culture. Helped by these three children of Luo, I had facility to contact and interview, in Nairobi peripheries, wise people and sages from Luo culture.

1.3.2. Objectives of the research

Can the knowledge of proverbs, ethical didactic proverbs, help Africa to get a better moral commitment? Can a return to African wisdom help African educators today? Are the current
studies of applied ethnology in Africa directed towards the provisions of data required for use in the solution of modern development problems?

As one can deduce from these questions, the aim of this paper is not ethnographic (description and information about such a people). This research has the objective to know the traditional wisdom in order to put it in-depth, to analyse it and, with this knowledge, to offer path of solutions for current social and cultural problems. More than ethnographic, this study aims to be ethno-philosophical, i.e., it seeks to move the interest from a folk wisdom to a philosophic one. Oruka (1991) counsels: «The philosophic sage may know, as the folk sage does, what the cardinal beliefs and wisdoms of its community are, but he makes an independent critical assessment to what the people take for granted» (p. 34). While the former is conformist, the philosophic sage is characterised by an expounded wisdom and by a rational thought on given customs and behaviours in order to contribute to human well-being. Taking off from the traditional wisdom in order to contribute for development is the aim of this paper.

Thus, in the current study, I intend to investigate how Luo proverbs have been appropriated as a tool for promoting and improving ethical education. This great role of proverbs will be demonstrate by the specific analyses on selected Luo sentences, collected from the field work respondents.

1.3.3. Methodology of the research

The present study is mainly descriptive with a tile of hermeneutic method. And, as descriptive research, it can be put under two models, i.e., quantitative and qualitative research (cf. Chesebro & Boisoff, 2007) Qualitative research deals with the observation and interpretation of data whose variables are not easily to quantify or to measure. In fact, qualitative research is about individual opinions, experiences and feelings. Qualitative researchers «seek to preserve
and analyse the situated form, content, and experience of social action, rather than subject it to mathematical or other formal transformations» (Lindlof & Taylor, 2002, p. 18).

Obviously, the paper was born by three parents: class conferences, bibliographic research and fieldworks. The latter, made among the Luo sages, was more determinant to carry out such a researches. I visited several Luo cultural areas surrounding Nairobi, near and far. To raise proverbs from the field, I witnessed and participated in conversations, parties, sermons... I also conducted interviews among adults and young people enculturated.

For the interpretation of proverbs, I mainly opted for semantic analysis method, moreover on applying a sort of hermeneutics of traditions (ethnopragmatics).
2. FIELD RESEARCH FINDINGS. REPORT AND ANALYSIS

2.1. Significance and Source of Proverbs

In the Luo language proverb designation is "ngero". One recognizes that proverb is a linguistic and rhetorical motif. In the word of our respondents, the proverb «is used to add value and strength to the speech» (App. G,1 cf. H,1). In this sense, the proverb or saying should be viewed in linguistic context, i.e., it belongs to the linguistic heritage of every people. The proverb, according to another informant, empowers the speech with some sort of aesthetic provocation in order to lead the auditor to reflection (cf. App. D,2.3).

In addition to its relationship with the language, the proverb must be also connected to culture and wisdom. As one of our informants says, «proverb is a simply wise saying used by the wise people» (App. E,1). It is to say that, although the proverbs can be used and understood by all, they have a proper subject: the wise person. And, who is the wise person, and with which qualities he/she will be characterized?

For our informants, the wise person is discreet in talking, patient in listening to others (App. A,1), prudent and conciliatory (App. B,3). His or her qualities are dependent neither on
school nor on books, but they come from the age and experience (App. A,1.2) and also from God (App. A,3; H 2). If so, we must admit that our partners made a very clear distinction between wisdom and knowledge. The latter comes from school and the former comes from life experience.

Proverbs, while expression of wisdom and culture, come also from life experience. According to one of our respondents «The source of proverbs is the environment and the past life experiences», said one of respondents (App. D,2; cf. A,1.2; G,2). One understands that proverbs are a heritage received from the Ancestors and transmitted by popular wisdom from generation to generation (App. C, 2; G,2; H,2). On account of that, one of the informants, asked about the origin and the moral authority of proverbs in Luo context, said:

> They (the proverbs) have authority. This authority comes from the deposit of the Luo traditions, that is the ancestors, forefathers etc. The proverbs also have a divine origin because they were used to control human behaviours towards the world of the spirits! The proverbs were as well used to create unity between the two worlds: that of the spirits and that of the living (App. H,2).

