

The Role of Oral Narratives in Building Peace in Nigeria

By

Jimmy AKOH, PhD
jimmy.akoh@gmail.com

&

Martins ODEH, PhD
paze2glory@gmail.com

&

Raphael IGWE, PhD
ralphigwe@yahoo.com

Department of Theatre Arts
Faculty of Arts
University of Abuja, Nigeria

Abstract

Contemporary knowledge forms leans towards an integration of cultural forms of knowing that supports development initiatives. 21st century scholarly insights reveal that the mitigation of conflict can be conditioned on culture specific oral traditions that manifest in various arts forms found in spoken, signs and symbolic art genres existent in Nigeria. This paper examines the role of Nigeria's oral narrative can play in building blocks of peaceful co-existence. It argues that art forms of oral narrative are viable agents of creating enduring peaceful currency in a country apparently filled with incessant ethno-religious and socio-economic and political informed conflicts. Identifiable prescriptive and descriptive forms of oral narrative that support peace building initiatives are the story telling and proverb dimension of Nigeria's rich cultural diversity. It interrogates the socio-cultural norms of oral narrative cadences in intersectional colorations amongst the three major ethnic tribes in Nigeria. The paper finds that these norms can reinvigorate peaceful living through storytelling and proverbs that attacks the counter narratives that breeds violence. The paper observes that oral narrative can create alternative paradigms capable of decolonizing doctored imperial languages and cultural knowledge forms over the orient ways of 'Knowing and Doing'. Therefore, oral narratives encapsulated in culture specific storytelling and proverbial ingenuity can be adequately employed as alternative strategies for conflict resolution and peace building in Nigeria. It concludes that these catalogues of oral tradition defining acceptable and peaceful agents of mutual respect for socially admissible norms, can reinforce patterns of sustainable peace building paradigms in Nigeria. Recommended and observable consequences should seek out indigenous oral narratives over and above hegemonic colonial ideologies that misrepresent Nigeria unique multi-ethnic, and cultural heritage dynamics of conflict resolution and sustainable peace building.

Keywords: Oral Narrative, Peacebuilding, Decolonization, Storytelling and Proverbs

Introduction

The importance of human speech in different cultures cannot be overemphasized. This primacy of the human voice and of the exchange of life through words is demonstrated over and over again in Africa. African Oral narrative is the historical and geographical shadow of Africans.

With the exception of Egypt, Ethiopia, Arabized Africa, the Bahum and the Vai peoples, the rest of African peoples had no written script (Peek and Yankah 2004). This means that tribal or national wisdom, knowledge, history and non-material culture, were conveyed orally. However, with the already established fact that Africa in particular, and some other developing countries of the world, are gradually losing their linguistic heritages, and in consequence their cultural ethos, to the encroachment of the ‘super-power’ languages like French and English, (Babalola, 2002b; Fakoya; 2008; Adegoju; 2008), it is necessary to examine the scope of the hegemonic influence wielded by foreign languages, particularly English, on the culture of the ‘colonized’, and how oral narrative as a part of communal tradition can invigorate a renaissance in the preservation and sustenance of culture.

More than three-quarters of the people living in the world today have had their lives shaped by the experience of colonialism. It is easy to see how important this has been in the political and economic spheres, but its general influence on the perceptual frameworks of contemporary peoples is often less evident. According to Osuafor (2003), oral narrative offers one of the most important ways in which these perceptions are expressed and it is through this, and through other arts such as painting, poetry, sculpture, music, and dance that the day-to-day realities experienced by colonized peoples have been most powerfully encoded and so profoundly influential. The way of life of a people manifests in their day to day activities and interactions with others. Traditional African societies have in the past maintained codes of conduct which hitherto shaped their existence. Violations of these norms, values and codes attracted sanctions and disciplinary measures. They are also embedded in the oral narratives of the societies; hence each man knew the traditional ethos and respected it.

This therefore makes oral narrative an appropriate tool to canvass for the peace and security of a people because the peace of a nation starts from the peace of its component units Utoh-Ezeajugh and Ogbonna (2013). The selected scenes of everyday life in families, villages, communities, social structures, micro and macro societies in African oral narratives reveals that there are lessons to be learnt from cultural tenets embedded in such artistic pieces. The utilitarian art of the oral arts are encompassing, and because of its capacity to communicate, teach and make social comments, visionaries manipulate the medium as a peace building agent. Hence, the oral narrative medium is an effective channel to canvass for peaceful co-existence and meaningful reconciliation amongst Nigerians and in the process, advocate for national peace and security.

In Nigeria, the oral tradition, which is now being incorporated into the country’s literary tradition, allows the Nigerian people to ensure the preservation of their history and culture. Nduka (2015) noted that even if the younger generation neglects the teachings, they are preserved “so as to ensure that generations yet unborn would have access to them”. In that way indigenous knowledge systems can be restored. Peace, on the hand, is the cornerstone of every nation’s development as it comes along with unity, positive thinking, and collaboration for the common good of all. However, the attainment of peace or otherwise, to a large extent depends on the words or language (orality) employed, thus, there is a connection between peace or harmonious relationships and words, or language spoken. The basic function of oral narratives is communication. However, as a social practice it goes beyond mere speech act to include among other things – peace building, peace-supporting, and peace-sustaining functions.

