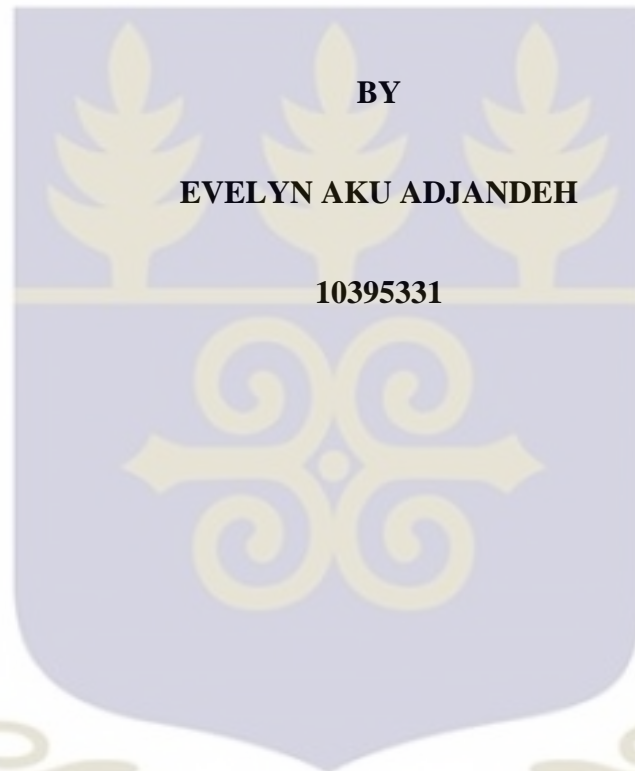


UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON
INSTITUTE OF AFRICAN STUDIES

**A STUDY OF PROVERBS IN *THINGS FALL APART* AND *SUNDIATA: AN EPIC*
*OF OLD MALI (SUNDIATA)***



**THIS THESIS IS SUBMITTED TO THE UNIVERSITY OF GHANA, LEGON IN
PARTIAL FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT FOR AWARD OF THE
MPHIL AFRICAN STUDIES DEGREE**

JULY, 2014

DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own original work carried out under supervision at the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana. Sources cited in this work have duly been acknowledged. This thesis, whether whole or in part, has not been presented elsewhere for any award.

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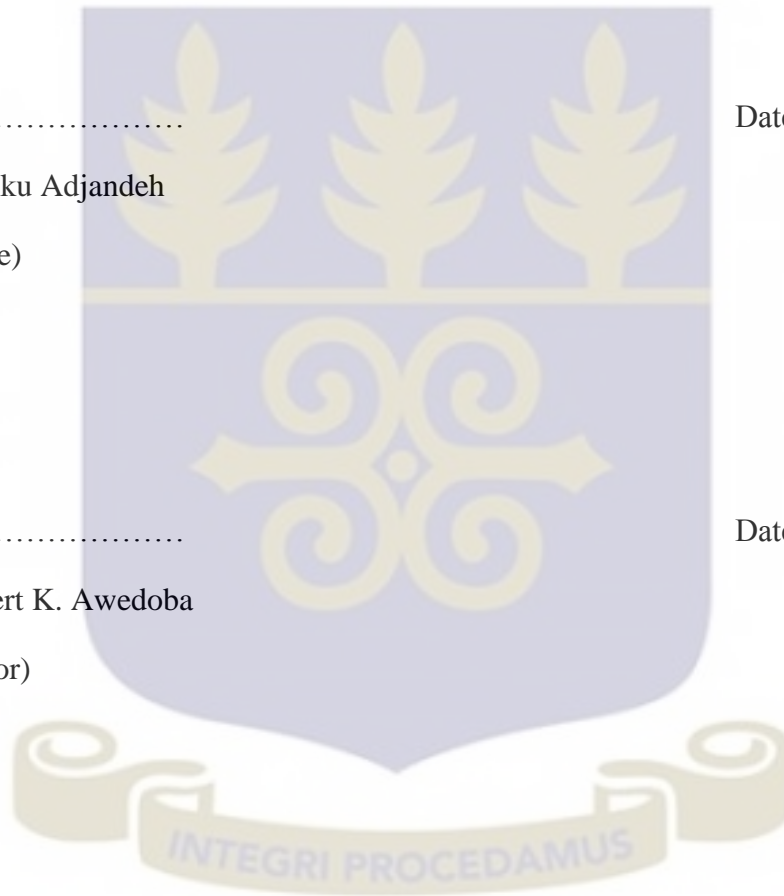
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DEDICATION

To my parents and all those who made me who I am today.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My first and foremost appreciation goes to *Mawu* (Almighty God) for the strength, wisdom and knowledge He has granted me to complete this work successfully.

I am also grateful to Prof. Albert K. Awedoba and Dr. Edward Nanbigne, the supervisors of this thesis, for their assistance and contributions that has brought this work this far. I extend my appreciation to all the lecturers and research fellows in the Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon for their enormous contribution towards my studies.

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ABSTRACT

Literature in general, just as the other art forms, opens a window into the cultural characteristics of a society. A culture of a particular group is established linguistically through narrative exchange that determines the relevance of belief systems which hold the people together (Finnegan 1970). To understand a culture, particularly one in which orality is still a predominant form of recording history and phenomena, one requires some acquaintance with its oral forms (Nwachuku-Agbada, 1994:194). As a group of people survive in a particular society, they continually foster their own relevant customs through different modes such as proverbs, songs, symbols, folktales and mythologies among others. These literary works express ideas and the concerns of the people at the time. One of such literary types which is well known in literary genre and often used to decode the culture of a people is proverbs. These proverbs often connote (historical) antecedents, customs, as well as the hopes, desires and fears of the people. This thesis therefore analyzed the proverbs in *Things Fall Apart*¹ (henceforth *TFA*) and *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali*² (*Sundiata* for short) for an understanding of the Igbo and Mande cultures.



¹For this thesis, the 1986 edition of *Things Fall Apart* was used.

² The 1965 English version of *Sundiata: An Epic of Old Mali* was also employed in thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

Proverbs provide insights into a people's philosophy, worldview and cosmology, their history, motifs and tradition. Aderemi refers to them as "culture markers" in the sense that they tell us, in rather brief and deep terms, so much about the past and the psychology of the peoples and communities from which they emanate (Aderemi 1994:74). Howell, an anthropologist who has studied and written about the language and culture of the Kasena for over 20 years, admitted that her reading of Awedoba's work on proverbs revealed deep insights into Kasena culture and religion that she had never known before (Cited in Moon, N.D). Virtually, every African philosophical issue has in one way or the other received some attention in the African proverb:- philosophical concepts such as justice, equity, kindness, truth, courage, respect, beauty, confidence, generosity, oppression and prowess, among others. Proverbs therefore reflect or are capable of reflecting the beliefs, values, norms, histories and any other aspect of a people's way of life. African proverbs according to Mbiti, serve as reminders of the oldest forms of African religious and philosophical wisdom (Mbiti, 1969). The use of proverbs is an effective means through which African societies have succeeded in maintaining social order, stabilizing their lives and transmitting their values and beliefs to their future generations. Proverbs constitute an integral part of the culture of each given society hence they address many themes, knowledge and areas of life that concern a particular group of people. Herskovits (1958) refers to proverbs as a grammar of values. This is because through them, one gets an idea of the dos and don'ts of a particular society.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The aim of this work is to move beyond the literal meanings of proverbs and arrive at their social connotations. This work seeks to further compare the proverbs with the social system of the Mande and Igbo people to find out whether there is a link between language and society. By doing a comparative study of two different societies, the research will unearth some of the similarities in the practices and beliefs of these two societies in terms of their being African and the differences resulting from their economic, religious, political, historical, physical, ecological and environmental aspects of the societies.

1.3 Significance of the Study

Controversies exist concerning what is, and what is deemed not the right or wrong code of conduct. This issue has turned out to be a worry. Proverbs provide answers to the questions to which we expect replies from theology, metaphysics, astronomy and geology. Through painstaking enquiries one will realize that, there are proverbs that define the right code of conduct pertaining to almost every aspect of human life. This work has exposed us to the role of proverbs in the quest for finding answers to some basic, yet pertinent, questions on morality and our ways of life in general.

The need for understanding the proverbs and their rightful usage will help preserve African traditional languages from being endangered. Proverbs qualify as important reference points in language use and in preserving words and expressions that have their roots in the passing cultural values of different language communities. Some lexical items or expressions that are considered as acceptable at a particular point in time may

become obsolete when the concepts or the physical objects that are expressed by such lexical items are no longer in use. Holmes (1992: 65) notes that, “Economic and social factors can make a word or an expression redundant and eventually make it become archaic.” Omoloso and Sanusi (2008:3) identify the issue of archaism in Yoruba language. They state as follows:

In the traditional Yoruba community, potable water was stored in clay pots called *amù* for the use of the household, and a small calabash, *ikéèmu*, would be put on the clay pot for people to use in taking water from the pot. Modern technology and improvements in the socio-economic status of Yoruba people have introduced the use of refrigerators and plastic containers to the people and these have replaced both the clay pot (*amù*) and the small calabash container (*ikéèmu*) in most, if not all, Yoruba homes, and these lexical items can only be saved from imminent death by being listed in a Yoruba dictionary or by being preserved in Yoruba proverbs. An example of archaic word in Yoruba proverb is, *Elenu riru loni amù iya re* (No matter how smelly a person’s mouth is, he still has authority over his mother’s water pot).

It can be realized that although (*amù*) clay pot is no longer commonly used in Yoruba discourse, yet the continuous use of proverbs containing these words guards against the complete demise of the words in Yoruba discourse. Therefore, proverbs and idioms have the linguistic capability of retaining and preserving some expressions that are no longer in common use.

An understanding of local proverbs then provides a key to the thinking, reasoning, and valuing patterns of many people. An insight into these proverbs will further enhance understanding of the wisdom with which Africans maintain their society particularly the Igbo and Mande societies.

Proverbs also show the relationship between literature and history because some of the proverbs are summaries of past events. Therefore they serve as valuable material for the historical reconstruction of the past. Historians have always relied on some form of oral tradition to place societies in perspective. For instance, the Malinke *Epic of Sundiata*,

recorded in 1950's, (which is a Malinke griot's account of the history and exploit of their great king), takes us back to around 1300 (Roberts, 1976: 50). Anyidoho's, study among the Ewes of the Volta Region of Ghana makes reference to the rendition of history through the narration of folktales including proverbs. With this sort of tale referred to as *xotutu*, there is "historicity or at least historical origin for the narratives" (Anyidoho, 1983: 145). The works of Tonkin (1992) and (Vansina, 1985) as well advocate for the use of oral sources to narrate the past. Historians have sometimes referred to this tradition as oral history because it is thought that through traditions all customs of a society are transmitted. Hence the proverbs serve as a preserver and their use serves as a reminder of past happenings.

This thesis on proverbs contributes to the literature on proverbs and could also serve as teaching and learning resource to educators when published. This contribution is partly due to the fact that the work reveals the sources, functions and other issues pertaining to proverbs from various African societies.

1.4 Methodology

This work made use of secondary sources. It analyzed the proverbs in Chinua Achebe's (*TFA*) which depicts traditional Igbo society of Nigeria as conceived by Achebe in pre-colonial times and at the dawn of European colonization and those of D.T. Niane's *Sundiata* representing the Mande society. This analysis was carried out by considering the situation preceding the use of a particular proverb and the context within which the proverbs were used. Reference was made to publications on these two societies and on their proverbs to get better understanding of proverbs and their use. With the reflectionist

theory as a reference point, the study looked out for the various aspects of the society that these proverbs seem to reflect. Although these two works were written within their respective traditional contexts, they offer deep insights into African traditional worldviews in general. As such, examples of similar proverbs in other African societies have been cited and discussed to enhance our understanding and knowledge of African societies, their traditional philosophies and concerns.

1.5 Justification for using *TFA* AND *SUNDIATA*

One important role of the African writer in the wake of colonialism is to help resurrect the cultural traditions of his/her people, which colonialism as an agent of Westernization has undermined. *TFA* qualifies as one of the novels which attempt to give a vivid picture of pre-colonial African people, specifically the Igbos; since it is one of the earliest novels written about Africans by an African. Although the book focuses on European colonization of Africa, Achebe wrote purposely to right the wrong ways in which Africa has been portrayed by European writers. Thus *TFA* attempts to delineate Igbo society and culture in a pre-colonial setting. Gikandi (2001: 6) agrees to this by pointing out that

I am ambivalent about the institutionalization of *Things Fall Apart* and the wisdom of using it as supplement for African culture or the authorized point of entry into Igbo, Nigerian, or African landscapes.

Sundiata is an epic which gives a vivid picture of the traditional life of the Mandes. In addition, *Sundiata* is an account purportedly presented by a griot. In some West African societies such as those of Mali and Guinea, griots are known for their rich knowledge about their societies. As cited by Niane in his preface, “This book, is then, the fruit of an initial contact with most authentic traditionist of Mali” (Niane, 1965: viii). Steven (2000: 293) observes that, “Griots worked to preserve the history and acted as the archives of the

constitutions, records traditions and customs of their kingdoms.” Apart from that, *TFA* and *SUNDIATA* contain a number of proverbs which deal with different aspects of people’s life, and are therefore useful materials which can provide information about the people through their oral works. Furthermore, the proverbs in these books are not just listed but are contextualized as they relate to occurrences. As Firth puts it, the meaning of a proverb is made clear only when it is placed side by side with ... the accompanying social situation, the purpose for its use and its effect (Firth, 1926: 134). Kwame Nkrumah asked: “In what ways can Ghana make its own specific contribution to the advancement of knowledge about the peoples and cultures of Africa through past history?”³ This research, it is hoped can serve as an answer to this important question. These proverbs will therefore serve as a historical source to reconstruct the African past and will serve as the basis for research works interested in cultural transformation in those societies.

1.6 Limitations of the Study

The researcher admits that culture is dynamic; hence, there might be some changes in the cultural systems of the people about which these proverbs were written especially looking at the times when the two books were written. The aim of the researcher is therefore to study the proverbs during these periods to identify what hitherto existed since knowledge of the past impacts on the presence and helps to build upon the future. For instance, an Ewe proverb has it that ‘old woven items become the pattern for weaving new items’ (*xoxoa nu wogbia yeyea do*). Apart from that, the researcher is also aware of the

³ An excerpt from the speech delivered by Dr Kwame Nkrumah, at the opening of the institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon.

problems encountered in the bid to convert an artistic performance into a static text. Foley admits to this by stating that, transcription renders “living species into museum exhibits thus reducing the flora and fauna of verbal arts to fossilized objects” (Foley, 2005: 233). Also, in order to make the work attractive, literary artists tend to embellish their works which, somewhat, alter the original form of the work. For instance, since the text has been translated into English, some of the proverbs seem to lose their original nature and become more of a figurative language. I argue that although culture is dynamic and changes occur with time, nevertheless there is still a component that is retained and serves to link the temporal manifestations of the culture. Also, the study is still relevant because, no matter the form in which the proverb is recorded, the core message is not completely lost and can still serve as relevant source through which the people’s culture can be viewed.

1.7 Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical constructs in particular, the reflectionist theory of literature and performance theory served as frameworks to this study.

1.7.1 Theory of Reflection

The reference to oral works as a reflection of a people’s way of life brings to mind the theory of reflection in literature. The reflection theory of literature states that, there is a relationship between literature and society (Watt 1964, Finnegan 1977). According to Watt,

All writings cannot but be a reflection of society since it contains many elements which are socially derived. Language, to begin with, is a social product and most writings,

certainly most literature, are related to some established tradition or model of expression (Watt 1964: 396, 307).

This view of Watt is buttressed by Finnegan's comment that, "All literature in an indirect and subtle way must reflect the society in which it exists" (Finnegan 1977: 273). This theory of reflection therefore confirms the idea that literary works such as proverbs are a mirror through which a society can be viewed. Gloudblom (1979) expresses the reflectionist view of literature further by submitting that:

This relation between art and literature is not simply a reflection in the sense of mirroring reality. Literary imagination should be seen as a continuation and an extension of the human experience. That continuation can be a 'reflection' of the social world, but it may also be a 'reflection' or expression of what people hope for, deny or fear (Cited in Nanbigne 2008: 129).

This suggests that, in these literary works, people might try to comment on the future looking at some of the recent occurrences. Nketia observes same about songs. According to him, '...in songs are laid plain the hopes, fears, joys and worries of the *homo africanus*' (Nketia, 1963).

Although many scholars agree on the reflection theory of literature, Watt criticizes some aspects of the theory. To Watt, some of these literary works cannot be accepted as wholly true because the interest of the one who created them might influence what is being put across. Apart from that, in the bid to be creative, literary artists tend to influence the actual work they intend to project (Watt, 1964: 264). These views rather confirm the theory of reflection because the interest of the individual is modeled by the society and so any view he or she puts across is as a result of what he or she has been exposed to in the society. Finnegan opposes Watt's criticism of the theory of reflection in literature. According to her, the opinion of man is not forced upon him by the study of poetry but people actively replicate the world around them. This is because in poetic institutions as

in any other institution, people act within a social context (Finnegan 1977: 10). Reference can be made to Yitah (2006) about how Kasena women now try to subvert the meaning of some of their proverbs quoted at them by men when the two sexes engage in verbal play or banter or even formulate new proverbs to suit their awareness of their social position. An example of such proverb is given by Yitah as, ‘a woman who kills a python must not go on to cut off its head’ (*kaane ba gu diio gwonee de yuu*). This proverb seems to suggest some acts which women should not partake in. But this interpretation can be that:

Not only is a woman prohibited from performing an action that is traditionally reserved for men (because it is considered too daring or dangerous), but also she risks social disapproval for usurping a man’s role and therefore demystifying “maleness” and threatening the boundary between male and female (Yitah, 2006: 244).

It has been observed that, in recent times, women try to subvert the meaning of the above proverb by using a counter-proverb that, ‘If neither cutting off the snakes head nor leaving it will give you peace then crush it.’ The counter-proverb provides a resolution to the conflict created by a command to complete an action and a prohibition for a woman to do so (Yitah 2006: 244). The point to be made here is that, in presenting the counter-proverb, the literary artist is not merely projecting his/her interest as Watt seeks to suggest, but is pointing to some arising societal issues.

1.7.2 Performance Theory

Performance as a focus of analysis has been approached from two main theoretical angles. One angle relates to language and communication theory, as well as socio-linguistics and folklore. This is a complex approach with a base in the ‘ethnography of speaking’ pioneered by Dell Hymes and specially associated with a group of linguistic

anthropologists and folklorists such as Bauman (1972), Sherzer (1983), Austin (1965) and Fine (1984). Performance theorists in literature and language focus on an action-centered and expressive view of language, on performance and on detailed ethnographic observation of how people actually use language (Finnegan 1992: 40). The second angle is that found in for example, Goffman (1974; 1980), Turner (1974; 1986) and Schechner (1985; 1988), which relates performance to an understanding of social life as enacted as “social drama” Turner (1974; 1986) and as a continual “presentation of self” (Goffman, 1974; 1986). Each of these perspectives represents a single metaphor for conceptualizing performance, in the first case language and in the second theatre (Askew 2000: 23).

Bauman’s approach views verbal art as performance and attempts to substitute a performance centered approach for the text centered approach that has previously dominated folklore scholarship. According to him,

...performance is a mode of communication, a way of speaking, the essence of which resides in an assumption of responsibility to an audience for a display of communicative skill highlighting the way in which communication is carried out above and beyond its referential content” (Bauman, 1975: 293).

Askew points out a loophole in Bauman’s notion of performance in the following statement: “One is then left wondering how non-verbal performance that communicates non-textual messages fit into this paradigm” (Askew, 2000: 19). Bauman seems to only focus on verbal arts, leaving out non-verbal art forms such as drum languages, drama and dance drama which are all performance types.

One other flaw in Bauman’s verbal art as performance is that, he shifts attention from the message being communicated to the act of communication but rather emphasizes “the way in which communication is carried out beyond its referential content” (Bauman, 1975: 293). Although the act of communication is important, the message is also very

important especially for literary types such as proverbs where one needs to analyze the symbolic references made in it to arrive at a better understanding. Askew suggests a more holistic and broader view of performance as an:

... active dialogic interaction between and among performers and audience, then traditional emphasis on the *product* (the text or the message communicated), plus recent performance theorists' emphasis on the *process* (Bauman and Schechner) and concern for form and the politics of context can be united and integrated into a single model (Cited in Askew 2000: 23).

The role of the audience in analyzing oral literary types is very crucial. In the case of the audience, attention has to be paid to their relationship with the speaker. Apart from that, there is the need to pay attention to the social data of the addressee in terms of his/her gender, age, occupation and any other characteristics that mark him/her as a member of the society. This will ensure an understanding of a particular proverb and why it has been used.

Askew also points to the need to focus on the message communicated. In terms of proverbs, attention has to be paid to the words and the symbols that are used since most proverbs are symbolic in meaning. Most of these proverbs are created by featuring familiar situations that abound in a particular environment as a vehicle to point out the wisdom they wish to relay. It is therefore erroneous for anyone to suggest that reference to animals, plants and other inanimate things in a people's literary traditions shows how primitive they are. Finnegan emphasizes this by making reference to the misinterpretation read into frequent use of animals in most African traditional proverbs. "Not because Africans have some mystical closeness to nature but many live in relatively rural and sparsely populated areas where the animal world impinges closely on their lives (Finnegan 1977: 45). That is, people feature mostly aspects of their environment in their literary works such as proverbs. In order to grasp a better understanding of these works, it

is important to look at the symbolic meanings the people attach to these things. Awedoba used this approach by looking at the symbolic meaning of two hundred and sixty-six Kasena proverbs since he realized that these proverbs can be better understood by looking beyond their literal meaning (Awedoba, 2000). By adopting this approach, new areas of cultural discovery arise.

Siran (1993: 225) applied symbolic theory to proverbs. He identified three aspects of proverbs: literal text that can be translated (signification), literal meaning in light of social and historical context (value), and symbolic or connotative meaning. All these attest to the fact that there is the need to look beyond the literal meaning of proverbs and find out their symbolic interpretations.

Another aspect of performance which Askew and Bauman point to is the process of performance. This is the act of communication or the means through which the message is rendered. At this point it is important to clarify the issue of performance in proverbs. Looking at the form of proverbs, some scholars do not see the need for performance. Finnegan (1970: 403) points out that “In proverbs the actual performance as distinct from apt citation and picturesque form is not really important.” She states further that, “Unlike stories and songs, in proverbs the performance does not seem to be very important” (Finnegan 1970: 399). Awedoba (2000: 39) also points to the fact that, “There are therefore no performance sections in proverbs.” Proverb rendition is a form of performance where the stage is the place where the communication is carried out, the proverb speaker being the performer and the addressee becomes the audience. Yitah who used the performance theory in analyzing Kasena proverbs admits that in terms of proverbs,

...we are not just dealing with the proverbial texts, but with a nexus of factors: performer, audience, “stage” (temporal, spatial, and interpersonal), and action generated from conflict (Yitah, 2009: 79).

Yankah’s comment on this deserves a full quote.

Proverb speaking, whether attributive or otherwise is a performance insofar as it constitutes a stylized mode of communication in which executive skills are evaluated by an audience. They may be modified, embellished or made more prosaic with rhetorical remarks in order to sharpen its persuasive thrust... they may also be changed or complemented with a prose or poetic style to lend it clarity, density or emphasis. Even when the proverb structure is not altered, the same performance may be marked by a particular tone, pause and emphasis to achieve rhythm. Equally important in proverb performance is its effect on the audience, its ability or failure to please the audience, seize their attention or elicit sympathetic performance (Yankah 1989: 249, 257).

From the above, one can say that there is a form of performance in proverbs which can aid in the appreciation and understanding of a proverb. Bauman indicates that, the use of the paralinguistic features ensures a better understanding of verbal performances and they therefore become an interpretive frame through which a particular performance can be appreciated.

Reference to performance calls for the need to pay attention to the performer. In this work it will be necessary to find out who is using a particular proverb. Just as for the audience, there is the need to find out the social history of the performer. This will include his or her gender, age, occupation, position in society, relationship to the addressee and any other aspect of the person. This is important because these factors influence the use of certain proverbs.

Askew highlights another aspect of the performance theory which is the context of performance. Understanding of context is in most cases limited to the most immediate setting of the performance. That is the most immediate and simple social aspects that are readily and easily available and describable. Context includes anything that affects the

content of performance. Bauman notes the importance of context in oral literature by stating that,

Concern has to go beyond a conception of oral literature as disembodied super organic stuff and to view it contextually and ethnographically in order to discover the individual, social and cultural factors that give it shape and meaning (Bauman 1986: 2).

