

Oral Traditions and Human Development in Africa: Lessons from the Ibibio-speaking People of Nigeria [□]

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Introduction

Oral literature, which is an aspect of the oral tradition, has functioned historically as a vital medium of moral and civic education in many societies the world over. Through the ages, oral literature has performed this function by presenting its various genres as forms of entertainment that are designed to inculcate in listeners the social mores and world view of their communities (Okafor, 2004). According to Finnegan (2012: 1), the concept of oral literature is an unfamiliar one to most people brought up in cultures which, like those of contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition. In the popular view it seems to convey on the one hand the idea of mystery, on the other that of crude and artistically undeveloped formulations. Finnegan (2012) further states that neither of these assumptions is generally valid, but that there are certain definite characteristics of this form of art which arise from its oral nature, and need to be understood before we can appreciate the status and qualities of many of these African literary forms. The study of culture, history, language, literature, anthropology, philosophy, religion, the arts and folklore constitute a people's common heritage. These humanistic disciplines, and particularly folklore, have a clear practical value: they teach critical and analytical thinking while at the same time stimulating the imagination and promoting ethical values (Sone, 2018). Leaders need these skills to lead, to identify problems, and to conceive creative solutions. Citizens need them to participate actively in public life. Yet the key contribution of the humanities – and folklore in particular – goes beyond cultural education and training in analytical skills. Oral literature is at the center of human development because, like the function of literature itself, it promotes ethically driven actions, by educating on what ought to be and not just what is (Sone, 2018). As a subject, oral literature has been deprioritized and relegated to the bottom of many curricula. This marginalization of oral literature as an academic discipline, especially in Africa, must be remedied, because every knowledge-led development strategy of any nation must be built on a solid foundational core of an understanding of values and principles enshrined in the oral traditions of these communities and cultures.

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Willson (1998: 157) avers that no other discipline is more concerned or no other discipline should be more concerned with discovering what it means to be human. It is this attempt to discover the basis of our common humanity – the imperatives of our human existence – that puts oral literature study at the very center of humanistic study.

1. Conceptualizing Oral Traditions and Oral Literature in Africa

The concept of oral traditions is not new to the field of social sciences, arts, history or humanities. In fact, scholarly research abounds in this area of inquiry, and on a broad spectrum of themes related to oral literature. While many varied scholarly definitions have been given to the concept of oral literature, especially within the sphere of the African society, certain aspects seem to be agreed upon by these scholars. One of such aspects is the transmission of oral literature from one generation to another, and another is the centrality of the ‘oralness.’ At the very basic level, oral traditions are a body of social, economic, political, religious and demographic experiences of a human group, preserved and transmitted from generation to generation by word of mouth. Early European scholars of oral literature subsumed it under ‘folklore’ perhaps because folklore encompasses the collective heritage of a rustic people, and also because it lends credence to the Eurocentric view that African culture is still in its primitive stages. Consequently, it may be necessary to begin by answering the question: what is oral literature, or, what are oral traditions?

Generally, literature is described as a work of art expressed in carefully selected language (spoken or written) which deals with the thoughts, concepts and ideas of an individual or a people. In other words, “it is the creative production of the human mind couched in figurative language. For example, when an individual expresses his joys or sorrows effectively in language, literature is said to be in the making” (Tala, 2013: 4-5). Oral literature is part of the vast field of knowledge known as ‘oral tradition’ or ‘orality’, that is, a system of communication in which information and messages are transmitted verbally from one generation to another. The term ‘oral literature’ is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘folklore’ to represent elements such as language and belief systems that are shared by a group; that which gives a community its cultural and national identity. What becomes evident here is that oral literature both embodies and transmits a people’s identity. As an embodiment of identity, it contains what I refer to as ‘identity markers’ of a people which include their language(s), beliefs, thought patterns, value systems, history, and more. A people’s shared norms become evident in their oral traditions and folklore, and can be used to identify them. In this way, it is equally representative of said people in the sense that not only does it showcase these elements, but in the shared space of being, it identifies and distinguishes a group or a community.

In contemporary usage ‘folklore’ means popular and group-oriented expressions of culture. This is the sense in which it is understood in conventions of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). However, Okoh (cited in Sone, 2018) holds that folklorists are not oral literature practitioners. Though they may have an interest in the same material, and synergize with the oral literature expert in data collection, their strategies and analysis are not the same in the long run. For while the folklorist may have an interest in masquerade dance, marriage, or birth ceremony, the oral literature expert is concerned with ‘literariness’. In this paper, however, the terms ‘oral literature’ and ‘folklore’ are used interchangeably to mean the same thing.

