

"The contributors of this book invite us through Achebe to see proverbs as nuggets that open a window to a multidimensional understanding of existence, especially in a world rendered flexible and interconnected by various forms of mobility and encounters with people of diverse geography, and with different ways of being and doing. Achebe was particularly good at using proverbs to share how intelligent his Igbo community have been throughout their history in taking advantage of the promise of such encounters with other peoples and other worlds without losing sight of who they are as a people."

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"Drawing inspiration from Chinua Achebe's work – in itself a remarkable archive of Igbo proverbs – this book is a tapestry of insights into the centrality of proverbs as a multifaceted archive of African thought on what it means to be human, to be in relation, and to nurture communities that unconditionally uphold the wellbeing of the human, the natural environment and the spiritual realms. [...] While these chapters approach African proverbs from fields as diverse as communication, linguistics, popular music and literary studies, collectively, they attest to the rich canvas of human experience that Achebe's own writing honoured."

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This book is a timely addition to debates and explorations on the epistemological relevance of African proverbs, especially with growing calls for the decolonisation of African curricula. The editors and contributors have chosen to reflect on the diverse ways of being and becoming African as a permanent work in progress by drawing inspiration from Chinua Achebe's harnessing of the effectualness of oratory, especially his use of proverbs in his works. The book recognises and celebrates the fact that Achebe's proverbial Igbo imaginations of being and becoming African are compelling because they are instructive about the lives, stories, struggles and aspirations of the rainbow of people that make up Africa as a veritable global arena of productive circulations, entanglements and compositeness of being. The contributions foray into how claims to and practices of being and becoming African are steeped in histories of mobilities and a myriad of encounters shaped by and inspiring of the competing and complementary logics of personhood and power that Africans have sought and seek to capture in their repertoires of proverbs. The task of documenting African proverbs and rendering them accessible in the form of a common hard currency with fascinating epistemological possibilities remains a challenge yearning for financial, scholarly, social and political attention. The book is an important contribution to John Mbiti's clarion call for an active and sustained interest in African proverbs.

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Being and Becoming African as a Permanent Work in Progress

INSPIRATION FROM CHINUA ACHEBE'S PROVERBS



EDITED BY
Francis B. Nyamnjoh, Patrick Nwosu &
Hassan M. Yosimbom

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(Professor, Rice University, USA)*

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⁶ Lewis Asimeng-Boahene, "Counter-Storytelling with African proverbs: A Vehicle for Teaching Social Justice and Global Understanding in Urban, U.S. Schools", *Equity & Excellence in Education*, 43(4), 434–445, 2010.

⁷ Madipoane Masenya, "A literary figure or patriarchal reality? Reflections on the 'ēšet hayil in light of depictions of womanhood from selected Yorùbá and Sotho proverbs", in *Verbum et Ecclesia*, ISSN: (online) 2074–7705.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Being and Becoming African: Insights from Chinua Achebe's and Related Usage of Proverbs

Francis B. Nyamnjoh, Patrick Nwosu & Hassan M. Yosimbom

The Many Faces and Guises of Being and Becoming African

In his famous speech of 8 May 1996, entitled "I am an African", Thabo Mbeki evoked the many faces and guises of being African by asserting Africa's generosity as a melting pot. He depicted Africa as an inclusive and ubuntu (i.e. welcoming) cradle of humankind with an infinite capacity to accommodate the creative diversity and nimble-footedness of the world and the peoples that inhabit it. Speaking of himself as the quintessential African in this open-handed, open-minded and open-ended understanding, Mbeki echoed what he had in common with many an African. He identified with those of them who owe their "being to the hills and the valleys, the mountains and the glades, the rivers, the deserts, the trees, the flowers, the seas and the ever-changing seasons". He stressed his kinship with the grandchildren "of warrior men and women" shaped by predicaments collectively confronted and shared stories. He pointed to his shared humanity and histories of sociality with descendants "of the migrants who left Europe to find a new home" in the inviting geographies of the continent. Similarly, he spoke of his bonds with those whose parents were mobilised by colonising Europeans in South Africa as slaves from South East Asia and beyond to provide labour, service and servitude in the context of colonial capitalism and Europe's ambitions of conquest and superiority.¹ In making this speech, Mbeki was drawing attention to the fact that he would not be the African that he was without these composites of encounters and relationships among humans of multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds and origins, and between humans and the geographical, natural and cultural environments that had given his life a myriad of possibilities in being and becoming African.

Like Mbeki, most Africans strive to construct what it means to be African daily, and in dignity and freedom, in a world where the realities of power and privilege have tended to impose a consciousness wherein identities and belonging are perceived as frozen in time and space, and that we take nimble-footedness and the messiness of fluidities and interconnections seriously at our peril. Mbeki may have shared a very generous idea of his Africanity, but there are many who would argue that it is more aspirational than real. An Ethiopian proverb invites us to contemplate the nuanced complexities of identities and identification in these words: "If a man is born in a stable, he does not become a horse, but if he lives long enough in the stable, he will behave like a horse" (Bookcraft 2008: 16). Hence, our desires, aspirations and preferences notwithstanding, the questions persist: Who qualifies to claim an African identity? What makes someone or something African? What does it mean to be or become African? When and how does someone's or something's being or becoming African assume importance? And on whose rules? Are the trajectories of being and becoming, peculiar to African multiplicities, malleabilities and particularities or static singularities? How easy is it, under ontologies that cherish being as singular and unified, to contemplate a fragmentary, fractured and composite Africanity that acknowledges the normalcy of incompleteness and in which mobility, debt and indebtedness are a constant in the menu of desired conviviality or ubuntu?

Re-echoing Mbeki's diverse shards of Africanness, Olukoshi and Nyamnjoh suggest that being African or claiming Africa could amongst other possibilities be:

... an attribute of race and skin colour (black, white, yellow), birth (umbilical cord, birth certificates, identity cards, passports), geography (physical spaces, home village), history (encounters), culture (prescriptive specificities), economics (availability and affordability, wealth and deprivation), sociology (social configurations and action, inclusion and exclusion), psychology (mind sets), philosophy (world views), politics (power relations), or collective memory (shared experiences and aspirations) (2004: 1).

Nowadays, in a context of accelerated globalisation and ever-widening technologies and realities of interconnection, these questions are being debated by diverse groups and individuals. This is especially the case in view of the growing attractions of, and

fixation with the logic and populist politics of exclusionary belonging privileged by narrow nationalism and its propensity for zero-sum games of citizenship. Such enquiries are becoming sites of constant struggles precisely because they have deep roots in debates on mobility, citizenship and identity, and their implications on "definitions of rights, entitlements, duties, and responsibilities" (Olukoshi and Nyamnjoh 2004: 1) and are always in juxtaposition with competing discourses of power and powerlessness and regimes of truth and falsehood.

The debates affirm that being and becoming African are: cocreated via interaction with fellow humans and other sentient beings; able to shift, and they often do; historically constituted; both private and public; ongoing and therefore part of our everyday lives; often political in the sense that they are affected by others' interpretations; may be imposed (ascribed) or self-selected (avowed); often socially monitored; and everyone has myriad ways and forms of being and becoming. In this connection, Zeleza echoes Mbeki when he argues that:

[t]he idea of "Africa" is a complex one with multiple genealogies and meanings, such that extrapolations of "African" culture, identity or nationality, in the singular or plural, any explorations of what makes "Africa" "African," are often quite slippery as these notions tend to swing unsteadily between the poles of essentialism and contingency (2005: 19).