The above quote suggests that a full appreciation of an oral work should go beyond the text of the performance to embrace the context of performance.

Malinowski (1926: 24) introduced the context of situation and suggests that “the conception of context has to be broadened and the situation in which the words are uttered can never be passed over as irrelevant in linguistic expression.” The meaning of context was even taken further by Malinowski to include the entire cultural setting of speech and the personal histories of the participants and the context of concurrent human activity (Cited in Yankah, 1989). Following Malinowski’s insight, this research also sets out to discuss the social system and the history of the people in order to enhance our understanding of the proverbs that are used in the two books.

According to Yankah, apart from the social context, for an ethnographer interested in proverbs, one must be more interested in the linguistic context. This requires the need to pay attention to the relevant discourse interaction in which the proverb is embedded. That is the documentation of the actual words used before and after the proverb usage (Yankah, 1989: 31).

This approach will help in analysis of the proverbs in the text because, since the researcher may not go to the actual societies, knowledge of who is saying what, where, when and to whom, in the presence of who and at what stage of the conversation will

ensure a better understanding of what a particular proverb seeks to convey. The performance theory is therefore useful for an analysis of proverbs since it suggests different areas that the researcher can look out for in the analysis of the proverbs and how they reflect the people's way of life or cosmology. I therefore propose that the reflectionist theory, particularly that propounded by Gloudeblom (1979) and performance theory especially that of Askew (2000) and Yankah's (1989) concern for the linguistic context can provide useful outlines for analyzing the proverbs in *TFA* and *SUNDIATA*.

1.8 Organization of the Study

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter one consists of the introduction, aims and objectives, significance of the study, methodology, limitations of the study, theoretical framework and organization of the study, while chapter two focuses on review of related literature. This includes the various definitions of proverbs, forms, sources, style and language, functions and general information on proverbs. Chapter three gives a brief background of Achebe and *TFA*, the social system of the Igbos and analysis of the proverbs in *TFA*. The fourth chapter presents a brief background of Sundiata, an overview of griots in Mande society, the social system of the Mandes and an analysis of proverbs in *SUNDIATA*. Finally, Chapter five deals with further discussion of issues raised in the previous chapters, summary, conclusion and recommendation.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on review of related literature. This includes the various definitions of proverbs, forms, sources, style and language, functions and general information on proverbs.

2.2 Definition of Proverbs

Proverbs are defined in several ways by various people depending on their purposes and their points of view. Okpewho (1992: 226) defines proverbs as “a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm.” Finnegan also defines proverbs 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” (Finnegan, 1970: 293). These definitions point out the fact that, proverbs are not words for their own sake but a verbal string that demands much reasoning and for that matter are often attributed to the elders because of the belief that wisdom is associated with old age. An Ewe proverb makes reference to this as, *Ametsitsi digbo menyɛ gbɔ wonu o*. This literally means, no matter how foolish an elder is he is still better than a goat (animal). The proverb therefore can be interpreted as, no matter how foolish an elder is, he is still not useless. A Yoruba proverb also puts it that, *Nwata tuo ilu nna ya turn ya kwuo kwa ugwo nna ji* (If a child uses proverbs for which his father was known, let him also pay debts owed by his father). This proverb can be used to suggest the fact that, there is a limit to what a child should say or do.

The terseness of proverbs is an important characteristic of proverbs. According to Okpewho (1992: 226),

The “terseness” of proverbs implies a certain economy in the choice of words and a sharpness of focus. This indicates that in one sentence or so, the proverb captures a large situation or an experience; in a brief, metaphorical way the proverb says what it would have taken many words to say in direct language.

Abbreviation and the use of proverb-names are some of the effective ways through which the brevity of proverbs is achieved. Okumba (1994: 62) gives an example of abbreviation in a Luo proverb. In this case, the speaker only gives a section of the proverb as in ‘starting early’ (*Chako chan*), then the interlocutor either loudly or silently completes the proverb with the other half of the phrase, ‘better than going to a medicine man’ (*loyo dhi ajuoya*) or the listener may ask for the full meaning in case he or she is not aware of it. The point here is that the shortened part of the proverb used by the speaker helps emphasize his point even without elaborate explanation. An example of brevity achieved through the use of proverb-names is the name Anyidoho which is the shortened form of the phrase *Anyi do ho* (‘Bees have formed a hive’). This name is the shortened form of the proverb, *Anyidoho menya tatam o* (‘Bees have formed a hive; it is not easy getting at the honey’). As a poetic metaphor, this name may be suggesting the fact that sweet things of life are not easily acquired (Anyidoho, 1983: 127). In some cases, the shortened form of the proverb is often quoted at people who wish to enjoy the fortunes of life but are not ready to work for them. The use of the proverb name instead of the long phrase ensures brevity. But it should be pointed out that there are proverbs which are expressed in the form of folktales. With this type, a person can deduce a proverb-like wisdom from the folktale narrative. This seems to defy the general idea that proverbs are always short and precise; a proverb-like folktale by contrast is lengthy.

Another important feature of proverbs is the poetic style in which they are couched. Most of the proverbs employ rich poetic devices such as alliteration, assonance, tonal rhyme, wordplay, parallelism, metaphor, idiophone, rhythm, and various forms of figurative language which make them so appealing to listen to. Hence they are said to be marked by “salt.” Hence Achebe refers to proverbs as the “Palm oil with which words are eaten” (Achebe, 1958: 5). Proverbs enrich language just as palm oil garnishes food and makes it very appetizing. Herzog observes the same about Jabo proverbs which he maintained are uttered in a much more rhythmic way than would be the case in corresponding words of ordinary speech (Herzog 1936). Another characteristic of salt evident in proverbs is its ability to preserve and conserve food or perishable goods. The continuous use of proverbs preserves the language of the people and also their beliefs, customs and values which the proverbs convey.

Addo (2001) says that African proverbs are philosophical expressions generally short and sometimes very funny yet make the language rich, picturesque, and express a hidden or obvious wisdom (Cited in Amate 2011: 7). Reference can be made to Ojoade (1983: 203) on Yoruba sexual proverbs. For example, a warning not to despise what appears to be insignificant is stated as *Oloko sikili loni obinrin le mefafa (Oyo)* (‘the owner of the small penis is the owner of his six wives’). There is another proverb which says *Oko nle’ ri obo nle’ ri Ipade di ore eni* (‘The penis is boasting; the vagina is also boasting; they will both meet on the bed’) which refers to the fact that ‘Actions speak louder than words’ or the ‘The proof of the pudding is in the eating.’ These proverbs obscene though they may be termed, express valuable ethical precepts which are appreciated by the society. Due to the humorous way they are presented, they easily capture people’s attention. Since these

proverbs are regarded as the voice of the elders, no matter how obscene they may be their truth is still respected.

One feature of proverbs is the oblique and allusive way in which they are expressed. Proverbs are often used to hide the intended meaning of words from other people and offer it only to its intended audience. For instance, adults use proverbs in their conversation when they do not want to disclose the message or information to young people around. This is done in order not to leak information to the public but it might occasionally furnish the opportunity for adults to entertain themselves with sexually explicit conversations. In certain ritual and cultic chants, proverbs serve as a form of mysticism and transcendent truth to the proceedings. Okpewho gives an example of this among the Igbo's of Nigeria. He observes that, proverbs play a very important role in their divination and most of their cultic chants. In some cases, proverbs are injected intermittently into the activities but in other cases the overall text is couched in the form of proverbs. An example is given below:

If a man taps palm wine and cooks food,
One or the other is fated to be badly done.
The stick used for removing a millipede is often thrown away with it
One who has not eaten the udala fruit
Never suffers from the disease associated with it (Okpewho 1992: 235).

The proverbs therefore limit the category of people who can understand the text of the ritual to only those who have been trained and have stayed in the group for some time. The couching of this chant in a proverbial form is a way of granting the text a touch of secrecy and sacredness.

Some definitions of proverbs by scholars also bring out important features of proverbs. According to Alagoa, proverbs are "Pithy sayings of the wise embodying physical and

general truth” (Alagoa 1968: 236). Whiting (1932: 237) also regards proverbs as “a short saying of a philosophic nature, of great antiquity, the product of the masses rather than of the classes, constantly applicable, and appealing because it bears a semblance of the universal truth”(Cited in Agbaje, 2002: 232). It is important to note that, because the proverbs are considered as traditional and originate from the observation of natural phenomena and human relations; old people are usually regarded as a repository of proverbs. This however applies mostly to elderly men and less so women. This contradicts Whiting’s view that proverb is a “Product of the masses.” This is because although the proverbs are about the society as a whole, the main originators are mostly the elderly men. Finnegan admits to this by pointing out that, “Proverbs are most common in law cases, and men are the chief litigants, proverbs are seldom used by women” (Finnegan 1970: 417). Although there are no specific taboos restricting the creation and use of proverbs, various scholars such as Yitah (2006), (2009) Obododinma (1998); and Harrow (1994) have admitted that “In African societies, proverbs have been a male dominated discourse shaped by a patriarchal mindset, a fact that is evident in the images of women evident in this traditional literature” (Yitah, 2006: 236). This is evidenced in the fact that, in both *TFA* and *SUNDIATA*, no woman utters a proverb in these works. In *SUNDIATA*, young men such as Sundiata and Manding Bori were conversing in proverbs. “The two brothers went on swopping proverbs” (Niane 1965: 29) whiles conversation of both mothers Sogolon and Sassouma Berete were without proverbs. In *TFA*, Chielo a female only crosses the gender line when she assumes her spiritual status. During these times she is no more considered as a woman. This is emphasized in the text as, “It was not the same Chielo who sat with her in the

market....Chielo was not a woman that night” (Achebe, 1958: 76). In the case of Chielo even the content of the proverbs she uttered only reflects her femininity as they deal with women and babies. But most of the proverbs uttered by the men maintain the status of counselors whose words retain a weight of authority and advice that touches on significant actions and not on the status of the speaker. The African male dominance is right away reflected through the creation of proverbs. This is because proverbs are expressions of wisdom that indicate the power of the speaker. Through proverbs, the speaker has the power to persuade others and then justify his decisions and actions. So, if proverbs are mostly associated with men then they also wield the power to control the society. One can also say that since the authors of both texts (SUNDIATA and TFA) are men they placed the proverb in the mouth of men rather than women in order to project their image. This is an example of the distortion of the image of the African women in literature written by men.

The reference to proverbs as old sayings or sayings of “great antiquity” as in Whiting’s (1932) definition above raises questions concerning the creativity and innovation that is evident in African oral arts. It is not surprising to hear in some folktales in recent times of Ananse (spider) which is the main character in most African tales eating fried rice or on a flight to other countries. Even in terms of the theme proverbs are being modified and new ones are being created to suit new concepts and ideas. Yitah (2009) points to the modification or even creation of new proverbs by Kasena women in order to “deconstruct the conservative, sexualized local ideology of power therein and to establish their own signifying terms” (Yitah, 2009:74, 75). Aderemi (1999: 75) as well point out that concerning Yoruba proverbs, “... relative fixity of proverbials dissolves and ultimately

they are deconstructed as postproverbials.” Nanbigne (2008) also points to the decline in care among kin folks among the Dagaaba which is leading to changes in Daagare discourse including proverbs. The researcher’s concern is if indeed there is “...the presence of “new” proverbs with new forms, new meanings and, perhaps, new values” (Aderemi, 1999: 75), then there is the need to take a second look at the general definition given to all proverbs as old sayings or sayings of great antiquity.

There is always an issue of anonymity in the creation of African literary types and proverbs are no exception. Hernstein refers to proverb as “Speech without a speaker...an utterance that asserts itself independently of any utterer – continuously, as it were, or eternally” (Hernstein, 1978: 737). According to Amate, in the creation of traditional proverbs no trace has been left on the historical landscape to indicate when they were originally created, and by whom. Although proverbs are frequently mentioned in legends, there is no mention of who the creators were (Amate, 2008: 10). The use of the personal pronoun – ‘they’ which normally precedes proverb-utterances is a universal ancestral wisdom, not a set of nameable authors. A similar observation by Nyembezi (1954), cited and commented upon by Finnegan (1970: 417) says that, although there are no special people responsible for creating proverbs, yet new ones rise through individuals and later are taken up by the community. Among the Zulus for example, it is said that proverbs were first spoken by well-known men before the king or at the drinking bar before its popularization by others.

Although there might not be concrete evidence as to who the authors of proverbs are, it is probable that the period within which some of these proverbs were formed can be traced. Oyekan (2005: 27) refers to these proverbs as “historical markers.” According to him,

Embedded in some proverbs are bits of dating information that reveal approximately when they came into being. These are usually references to identifiable historical events, sometimes to historical personalities, and sometimes to items whose advent is associated with historical developments...Proverbs that incorporate historical markers permit an approximate determination of the time when they came into use. An event referred to in a proverb obviously pre-dates it, and one that is about a historical figure probably originated during the lifetime or soon after the demise of that person.

He continues to give examples of proverbs that serve as historical markers.

Qlòrun ò pín dògba Sajiméjò-ó ju Kòròfo ('God has not apportioned things equally, the Sergeant Major outranks the Corporal'). The mention of British military ranks bears witness to the prior establishment of British presence and institutions. One could further narrow the temporal space in which the proverb probably came into being by suggesting that it postdated the establishment of the British West Africa Frontier Force and the recruitment of local soldiers into its ranks.

The Anlos have a praise-proverb which can be traced to a particular historical period. According to Anyidoho, the Anlo proverb *Anlo Kotsieko naketsi dɛka nɔ dzome bi nu* which translates as 'Anlo Kotsieko a single log in the fire cooks the whole meal' is believed to originate in a historical event. This name came about as a result of how an Anlo leader used his tactfulness to win a battle single handedly for the whole state. It was said that, the invading army who were coming to fight got stranded at the shores of the Keta lagoon because they were unable to cross the sea. As they were contemplating how to solve the problem, they saw a man with a canoe and upon request the man agreed to ferry them in batches to cross the lagoon. The sailor carried each canoe load of enemy warriors into a deep part of the lagoon and capsized the canoe thus drowning its human cargo (Anyidoho, 1983: 131, 132). This incident therefore brought about the name and the proverb. The coinage of this proverb can therefore be traced to a particular period in Anlo history.

2.3 Classification of Proverbs

This comprises the forms of proverbs, their various functions and the style in which these proverbs are presented.

2.3.1 Forms of Proverbs

The definitions of proverbs above have suggested some of the sources of proverbs. I will therefore proceed to discuss some other sources and how proverbs are formed. The chief methods of expressing proverbs in African society are by literal statements, similes or metaphors, by hyperbole and by paradox. Some are also presented in anecdotes and riddles. Some scholars such as Sharpin (2001: 735) have tried to classify proverbs into such categories as adages, aphorisms, apophthegms, clichés, commonplaces, dicta, epigrams, exempla, gnomes, maxims, precepts, saws and sayings. The common ways through which African proverbs are presented have been discussed below.

2.3.1.1 Verbal Proverbs

Bascom defines verbal art as “the form of literature expressed in words whether spoken or written” (Bascom, 1955: 245). Therefore verbal proverbs are those proverbs that are mostly delivered through words as opposed to pictorial presentation or through drum languages. The proverbs in this category are those in the form of folktales, proverb-names, praise-proverbs, proverb-riddles and proverbs used in songs.

2.3.1.1.1 Folktales as Proverb

In some cultures, there is a very close relationship between proverbs and folktales such that they are both referred to by the same name. Finnegan (1970: 390) gives examples from various societies to ascertain this fact.

The Nyanja *mwambi*, for instance, refers to story, riddle or proverb, the Ganda *olugero* means, among other things, a saying, a story, a proverb, and a parable, and the Mongo *bokolo* is used of all expression including fable, proverb, poetry and allegory. This overlap in terms is fairly common in Bantu languages and also sometimes occurs in West Africa too: the Limba *Mbɔrɔ* refers to story, riddle and parable as well as to sayings which we might term proverbs, while the Fulani *tindol* can mean not only a popular story but also a proverb or a maxim.

Some proverbs arise out of folktales. Yankah notes that, the basis of the link between the tale and the proverb seems to be that these two are among the most accessible tools of rhetoric in which morals can be embedded. He goes on to stress the relationship between the proverb and the folktale by pointing out that, among the Akans, the fictional tale *anansesem* becomes *ebe* (proverb) when used in an illustrative anecdote in discourse interactions (Yankah, 1989: 92). In other words, some folktales are narrated to stress on a particular point which the narrator seeks to emphasize. Agbaje (2002) refers to them as “Allusive proverbs.” With this kind of genre there are two components: a proverb is quoted and then is followed by the narration of the tale or alternatively the narration is concluded with a proverb.

In some cases, the narrator just gives the narration to emphasize what he intends to say or what he has said earlier. For example, the Akan proverb, *esie⁴ ne kagya⁵ enhia aseɖa* (the anthill and the *kagya* tree do not need to thank each other). This proverb is further explained with a folktale. The story is about anthill and the *gliffonia simplicifolia* tree. The tree does not get enough sunlight because it is not tall and hence hindered by other trees; the anthill as well needs trees to grow on it in order to give it shade. The tree and the anthill therefore came to an agreement that the tree will grow on the anthill to give it shade and the anthill will grant the tree height in order to get sunlight. This union is a symbiotic relationship where the partners are both beneficiaries. Arewa (1970: 432) gives an example of a folktale to stress the fact that a person signing up to a contract must first get a better understanding of the conditions underlying the contract. In this case, the story is about a thief who stole some goods which he put in a sack and then started

⁴*Esie is the local name for anthill in the Akan language.*

⁵*The local name for kagya is griffonia simplicifolia*

looking for somebody to help him carry the stolen goods. He then met a passerby and asked him to help him carry the stolen goods. The man obliged but when they got to a gate, the gateman stopped them and then inquired who the owner of the goods was. The owner then responded by pointing at the one carrying the goods. The innocent helper tried to defend himself by saying that, he only helped the other man who owned the goods. The gateman then replied with the proverb that, “It is expected of a child carrying a burden to know what the burden is.”

2.3.1.1.2 Proverb Names

Proverbs can and do appear in the form of proverb names. These are shortened forms of proverbs. Some names serve as summary of what a particular proverb seeks to put across. Names form an important feature of African literature. This observation by Nketia, (1955) cited and commented on by Anyidoho (1983: 119), gives an illustration of how names and name clusters ensure a vivid appreciation of the poetic effects of Akan dirges. Anyidoho further points out that, this extends to written literature. “For contemporary written African literature, a study of names may yield fruitful results for a richer critical appreciation” (Anyidoho 1983: 119). The mention of the name brings to mind the proverb from which it is derived and even in some cases people mention those names in place of the entire proverb whenever they want to make a point. Finnegan comments on the immense role of these proverbial names by asserting thus:

We can certainly find some literary significance in the occurrence of these condensed, evocative, and often proverbial or figurative forms of words which appear as personal names in African languages... sometimes appearing directly as elements of large-scale creations, sometimes affording scope for imagery, depth, personal expressiveness, succinct comment, or overtones in otherwise non-literary modes of speech (Finnegan 1970: 479).

Finnegan's assertion is evident in Ewe names such as 'Vinyo' and 'Gameli' meaning respectively: "children are important" and "there is time for everything." These names emphasize the importance placed on children. The two names suggest the problems people face if they are unable to bear children and consequently the efforts that childless people will make to have their own children. 'Gameli' suggests patience in life and the wisdom of not easily giving up on difficult situations.

Awedoba admits to the fact that personal names can double as proverbs. He observes that the majority of the names Kasena individuals bear are proverbial in their own right. This is because these names reflect on personal circumstances and the name givers attempt to philosophize and comment on life. He gives examples of names such as *Keimtogedetu* ('deeds follow their authors or what you sow is what you reap') and *Goronongdiga* ('the murderer is within or those to fear most are the enemies within'). These names just like proverbs express the wisdom of the people (Awedoba, 2000: 57). This points to an important role of African naming system that, the people have a reason for whatever name they give.

2.3.1.1.3 Praise-Proverbs

Beside these various forms of proverbs, there are some which are occasionally connected with appellations. These proverbs in most cases serve as a prelude or an interlude to a story or a song. According to Okpewho, these proverbs are used because they have a direct link with the theme of the performance. Such a device serves various purposes for the performer: to gather momentum before launching into the act of narrative performance, to recover energy or stability before moving to the next episode and more

importantly, to put the content of the story within the larger philosophical and cultural outlook that proverbs generally define. This practice has been recorded among the Mandinka storytellers especially in Mali (Okpewho 1992: 232).

The use of proverbs in appellation serves as spice to the speech and also ensures a better appreciation of the performance. This is because the narrator needs to use skill and tact to select proverbs that fit a particular performance. In addition, the proverb helps to emphasize whatever the narrator wants to put across.

In Seydou Camara's heroic hunter's tale *Kambili*, the editor referred to these proverbs as praise proverbs (Bird, 1974). Okpewho (1992: 232) observes that:

These are series of lines in which the narrator steps a bit outside the main line of the story to praise various personalities and especially to chant some proverbial statements relating to life, the hunting profession, destiny, death and other subjects. This example is very evident in *Kambili*. The entire story of two thousand, seven hundred and twenty seven (2727) lines starts off with about one hundred and fifteen lines of such praise proverbs which sets the pace for the performance; it is then interspersed from time to time, between episodes, with other bundles of such lines dealing with various subjects.

An example of the proverb in *Kambili* is given below.

Born for a reason and learning are not the same
A man doesn't become a hunter
2540 If he can't control his fear
The coward does not become a hunter,
Or become a man of renown.
Death may end the man; death doesn't end his name.
The omen for staying here is not easy on things with souls.
2545 A slave spends but a late evening with you;
A slave doesn't stay long among you.
Look to the rolling stone for the pebble crusher.
Look to the deathless for the sightless.
Kambili the hunter Kambili Sananfila (Bird, 1974: 94).

The praise-proverbs cited above play very important roles. They provide, in the first place, a transition from one event to the next. For example, as the writer moves from the need to be courageous which ends on line 2542, he uses the proverb "Death may end the man; death doesn't end his name" to introduce a new theme which means there is the

need to leave good legacies after one passes away. This is a praise-proverb since the praises are couched in proverbial language.

Yankah (1989: 96) gives an example of the use of proverbs in the royal appellation performance *apaɛɛ* of the Asantes.

*Ono no
Mmirikisie, yeantumi anno
Na yɛfrɛ no nsamanpɔ
Yede so de so na yeangya no so
Osee Tutu wonkɔ ano oo
Abɔrɔfo se yerenye no yi e.
Kaakae Gyaame ayede ntutuua ko apremo ano.
Osee Tutu, yede apremo sum wo a wonkɔ aawo!.*

This translates as,

There he is
The ticket, when they cannot clear it,
They call it a sacred grove.
They try and try and give it up.
Osei Tutu went to the war front.
The whiteman did not treat him well
The frightful Kaekae Gyaame, who confronts canons with a small gun,
Osei Tutu when you are pushed with the canons you don't succumb.

The appellation stanza, celebrating the personality of the Asante King, opens with the proverb *Mmirikisie, yeantumi anno na yɛfrɛ no nsamanpɔ* which translates as “The ticket, when they cannot clear it, they call it a sacred grove” ridiculing the king's foes who unable to overcome his strength and courage give him up on the pretext that he is sacred. The message of the king's invincibility is enhanced and sustained throughout the stanza. The stanza is unified with the proverb acting as the focus. These proverbial lines lend to the performance some of the wit and in-depth understanding that proverbs are noted for.

2.3.1.1.4 Proverb-Riddles

Proverbs can also be expressed in the form of riddles. There is a close relationship between proverbs and riddles. Barley (1972) and Dundes (1981) have both discussed the structural relations between proverbs and riddles, noting that proverbs can sometimes be used as riddles and vice versa (Cited in Lieber, 1984: 435). Finnegan refers to these proverbs as “Proverb-riddles.” At some point it even becomes difficult to distinguish between the two.

Fletcher (1912) gives an example of this among the Fulani. According to him, Fulani epigrams are closely related to proverbs and riddles. An example is as follows “Three things are like three things but for three things.” This is the general statement and the following can serve as the responses. Sleep is like death but for breathing; marriage is like slavery but for wifely respect; guinea fowl is like grey cloth but for being alive (Cited and commented upon in Finnegan 1970: 434). The above epigrams can be regarded as riddles with the first general statement as the challenge and explanation as the response. When one takes a second look, these riddles and their responses go beyond just joke and entertainment and state some proverbial ideas.