Falola (cited in Mohamed *et al.*, 2015), views oral traditions as: “Accounts of the past of people passed on orally from one generation to another up to the present. For example, traditions of origin of the Nigerian people are thus oral accounts about the beginnings

of various ethnic groups, usually given from generation to generation and from time immemorial. Miller (also cited in Mohamed *et al.*, 2015) sees oral tradition as a “narrative describing or purporting to describe the eras before the time of the person who relates it. He limits oral traditions only to conscious historical statements where the narrator’s intent is to communicate the past to his or her audiences. He further argues that the heart of such statements consists of stereotypes or clichés which remain very stable over time, and which, in his view, are the genuine unchanged formations that the historian must decode. From studying these definitions, I would aver that oral traditions are the summation of the totality of a people’s norms, values and principles, transmitted or handed down orally from one person to the other. What is important in this transmission process is that it is often an exchange occurring from the top to the lower level, to wit, from an elder to a younger person. The dynamics of this exchange, I believe, is not necessarily a wielding of power but the transference or expression of experience and knowledge in an (often) instructive way. One key point to note from these views that exist in the attempts by scholars to conceptualize oral literature in Africa, is that oral literature is the repository of history, critical knowledge and wisdom for societies. While it exists to tell the stories of the past as purported above, it goes beyond just telling stories through narrative, poetry, song, dance, myths and fables, to providing a reflection on the meaning of life as experienced by society at a particular time and place, with its unique existential challenges. This literature portrays how one is to live a moral life and explains the nature of one’s relationships to divinity. It, thus, retains the knowledge of society which is passed on to succeeding generations (Gill, 2017).

It is also worthy to note that oral traditions are not only transmitted from the older generation to the younger generation. While this may be the most common form of transmission, oral traditions can also be shared between children, in the forms of nursery rhymes, songs and more. However, I argue that the interaction or transmission between children, for instance, is only secondary. The word ‘tradition’ in the term ‘oral traditions,’ suggests a dimension of progeny which cannot be ignored. The primary custodians of these traditions are the elders. Most times, handing down these dimensions of knowledge could be done in creative forms that allow people of all age groups to assimilate the values easily. Children’s rhymes and songs are part of these creative processes. In that case, the transmission between children would be a latent benefit to the primary transmission that had earlier taken place, either by the teacher’s previous interactions with an elder or a consequent transmission happening through social interactions within that particular community or culture.

Finnegan (2012) argues that oral literature “is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion – there is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product” (Finnegan, 2012). She stresses that “the significance of performance in oral literature goes beyond a mere matter of definition: for the nature of the performance itself can make an important contribution to the impact of the particular literary form being exhibited” (Finnegan, 2012: 5). African oral literature, therefore, like its written counterpart, has both form and structure which rely on certain principles. As is to be expected, these principles differ from one society to another. As Sone (2018: 4) puts it:

The people who create and use an oral piece are best placed to determine what is literature and what is not in their particular culture because they have been able to develop clear-cut procedures over the years for the performance of oral pieces, which enables these pieces to be classed as oral literature or not. This is to be expected because literature, whether written or oral, is a product and expression of culture. Put differently, oral literature exists both in its composition and appreciation within a specific cultural context.

These arguments point to two key issues in the concept and conceptualization of oral literature. The first is the performance component, and the second is the argument on what does or does not constitute oral literature. It is important to note that performance cannot be divorced from the transmission of oral literature in Africa. However, I see performance as being either active or passive. The notion of passivity herein is not a negative one, but that which represents an action that is less energetic and devoid of physically vigorous movements or expressions. In songs and dances, oral literature is in its active performance stage. In narratives such as tales, the activeness is presented in the performer's paralinguistic expressions, that is, the body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone and pitch of voice, volume and speed. However, when oral traditions are used to instruct or convey values within a particular setting, it is expressed in its passive state. For example, a parent need not dramatize the value of honesty and respect to his or her offspring. On some occasions, simple communication suffices. Regardless of how oral literature is performed, what remains vital is the inherent values and the transmission of same.