There is no doubt that peace plays a very significant part in ensuring mutual co-existence, self-actualization, and development in any society, community or nation. However, the kind of

language or oral narratives that are obtainable or used to communicate create peace and can even be used to create conflict. This paper, as a synchronic study, therefore, intends to discuss the utilitarian values of oral narratives in Nigeria in ensuring a reappraisal of its nature and forms viz-a-viz peace education and peace building. It seeks to establish that traditional African oral narratives and culture are African legacies that should be cherished, recalled and embraced because of their unique components in achieving peace, stability, spirituality, morality and above all their concern for the sanctity of human life. Although a total return to its original state may be unachievable due to civilization, education and high level of awareness of other cultures, but a retention of those African religious forms and cultural ethos that foster nation building, peaceful co-existence and restore our value system has become imperative.

This paper is therefore, structured into 6 parts; namely; the introduction which gives a background pedestal on oral narratives in Africa and then, Nigeria; conceptual clarification (provides an understanding of oral narratives); the nexus between African oral narratives peace building and decolonization; the functionality and dynamics of oral narratives in Nigeria vis-a-viza syncretic analysis of oral narrative as storytelling and a pool of proverbs and an applied discourse on how they connect to peace building; an overview of contemporaneous assessment of oral narratives as therapy to overcoming conflicts and the stifling effects of trauma and finally; the conclusion

Conceptual Clarification

Oral narrative

The discipline of oral narratives has been shadowed for too many years by debates over terminology and the scope of the field. Some scholars refer to it as oral histories, oral literatures and or oral traditions. However, instead of utilizing these terminologies interchangeably, I will adopt oral narrative as a catch-all-phrase for the aggregate of all the unwritten traditional expressions. The term covers many items, since in 'pre-literate' society nearly every aspect of human knowledge is disseminated orally. Some items are sung, others are spoken in narrative form, and others are simply uttered on special occasions. The researcher/fieldworker has to be continually alert to defining features of the many spoken arts genres, as well as to the fascinating overlaps of various forms. Be that as it may, a narrative is a story or prosaic account of people, events and places that may either be fictional or factual. Oral narratives therefore would be verbal renditions of people, events and places that may be fictional or factual (Oduolowu and Oluwakemi 2014).

According to Chukwuma (2004) oral narrative is the form of literature that uses the oral medium as its mode of transmission and expressions, to offer explanations to the vital issues that surround man, his existence and related world, world view. It is a form of unwritten performance characteristically transmitted orally and handed down to succeeding generation much as it is inherited orally from previous generations to lead the present people in the explanation of their cultural believes, politics, economy, local sciences, industry, war, and commerce. Oriola (2010) sees oral narrative as the oral revitalizing system of re-enacting, re-creation, re-standardization, re-inventing, re-claiming, proclaiming, justifying, exhibiting, and configuring the existence of man, his universe, and other surrounding 'bodies'.

Whatever oral narrative is used to do in any existing society, it must be transmitted orally, oral narrative do not have the culture of writing, but its recognizably culture of verbiage makes it essentially oral. It is a regenerated local wisdom, told and retold to justify its purpose. (Omotunde 2006). Omotunde further reflects that:

Oral narrative is the ‘voicing capacity’; the ‘native voice’ of the people that expresses the totality of their existence, histories, wars, politics, commerce, industry, economy, religion, reactions to other vital human related issues like how the Earth came into being, the existence of God, the sea, heaven and death; it is the local verbiage that measures and justifies man’s living standard, interactions, identities, his position, heroism, ancestral connectivity, stories to explain why?, how?, and where of things?

Some scholars like Ruth Finnegan, Isidore Okpewho, Harold Scheub, and Kwesi Yankah refer to oral narratives as prose narratives because of the prosaic nature of many narratives. Oral narratives are more than just oral renditions of a people’s history, it is the totality of their ethno history (Amali 2014). Perhaps this is why the study of oral narratives was started by anthropologists who were primarily interested in the cultures of people. Succinctly put, it is the body of expressive culture, including stories, music, dance, legends, oral history, proverbs, jokes, popular beliefs, customs, and so forth within a particular population comprising the traditions (including oral traditions) of that culture, subculture, or group ([\wiki\proverb](#)). It is also the set of practices through which those expressive genres are shared. There are innumerable purposes served by oral narratives in African society. It is first and foremost, an outlet for the creative activities of the people that normally finds answers to things most of which are shroud to man; and many of life challenges (Hayab 2014). Oral Narratives can also function as means of entrenching peace among communities. Ojaide (2009), in his study of the Udje Songs of the Urhobo notes that:

It began sometimes in the mid nineteenth century after the abolition of slavery and the relatively peaceful times allowed the extraordinary poetic performance competition among different communities. The songs grew from a tradition of warfare in the battle analogies of composition and performance. It became an artistic replacement of intra-ethnic warfare, since the fiercely adversarial pairing of communities made those involved in the tradition to spend their energy artistically rather than in bloody combats.

In traditional life artists were not paid, with perhaps special expectations of people who received honour or high positions in society, but the majority simply created for the sake of satisfying their creative urge. Many of the oral works have no known authors – oral narratives belong to the whole ethnic group or nation, being the product of its daughters and sons. There are no copyrights (Sunday 2001). The majority of items in oral narratives serve the purpose of entertainment, which takes different forms. There is entertainment in the form of humor. There is entertainment through the use of marvel that stretch out the imagination of the audience. Riddles are also generally for the purpose of entertainment, as are also puzzles and mental tests. Many songs are also for the same purpose.