Here we enter a transcendental dimension of reflection. «The proverbs have a divine origin ... They are used to create the unity between the two worlds: that of the spirits and that of the living» What a kind of two worlds they are? In effect, for African metaphysics, there are two domains of human beings: the visible existence (living), and the invisible one (living dead). The latter is more important, and determines and performs the former. In fact, the proverbs are generally understood and used as teaching the intention of Ancestors. The proverbs acquire, therefore, a didactic, moral and religious authority.
2.2. Social Use and challenges of Proverbs

The social dimension of the proverb is undeniable. As there is no tongue for an individual utility, so there will be no proverb for an individual use. Proverbs certainly have been created by individuals. But they earn name and value only in the social use (App. E,1). Moreover, proverbs have always been used as socializing tools. That is, they are a product of society, but they also produce society. Hence one of the witnesses collected by us:

Proverbs played a very significant role in the education and socialization of children. They were used as tools to, among other things, inspire, encourage, rebuke, congratulate, advise, warn, scorn as well as sharpen the mind and deepen the knowledge of language and important skills and also entertainment (App. H,3).

Within the social context, our informants distinguish various fields of proverb use. I enumerate some functions below, according to the testimonies of our informants:

1) **Didactic and moralizing function.** This is the most general and implied in all other functions and typologies. And the informant witnesses: «proverbs were used by seniors to install moral in the young, to educate and to teach about cultural and religious values» (App. H,3);

2) **Philosophical function.** Proverbs «sharpen the mind and deepen the knowledge» (App. H,3). The idea is that the proverbs can be a school that transcends common sense, questions and gives reasons. We are obviously entering the philosophical dimension of human knowledge;

3) **Therapeutic function.** A branch of modern medicine is called "logotherapy", i.e., one heals by using the power of speech. Respondents recognize that the word power hidden in proverb and its message can mitigate human suffering and can bring happiness to the embittered heart (App. H,3.4). Here, healing means, of course, not necessarily physical therapy.
4) *Humorous function*. The proverbial word can bring contentment and joy, fun and entertainment (App. G,3, H,3).

Another observation, collected from the field, concerns the relationship between proverbs and contemporary changing times. May ancient proverbs still have some significance to modern generations? Our interlocutors, in general, do not accept that proverbs are expired. Some of the proverbs, because of the change of their creation environment, need to be interpreted, otherwise they could be misunderstood.

The proverbs can’t be changed or be updated but their interpretation can be made to suit the current situation or the issues at hand. Like in our modern world the proverbs remain as they were but their interpretation differs depending on the many different new issues we have at hand and that need to be illuminated culturally. (App. H,4; cf. F,1).

2.3. Hermeneutics on selected Luo Proverb

2.3.1. *The Applied Ethnopragmatic Method*

Hermeneutics is the science of interpretation. But with what method? For the sake of the subject, I prefer to use the ethnopragmatic method, just as understood it its founder, Alessandro Duranti (cf. Hill & Irvine, 1993, p. 24; Leech & Thomas, 1990). One of the good definitions or explanations about ethnopragmatic method can be taken from Bernard Traimond (2015):

The ethnopragmatic method studies the construction of meaning in the context of lived experience and in its cultural variations in order to develop an analysis of the main areas of discussion, namely, the shared repository space constructed by participants, the action sequence - exposition, prayer, pleading, argument ... - in which they participate and the thematic thread that gradually the participants weave through their speech (https://antropologiabordeaux.wordpress.com, accessed 04/07/15)
Our purpose is to apply this method to the proverbs we are about to analyse. Ethnopragmatics constitutes an integrated bridge between anthropology and semantics. On account of that, it is sometimes called "semantic anthropology". Three issues will orientate my hermeneutic analysis: text, context and message.

2.3.2. Text and Context of proverb

In the impossibility to analyse more than one proverb, due to the current pages limitation, I decided to choose only one proverb on the purpose that it will serve as a model for all other proverbs.

*Kogno achiel ok toyo onyuogo* (one fingernail cannot crash a louse)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><em>Kogno</em></th>
<th><em>achiel</em></th>
<th><em>ok</em></th>
<th><em>toyo</em></th>
<th><em>onyuogo</em></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Fingernail</td>
<td>one (alone)</td>
<td>not (cannot)</td>
<td>crash</td>
<td>a louse</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The text.* The text is short and simple. The shortness is a characteristic of paremiological text. At the level of *signifier*, the wording of the text is quite de-notative, it uses no connotation, no metaphor, and its language is referential and informative. We are on literal sense (*signifier*). But, obviously, this reading level is not enough to understand the whole message. One waits for another reading level, the level of meaning (*signifié*).