Finnegan affirms the relationship between proverbs and riddles by pointing out that, though proverb-riddles have not been widely reported as a distinct named type, it is possible that proverbs may turn out to occur more often than is realized in connection with riddles either explicitly or by allusion, so that for a full analysis of the literature of any group of people, proverbs and riddles should really be treated in conjunction (Ibid: 31). Lestrade (1935: 294) gives an example of this among the Bantus of South Africa; according to him proverbs are sometimes used in a regular game similar to riddles.

2.3.1.1.5 Proverbs used in Songs

Proverbs are also expressed in song form. Anyidoho (1983: 349) point out that the Ewes refer to these proverbs as *hamelo* which literally means song proverbs. These proverbs are some of the striking line or lines in the song which are not actually the poet's own creation but are traditional proverbs which are put into aesthetically appropriate use in songs. Yankah gives an example of the use of proverbs in an Akan popular song, which mourns the plight of an orphan, and draws attention to the divergence between the Akan aphorism *agya bi wua, agya bi te ase* which means, ('When a father dies, another lives') which is often cited by sympathizers to console an orphan, and the social reality whereby orphans are neglected by successors to their father's estates in a matrilineal society. Part of the song runs as,

*Agya bi wu a agya bi te ase dec,
Yeka a yede dada awisia.
Nea ehia ara ne se yeasie agya yi awɛ
Deca gyanka beda mpo abo no
Eho aye den ama no
Eye a no eho aye den ama no.*

This translates as,

When a father dies another lives they say;
But that is just to delude the orphan.
A fathers body is interred, and soon
The orphan loses his place of sleep.
It becomes rare,
A sleeping place becomes rare.

This song is a critique of the Akan matrilineal system of inheritance whereby the child may lose his father's estates to his father's matrilineal relatives. The singer does not only attack the matrilineal system, but he indulges in oral literary criticism, exposing the oft-cited consolatory proverb as mere rhetoric (Yankah 1989: 79).

The use of proverbs is also a common feature in the Borborbor musical type of the Northern Ewes of Ghana. An example of this song is indicated below.

*Denu le ŋku dzinam eyata novi o zɔna veve ɔ
 Wozɔna veve wozɔna veve
 Wozɔnaveve loo
 Denu le ŋku dzinam eyata noviozɔna
 Wozɔna veve loo.*

This literally means, ‘It is due to the fact that people need someone else to help them remove a mote from their eyes that is why there is the need to walk in pairs.’ This highlights the communal life of Africans and emphasizes that nobody is independent in life. The use of proverbs in songs points out the creativity of the poet in selecting a myriad of proverbs that fits a particular song and this also helps emphasize the point that the song intends to make. The relationship between proverbs and other literary types as well shows the flexible connection that exists between African oral literary types. But there are also the non-verbal proverb forms.

2.3.1.2 Non-Verbal Proverbs

Apart from the verbal ways in which proverbs are presented or conveyed, a proverb idea may be expressed through non-verbal ways such as through drum languages, paintings, drawings and sculptures. Doran (1982: 56) attests to the fact that among the Akans for instance, nearly all their visual arts such as Adinkra symbols, gold weights, names of cloths etc have a traditional proverbial interpretation.

2.3.1.2.1 Drum Language

The highly stylistic and structured drum language is replete with proverbs. Part of the training in drumming is the accumulation of both a large store of proverbs and the knowledge of the appropriate occasions for their use. Nketia has noted that, among the Akans, almost every ordinary proverb can be reproduced on drums, and in drum poetry in

general there is frequent use of proverbs to provide encouragement and excitement. (Nketia, 1958). Kaminski (2008) gives an example of *atumpan* drum language used to praise the power and majesty of the king.

Opoku ten-ten-ten-ten-ten-ten-ten-ten-ten-ten-ten,
Asante Kotokohene,
Okosu Akyeao Prempon bra,
Qpanini mmpenin suro no.
Odokroo Kwanta dan kesee na se awuno,
Asante Kotokohene.
Otwe dua etia,
Firi tete,
Ode saa na pra ne ho,
Firi tete.
Ode saa na pra ne ho.

Tall Opoku,
 King of the Asante porcupines,
 The elder who elders fear.
 Great Odokroo Kwanta is feared,
 King of the Asante porcupines,
 The antelope's tail is short,
 From ancient time,
 But it uses it to clean itself,
 From ancient time.
 But it uses it to clean itself.

The proverb, *Otwe dua etia and Ode saa na pra ne ho* ('The antelope's tail is short, but it uses it to clean itself'). This proverb connotes that people make do with what they have, and it especially relates to how the Asante, with small resources, defeated the Denkyira Kingdom in 1701 (Kaminski, 2008: 126).

2.3.1.2.2 Sculptures and Designs

Another means through which proverbs are presented in non-verbal ways are through sculptures and drawings. This is very common in the courts of African traditional chiefs via the symbols of regalia such as the Akan linguist staffs. Most Akan linguist staffs have some form of carving that inscribes a proverbial saying with a chain of metaphorical associations. Doran, gives an example of this at the Fante paramountcy of Enyan Abaasa.

There is a linguist staff which depicts a tree with several birds on its branches and is interpreted as *Anomaa nua ne nea ine no da kori* this means ‘birds of the same species roost in the same tree.’ The image emphasizes the need for unity and solidarity within the state and within the royal family (Doran 1982: 58). In Yoruba culture, proverbial discourse may be set in motion through visual symbolism, for example on designs of cloth, on walls, on the staffs or walking-sticks of chiefs and royal fathers (Agbaje 2002: 238).

2.3.2 Sources of Proverbs

A large group of proverbs are formed as a result of man’s continuous observation of the various aspects of the natural environment as well as general human behavior, conduct and activities. This made some to say that, “Proverbs are largely imaginative propositions and reflections about life and are not primarily scientific statements about man and the universe” (Brookman-Amissah 1986: 75). This assertion by Brookman-Amissah is too general and cannot be wholly true because most of these proverbs did not arise out of the blue but as a result of continuous observation and logical deduction, and are therefore scientific. Some of these proverbs relate to nature (the world of animals). An example of this is the bird lore. Among the Ewes, an example is about the parrot called *akpakpa*. It is said that the sound made by the parrot means “*Ame gedewoyi ketume*”, literally, ‘a lot of people have gone to the grave.’ This is an observation on the inevitability of death, hence the need to do all we can, and do it well whiles we are still alive.

Apart from the bird lore as a source of proverb, there are proverbs about other animals. The Ewes also have a proverb about the monkey that “*kese be dome tɔnye ameto alɔgo*

me to ya adelāwo tɔe. This literally means, the monkey says, it is what you have in your stomach that belongs to you, as for what is in the jaw, it belongs to the hunter. This is also an advice to people who are stingy not to always hoard things but spend if necessary. Apart from animals, there are also proverbs about plants. Among the Ewes, it is said of cassava that, “*Yevea amenu gake yeme xɔa akpe o.*” This literally translates as, ‘the cassava says although it helps a lot of people, it does not receive thanks.’ This is also an advice that there is the need to show gratitude for whatever help received. These proverbs are attributed to these plants and animals due to the unique characteristics observed about them which can serve as useful symbols to ensure a better understanding into these proverbs.

2.3.3 Functions of Proverbs

The use of proverbs has been indirectly dealt with in the preceding chapters but it is in order to still discuss in detail other aspects which have not been fully addressed, such as their functions. Proverbs have social and literary significance for their users.

2.3.3.1 Aesthetic Functions

Proverbs make communication more persuasive and effective. Proverbs show their oral literary significance first of all in the appeal they make to our ear. As Okpewho points out, “When people make speeches they frequently use proverbs to add some wit or spice to their statements.” Part of the beauty which proverbs add to speech is achieved through the repetition of sounds in successive lines, alliteration, parallelism and rhyme among others. Through the use of these devices, the communication becomes more poetic in

style and distinct from straightforward maxim. Okpewho points out that, among the Yoruba of Nigeria, many chants of the Ifa divination begin with a proverb or a series of proverbs (Okpewho, 1992: 234). An example of this poetic chant is given by Abimbola as, “It is scarcity of iron which makes the blacksmith to melt needles in his fire. It is scarcity of water that leads to the loss of calabash water container. It is scarcity of children which makes the people of Ido to overlook stealing on the part of a child” (Abimbola, 1975:76). The parallelism in these three lines of the proverbial prelude, add some poetic effect to the charm. This device helps sustain the interest of the listeners and breaks boredom. The beauty and charm lie in the skill with which the chanter weaves various insights together and the steadiness with which he sustains a proverbial chant.

2.3.3.2 Proverbs for Entertainment

Another function of proverb is their entertainment role. This is not very common in most cultures as proverbs are commonly known to arise out of discourse. Opoku (1997: xi) attests to the entertaining role of proverbs by stating that “Some proverbs appeal more to emotions than just reflection.” Finnegan has admitted that, in some societies, there are cases of contests in proverb telling. Among the Fantes, proverbs are recited as entertainment both at casual gatherings in the evenings and at ceremonies and celebrations with a panel of judges to decide between the contestants (Finnegan, 1970: 415). Lestrade also notices that among the Bantus, proverbs are used in a regular game similar to that of a riddling. In this case, participants take turns in the utterance of proverbs the loser being the one with no proverb at hand during his turn (Lestrade 1935:

294). The use of proverbs in discourse is a form of entertainment since it makes speech less boring and interesting. This has been addressed in the poetic language of proverbs.

2.3.3.3 Reflective Function

Whether original or regular in oral circulation, the strategy and message of these literary forms primarily reflect the cultural values and are projections of social and psychological tensions in the society. This reflective role of art is very evident in African proverbs. In most societies there are proverbs that focus on the people's religion, kinship systems, marriage, their perception about death and afterlife among others. Stevenson (1973: 53) gives an example of a proverb among the Agni of South-eastern Ivory Coast. As, *ek'pho gumi zua mabi*, which translates as 'The lizard alone does not carry the burden of his own excrement.' This proverb, according to Stevenson goes to confirm an observation about the people that there is an emphasis on the group, whether in terms of community co-operation or extended family relations. The individual is only a part of the community conformation; he/she both reaps the benefits and shares in the misfortunes of others, and even in the guilt of their misdeeds. She states further that, "I realized that Agni social codes are not based on individual responsibility rugged individualism is a Western notion, while sharing is the essence of the West African tradition. The proverb in this case becomes a vehicle through which the people's values are driven.

The Maasai of Kenya express some important aspects of their society through their proverbs. Kinship is an esteemed institution in Africa. Regardless of all sorts of differences, blood relationships are not completely dissolved. This is expressed in a Maasai proverb as "*Eiv oltung' ani osuuji naa olanya.*" This means 'A man's son may be

a coward but he is still his son.’ The Maasai are a gallant pastoral community that highly value bravery. A father is most embarrassed by a cowardly son, but he cannot disown him. If we apply the science of genetics, the father’s recessive genes may have been responsible for the child’s cowardice (Okumba 1994: 79). The proverb therefore is the summary of the beliefs and values of the people. This is why Quarshie (2002: 11) states that, when people abandon their languages, they give up on more than merely words; they reject to a certain degree their very identity. Language in this case goes beyond syntax and morphology and includes the image, concepts and the beliefs of a people.

2.3.3.4 The Role of Proverbs as Media of Instruction

Comments made on behavior may be made in the form of a proverb and used to warn advice or bring someone to his or her senses. The person concerned is reminded of the general implication of his or her action. Among the Ewes, there are proverbs that discourage individualistic/egoistic behaviors and stress on the communal/communitarian life of the people. An example of this is *Asibide deka melɔa dzowɔ o*. This translates as, ‘A single finger cannot collect ash.’ This can mean that, it is easier working in group than working alone. A Zulu proverb also says, ‘If you want to walk fast walk alone but if you want to walk far walk in group.’ Yet another way in which proverbs can be used to advice is in the form of mockery. Example is evident in the Ewe proverbs, *Enu dze xɔmenye xɔ̃ tɔ o* (‘an item can fit a friend but is not for him/her’). They also have, *Atikpo nɔ tɔme dzidzi metrɔa zu lo o* (‘No matter how long a log stays in water it cannot turn into a crocodile’). These proverbs are normally used if someone tries to be what he/she is not; or jettison to his identity. We can imagine this happening where a person prefers speaking other languages to his mother tongue or always associates him/herself with

people of other ethnicities. In cases such as this, the use of proverbs is purposely to shame non-conformists. This proverb may be used as an advice for people to identify themselves with their origin. Parents employ proverbs, riddles and fables to instruct their children on socially appropriate behaviours. The oblique and tactful way in which proverbs are used to advice makes them very effective.

2.3.3.5 Use of Proverbs in Adjudication of Cases

In traditional African courts, proverbs form part of the adjudication of cases and since elders are the ones who judge cases, the use of proverbs in the adjudication is very common since proverbs are mostly used by elders. During the resolution of conflicts, the mediators introduce proverbs into their speeches at crucial moments. Okpewho (1992: 231) points out that, the use of proverbs in the adjudication of cases is very common. A Yoruba proverb says that, ‘A counselor who understands proverbs sets matters right.’ Various scholars have pointed out the important role of proverbs in the adjudication of cases in African traditional courts. For example, according to Messenger (1965), the use of proverb by the Anang of Nigeria helps one to win sympathy for a case that is not so good, and may even swing the case in favour of the guilty party (Cited in Finnegan, 1970: 231). This assertion has rather reduced the African court system to what can be termed as the “survival of the eloquent” and if this were true it would undermine the role of reasoning in African judicial systems. Yankah vehemently opposes this shallow interpretation of the use of proverbs by saying that:

Issues deliberated upon during judicial proceedings are often too grave for judgment to be based exclusively on competence in proverb use. Verdicts often involve heavy fines, loss of access to expensive property-land, farm, wealth, building, title, position children or spouse. This makes the use of evidence, witness, testimonies and customary law the bases of judges’ verdicts (Yankah, 1989: 221).

This is not to argue that proverbs are irrelevant in African traditional court systems. For example, among Ewes, during the resolution of misunderstanding between parents and their children, a proverb such as *Evi dada metsɔa vi kple tsilele fua gbe o* ('A mother does not throw her child away with the bathing water') can be used. This proverb may be used to address misunderstandings between people in high authority and their subordinates telling them to limit their punishment to the subordinates and not to write them off totally. Yet another proverb that can be used is, *Evi menyɛa mi dɛ dadaa fe atata wotsɔhe kpane o* ('A mother does not cut her body together with her child's feces'). This proverb may be used to emphasize the fact that, there is an extent to which an individual can sacrifice for another person. These proverbs work very well because they are more of analogy rather than a straight forward injunction, since the mother should not be rebuked in the presence of her child. Yankah adds that although proverbs do not take over the faculties of reasoning in judicial cases, they tend to validate the trend of argument and make the argument more conspicuous (Yankah 1989: 221). Proverbs when used in speech situations help the speaker to make his point more forcefully and convincing.

Looking at the above mentioned roles of proverbs, it can be realized that, in most African societies, proverbs play important roles for the people and are more than just the "Palmoil in which words are eaten" as opined by (Achebe, 1958: 5).

2.3.4 Aspects of Style

African proverbs have several characteristics which mark them out as literary statements and distinguish them from everyday conversation. It is therefore necessary to look at

some of the stylistic features of proverbs. In terms of style, proverbs can be studied from several perspectives. These include abbreviation, wellerism, parallelism, negative axiom, hyperbole, exaggeration and metaphorical associations.

2.3.4.1 Abbreviation

In several parts of Africa, proverb abbreviation is a common feature. According to Yankah (1989: 168), among the Yoruba, there is a proverb that acknowledges and even advocates lexical elision in proverb use. For example, “It is half a word that we speak to a well-bred person; when it gets inside it becomes whole.” Proverb abridgement may not be very common when the proverb is put to writing. In verbal communication, there is the tendency to leave out whole words. This can be done to achieve a rhythmic effect. There is also the tendency to give one part of the proverb and leave the second to be completed by the addressee, either silently or loudly. Okumba (1994: 62) gives examples of this among the Luo.

Speaker

Chan man ko wadu

Respondent

Ok moni nindo

This translates as,
Your brother’s property

does not prevent you from sleeping.

This proverb means there is a limit to what one can do to help another person hence everyone must be responsible for his/her life.

In some societies, such as the Ewes, these proverbs can be stated in a proverb-name format which serves as a phrasal segment of the full proverb statement which the addressee/listener might complement. Example of this is the name ‘Dzamesi’ which is a shortened form of the phrase *Dze ame si* which literally means ‘what you have at your

disposal.’ This is used in the proverbial form as follows: The speaker starts with the proverb-name *Dzamesi* (‘what you have’), then the addressee who is conversant with the proverb might reply, (‘*wowɔna na ahiã, ahiã, medɔa ame ɖe fi gbe o*’) meaning, ‘what you give to your lover, love does not lead one to steal’ This proverb can mean there is no sense in trying to offer what one does not have. The use of abbreviation in proverbs achieves certain effects. In the first place, it shows the familiarity of the proverb in the society since the audience is expected to complete the proverb by supplying the missing segment. This is not to say that everybody in the society knows all of such proverbs. Most people may have an idea and people who do not know them learn from the response of others. Abbreviation is also a tactful way of engaging the audience in the conversation in order to win their attention.

2.3.4.2 Wellerism

This results from attributing the saying to an actual or fictional figure. Oyekan (2005: 2) notes that,

Wellerism is a bona fide subgenre of the proverb with a distinguishing structural peculiarity: it comprises a direct quotation that is attributed to a person, plus a facetious tag specifying the context (or occasion) of the quotation.

Abrahams (1972) describes it variously as a cliché, a “dialogue-proverb,” and a joking device. Brunvand (1978) describes it as a ‘quotation proverb’ (Cited in Ibid: 2005: 2). In most cases, this is attributed to the elders since it is believed that they are the experienced ones and consequently have the wisdom to put those experiences into wise sayings. This also works as a device to give authority to the saying, since authority belongs to the elders and their words must be taken with all seriousness. An example of this is the Ewe

proverb: *Tsitsiawo be atikponɔ tɔme dzidzi metrɔa zu lo o* meaning, no matter how long a log stays in water, it can never become a crocodile.

In some cases, the proverb is started with, “It has been said.” Okumba (1994: 64) gives an example of this among the Maasai as *Etejoki opa, Rrib rrib kiyama, meeta mkonyek*; which means, it has been said that, “Marriage is ‘rib rib’, it has no eyes or marriage is a matter of luck.” Oyekan (2005: 4) gives an example of wellerism in Yoruba proverb as *‘Súnmhùnkí àlejò di onílé*. This translates as (‘make room we are about to perform our lineage ritual which keeps a sojourner from becoming a permanent resident’). As long as citizens exclude immigrants from full participation in civic activities, the latter will not become fully integrated into the population. This proverb suggests that, a stranger is still a stranger no matter how long or how well he lives with the natives of the land.

In most African wellerisms, the speakers are generally animals, plants, fishes and the sea unlike in European wellerisms where animals are seldom associated with an act. Examples of wellerism are evident in proverbs from different societies. An example of this is found among the Ewes in a proverb such as *“Detifu be hamee yewonɔna tsɔa kpe.”* This translates as; ‘The cotton says it is when they are in group that they can carry stones.’ This proverb can mean that “there is unity in strength”. Ojoade gives an example of wellerism in some Ilaje proverbs such as *Akokoro ji, bi mu gbo ju me ba le ba epiya wo’wo.* This translates as ‘*Akokoro* (a kind of fish) says ‘if I were not courageous, I would not have been able to go into the same hole with the tilapia.’ Akokoro is smaller than the tilapia but brave. Hence the proverb can be quoted to describe a person who, though small, is courageous enough to contest the claim of bigger people or to take them on. This proverb is an encouragement to people not to underrate themselves but dare to

do things which may seem difficult (Ojoade 1980: 65). The reflective function of proverbs is realized in the use of wellerism. This is because, the experiences influence the kind of symbols used in proverbs. It is therefore not surprising to find that the exploits in the examples above are attributed to plants and animals that are found in the people's environment. The use of wellerism plays important roles in proverbs. In the first place, there is a sense of detachment, which establishes objectivity. This is because whoever is saying the proverb attributes it to someone else and thus distances him/her and escapes from the responsibility for the act or event. It is like saying I am not responsible for this but it is the truth because we find it in nature. In addition, it also emphasizes the issue of anonymity and indirection in African oral literature. This has already been discussed extensively in this work.

2.3.4.3 Parallelism

This is the use of two balancing units within a literary form. It is a common feature in proverbs. An example of parallelism is the cross parallelism. This is a kind of parallelism where the first part is a general statement while the second is its extension. Both of them are in the affirmative but in other cases they can both be negative. An example from Swahili is given below. *Natuone ndipo twambie, kusikia si kuona* (Translated as: 'let us see before we say (then tell); hearing is not seeing.' Parallelism makes the proverb poetic and creates rhythm.

2.3.4.4 Negative Axiom

Negative axiom refers to proverb in the negative of what may be put in the positive. The positive sense is the proverb. Okumba (1994) provides example of this among the Maasai

of Kenya as *Hapana marefu yasiyo na ncha* (translated as, ‘there is no distance that does not end’). The axiom is that every distance has an end. This proverb may be a way of consoling someone in an unpleasant situation by the assurance that the problem will come to an end. An example of such proverbs can also be found among the Ewes in the Volta Region of Ghana. For instance, *Devi gba abɔbɔ go megbaa klo go o*. (‘a child can break the shell of a snail but cannot break that of a tortoise’). This proverb can be a way of advising someone who thinks he is capable of doing everything that, there is a limit to what he can do.

2.3.4.5 Hyperbole and Exaggeration

Hyperbole and exaggeration are some of the devices used in proverbs. Many instances could be cited. Finnegan gives an example among the Fulani as ‘You will not see an elephant moving on your own head, only the louse moving on another’s’ (Finnegan 1970: 398). This is an admonishment to people who are quick to criticize others but overlook their own faults. The reference to elephant is an exaggeration but in this case it is a way of pointing at the fault of the accuser which might even be more serious than the one he is criticizing. Awedoba (1989: 43) gives examples of the use of exaggeration and hyperbole in Kasena proverbs as follows, *Kanvwogili mo lore tuu* (‘it is the puny frog that begets an elephant’). This is an exaggeration because by nature it is not possible for a frog to beget an elephant, but when used this way, it can be interpreted that mighty things can come out of little things. Another example of such proverb is, *Nabiina nia goe chana* (‘the human mouth kills the moon’). This is yet another exaggeration to stress the power of words.

2.3.4.6 Metaphorical Associations

There are often metaphorical associations in proverbs, in that, one set of images or an object describing a situation is used for reflecting another experience. This becomes a form of symbolism whereby people relate the behaviours of plants, animals and items in the environment to human behaviour. Liyong (1972) gives an example of the use of metaphors in Luo (Kenya) proverbs as ‘Giving birth has helped the vegetable.’ This is explained as, ‘The young shoot from an old vegetable freed it from the people who plucked its leaves because they now pluck the leaves of the new plant.’ The message of this statement is better explained as ‘Parents will be helped by children.’ This is because the responsibilities of parents will be taken over by their children (Cited and commented upon by Okpewho, 1992: 237). The above proverb shows the relationship between parents and their children. Awedoba (2000: 44) gives an example of the use of metaphors in Kasena proverb where a sleeping mat is said in one proverb to be a soothsayer. What is implied is that, the mat in a way is like a soothsayer: for example, as you sleep in it you contemplate over issues and you even dream about your problems and through this you discover the solutions to your problems. The metaphorical association in proverbs helps to achieve brevity and the economy of words that proverbs are characterized with. These proverbs would have taken more words if expressed in direct language. It should be added that without an appreciation of a culture, the metaphorical associations in its proverbs may be lost on an outsider. For example, unless a person understands the role of the soothsayer, he or she might not see the relationship between a soothsayer and a sleeping mat. Boadi, realizing the importance of these devices for a better appreciation of proverbs, remarks that “The artistic and literary features of proverbs, which include the

sharp witticism, the sarcasm, the humor, the rhetoric, and all the aesthetic and poetic values of language use, cannot be ignored” (Boadi, 1972: 183). Finnegan further affirms the stylistic quality evident in proverbs by stating that “Whatever the details, however, it is clear that some sort of heightened speech, in one form or the other is commonly used in proverbs and this serves to set them apart from ordinary speech” (Finnegan 1970: 403).

Other scholars have pointed out that proverbs cannot be used as a true reflection of a society because there are contradictions in various proverbs hence we cannot use them as a reference point to depict the views of a society. Firth (1926) refers to the diverse nature, the square-faced oppositions of Maori proverbs; Andrzejewski (1968) in his study of Somali proverbs comments on the contradictions in proverbs; Herzog (1936) talked about the contradictions in Jabo proverbs. This assertion however seems to downplay the reflectionist view of literature especially in the case of proverbs.