In this regard, Africanness and the multiple ways of being and becoming African are contrivances, synergistically constitutive ontologico-epistemological constructions. Far from being an encumbrance, the growing diversity of being and becoming African is something we are coming to terms with, and indeed should, as it gives much needed strength in an increasingly globalised world. As we gather from Chinua Achebe's relevant essays and writings, for the neophytes and adepts of African literature alike, the more the ways of being and becoming African there are, the greater the variety of stories to be told, read, thought about and discussed. This state of affairs is due to how each story reflects something of ourselves and our life-journeys and something of other ways of being African in Africa and being African in the world through encounters with equally mobile others.

Proverbs, as condensed wisdom drawn from human experience,

provide a rich resource for understanding, *inter alia*, how African communities have, through the ages, negotiated and navigated questions of being and belonging through a myriad of encounters with one another, as well as with people from elsewhere and those they have come to know and relate with through their own mobility. Proverbs are cherished repertoires of humans as dynamic and creative innovators in conversation with the geographies and environments that continually feed their individual and collective selves and appetite for the nuanced complexities of being human.

"[T]he African soil is very rich in proverbs", affirms John M. Mbiti (2002: 263), according to whom, there are "an estimated four million proverbs in two thousand African languages" in Africa (Mbiti 2002: 259). While these proverbs are still to be comprehensively and thoroughly documented and archived in accessible ways, some very promising efforts are already under way by individual storytellers, historians, anthropologists and other scholars writing about the folklore and oral traditions of various cultural communities on the continent. Particularly worth noting, as an example in this connection, is the African Proverbs Project described by John S. Mbiti (2002). Financed for three years (1993–1996) by the Pew Charitable Trusts and coordinated by Dr Stan Nussbaum, the project was able to publish 4,453 proverbs in five volumes. Under the African Proverbs series edited by John S. Mbiti, "proverbs from respectively Ethiopia, Uganda, Lesotho, Burkina Faso and Ghana were published. The size of each volume ranged from 584 to 1497 proverbs in African languages, with translations into English or French" (Mbiti 2002: 256). An additional set of publications comprising three volumes on Malawi, Ghana and Liberia, and with the Rev. Joshua Kudadjie, as editor, "covered proverbs for preaching and teaching purposes" (Mbiti 2002: 256). Another product from the project was the publication of an annotated bibliography by Prof. Wolfgang Mieder. Another output of the project was the publication of a CD-ROM edited by Dr Stan Nussbaum, which Mbiti describes as "a very comprehensive collection and source of material that includes, *inter alia*, books from the Project, some 28000 proverbs, a bibliography with 1000 items, summaries and extracts from published collections, and a language survey of work on proverbs" (Mbiti 2002: 256). Mbiti concludes:

The African Proverbs Project has sparked interest in individuals and institutions. It has encouraged (or challenged) them to pay closer attention to proverbs, to collect them, use them for pedagogical and preaching purposes, and eventually publish them as collections or in texts. It has stimulated academic scrutiny that may result in the interdisciplinary study of proverbs in various fields such as linguistics, history, philosophy, religion, sociology, literature and others (Mbiti 2002: 263).

Indeed, the task of documenting African proverbs and rendering them accessible in the form of a common hard currency remains a challenge yearning for financial, scholarly, social and political attention.

We see the current book as our modest contribution to Mbiti's clarion call for an active and sustained interest in African proverbs. The book is also an addition to debates and explorations on the epistemological relevance of African proverbs, especially with growing calls for the decolonisation of African curricula (Dei et al. 2018). We have chosen to reflect on the diverse ways of being and becoming African as a permanent work in progress by drawing our inspiration from Chinua Achebe's harnessing of the effectualness of oratory, especially his use of proverbs in his works. We recognise and celebrate the fact that Achebe's Igbo (proverbial) imaginations of being and becoming African are compelling because they teach us about the lives and stories and the struggles and aspirations of the rainbow of people that make up Africa as a veritable global arena of productive circulations and entanglements. The contributions explore how claims to and practices of being and becoming African are embedded in how proverbs are employed to articulate the tensions and possibilities experienced by Africans in their encounters and relationship with other peoples and places in the course of their mobilities. Granted that there is no agreement on what being and becoming African means, the contributions in this volume resonate with Zeleza's idea that African identities are "provisional and partial conceptualizations and categorizations" (Zeleza 2005: 25). As Zeleza observes, even though we all believe we know what being and becoming African are or what they must be, "when we think we have finally seen them, felt them, touched them, captured and tamed them with our terms of endearment, aversion, or indifference [they] suddenly melt away into a mirage beyond the assured and unilateral classifications of race, representation, geography, or history" (Zeleza

2005: 25). Through the lens of (Achebesque) proverbs, we, like Zeleza, see being and becoming African as “many things, a mélange of peoples, places, practices, processes, projects, and possibilities that are both unique and common in their configuration over time and space” (Zeleza 2005: 25).

Chinua Achebe's Contribution in the Storytelling of Being and Becoming African

Chinua Achebe abhors contrived universalism narrowly articulated around the ambitions of dominance of some to the exclusion of others. To Achebe, universalism is acceptable only to the extent that it is carefully negotiated and comprehensive in its inclusivity. It is not, nor should it be, a function of power and privilege. Steeped in an Igbo ontology of motion, flexibility and dynamism, his stories and essays keep coming back again and again to this point of the complexity of the world in which each and every one has got a story to tell from the vantage point of the geography, culture, history and experience of the world. In his Bates College Commencement Address (May 1996), Achebe revisits this theme, when he decries the predominance of global hegemonic “beings” and “becomings” by asserting that “[t]he world is big. Some people are unable to comprehend that simple fact. They want the world on their own terms, its peoples just like them and their friends, its places like the manicured little patch on which they live. But this is a foolish and blind wish” (Achebe May 1996). He concluded that “[d]iversity is not an abnormality but the very reality of our planet. The human world manifests the same reality and will not seek our permission to celebrate itself in the magnificence of its endless varieties. Civility is a sensible attribute in this kind of world we have; narrowness of heart and mind is not” (Achebe May 1996). In Achebe's *Anthills of the Savannah*, one of the characters, the Abazonian elder, tells us that the owner of the world has divided its people into three categories: those gifted with telling “their fellows that the time to get up has finally come”; some blessed with “the eagerness to rise when they hear the call, put on their garbs of war and go to the boundary of their town to engage the invading enemy boldly in battle”; and those others “whose part is to wait and when the struggle is ended, to take over and recount the story” (113).

Although the elder affirms that both “the sounding of the battle-drum” and “the fierce waging of war” are important, he concedes

that the story “takes the eagle-feather” because it continues “beyond the war and the warrior; outlives the sound of war-drums and the exploits of brave fighters; saves our progeny from blundering [and] sets one people apart from their neighbours” (114). He explains that the appointment of someone to tell the story of the community is always the responsibility of the Agwu, the god of healers, whose chosen “miracle-man will amaze us because he may be a fellow of little account, not the bold warrior we all expect nor even the war-drummer. But in his new-found utterance our struggle will stand reincarnated before us” (115). During an interview with Bill Moyers in September 1988, Achebe himself reiterated the primacy of the storyteller by affirming that he/she is the one “who makes us what we are, who creates history; creates the memory that survivors must have – otherwise surviving would have no meaning” (Achebe in Moyers, September 1988). Achebe's asseveration is symptomatic of his fervent belief that the story is chief among his fellow agents of being and becoming. This is echoed by Firoze Manji who argues that the story could be used to change being and becoming African from being “a synonym for the non-human or lesser human being that justifies enslavement, slavery, colonialism and exploitation” to representing “the reassertion by Africans of their humanity, and as human beings, as makers of history, as contributors to the history of human emancipation” (Manji 2019: 50, 71).