*The cultural context.* The environment is rural. There is no hygienic care. On the context of the village, in fact, the lack of hygiene uses to cause lice (louse) on the dirty hair as well as in the folds of unclean garments. Lice are parasites fed by the blood of the human host. They sniff the pores and introduce in there, in order to suck blood. On sucking blood, the small
An insect would be comparable to a mosquito. But there are differences: the mosquito sucking is notoriously painful; the louse sucking, however, is smoothing and may cause only some slight itching and, sometimes, it is feels pleasant.

In such a rural context, after dinner, while some tell stories, most other adults are occupied hunting lice with fingers and killing them between two nails of the thumbs. The slight crack of each dead louse constitutes a pleasant entertainment. The ladies used to like to pick the lice and they could do that during the day too, during leisure time. It is said that, one day, when God sowed, in the dry season, that so much unemployment was among the women. He sent a merchant angel to sell the bowls of lice, one for each village. Since then, the women found an occupation and leisure: crashing the lice.

2.3.3. The Wise Message

The didactic saying is in the "ok toyo" (cannot crash). Why can the nail alone not crash? Surely, because the louse will die only when put between two nails, in tight contact between one against the other. Now, we can move from the literal level to symbolic one. Now we move from the reading of signifier (verbal speech, representative) to the reading of signifié (meaning, represented). The "signifié" doesn't come in direct text, it must be discovered (revealed) by interpreting the textual elements.

"Achiel kogno" (solitary nail) is the individualistic man. He will not achieve anything important, because the real human success depends on the contribution from the others. The wise lesson is also against the self-sufficient, because nobody is sufficient enough to him/herself.

Therefore, this saying also becomes a school to prepare young people for solidarity. In fact,
the blame is not only against solitary nail, working alone. Guilty will also be another nail. Where was it? Why did it not help?

The lesson of solidarity and unity of ones with others also shows that the wise didactics, beyond individual ethics, reaches the construction of tribal and supra-tribal community. It also teaches some sort of human dependence on communion with the community, the elders, and also the ancestors. In the African metaphysics, the communion is a condition of life: or you are united or culturally dead.

I have collected more and more proverbs on the field work (see App. I). But our ethnopragmatic hermeneutics cannot go further. I do not want to abuse the limits set for the extension of this integrated paper.
3. LITERATURE AND DISCUSSION ABOUT THE ROLE OF PROVERBS

At first and in a more theoretical way, I would like to say some words about the significance and the role of proverbs in African cultures. Although my research’s focus was on Luo culture, my theoretical perspective will be wide and claims to be extensive to the entire sub-Saharan Africa, and to every thinker no matter where he is from on subject of proverbs.

On behalf of bibliography and scholars on proverbs matter, there is an interesting doctorate thesis of Adrien Munyoka Mwana-Cyalu, published in 2012, titled Analyse structuro-sémantique des parèmes zoophytonymiques lubà, (Ghent University, Gand-Belgique). The thesis can be appointed as one of the best on literature review. I highly recommend it and will be my point of departure. Another important bibliographic source is the famous journal Proverbium: Yearbook of International Proverb Scholarship. This journal, annually published by the University of Vermont, includes almost all paremiology, i.e., all articles on proverbs from around the world, books, and all publications of recent proverb scholarship.

3.1. Bibliographic Recension

In front of so many publications on African proverbs in the last years, one has to make difficult choices. As it is said in German maxim, "jede Whal, eine Qual" (each choice is a
suffering). I tried to choose the most representative publications, on giving up many of them.


In this interesting work Finnegan dedicates an entire chapter (14th) to African proverbs. She shows theoretical and semantic concerns about this literature, describing the formal dimension of its content and form. She also boasts the proverbs functions. Although this study scans the broad field of Africa, R. Finnegan has taken her examples from Jabo, Zulu and Azande languages. Other books and articles of Finnegan deserve mention: «How of Literature»; *Oral Literature in Africa; Oral Traditions and The Verbal Arts. A Guide to Research Practices*...


Jason Heda wrote his article «Proverbs in Society: The Problem of Meaning and Function» (in *Proverbium* 17: 617-23). The author deals with the meaning, role and use of the proverb in a social group. He describes the proverb as the oil in the wheels of this social machine. Hence the proverb offers safety benefits for the use of images; it softens the verbal assault in the transmission of messages and in social relations. The proverb is a sort of intersubjective peacemaker.