Oral narratives can further be used to create awareness in the society. Stories and narratives can be used by the authorities to validate cultural practices and help communities stay connected to the conventions that established such communities. Agbaje (2002) has explored proverbs as a strategy to resolve conflict in the Yoruba Society. Jegede (2005), having examined the court narratives of the Yoruba and Benin kingdoms, have explained that they are meant to announce visitors and eulogise the kings, reminding them of the heroic deeds of their ancestors. Abatan (2011) has also showed that Oral Narratives are valid materials for pedagogy. He opines that

“Education steeped in the cultural heritage of the people, especially in folktales, could go a long way to ensure the attainment of national literacy objectives. By making these references, they provide their audience with Oral Information bringing their Cultural heritage once more into the limelight.

As Oduolowu and Oluwakemi (2014) stated, in the traditional African environment, specifically Nigeria, young children were told stories in the form of oral narratives by parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. This way, the younger offspring were able to learn how to obey instructions from their elders by practicing listening skills and learning about their heritage. For adult listeners, stories were used to depict the wisdom, knowledge, and power of elders. An oral narrative as a genre of oral Literature is fluid and controversial. It has generated several scholarly studies but unlike written literature, it remains uniquely undefined in terms of theory and classification. Perhaps this is because of its nature as a genre that is culture specific. Each culture defines their own corpus. Oral narratives come in different varieties or categories.

The issue of categorizing oral narratives has attracted diverse opinions. Unlike the categorization of Ruth Finnegan (1976) which divided oral narratives into drama, prose, poetry and short forms. Okpewho (1992) classifies them into four. The first category is on the basis of the protagonists in the tales. The second way of categorizing these tales is on the purpose of narration. A third method of classifying these tales is on thematic basis, while the last category in the Okpewho structure is according to the context or occasion. According to Opata and Ohaegbu (2000), despite the many attempts by scholars to avoid what has often been referred to as hegemonic categorizations, Western terms myth, legend, storytelling (folk tale or folk lore), ballad, epic, legend, praise poetry, creation stories, chants, riddles, fable, witticism, proverb, explanatory tale, etiological tale and dirge, orality, creative speech, verbal arts, and so on, have been used to explain these narratives. With all its controversies and competing terminologies, an approach to African oral narratives still has the valuable advantage of linking into the spectrum of perspectives within literary studies more generally. Which of those many perspectives turn out to be most fruitful depends on both the analyst and the nature of the specific subject under study. But the important - if obvious - point is the availability of numerous *alternative* perspectives. Their rich multiplicities can respond to analysis from a whole series of competing or overlapping literary perspectives.

The Nexus between African Oral Narratives Peace building and Decolonization

Oral narratives are important resources for the reflective and deliberative peace building practitioner. First of all, narratives are very much in the substance of peace work. “Different narratives can be the source of controversy and conflict (for instance, historical and identity narratives) but also a means for healing (self-histories, truth and memory) and inter-subjective understanding (in political dialogue and consensus-building)” (Eneko 2012). Oral narratives can be used as a practical tool for peace building practitioners. It will help to make sense of the world and tame complexity factoring in and negotiating experiences and effects. In addition, oral narratives are not used only to talk about the past, but also the present and the future. Past experiences feed into plans, and different visions and future scenarios can be confronted, compared and collectively developed. In sum, oral narratives have both a cognitive function. (it help us make sense of complex processes), and a communicative function (it allows for deliberation) in peace building. It also preserves the history and language of people and societies from one generation to another.

One of the main marks of imperial oppression is control over language and culture. The imperial education system mounts a ‘standard’ version of the metropolitan language as the model, and marginalizes all ‘alternatives’ as impurities. Language becomes the medium through which a hierarchical structure of power is achieved, and the medium through which formations of ‘truth’, ‘order’, and ‘reality’ becomes established. Such power is rejected in the emergence of an effective post-colonial voice (Fabunmi and Salawu 2005). For this reason, the discussion of oral narratives as it connects with decolonization which follows, is largely a discussion of the process by which oral narratives, with its power, and, with its signification of culture, should and can be wrested from the dominant European culture.

Sociolinguists from Africa owe their communities a duty of not only analyzing and describing their linguistic milieu, but also making sure that necessary changes that will spur the preservation, regeneration, and growth of such languages are promoted and supported. Currently, the language situation in most African nations are wholly exoglossic, that is, the languages used in formal, official situations are languages that are not indigenous to those societies (Oluwole and Adesina 2009). This situation can be traced to the colonial experience foisted on the African continent. The major exception to this is in the use of Kiswahili, the national language of Tanzania and Kenya, which is also widely used in Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and neighboring countries.

The local or indigenous languages have however long been relegated to the background, with most language users now opting to jettison their language for the “more superior and respectable” foreign languages (Adegoju 2008). Although the governments of many African countries claim to pay attention to the language situation in their domains by making their indigenous languages part of the recognized languages, as is the case in Nigeria where Yoruba, Hausa, and Igbo exist as regional superpowers, indigenous language planning has not really been established and promoted because there is the unfortunate perception, in many parts of Africa, that language does not really have a place in national development (Awonusi 2004).