The Abazonian elder's and Achebe's preferences for the story resonate with this collection's idea of being and becoming African as a repository of a variety of stories to be told, read, thought about and discussed with each story reflecting ways of being African in Africa and being African in the world. Achebe's strong suit lies in the fact that, more than most African writers, he notches up a staggering intermixture of being and becoming African as battle-drum sounding, war waging and storytelling by masterfully limning the interconnections and interdependencies between the three. By the same token, Achebe presents his characters negotiating and navigating the crossroads of the same three categorisations. As contributors to this collection, we, like Achebe's miracle-men, join him and his characters to tell our own stories about being and becoming African with the hope that those stories would escort Africans, direct them and set them apart from the global community by giving them distinct but non-exclusivist identities that acknowledge and celebrate incompleteness and conviviality.

Through their accentuation of the omnipotence of the story, the

old man and Achebe invite us to celebrate the compelling rhetorical representation of (narrative) proverbs that raise Achebe's works to the level of the sublime. We are inspired by Achebe's constructions of cosmopolitan African identities that would be in synch with the ideology of rainbowism of an African renaissance; African identities that would be products of tapestries of interwoven histories and migrations, some heartrending and others lionhearted. Thus, the contributors to this collection see Achebe's works as bellwethers not in the hegemonic sense where they become denizens of a museum of perfection meant to be aped, but in the African sense of hallowed chief masquerades that deserve to be imitated by other masquerades while being watched adoringly from constantly shifting standpoints by countless admirers. Just as Achebe once asserted that one cannot cram African literature into a small neat definition, the contributors to this volume affirm that one cannot cram being and becoming African into a small, neat definition. The rationale for this position lies in how like African literature being and becoming African is not one unit but a group of associated units; the sum total of all the national and ethnic beings and becomings of Africa (Achebe [1965]1997: 343).

Chinua Achebe's Artistic Iconoclasm

In 1964, Achebe told Lewis Nkosi and Wole Soyinka that as a response to Africa's linguistic entrapment within a nest of contradictions involving the use of colonial languages, his then budding oeuvre had a diverse agenda. First, that it aimed at demonstrating that even revered men like Okonkwo would still crumble if they become unbending in their strides towards being and becoming African. He also revealed that his language owed much to his childhood reverence for his elders' speech patterns. Lastly, he affirmed that his writing started as a reaction to Joyce Cary's *Mister Johnson* ([1939]1952) that had depicted Africa as a stagnant masquerade with stagnant seers devoid of logic and rationality but consumed by sensory delusions. In order to satisfy the above agenda, Achebe suggests that the African writer should aim at using English iconoclastically by "fashioning an English that is at once universal and able to carry his peculiar experience" (1997[1965]: 347). To him such a writer's language "will have to be a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home, but altered to suit its new African surroundings" (1997[1965]: 347, 349). That Africanised

English is seen in *Arrow of God* where the chief priest is telling one of his sons why it is necessary to send him to church: "I want one of my sons to join these people and be my eyes there. If there is nothing in it, you will come back. But if there is something there you will bring home my share. The world is like a Mask, dancing. If you want to see it well, you do not stand in one place" (qtd. Achebe 1997[1965]: 348). Inspired by Achebe's call for linguistic iconoclasm, the contributors to this collection celebrate Achebe's oeuvre as a dancing masquerade and the various papers become the various positions from which it is seen.

Conscious of Achebe's injunction that "there's a limit to what storytelling can achieve" (Achebe in Moyers, September 1988), the contributors aim at using the power of their various stories to remind generations of Africans that for them to notch up meaningful socio-economic and politico-cultural ways of being and becoming African, they must know "where the rain started to beat them" because the Igbo people have a saying that "a man who cannot tell where the rain began to beat him cannot know where he dried his body" (Achebe 1964: 158). The papers are, therefore, "proverbialised or Achebelised" asseverations of Achebe's idea of the fundamental theme of African literature – "that African peoples did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans, that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry, and, above all, they had dignity" (158). In line with Achebe's submission, the contributors affirm that African dignity can be ensured through recognising and providing for incomplete but composite and interconnected and interdependent ways of being and becoming African.

Our aim is not only to unmask being and becoming African as an Achebelised or proverbialised imaginary that scholars can deconstruct. Rather, we use proverbs to examine how imaginations of being and becoming African as multiplicities, changeabilities and particularities take root, materialise, circulate and persuade or fail to convince the rest of the world about the humanity of Africans. By acknowledging that there are numerous perspectives of being and becoming African, this collection, thus, examines how being and becoming African foreground the formation and performance of identities that nurture globalising forms of Africanness. Taken together, the papers assembled here uphold Nyamnjoh's idea that "[n]imble-footed realities [such as being and becoming African] require nimble-footed intellects and nimble-footed scholarship [that

draws] on and distils from yesterday and today to inform a far-from-linear future" (2020: 13).

Using proverbs to call attention to the multiple, complementary and even contradictory usages (and abuses) of the notion of being and becoming African, we join Nyamnjoh in making "a case for conviviality as a currency for frontier Africans" and arguing "that incompleteness is the normal order of things, and that conviviality invites us to celebrate and preserve incompleteness and mitigate the delusions of grandeur that come with ambitions and claims of completeness" (2017[2015]: 253. We also join him in encouraging "frontier Africans to reach out, encounter and explore ways of enhancing or complementing themselves with the added possibilities of potency brought their way by the incompleteness of others, never as a ploy to becoming complete, but to make them more efficacious in their relationships(2017[2015]: 253)of being and becoming.

That incompleteness and frontieriness were what Achebe was referring to when Morrow asked him about the accident that had paralysed his legs in 1990 and Achebe spoke about it with stoicism: "I've been very lucky." "I walked for 60 years." "So, what does it matter that I can't for my last few years." "There are people who never walked at all." "It is an opportunity." "It's a lesson." "It is an enrichment." "I've learned how much we depend on each other." (Achebe and Morrow 1991: 27, 28). It was also a celebration of such incompleteness at its best when Achebe told *The Paris Review* in 1994 that "If you don't like someone's story, write your own." With ethnographic accounts, historical and textual analyses, intertextual conversations and critical reflections on proverbs, this collection concludes, as Zeleza has done elsewhere, that "[t]he numerous peoples and societies that have carved out a place of their own across this vast continent have, in a sense, been creating their little Africas, each laying their bricks across the huge and intricate cartographic, cognitive, and cultural construct, known as 'Africa'" (2006:18), while at the same time asserting that if anyone does not like their little Africas, they should create their own.

Synopsis of Chapters

The contributions in this volume stress the importance and relevance of proverbs in articulating identities and belonging. The authors discuss the specific socio-cultural contexts and backgrounds in which proverbs originate, generate meaning and acquire the status of stable currencies with predictable exchange value even as

fluctuations or creativity in usage are expected and accommodated. In this sense, proverbs are, in essence, a product of particular cultural contexts, if culture is understood as the totality of the way of life of a people – encompassing the spiritual, ecological, economic, political state and level of development. Importantly as well, the authors approach their discussion of proverbs by drawing on the wisdom of many an African proverb that speaks to African societies and cultures as dynamic realities, even when emphasis has been on cultural reproduction in predictable ways. The authors therefore seek to bring the tensions and complementarities between continuities and discontinuities, reproduction and transformation into a very productive conversation that highlights the nuanced complexities in being and becoming African. Equally engaged in the volume is the issue of time, through the question of whether and how proverbs retain their value as and when society changes. To what extent, for example, has globalisation, modern communication technologies and development in different forms rendered some proverbs obsolete or enhanced the relevance of others? In other words, how has the usage of particular proverbs evolved as African societies have changed over time, regardless of whether the change has been from within or a product of adjustments to exogenously induced expectations and obligations? What, for example, have been the impacts of political independence curbed by neocolonialism, authoritarianism and kleptocracy on the production, adaptation and use of proverbs? If one is not simply to assume the timelessness of the wisdom in proverbs as essential communication and socialisation vehicles for African cultures on the continent and in the diaspora, it is important through empirical observations to document, as meticulously as possible, the extent to which proverbs are both timeless and evolving. Apart from their obvious relevance to contributing to redressing epistemic injustices, such research and scholarship equally have policy implications for those interested in how cultures are activated to varying degrees of efficacy through the potency of words.