Both authors above are united on theme that African development is an African issue. They consider the possible relevance of proverbs in relation to development in African societies. W'Oleko, for instance, comes with an interesting contribution: *Pour une philosophie de la culture et du développement*. In this study, the author presents a practical situation in front of the current African reality. This reality is a demand for
spiritual and physical survival before the threats of a western culture with its powerful and imperialist means of diffusion.


The Scholar, questioning on the topic of human rights, produced a study at today date still relevant to the context of a contemporary traumatized Africa.


This book theorizes on the formal identity of proverbs, their socio-geographical experience, the themes and content of the Nigerian proverbs, the relationship with art and poetry.

For Luo Culture we quote the most relevant:


All this literature review led me, at least, to two conclusions. The first is about the need of a new epistemological and methodological vision. That is, Africa needs scholars who look at the cultural inheritance and oral literature with a new hermeneutics and philosophical
perspective. Ethnography must pass to ethnology and critical ethno-philosophy. It's what MIA SMU called Sage Philosophy. On the other hand, African leadership (academic and politic) must rethink the public policies on departing from the culture of the people. The endemic poverty of Africa, among all sources, has also this: Westernization of politic and cultural thought. The development of Africa will begin at the cultural autonomy and at the liberation of African minds. The reading and the rereading of proverbs can provide an indispensable aid (cf. J. Heda 1971; E. Nj. Mouelle 1975; O. O. W'oleko 1986).

### 3.2. The Proverb in the Perspective of Universal History

We must admit that the beginnings of the proverbs lurk behind millennia. The earliest writings from the archaeology that we know witness the use of the proverb genre. The archaeological findings of the oldest societies such as Sumer, Egypt, Babylon and the biblical writings testify the use and the excellence of proverb genre (cf. Pritchard, 1969). In Sumer, for instance, was found 700 plates and fragments that attest the literary importance and the educational use of the proverbs. Such writings date back to the III millennium BC. A book to highlight this is the *Teaching of Amenemope* (1300-1075 BC). The author, who was a senior official of the Egyptian king, based on his personal experience, recommends the respect for the weak, the rejection of evil, the use of generosity and the refrain from discussions. All this text appears in proverb genre (http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk, access: 26/6/15).

The best known example is the biblical book of *Proverbs*, also known as *Proverbs of Solomon*. This book of 31 chapters had a long literary gestation. But its first collections, rescued from oral tradition, date back to King Solomon (950 BC). In this book is clear and obvious the contact and influence from the *Teaching of Amenemope*. 
The Greek and Roman antiquities witness that same literary tradition. There are several copies of paremiographic literature in Ancient Greece (see, for instance, the writings of Aristotle, Democritus, Sophocles). Also among the Latin authors of all times, there is evidence of use of proverbs. You can see, for example, the works of Cato, Cicero and Seneca.

The medieval Christianity greatly contributed to the cultivation and preservation of paremies. Through the study of Greek and Latin classics, the Middle-age was a rich storehouse for the culture of proverbs, whose prestige made them to serve as basis for the grammar exercises in the schools (cf. Bragança, 1015). Since then, large numbers of proverbs were broadcast by authors through all Christianity. No wonder why the basis of all medieval thought was the biblical wisdom, expressed moreover in the proverbs. With the advent of printing, the proverbs crossed generations and cultures, on creating a common literary heritage.

J. de La Fontaine's fables, for instance, which date from the XVII century, contain proverbs as moral lessons. These fables were studied and used by generations and generations for centuries. The current scientific commitment join here a long philosophical and popular tradition which resulted in an endless series of ambitious publications - books, dictionaries, journalistic heading.

There is also a known fact that every language in proverbs vehicles and develops its thoughts, its fast-thinking. For the thought of all people, the proverbs are like a silent dogma that orders, filters life and creates behaviour.

Therefore, in recent written history of African literature, the proverbs appear among the first publications. Generally speaking, the Christian missionaries were the first major promoters of proverbs collections. Among the first translations of the Bible and catechism books there are also the first collections of proverbs. The written history of African proverbs began from the
dawn of the XVII century by missionaries.