It should be pointed out that the contradiction that these scholars pointed out is not based on a single proverb; it is based on the comparison of two or more proverbs. An example can be given from the following Ewe proverbs. *Kpemimli mefoafu adukpla o* which can be interpreted as, ‘A rolling stone gathers no moss’. This suggests the need to settle at one place in order to progress in one’s endeavour. There is however another proverb which says, *Ɖevi matsa dukpɔ gblɔ be yenɔ fe detsi koe vivina*. (‘It is only a child who does not travel that says his mother’s soup is the most palatable’). This also suggests the need for one to explore different circumstances in order to progress. These are some of the examples people allude to in concluding that proverbs are contradictory and can therefore not be used as a reference point to a people’s way of life. This analysis is not in

place because these proverbs portray different views of society. Yankah (1984) and Finnegan (1977) disagree with this notion of contradictions in proverbs.

Yankah (1984) thinks that these divergent proverbs which are perceived as contradictions are not necessarily so because the two proverbs may be used in different contexts and hence the need to look out for the context within which a particular proverb can be used rather than seeing them as contradicting each other. Sharpin (2001: 753) argues that the contradiction that seems so manifest when proverbs are treated as isolated propositions in a list disappears like smoke when they are interpreted as utterances in a particular situation. These claims therefore point to the fact that through proverbs one can get to know the diverse views of a particular society hence can be used as a 'mirror' which reflects a particular society. These proverbs considered as contradictory, can be used as the options of life which are presented to an individual and is made to apply wisdom in choosing the right course.

Finnegan (1984) also disagrees with the contradiction in proverbs by stating that, "Equally, literature can also express the views of minority or differing views within the society at large. Such examples are by no means uncommon... even in what used to be wrongly regarded as 'homogeneous' and 'communal' context of 'primitive' society." This assertion illustrates that, in every society, people have diverse views on how things ought to be done. It is little wonder that even within the nuclear family; members have different opinions concerning particular issues. Hence the contradiction in proverbs is just a reflection of the diversity of views in the society on a subject. The contradiction in proverb is a reflection of life since life itself is full of contradictions. In any case, as a symbol, the proverb has potentially many meanings, some of which may contradict.

Another criticism of oral cultures in general is that, they make a considerable use of memorization which limits creativity and imagination. Scholars such as Havelock have pointed out that, oral cultures are full of fixed expressions and clichés and this is what literate cultures teach their children to scorn (Havelock, 1963).

Shelton comments on proverbs in particular by emphasizing that proverb continue to be learned by heart and that the process involved in memorizing them has important consequences in contemporary education. The inheritance of memorized phrases and their application as problem solvers often encourages students to rely on what, in formal education, is referred to as “rote learning”; that is, memory without understanding. The result, according to Shelton, is that critical thinking is reduced due to the maintenance of oral tradition, particularly of proverbs (Shelton, 1963). This assertion is not wholly true because people do not just use any proverb at any time but one that fits the situation, and the ability of a proverb user to select a proverb from a myriad of proverbs demands critical thinking.

There have been some studies on proverbs in general, but such studies focus on the use of language in proverbs and how proverbs are used to add aesthetic quality to language. Scholars such as Adeeko (1991), Arnott (1957), Bamgbose (1958) and Yankah (1986) have written a lot on the use and function of proverbs. But their focus is more on the importance of the proverb as an effective literary device and a tool for communication than on how these proverbs portray the way of life of a people. This research will differ from such approaches in that my emphasis is not on grammatical or syntactical appreciation of the language of the proverbs but is premised on their cultural significance.

In this work similar examples have been cited from other societies to demonstrate the universality of the themes.

It is important to point out that a lot of work has been done on proverbs especially among the Akans. Works such as Appiah et al (2007), Rattray (1914), Adaye (1947) only list the proverbs in their traditional language followed by a translation in English; in the end we see compilations of proverbs without references to practices in the traditional society that confirm the wisdom in these proverbs.

2.4 Chapter Summary

This chapter provides an understanding of proverbs by offering various definitions of proverbs, and through these definition, various features of proverbs have been realized such as their terseness (through the use of proverb-names and abbreviation) and the use of poetic language which is achieved through the use of parallelism, metaphors and hyperbole. Through these definitions, the anonymity of the proverb authors is also realized and to achieve this, the proverbs are attributed to inanimate objects such as animals, trees and the elders in the society. It has also been realized that proverbs express the general wisdom of the society since they mostly come from the elders who are believed to have more knowledge of the society due to their age and experience. This chapter has outlined some forms in which proverbs are expressed such as songs, riddles, folktales, names, sculptures and paintings. It has been realized through this work that the importance of proverbs go beyond their literary roles and help as media of instruction, used in adjudication of cases and help to preserve archaic language. Various criticisms from scholars regarding the use of proverbs have been discussed under this chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF PROVERBS IN *TFA*

3.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the proverbs in *TFA* in relation to the social system of the Igbos. It begins with a brief biography of Chinua Achebe which seeks to bring to the fore the influence that his background has on his writing of *TFA*. This comprises his family background, education, occupation and his publications. In order to understand and appreciate the proverbs in *TFA*, the chapter presents a brief background of the book. Finally, the chapter moves on to its main objective which is aimed at analyzing the proverbs in *TFA* and how they reflect the cultural system of the Igbo society of Nigeria.

3.2 A Brief Biography of Chinua Achebe

Chinua Achebe was born on November 16, 1930 in Ogidi, an Igbo town of South-eastern Nigeria, to Isaiah Okafor Achebe, an evangelical Christian Churchman, and Janet Anaenechi Achebe. His full name is Albert Chinualumogu Achebe. ‘Chinualumogu’ is interpreted as, “May God fight on our behalf.” The name which is both a prayer and a philosophical statement in the Igbo tradition reflects both a concept of life and a desire for stability in that life (Ezenwa-Ohaeto, 1997: 7). The name further indicates the Igbo belief in the supernatural being that is able to fight their battles. The family name ‘Achebe’ is an abbreviation of *Ani Chebe* (‘May mother earth preserve’). This name is in contrast with the names Isaiah Achebe gave to his children depicting his change from the Traditional religion to Christian religion.

3.2.1 Achebe's Education

Achebe started school at St. Phillip's Central School at Akpakaogwe Ogidi in 1936. He was in Standard Two (class four) when the Second World War broke out. According to Ezaewa-Ohaeto (1997), Achebe confirmed that the rest of his primary education happened against its distant background. In 1942, at age twelve, Achebe proceeded to live with his brother John Achebe at Nekede to continue his education. Later on, he enrolled in the Government College at Umuahia from 1944 to 1947 and University College of Ibadan from 1948 to 1953 where he studied English, History and Theology. After his undergraduate course he came back to Ogidi and took a teaching appointment as English teacher at Merchant of Light Secondary School. Not long after, he became a senior broadcasting officer at the Nigerian Broadcasting Service. From 1972 to 1988, he was a professor of English at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst and also at the University of Connecticut, Storrs. He also taught at Bard College (Ezaewa-Ohaeto, 1997: 9-35).

Achebe got married to Christie Chinwe Okoli on September 10, 1961, and had four children, namely: Chinelo, Ikechukwu, Chidi and Nwando. As a political crusader especially, during the years when Biafra separated from Nigeria, Achebe served as an ambassador. He travelled to different countries discussing the plight of his people, especially the starving and slaughtering of Igbo children. He wrote articles in magazines and published in newspapers about the Biafran struggle. For instance, his children story, *How the Leopard Got its Claws* (1972) and the collection of poetry, *Christmas in Biafra* (1973) are about internal struggle in Nigeria. He also cofounded the citadel press with Christopher Okigbo to discuss the prevailing social and political issues. Achebe received

numerous honours such as, honorary fellowship of the American Academy and Institute of Arts and Letters; he is also the recipient of the Nigerian National Merit Award and the 1972 Commonwealth Poetry Prize. Achebe received more than twenty honorary doctorates from universities around the world (Ibid, 1997: 79-94).

He published many novels, short stories and poems among others. Among his published works are, *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *No Longer at Ease* (1960), *The Sacrificial egg and other Stories* (1962), *Arrow of God* (1964), *A Man of the People* (1966) and *Hopes and Impediment* (1988). Chinua Achebe died on 1st March, 2013 at the age of eighty-two.

3.3 Achebe's Themes and Style of Writing

3.3.1 Theme

Achebe's works comment on the political and social issues that the African has been through and those that are occurring today. Ihechukwu comments that:

His is a serious and thorough examination of the damage done to his people during the 'Chance' meeting between Africa and Europe, and he portrays this in terms of the psychological and social implications to the individual and the society. He also tries to use his writings to restore the true image of Africa as well as helping his people rediscover a cultural heritage lost under the traumatic impact of colonization (Ihechukwu, 1974: 61).

This mission is expressed in *TFA* and *Arrow of God* since Achebe portrays the culture of the Igbo society and points out the challenges that the Europeans have caused due to their presence on the Igbo land. Most of Achebe's writings emanate from personal experiences and other accounts told him.

Ihechukwu (1974: 70) observes same about Achebe's writings thus:

Most of Chinua Achebe's ideas on African Literature evolved from actual experiences. From the stories told him as a boy to his own personal experiences, from the experiences of his wife in the classroom and his own experiences as a writer, he found materials enough from which to build a theory and practice of literature.

3.3.2 Style of Writing

Chinua Achebe is among the scholars who advocate that Africans should write in English. Achebe justifies his choice of English in writing as:

...It gave them a language with which to talk to one another.
If it failed to give them a song, it at least gave them a tongue for singing. There are not many countries today in Africa where you could abolish the language of the erstwhile colonial powers and still retain the facility for communication (Achebe, 1997: 343).

In order to express the African situation better he adapts the English Language to the African culture. Abiola (2001: 114) remarks:

The novel testifies an aesthetic project that consists of fashioning new language appropriate to its setting which serves therefore to give life and substance to the narrative content and thus enforce the novelist's initial gesture of reclamation.

Izevbaye (2009) identifies this about Achebe's works thus, 'it is possible to shape literary English into the language of an ethnic experience far distant from the English homeland.' The style of Achebe's fictions draws heavily on the oral narrative of the Igbo people. He weaves folktales into his fictions enlightening community values into both the content and form of the storytelling. Another hallmark of Achebe's style is the use of proverbs. An example of this can be cited from his book *Arrow of God* as, "The man who has not submitted to anything will soon submit to his burial mat" (Achebe, 1964:5). This suggests that there is the need to be a bit flexible in the way things are done. The proverb also suggests the fact that death is inevitable. Achebe therefore infuses the symbols, metaphors, Igbo vocabulary and aspects of the African oral literature into the English Language making it more appealing to the African audience. Ihechukwu (1974: 67) identifies this:

This is what people mean when they say Achebe's English is modeled on the linguistic pattern of his mother tongue. Achebe has destroyed the structural pattern of the English language. Yet what we have is 'new' English Language full of energy and freshness. The linguistic originality of the language, the pleasure his language gives us, all derive from his effective and efficient use of Igbo verbal styles which is so evident in his writings.

This native influence especially in terms of the use of proverbs was referenced in *TFA* as Achebe remarks that among the Igbos, “The art of conversation is regarded highly and proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten”(Pg.10). Achebe also uses anecdotes which are mostly taken from Igbo folklore. It can thus be concluded that both the style and the theme of Achebe’s novels are socially derived.

3.4 Background of *TFA*

Achebe took the title of the novel from William Butler Yeats’ *The Second Coming Things Fall Apart; the center cannot hold.*’ *TFA* published by Heinemann in 1958, was reissued four years later in paperback, inaugurating Heinemann Educational Book African writers series for which Achebe later became Editorial Advisor. The novel was the winner of the Margaret Wrong Prize (Hans, Carol, & Virginia, 1971). Before *TFA* was published, most novels written by Europeans largely portrayed Africans as savages who needed to be enlightened by Europeans; what emerged and popularized in European literature as the ‘Whiteman’s burden’. For example, Joseph Conrad’s classic tale *Heart of Darkness* (1899), one of the most celebrated novels of the early twentieth century, presents Africa as a “wild”, “dark,” and “uncivilized” continent. In 1958, however, Chinua Achebe broke apart this dominant model with *TFA*, a novel that portrays Igbo society with specificity and examines the effects of European colonialism from an African perspective. Set in pre-colonial Nigeria in the 1890s, *TFA* highlights the clash between colonialism and traditional culture (Amy , 2010). The story takes place in the village of Umuofia or “the people of the forest” Abiola (2001: 121), located west of the actual city of Onitsha, on the east bank of the Niger River in Nigeria. The events of the novel unfolded in the 1890s.

The culture depicted in *TFA* is that of the Igbo people, which is similar to that of Achebe's birthplace Ogidi where Igbo-speaking people lived together in groups of independent villages ruled by titled elders. The customs described in the novel reflect those of the actual Onitsha people, who lived near Ogidi, with whom Achebe was familiar (Ibid, 2001).

3.5 The Origin of the Igbos

The word “Igbo” signifies various things such as the speakers of the language, the area occupied by the Igbos and the language spoken by the Igbos which is a Benue-Congo language of the Kwa branch of the Niger-Congo family (Ibid 1990: 17). Historians of Igbo culture have not been able to produce adequate facts to support an accurate analysis of Igbo origin. According to Okigbo (1986),

There is a certain school of thought; however, from colonial times that run contrary to popular Igbo belief that Igbo civilization might have evolved from Nok, Ife and Benin civilizations. The accepted doctrine is that the classic transition from stone to Iron Age came from Nok culture from Meroe or the Phoenician settlements in the Maghreb (Cited in Egberebulam, 1990: vii).

Ojukwu (1989) gives another version of the Igbo origin that,

Igbos have been located originally around the Niger Benue-confluence; thence due to population pressure, they migrated through the Niger. Igbos during the migration moved from Egypt through the Sudan and Southwards to their present location. Archaeologists have based certain of their conclusions on Igbo child-naming and the meaning of names assigned at birth. Naming/circumcision ceremonies, for instance, are as important to the Igbos as they were to the Hebrews of old; one has only to read the Old Testament to note the similarities between Hebrew customs and those of the Igbo in this as in many aspects of life (Cited in Egberebulam, 1990: viii)

3.6 The Social System of the Igbos of Nigeria

In order to engage in a better analysis of proverbs in *TFA* there is the need to have information on the culture of the people about which the book was written. This fact finds correlation in Awedoba's statement that, “We cannot fully appreciate a proverb unless we

have some insight into the society and culture of the people and the institutions, norms and practices that underpin these proverbs” (Awedoba, 2000: 30).

Considerable variation exists in Igbo culture and social groupings that make it difficult to describe them as one. Despite these differences, certain features characterized the Igbo society before 1900, and to a certain extent in contemporary times. As a result of this, my reference to Igbo culture will give the broad idea of Igbo society and how it relates to Achebe’s *TFA*. Before addressing aspects of the social system of the Igbos, there is the need to give a brief overview of Nigeria where Igbos are mainly located. According to Egberegbulam (1990: 3), the total land area occupied by the Igbos is 356,669 sq. miles (913,072.64 sq.km). Its length from east to west is over 700 miles (1,120km). Nigeria is bounded on the west by the Republic of Benin, on the north by the Republic of Niger, on the east by the Republic of Cameroon and on the south by the Gulf Guinea. Igbos are located at the South-Eastern part of Nigeria. Among the early settlers of Nigeria are Igbos, Hausas and Yoruba.

3.6.1 Kinship Organisation

A classic Igbo village considers itself as a clan or lineage, and it usually supports this with a genealogical charter which presents the group as the agnatic descendants of a single ancestor, whose sons founded its constituent villages and whose grandsons – its village sections (Ibid, 1961: 120). Among the Igbos, one has to take a wife outside his kinship group. Also, Igbos practice the patrilineal system of descent where a child belongs to the father’s lineage. When one attains the age of puberty, then he or she is introduced to his father’s father’s lineage. When one marries, his wife’s lineage plays a

very important social role for his children. For inheritance and succession, a person has lawful claims to property from the lineage of his father (Egberegbulam, 1990: 26).

3.6.2 Igbo Religious Worldview

Assimeng (2000: 1) describes religion as,

The sets of phenomena and occurrences that falls outside 'normal,' ordinary explanation, about which human beings feel impelled to think and behave from a position of awe, wonder, humility and supplication, and are usually categorized as falling in the sphere of the super-empirical or super-normal.

Gyekye (1996: 3) considers religion as the “Awareness of the existence of some ultimate, supreme being who is the origin and sustainer of this universe.” This idea of an existence of a sacred being is evident in most cultures. Assimeng (2000: 1) points out that generally throughout history, and at every level of human development, religion of some kind has been a vital feature of social development. For the African, religion is central to the people’s way of life. Gyekye (1996: 3), agrees that

Religion enters all aspects of African life so fully, determining practically every aspect of life; including moral behavior...African heritage is intensely religious. The African lives in a religious universe, all actions and thoughts have a religious meaning and are inspired or influenced by a religious point of view.

As Mbiti (1969) puts it, Africans are “notoriously religious” and Igbos are no exception.

Considering the prominent role of religion in *TFA*, this work cannot be fully appreciated and understood without knowledge of Igbo religion, hence the need to provide a brief background of Igbo traditional religion.

Religion permeates the entire life of the Igbo people. Igbos are profoundly religious, and all accounts of their life reflect this fact. One means through which one can penetrate into the religious life of a people is through their prayer. In prayer, says Heiler, “we can

penetrate into the deepest and most intimate movements of a religious soul” (Heiler 1958: xv). This is not only limited to the individual but to societies, cultures and religious systems. Heiler continues by pointing out that, prayer is not only a reliable expression of people's religious beliefs but also an index of their spirituality.

Prayer, according to (Heiler 1958: xv) is "a religion's primary mode of expression.” In the view of Emefie, the spiritual beings with whom the Igbo seek to communicate through prayer are many and varied. In the prayers, four categories of spiritual beings could be identified: the Supreme Being or God, referred to as *Chukwu*; the Nature deities; the Spirit-forces; and the Living-dead. There are three emanations of God: *Anyanwu na Agbala*, (the Sun Spirit and power); *chi*, (the destiny spirit); and *Okike*, (the Creator spirit). In some contexts these are identified with God, while in other contexts, they appear as independent spirits. Each has its own cult and may be addressed in prayer. Among these deities, one which is frequently mentioned among the Igbos and also in *TFA* is *chi*. *Chi* is God's spirit dwelling in man, to guide and protect man and to win benefits from God on his behalf (Emefie, 1985: 342).

Isichei describes *chi* as a personalized providence from *Chukwu* and reverts to him after a man's death. Each has his own *chi*, which may be well or ill disposed (Isichei, 1976: 25). The Igbos, just like other Africans recognize the Supreme God (*Chukwu*) as the highest and all powerful. *Chukwu* is continually heard and is supposed to do everything. The Igbo belief in the power and indispensability of *Chukwu* in their life is expressed in many of their invocations. Emefie gives examples of these invocations, *Chukwu ebuka* ('God is almighty') *Arinze Chukwu* ('Thanks be to God') and *Chukwu anokwo'm gi n'aka* ('God! I am in your hands'). These invocations depict the people's gratitude to God and

an expression of their human limitations and insecurity and God's all powerful and all-knowing attributes. The living, the dead and the unborn also form part of the people's religious worldview. Those who live well-spent lives and die in socially approved ways are given befitting burial rites and they live in the world of the dead which mirror the world of the living (Emefie, 1985:321).

According to Uzodinmma (1985), the notion of the hereafter denotes that the dead, although dead in flesh, are still alive in spirit. Implicit in this belief is the notion of "*Ala Mmuo*" (the spirit world) where it is believed all spirit of the dead forbears and the dead relatives of the family live peacefully. The ancestors watch over the living and are reincarnated among them hence the name *Ndichie* which means "the returners" (Cited in Assimeng 2010: 63). The ancestors ensure that the families did not become extinct for lack of children, and in this respect it was their duty to be born again into the families through reincarnation.

According to Bascom:

An individual is often reborn into his own clan, so that the guardian's soul is often that of the patrilineal ancestor. The personal names 'Father returns' (Babatunde) and "Mother returns (Yetunde) are given to the children of the same sex as the reincarnated ancestors, but an ancestor may be reborn in a child with a different sex. The identity of the reincarnated ancestor is determined through physical resemblances, similarities in character, behavior, dreams in which the ancestor tells someone in the family that he has returned (Bascom 1969: 71).

Apart from these deities, there are other deities which are very important among the Igbos. *Ala*, Earth-mother, feature frequently in prayers, especially ritual prayers. She is patron deity of customs and traditions as well as custodian of law and order. Her protection and blessings are sought in prayers for every important undertaking, especially

those related to land, the community and traditional laws and customs (Emefie, 1985: 343).

Ubah notes that these deities had sacred animals with which their names were associated. These animals were never harmed, killed or eaten, and were believed to be absolutely harmless to people. If killed accidentally they were given ritual burial of the type normally accorded to human beings. An outstanding example of a sacred animal was the boa constrictor (a type of snake), locally known as *Idemili* which moved unmolested from one part of Igboland to another (Ubah, 1988: 74). Achebe gives an incident in *TFA* where the snake *idemili* was killed by Okoli one of the Christian converts; the next day, the man died (*TFA*: Pg.116).

The Igbos can pray anytime and have prayers for every circumstance in life. There are prayers for a newly born child, prayers during the puberty rites of an individual, prayers during marriage and funeral ceremonies, prayers during harvesting and planting of new crops as well as prayers for gratitude.

3.7 The Political Culture of the Igbos

Most classical social anthropological and historical accounts of Igbo society have described it as prototypically 'stateless', 'acephalous', or a 'segmentary system consisting of autonomous villages and village groups (*obodo*, 'town') ruled by 'diffused' authority without formalized, permanent, or hereditary leadership positions. With the exception of a few distinguished Igbo towns like Onitsha, which had kings called Obi, and places like Nri and Arochukwu, which had priest-kings known as Eze, Igbo communities and area

governments were ruled solely by a republican consultative assembly of the common people (Axle,1999: 59).

The absence of centralization of power and authority on an individual is evident in Igbo proverbs such as *Igbo ewegh eze* which translates as ‘Igbo have no king’ or in the common name, *Igboamaeze* (the Igbo recognize no king) (Isichei 1976: 19). This name explains the Igbo belief that each person is a king and master of his or her affairs. The most universal political institution among the Igbos was the family. The families were represented by their elders referred to as Ndichie. These elders play the role of public relation officers and also as law maintenance officers. They also help to uphold the property of religious and customary practices: to dispense justice according to equity and the law of the land; to promote social welfare and to defend the land against external aggression (Egberegbulam, 1990: 19). This suggests that contrary to the perception that the Igbo society was a lawless society, there was law and order, only that it was limited to the village state.

According to Isichei (1976: 22), due to the important functions performed by these male elders, Igbo government has sometimes been called a gerontocracy, but not all elderly men had an equal say. Igbo political authority appears to except the young since it was based on wealth and this was based on years of accumulation. A successful man who was affluent could, according to custom, register and legitimize his success by taking a title. The title system served as a social security. This is because the man who takes the title pays to do so, and shared in fees paid by latter entrants. Apart from that, the title guaranteed good character, as well as success. This is evident in the life of the title holders in *TFA*. The title holders such as Okonkwo and Obiereka were highly respected

and it was necessary for them to keep up with the norms of the society. The life history of Okonkwo suggests how the system worked. An industrious man like Okonkwo could rise fast but a lazy man like his father Unoka could remain untitled till death.

There are other political institutions which are found in most parts of Igbo society. An example is the age grade system which had defined responsibilities in community service. Secret societies were also valued instruments of social control. Their members will perform, mask, often at night in the role of supernatural beings to criticize and attack offenders (Ibid, 1976: 22).

Residence in the territory of a village group was not haphazard but conformed to a very definite pattern, the essence of which was to group a number of villages around a common center which acted as a focus for their common ritual, political, and economic activities and to direct their activities by assigning to each village land in a specific direction away from the center. Land was distinguished as houseland (*ala ulo*) (Jones, 1961: 120).

3.8 The Agricultural Activities of the Igbos

Igbo agriculture is conditioned to a very large extent by its environment. In most towns of the Igbo, Ibibio, and Cross River areas, their vegetation was characterized by light-soiled tropical rain forest which would revert to its climax when left fallow for a long time. Igbo agriculture is based on simple tools such as hoes and cutlasses for the cultivation of the yams (*Dioscorea* spp.). The farming year is divided into two; a dry season, which lasts roughly from late November to the end of March, and a wet season, from April to November. The work involved can be summarized under the four

continuous processes of clearing, planting, tending, and produce storing. Apart from yam, the people also cultivate other food crops such as pepper, groundnut, cocoyam, cassava and palm nut but yam is known as the ‘king of crops’ hence there is a specific deity for yam which is called Uhejioku. This deity is also responsible for agricultural production as a whole explaining why the people make periodic sacrifices to it (Jones, 1961: 119).