This collection is thematically divided into four parts as follows: (I) Proverbial Cultures: Being, Becoming and Belonging in African Proverbs; (II) The Materiality of Proverbs: Performing Morality, Spirituality, Politics and Wisdom in and through African Proverbs; (III) Celebrating the Proverbial Genre: Interlinkages between African Proverbs and Creativity; and (IV) African Epistemologies: Indigenous knowledge systems, conceptualisations and pedagogical values of proverbs.

Part I: Proverbial Cultures: Being, Becoming and Belonging in African Proverbs

In this section, we consider the use of proverbs as a major form of linguistic and cultural practice through which other forms of cultural practices such as being, becoming and belonging are performed. Through the chapters in this section therefore, we attempt to chart the myriad links between Africans' use of proverbs and their negotiation and navigation of the compositeness of their being, becoming and belonging.

In chapter two, Francis Nyamnjoh in "Being and Becoming African as a Permanent Work in Progress: Inspiration from Chinua Achebe's Proverbs" explores what we could learn about being and becoming African as a permanent work in progress from how Chinua Achebe adopts and adapts Igbo proverbs in his writings. Nyamnjoh contends that the expediency with which being African is often claimed and denied makes being and becoming African identical to customers shopping at a supermarket with some flexibility in what they put into their shopping baskets: some are picky, even when invited to take a lot by attractive offers, sales and discounts, whereas others have products thrust down their consumer palates through the power of aggressive advertisement or for lack of purchasing power. Particularly interested in how being African is claimed and denied in history, socio-anthropologically and politically, Nyamnjoh finds much inspiration in Chinua Achebe's use of proverbs as words of salience and significance. Nyamnjoh concludes that Achebe found in proverbs a powerful resource of complicated repertoires from which he has drawn repeatedly to nourish his characters and oil their experiences and relationships, depicting their multifacetedness and celebrating their humanity.

In chapter three, Edmond Agyeman's "The Community, Belonging and Agency in Akan Proverbs", examines two sets of Akan proverbs that express two aspects of human existence: one that depicts being as belonging to a community and the other that stresses individual agency and identity. Drawing on the Akan saying, "When you see a bird flying alone, then it is coming from a multitude or it is going to join a multitude." Agyeman asserts the Akan believe that everybody belongs to a group because we all get protection and support from the community and so there is no lone ranger. Affirming another Akan saying, "The person who helps you to carry your load does not develop a hump," Agyeman concludes that whereas among the Akan, there is a close bond between the

individual and the community and there is no person without a home, and group members derive their source of existence from the community, every individual however, bears a responsibility for the sustenance of the community.

In chapter four, Lemuel Ekedegwa Odeh in "The Place of Proverbs amongst the Otukpo of North Central Nigeria" argues that, in most African countries, proverbs and idioms are natural means of verbal conversation. To him, the ability to use this method of speech within the context of any conversations or dialogues varies in different localities and usually shows the user's communicative competence or otherwise. Odeh observes that proverbs are generational and form a large chunk of oral history usually handed over from one generation to the other. Using historical analysis and oral sources, he analyses Otukpo proverbs and idioms and concludes that most of them are structured towards good deeds, highlight the demerits of evil deeds, educate the entire community on the virtues and rewards of good over evil, and create sanity in the community through their assertions of traditional checks and balances.

Chapter five, G. M. T. Emezue and Nefertiti N. Emezue's "An Encounter with a Proverb-Hunter and the Beingness of Igbo Proverbs" focuses on the beingness of Igbo proverbs. Drawing on the Igbo proverb resources in P. K. Davids's *Ilulu Igbo n'ime Igbo: Textbook of Igbo proverbs*, Emezue and Emezue investigate the sources of Igbo proverbs, the most recurrent Igbo sound segments among the Igbo and the narratives of past events and cultural practices among the Igbo. They go further to explore the existence of Igbo proverbs in 21st-century platforms like websites and YouTube videos, and conclude that though Igbo proverbs occur traditionally as an aspect of Igbo language, the 21st century has witnessed their appearance in most technological gadgets, thus ensuring their survival into the new century and beyond.

Part II: The Materiality of Proverbs: Performing Morality, Spirituality, Politics and Wisdom in and through African Proverbs

This section comprises four chapters with similar thematic foci. Here, we move a step further from seeing proverbs as cultural elements of being, becoming and belonging to seeing them as material elements or entities through which Africans fulfil their being, becoming and belonging by using them to form and perform their contemporary identities in the fields of morality, spirituality, wisdom and politics in multifaceted ways.

In chapter six, Tekletsadik Belachew in "Wax and Gold: Wisdom, Spirituality and Moral Discourse in Ethiopian Proverbs" opens with the asseveration that Ethiopian proverbs defy the false dichotomy between orality and textuality. They are usually used to elucidate speech, critique, denounce, praise, express sorrow or to mediate reconciliation in the "traditional" judicial contexts, to sustain the social equilibrium, to educate youngsters, to enrich religious services and endure political discourse. He argues that like other types of orality including improvised oral poetry known as *Qene* in Ethiopia, proverbs use metaphors figuratively expressed in Amharic as "Wax and Gold", an expression drawn from the artwork of goldsmithing, to contrast different images. He asserts that because proverbs and poetry converge and enrich each other, *Qene*-poetry utilises proverbs because of their poetic nature. He concludes that in order to better appreciate the roles that proverbs and *Qene*-poetry play in forming and performing Ethiopian wisdom, spirituality and morality, one needs to understand the Amharic proverb about proverbs being brief, beautiful and poetic rhymes, ነገር በምሳሌ፡ ጠጅ በብርሌ [*nagar bamesale, tajj be-berilaie*], that translates, "Speak with proverbs, drink honey-wine with the decanter."

Chapter seven is Patrick Nwosu's "Proverbs and the Celebration of the Igbo Tradition of Politics in Chinua Achebe's Novels". Drawing inspiration from Achebe's celebration of African proverbs in his novels, Nwosu argues that the Igbo tradition of governance symbolised in *Umunacra* (consensus and dialogue) establishes the link between the African present and the past particularly in South Eastern Nigeria. To him, Achebe's approach to African proverbs was critical and its highlights on leadership and politics call for constant reexamination. Using what he identifies as historical and analytical methods, Nwosu traces the social evolution expressed in proverbs, politics and culture in *Anthills of the Savannah*, *A Man of the People*, *Arrow of God*, *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* as representations of Achebe's best use of proverbs. The chapter concludes that the principle of "harmonious and peaceful coexistence" often expressed through Igbo proverbs is still relevant for sustainable growth of the African continent.