3.3. Types and Functions of Proverbs in African Culture

3.3.1. Structural Functionalism and proverbs

Why did the proverbs get a historical citizenship in all societies? Despite all the questionable aspects of Émile Durkheim's functionalism, it is compulsory to hold that, in the societies, what will last is only what is necessary. Functionalism emphasizes a societal equilibrium. If something happens to disrupt the order and the flow of the system, society must adjust to achieve a stable state. According to Durkheim, society is a system of interrelated parts where no one part can function without the other. These parts make up the whole of society. If one part lasts, it has a role on society as a whole.

Osaga Odak, paraphrasing Malinowski, will apply this theory to African culture, on saying: «all cultural components have a function to do within a cultural system. From this it follows that a cultural trait or element without any function within a culture cannot survive» (cf. 1997, p. 33). I conclude this thought on linking this assertion to the proverbs, while important element of African culture. Without any specific socio-cultural role, the proverbs would have disappeared. The proverbs, in fact, are sponsoring functions that maintain the society itself. In addition to its rhetorical value, they have a didactic, religious, moral, humorous functions, necessary to the societies. That is to say that proverbs promote a harmonious balance in the society, are functional; if not, they would disappear. They are necessary to the society, to the culture.
3.3.2. The general and social functions of proverbs

I intend to reflect on didactic and ethical functions. Before I introduce this final and central function of the current paper, let me begin with other pertinent roles.

Eulogic and civic function. The English word euloge (from the Greek: eu + logos) means good word. Therefore, eulogic proverbs express some politeness and courteous purpose (cf. App. G,1). On using this genre of proverb, enunciator seeks to be agreeable and persuasive before his/her interlocutor. The eulogic proverb, in classic rhetoric, is a sort of captatio benevolentiae (subtle search for favours).

Playful, satirical and humorous Function. This function uses the saying in ironic jokes with the purpose of putting discovered flaws, real or taken as such. The playful function can take place also in the nursery rhymes, fables and riddles. In funny malice, the enunciator can laugh and make laughing his auditors.

Subversive and insulting Function. Unless employed in a context of recreation and entertainment between same aged interlocutors, these proverbs can become inconvenient insult. In Umbundu community, for instance, society gives to twins and to parents of twins the right and duty of reciting insults. These insults, however, should hurt nobody, since designed to recreate and to humorous purpose.

Therapeutic and sacral Function. For the therapeutic function generally occurs songs, ritual dances. The continuous repetition of specific sayings, in ritual celebrations, can lead to enchantments and trances. The gesture, the rite, the word is used to re-establish the broken balance, to exorcise and transfer the physical and spiritual harm, alleviating the anguish and peace return to the family (confirmed by field informants. cf. App. H,4). In traditional context, blessings, curses, prayers and supplications, belong to this religious genre. Only the
sayings and prayers can penetrate and reach the transcendent sacral dwelling of Ancestors and God.

3.3.3. The didactic and ethical role of proverbs

The didactic moralizing function can be read in almost every peremies and all scholars are in agreement with this point of view. It is through this function that society forges the soul of its members, perpetuates its culture and passes its social model of socialization. In the structure of a religion there are always three foundational pillars: moral, credo and worship. The proverbs, with its didactic density, will be the best tools to teach ethical principles (cf. Field findings, App. H 1). On that account, the traditional priests (diviners and sages) and the Christian priests and pastors are the more interested in the matter of proverbs. For its persuasive value, proverbs cannot be dispensed by educators, judges and politicians. The instructions of Amenemope from ancient Egypt and the biblical Book of Proverbs spread sayings anthologies and sentences directed to young people, on preparing them for social and religious responsibilities.

In African societies, in each homestead, there is a "duol" (in Dhuluuo, special hut for clanic sapiential transmission) that uses to gather young people or deviated adults to help and correct them. This is used every night to pass narratives and wise sayings hidden in proverbs. Without duol teaching, without sage proverbs no body grows up to reach maturity elderhood and to undertake social commitments.

To conclude this chapter, I borrow thoughts and words from Pachocinski (1996): Proverbs help in acquisition of individual and behavioural principles and rules needed for growth and development. They are used:

a) to criticize wrong practices of some people;
b) to inculcate good habits in children (obedience, industriousness, self-reliance)
c) to combat hypocrisy, lies, for example: 'Lies may flower but they never bear fruit';
d) to teach good manners, respect due to parents and elders:
e) to encourage people to strive hard to achieve something in and to face life squarely despite all odds because 'the world is full of ups and downs' (cf. p. 83).
4. CONCLUSION. CHALLENGES OF PROVERBS IN AFRICA TODAY

Returning from a nightclub, a middle-aged man saw at the wall of a church this inscription: "JESUS UNIQUE SOLUTION". The passer-by man, who came half-drunk and tired from dancing-club, took his bold pen and wrote, aside the first inscription: SORRY, WHAT'S THE PROBLEM TO RESOLVE?" And he went away. For all African problems I propose a solution, a solution from African wisdom.