The role of oral narratives and other arts in African society is an important one for all who are concerned with the advancement of African culture, African thought, the African personality and by extension, Pan-Africanism and or, decolonization. Oral narratives, Momoh (2003) elaborates, involves “the production of indigenous knowledge, reinterpretation and understanding of Africa from a perspective that informs the African being and, above all, waging struggles in the context of a shaped Afro-centric perspective”. It is oral narrative which has survived the impact of the forces of Western forms of acculturation, and is therefore, quite distinct in orientation from contemporary popular arts which makes it a veritable tool for decolonization. According to Gyekye(2010):

In the pre-colonial era, oral arts were practiced as they still are, as purely local forms. Wherever such forms are now found outside their limited areas, it is often due to the presence of immigrant groups who continue to find the oral art forms of their own areas the best form of entertainment and a means of promoting culture...The new national context in most African countries now provides greater scope for the performance of these local forms outside their former cultural boundaries to larger audiences at political rallies, national

gatherings and national theatres, or to the entire nation through the medium of broadcasting and television

Based on the above reflection by Gyekye, oral narratives for the present generation of Africans have gone beyond art for art sake and must be taken very seriously by the younger generation. The terms African negro art, African traditional art, primitive art, tribal art and related aesthetic clichés which have become the currency of aesthetic evaluation of works of African art, must now be reconsidered in the light of de-colonialism.

Contacts between Africa and Europe have been shaped historically by explorations, slave trade, colonialism and migration. Increased globalization and internet penetration in Africa also means that African-European cultural exchanges are continuous, altering and persistent. From a de-colonial perspective, Ngugi wa Thiong’O (1986) talks about ‘imperialist’ and ‘resistant’ traditions confronting each other over cultural dominance in Africa, privileging a triumph of the latter. Within postcolonial studies, Homi Bhabha (2004) discusses oral narratives, hybridity and how intercultural exchanges mean that intersecting cultures mutate in varying measures. These discourses, together with the influences they exert on the critical mind, should now be regarded as part and parcel of the evangelical, educational, social, economic and even the political chapters of the colonial past; because art in present day Africa is seeking a new role, and this role must be given to it by the Africans themselves, will determine the form that it should take as the mirror of the aspirations of Independent African people.

The Functionality and Dynamics Oral Narratives in Nigeria

Oral narrative in Nigeria is the means by which numerous genres of verbal arts are externalized through the interaction between performer(s) and audience(s). The techniques employed by performers and the context within which the oral arts occur comprise the dynamics of oral narratives (Ibekwe 2012). On one level, performance dynamics are linked to the methods or techniques the performer employs in externalizing the particular genre at any one time. According to Avoseh (2013), as an example of these techniques is “the choice of demeanor by a storyteller or bardic performer of epic poems. This choice is often dictated by the individual’s personality; serious or comical, authoritative or open to audience concerns”. This demeanor is also influenced by the context of the performance, which is, tied to an important ritual/festival, an informal gathering around a fire, a competitive situation between performers, and so forth. Both the qualities of the individual, and the elements of context of performance are also mediated by the expectations of the audience.

The most common types of narratives in Nigeria are myth, legend, storytelling (folk tale or folk lore) and performances, ballad, epic, legend, praise poetry, creation stories, chants, riddles, fable, witticism, proverb, dirge, and so on. Myths and epics are particularly problematic in their composition and performance as many scholars like Ruth Finnegan (1978) and Sir Maurice Bowra (1978) say that there is no epic in Africa but Okpewho (1992), refuting this view in his seminal book, *The Epic in Africa: Toward a Poetics of the Oral Performance* disagrees with this view. He gathers several representative African tales and compared them with some non-African tales. Epics like the Mwindo, Izibongo, Ozidi, Sundiata, and Shaka were compiled by Okpewho to show the dynamic nature and multifarious nature of these tales. Also, Finnegan, despite her extensive

research on African Oral Narrative believes that myths do not exist in Africa. However, Bascom (1992) gives an apt summary of myths in the following excerpt:

Myths are prose narratives which, in the society in which they are told are considered to be truthful accounts of what happened in the remote past. They are accepted on faith; they are taught to be believed; and they can be cited as authority in answer to ignorance, doubt, or disbelief. Myths are the embodiment of dogma; they are usually sacred; and they are often associated with theology and ritual. Their main characters are . . . animals, deities, or culture heroes, whose actions are set in an earlier world, when the earth was different from what it is today, or in another world such as the sky or underworld.

Research in Nigeria oral narratives has primarily emphasized material culture, oral literature, and the performing arts. Material culture studies have focused on the archaeological record, as well as the application and distribution of contemporary production techniques. The examination of pottery techniques in the former Kingdom of Benin and Kanem Borno Empire, for example, has yielded detailed information concerning the migration patterns of nomadic pastoralist communities in the early fifteenth century. Additional research (carried out primarily in the 1950s) has focused on the countrywide distribution of a variety of local technologies such as building construction, weaving techniques, iron working, body adornment, and instrument construction. Uganda retains a remarkable diversity of oral literary forms, and each of these forms maintains a large set of subcategories, which vary in different regions of the country and are especially significant with respect to storytelling, proverbs, performance, songs and praises and, riddles.

Based on the foregoing, oral narrative as a concept is very large and all aspects cannot be thoroughly discussed and evaluated in a single study of this nature. This study will therefore, evaluate how oral narrative connects with conflict resolution and peace building in the Nigerian context. To do this, the researcher utilized proverbs and storytelling as a microcosm for oral narratives and will use copious examples to draw inferences on how they can facilitate peace building and societal regeneration.

A Syncretic Analysis of Oral Narrative as Storytelling and a Pool of Proverbs

In and outside Nigeria, the status of folk narratives or storytelling has been deplored by almost everyone who has been concerned about it. For instance, folklorists like Darah, Okpewho, Bamgbose, Olatunji, Amali have described it as underrated, ignored and neglected. However, one can say, without fear of equivocation or contradiction that storytelling is one of the oldest methods of interaction and communication in human history. Before the advent of the written word,

historical events were transmitted to future generations through the use of compelling stories. A significant approach of human capacity was the ability to preserve its historical heritage using narratives. Every civilization has a historical and cultural heritage which people hold dear (Nduka, 2014), and transmitting history and cultural heritage through the oral tradition of storytelling is a common phenomenon of human practice.