In chapter eight, Ichie P. A. Ezikeojiaku examines "Poetry as a Vehicle for Communication and Orientation in Contemporary Igbo Politics" by focusing on the role of folk poetry in the political activities of traditional and modern societies. Asserting that whereas the role of this form of poetry has been attested in societies such as

Communist China, the Soviet Union and the United States of America, in modern Africa, political parties are gradually doing so by accepting poetry as a vehicle for communication, political pressure, orientation and education. He argues that in Africa, there are songs for all occasions, and so songs can be categorised according to the occasion or purpose of use. To him, one of the distinctive characteristics of the poetic songs used for contemporary Igbo politics is that they are creative, imaginative and educative, and serve to entertain and persuade. They offer vicarious experiences and excite the emotions, just as they reflect the realities of human existence. Ezikeojiaku concludes that whether they are elegiac, panegyric, ritualistic or political, songs are part of oratory, and they appeal and inspire the human spirit as well as act as a mirror by which humans can see the realities of life. That is, the impact of songs on the individual and society depends on the significance attached to them by members of the society because songs, like every other art, mirror the activities in society. It is through songs, therefore, that one becomes aware of other peoples' states of mind and even the changes that occur within them.

In chapter nine, Christopher Olatúbòsún Oṃóléwu' explores "African Wisdom in Proverbs: The Yorùbá Example". Drawing on proverbs as enigmatic and universal phenomena present in all cultures, Oṃóléwu' shows how the Yorùbá have been able to use proverbs to preserve their African wisdom, and how they have so far used proverbs as a viable tool through which age-long wisdom has been preserved for generations. Oṃóléwu' contends that, among the Yorùbá, like in other African societies, proverbs are repositories of societal norms and values that are passed from generation to generation. He also asserts that proverbs among the Yorùbá are far more than general observations, precepts or mere pieces of advice but words of wisdom. The chapter concludes that, in proverbs, African wisdom is deposited and in them, also, the level of Yorùbá wisdom and intelligence are truly found and appreciated.

Part III: Celebrating the Proverbial Genre: Interlinkages between African Proverbs and Creativity

Section three brings together four chapters that celebrate the proverbial genre by attempting to harness the interconnections and interdependencies that exist between African proverbs and creativity. A unifying factor for the chapters in this section is their focus on the fruitful link between the ability to use proverbs and being an African

creative writer. They remind us that the ability to use proverbs effectively is generally an unwritten condition for being a revered African creative writer.

In chapter ten, "Paremiological Poetics: The Poetic Dimensions of Igbo Proverbs" by Onyebuchi Nwosu, the focus is on the proverb as both a linguistic and a literary phenomenon. Nwosu contends that, while most folklorists and scholars of oral literature generally believe that the proverb has outstanding sentential features that make it to be prominently featured in formal and informal speeches with the effect that its effective use marks one as an orator, the proverb also has manifest poetic features. Building on the proposition that Igbo proverbs are more of poetic creations than mere utterances, Nwosu views Igbo proverbs as terse but highly emotive poetic invocations that have well-measured poetic bits (rhythms) and make prodigious use of figurative expressions. The chapter unravels the numerous poetic dimensions of the Igbos thus establishing the fact that, in proverbial invocations, there are more literary considerations (emotive/figurative) that help Igbo men and women to achieve apt and appropriate meanings. He concludes that most proverbs are embodiments of highly emotive and figurative meanings.

In chapter eleven, Joseph Oduro-Frimpong examines "The Pleasure(s) of Proverb Discourse in Contemporary Popular Ghanaian Music: The Case of Obrafour's Hiplife Songs". The chapter draws inspiration from Achebe's dexterity in proverb use in fictional contexts to explore the use of proverbs as a public form of communication in Ghanaian public life within hiplife, a popular music type that blends US hip-hop musical aesthetics with that of Ghanaian highlife. Through a distinctive theoretical approach to "pleasure" situated within an Akan understanding, Oduro-Frimpong, specifically, investigates the proverb discourse within the music oeuvre of Obrafour, a respected hiplife artist and acknowledged master of this shared communicative genre in Ghana. In doing so, he also probes Obrafour's thematic engagement with delicate topics via proverbs on harmful experiences in romantic relationships, corruption, traditionally appropriate ways of consuming romantic affairs and, overall, being cautious in life. Oduro-Frimpong concludes that, through Obrafour's use of proverbs in hiplife music, we learn how serious matters in social and national lives are mediated within public spaces in acceptable, locally comprehensible ways and thus experienced as "pleasurable".

Chapter twelve is "Malinkelisation of French in Ahmadou

Kourouma's *Les soleils des indépendances*" in which Peter Wuteh Vakunta contends that to make the French language carry the worldview, speech patterns and lived experiences of the Malinke, Kourouma resorts to the technique of "Malinkelisation" as a literary canon in *Les soleils des indépendances*. To Vakunta, Kourouma proceeds through the process of intra-lingual translation in order to transpose not just the lexemes of his native tongue into the French language but also the proverbs and other figures of speech that sustain his native language. Vakunta asserts that it is evident that in a bid to give adequate expression to the particularity of socio-linguistic realities, Kourouma resorts to the technique of indigenisation of language in his novel. This chapter explores the centrality of recourse to proverbs in a bid to indigenise the language of the ex-coloniser in *Les soleils*. The chapter also provides answers to intriguing questions, not the least of which is the problematics of translation in contemporary African literature. Vakunta's chapter is an enriching contribution to the ongoing research on the language question in Europhone African literature.

In chapter thirteen, "Drinking from the Bottomless 'Eagle on Iroko' Proverbial Gourd: Africanising and Globalising Chinua Achebe's Igbo (Narrative) Proverbs", Hassan Mbiydenyuy Yosimbom argues that Francis B. Nyamnjoh situates some of his scholarly works within a field of interlinkages with Chinua Achebe's by drinking from the Achebesque proverbial gourd. He asserts that by borrowing Achebesque proverbs, Nyamnjoh affirms his paratextuality. The chapter contends that aside the interlinkages between Nyamnjoh's hypertexts and Achebe's hypotexts, Nyamnjoh also uses Mimboland (narrative) proverbs in his novels, especially *Souls Forgotten*, to delineate a proverbialisation of Mimboland marginalisation and dismemberment. To him, Nyamnjoh uses proverbs to demonstrate that close propinquity between Mimboland is experienced less as opportunity and possibility and more as heightened risks, separations and dismemberments. The chapter concludes that Nyamnjohian (narrative) proverbs, just like their Achebesque counterparts, function as images, metaphors and symbols that advance the meanings and formal qualities of the narratives in which they occur by extending across broad ideological divides.

Part IV: African Epistemologies: Indigenous Knowledge Systems, Conceptualisations and Pedagogical Values of Proverbs

Section four focuses pointedly on the real and potential contribution of African proverbs to the call for epistemological inclusivity to the sort of convivial scholarship needed to accomplish a truly decolonial dispensation that is predicated not on repeating the same mistakes of the winner-takes-all colonial superiority syndrome but, rather, on the principle of embracing and celebrating the potentials of interconnecting and interdepending incompleteness as a universal attribute of being and becoming. The six chapters in the section make the important point of providing for knowledge production as a process in which no one – race, ethnicity, culture, civilisation, geography, class, gender, sexuality or age group, among other social categories – has the monopoly of insights, and in which there are no permanent answers, but only new questions and creative and innovative ways of questioning.

In chapter fourteen, Jude Fokwang's "Drinking from the Cosmic Gourd' and the Fallacy of Completeness by Way of African Proverbs" provides a critical appraisal of Francis Nyamnjoh's *Drinking from the Cosmic Gourd* (2017), peppered with a variety of proverbs that sum up the imperative to incorporate African epistemologies and worldviews in theorising African experiences. It compares Eurocentric and totalising theories to the masquerade in the Bali proverb that refused to leave the dance arena, despite being rewarded with a rooster. Most importantly, it also examines the applicability of the concepts of conviviality and incompleteness in explaining everyday African experiences, not just as alternatives to the Eurocentric models that have dominated scholarship in and on Africa, but also as conceptual bridges between other epistemologies and African knowledge systems.