Sone's (2018) assertion is therefore true that the people who create and use an oral piece are best placed to determine what is literature and what is not, because they have developed procedures for the performance of these oral pieces, and these differ from society to society. However, with the impact of globalization and as more and more storytellers travel from one place to another, and as the stories spread from one place to another, from one town to another, from one state to another and from one country to another, it is important, for future research, to underscore these transcultural interactions and how they impact the definitions and originality of oral literature. It becomes important to question whether or not meaning solely resides solely with the (oral literature) community of origin.

2. Human Development

The meaning of the term development continues to engage scholars in philosophical and theoretical debate (Overton, 2013). While developmental science seeks to describe, explain, and optimize intraindividual (within-person) change and interindividual (between-person) change across the lifespan (Baltes *et al.*, 1998), many scholars seem to agree that change is the most obvious indicator of development. Simply put, and for the purpose of this paper, development is a continuous process through which physical, emotional and intellectual changes occur. Thus, development is a process of change in growth and capability over time due to function of both maturation and interaction with the environment. It refers to change through time, and while the concept of change and development are often used interchangeably, not all changes are developmental. Developmental changes can be said to be systematic and successive, and not haphazard. Human development was originally defined as "a process of enlarging people's choices" that enables them "to lead a long and healthy life, to acquire knowledge and to have access to resources needed for a decent standard of living" (UNDP, 1990: 10). The problem with this is that development is usually defined mainly in terms of economic growth: as countries register growth, we say that they are developing. Drewery (2011) argues that people in the general population are more likely to think about the kind of work done by agencies such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) when they hear the term "human development," than about the psychologised academic study of the lifespan of individuals in families and societies, yet the continuing use of the term "human development" for foundation courses in Education, Nursing and Social Science suggests similarities between development through the lifespan and the more global concept.

Many theories have been produced concerning what enables the development of individuals from infancy to adulthood. There have been constant debates about the relative influence of “nature” or “nurture” in producing outcomes for individual lives. Historically, theorists such as Sigmund Freud have placed strong emphasis on internal drives. Others such as B. F. Skinner (1971) and John Bowlby (1951) have argued that aspects of a child’s upbringing can determine its adult personality and behaviour. Konrad Lorenz (1973) argued firmly for ethology, the influence of underlying instincts in development from a very early age. Erik Erikson (1994) suggested that identity, for example, unfolds in relation to the quality of a person’s social environment. Jean Piaget (1972) argued that biology is a major underpinning of, and constraint on, human cognition.

Development, however, is multidimensional and entails changes in many areas such as the physical, the cognitive, and the socioemotional (Baltes *et al.*, 1998). Physical development refers to body maturation and growth, including body size, proportion, appearance, health, and perceptual abilities. Cognitive development refers to the maturation of thought processes and the tools that we use to obtain knowledge, become aware of the world around us, and solve problems. Socioemotional development includes changes in personality, emotions, views of oneself, social skills, and interpersonal relationships with family and friends. Each of these areas of development overlap and interact (Baltes *et al.*, 1998). Human development occurs through reciprocal co-actions between the individual and their contexts and culture, with relationships as the key drivers.

Lifespan human development, as an approach to studying human development, examines ways in which individuals grow, change, and stay the same throughout their lives, from conception to death. Nsamenang (2008) argues that culture contours and sharpens the nature of many features of every developmental environment, and that almost every aspect of development is deeply influenced by the local context. He further states that differences are obvious in the values and practices that inform and guide the nurturing of children into cultural competence throughout the globe, explaining that human offsprings develop into culturally competent citizens in a huge variety of ecological and cultural circumstances. Drewery (2011) contends that the social science of human development cannot afford to ignore the differential impacts of environments and social structures on personal well-being, and that the UNDP cannot afford to ignore the experiences of individuals in their environments.

The Human Development notion here described, is therefore not restricted to that which is well known and popularized by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP): To enlarge people’s choices considering the most critical ones, to lead as long a healthy life, to be educated and to enjoy a decent standard of living; additional choices include political freedom, guaranteed human rights and self-respect (UNDP, 1990: 10). Human development is used here to mean the physical, cognitive, and psychosocial development of humans throughout the lifespan, specifically psychosocial development, which involves emotions, personality, and social relationships. By understanding and celebrating the strengths of all individuals, and the assets that exist in their families, communities and cultures to promote positive features of human development, we can have a development science that may, in these challenging times, help us, as a scientific body and as members of democratic nations, to ensure liberty and justice for all (Overton, 2013).