From 2015 to 2017, the National Troupe of Nigeria toured some IDP camps in northern Nigeria with a performance titled *Murna* in Hausa language (translation is 'joy'). The performance, which was a blend of songs, proverbs and spoken words, explored the lived experiences of IDP Camp residents who are constantly at the mercy of the state to provide necessary infrastructure that will facilitate their return or resettlement and ensure their safety from the hands of the terrorist group called Boko Haram. The storytelling technique was used to capture the different scenarios via the aid of a narrator. The audience danced, laughed and learned from the performance. Using the storytelling technique that the participants can connect with helped to address ethical issues of misunderstanding and re-traumatization. Through this technique, the goal to provide therapy, redeem ethnic image and rebuild relationship among people of different ethno-religious groups was achieved. According to Afolabi (2018), researching oral artistic practices especially in IDP camps is a laborious endeavor because little is written on such practices by local artists in IDP camps. More so, many artists involved in such creative endeavors are not in the academics; hence, they do not write about their works. This is the main reason why the storytelling approach is a veritable tool for those in the academics to explore its role as a viable peace building strategy for sustainable development especially at an informal conflict resolution stage. In the Nigerian context, no doubt, there have been some documented efforts like the Femi Kuti performance in IDP camp in Adamawa state where music-drama in form of storytelling was performed and documented. There has been Theatre for Development projects in different communities that explore diverse issues surrounding peace building among displaced population (Kafewo, Iorapuu and Dandaura 2013). Some of these projects used storytelling and the playback theatre methods among others. As an oral art, storytelling has broad applicability in human learning both for children and adults (Amali, 2014). The strong sense of emotional appeal and personal experience that is incorporated into storytelling makes it an appealing method in learning and entertainment (Adebisi, 2016). Storytelling motivates learners as well as helps them access, express, and retain information and knowledge (Olufayo and Jegede 2014). It promotes brain-based learning and reflective thinking. Through storytelling, people and societies around the world learn, develop the codes of behavior, and formulate meaning-making in their lives (Adichie, 2013). The folktale (storytelling) genre is considered "the most popular genre of oral literature which serve several purposes" (Nwaozuzu 2007). Among the Idoma people of the Lower Benue, their folktales, like those of other parts of Africa, consist of themes which project the society's norms and values. They are entertaining as well as didactic. In this regard, Nwaozuzu (2007) further asserts that folktales "serve as a window through which social norms and values are mirrored. The reason for this is that a people's folktales are woven around their world view experiences, expectations and achievements".

Various research has been carried out which relate to the present study, some of which are presented in this segment of the paper. Bersgma and Ruth (1969) in their work *Tales Tiv Tell* present Tiv folktales written in the English language. It is one of the pioneering publications on Tiv Folktales which opened up their folktale genre to the world. This is unlike the Idoma case where their folktales are yet to see the light of day in such a published collection. The conference

proceeding and African folktale (1972) edited by Dorson contains articles relevant to this study, particularly those by Dan Ben Amos, Harold Scheub, Lee Haring and William Bascom. Dan Ben Amos presents an analysis of two Benin storytellers, while Bascom highlights the important aspects of African folktales. Also contained in Dorson's work is Haring's paper which examines certain literary features and characters of the African folktale in general, and which this researcher finds applicable to Idoma folktales. A valuable book in the genre of African storytelling is Ruth Finnegan's *Oral Literature in Africa*. Some sections of this book focus on folktales. The scholar examines literary issues which relate to the performance of folktales in traditional Africa. The various categories of African folktales are analyzed. Skinner's *Anthology of Hausa Literature* (1980) highlights this group's *tatsuniya* (folktales) and other oral genres of the Hausa people. He observes that the performance of folktales in Hausaland, is told in the evening hour. Children are expected to listen attentively and learn from the lessons contained in the tales. The traditional Gbagyi people of Abuja, like the traditional Idoma people of lower Benue, have strong ties to traditional practices, one of which is folktales performance. This is the focus of discussion in a study by Amali (1986), where he reviews the impact of storytelling practice among the Gbagyi people. He observes folktale telling practice to have significant status in their traditional lifestyles. He further observes that folktales are employed for interpreting and analyzing their cultural values, as well as playing the function of promoting and instilling moral discipline among the youths for the purpose of building moral uprightness and standard. In his work, Samson-Akpan (1986) analyses the impact of folktales in Education. The paper observes that folktales and folktale telling sessions imbibe dramatic and educative elements. These educative elements as presented in the paper include the structure and form of folktales, which arouse interest in the children and encourage group participation and mental alertness. The children learn of existing issues in the human and animal world as reflected through folktales. A paper by Fayose (1989) holds that written literature was borne out of the oral genre such as storytelling, myths and legends. He reveals that folklorists are good entertainers while the tales inspire writers in the present day. Examining the functions of Yoruba folktales in educating children, Adeyemi (1997) focuses on the traditional methods employed in their training, specifically as may be inculcated through storytelling. However, he asserts that the "incursion of colonialism and neo-colonialism in the Nigerian cultural life has altered the relevance of Yoruba folktales in training children (118)". Adeyemi is however optimistic that there could be a turn-around for folktales to once more become a common tool in training children if educational planners focus on exploring their functions in the educational process.