In chapter fifteen, Husein Inusah and Michael Segbefia's "Intellectual Virtues of Indigenous African Wisdom: The Perspectives of Akan Proverbs" explores the indigenous wisdom embedded in Akan proverbs and illuminates what they teach us about intellectual virtues. Inusah and Segbefia argue that Akan proverbs have attracted much attention with respect to the lessons derived from the witty imaginations, moral values and the communitarian ethos they represent and further draw implications for practice in education and politics in Africa. They conclude by underscoring not only the importance of intellectual virtues as a guide to enriching African educational modules with the aim of expanding the frontiers

of knowledge but also by indicating their relevance to addressing the current degradation of political deliberations and public discourses in Africa.

Chapter sixteen, Munyaradzi Mawere's "Epistemological and Moral Aspects of Selected Shona Proverbial Lore: Implications for Health and Safety in the Face of Covid-19 and Other Such Pandemics", focuses on the moral, epistemological, logical and metaphysical lessons embedded in Shona proverbs. Drawing on selected Shona proverbs, Mawere examines Shona epistemological and moral thought systems and exposes their underpinnings and implications to the health and safety of society in the face of the Covid-19 and related pandemics such as HIV-AIDS. The chapter posits that Shona proverbial lore, just like African proverbial lore in general, is laden with epistemic and moral content that, if integrated with existing biomedical approaches in the fight against Covid-19 and other pandemics such as HIV-AIDS, can significantly downplay the prevalence rate of pandemics. He concludes that proverbial lore is one among Shona folklore through which issues related to health and safety in society in the era of pandemics can be examined and deeply understood.

Chapter seventeen, Murindwa Rutanga and Vincent Kanyonza's "Epistemology and Politics in Proverbial Names in the Pre-Colonial Great Lakes Region", focuses on proverbial naming in Bakiga-Banyankoreland. Drawing on their travels to different continents and many African countries, the authors argue that the Bakiga-Banyankore had the largest varieties of proverbial names. They assert that naming in Bakiga-Banyankore society was politics being played in the most sensitive guarded spaces and the only way for the outsiders to know about such politics was through the proverbial naming of children and domestic animals. Proverbial names were carefully and intelligently designed within their socio-cultural confines to express their hidden messages through the intended recipients to other members of society. They further argue that such political or politicised names were given by either of the parents, grandparents, other elders or even other members of the family, social groups or those linked to the family through blood brotherhood and marriage. The authors conclude that child naming was eclectic and circumstantial and the historical, mental or psychological predisposition of the person naming the child plus the prevailing environmental circumstances and the gender of the child influenced which name was given to each child.

Chapter eighteen, Samuel Ntewusu's "If You Want to Understand Africa's Politico-Epistemological World, look at the Chameleon", examines proverbs in Ghana with a particular focus on the chameleon and the chief proverb of the Nawuris of Ghana. He argues that the chameleon and the chief proverb provide ideas and shed light on African knowledge systems and politics. Through a detailed examination of the attributes or characteristics of the chameleon in the proverb, the chapter makes a critical contribution to African knowledge and politics by providing epistemological reflections and contexts within which the behaviour of people in authority in African societies could be analysed. Ntewusu emphasises the importance of traditional forms of education and issues of orality in African communities and concludes that the need to build a society that is responsive to everyone necessitates that elders teach the young, the old, the chiefs and contemporary African leaders to appreciate proverbs, since African political and knowledge systems are deeply rooted in them and vice versa.

Chapter nineteen, Divine Fuh's "The Kola Nuts of Ideas: African Proverbs and Epistemic Emancipation", engages with the interlinkages between African proverbs, creativity and epistemic emancipation by attempting to build conceptual tools grounded in African ontologies. Fuh takes on a recurrent critique of knowledge production efforts in and from Africa that continually emphasises the lack of what is framed as an original and sophisticated theory of knowledge. Using anecdotes, select proverbs and the situations in which they are deployed to provide explanations, he argues for the foregrounding of African proverbs as conceptual framework or scientific propositions for alternative ontologies, particularly those located in the everyday archives and ordinariness of being. He asserts that the metaphors in African proverbs represent the already existing scientific introversion that decolonisation scholars are seeking and should therefore be intentionally deployed for epistemic disobedience. He concludes that as a cultural project decolonisation must borrow from the archives of the everyday such as proverbs to offer a complimentary thought frame, to produce, circulate and consume ideas.

Endnotes

¹ https://soweto.co.za/html/i_iamaffrican.htm;
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Part I

Proverbial Cultures:

Being, Becoming and Belonging in

African Proverbs

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Chapter 7

Proverbs and the Celebration of the Igbo Tradition of Politics in Chinua Achebe's Novels

Patrick U. Nwosu

Introduction

No one could have predicted the changes that were to take place in the religious and political culture of the African during the colonial era of Chinua Achebe's time. The decline of the authentic African cultural ethos and the emergence of Europeanism were drastic and dramatic. The inevitable change and the outline of the overall picture are captured in a submission by Nwachukwu-Agbada (1993: 121):

This was a time when to buy European views was *à la mode* and not a few Africans in Achebe's time bought them. For some members of this generation, Europeanism was a monster that needed to be rejected. Achebe himself first sought to understand it, and later to question it.

The above citation correctly notes that as at the time Achebe began his literary career, there was hardly any sphere of African life that remained impenetrable to the overwhelming influence of colonialism.

Chinua Achebe, whose novels celebrate African proverbs as the palm-oil with which words are eaten; and the Igbo tradition of governance, tried to establish a link between the African present and the past with particular focus on Igboland. He acknowledged that his first novel, *Things Fall Apart*, was "an act of atonement with the past, the ritual and homage of a prodigal son" (Wren 1980: 3). In some of his novels, Achebe's approach to African proverbs was to study the themes critically and highlight their relevance to the leadership and politics of the time.

Using historical and analytical methods, this chapter aims at tracing the social evolution, politics, and culture expressed through proverbs in Chinua Achebe's five novels, *Anthills of the Savannah*, *A Man of the People*, *Arrow of God*, *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease*.

These selected novels bring out the best of Achebe's use of proverbs in reflecting the Igbo tradition of politics and leadership. The chapter attempts to make a conscious and deliberate examination of aspects of the Igbo past and the lessons for contemporary times.

Thus, the effort in this study is to examine the ways the old African society allocates roles of leadership on the basis of "philosopher-king" qualification; chatting ways and means of reaching decisions, and eventually, coming to grips with realities that guarantee the principles of: "*Egbe bere Ugo ebere*" which means, "harmonious and peaceful coexistence." The study proceeds through the following subheadings: Ancestral Spirit and Good Governance; Elders' Wisdom and the State; Negotiated Power Ratio; and The Political Hero. The conclusion draws lessons for contemporary times.