3. The Ibibio World View

The Ibibios, who are the main focus of this article, are found in the South – South Geopolitical zone of Nigeria. More specifically, “the area lies between latitudes 4°25’

and 5°45' and longitudes 7°16' and 8°55'E (Inyang, 1991: 1). With a population of about 4,000,000 (4 million) speakers living in Akwa Ibom, Cross River and in other states of the Federation, they are described as the fourth largest ethnic group in Nigeria (Essien, 1990). Ibibio identifies a people and their language. Ibibio belongs to the Benue-Congo family. A further sub-classification shows Ibibio as belonging to the Lower Cross. Ibibio and other genetically related languages have been classed under what Essien (cited in Okon & Ansa, 2012) refers to as *Ibibiod*, a term which in essence, captures the common origin or history, culture of the language and the people (Urua, 2007).

The Ibibio worldview highlights the beliefs, the ideologies, values and the thought-pattern of the people. The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis argues that, "The relationship between language and culture is that the structure of a language determines the way in which speakers of that language view the world". The Sapir-Whorf hypothesis is categorized into two subclasses. The weak, also known as linguistic relativity, asserts that, "The structure of our language, with its predetermined categories, must have an influence on how we perceive the world". The strong version known as linguistic determinism states that "language determines thought" meaning that we can only think in the categories provided by our language (Yule, 2007: 218). Okon & Ansa (2012: 70) however refute this claim by arguing that the worldview of a people is not determined only by the structure of a language. In addition, especially for the African (Ibibio) society, the worldview extends beyond the members of the society at a given point in time to those who are dead instead of the unborn. The Ibibio worldview promotes individual and group survival, adaptation and growth. These are portrayed and illustrated through the use and application of proverbs, religion and names in Ibibio language.

Some traditional means of communication among the Ibibio people include the town crier, plants and water. The town crier is a common feature in most traditional African societies. In Ibibio societies, the town crier can go about with the 'mkporok' or 'ntakrok/ itakrok' (wooden gong) or bell to make announcements. For example it goes thus, the town crier goes around and beats the drum or rings the bell, while at the same time verbalizing his message:

Ikpañ utong - o -o - o	Listen-o-o-o
Ikpañ utong - o -o - o	Listen-o-o-o
Eya ekwok usung idim mkpong	There will be clearing/sweeping of the road leading to the stream tomorrow
Eya ekwok usung idim mkpong	There will be clearing/sweeping of the road leading to the stream tomorrow

(Okon *et al.*, 2007: 46).

Water is another traditional means of communication among the Ibibios. In the instance of dispute between communities or people, both parties are made to drink water from the same pot or cup. This sharing of water symbolizes peace and a readiness to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Water bodies are also representative of geographical boundaries between communities. For example, a river between two communities is usually taken as an indication of the border or boundaries between such communities.

Plants such as the *eyei* play a great role in peacekeeping. For instance, the "shaking" of the palm frond (*eyei*) between two warring communities is to signify peace among the groups. Also, *eyei* is used to communicate the fact that a corpse is being moved from one place to another. The communication is shown by tying young palm fronds in front and at the back of a vehicle carrying a corpse. Palm fronds are also used during festivities. At the end

of the year, for example, the palm frond is used in a process called “*utad ndak*” to signal entry into a new year. The palm tree is a symbolic plant among the Ibibios and it features in their traditional religion (Okon *et al.*, 2007).

4. Oral Traditions among the Ibibios

It has been established that oral traditions are a characteristic of many African societies. The Ibibio people are not an exception to this. The folklore of the Ibibio people include tales, proverbs, riddles among others. The Ibibio culture also has the proverb-riddle which combines the properties of proverb and riddles. Umoh (cited in Okon & Ansa, 2012) notes that the components of the proverb- riddle comprise: Question, answer, tone and rhythm. Select proverbs, riddles, and tales will be presented and analysed in this section. The materials presented here were obtained from interview and focus group discussion with members of the Charles Ibanga (extended) family, the head being a sexagenarian well vested in the oral traditions of the Ibibio people. This family’s indigenous community is the Ikot Akpa Edung village of Ibesikpo Asutan Local Government Area, Akwa Ibom State. However, their residence is, and has been, in Eket local government area of Akwa Ibom State for more than three decades, allowing them to interact with the indigenous wisdom of both communities. The oral traditions considered here were collected in three main ways: members of the family were asked to recount proverbs they had heard and the meanings of same; the family head and older members of the family were also requested, separately, to recount proverbs and explain the context of usage as well as the significance for human development, and the third source used was secondary data from previous research on the oral traditions of the Ibibios. With the help of the family head who is also fluent in the English language, I have attempted to present these oral literary forms and their interpretations as literally as possible to ensure that the authenticity is preserved and not lost in translation.