3.9 Analysis of the Proverbs in *TFA*

Having pointed out some aspects of the Igbo social system, attention will now shift to the proverbs in Achebe’s *TFA* to find the correlation between the proverbs and the culture of the people, pointing out those aspects of the people’s life that have not been explicitly addressed by other writers and thus contribute to the differences in perspectives regarding the peoples culture. The proverbs in *TFA* have been categorized into various sections such as cultural values, communal life of Africans, African Traditional Religion, kinship and entertainment among others. This categorization is done in order to present the themes clearly and for a better organization of the work.

3.9.1 Cultural Values

Most of the proverbs are based on cultural values. Antubam (1963: 13) refers to values as “Basic social principles which have guided the particular people to survival through the ages.” These values have been part of the people’s culture from time immemorial. Gyekye (1963: 55) considers these values as those forms or patterns of conduct that are considered most worthwhile and thus cherished by the society. These values such as respect, tolerance, patience, hard work and diligence are not only principles of behaviour but also goals of individual and social action.

3.9.1.1 Generosity

“I cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle” (TFA: Pg.119).

Okonkwo uses this proverb as he holds a feast at his mother’s village in Mbanta. Before this proverb, the reader is told that Okonkwo never did things by halves. When his wife Ekwefi protested that two goats were sufficient for the feast, he told her it was not her affair and then followed it up with the above proverb. A message that can be deduced from this proverb is that, one should not be miserly. Okonkwo was prosperous even in his mother’s village which is symbolized in the proverb as living on the bank of a river. Apart from that, Okonkwo’s art of holding a feast is not to show his wealth but as a way of showing appreciation to his mother’s people for how they received him wholeheartedly when he desperately needed their help. As Okonkwo points out, “My mother’s people have been good to me and I must show appreciation” (TFA: Pg.119). The message of this proverb is that, people should give out to other people especially when they are in the position to do so, and if the beneficiary deserves it.

3.9.1.2 Gratitude

“A child cannot pay for its mother’s milk” (TFA: Pg.119).

Okonkwo uses this proverb to explain his actions and confirm the proverb used earlier. As has been pointed out, Okonkwo’s act is not a pay back of the love and concern of his mother’s people. The “mother’s breast” as used in the proverb signifies the affection and love of a mother. The proverb then emphasizes the fact that, a child cannot pay for the love and affection received from the mother. The act of showing appreciation is an important value in African societies. The commonest form of appreciation is ‘Thank

you’. As a result, right from infancy, children are taught to say ‘Thank you’ to anyone who shows kindness to them. But when routine services and benefits are concerned, there is no need for close kin to express verbal gratitude.

In some African societies such as the Ewes, this act is so important that even after days of receiving help from other people, one still hears people saying, *etsɔ feakpe* (‘Thank you for yesterday’) or *woewɔ dɔ nyitsɔ* (‘Thank you for your help the other day’). In some cases, the recipient of a favour may ask other people to accompany him/her to render thanks. Sarpong (1974: 67) attests that the issue of gratitude is not just limited to fellow beings but is evident in the African’s relationship with the spirit beings. He points out that:

The same wholesome attitude is adopted towards the deities and spirits. In gratitude for their protection, yearly sacrifices are offered them not only by the community and group of individuals, but also by private persons.

Antubam (1963: 167) points out the need for gratitude in an Akan proverb as, *Akokonin nomo nsua, oto ne tir wim aseda so* (‘The cock, while drinking water raises its head to God in gratitude’). All these confirm that it is very important to show appreciation. It can be added that although people who offer gifts do not necessarily demand or expect a reward in return, the recipient is indirectly under an obligation to reciprocate the gift either in the form of words of gratitude, as stated above or any other appropriate form when necessary. Thus one can say that although a child cannot pay for his/her mother’s breast milk, a child is expected to help the mother lose her teeth since she (mother) helped him/her to grow his/her teeth. This is expressed in Ewe and Akan proverbs respectively as *Ne vi nɔ kpe de via nu wo to adua edze be de via na kpe de dada nu woatu etɔ* and *Obi hwe wo ma wo se fifi a, wo nso wohwe no ma ne de fifi*. The growing and

losing of teeth symbolizes childhood and aging respectively. The proverb expresses the mutual responsibility of parents and children towards each other. This can be an example of the generalized form of reciprocity whereby the return of the gift is not indebted by time or quantity but the recipient of a gift is indirectly under some obligation to offer assistance whether in cash or kind to the one who offers him or her gift. The children's fulfillment of this moral obligation is also a way of expressing gratitude for the care given them by their parents.

3.9.1.3 Tolerance

“Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other let his wing break” (TFA: Pg.14).

This proverb was used in concluding Nwakibie's prayer that, “We shall all live. We pray for life, children, a good harvest and happiness. You will have what is good for you and I will have what is good for me.”(Pg.14). In the first place, reference to the kite and the eagle provides information about the kind of bird life found in the environment. The reference made to eagle and kite can be a symbolic representation of the strong and powerful or the rich to the less powerful and less privileged in the society. The eagle represents superior strength or might in comparison with the kite, also a predatory bird, though one that is less powerful.

The proverb is, therefore, an admonition for people who should not be selfish but provide opportunity for others to also get their share of resources. The Igbo society is said to be an egalitarian society where everyone is equal. According to Egberegbulam (1990: 27), “The structure of the system looks thus, but in practice does not conform. There are marked differences in political organization.” This inequality is as well evident in the

situation of the eagle and the kite; although both are birds in the family of *accipitridae*, the eagle is more powerful than the kite. This inequality is evident in Okonkwo's life as it is indicated that, "Okonkwo did not have the start in life which many young men had. He neither inherited a barn, nor a title nor a young wife" (Pg.13). This is why he went to Nwakibie for yam seeds to start his farm. Nwakibie's kind gesture of offering yam seeds to Okonkwo can be an example of Nwakibie being the more powerful and privileged (eagle) in the society giving opportunity to the less privileged Okonkwo (kite) to assert himself. In another sense, the proverb expresses the need for coexistence. This idea is expressed in an Akan proverb as, *Aboa okraman na okae se: Da fam, ma menna fam, na emma ayonkogoro soee* (It is the dog that says lie down, let me lie down, that makes a friendly game interesting). This proverb stems from the observation made about dogs that when playing whether big or small, they take turns to fall for each other.

"If I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is a play" (TFA: Pg.52).

This proverb was used by Machi Obiereka's eldest brother during the marriage transaction of Akueke Obiereka's daughter. The proverb was preceded by Machi's statement that, "We had not thought to go below thirty but as the dog said, if I fall down for you and you fall down for me, it is a play" (Pg.52). The above proverb suggests the need for tolerance and understanding. It is an admonition that one should not be rigid in making decisions and taking actions. Agbaje (2002: 242) gives an example of a Yoruba proverb that reflects this theme. *Mowa foniwa ni ore fii pe*. ('The understanding and tolerance of a friend makes friendship last long'). The proverb suggests the need to consider the feelings and concerns of others before making decisions, if friendships and mutually beneficial relationships are to be sustained. Considering TFA, one can say that

Igbos are more tolerant than the Europeans who came to the land. Although the Igbos did not accept or agree to the White man's religion, they did not fight them but the White man rather publicly preached against the African gods and even some of the converts, such as Nwoye in *TFA* and Obika in *Arrow of God* went to the extent of tampering with the sacred python which occupies an important place in the Igbo traditional religion. Considering the use of the proverb one can say that marriage in this society is patrilineal since it is the father's relatives that preside over the marriage. Apart from that, it can be realized that the communal life of Africans extends to marriage since the marriage ceremony was not limited to the immediate family of the bride and the bridegroom but takes account of the extended family of both sides.

3.9.1.4 Respect and Humility

“Looking at a king's mouth, one will think he never sucked at his mother's breast”

(*TFA*: Pg.19).

The proverb frowns on arrogance and disrespect. The proverb was used by an old man to reprimand Okonkwo for his rudeness in dealing with less prosperous men. As pointed out in the text, a man challenged Okonkwo at a kindred meeting and Okonkwo told the man that “this meeting is for men”. This is because Okonkwo knew that the man had no title (Pg.19). The proverb is therefore a way of rebuking Okonkwo for being so arrogant considering his humble beginning. The proverb therefore symbolizes authority and power on the one hand, and tenderness on the other. The king representing power and authority, and a child sucking at his mother's breast representing the helpless. The proverb helps to establish the morality on which the society depends. In African societies, although

industry and success are admired, one is not expected to become arrogant and disrespectful towards those who are less successful.

“A man who pays respect to the great paves way for his own greatness” (TFA: Pg.14).

This proverb points to an important aspect of the African value system which is the need to show respect to the elderly and those in authority. Okonkwo uses this proverb when he came to request for a loan of yam seeds from Nwakibie. He used this proverb after saying that, “I have brought you this kola...I have come to pay you respect and also to ask a favor” (Pg.14). An interpretation of this proverb can be that the kind of people one relates to has influence on one’s life. As the popular adage goes, “Show me your friend and I will show you your character.” This proverb can also reflect the fact that the kind of attitude one portrays towards another individual influences the person’s reaction towards one, that is to say, respect is reciprocal. The proverb is also an admonition for children to pay respect to the elderly. The statement is reiterated in another Igbo proverb as, *Onyefee ogaranya, ogaranya iruya* meaning, “He who respects an elder, an elder he will become” (Penfield & Duru, 1988: 126).

An important value in African society is the need to show respect to those in authority and the elderly. As discussed earlier, the elderly are believed to be more knowledgeable than children as a result of experiences acquired through longevity. Hence, no matter the accomplishment of a child he/she needs to respect the elderly. Aside this, the African attaches a religious meaning to the respect accorded the elderly in the society. Sarpong (1974: 65), presents his thought on this thus,

Old age is sacred as the old person is thought to be in closer proximity to the ancestors, he is likely to die before others-than the young. The mysterious and the spiritual acquire their character by reason of their being sacred. Hence it is in relation to the sacred that a

respectful attitude should be shown towards authority, old age, the mysterious and the spiritual.

This implies that since Africans accord respect to religion, the elderly who are believed to achieve sacredness as a result of their age are highly respected.

3.9.1.5 Hardwork and Perseverance

“If a child washed his hands he could eat with kings” (TFA: Pg.6).

The proverb emphasizes the need for hard work in one's endeavour. This proverb was used to emphasize the fact that, although Okonkwo was young he was already one of the greatest men of his time. Age was respected among his people but achievement was esteemed. It has been pointed out earlier that among the Igbos, just as is the case of most African societies, authority resides with the elderly men in the society, and that is why Igbo society in particular has been considered as gerontocracy (Isichei, 1976: 22). Isichei's assertion suggests the point that seniority according to age is one of the primary beliefs in Africa. But Achebe through his work points out that, achievement can also accord an individual authority and respect. This is evident in Okonkwo's life. This is because at a youthful age of eighteen, Okonkwo had started to fight for his village and even defeated one of the greatest wrestlers at the time. Achebe writes that, “As young as eighteen he has brought honor to his village by throwing Amalinze the cat” (Pg.3). Due to Okonkwo's achievement, he is part of the decision making body (*Ndichie*) of the clan; a position that his father Unoka never attained. “Okonkwo's fame thus rested on solid personal achievements” (Pg.3) rather than age or inheritance.

3.9.1.6 Communal Life of Africans

Gyekye (1996: 35) refers to a community as, “A group of persons linked by interpersonal bonds which are not necessarily biological, who share common values, interests, and goals.” Whiles communal values are,

Those values that express the appreciation of the worth and importance of the community, those values that underpin and guide the type of social relations, attitudes, and behavior that ought to exist between individuals who live together in a community, sharing a social life and having a sense of common good (Ibid, 1996: 36).

He further points out that social solidarity, harmony, and cooperation are values that are of great importance to the African people (Gyekye, 1996: 17). Hence the success or failure of an individual in a way affects the whole community. The communal structure is expressed in the proverb below.

“If one finger brought oil it soils the others” (TFA: Pg.89).

Obiereka used this proverb as he contemplates on the punishment Okonkwo has to endure for inadvertently killing a boy. This proverb highlights the communal life of Africans where one man’s joy or sorrow affects the community. Pobe brings out the difference between the communal life of Africans and Western individualism. He states that:

Whereas Descartes wrote for Westerners when he said cogito ergo sum– I think therefore I am– the ontology of the traditional African tends to be cognatus ergo sum– I am related by blood, therefore I exist or I exist because I belong to a family (Pobe 1979: 49).

This statement as well finds connection in Deacon’s statement that:

European individuality which was partly evident in the nature of Christian practices mediated in the missionary era is thus in opposition to the integral feature of African philosophy, which is communality (Deacon, 2008: 93).

Achebe points out this theme in different parts of his novel. For instance, when Ezeugo, the wife of Ogbuefi Odo was murdered by the people of Mbaino, Egbuefi Odo was not left alone to fight for himself but rather called for a communal response since they

considered her as a member of the community. As pointed out in the text, “Those sons of wild animals have dared to murder a daughter of Mbaino” (Pg.8). Ezeani the priest of the Earth goddess also expresses this theme when Okonkwo beat his wife Ojiugo during the week of peace.

The priest was very furious with Okonkwo’s action since it can bring calamity to the whole community. The priest expresses his fury thus: “the evil you have done can destroy the whole clan. The Earth goddess who you have offended may decline to give us her increase and we shall all perish” (Pg.22). One can go ahead to point out this theme in Obierika’s conversation with Okonkwo after the death of Ikemefuna. Having been disappointed in Okonkwo’s participation in killing Ikemefuna, Obierika states, “And let me tell you one thing, my friend. If I were you I would have stayed at home. What you have done will not please the Earth. It is the kind of action for which the goddess wipes out whole families” (Pg.47). Achebe succeeds in pointing out that for the Igbos, just as in most African societies, one does not live only as an individual but also as a member of the community. Examples of proverbs from the Agni of south-eastern Ivory Coast and the Ewes of Ghana further stress this point- *Ek’pho gumi zua mabi* (‘The lizard alone does not carry the burden of his own excrement’) and *deku dekae gblea detsi* (‘A single nut spoils the whole soup’) respectively. One can say that in African society, an individual is part of the community; therefore he benefits and shares in the misfortunes of others, and even in the guilt of their misdeeds.

3.9.2 Proverbs on African Traditional Religion

People express their beliefs, experiences, observations, hopes and fears in their utterances (Gloudblom 1979). It is no wonder that religion being an important element in African culture is expressed in many ways through their proverbs.

Chukwuka (TFA: Pg.129) which means ‘Chukwu is Supreme’ is a proverb-name used in TFA. Akunna uses this proverb-name as part of his conversation with one of the missionaries. A better understanding of this name demands an excerpt from the conversation.

We make sacrifices to the little gods, but when they fail and there is no one else to turn to then we go to Chukwu. It is right to do so. We approach a great man through his servants. But when his servants fail to help us, then we go to the last source of hope. We appear to pay greater attention to the little gods but that is not so ...Our fathers knew Chukwu is the overlord that is why they gave their children the name Chukwuka (Pg.129).

The proverbial-name clears the mistaken belief that Africans were introduced to God through the missionaries. In contrast to the Western religions that possess sacred literature as documentation for the existence of God, African Traditional religions do not possess such a written document. The idea of God to the African was, and still is revealed mainly through oral forms and testimonies. One of these is through myths, which convey certain ideas about human existence in the world. Quarcoopome (1987: 27) provides an example of myth that expresses the African believe in God. Ewes believe that *Mawu* is the creator of the universe and everything that is within. However, the sins of man are believed to have caused *Mawu* to take a permanent abode in the sky away from man sending his son *Lisa* to come and take control over the affairs of the world. The withdrawal of God to reside in the skies due to the behaviour of man is a shared myth among various African societies typically the Akan and Yoruba. Apart from myths, the idea of God is expressed through names and appellations. Some of these names and

appellations are *Onyankopon* (the only Great God) among the Asantes; and *Mawu* (the Supreme God) among the Ewes and *Elémîi* (owner of life) among the Yorubas. The idea of God is further revealed to the African through proverbs such as the Akan proverb, *Obiaa nkyere abɔfra Nyame* ('God needs no pointing out to a child'). This clearly suggests that, to the Akan, God's existence is so evident that even a child knows of His existence by instinct (Quarcoopome, 1987: 33). This idea of God is also evident in the pouring of libation, for instance, among the Ewes the supreme God (*Mawugã*) literally the greater God is first referred to before the lesser gods (*Mawuviwo*) and the ancestral deities (*ɲɔliwo*) during ritual performances.

Although these oral sources are mostly without written or historical evidences to ascertain their legitimacy, they give a clear indication of the African's knowledge of God. These oral sources therefore stress the fact that Africans had and still have the concept of the Supreme Being and that atheism is alien to African culture. Contrary to the misconception that Africans worship inanimate objects such as trees, stones, mountains, animals and ancestors, Africans believe in the Supreme Being but only engage these objects as intermediaries to communicate with the Supreme Being.

Emefie (1985: 321) gives an example of prayer offered to Chukwu:

Em Chukwu anokwo'm gi n'aka
The ikwuru g'eme
Onweghi ihe
ghara gi ghari

This translates as,
 God! I am in your hands!
 What you say will happen!
 Nothing baffles you!

The prayer expresses the Igbos recognition, belief and dependence on the supreme God who is able to influence their lives. These points emphasize the fact that, the Western religions were introduced into a society in which there was and still is a high level of religious consciousness including the belief in the supreme being but the people resort to Him through other spirit beings such as the ancestors which they believe are closer to Him. This religious practice of communicating with God through other medium is similar to what pertains in most African political systems where subjects communicate indirectly with their chiefs through their linguists.

“Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble” (TFA: Pg.19).

This proverb is still in response to Okonkwo’s rude comment made earlier. The cracking of palm-kernel symbolizes difficulty because the nut is hard to crack. The proverb presents an important moral value in African culture which is humility. The point of this proverb can be the need to be humble and not to undermine those who are less successful. This proverb therefore suggests that in addition to hard work, some people become successful through good luck or through the help of supernatural forces. The proverb therefore reflects the Igbo belief in supernatural forces that influence human life and the interaction of physical and non-physical beings in human existence.

“When a man says yes his chi says yes also (TFA: Pg.19).

This proverb was used in response to the statement made earlier that Okonkwo was just lucky in life or others will say his *chi* or personal god was good. This proverb points to an aspect of Igbo traditional religion. It has been pointed out earlier that *chi* or the personal

god occupies a central place in Igbo traditional religion. The reference to *chi* is replete in Achebe's *TFA* and Igbo culture as a whole. Okpala (2002: 561) gives an example of this type of proverb in the Igbo language as, *Onye kwe chi ya ekwe* ('If you say yes, your *chi* will say yes'). He adds that, *chi* is a spirit that is a person's best proximity to Chukwu. The concept of the soul is evident in other African societies. As pointed out by Quarcoopome,

Among the Yoruba the essence of being is the *Ori*, which is a symbol of *Ori-nu*, or the inner person. It controls, rules, guides and guards the person. The Mende call the soul *Ngafa*. It is the personality soul. A healthy one produces a state of wellbeing (*Gahun*); a weak one produces *Ganya* or sickness through the loss of weight. The Akans believe that the soul (*okra*) is the vitalizing force in man and is the last act of creation given directly by God. Its departure from the body means the death of the person (Quarcoopome 1987: 99).

It is implicit in Achebe's observation that in Igbo thought, a human being is incomplete without the *chi*, which is an invisible aspect of divinity, a manifestation of *Chi-ukwu* (Great *chi*) or Chukwu (God), which directs an individual in life and draws the individual to Chi-ukwu or Chukwu (Okpala 2002: 560). In some cases, *chi* is represented by certain objects through which people communicate with the divine. Emefie (1985: 326) notes that, for a man, *chi* is sometimes represented by a tree (*ogbu or egbo*) planted in front of his house, or a piece of wood about twelve inches long cut from the *egbo* tree. Women set up shrines for their *chi* with remnants taken from their mother's shrines. The shrine comprises of a small earthen mound over which a small roof is built to protect it from rain and sunshine. Achebe's use of *chi* in the proverb opens up the big debate about whether human beings are pre-determined beings or there is a free will. In another part of the book the use of *chi* agrees with the belief that, "A man receives his gifts or talents, his character and indeed his portion in life generally before he comes into the world" (Achebe, 1975: 65). This was said about Unoka in *TFA* that,

“He had a bad *chi* and poverty followed him to the grave” (Pg.13). Those with good *chi* are referred to as Chioma (Quarcoopome 1987: 99). The use of *chi* in this sense may challenge the freewill of an individual. This belief in determinism underlies some of the practices in African societies. For example, in some societies such as the Ewes, immediately a child is born, there is divination to find out his or her future. But Achebe’s use of *chi* in the proverb suggests that, although Okonkwo is born to a poor father like Unoka since he decided to be successful, he did his best to become one of the successful men in Umuofia. The point of this proverb seems to be that although spiritual forces play a role in people’s success or failure, the individual has a part to play in becoming a successful person or a failure.

“A child’s fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam its mother puts into its palm” (TFA: Pg.48).

Okonkwo used this proverb when Obierika blames him for playing a role in Ikemefuna’s death. This proverb was preceded by a statement by Okonkwo that “The Earth cannot punish me for obeying his messenger” (Pg.48). In the literal sense, this proverb seems to reflect on kinship, that is, on the relationship derived from consanguinity. In another sense, it also points out motherliness. The role that a mother plays in the proverb points to the bond between the mother and a child. The love a mother has for her child is considered as one of the highest form of love. A Kasena proverb presents a similar theme as, *Ba ná wɔge nu bu wó di se ba ná wɔge bu nu baa di* (‘if they roast mother child will eat but if child were roasted mother will not eat’). This proverb suggests the view that a parent’s commitment to the child exceeds that of a child to the parent, if the two types of commitment were to be compared (Awedoba, 2000: 217, 218).

Considering the dialogue within which this proverb is used, attention is drawn to Igbos believe in supernatural forces which can punish wrong doers. The comparison between a child and the mother is the symbolic representation between human beings and the spirit beings, in this case, Mother Earth. According to Opoku (1978: 57, 60)

Igbos refer to Mother Earth as *Ani*, *Ala*, *Ala* or *Ane*. She is regarded as the mother and a goddess who gave the Igbos all that they have...she is the source of human and accordingly exercises the main ritual sanctions in disputes and offences such as homicide, poisoning, stealing and adultery among others. She is regarded as the law giver and her priests are guardians of public morality. The Akans of Ghana refer to her as Asaase Yaa, Asaase Efua among the Fantis, and Maa-ndɔɔ among the Mendes.

The above proverb points to the belief in spiritual forces which award good and punish evil. It further reflects the role of religion in ensuring law and order in African society.

“Living fire begets cold, impotent ash” (TFA: Pg.111).

Okonkwo uses this proverb to express his displeasure over his son Nwoye who is not living up to his father's ideals. The use of the phrases – “living fire” and “cold impotent ash” symbolizes life and vibrancy on the one hand and coldness and hopelessness on the other hand. Okonkwo represents the living fire as evident in his names, “Roaring flame” and “flaming fire” (Pg.110). The expressions can be contrasted with Okonkwo's description of Nwoye (his eldest male child) as “degenerate and effeminate” (Pg.110). An Ewe proverb states this contrast between a child and the father as *Evi di to mewɔ to nugbe o* (‘A child looks like the father but does not behave like him’). The differences between father and son cannot be considered as a contradiction of the point made earlier that a child may take after the parent. It also suggests that, people can take after other members of their family other than their immediate parents, whether these people are dead or alive. As pointed out, “But Nwoye resembled his grandfather” (Pg.110). Since Nwoye exhibits the physical attributes of his grandfather; it would not be surprising if he takes after his

character. The proverb then draws attention to the belief in reincarnation. As stated earlier, “An ancestor may be reborn in a child..., the identity of the reincarnated ancestor is determined through physical resemblances, similarities in character, behavior...” (Bascom, 1969). Due to this belief in reincarnation, in African societies such as the Ewes of Ghana, whenever a child is born there is divination to find out the person who has reincarnated in the baby. This is referred to as *megbekpokpo* which literally means ‘looking at the past.’ A deeper understanding of this proverb draws attention to the relationship between kinship and religion. As Nukunya (1992: 12) confirms,

It is important to mention that it is the kinship system which determines those who will worship at a given ancestral shrine, the person who will officiate, which ancestral spirits should be invoked and where the rituals should be performed.