Ancestral Spirit and Good Governance

Igbo religious beliefs explain and provide meaning to the world; the religion is also heavily anchored on social and political institutions. Achebe shows that Igbo religious authorities like the Oracle, always possess clear insights into the realities around the people and their communities. Thus, whatever the Oracle dictates happens. When the Earth goddess plans a drought, the crops are destroyed. When the Earth goddess calls for rain, there would certainly be a great harvest. In this regard, beliefs in ancestral spirits and in the gods are an important element in African religions in general and that of the Igbo in particular. The beliefs are situated in the family life and spring out of the family structure to constitute communal spirit. Though age is respected among the people, achievement is revered. Thus, Achebe reminds us of the ancestral wisdom of the elders through the saying: if a child washes his/her hands clean he/she could eat with kings. The ancestors as spirits are believed to be present in the family, concretely symbolized in several ways for the wellbeing of the people. This fact is common knowledge to all the Igbo of old. In other words, the ancestral spirit expressed in a communal spirit makes for good governance. The awareness of the nearness of the ancestral spirits was essential for security and maintaining the rights and respect due to a people (Anyawu & Aguwa 1993:122). Communal interest at this level transcends any individual interest. Thus, the Igbo of the past had a vehement-rooted desire for one voice. Achebe echoes this communal spirit in *Things Fall Apart* when the Umuofia people demonstrate a corporate bond in their demand from the Mbaino

people. One of their wives returning from the market is killed by Mbaino people. The demand of Umuofia people for immediate reparation is firm and unanimous. In this regard, when unity begins to elude the people of Mbanta, one of the oldest members, symbolic of ancestral spirits, raises alarm: "But I fear for you young people because you do not know what it is to speak with one voice" (Achebe, 1981[1958]: 118). In the light of the foregoing, Nwachukwu-Agada (1993) notes that "the failure of Okonkwo and even Ezeulu in *Arrow of God*, is due to their ambition to chart their separate courses while expecting their communities to come behind them" (123). In Igbo society therefore, good governance anchors on corporate interest and collective spirit. Thus:

In spite of Obi Okonkwo's sauciness to his clansmen residing in Lagos, they make concerted effort to ensure that he does not go to prison. The following proverb which is found in both *Arrow of God* (99) and *No Longer at Ease* (5) exemplifies the societies position on Obi's situation: "let us first chase away the wild cat afterwards we blame the hen" (Anyanwu & Aguwa 1993: 123).

In almost all his novels, Achebe calls attention to the fact that the Igbo have a communal spirit expressed in some communities as *umunnacra*. *Things Fall Apart* gives a cryptic setting of clan unity in the market square gathering meant to find a lasting solution to the menace of the new religion. The objective of such a gathering is for community members to put their heads together to arrive at an agreement. This is *umunnacra* in action which is original to the Igbo. As Anyanwu and Aguwa (1993: 123) put it:

At such a meeting, there would be counterviews from dissenting individuals but in the end, the popular view would carry the day. In *Arrow of God*, Nwaka's opposition to Ezeulu when the latter asks Umuaro people to give him some men who will accompany him to answer the white man's call is a popular view. Although Ogbuefi Nwaka is opposed to Ezeulu's request partly on the personal bias, his opinion on the matter tallies with the view of the people, and so the request is turned down.

Consensus strategies are quite familiar terrain for the Igbo. This makes for stronger unity and good governance. Beginning from the family front, to the larger community and society, people are

expected to take responsibility for both the good and the ugly that comes from one of their own. Thus, the call-response greeting in Igbo stands for corporate governance and unity. For example, the Igbo leader would always begin his speech with the call, "*Cha chachaa! Igbo Kwenuu!!*" And the audience or crowd would respond, "*yaah!*" The call-response greeting is repeated two or three times as the spirit directs. This is quite aptly used in the novels: *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God's Umuofia Kwenu* and the *Yaa* answer. In these novels, the call-response greeting "was meant to keep people together, to think in a specific manner and to respond to social problems in unison" (Anyanwu & Aguwa 1993: 124). This sense of unity and responsibility that is integral for good governance remains relevant in the contemporary politics of the continent and the world at large.

Elders' Wisdom and the State

The concept of a "state" comes from the Greek word "polis", which means city. In modern politics from the 17th century onwards, the word "state" came to stand for the political territory under a ruler (Osudibia 1995:12). Ward (1965:215) defines a state as "a society or community of persons united under an organized rule and law to pursue the common temporal good". In other words, Ward sees a state as a government and organic community comprising the leaders and the led within a given territory for the purpose of the common good of all. Highlighting the natural and linguistic elements of the state, Fagothey (1956:404) writes, "the state is a perfect and self-sufficing natural society consisting of many individuals and families united under a common authority for the attainment of temporal welfare of the community." The common good of the greatest number of people, as submitted by Ward and Fagothey, forms the validity of the state. Its primary objective is the wellbeing of the greatest number. Thus, in the state one encounters territory, people, rules and integral sovereignty.

In the light of the above, elders are the primary source of African wisdom and traditions in the Igbo state. They are the link between the ancestors of the community and the present generation. Hence, their wisdom and experience are reckoned with in any state or community politics. Through their wisdom, people reach back to the origins of the clan and nations for the root sources of tradition and community cohesion. Since oral traditions have no written texts to dig up somewhere, people must investigate elsewhere. And where

else than the very wisdom of the elders being discussed (Fisher 1998: 13) in the form of proverbs.

Chinua Achebe's novels place the duty of state affairs on the shoulders of the elders. In *Anthills of the Savannah*, the elders and their wisdom play a significant role in the political affairs of Abazon. In *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, the elders comprehensively manage the affairs of the community's members. To Anyanwu and Aguwa, "Although they constitute the hub of the state machinery, all the gatherings in the two novels were addressed by the elders while the younger men listened attentively" (1993: 124).

Leadership qualities and role rotate around integrity, social status and upright achievement. These attributes come through lifelong hard work and honesty. In other words, by the moment a person has obtained titles and achieved success through an upright path of life, the person would already be elderly. Thus, the Igbo would say that "a good name is better than silver and gold".

In *No Longer at Ease*, the President General of the Umuofia Progressive Union in Lagos speaks like a wise elder. The political contest between him and Nanga in *A Man of the People* is due to the former's age. His father asks him, "so you really want to fight chief Nanga! My son, why don't you fall where your pieces could be gathered?" The father throws a proverb to buttress his point: "a mad man may sometimes speak true words, but you watch him, he will soon add something to it that will tell you his mind is still spoilt" (Achebe, *A Man of the People*, 131).

Be that as it may, in a few situations in Achebe's novels, the author also indicated that academic knowledge can make up for age. The elderly man who doubles as a local councillor confirms the point being made. He replies to Maxwell Kulane:

I want to thank the young man for his beautiful words. Every one of them had entered my ear. I always say that what is important nowadays is no longer age or title but knowledge. The young man clearly has it and I salute him (Achebe, *A Man of the People*, 137).

One sees a similar situation when Obi Okonkwo visits Umuofia in *No Longer at Ease*. Odogwu remarks: "Today greatness has changed its tune. Titles are no longer great, neither are barns or larger numbers of wives and children. Greatness is now in the things of the white man. And so we too have changed our tune" (Achebe, *No Longer at Ease*, 49).

Achebe was so strongly rooted in the values and integrity of aged wisdom that despite the success of the young and their education, his novels did not set any framework to guarantee their leadership success. For him, the important roles of the elders cannot be replaced. Thus, in *Anthills of the Savannah*, an elder leads a delegation of Abazonians to Bassa in order to meet with the governor over their utility challenges. Although the Governor would not see them, the author presents the elder an opportunity to address Abazonians living in Bassa. Achebe strongly holds that age is always crucial even in the contemporary challenges of leadership. Wherever elders have appeared in his novels, they have been presented with dignity, maturity and nobility. Wisdom, caution, intelligence, experience and tolerance seems to be the forte of the old in his novels (Anyanwu & Aguwa, 1993: 125).

Negotiated Power Ratio

Tzu, in *The Art of War*, notes that struggle is the pursuit of advantage which one or a community may go for with others. He strongly emphasised that struggle means struggle for advantage and those who get the advantage are considered victorious. Conflicts involving violence between communities and nations are always struggles that require negotiation and diplomatic strategies. Chinua Achebe notes this by showing how African communities of old organised their polity.