This writer observes that folktales go beyond mere entertainment. They are an aspect of the people's traditions which have existed from one generation to the other and "embody values which they cherish and vices which they condemn". (Mireku-Gyimah 2010). In them are to be found, salient functions of educating children to be good citizens who can stand and work towards successfully achieving their life goals. Furthermore, they learn of the traditional norms and values of their community. Peace building advocates therefore could exploit the golden opportunity of harnessing our traditional folktales in the orientation of Nigerian youths on the dangers of violent behavior that could trigger clashes and terrorism. Education entails a systematic instruction development of character or mental powers. Folktales possess peace building educational potentials in a heavily traumatized Nigeria confronted with banditry, kidnapping, terrorism, and extreme ethno-religious conflicts.

Just like storytelling, proverbs possess educational potentials and it is also a veritable tool for peace building. According to Finnegan (1976), a foremost scholar of African oral literature, “Proverbs seem to occur everywhere in Africa...” Ssetuba (2002) consents to the above in stating that “the proverb is a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of a people’s wisdom and philosophy of life”. But in fact, apart from Africa, proverbs occur everywhere in the world. All languages and cultures in the world have proverbs which reflect their beliefs, sensibilities, experiences and wisdom. Petrova (2019) makes a two-pronged assertion that confirms the universal presence and value of proverbs as reflectors of wisdom across societies: “No nation lacks proverbs about truth, justice or wisdom and there seems to be a lot in common among the proverbs about truth of various nations”. Martin (2015) states that “Nothing defines a culture as distinctly as its language, and the element of language that best encapsulates a society’s values and beliefs is its proverbs”. Language users normally deploy every applicable linguistic resource including proverbs to convey their messages and proverbs are in good supply in every language especially in the African linguistic space. When they are used, proverbs add pragmatic force to the illocutionary intentions of their users. Moral impact of oral African literature reflects in the use of proverbs. Everywhere around Africa; orature is marked by prescriptive mode of metaphorical expressions to impact moral. Oral African literature is so much in love with proverbs and its appropriate use in discussion is highly regarded. The African audience values proverbs, its precise use of language more than the real story itself. This is where the ingenuity of the oral Artist is praised. A clever manipulation of proverbs is one of the aspects of language which the oral Artist uses to create rapport with his audience.

Nigeria proverbs reflect in rhetorics with its spontaneity to drive home the point of the oral Artist and to forge the beauty of the language of the oral Artist, who uses proverbs to sustain the attention and interest of the audience. Nigerian proverbs like poems everywhere in the world are short, witty statements with implicit, moral truth. They are a distillation of the wisdom of the people derived over the ages from the careful observation of everyday socio-cultural and political traits involving human being, nature and animals, as well as metaphysical. Proverbs are a short, repeated, witty statements or a set of statement of wisdom, truth and experience which is used to further a social cultural end. Finnegan (1976) refers to it as “a saying in more or less fixed form marked by ‘shortness, sense and salt’ and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it”. The description of the proverb as marked by salt is highly metaphorical if we reflect on the use of salt in our meals – its absence in meals is always felt; the meal is flat. The absence of proverbs in Nigeria speech, nay any speech, leaves it flat, salt-less, without wisdom. Proverbs convey wisdom. The wisdom perspective of proverbs is unassailable. Ayeni (2011) asserts that proverbs are “condensed quintessential wisdom”. He further quotes Egbkewogbe that African proverbs are “a distillation of the wisdom of the people”. Similarly, Odeunmi (2008) states that proverbs “are usually associated with wisdom and are used to perform a variety of functions”. Thus, proverbs contain and convey the depth of thought of both the individual and the community due to common or shared cultural beliefs, practices, experience and knowledge. Akporobaro (2006) states that the proverb “has been and remains a most powerful and effective instrument for the transmission of culture, social morality, manners and ideas of a people from one generation to another”. He states further that the proverb is “based upon people’s experience and is a reflection of the social values and sensibility of the people”. Because of their usual allusion to images removed from the situation in which they are given, proverbs are or can be indirect. Accordingly, their indirectness and allusiveness situate them within the domain of pragmatics or the pragmatic use of language. They allow users to share meaning in an implicit but pragmatic

way. In Nigeria, proverbs always lead people to come to an understanding of an utterance beyond the obvious or explicit meanings of the linguistic codes used. Sometimes, they remove us from the present and catapult our imagination to some abstract situation analogous to the present, to make us extrapolate meaning. And this is partly what pragmatics calls us to do – **find meaning from every factor surrounding an utterance including what is not said but meant or what is not meant but said**. Thus, beyond merely embellishing speech, proverbs have the pragmatic force of eliciting the imaginativeness of the participants to contextualize and give form to meaning; they have the power of igniting the discernment or imagination of the hearer especially because they are often full of imagery. ‘Oral narrative as a concept is very large and all aspects as they relate to peace building cannot be thoroughly discussed and evaluated in a single paper of this nature. This paper will therefore, evaluate indigenous proverbs and peace building in Nigeria.

Indigenous Proverbs and Peace Building in Nigeria

Proverbs are the vehicle with which socio-cultural and philosophical thoughts underlying social values, issues, ethnic and religion are transmitted across generation. Thus, Owomoyela (2012) opines that language development and socialization among the Yoruba people of South-Western Nigeria are done through the use of proverbs. He avers that the Yoruba people “approach with deliberate care, taking great pains to avoid careless or thoughtless statement, whose damage might outlast lifetimes”. Also, among the Igbo of South-Easter Nigeria, Achebe (1958) while underscoring the importance of proverbs to Igbo word-view and culture states in his maiden novel, *Things Fall Apart*, states that “proverbs are the oil with which words are eaten”.