Since oral traditions can be used in practically any situation, it would be impossible to give any comprehensive account of the content of African or Ibibio oral traditions. Something of their variety can be gathered from the headings under which they are classed in many collections (in terms either of explicit content or implied allusion), as well as the thematic concerns explored by these proverbs, tales, or oral traditions generally. These headings and thematic concerns examine every aspect of human affairs. Categories of the manifest content include such headings as ‘Animals’ (subdivided into, for instance, ‘dangerous’, ‘game’, and ‘domestic’), ‘Birds’, ‘Insects’, ‘Mice, rats, and others’, ‘Strangers, Europeans, and Europe’, ‘War, fighting, guns, and weapons’, and innumerable others; while classifications in terms of the latent reference range from ‘Man and woman’, ‘Efficiency and its conditions’, ‘Home life’, ‘Life and death’, and ‘Passage of time’ to ‘Conceit’, ‘Power’, ‘Cunning’, and, of course, ‘Miscellaneous’ (Finnegan, 2012). The criterion for the selection of the oral traditions I use here is their perceived relevance and suitability to the general concerns of human development.

4.1. Proverbs

Among the Ibibios, like other communities, proverbs are communicated in colourful and vivid language to show the values for members to follow. They are called *nke*, and reflect the ideal or norm of behaviour rather than the actual. The technique of presentation used does not imply that a given proverb is limited in its use to the area of experience under which it is listed. Some proverbs have wide applicability and could be quoted with equal validity in reference to the beliefs and behaviour patterns of the Ibibios in several aspects of culture.

4.1.1. “Ötöñö ke tep-tep tutu öyöhö abañ”

Meaning: Little consistent efforts result in massive accomplishments.

The philosophy behind this is from the experience of the palm wine tapper who needs droplets of the palm wine over the night to fill the pot by the morning. Or consistent, regular little savings can make a person a millionaire.

4.1.2. “Ötöñö ke ‘mkpke ndia’ ufök eka oboyo öböhö”

Meaning: To become a big thief, one starts from little pilfering in his/her mother’s house. In other words the corruption in the society today started from the home.

4.1.3. Ubok Otak edem, edem otak ubok

Meaning: The hand is needed to scrub the back clean just as the back equally needs to scrub the hand clean. The world view here is that help is reciprocal. As a group, people can overcome any obstacle; if you need others to help you, you equally need to help others too.

4.1.4. Eto idaaha ikpoñ ikap-pa akai

Meaning: A tree cannot make a forest or no man is an island. This proverb uses language to explore the African poetic landscape with its flora and fauna. This is achieved through the use of words like “eto” – tree and “akai” – forest. The tree symbolizes man and this proverb further strengthens the concept of togetherness.

4.1.5. Owo akpaniko ikpaaha bioñ

Meaning: An honest man will always find work to do.

4.2. Proverb-riddle

Proverb-riddles are often referred to as *ekoñ nke*. A few of them are discussed below. They are often presented in two parts. The presenter says the first part, the audience respond saying “iyiii”, an expression that implies that they may not know what follows after, therefore inviting the presenter to answer the riddle by providing the supporting assertion.

a. Oduok ntoñ ke ntoñ akeene | **a.** He who throws the ash, is the one that the ash follows.
b. *Asua ayin owo inieeghe ake mmó* | **b.** He who hates another person’s child does not have his own.

Meaning: This proverb shows the worldview where whatever one does will surely boomerang. It calls to mind the belief in the law of karma or retribution. The proverb provides insight into the lifestyle, the beliefs, the environment and the fauna of the Ibibio (Okon & Ansa, 2012).

a. Afia nnyin unen idak akpap | **a.** An unusual white chicken under the bed
b. *Ama eyin uwene ini ntem* | **b.** An unusual show of love to a destitute person during farming season

a. Öfiõñ ke enyõñ ndeñ k'isõñ | **a.** The moon is high up the sky but the ground is still wet
b. Owo osuk uma edidök k'esit | **b.** Someone professes love for but harbors bad thoughts against you

a. Ntuen ked k'enyõñ ukim | **a.** A single pepper on a cedar tree
b. Osuk andiõñõ ke edõñõ utom | **b.** You only remember me only when you need an errand boy.