When the Umuofia community agrees to request for reparation for one of their wives killed in Mbaino, they engage in negotiated power by sending emissaries to the offending community to consider conditions for peace. Nwachukwu-Agbada notes that "In spite of the emotional climate at the gathering of the Umuofians grieving over the loss of their member, they show maturity by sending a delegation to talk things over and to make their demands known to the other group" (1993: 125-126). The disposition of Mbaino, the offending community is equally a sign of negotiated power and diplomatic maturity when they quickly give in to the demands of the Umuofians.

In *Arrow of God* the negotiated power is of a different kind. First Umuaro people send three of their own to Okperi, their neighbour "to place the choice of war or peace before them" in the light of a land disagreement between them. Secondly, the people sent are expected to present the views of the community rather than their own views for which the Igbos would say that "a messenger/emissary

does not display proverbs". He is expected to go straight to the point as the larger community had agreed. However, when Akukalia, the head of the delegation, gets there, he oversteps the boundary of his delegation's mandate and breaks a man's symbol of strength, the *Ikenga*, for which he is killed in return. His gross display of his overbearing nature receives the displeasure of the people thus:

When the body was brought home to Umuaro, everyone was stunned. It had never happened before that an emissary of Umuaro was killed abroad. But after the first shock people began to say that their clansman had done an unforgiveable thing (Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 25).

A delegation of Umuaro elders equally goes to Ezeulu when he refused to eat up the sacred yams, whose consumption by the chief priests of Ulu ushers in the harvest. It is Umuaro's moment of crisis and it calls for negotiated power ratio instead of dictatorial approach. As Nwachukwu-Agbada (1993: 126) notes "although the delegation of ten elders fails to obtain concessions from Ezeulu, the meeting is perhaps the most intellectually intriguing of all such occasions. There are views and counter-views on both sides on virtually any strand of the argument advanced during the course of the discussion."

In all, the Umuaro delegation to Abazon in *Anthill of the Savannah* could not achieve their mission or bring the struggle to the advantage of their communities. Both Ezeulu and Sam prove recalcitrant who succeeded in personalizing their religious and social leadership outlook. The men became tragic figures; they portray the proverbial dog being priced by death which would not allow it to perceive the odour of excreta.

The Political Hero

Within the traditional Igbo society, the framework, knowledge and political skills are complex and diverse. This is because for the Igbo, the God who creates, communicates and governs is also the one who inspires humans to achieve greatness. Von Rad (1967: 418) describes it as "the practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world based on experience: it reflects that human knowledge of the laws of life and of the world based on experience". It reflects that human knowledge and skill which results from human reflection and conformity with perceived order. Hence, political heroes are not lacking in Igbo traditional society. The value of rhetoric among the

Igbo and by extension, Africans is established early in Achebe's novels, a factor clearly misunderstood by the colonialists who prefer direct speech.

In Igbo culture, before communal decisions are arrived at, men familiar with the use of words are usually allowed to speak on the issue at stake. Basic things and elements would be expected in the speech. As Anyawu and Aguwa rightly point out,

The logic of the contributions, the sense of history located in them, the beauty of their speech and the development of rhetorical devices enabled the community to arrive at a decision. The quintessential Igbo political hero in Achebe's view is a mover of crowds; he is a careful articulator of the people's most immediate needs and can deploy his sentiments in a manner which also takes into consideration the emotional stance of the people (1993: 127).

In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe projects three political heroes. They are Ezeugo, Egonwane and Okika. The novel describes the oratorical ability of Ezeugo thus:

... on each occasion he faced a different direction and seemed to push the air with a clenched fist. And ten thousand men answered "Yea" each time. Ogbuefi Ezeugo was a powerful orator and was always chosen to speak on such occasions. (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 9).

On the part of Egonwanne, he lacks the war-lord status of Ezeugo. Okonkwo despises him for being a coward whose tongue though "can change fire into cold ash" (Achebe, 141). Egonwanne displays more maturity and tempers emotions with good reasoning and judgement. Okika is perhaps Okonkwo's idea of an orator. He impresses the people and leads them to their sense of corporate history and ancestral pride:

All our gods are weeping. Idemili is weeping. Ogwugwu is weeping. Agbala is weeping, all the others. Our dead fathers are weeping because of the shameful sacrilege they are suffering and the abomination we have all seen with our eyes. Okika stopped again to steady his trembling voice (Achebe, *Things Fall Apart*, 143).

For Okonkwo, Egonwanne has metamorphosed into "the adult in the house" who watches as a tethered goat "suffered in her parturition" in *Arrow of God*. In this regard, Ezeulu would describe such an elder as one who "put a piece of live coal into the child's palm and asked him to carry it with care". Furthermore, political heroes in African context portray the pros and cons of every political issue confronting the people. This is what one sees in *Arrow of God* with Ezeulu and Nwaka. During the period of tension between Umuaro and Okperi, Nwaka speaks in favour of war, Ezeulu speaks against it:

The meeting ended in confusion. Umuaro was divided in two. Many people gathered round Ezeulu and said they stood with him, but there were others who went with Nwaka (Achebe, *Arrow of God*, 27).

As in Achebe's novels, the political hero always has a leading role in any political circle. For him, the Igbo politician is always an orator that owns his words and at the same time, highly informed. Therefore, Achebe would believe that "a nation does not belong to any one person or clique ... no matter how talented" (Anyanwu and Aguwa 1993: 129).

Lessons for Contemporary Time

Chinua Achebe's portrayal of Igbo politics with the use of proverbs is a deliberate one. For him, it reveals those aspects of the African past that would always be relived in every generation. First, every African community must retain, assert and sustain its communal integrity. This may be expressed through developmental project and more dividends of democracy. Again, love for consensus must not be lost. It guarantees the accommodation of diversity of voices and opinions while upholding the interest of the majority. Therefore, unitary system of government or one-party system may not be favourable to any African community, particularly the Igbo. Furthermore, there should always be a place for the voice of the elders to serve as the voice of caution. As always, what the elder sees sitting down, the young would never see even if they climb the highest iroko tree. Age is the voice of maturity and the sense of history.

Finally, it is no longer news that Nigerian Government at all levels is not close to the people at the grass-root. This is as a result of the

elimination of the local government system in practice. It functions in Nigeria only in papers. Hence, there is the need to inject African folklore and principles into modern democratic governance. This would bring about the process of indigenization of democracy in Africa. After all, the basic interest in Achebe's novels was to show how African ancestors lived and organized themselves and their communities for centuries with political principles of "*Egbe bere Ugo ebere, Ununnacra* and *Anyia mbewe, immi ebewe*" which remain interesting tools to aid contemporary approaches to governance and coexistence.

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Chapter 8

Poetry as a Vehicle for Communication and Orientation in Contemporary Igbo Politics

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Introduction

Perhaps one of the most striking and interesting values of folk poetry is its role in the political activities of both the traditional and modern societies. In communist China, the Soviet Union and the United States, the political role of this form of poetry has been attested. In modern Africa, political parties have accepted songs as vehicles for communication, political pressure, orientation and education. In attesting to the above fact, Finnegan (1970: 294) states:

By the late 1950s and early 1960s, political songs in Africa seem to have become a standard accompaniment of recognised political parties and the election campaigns that were by now becoming more a feature of political activity in African colonies and ex-colonies.

Language is used to communicate emotions and feelings of joy, anger and sorrow, and these characteristics of language can be very important in political songs. Writing in *West African Voices*, Osadebey (1965: 18) says,

[W]e have a wealth of culture and fine feelings which find expressions in music and poetry. We sing when we fight, work, love, hate, when a child is born and also when death takes a toll.

This statement underlines the expression that there are songs for all occasions, and so songs can be categorised according to the occasion or purpose of use. One of the distinctive characteristics of language is that it is creative, imaginative, it educates, entertains, persuades and offers vicarious experiences and excites the emotion while reflecting the realities of human existence. This is the function