The above seems to be Okonkwo’s concern when one analyses his statement preceding the proverb. “To abandon the gods of one’s father and go about with a lot of effeminate men clucking like old hens was the very depth of abomination” (Pg.110). This religious theme brings out an aspect of African religious worship which has been termed “Ancestor worship.” Opoku (1978: 5) explains this as, “The rites performed in connection with the ancestors, such as libation and the offering of food to the ancestral spirits.” This religious practice is important to the African people and especially to their kinship because as Nukunya (1992: 12) puts it, “These beliefs and practices help to maintain the authority structure within the kinship system and to enhance the continuous working of existing relationships.” Okonkwo registers his deep concern through these words;

Okonkwo felt a cold shudder run through him at the terrible prospect, like the prospect of annihilation. He saw himself and his father crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man’s god (Pg.110).

It was as a result of Nwoye's disappointment to his father in terms of the above roles that prompted Okonkwo's use of the above proverb. Thus, stressing the role of the kin groups in perpetuating the family's religious worship and expresses the African belief in ancestral veneration in the hereafter.



3.9.3 Kinship

Some of the proverbs in *TFA* focus on other African customs such as kinship. Nukunya (1992: 17) defines kinship as social relationships derived from consanguinity, marriage and adoption. Kinship has different dimensions such as the political, religious, economic and social. As a social institution, the success or failure of an individual does not pertain to him/her alone but by other members of the family. This view is expressed in the proverb below.

“An old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb” (TFA: Pg.15).

The proverb was used after a conversation about Obiako who went to consult an oracle and he was told that his dead father wanted a goat as a sacrifice. Obiako’s reply to the oracle was that, they should ask his father if he ever had a fowl when he was alive. This provoked a lot of people to laugh except Okonkwo who laughed uneasily because he remembered his father who possessed next to nothing in his lifetime. This fact is pointed out as follows:

Unoka ...was a failure. He was poor and his wife and children had barely enough to eat. People laughed at him because he was a loafer, and they swore never to lend him any more money because he never paid back. But Unoka was such a man that he always succeeded in borrowing more, and piling up his debts...when Unoka died he had taken no title at all and he was heavily in debt (Pg.4;6).

The quote (above) reflects the fact that a father’s success or failure affects the child and vice versa. In a larger sense, any action put up by an individual does not affect the person alone but also his long distance relations. Awedoba (2000: 33) identifies a similar proverb among the Kasena as *Ba ná jege nubu kolɔɔ ba vei tega n ba ye gɛɛ mo* which translates as ‘When your kin is being put down or degraded you feel it.’ Additionally, the

proverb indicates that, the deeds of individuals do not die with them but still live in the memories of people hence the need to lead good lives while alive.

“Where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies?” (TFA: Pg.47)

An important aspect of the kinship institution is continuity via inheritance. This is because identities and other possessions of the elderly must be passed on to other members of the family and the right people to inheritance are determined by the kinship system. This will depend on whether the society practices the matrilineal or patrilineal system of descent.

This proverb was used by Okonkwo to express his disappointment in his children due to the fact that they are not able to display the boldness and courage that Okonkwo is known for. This is reflected in Okonkwo’s worry thus; “I tell you Obiereka, that my children do not resemble me” (Pg.47). The proverb suggests the fact that the older generation expects the younger ones to take after them. Legacy matters to some people. This is one of the reasons why people often worry so much if they do not have their own children even in some cases; preference is given to particular genders.

For example in Achebe’s *Arrow of God*, the reader is made to know that, although all the adult male children have their own apartment, that of the eldest son is small compared to the others because he is supposed to inherit his father’s apartment after his death. This inheritance is not only limited to physical structures but people are needed to take over and continue the worship and perform sacrifice to the gods and ancestors of the land. This point has already been discussed.

“When a mother-cow is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth” (TFA: Pg.50).

Obiereka’s younger brother made use of this proverb when Obiereka said that one of his sons Maduka is too smart “I sometimes think he is too sharp. He hardly ever walks...If you are sending him on an errand he flies away before he has heard half of the message” (Pg.50). Apart from the biological traits that children inherit from their parent, they also imitate and exhibit some of the things that their parents do. A Kasena proverb also makes this same point as *Kaleiŋa baka nu swolim yaga* (‘The Kaleiga fish does not fail to inherit its mother’s slippery skin’) (Awedoba, 2000: 95). It is therefore common that a lot of people take to their parent’s occupation and their ways of doing things, since the parents are the closest and first people with whom the children come into contact. Sometimes children imitate both positive and negative attitudes of their parents.

An Ewe proverb also makes this same point: *Akpa medzia vi woɖia adehe o* (‘The offspring of a fish does not resemble a crocodile). That is to say, although the crocodile and the fish are all aquatic animals, the fish does not mistakenly resemble the crocodile. An English saying reiterates this point that, “Like mother like daughter.” Due to the fact that children learn from their parents, parents are advised to live lives worthy of emulation.

“An animal rubs its aching flank on a tree but a man asks his kinsman to scratch him” (TFA: 119). The proverb was used by Uchendu, Okonkwo’s uncle as part of his prayer during the feast held by Okonkwo. This proverb was preceded by the comment that “...he prayed to the ancestors. He asked them for health and children. We do not pray to have more money but to have more kinsmen. We are better than animals because we have kinsmen” (Pg.119). It has been pointed out earlier that Africans live communal life. No

matter how successful a person is, he still needs to rely on other people for certain needs. This proverb brings to mind the idea of spheres of exchange in African cultures. Substantivists argue that, “In most African societies, economy exchange spheres were culturally embedded.” They stated further that even in those societies where currencies were used, they were restricted. Thus, the economies in most non-Western societies were ruled by “Social and contextual rather than economic and universalist analysis” (Cited in Piot, 1991: 407). Bohannan, commenting on the spheres of exchange among the Tiv notes that the gifts exchanged between people, may be a factor designed to strengthen their relationship, or even to create it (Bohannan, 1955: 60). Achebe augments our understanding about the relationship between kinship and the gift economy when he states in the following words:

Okonkwo was well received by his mother's kinsmen in Mbanta...he was given a plot of ground on which to build his compound, and two or three pieces of land on which to farm. Each of Uchendu's five sons contributed three hundred seed-yams to enable their cousin to plant a farm (Pg.93).

All these offers are without economic charges but are based on kinship ties. This proverb as already noted stresses the social obligation people have towards each other as members of kinship group and also reflects the relationship between African economic systems and their kinship. These offers strengthen the bond between Okonkwo and his mother's kinsmen so that if any of these kinsmen were to be in need Okonkwo would also be morally constrained to help. One of the closest people that anyone can have is one's family, especially children, parents and siblings. Children are one of the greatest asserts in Africa. It is therefore considered a woe not to have children in Africa hence people do whatever they can to have their own children. People also consult the gods and ancestors to help them have children. No wonder this request is always evident in their

prayers. For instance, during the marriage of Akueke, part of the prayer was that, “She will bear you nine sons like the mother of our town” (Pg.84). There are customs to congratulate women who have borne many children. For example, when Okonkwo’s first wife had born her third son in succession, Okonkwo slaughtered a goat for her (Pg.57). This explains Ekwefi’s bitterness and the kind of name she gives to her children: ‘Onwumbiko’ (‘Death I implore you’), ‘Ozoemena’ (‘May it not happen again’) and ‘Onwuma’ (‘Death may please itself’).

Apart from children, other relatives such as parents, siblings, uncles, aunties, cousins and even friends play important roles in an individual’s life. An example is how Okonkwo was welcomed by his mother’s kinsmen. It is therefore important to help people in need so that this action can be reciprocated if one were ever to need them.

Nneka (TFA: Pg.96).

Nneka which means mother is supreme is one of the proverbial-names used in TFA. This name as well reflects an aspect of kinship among the Igbo. Okonkwo’s uncle Uchendu refers to this name as he advises Okonkwo not to bemoan his exile to his mother’s land. He further explains his reason for using this name as, “We all know that a man is the head of the family and his wives do his bidding. A child belongs to its father and his family and not to its mother and her family. A man belongs to his fatherland and not his motherland and yet we say Nneka (Mother is Supreme) why is that?” (Pg.96). This proverb brings to mind the importance of patrilineal kinship or what Fortes (1969) describes as ‘complementary filiation’. The latter emphasizes the important roles played by the mother’s lineage in a patrilineal society (cited in Awedoba, 2000: 53). This

suggests the fact that even in patrilineal systems the mother's family still has a role to play in an individual's life.

3.9.4 Other Proverbs

The proverbs below are those that do not fall under the above groups, but comment on other aspects of the society. Hence they will be categorized as other proverbs. As pointed out earlier, most of these proverbs are based on observation about people which are formulated into proverbial words to stress on the beliefs, customs and values of the societies. Since these proverbs are built through observation of the environment in its totality, they as well bring to the fore different aspects of the peoples culture, such as their vegetation, climate and animal life.

"A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches" (TFA: Pg.47).

This proverb is used by Okonkwo in response to Obierika's statement that, "You worry yourself for nothing the children are still young" (Pg.47). This proverb suggests the fact that a person's traits can be identified even while he is a child. One way in which these characteristics are identified among children is during play. For example, oral tradition has it that some of the contests that were held for children were useful means through which warriors; leaders, soloists and other leaders were identified and recruited. Oyekan (2005: 24) identifies a similar proverb among the Yoruba as 'a child that will turn out to be peerless, it is from childhood that he or she distinguishes himself or herself' (*Omoti yó j àṣàmú Kékeré ló ti ñṣenu ṣámú-ṣámú*).

“Proverbs are regarded as the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (TFA: Pg.5).

This proverb was preceded by the statement that, among the Igbos, the art of conversation is regarded very highly. This proverb can be regarded as a proverb about proverbs. The comparison of proverbs with palm-oil in the first place suggests how frequent proverbs are used in conversation just as palm oil is frequently used in preparing food among the Igbos. The truth of such a proverb is evident in most Igbo writings and conversations. Achebe is known for the use of proverbs in his writings and this is evident in his three books namely *TFA*, *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease*. This proverb suggests the idea that just as palm-oil helps to make food palatable, the use of proverbs helps to spice up speech and make it more interesting and less boring. Oyekan (2005: 12) commenting on the role of proverbs among Yorubas says:

Resort to proverbs is the most important and most effective strategy the Yoruba have devised to optimize the efficaciousness of speech. The culture's richness in them bears out the Yoruba insistence that bereft of proverbs; speech flounders and falls short of its mark.

He emphasizes the point with the Yoruba proverb, *Òwe lẹsin - bá sọ̀nù, òwe la fì ñwá a* ('the proverb is the horse of speech. When speech is lost; the proverb is the means we use to hunt for it').

“The sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them” (TFA: Pg.6).

Unoka uses this proverb when Okoye asks him to pay back his debt. This was after Unoka told Okoye that, “You see, I owe that man a thousand cowries. But he has not come to wake me up in the morning for it. I shall pay you but not today” (Pg.6). This proverb may be interpreted as, there is the need to address matters in the order of

importance, and that is to say, first things must be done first. A Kasena proverb also makes this point as *Sɔŋɔ tu we obaada bebala yenyɔna ŋwaane se o jwoni maŋe da*. ('The head of compound says he cannot neglect his ritual duties to the ancestors on account of the sad countenance exhibited by a billy goat') (Awedoba, 2000: 131). The proverb may be referred to when an individual is expected to prioritize, for example, if he/she has to do a lot of things but he decides to do one before the other. Oyekan (2005: 90) gives an example of a similar proverb among the Yoruba as, *A kì í fì tsílpa làpálápá* ('One does not ignore leprosy to treat a rash') That is to say, more serious problems deserve more immediate attention.

"A toad does not run in the day time for nothing" (TFA: Pg.15).

The proverb was used by Ogbuefi Idigo after saying that Obiako the palm-wine tapper has suddenly given up his trade. He then continues to say that there must be a reason for Obiako's behavior. This proverb suggests the fact that nothing happens by chance hence the need to ask questions and not just accept everything at face value or draw hasty conclusions. It is this understanding of the world that makes people to always inquire about the past and the future through divination. For example, after the death of Ekwefi's second child, Okonkwo had gone to a diviner to inquire of the cause of the child's death (Pg.55). Even for cases that seem trivial, people go to investigate the cause, and find out where and when something would or has happened and seek possible intervention. A Kasena proverb makes this same point as *Tete zuŋa ba zaŋe kafe* 'The night bird does not fly without a good cause' (Awedoba, 2000: 76). This proverb stems from the observation made by the Igbos that toads are nocturnal animals and normally do not hop about during the day and to see a bird fly during the night it means an enemy pursues it.

The message of these proverbs is that, there is always a reason for unexpected occurrences. This idea is evident in the Ewe proverb, *Agɔ mefoa nu dzro o* ('a fan palm tree does not rustle for nothing'). When the leaf of a palm tree rustles, the reason for it is that the wind is blowing. As a popular saying puts it, 'There is no smoke without fire.'

"The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he will praise himself if no one else did" (TFA: Pg.16).

Okonkwo applies this proverb to stress the fact that he is hard working as he said, "I am not afraid of work. I began to fend for myself at an age when most people still suck at their mother's breast" (Pg.16). Lizard and iroko tree as used in the proverb serve as a pointer to the kind of vegetation zone within which this particular proverb emanates. The effort made by the lizard to jump from the Iroko tree deserves appreciation considering the height it drops. The saying is based on the observation of the behaviour of the lizard. It is observed that if the lizard falls from an altitude, it lies where it falls and nods as if to assure itself that it has done a great job. This proverb suggests the need to be self-confident. Although complacency is not a desired trait in African societies, there is the need to be self-confident in what one can do or has done and to pride oneself accordingly. This idea is presented in an Ewe proverb as, *Ame ɲutɔe yɔa efe akplekɔ be akplekɔ* 'One should call his own banku (starchy cassava food), banku' or *Ame deke metsɔa mia si fia efe du o*. ('Nobody points at his hometown using the left hand'). Among the Ewes, the left hand is considered unclean and inappropriate hence is not used in most activities such as greetings and eating. The left hand is used in cleaning one's anus. As such, to point at something with the left hand shows a sign of disrespect. One message that can be deduced from this proverb is that there is the need to look at the positive aspects of life

and not always be quick to point at the negatives. The proverb admonishes individuals to be persistent in their endeavours; it also indicates that, people's efforts must be appreciated to encourage them to do more. In another sense this proverb also suggests that the public will not lavish praises in all cases, and if they do not one should not be despaired.

“Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has also learnt to fly without perching” (TFA: Pg.16).

Nwakibie employs this proverb when Okonkwo came to ask him for yam seeds for planting. According to Nwakibie, “Many young men have come to me to ask for yams but I have refused because I knew they will just dump them in the soil and leave them to be choked by weeds. I have learnt to be stingy with my yams” (Pg. 16). This proverb used this way suggests the fact that people's behaviors change depending on the situation. The proverb suggests the need to be innovative and not continue to do things the same way as is always done but to find out other means to improve one's ways of doing things. Adhering to tradition does not necessarily mean one should be static. Achebe in his book *Arrow of God* (1964) says this in another way thus: “The world is like a Mask dancing. If you want to see it well you do not stand in one place” or “A man must dance the dance prevailing in his time.” An Ewe proverb also says, *Ne wole yedu ya vugbea trɔa dewo trɔ denu* (‘You change your dance patterns to suit the changes of the drum pattern’). Awedoba identifies a similar theme in Kasena proverb as, *Manlaa we n ná diini twio nji ko vɔɔ* (‘The chameleon says when on a tree it assumes the color of the tree’). These proverbs suggest adaptation to prevailing circumstances and situations as survival strategy (Awedoba, 2000: 204). The proverb suggests the need to be crafty in order to

suit the changing situations. These proverbs drive home the point that in every changing situation, there is the need for innovation and adaptation since necessity is said to be the father of invention. The proverb suggests the need to challenge the ways of doing things in the past in order to survive in the present.

‘As our fathers say “*You can tell a ripe corn by its look*” (TFA: Pg.16).

Nwakibie uses this proverb to affirm that he has confidence in Okonkwo as a hardworking man. It confirms the point he made about Okonkwo that, “But I can trust you. I know it as I look at you” (Pg.16). The proverb suggests that a successful person can be identified by his attitude towards work. It further illustrates that people observe the actions of others and this can have influence on the perceptions they form. It is, therefore, an admonition that there is the need to always do everything with all seriousness since others watch. This proverb seems to contradict the saying that, “Appearances are deceptive.” But it should be noted that, Nwakibie’s conclusion about Okonkwo was not made based on cursory observation (within a short time) but upon continuous observation.

“*The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it will soon grow another*” (TFA: Pg. 123).

The proverb emphasizes the point that the misfortune that befell Okonkwo made him lose his influence in his clan. As pointed out in the text, “A man’s place was not always there waiting for him, as soon as he left, someone else rose and filled it” (Pg.123). A Kasena proverb has it as follows, *Pe ná zaŋe o dwoŋi mo wó leiri* and this translates as, ‘When one chief falls another replaces’ (Awedoba 2000: 141). These proverbs stress the idea that one needs to always uphold his integrity since a fault can cause one his/her downfall and earlier achievements become futile. This proverb is also an admonition especially to

people in authority to be very careful since society looks up to them, their faults become easily noticed. It is said that a leader's fault is a leading fault. In another sense, this proverb points to the fact that nobody is indispensable. There can always be a substitution when someone fails to perform or is absent. The proverb also shows that people should not become so proud and arrogant as a result of their skills or abilities since there are others who can perform to the same standard, if not better when given the opportunity.

3.9.5 Form of Entertainment

“When the moon is shining, the cripple becomes hungry for a walk” (TFA: Pg.7).

This proverb was used to emphasize the point made earlier that, “On moonlight days happy voices of children playing in open fields are heard and those not so young will be playing in pairs in less open places and old men and women would remember their youth.” (Pg.7). The proverb suggests the kind of living condition of the people where people are not always confined indoors as in the self-contained houses of today or even in the European context. The statement preceding the proverb also suggests the kind of entertainment that the people engaged in at the time, unlike today where modern technology provides a form of entertainment for people through television, radio and the internet.

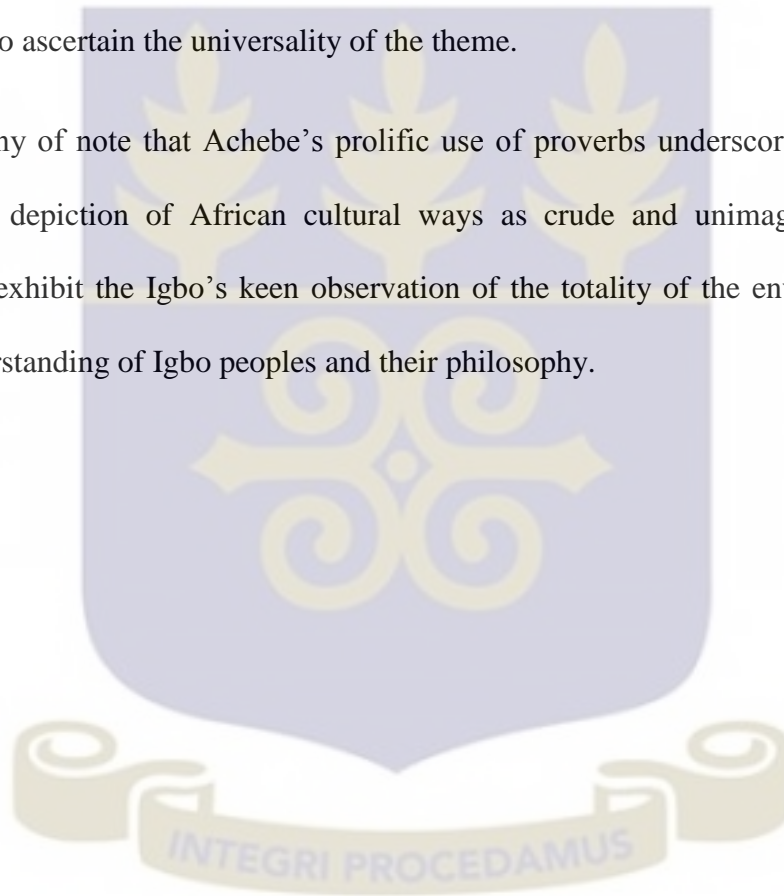
3.10 Chapter Summary

From the above, it can be realized that the proverbs in *TFA* play an immense role in understanding the novel and aspects of Igbo culture. An attempt to regard proverbs as mere aesthetic aspect of language ignores their reflective role and undermine the true understanding of the intended message. This point is echoed by Lindfors that:

Achebe's proverbs can serve as keys to an understanding of his novels because he uses them not merely to add touches of local color but to sound and reiterate themes, to sharpen characterization, to clarify conflicts, and to focus on the values of the society he is portraying (Lindfors, 2009: 56).

Furthermore, Achebe's use of local speech patterns such as proverbs, folktales and song, in addition to local terms such as *iroko* and *eneke* among others, is an effective way of indigenizing the English language and making it more suitable to its new context. This chapter has also presented some insightful examples of proverbs from different African societies to ascertain the universality of the theme.

It is worthy of note that Achebe's prolific use of proverbs underscores his criticism of European depiction of African cultural ways as crude and unimaginative. His Igbo proverbs exhibit the Igbo's keen observation of the totality of the environment and the rich understanding of Igbo peoples and their philosophy.



CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS OF PROVERBS IN *SUNDIATA: AN EPIC OF OLD MALI*

(*SUNDIATA*)

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the proverbs in *Sundiata* in relation to the social system of the Mandes. For a better understanding of this chapter, there is the need to give a background of the book. This will take into account the epic tradition in Africa and a background of the griot in the Mande society. The work will also proceed to comment on the social system of the Mandes and then analyze the proverbs in *Sundiata*.

4.2 The Epic Tradition in Africa

Before engaging in a work that borders on African epic, it is important to touch on the much debated issue of whether epic exists in Africa. The question of the existence of epic in Africa which was ignited by Finnegan has generated considerable debate among scholars worldwide. Finnegan made the assertion that:

Even though the epic is assumed to be the typical poetic form of non-literate people at a certain stage, it does not seem to be borne out by the African experience since in the form of a relatively long narrative poem, epic hardly seems to occur in Sub-Saharan Africa (Finnegan (1970: 308).

She made this assertion because according to her, “The texts are published as prose narratives rather than as poetic narratives, Africa’s non-conformance to the thesis of the heroic age and the fact that certain scholars have incorrectly described praise poetry as epic poetry” (Ibid,1970: 308).

On the issue of epic, Bowra (1952: 11) also argues that:

Though African poems and many others like them show a real admiration for active and generous manhood, they come from peoples who have no heroic poetry and have never advanced beyond panegyric and lament. The intellectual effort required for such an advance seems to have been beyond their powers.

Bowra continues by pointing out that,

The African poet's outlook is limited to the actual present and he does not conceive of great events in an objective setting. Indeed this restriction of outlook may be the reason why African tribes in general have no heroic poetry. The present so absorbs and occupies them that they feel no need to traffic with the past and imaginary (Bowra 1952: 12).

This assertion is out of place when one considers the presence of griots in Africa and their role as custodians of the history of many African societies and particular story telling traditions. Although references have earlier been made, suffice it to say that the *xotutu* among the Southern Ewes of Ghana plays an instrumental role in relaying historical facts through stories and songs.

Various scholars such as Johnson (1980), Thiery (2005), Biebuyck (1976) and Okpewho (1975) have dispelled Finnegan and Bowra's assertion and have given their definitions of epic that agree with what is considered as epic in Africa. Biebuyck (1976: 5) has defined the epic as "Long, orally transmitted poetic narratives in an episodic manner and presented intermittently." Thierry as well defines epic as "a lengthy narrative poem describing in lofty language the achievements of a heroic personage whose accomplishments either contribute to the development of a race or nation or reflect the ideals of a culture" (Thierry 2005: 96). From these definitions, one can say that the narration about the Mande ruler, (Sundiata) qualify as an epic, because it recounts the exploits and history of a hero.

4.3 Overview of the Griots in Mande Society

There are peculiar terms for the word griot in different societies. Among the Wolof, they are referred to as *guewel* sometimes spelled *gewel*. The Mandinka refer to them as *jali* with *jalimuso* for women and *jali ke* for men. The Soninké refer to them as *geséré* or *gesseré*. The Hausa-speaking peoples of Northern Nigeria and Western Niger term griots as *marok'a*, with *marok'i* for the male and *marok'iya* for the female (Hale, 1998: 350-355).