4.3. Short Tales

Short tales are referred to as '*mbuk*.' These are short stories whose main characters are often animals. These stories are often known for their didactic quality. They are also entertaining in nature. One of such tales is presented below.

4.3.1. Iyak idim ake bo eka ekpu, "ami nke-se-sine ke esit mmong nkop etop inõ mfo. Esuk ensio mien edi nwan mi, afo asuk adi nsiongo mien anyen? Eka ekpu, afo ado ata inõ!"

Interpretation: The fish that was caught from the stream (*iyak idim*) told the house rat (*eka ekpu*) that the news of his thefts reached her while she was still in the stream. Surprised, she added, "And while they were smoking (drying) me in the kitchen, you still came and removed my eyes and ate?" I have now confirmed that you are indeed a terrible thief ("*Eka ekpu, 'afo odo ata inõ*").

Lesson/Meaning: Don't allow your conduct to confirm the negative rumor about you.

5. Analysis: The Role of Oral Traditions in Human Development

Oral traditions impact all aspects of life. They are used to convey and emphasize words of wisdom. They are the stock in trade of older people who use them to convey exact morals, warnings and advice, as these literary forms make greater impacts on the mind than ordinary words. These literary forms are impactful because of the imagination they are capable of evoking. Oral traditions teach, among other things, the tenets of self-restraint, humility, modesty, tolerance, patience, understanding, altruism, and transparency in our dealings with others. Oral literary forms such as stories, songs and proverbs are metaphors to guide moral choice and self-examination. They are mirrors for seeing things in a particular way. They serve as pedagogic devices and are a significant tool for teaching values that guide children's concrete behavior in society (Sone, 2018).

The proverb that states that little consistent efforts result in massive accomplishments, calls for the value of consistency, dedication and determination. It highlights the truth that these qualities always yield great results. As stated earlier, proverbs are witty sayings often used to communicate an important idea or lesson to the audience. The importance of a good upbringing, for instance, is what the second proverb highlights. By implying that corruption often begins with little misbehaviors at home, the idea that this proverb seeks to communicate is the need for good behavior to be encouraged at the formative stages of human development. While this does not necessarily guarantee that an individual will grow up to do what is right, the reasoning is that due diligence must be done to instill moral codes and values during the early stages of human development. These major oral genres – the riddles, proverbs and tales – are characterized by a metaphorical process, the product of pattern and image; and, being prescriptive rather than descriptive, they resolve

themselves into models for human and cultural behavior, falling into a cyclical, not linear, mode (Scheub, 1985).

The themes of unity, togetherness and honesty are also highlighted in the proverbs. These characteristics are required for any community that must progress or develop. Since communities and societies are made up of individuals, an orientation towards unity, togetherness, community, and honesty, is important. Every individual, through these lessons, learns to be a part of the process of promoting peaceful coexistence and honest interactions. The outcomes of being honest, for instance, might not necessarily be as the proverb presents, but the importance of honesty cannot be ignored. Dishonesty has far-ranging effects in any given society, and manifests in different forms such as corruption, nepotism and violence of varying forms.

The proverb-riddles are not very different from the proverbs themselves. For most of these proverb-riddles, their expressions directly relate to the phenomena we see in everyday life. For example, among the Ibibios, ash from burnt coal is often used by farmers as pesticide, and also to enrich the soil for planting. In pouring this ash on the plants, the wind often disperses the ashes onto the person pouring it. Observing that seemingly boomerang effect, the riddle adds that a person who hates another person's child never has his or hers. This implies that the things we do have consequences that we must bear. A lesson such as this impacts the choices and behavioural pattern of people.