But, at first, we have to know which problems to solve. Here I enlist some of them, perhaps the most representative ones: a) the historical inferiority complex of African before the western, this complex that robs our human dignity and drags us to subservience; b) the endemic corruption of our political leaders who have made African Union a "club of gangsters" (on paraphrasing Prof. Nyarwath); c) the weakness of our state institutions and the concomitant structural corruption of the rulers and the ruled; d) the heavy and unjust poverty of our people, despite the enormous material resources of the soil and subsoil; e) the issue of terrorism and political assassinations; f) the neo-colonialism operated by our compatriots, many of them children of nationalist veterans; g) the absence of the state sense in current rulers, devoted only to squander public money.

These issues have a big challenge to put on consideration of all honest African thinkers. In my opinion, the liberation of the African people will pass through the following principles:

1. Africanity. We know that the solution will not come from outside. I quote again St.
Augustine: *Noli foras ire, sed in teipsum redi; in interiore hominis est veritas* (do not go out, come back to yourself; the truth dwells in the human being). The solution can not come from outside, but from Africa. As the African proverb teaches, "the others only help, they do not replace us" The africanity requires overcoming the cultural alienation and inferiority complex.

2. *Religion and morality*. We need to recover (critically) the faith in African dogmatic (God - Ancestors - community of living), we need to go back critically to our religious and moral heritage. The rescue of African values should be made compulsory principle. On that account, we should come back to solidarity and to love our fellow Africans.

3. *Wise philosophy* (culture and proverbs). The master we should follow is the African philosopher. He still exists. Without anachronisms, we must know our common wise heritage, we need to study it critically and to derive from it lessons of life. In this solution path proverbs, as depository of wisdom, can provide an indispensable aid. On my opinion, our course, Sage Philosophy, is a half path leading to such a goal.
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Investigações do Ultramar.


APPENDIX (A-I)

APPENDIX A
Ongata Rongai, 20/06/15. To find out who is a wise person, his/her qualities, how to acquire wisdom.

1. We interviewed a middle-aged lady from the Kikuyu community on the above issue. She explained to us that wisdom is acquired through wide experience over a long period of time. A major factor is in the position one holds a community which makes him/her to interact with many people. She identified the followings as the qualities or characteristics of a wise person: discreet in his/her talking, attentive to others' opinion. He/she listens and respect people's opinions.

2. Another informant, middle-aged man, teacher of a primary school, agrees with the first one on saying that: The wisdom is acquired with age and experience. According to him, wisdom doesn't come from school, but school only gives knowledge. The wisdom is acquired from the living experience. One of the most important sources of the wisdom is the tradition which is passed on from generation to generation. The wise person is characterised by prudence, cultured, reflective judgement,

3. The third person we inquired was a young man, a businessman or shopkeeper. He defines a wise person as the one who makes right decisions, stands out, helpful in the society. He/she receives wisdom from God and from the teachings and examples of the council of elders in the community. The wise man is a councillor and morally committed. He or she gives advice to the people in the community. He or she guides members of the community most especially the young ones to live a very good life.

APPENDIX B
Kiserian, 21/06/15, To find out the differences between folk sage and philosophic sage.

1. We interviewed two people adults teachers by profession who told us that: the difference between folk sage and philosophic sage is that: a) a folk sage simply narrates stories and
experience of his/her community; b) the philosophic sages go deeply and explain the meaning and the reason why certain cultural practices are done.

2. Other informant said all sages are initially equal, while their wisdom comes from age and experience. The difference comes from the school and from literacy (books). They both said the politicians, although they are knowledgeable. They are not wise, he added.

APPENDIX C
Otiende-Langata, 22/06/15, To find out what is culture and how it changes.

1. We interviewed a young man on what he understands culture to be. He explained that culture is a way of life that is brought about by environment, religion, common life in the community, language etc. He also told us that culture change is brought about by western education, media, religion, interaction with people from different background, migration etc.

2. Other informant said that culture comprehends dresses, language, music and religion. This culture comes to us from generation to generation. The change takes place because of the borrowings from different cultures. Sometimes the changes come from the political issues and the constitution law.