Hale proceeds to provide some theories for the origin of the word griot. The first explanation is that the term comes from the French and therefore denotes a colonial impact. This view is based on the fact that Saint-Lô's Guiriot is the earliest ancestor who used the term griot (Ibid, 1998: 357).

Monteil (1968: 778) suggests that the term griot is of African origin specifically from the Berbers and from the Hassaniya Arabic dialect spoken in Northwest Africa. Among these people, the local name for the griot is *iggio*, *iggiw* or *igggow* which is Berber. The word griot might come directly from *iggio* with a floating r- as the old form of griot shows, *guiriot* (Cited in Hale, 1998: 360).

Bird (1971: 16) proposes that the term griot is of Mande origin.

Griot is a Frenchified African word. In the earliest references found in French texts, the word is spelled "gueriau" or "guirot(e)." It can be realized that *jeli* and *griot* are from the same source. Velar consonants such as k and g palatalize in Bambara so the original form *geeli* becomes *jeeli*. In many dialects, l after a long high vowel becomes r. *Geli* would thus become *geri*. All the dialects of Mandenkan once had a definite article suffix, the form of which was o. This suffix was always present in citation forms. Thus the early French explorers most likely heard a word like *gerio*.

Conrad (2006: 76) provides a background of griots in Mande society. He writes as follows:

Among the people of Mande heartland, oral tradition is in the domain of *jeliw* (griots) that were born into specialized occupational groups collectively known as *nyamakalaw*. The *nyamakalaw* are blacksmiths and porters (*numuw*), leatherworkers (*garankéw*), *jeliw* specializing in Islamic texts (*funéw or finaw*), and *jeliw* who are musicians, oral traditionists and public speakers. The *jeli* occupation is most closely related to music and the oral arts, but any *nyamakalaw* with verbal gifts and the opportunity to profit by them could engage in those activities.

Apart from the commonly known function of griots as praise-singers, there are myriad of activities that the griots perform. According to Hale, griots perform functions such as, “Genealogist, historian, adviser, spokesperson, diplomat, mediator, interpreter and translator, musician, composer, teacher, exhorter, warrior, witness and master or participant in a lot of ceremonies” (Hale, 1998: 57).

4.4 A Brief Background of *SUNDIATA*

In order to give an account of the Sundiata Epic, it is prudent to give a background of Sundiata, the epic hero. The name has been referred to in different ways by different authors. Johnson (1992) refers to him as Sonjara while in Niane’s version he is called Sundiata. Niane (1965), in his introduction tried to trace the lineage of Sundiata. He writes that the Mandingoes of Mali are not indigenous citizens but they come from the East. He adds that the first ancestor of Mandingoes named Bilali Boumana was a servant to Prophet Mohammed. Bilali had seven sons of which the eldest was Lawalo who also begot a son, Latal Kalabi, Latal had Damul who then had Lahilatoul. Lahilatoul had two sons; Boumba (elder) and Dauman (younger). Boumba then had Mamadi Kani for a son (Niane 1965: 3). Niane then continues to situate Sundiata in the lineage.

Mamadi Kani had four sons which were Kani Simbom, Kmignogo Simbom, Kabala Simbom and Simbom Tagnogokelin. It was the lineage of Tagnogokelin which held on to power; his son was M’Bali Nèné whose son was Bello, Bello’s son was Bakon he had a

son called Maghan Kon Fatta who was also known as Maghan Keigu he was the father of Sundiata. Sogolon Kedjou was the mother of Sundiata (Ibid, 1965: 3).

The son of Sogolon was named on the eighth day. He was called Maghan after the father and Mari Djata, a name which no Mandingo prince has ever borne. Sogolon's son was then referred to as Sogolon Djata, thus prefixing his mother's name to his. Sundiata or Sonjata therefore became a corruption of Sogolon Djata (Niane, 1965: 14).

The Sundiata epic has been written by various authors such as the *Epic of Sonjara*, translated and written by John William Johnson; *Sunjata: A West African Epic of the Mande Peoples* by David C. Conrad and the *Epic of Sundiata* written by D.T. Niane.

This research relies on the *Epic of Sundiata* by D.T Niane. This is because it is one of the versions commended by most scholars. As Austen puts it,

The single written version of Sunjata that has already achieved something like canonical status in classrooms as well as the footnotes of colleagues in both oral literature and Mande studies is that of D.T Niane. Niane manages to capture at least some of the diction of the *jeli* as well as incorporating into his narrative the genres of song, praise-poem, proverb and riddle in a form consistent with Mande epic performance. All these give archaic flavor to the form (Austen, 1999: 1).

Of critical importance to this study is the fact that Niane's version is captured in the prose form, hence making it much more convenient to use in a study which focuses on proverbs. The proverbs in this version, like *TFA*, are clearly stated for better understanding.

4.5 Origin and Location of the Mandes

The Mandingo empire of Mali arose from the old Ghana empire. Davidson (1968: 76) writes that:

With the collapse of the Ghana empire, a previously subject people took advantage of the chaos and gained independence. Among these people are the Mandinka of the little state of Kangaba on the bank of upper-Niger. Their success is said to be due to the strength and skill of some of their early rulers notably Sundiata Keita. But the

conventional date of Mali's appearance on the scene is assigned to a great battle at Krina in about 1240 when Sundiata triumphed over his main enemy. This was Sumanguru king of the people of Tekur.

The word 'Mali' according to Dalfosse (1929), is derived from the West African ethnic group called Fulani, and is not actually a Mande word. The first settlers of the region were North Africans and they probably picked up the name of the region from the Fulani merchants involved in the trans-Saharan slave trade. Another account for the word Mali involves natural sound shift in the language. In that etymology, the alveolar segment /nd/ shifts to /l/ and the terminal vowel denasalizes and raises thus "Manden" shifts to /Mali/ (Cited in Johnson, 1982: 104). Niane (1965: 85) provides another version of the origin of the name Mali thus:

Mali in the Mandingo language means "hippopotamus" and it is not impossible that Mali was the name given to one of the capitals of the emperors. One tradition tells us that Sundiata changed himself into a hippopotamus in the Sankarani river. So it is not astonishing to find villages in old Mali which have Mali for a "name". This name could have formerly been that of a city. In old Mali there is one village called Malikoma which means "New Mali."

Geographically, the Mande live across the savannah heartland of Western Africa in countries like Gambia, Guinea, Sierra-Leone, Senegal, Niger and Burkina Faso among others. The geographical distribution of Mande-speakers has diverse explanations. Hrbek (1992: 258) writes that:

As the great bulk of the Mande is represented just by the Mandenka, it was for a long time held that the original home of all Mande was situated in the upper Senegal-Niger region in present-day Mali. It was further reasoned that all the other Mande-speakers were offshoots of successive migratory waves from this original center.

The inhabitants of Mali call themselves Maninka (e) or Mandinka (e) or Mandingo. Malli and Mallinke are the Fulani deformations of the word Manding and Mandinka respectively (Niane, 1965).

The term 'Mandingo' or 'Manding' denotes:

... dialects of a Mande language group which has been called the Bambara-Maninka-Dyula dialect cluster. These dialects are spoken by approximately three million people over a vast geographical area extending into ten West African nations (Spears, 1972: 281).

Mandingo as well refers to the cultural group.

The people who trace their ancestry to the Mande, Mandingo, Bambara, Dyula, Kuranko and Wangara, are dispersed throughout the West African Savannah, from the Gambian coast in the West, eastward to Ouagadougou in Upper Volta(now Burkina Faso), and from the Mauritania border in the north to Abidjan in the South (Bird and Kendall, 1980: 13).

Despite the differences in the geographic locations of all these people they are regarded as the same people. Ibid (1980: 13) point out that:

The modern descendants of the original people of the Mande speak dialects of Mandekan and ... all share socio-cultural values defining kinship, political organization, and economic activities. That which unifies the Mande people culturally... is not simply recognition of common ancestry; it is rather a system of commonly held beliefs, philosophy, ideology, or cosmology which defines appropriate behavior for individual actors and allow in turn the interpretation of behavior of others.

The research proceeds to point out some cultural features that characterize the Mandes.

4.6 Vegetation

Harrison (1960: 240) describes the Mali landscape as, "Very flat but well known for its vivid sandstone mountains and plateaux which are limited by steep scarps."

Writing about the vegetation of the Mandingos, Okpewho (1979: 21) points out that:

The vegetation is thin and low, and the animals as well as the human forms stand out in slender relief against the background of scanty bush. There is little in the savannah flora that would supply the kind of stout, lusty wooden material necessary for rotund figures.

4.7 Agriculture

Brooks (1989: 35) notes that the Mandekan speakers live dispersed across the savannah heartland of Africa. The savannah environment is appropriate for the cultivation of cotton. The people also grow other crops such as rice and millet. Niger is very important

in their agriculture because crop production depends on the irrigation system or flooding from the Niger River. Harrison (1960: 244) emphasizes that:

The Niger and its tributaries are the life-givers of Mali Republic. Water is used for rice cultivation, the rivers for navigation and for fishing; and it would appear that, in the Inland Delta region at least, rainfall is increased by the amount of water in the many channels of the river.

4.8 Occupation

It is important to look at some of the activities of the Mande people and how they made their living in order to understand some of the references made in their proverbs.

Hrbek (1992: 261) says that:

Mandes are known as having contributed many skills, such as techniques of iron working and cotton weaving. The earliest Mande speakers were primarily hunters and warriors. Subsequent waves of Mande migrants introduced rice cultivation; together with iron implements for intensive farming of forest areas by slash and burn methods.

They are also noted for long distance trades including the production of cotton textiles in large quantities which were carried to the south by the Mande traders to barter for kola, malaguetta pepper and other commodities available in the savannah-woodland and the forest zones and salt from the coastal suppliers (Brooks 1989: 35).

4.9 Social System of the Mandes

The social system of the people cannot be left out following the theoretical framework chosen for this research which demands information about the general socio-cultural context of the people whose proverb is being analyzed. The social system of a people plays immense role in their oral traditions. It is therefore essential to provide background information about the Mande people.

4.9.1 Religion

Religion, being an indispensable aspect of Mande culture cannot be left out on issues bothering on the people's culture. Conrad (2006: 83, 84) asserts thus:

The Mande, like other African people believe in the power of the deities, spirits and the ancestors. In Manding societies, there are still people who follow the old pre-Islamic spiritual practices of the ancestors, involving sacrifice and other forms of ritualized communication with a variety of spirits believed to inhabit secluded groves, rock formations or bodies of water found everywhere in the countryside.

At a certain point in their history, the Mandes came into contact with people of Islamic background and this affected their religion. This is also opined by Conrad when he opines that:

Some people of the broader Mande cultural family have been exposed to Islam since at least the tenth century when Muslim traders crossed the Sahara desert to conduct trade with the Soninke of the Ghana Empire, which was locally known as the Wagadu (Conrad, 2006: 84).

Similarly, Levtzion and Hopkins (1981) also write that,

The process through which characters from Islamic literature came to occupy important roles in Manding oral tradition probably began at a very early date. The respected Arab geographer al-Bakri wrote in the year 1068 that there were significant Muslim populations already occupying towns of the Manding peoples and their neighbors in the western Sahel (Cited in Conrad, 1985: 36).

However, a majority of Mande people are either Muslims or they practice a mixture of Islam and the indigenous system of belief. "At some point the Soninke and the Mande branches began to conceive Islam as a source of significant spiritual power that could be added to the indigenous power sources that they possessed" (Conrad, 2006: 84).

4.10 Political System

Austen provides some information on the political aspects of the Mande society as follows:

Among the Mandes, authority in the village level is shared by two office holders, one with political credentials and one with a ritual commission. Both of these men are the elders at the sub lineage tier of the two dominant families, and their offices are held by the authority of the legendary charter of the founding of the village. The first patrilineal family believed to have settled in the area is usually granted the ritual chieftaincy. Again, the eldest member of the core lineage of the family becomes the ritual chief (*dugu-kolo-tigi*) or earth surface master whose functions are mostly ritualistic. It is said that this man is the spiritual mediator between the local earth priest and the village farmers and is his duty to maintain a balanced relationship between them by means of such occult activities as might be needed in any given situation. The force behind this authority is based on the belief that an ancestor of the ritual chief was the first immigrant to the area and had to come to terms with the ritual spirit of the land thus he maintains a cordial relationship with those spirits and is most qualified to mediate with them for the rest of immigrants and inhabitants of the area (Austen, 1999: 11, 12).

Apart from the important roles played by these religious leaders, the people also recognize other political leaders. McCall and Stewart (1979: 43) admit that, "... for Mali the regional government under the agent of the King is reasonably well understood in its general outlines. Austen points out further that among these Mande people,

The village political chief (*dugu-tigi*), earth/village master is usually associated with power struggle in a legend composed in a part of the mythical charter of the village. Sometimes the sub lineage whose elder holds this office is thought to be the conqueror of the area whose ancestor prevented an external conquest in some time past, thus gaining the right to rule over the area. The other sub lineages of the village are ranked according to the legendary account of their temporal arrival in the village. These tenets apply to the free born (*horon*) only (Austen, 1999: 12).

The researcher is aware of the fact that the social system of these societies that have been pointed out focus on the pre-colonial period and changes might have occurred in recent times. Nonetheless, they are relevant and critical to the discussion pertaining to proverbs since the proverbs in the texts of analysis were as well employed during these periods.

4.11 Analysis of the Proverbs in *SUNDIATA*

It has been established in this work that oral sources provide useful avenues into the cosmology of a people. One of such oral sources that can be regarded as useful material for historicity is the *Sundiata epic*. Conrad (1985: 33) asserts that:

Certain oral traditions preserved by the bards or 'griots' of the Manding-speaking populations in twentieth-century Mali and neighboring regions of West Africa have

been of special interest to historians because they refer to ancient periods for which documentary evidence is extremely scarce. An example of a prominent tradition that has received a good deal of attention in this respect is the legend of Sunjata.

This discussion continues with an examination of the proverbs in Sundiata to unravel some aspects of Mande ways of life and thought from their proverbs. As Crystal (1971: 19) observes:

It is impossible to conceive of a rational being, or of a society, without implying the existence of a language. Language and thinking are so closely related that any study of the former is bound to be a contribution to our understanding of the human mind.

An Analysis of these proverbs reveals the various aspects of the way of life of the Mande and that of the African society in general. These proverbs fall under various aspects of Mande culture such as their religion, kinship, customs and values, their ecology among others.

4.11.1 Religion

Religion is a central part of African culture and it is always manifesting in issues that pertain to the culture of the African people, the work proceeds to explore the religious concepts in the proverb below.

“Our action is not us but it is commanded of us” (SUNDIATA: Pg.28).

The point of this proverb is the issue of destiny and the existence of powers that influence and control our destiny. This observation stems from the fact that although Sassouma Berete, Sogolon’s co-wife succeeded in forcing Sogolon and her children to exile, she was rather helping Sundiata fulfill his destiny since the hardships and trials of exile were rather training grounds that would fortify Sundiata in his quest for the throne. As pointed out, “We poor creatures we think we are hurting our neighbor at a time when we are working in the direction of destiny” (Pg.28). This saying suggests the belief in external

forces that coordinate the affairs of man hence there is both a spiritual and physical dimension to life. Apart from that the proverb unveils the belief that human beings are predetermined beings and all that will happen on earth have already been planned before the person is born, hence everything happens in fulfillment of destiny. This seems to be an opposition to an aspect of the Igbo idea of destiny that everything in life has been predestined which is expressed in the Igbo proverb, “when a man says yes his chi also says yes”. This notion of destiny is evident in various African religious thoughts such as *Nkrabea* among the Akans and *Sé* or *Dzogbesé* among the Ewes. In case of the Akans for example, Quarcoopome (1987: 106) notes that:

Destiny is known as *nkrakea*. This word is made up of *kra* (to bid farewell or take leave of) and *bea* (the way or manner of doing something). Thus *nkrabea* literally means the way or manner in which the soul bids farewell to Onyame before its departure into the world. The *nkrabea* describes the soul’s place or lot in this world. The destiny is fixed beforehand therefore in principle unalterable.

According to Gaba (1971), for the Ewes, there is the belief that:

The life soul or *Dzogbese* is believed to bring from the Supreme Being the life plan of every man at birth. This plan is predetermined by the Supreme Being. Every step whether good or bad taken by every person in the material world is considered to go strictly according to the items of his own predetermined destiny (Cited in Anyidoho 1983: 217).

In the case of Sundiata it has been said even before he was born, that he will succeed to his father’s throne. Despite his physical challenges, which were pointed out as, “He had nothing of the great beauty of his father Naré Maghan. He had a head so big that he seemed unable to support it; he had eyes which will open wide whenever someone entered his mother’s house” (Pg.15), Sundiata still succeeded his father. The issue of destiny is also evident in Alta Jablow’s book, *Gassire’s lute*. In this book it is realized that although Gassire did all he could to succeed his father’s throne including sacrificing his seven sons; despite being first born son, and the rule of primogeniture favoring him

he could not succeed his father. Gassire at the end became a singer as was foretold by the soothsayer. That is to say that – in his case – destiny can outwit tradition. This issue has been pointed out clearly: “...You, perhaps, will be a king. You can do nothing about it. You on the other hand, will be unlucky but you can do nothing about that either. Each man finds his way already marked out for him and he can change nothing about it” (Pg.15). One can argue that soothsayers play a role in this issue of destiny since it might be possible that those who have received prognosis for future greatness strive for excellence while those who have been told that they will fail resign to fate or divine providence. This can be likened to the case of Sundiata who did all to become a king as foretold by the soothsayer. Even in this case, one can argue that the power of destiny can still be the force that influences the soothsayers to come out with what they say, since most people who even try all they can to defy what was said by the soothsayers end up fulfilling the soothsayer’s prediction as in the case of Gassire which was cited earlier. It should be noted that this issue of humans as pre-determined beings exist in principle but in practice there can be a remedy. Quacoopome (1987: 104) notes that a person’s destiny can be altered through the intercession of divinities which serve as delegated authority from God; through the malevolent activities of witches, wizards and sorcerers and through propitiatory sacrifices, a person can appease the soul to alter a bad destiny.

4.11.2 Proverbs on Kinship

Robin (1967: 33) describes kinship broadly as the relations between ‘kin.’ Nukunya (1992: 17) points out further that this social relationship is derived from consanguinity, marriage and adoption. The kinship system determines inheritance, as to who will inherit

what from whom. It as well determines the rules of succession and marriage. In the case of marriage the kinship system determines which marriage is incestuous or not.

“Each is the child of his mother” (SUNDIATA: Pg.22).

This sentence might be considered so simple and obvious, and it might be asked why the need to bother about it, let alone consider it as a proverb. But considering the discourse within which it emerged, it can be realized that there is more to its literal meaning. It is intended to emphasize the strong influence parents, especially mothers, have on their children. This statement was made when comparing Sogolon Djata and Dankaran Touman and it was concluded that the two boys reflect the behaviors of their mothers. It was said about Dankaran that:

The king was so colorless, for his mother has never shown the slightest respect to her husband and never in the presence of the late king, did she show that humility which every wife should show before her husband (Pg.22).

In the case of Sundiata, it was said that “The more a wife loves and respects her husband, and the more she suffers for her child, the more valorous will the child be one day” (Pg.22). Sogolon Djata’s influence on Sundiata is further expressed through the statement underneath:

Every evening Sogolon Kedjou will gather Djata and his companions outside her hut. She would tell them stories about the beast of the bush...Sogolon Djata learnt to distinguish between the animals, he also learnt the names of the medicinal plants which every hunter should know. Thus between his mother and his griot, the child got to know all that there needed to be known.

The quote suggests that apart from the genetic traits that children inherit from their parents, they also emulate their ways of doing things. Hence parents are encouraged to live good lives that their children can emulate. Sogolon’s motherly role implanted in his

son becomes more evident as Sundiata moved out of his father's palace. When Sogolon and her family got to the palace of Mema, it was said that "The king and his brother had not taken their eyes off Sundiata for an instant. Any other child of eleven would have been disconcerted by the eyes of adults. There's one that will make a great king" (Pg.34). It was therefore not a surprise when the chief made Sundiata his viceroy. No wonder when Sogolon was about to die it was said that "Sogolon knew that the time has arrived and she had performed her task. She had nurtured the son for whom the world was waiting and she knew that now her mission was accomplished" (Pg37). One can say that Sundiata, the son of a remarkable mother, had made extraordinary achievements as a result of his maternal influence. This proverb therefore points out the relationship between kinship and human conduct.

The son of another is always the son of another (SUNDIATA: Pg.46).

This saying was deployed by Moussa Tounkara, the king of Mema with whom Sogolon and his children lived before returning to Mali. The exceptional qualities of Sundiata so much pleased the king to the extent that within three years, Sundiata was made the viceroy, and in the king's absence it was he who governed (Pg.37). Despite the privileges granted Sundiata at Mema, he readily decided to go back to his homeland when he heard of the plight of his people. Sundiata expressed his decision to the king thus:

I am going to ask the king's leave and will return immediately. He said to the king, 'king, you gave me hospitality at your court when I needed shelter. Under your orders I went on my first campaign...but I am now a man and I must return to Mali to claim the kingdom of my fathers (Pg.46).

The king least expected Sundiata's reaction and as a result was so disappointed in him. Tounkara's discontentment was expressed as

These words displeased the king. Never did he think the son of Sogolon could leave him. What was he going to seek in Mali? Did he not live happy and respected by all in Mema? Was he not already the heir to the throne of Mema? How ungrateful thought, the king, the son of another is always the son of another (Pg.46).

This proverb points to the importance of bearing children in African societies. This opinion is expressed in Ewe proverbial names such as Vivõ which is the abbreviation of the proverb, *vivõ nyo wu ko* ('having a troublesome child is better than being barren'). The point of the proverb is that blood relations supersede any other relation. This idea is expressed in an Ewe proverb as, *Sabala le nogoo gake mɔ le me* ('the onion is one big whole but there are divisions'). That is, although people might live as one, those related by blood see themselves as closer. A similar view is expressed in the popular maxim, "blood is thicker than water". The proverb as well brings out questions about kinship and succession. That is, whether there is the need to hold on to the practice of offering positions to people who are next of kin or to people who might not be necessarily next of kin but deserve the title as in the case of Sundiata in the palace of Mema. Sundiata's rejection of Tounkara's offer but rather preferred his kinsmen's. This is among the reasons why people hold on to kinship royalties over abilities in succession. This idea from the traditional set up is one of the factors leading to nepotism in job sectors and corporate institutions. Robin's comment confirms this assertion,

In the developing countries bureaucratic rationality often loses out to kinship royalties; an official selects his subordinates not on the criterion of ability to do the job, but on the basis of closeness of relationship. What to us is rank nepotism is to him a high moral duty (Robin, 1967: 14).

"You cannot choose your relatives but you can choose your friends" (SUNDIATA: Pg.27).

This observation stems from the close relationship between Sundiata and his step brother Manding Bory and on the opposite the sour relationship between Sundiata and his other step brother Dankaran Touman. As has been pointed out,

Sundiata had found a great friend in his half-brother and since the death of his mother Namandje he had been welcomed by Sogolon and it was to save his brother that Djata accepted exile since he had no gift of sorcery (Pg.27).

It can be realized that bonds are not only based on blood relations but can also be grounded and even become more intimate as a result of common interest. It also suggests that, friendship ties can, in most cases, be closer or even stronger than blood relations.

4.11.3 Other Proverbs

“The silk-cotton tree springs from a tiny seed” (SUNDIATA: Pg.5).

The reference to silk-cotton tree suggests the kind of vegetation in which the people are located. The Mandes are said to be located in the savannah region and this land is suitable for the cultivation of cotton. A silk-cotton tree is known to be a large tropical tree as pointed out in the book, “The king and his suite were seated under the great silk-cotton tree of Nianiba” (Pg.6). Considering the tiny seed from which a huge tree such as this emerges, the proverb therefore suggests that there is no need to despise little beginnings. The idea is reiterated in the following words, “The great comes from the small” (Pg.5) and “When the seed germinates growth is not always easy; great trees plunge their root deep into the ground” (Pg.17). This proverb is evident in the case of Sundiata, whose birth had delayed, although expected to become a king. As expressed by Mare Maghan the king, “Could it be that the stiff-necked son of Sogolon was the one the hunter soothsayer has foretold?” (Pg.16). Sogolon herself has been described to be very ugly,

If the young girl succeeds in hiding her face, she did not, however, manage to cover up her hump which deformed her shoulders and back. She was ugly in a sturdy sort of way. You could see her muscular arms, and her bulging breasts pushing strongly against the strong pagne of cotton fabric which was knotted just under her armpit (Pg.7).