Among Hausa and other ethnic groups constituting Nigeria, proverbs are a veritable tool for education in values, culture and social attitudes, especially in the indigenous educational practices. It could, therefore, be asserted that prior to the European invasion of the African Continent of which Nigeria is a part, indigenous educational system existed. Mara (2006) contends that African traditional education apart from focusing on vocational training, aimed at inducting the members of society into activities and mode of thought that conformed to the norms and values of the society. Mara further observes that African societies were noted for their cultural heritage which was preserved and transmitted from generation to generation through a system of traditional education. According to Okoro (2010), traditional education took place within the family by means of stories and proverbs as the occasion presented itself and acquisition of functional life skills. Children were taught the virtues of living together peacefully under the same roof. The principle of community living centered around themes of moderation, solidarity, respect for truth and willingness to work and suffer for self and community advancement, respect for authority, sense of honesty, modesty, tolerance, sense of goodness and kindness, love of one’s neighbor, respect for life and so on (Ntahobari and Ndayiziga, 2005, Okoro, 2010, Falade, Adeyemi and Olowo, 2011). Proverbs are central to indigenous education and various themes of traditional education were imparted through the vehicle of proverbs. Underscoring the importance of proverbs in traditional societies, Akinmade (2012) notes that in African societies, proverbs have been and will continue to be of great advantage to man. He argues that:

“It (proverb) is the most powerful and potent vehicle for culture dissemination from one generation to the other. Proverbs express the nature of African wisdom as they perform diverse functions, ranging from bringing peace...where there is conflict and misunderstandings, giving hope where there is despair and light

where there is darkness in human relationships and interactions (128).

Thus, in African societies, proverbs are essential for a deep understanding of the communal bases of the society and the bonds which tie them together. Perhaps, one of the major ways of indigenous socialization of children and youth for peace selected Nigerian proverbs that could form part of the basis of indigenous peace education. (Ntahobari and Ndayiziga, 2005; Okoro, 2010; Akinmade, 2012). Indigenous proverbs could serve as basis for indigenous model on peace education in Nigeria. All ethnic groups in Nigeria are rich in culture, language and values which are enduring. Proverbs from three major ethnic groups in Nigeria; Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba are identified with a view to bringing all their values of moderation, modesty, tolerance, sense of goodness, kindness, good neighborliness and respect for life which have been identified as essentials for peace education and peace building (Ndayiziga, 2005; Okoro, 2010). There are principles of peace education prominent in Hausa proverbial world-view which is that every individual, irrespective of race and colour, has his peculiarities which have to be understood for peace to reign. Below is an example of a proverb collected by Merrick (1905) extolling this virtue:

Text (1)

Albassaba ta balli n rua.

Translation

The nature of onion and water are different, though one grows by the help of the other.

Apart from understanding individual differences and principle of ethnic diversity, the above proverb also emphasizes the symbiotic and interdependent relationships among ethno-religious divides and political differences. Despite the differences, for peace to reign, the ethnic nationalities making up Nigeria must live together. Thus, the proverb can be adapted to treat the principle of unity in diversity. Igbo is another major ethnic group in Nigeria. There are Igbo proverbs that also emphasize symbiotic and interdependent relationships. Below is a translated Igbo proverb from a collection by Ogbalu (1965) on modesty and moderation for peaceful co-existence:

Text (2)

When a strong man is constantly praised, he fights empty handed and is carried away in a worn-out basket.

Thus, the proverb hammers on the themes of moderation and modesty. Perhaps, this proverb summarizes the major basic content of indigenous peace education among Igbo people. A person who is full of himself; does not listen to other people's advice and extols in the belief that he knows the best, not only causes horror to himself but to the community. These themes are, perhaps, exemplified by Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* where Okonkwo epitomizes vices of pride; over-confidence and self-praise which eventually led to his destruction. This proverb also stresses need for caution in order to avoid trouble. In the Nigerian post-independence experience, cautions are necessary on issues of politics; religion; inter-ethnic relations; boundary disputes and sharing of national resources. Themes of carefulness and caution are predominant in Igbo indigenous socialization processes.

Among the Yoruba people, proverbs are relics, preserved and transmitted over generations. The theme of co-operation at the family and society levels are a precondition for peace in Yoruba world

view. No wonder Owomoyela (2012) and Adeboye (2010) in their respective papers used the proverb below to illustrate the need for cooperation and solidarity:

Text (3)

Bi ede o dun, biiigbeniiluri

Translation

If the home is not settled, the town is like a forest (without any allurements).

This proverb emphasizes the centrality of the family as the basis of socialization and peace education in indigenous Yoruba education. This line of thinking among the Yoruba people which have fostered communal and inter-tribal peace and harmony over the years could be harnessed for indigenous peace education model. Yoruba proverbs also cover aspects of patience and perseverance. Values of patience and perseverance are needed if achievement is to be recorded in any community. Through patience and tolerance, peace is always ensured.