3. Another informant also defined the culture as the previous informants. He added that culture comes from the past, age, councils from the elders and from God's inspiration. For this informant the cultural changes come normally from the intercultural contacts and, sometimes, from the wise pioneers.

APPENDIX D
Ongata Rongai, 27/06/15, To find out meaning, nature and source of proverbs.

1. We interviewed a pastor from one of the evangelical churches from the Luo community. He told us that a proverb is a wise saying from a wise man that does not give direct meaning but lives the audience to extract their own meaning.

2. The source of proverbs, according to this informant, is the environment and the past live experiences. He also observed that people prefer speakers who address them using proverbs.

3. He gave us some proverbs from the Luo community, their meaning and application.
   -a) Toing oromo liech. It means « enough is enough» and it originated from the hunting experience when hunters had speared an elephant to an extent that it was about to die. Then they would say «the spear is full on the elephant.
   -b) Jarikni jamuod nyoyo gi kuoyo. It means: «hurry hurry has no blessing» and it also
originated from the Luo needs of maize and beans (nyoyo). And since the maize and beans were often dried in the bare ground they were often cooked, with some sad pebbles and so people who often ate in a hurry often ate it with some sand pebbles.

APPENDIX E
Catholic University of Eastern Africa 28/06/15, To find out the role, use and examples of proverbs from the Luo community.

1. We interviewed a wise man, a professor from South Eastern University on the role and function of proverbs from the Luo community. The informant began by explaining that a proverb is a simply wise saying used by wise people. He said that proverbs come from experience both personal and communal. The society inherits proverbs but individuals create them.
2. He also said that proverbs are distinguished by the lesson which they teach. They can give different meanings according to situations and that people cannot change proverbs because they are considered sacred.
3. The examples of proverbs:
   -a) Ling loyo duoko. It means guiltiness is better than mere responding and which originated from people who just respond for sake of responding.
   -b) Mach onyuolo bur. It means that fire begets ash. Used to show the differences in society and it is contrary to one which says «niathi thuol en thuol», which means a snake's offspring is a snake.
   -c) Thuol odongo e ko. It means a snake has gotten into a milk guard. Here the challenge is whether to break the milk guard or pour out the milk.

APPENDIX F
Ngong Road, 29/06/15. To find out the how to apply old proverbs into contemporary society

1. We started by asking him whether proverbs can be changed or modified to find the contemporary set up. His answer was that «nobody can change or modify proverbs». Why because its originality is sacred and modifying or changing proverbs would mean disrespecting the community's wisdom and inheritance. He therefore said that we can make new proverbs that, if the society accepts then, would include them to the list of community proverbs. An example that we wanted to be modified was «kodwo achiel ok to onyuogo» (you cannot crash a louse with one fingernail). Our argument was that young people today do not
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know what a louse is and hence it's not applicable today. But the wise man rejected the suggestion. He only proposed that, if it's not relevant, the community will create a new proverb to convey the same message.

2. Examples of proverbs. He also gave another example of a proverb saying:
   -a) Ondiek odak eniang' to kia mit niang, meaning: a hyena lives in sugar-cane plantation but it doesn't know the sweetness of the sugar-cane.
   -b) Kodwo achiel ok to onyuogo. You cannot crash a louse with one fingernail
   -c) Ondiek odak eniang' to kia mit niang. The hyena lives in sugar-cane plantation but it doesn't know the sweetness of the sugar-cane

APPENDIX G
Tangaza Hostel, 03/07/15, To find out the use and significance of proverbs among Luo community.

1. We interviewed a religious 39 years old nun in Tangaza hostel on above subject. She said that the Luo word for proverbs is ngero, she added that they were used to add value and strength to the speech one is making. The people who are fond of using the proverbs are elders especially those who have so much experience in life. The words are carefully selected, this makes it communally accepted and appreciated.

2. The proverbs had very respectable authority because they were used by those who are experienced in life and those who were considered knowledgeable. It is believed that they knew how to use and apply them so that they fitted a given situation which is intended to be addressed. They are found from historical and today experiences of life. Anything that lives and non-living things can be used to formulate a proverb. To stress it’s importance, it is better expressed in Luo than in English.

3. Many are the uses, namely: Ridicule certain bad behaviour; giving counsel and advise; Making the speech interesting and voluminous; Wise means to pass information or message.

4. They cannot be corrected, they are used to correct. The new ones are made. I think they can be updated, according to the changing life style.