Because the riddle involves paradox as well as imagery, it exercises both the intellect and the imagination of the audience: in its attempts to find the answer, it becomes a part of the metaphorical transformation. The delight in discovery characterizes the riddle, and prepares members of an audience for the more complex coupling that occurs in the tale and epic, and reflects the relations among images in lyric poetry. The riddle operates in two modes, much as lyric and tale do; one is literal, the other figurative, with a tension and an interaction between them. It is not that the literal mode acts as a block or misleading clue to the audience, but that the literal level of interpretation interacts vigorously and creatively with the figurative; that is the full experience of the riddle. It is not simply a solution that is wanted, it is the prismatic experience of figurative imagery placed against the literal (Scheub, 1985). More, perhaps, than the riddle, the proverb establishes ties with the culture's sages; ancient wisdom is carried by the proverbial expression that through constant use becomes easily remembered-and hackneyed, until given new life. The proverb gives cultural and artistic form to present action. The riddle does much the same thing when problem and solution are harmonized. With the proverb-riddle genre of the Ibibio oral traditions, a hybridization occurs to multiply the impact that one or any of these oral literary forms would have had on its own.

Developmental researchers have argued that because much of the research on human development has focused on individuals from Western industrialized societies, there is the danger of defining typical development in Western samples as the norm which can lead to "narrow views of human development that do not take into account the variety of contexts in which people live. From a cultural research perspective, culture influences our development because it contributes to the context in which we are embedded, transmitting values, attitudes and beliefs that shape our thoughts, beliefs and behaviors" (Cole, 1999). This holds true for oral traditions among the Ibibios, as these oral literary forms show.

A crucial aspect that these oral traditions touch on is interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships. Maintaining a good relationship with oneself and with others, is of utmost importance. The proverb-riddles advocate for the show of love and kindness to everyone, regardless of status, class or any perceived differences. It ridicules the idea of taking advantage of people, especially those who are not of equal standing. It also calls

for sincerity and resonance between thought and action. Kindness and love must be expressed from the heart, with no ulterior motives. If this were to be indeed true of today's society, social and political unrest would be a much lesser occurrence.

It is important to state here that the idea of the role that oral traditions play in human development, as this paper states, could be argued as idealistic. I would however insist that this only becomes tenable where the assumption is that oral traditions – and the lessons embedded in them – are the only requirements for human development, or that human development is the only function that oral traditions have. This is not true. The idea communicated here is that a primary role and function of oral traditions is human development. It is not the only function. On the flip side of this argument is the fact that human development can be achieved in other ways – a recourse to the lessons in oral traditions being one of those ways.

The didactic quality of these literary forms cannot be denied. Stories, such as that of the rat and the fish (4.3.1.), remind people of the importance of character and conduct. The importance of good conduct and character is commonly agreed upon in all spheres of life. These are the philosophies that oral traditions attempt to bring to the fore – a reminder of what should be.

Conclusion

Oral traditions, as explained in this paper, play an important role in every society. The argument of this paper has been that discourses on development must not only focus on economic and financial aspects, but also on human development. There is a wealth of indigeneous knowledge contained in oral literary forms, which could be used to facilitate human development. The African oral tradition distills the essences of human experiences, shaping them into rememberable, readily retrievable images of broad applicability with an extraordinary potential for facilitating human development.

It has been argued that oral literature is too conservative and could be an obstacle to development. The idea of conservatism expressed in this argument is the notion of aversion to change and a preference for long held traditions. The problem with this argument is the tendency to define 'change' as the need to 'imitate' and imbibe Western culture, rather than as the improvement and betterment of lives and outcomes based on the changing realities and contemporary challenges. This is also true for 'development'. I believe that the focus must rather be on making African countries aware of their own potentials; of the vitality and dynamism of their own cultures and their ability to impact positively on the global arena if properly harnessed. It must also be noted that embedded in oral traditions are 'systems' of development. Since Africa, like the rest of the world requires development and since we cannot shut Africa out of the globalizing trends as Chomsky has observed, we must either look inwards and focus on domestic development which entails building up our own resources, or look for ways to moderate the development machinery to African standards which is beyond our capabilities (Ganyi, 2016). If our culture is what we can offer the globalized world, Africans can insist on channeling their resources into the building of an identity and personality profile through the development of African culture and values to pursue an ultimate goal of human development.

As stated in this paper, human development is not the only function of oral literature. As with other genres of literature, oral literature can be used for entertainment, information, and education purposes. However, this study focused on its potential to positively influence the behaviour of individuals within the society. Stories and proverbs (as well as other literary forms) are told to encourage people to make the right decision,

or adjust their behaviors. This indeed has the potential of impacting the society as a whole. Perhaps the change that Africa as a continent so desperately seeks, does not lie in importing external systems and methodologies, but in an introspective look to unearth the values that are embedded in indigenous wisdom, but have long been neglected and overlooked.

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