Oral Narratives as Therapy to Overcoming Conflicts and the Stifling Effects of Trauma

The word conflict conjures associations of tension, disruption, and violence with the expectation of anything from uncomfortable to life-threatening situations. From such a perspective, conflict is something to be avoided or even suppressed (Idogho 2019). However, there is another side to it; which is the bringing of pain or an unjust situation to the surface or public arena, the deliberate instigation of violence among members of a community or one community against another. Thus, the interaction between community members or people from different cultural backgrounds (like the case of Nigeria) cannot be violent-free, since they all have different beliefs and attitude to life. Therefore, conflict in itself cannot be eliminated, but proper channels need to be developed to handle conflict which liberate its creative potential and curtail its destructive manifestations. It is in the light of the foregoing that oral narratives can be utilized as a veritable tool to stimulate and serve as an alternative for creative solution to challenge outmoded ideas and patterns of thinking. Oral narratives; especially proverbs and storytelling, seek reforms of conflict resolution. Bessettein Idogho (2011) reflects “we no longer search for safe places. Those do not exist and if they did, they are not conclusive to fundamental change. I now look for contested space where to practice pedagogies of discomfort, if it doesn’t, we will create them. This reflection points to the fact that if oral narratives has any purpose of transformation other than entertainment, then it is to show new ways of seeing, to confront us with truth, to make us think in new dynamic directions and even change our behavioral patterns which bring us to the idea of “putting people first” Foluke Ifejola Adebisi (2016) asserts that “to date, there has been little work on trauma in the context of colonization, conflict and forced assimilation”. However, slavery and colonialism are African experiences that can be perceived as harrowing “Siamese twins” whose historical existence left indelible marks on the memory of Africa and its history; in essence, they can be seen as traumas which Chinua Achebe (1978) agrees “can occur on a collective level”. No past experience shattered the “life narrative” of Africans like colonialism and likewise attracted several attempts towards the reconstruction of the collective memory of Africans through written African literature. In essence, the colonial and postcolonial experiences of African nations constitute their collective memory which many postcolonial African writers attempt to relate in their “popular” traditional

genres of literary writing. African literature's admittance into the "geography of postcolonial studies" is premised on its emergence from the bitter experience of colonization and its assertion by "foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing [its] differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre." (Falola 2007).

The word "tension" as used above by Falola and his colleagues, defines the trauma of Africa's postcoloniality or the postcoloniality of its trauma; therefore, African literature becomes a place of encounters of historical and intergenerational traumas where the memory of heroes past is now honored through the "passing of narratives from one generation to the next in a sharing fashion" (Fast and Collin-Vézina 2008). Ecaterina Patrascu (2013) admits that post colonialism in literature is concerned among other things with the role of memory in representing history; the commodification of memory, the fictionalization of representation, dethroning the concept of History, fragmentarity, the politics of identity, the centre-periphery dynamic – all indicating connections between memory and trauma.

Joke de Mey as cited in Kennedy (2015) affirms that narration and testimony are central to overcoming the stifling effects of trauma. So African literature engages in the process of "uncovering the history of oppression" while its subgenre of testimonio "challenges official history" (Kennedy 2015). Lack of literature on trauma in the context of colonization does not mean that African writers have not written sufficiently about European colonialism in Africa; it is possible to read Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Ngugi's *Weep Not Child*, Sembene's *Les bouts de bois de Dieu*, Ferdinand Oyono's *Le Vieux nègre et la médaille*, among others through the lenses of trauma studies as they represent "the margins of empire [that] are now 'writing back' in an overdue attempt to correct the Western canon and its versions of truth" (Kennedy 235).

More than at any other time in the history of Nigeria, Overcoming the Stifling Effects of Trauma and societal Regeneration and the introduction of peace education in our schools has become necessary. This is to ensure that the nation, through education, finds ways of addressing the root cause of conflicts that are responsible for national insecurity. Igbuzor (2011) has identified that for sustainable peace in any society; there must be justice, just and accountable governance, protection of human rights, equitable distribution of resources and peace and security education. The absence of some of these factors has led to and sustains violence in Nigeria. Hence, the need to urgently introduce oral narratives capturing peace education has arisen. This alternative will be in line with the saying of Yoruba people that "oro tutu niiyo obi lapo, oroburukuniiyoidaniaako meaning, "that good words (peaceful resolution of issues) bring out kolanut from pocket, while confrontation brings about sword from its sheath".

Conclusion

Oral Narratives are critical to peace building and the study of Oral Literature. Oral narratives are experiencing radical changes in terms of production and performance. Old forms are transforming with several other cultural elements to embrace modernity. Modern adaptations of native forms also show the development of narratives. Okot P' Bitek's *Songs of Lawino* is based on ancient Gikuyu traditional Songs. The Fuji, Juju, Sakara and Apala Music genres can be described as offsprings of ancient forms. There is no single approach to the study that is more viable than the other. Also, there is no single classification style that is more viable than the other as it relates to peace building. Scholars have only tried to approach the study from their own personal perspectives. A

holistic approach would be recommended because it covers for the multifarious nature of Oral Narratives. Because narratives rely on performance, a focus on performance will also make approaching narratives easier and more sustainable in peace building. Oral Narratives remain valid but the advent of technology and modernity has affected folktales. Despite this challenge, technology has also helped in the preservation and propagation of some of these narratives. Some folktales have been codified so as to make them accessible to a larger number of people and some have also been adapted into new media forms like movies, novels and the cinema. It has also been argued elsewhere that there is no political will to promote some language (s) in the country to the level of national language (babalola, 2002a). Presently, people are embarrassed to speak their own language, preferring the English language. Children are taught not to speak in their own local languages and are sometimes even punished for doing so in the schools. The English language is even believed to be more prestigious and seen as a mark of “superiority and class”. If this attitudinal trend continues among people of all levels, there is no way of ensuring that the indigenous languages will survive. If these languages are allowed to die due to neglect, and non-use, then there lies the danger of losing the rich indigenous folktales, cultural ethos and consequently the sources of our identity and co-existence as a nation. Thus, what is the veracity of the nation’s claim to greatness a force to be reckoned with in the black race?

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