APPENDIX H
Rambula, 04/07/15, To find out the role, didactic role of proverbs among Luo community

1. Proverbs are found within the language domain among the Luo people. Like any other African culture, the proverbs entail the entire source of the wisdom among the Luo ethnic group. They contained religious beliefs, ideas, morals and warnings. The proverbs were short and, therefore, easy to memorize; children were taught and obliged to learn them by heart,
keep them in mind, and have them at their finger-tips; this was generally done by the elderly as a way of making children know the moral teachings.

2. Yes, they have authority. This authority comes from the deposit of the Luo traditions, that is the ancestors, forefathers etc. The proverbs also have a divine origin: the world of the spirits because they were used to control human behaviours towards the world of the spirits! The proverbs were well used to create unity between the two worlds; that of the spirits and of the living.

3. The proverbs mostly dealt with things that directly affected the communities’ life in all its daily aspects. Generally found in the Luo proverbs are: God, the world, the nature of things, human relationships, among many others. Proverbs were used by elders to instil morals in the young, to educate and to teach about cultural and religious values. They were used to pass some messages in the presence of children in cases where the children were not supposed to understand what was going on. Proverbs played a very significant role in the education and socialization of children. They were used as tools to among other things, inspire, encourage, rebuke, congratulate, warn, scorn as well as sharpen the mind and deepen the knowledge of language and important skills and also entertainment.

4. The proverbs can’t be changed or be updated but their interpretation can be made to suit the current situation or the issues at hand. Like in our modern world the proverbs remain as they were but their interpretation differs depending on the many different new issues we have at hand and that need to be illuminated culturally. For example the modern human suffering, human migration and intercultural marriages, etc.

APPENDIX I
Ngong, 5/07/15, To find out the examples of didactic of proverbs among Luo community

1. Wang’mithiedho ema gawi.
An eye that you treat is the one that turns against you. This proverb is used by Luo people especially from Kisumu District to warn and create awareness in community members towards jealous and unappreciative people.

2. Atonga mayot ema iyombo go koth.
A light basket is the one that you can easily run with to escape the rain. This proverb means that one should maintain his or her status in the society, don’t put yourself where you don’t belong. When you eat, put the food portion that is proportionate to your mouth. If not, the soup can spill off and mess you up and embarrass you. This is a lesson to everyone that we should not put ourselves in a category of persons that we are not.

3. Ng’at mamiel mamit ema iting’o bade.
It’s the good dancer whose arms are raised. It means praise should always go to those who deserve it. The proverb acknowledges that individuals differ in their giftedness and initiatives; therefore it’s right to applaud a person according to his or her abilities.

4. Nga’ma nigi nyathi ok nind e thim.
She who has children or a child does not sleep in the wilderness. This means that a child is believed to take care of her parents one time in life.

5. *Oboke ko lwar to ok dogi ewi yien.*
   When a leaf falls from the top of it never returns to the tree. This is used mostly when one dies. It acts as a reminder to the living so that they would take care of the life that they have known that it is irreplaceable.

6. *Kik ipakri gi mwandu ma kowadu.*
   Never boast about your brother’s wealth. It means that everyone should work hard to achieve his own wealth or riches. It is used to make every child in the family to work hard and invest and not lazy about because his brother or sister is rich.

7. *Weche iweyo ji jo gwen.*
   Let go of painful experiences because we are one community. This proverb is given in the context where people have differences that can cause division or misunderstanding. The Luos value kinship and recognises its permanence. For this reason one must learn to let go.

8. *Wat imedo gi osiep*
   Kinship is complemented with friendship. This proverb also helps to promote family relationship and cordiality. The proverbs have an undeniable didactic role.

9. *Ich lach nonego okal tako.*
   Greed killed Okal Tako. The proverb originates from the story of a man whose name is Okal Tako, he was a humorous money to journey with for party and every ceremony due to his sense of humour. Every food that was served he ate uncontrollably; he died due to eating different types of food at the same time even when he had had enough.

10. *Wat ng’we.*
    Kinship smells. You cannot extricate yourself from your kin.

11. *Awendo ok we yiere.*
    The guinea fowl never abandons it’s colour/feathers. Meaning, one takes after his parents. This is always said when a child acts exactly like his people or ancestors.
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ISP PIAGET

CESPES CENTRO DE ESTUDOS E PESQUISAS NÚCLEO DE ESTUDOS DE LÍNGUAS E CULTURAS DOS PovOS