The proverb can also be understood not only in terms of physical growth but in terms of social reputation. Considering the fact that Sogolon was the third wife and Sundiata being

the second male born of the father, nobody thought Sundiata could succeed to the throne. This suggests that great things may emerge from unsuspecting sources. Another message that can be deduced from this proverb is that there is need to be patience in life. This notion finds expression in the saying that, “Man is in a hurry but time is tardy and everything has its season” (Pg.6). An Ewe proverb also says, *adi di be vivivi koe dea do gbɔ* (‘The ant says, it is little by little that they get into holes’). This suggests that it is only with patience that great things are done. This is equally expressed in the English saying, “Rome was not built in a day.” Another interpretation of this proverb is the need to be courageous and resolute in difficult and trying situations, although things do not unfold as anticipated there is no need to despair, rather one should hope for the best.

“The waters of Niger can efface a stain from the body, but they cannot wipe an insult” (SUNDIATA: Pg.20).

Reference to river Niger draws attention to the geographical location of the river Niger in relation to Mali. “Mali is in the Niger River valley and the surrounding savanna, the river Niger passes through Mali” (McCall & Stewaart, 1979). As pointed out earlier, the River Niger plays important role for the people especially in their agriculture it as well helps in their economic system since it is used as a source of irrigation for their crops and also for fishing. Harrison (1960: 244) attests to the fact that “The Niger and its tributaries are the life-givers of Mali Republic.” It is therefore not surprising if Niger features in Mande proverbs. Balla Fasséke, Sundiata’s griot, uses this proverb to encourage Sundiata to walk after Sogolon Djata comes to pour out with pain Sassouma Berete’s words of humiliation to Sundiata. Sogolon Djata goes to ask her co-wife for some condiments. Sassouma Berete’s answer to Sogolon Djata’s request was: “I have a calabash full. Help

yourself you poor woman. As for me my son knew how to walk at seven and it was he who went and picked these baobab leaves” (Pg.19). Sassouma’s reply was so hurting to Sogolon because her son Sundiata at the age of seven still crawls (Pg.18) which disables her to reply Sassouma rather but goes back home to pour out her worry to her son thus:

Oh son of misfortune, will you never walk? Through your fault I have just suffered the greatest affront of my life! Sassouma has just humiliated me over a matter of a baobab leaf. At your age her own son could walk and used to bring his mother baobab leaves. Ah my son... I want the whole tree, in front of my hut, the whole tree (Pg.19).

In the following quote, Balla Fasséke, after listening to Sogolon Djata’s words encourages Sundiata to rise up and walk:

Here is the great day, Mari Djata. I am speaking to you Maghan, son of Sogolon. The waters of the Niger can efface the stain from the body, but they cannot wipe out an insult. Arise; young lion roar, and may the bush know that from henceforth it has a master (Pg.20).

This proverb stirred up the desire in Sundiata to walk. It can be realized that words are very powerful but “silent weapons”. This is because it is as a result of the humiliating words from Sassouma Berete and the encouragement from Balla Fasséke that stimulated Sundiata to walk. The use of this proverb suggests the fact that words are very influential and must be used wisely since they can produce either affirmative or adverse results. Sorcerers and other people, who engage with spiritual forces, recognize the power of words hence they are employed to undo the power of other forces. Olatunji (1973) makes reference to how “The Yoruba attempt to control the world around them through the utterance of incantations and observance of any rites or taboos that may accompany words” (Cited in Anyidoho, 1983: 99). For instance, when the griot Balla Fasseke entered the secret chamber of Soumaoro, the king of Sosso, he “Recited some formulas and everything in the room fell quiet” (Pg.38). Still on the religious role of words, Anyidoho (1983: 103) admits that “The belief in prayers so central to the traditions of oral and

written cultures alike is grounded in the underlying regard for the power of words to call things and events into being.” Due to the power of words, in order to encourage people for great tasks, they are told of the victories of others to spur them on. For instance, as Sundiata prepares to fight with Soumaoro, his griot Balla Fasseke reminds him of the victories of his predecessors: “But listen to what your ancestors did, so that you will know what you have to do...by the spoken word we give life to the gestures of kings”(Pg.63).

Another message that can be deduced from this proverb is that, words are not easily forgotten so it is important to think before talking. Oyekan (2005: 86) points out the importance of speech in the following Yoruba proverbs: *Eyin lo ro bó bá bale, fífo níńfo* (‘Speech is an egg, when it drops on the floor it shatters’) and *Pètèpètè Ìjèsà, ó ta sèni lára kò wón* (‘The mud of the Ìjèsà: it splashes on one and will not be washed off’) This means disgrace is not easily washed away. He continues to point out that:

In Yoruba culture a great deal of importance attaches to whatever utterance issues out of the mouth. Speeches being the highest form of utterance, Yorubas approach it with deliberate care, taking great pains to avoid careless, casual, or thoughtless statements whose damage might outlast lifetimes.

“*The snake has no legs but it is as swift as any other animal that has four*” (SUNDIATA: Pg.22).

This proverb is used to compare the differences between Sogolon Djata and Dankaran. Despite, Sundiata and the mother’s physical challenges, it was said that: Sogolon Djata’s popularity grew from day to day and he was surrounded by a gang of children of the same age as himself (Pg.22).

This proverb suggests the fact that no matter the challenge or limitation an individual has, there is an aspect of him/her that is still appreciated by other people. There is an Ewe

proverb which says that, 'It is God who drives away the flies of tailless animals' (*Lamatoasike Mawu ɲutɔe nyaa tagbatsutsu nɛ*). This can also be explained as: the challenges in life should not make one to be sad and feel useless but rather one should look on the bright side of life since no condition is entirely hopeless. Closely related to the message of not giving up in life is the need to look out for other opportunities in life and be innovative. This proverb stems from the observation made about the snake that although it has no legs or wings to fly, is still able to move even with more speed than some of the animals with legs. The nature of snake therefore points out that even without legs; there is still a facility for movement. Another point of this proverb is that God gave us all the equipment and endowment we need in life hence the need to find ways to make all we have profitable. As an Akan proverb puts it, *Aboa akyekyedee nni ntoma, awɔ nne no da* ('The tortoise has no cloth but it does not feel cold').

'The snake seldom bites the foot that does not walk' (SUNDIATA: Pg.24)

This proverb was employed by one of the witches which Sassouma Berete sent to kill Sogolon Djata. The proverb is used to emphasize the point that:

Life has a cause and death as well. The one comes from the other. Your hate has a cause and your action must have a cause...our action will have no effect unless we are ourselves implicated (Pg.24).

This proverb stems from the observation made about the snake that even though it is dangerous and feared by man, it does not sting without a cause. It only stings if its life is threatened either by stepping on it or crossing its path. This proverb suggests the fact that every action has a cause and some things can be avoided through our actions. As one Ewe proverb puts it, *Nya medzia ame o ame ɲutɔe dzia nya* ('Problems do not hunt for people but people rather look for problems'). In the case of Sundiata, even when the witches tried to tempt him by stealing leaves from his mother's garden, he did not assault

them hence the witches had no cause to bewitch him. The proverb is therefore a counsel to troublemakers to desist from making unprovoked/needless trouble. Considering the discourse within which the proverb is used it can be realized that apart from natural causes, activities of malevolent spirits can also harm individuals. This points out the African belief in witchcraft and sorcery. It is also recognized that these malevolent spirits do not only operate through spiritual means but may employ even physical means just as how Sundiata met the witches and spoke with them physically. It should be added that, Sundiata knew the plan of these witches because Sogolon Djata has initiated him into the art of sorcery. It has been pointed out as follows: “Sogolon initiated his son into certain secrets and revealed to him the names of medicinal plants” (Pg.23). As reiterated by Sogolon:

Let us leave here, my son (Sundiata), Manding Bory and Djamarou are vulnerable. They are not yet initiated into the secrets of the night, they are not sorcerers. Despairing of ever injuring you, Sassouma will aim her blows at your brother or sister (Pg.26).

The tree that the tempest will throw down does not see the storm building up in the horizon. Its proud head braves the winds even when it is near its end (SUNDIATA: Pg.41).

The proverb is about Soumaoro, the king of Sosso, who became corrupt as a result of his position as a king. He became sexually corrupt and this is expressed as, “He had defiled every family and everywhere in his vast empire there were villages populated by girls whom he had forcibly abducted from their families without marrying them” (Pg.41). Soumaoro went to the extent of committing incest with Keleya the wife of Soumaoro’s nephew and chief general.

Fakoli fell into a dreadful rage and went to his uncle and said, since you are not ashamed to commit incest by taking my wife, I am freed from this day forward. Hence I shall be

on the side of your enemies I shall combine insurgent Mandingoes with my own troops and wage war against you (Pg.42).

Soumaoro also committed murder. It was stated that, for a long time, Soumaoro rebelled against the whole world. Since his accession to the throne of Sosso he had conquered nine kings whose heads served him as fetishes in his macabre chamber. Their skins served as seats and he cut his footwear from human skin (Pg.41). Tempest is a severe storm with very high winds, so the tempest throwing down trees, used in the proverb, describes destruction or fall. The proverb is therefore to reprimand those in power not to become tyrannical and power drunk. Another point of interest pursued in this proverb is that those in authority should heed to warning signs and respect people's feelings. As expressed in the proverb: "Its proud head braves the wind even when it is near its end." In the case of Soumaoro even when his nephew told him he would fight against him as revenge for Soumaoro's incestuous relations with his wife, Soumaoro never bothered to apologize to his brother. Subsequently he was overthrown by Sundiata with the help of Fakoli. This proverb frowns on pride especially, in the case of those with power, as said in the proverb "Its proud head braves the wind even when it is near its end." As further emphasized in (Pg.34) "Modesty is the portion of the average man, but superior men are ignorant of humility."

"The snake, man's enemy, is not long-lived, yet the serpent that lived hidden will surely die old" (SUNDIATA: Pg.47).

The proverb was preceded by the statement, "Neither the jealousy of a cruel stepmother, nor her wickedness, could alter for a moment the cause of great destiny" and followed by the fact that, "Djata was strong enough now to face his enemies" (Pg.47). This proverb is therefore an admonition that no matter how difficult a situation is, it will still come to an

end. As one Ewe proverb puts it, *Fukpevi metsia fu me kuna o* ('A suffering child does not die in his predicament'). A common Ghanaian expression also says "there is no long journey without an end". That is to say no condition is permanent and every problem will come to an end someday.

"No matter how small a forest may be, you can always find there sufficient fibre to tie a man" (SUNDIATA: Pg.48).

Sundiata said this after his brother Manding Bori asked him if he will be able to fight Soumaoro since it was realized that Djata did not have enough troops to confront Soumaoro directly. This proverb stems from the practice in rural communities where people mostly use firewood as fuel. In order to gather the firewood, people go to the bush to collect and then tie them together which is then brought home for use. The proverb points to the people's vegetation which is not a forest zone but savannah. As has been pointed out earlier, there is little in the savannah flora that would supply the kind of stout, lusty wooden material necessary for plump figures. The proverb seems to point out that no matter how dry the vegetation is resulting in scanty forests, one can still get enough fibre to tie a whole lot of firewood that have been gathered. By using this proverb, Sundiata suggests that with his army he can conquer Soumaoro. As Sundiata puts it, "With my cavalry I shall clear a path to Mali." This proverb suggests the fact that it does not matter how much one has but how well the little is used. This is an advice that one should not always complain of limited opportunities and privileges but should make use of whatever little is available. The proverb then confirms the fact that "Numbers mean nothing it is worth that counts" (Pg. 48). It also suggests the idea that it is better to use few individuals or items that can make a task better rather than use a lot without effective

result. As Appiah et al (2007: 19) point out, *baanu ka a,ekyeene dodoɔ* ('If two people get on with each other it is better than many friends') and *Abosom bebrebe bo kuro* ('Too many fetishes spoil the town'). This is expressed in the English saying as; "too many cooks spoil the broth."

4.12 Chapter Summary

The chapter discussed some intriguing proverbs in *SUNDIATA*, featuring their environment from whence the proverbs have emerged. These proverbs, it should be noted, are not necessarily precise sources of information about historical people and events, but they do provide insight into how certain Mandingo traditions developed. The work is therefore useful as reference point into seemingly neglected but important aspects of Mande culture. I admit, though, that these categories under which the proverbs have been placed are not isolated but are intertwined and might fit into other categories as well. But the category is due to the researcher's consideration of proverbs that best fits a particular category than others.



CHAPTER FIVE

5.1 Further Discussion of Issues

The concept of soul as evident in African religion stresses the African belief in the Supreme Being who is the creator and sustainer of life. A close observation of the concept of soul in the various societies point to the fact that the soul is an aspect of God in humans and it also returns to God after death therefore human beings have a divine origin. This idea points out the stand of the African people on the origin of man which is contrary to the explanation given by Darwin and other scholars on the origin of man. According to Darwin (1871), human species could be explained without resort to divine intervention; following their claim that human beings had evolved from ape-like progenitors.

An important aspect of African religion which is evident in the Igbo and Mande proverbs discussed is the issue of destiny. That is, whatever will happen to any human being on earth has been predestined by God. Despite this belief, there is still the need for individuals to take responsibility for their life and not resign to fate, hence the proverb ‘when a man says yes his *chi* also says yes.’ One can say that this issue of destiny as expressed by the African people is a way of explaining the inexplicable. This is because in most cases an individual becomes conscious of his destiny when he or she encounters situations that seem bizarre and unexplainable. As cited in *Sundiata*, “It is in the midst of calamity that man questions himself about his destiny (Pg.42). It can be realized that the concept of destiny especially the belief that man’s life follows a pre-determined plan seems to be challenged as people become converts of the Western religion which stresses

that God's wish for his children is always positive and nobody has been predestined for hardship in life. The Bible for instance states in Jeremiah 29:11 that "For I know the thoughts that I think towards you, saith the Lord, thoughts of peace, and not of evil, to give you an expected end."

The Communal structure of the African people which suggests sharing a social life and having a sense of common good is reflected in proverb, "*If one finger brought oil it soils the others*" (Pg.89). Despite this communal value, there is the need for individual responsibility for actions. Gyekye (1996: 47) admits that African cultures usually identify that "the naturally human being also has individuality, personal will, and an identity that must be exercised." For example in the case of Okonkwo, although his inadvertent killing was considered the misfortune of the whole community, it was only Okonkwo and his family that was exiled and not any other member of the community. This theme is presented in the Ewe proverbs, *Amekpela meɖoa kpo o* ('A person who helps another to carry a load does not develop hunch back'), *Nekɔe ɖo klo ya woale ɖo ta nawo* ('If you lift it (load) to your knee then you will be helped to put it on your head'). *Agbenye nu si newɔe* ('Life is how you make it'). The emphasis here is on you which is, the role of the individual. That is to say, although Africans cherish communal life, an individual must be responsible for his/her action.

The issue of individualism now creeps into the kinship system where one expects members to be each other's keeper. One cannot overlook the fact that the care and concern that kin members have toward one another as evident in the proverb, "*An animal rubs its aching flank on a tree but a man asks his kinsman to scratch him*" (Pg.119), will undergo some changes in the recent global dispensation. Nanbigne's work on the

changing discourse on care among the Dagaare of Northern Ghana attests to the fact that changes in care among members of the Dagaare kinship group is evident in their daily discourse such as proverbs, conversations, folktales and songs. The proverb, *Saazu kuuri la lere; nie zaa man porin la u zu* ('A stone is falling from the sky; everyone covers his own head'), buttresses the decline in kin support (Nanbigne, 2008: 23).

The relationship between religion and morality is expressed in the proverb "*A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam its mother puts into its palm*" (Pg.48). Okonkwo uses this proverb to justify his involvement in killing Ikemefuna and then explaining that he did the bidding of the gods hence the gods cannot punish him. This proverb then draws attention to the origin of societal norms, the force of its demands and sanctions. This leads to the continuing debate on whether or not morality depends on human experience, religion or common sense. Gyekye (1996: 57) who is of the view that morality depends on human experience argues that

Morality is intrinsically social, arising out of the relationship between individuals...it would be more correct to say that African moral values derive from the experiences of the people living together, or in trying to evolve a common and harmonious social life... the moral values of the African people have a social and humanistic basis rather than a religious basis. Although religion cannot be completely banished from the domain of moral practice, the moral values of the African society did not derive directly from religion.

Another school of thought regards morality as the product of religion. One of the scholars in this area is Opoku (1978). Quarcoopome (1987: 160-162) who is also of this view maintains that:

In West African Traditional Religion morality is the fruit of religion. The social and moral ordinances are the injunctions of God, who himself had instituted them...the Yoruba say of a criminal whom misfortune has overtaken that, he is under the lashes of Olumdumare. God himself has punished him for breaking His moral laws...the traditional belief that God created the world and man means society came into being by God's ordinance. Thus every institution is religious oriented. West Africans also strongly believe that moral values are not invented by human beings, but are the offspring of

religion because God has put his law into man and it is this which is referred to as conscience. Thus man is expected to use his conscience to behave in a morally good way.

Another view considers common sense as the origin of morality. According to Geertz (1983: 76),

Common sense is more than just using eyes and ears, but is keeping them open, using them judiciously, intelligently, perceptively, or trying to, and being capable of coping with everyday problems in an everyday way with some effectiveness.

Another school of thought emphasizes the role of common sense as the basis of morality in the sense that:

In order to survive, man must adapt himself to his environment. Experience soon teaches him what could be done and what must be avoided. A gradual and steady accumulation of this experience over a long period of time has resulted in a very strong sense of what has come to be popularly known as right and wrong. Thus the moral imperative in man has its basis in nothing but common sense (Quarcoopome, 1987: 160).

It can be realized that most of the discussions seem to have their basis in human experience. In the case of religion, the conscience which is said to be the guide to the right conduct of life can function effectively only if it has adequate knowledge of this right standard. For instance, if the conscience is ignorant of the truth it can take wrong actions as right and condemn right actions. This experience is founded on man's relationship with other people and what society agrees on to be the right code of behavior. All these are derived from human experience with the society. The role of religion cannot be completely ruled out in matters that relate to morality since religion encompasses every aspect of the African. Most importantly, it is religion that enforces the moral codes. People fear supernatural sanctions and will therefore conform to societal norms. Religion in its restrictive sense enforces the moral codes which of course, are undeniably derived as a result of human experience. In terms of common sense, a person develops his sense of right or wrong from experience. From the discussion, one can say that morality is basically the product of experience.

“*Living fire begets cold, impotent ash*” (Pg.111). As has been pointed out earlier, this proverb arises out of Okonkwo’s deep concern of his son’s unpromising attitude towards the traditional religion. This is expressed thus,

He saw himself and his father crowding round their ancestral shrine waiting in vain for worship and sacrifice and finding nothing but ashes of bygone days, and his children the while praying to the white man’s god” (TFA: Pg.110).

The above draws attention to what has been wrongly termed “ancestor worship”. This name is first used by an anthropologist Herbert Spencer in his book *Principles of sociology*. Spencer’s use of the term arose from his assumption that in what he termed “savage” societies, the people linked certain objects with the spirit of the dead and in order to keep on good relationships with the departed spirits, offered sacrifices to these objects (Cited in Opoku 1978: 4). These religious rites are the rites performed in connection with the ancestors, such as libation and the offering of food to the ancestral spirits. The ancestors are not the focus of the people but they use them as intermediaries to the Supreme Being. In the words of Quarcoopome (1987: 130),

The ancestors are believed to be bilingual, speaking the language of men with whom they lived until recently and also that of the spirits and God. They are not revered as gods but spirits. Through the ancestors, the spirit realm becomes generally real to the people. The ancestors seem to be the best group of intermediaries between the divinities and God on the one hand and men on the other.

He points out further that:

Technically speaking, Africans do not place the ancestors on the same footing with God or the divinities and thus strictly speaking, Africans do not worship their ancestors, but merely venerate them. In practice, however, there is every danger of veneration slipping unawares into worship, especially as the veneration becomes so intense. But this is virtually the flaw in all religions (Quarcoopome 1987: 132).

Although the ancestors play very important roles in African societies and the people recognize them as such, it will be inappropriate to regard the entire African religion as

ancestral worship since the people as well recognize the Supreme Being and other spirit entities who as well occupy important aspects in their religious practices.

5.2 Summary

The above chapters attempted an analysis of the proverbs in *TFA* and *SUNDIATA*. In order to get a better analysis of proverbs, the research provides various definitions of proverbs by scholars and through this the characteristics of proverbs was discussed. Through this research it is realized that the common definition of proverbs as “short wise sayings” Quarcoopome (1987: 31) stands to be corrected since there are more extensive texts that can be classified as proverbs; for example there are proverb-like folktales which by contrast are lengthy. It has also been recognized that although proverbs, just as other oral forms are anonymous, there can be pointers in some of the proverbs to their period and setting. This leads to the reference made to proverbs as “historical markers” (Oyekan, 2005: 27). The research points to the relationship in African oral literature, particularly among the various genres such as proverbs that manifest in the form of songs, folktales, names, praise poems, riddles among others.

The poetic language of proverbs has also been stressed in this study; it has been argued that the language of proverbs differs from ordinary spoken language. Hence their use makes communication interesting. This is due to the poetic qualities that characterize proverbs, which is evident in the use of various devices such as alliteration, parallelism, simile, exaggeration and hyperbole among others. Their literary nature is as well intensified through their association with other oral literature types such as songs, folktales, riddles among others. Thus these features make the proverbs less boring to listen to. Closely related to the issue of language is the important role proverbs play in

preserving the language of a people. Holmes (1992: 65) notes that, “Economic and social factors can make a word or an expression redundant and eventually make it become archaic. The continuous use of proverbs therefore has the linguistic capability of recalling and preserving some expressions that are no longer in common use due to socio-cultural changes.

This research highlights the fact that proverbs go beyond just beautifying language; they also lead to a better understanding of the ideology and belief systems of a group of people. That is why Aderemi refers to them as "culture markers" in the sense that they tell us, in rather brief and intense terms, so much about the history and psychology of the peoples and communities from which they emanate (Aderemi, 1994: 74).

Proverbs play important roles in communicating the customs and norms, to which a particular group of people adhere. They can be regarded as the moral codes of the society. Herskovits (1958) refers to proverbs as a grammar of values. This is because through them, one gets an idea of the dos and don'ts of a particular society.

The researcher has adopted Askew's notion of performance as active dialogic interaction between and among performers and audience... traditional emphasis on the *product* (the text or the message communicated), plus recent performance theorists' emphasis on the *process* (Bauman and Schechner) and concern for form and the politics of context ... integrated into a single model (Askew 2000: 23) and Yankah's concern for linguistic context which requires the need to pay attention to the relevant discourse interaction in which the proverb is embedded (Yankah, 1989: 31) as frameworks in the analysis of the proverbs in *TFA* and *SUNDIATA*.

This research dispels the notion that performance is irrelevant in proverbs and stresses the fact that proverb usage is a form of performance in which the stage is the place where the communication is carried out, the proverb speaker being the performer and the addressee becomes the audience. It also agrees with Yankah (1989: 248) that, “Proverb speaking whether attributive or otherwise is a performance insofar as it constitutes a stylized mode of communication in which executive skills are evaluated by an audience.”

The proverb performance becomes more effective based on the proverb user on the one hand and the audience on the other hand. Yankah (1989: 146) admits that in proverb usage, the competence of the performer is not centered on the number of proverbs used but the ability to utter proverbs conducive for a particular discourse, the ability of imagery used; the social and logical correctness of the proverbs and the ability to manipulate and articulate flawless known proverbs. The competence of the proverb speaker is also enforced through the mode in which the proverb is performed such as influence of tone, facial expression among others. This point is in line with Bauman’s verbal art as performance, which views performance as “a mode of communication ... which resides in an assumption of responsibility to an audience for an exhibition of communicative skill emphasizing the way in which communication is carried out above and beyond its referential content” (Bauman, 1975: 293).

Like the other oral performance types, the audience also plays crucial roles in proverb performance. In some cases, the audience readily point out their displeasure in a proverb used through the comment, *kasa yie* (‘Speak well’) or *wobu be a bu no ne kwan so* (‘When you speak a proverb, place it on its right path’) (Yankah, 1989:138). Aside that if

the audience is an informed audience, which refers to those who know the proverb, the speaker may decide to present only a part of the proverb and the audience completes or he mentions the proverb name and the audience then gives the full version of the proverb. This then becomes a sort of call and response between the proverb speaker and the audience thus enhancing the proverb performance.

5.3 Conclusion

The analysis of the proverbs in *TFA* and *Sundiata* brings out important aspects of the traditional Igbo and Mande peoples' cultures which are rarely pointed out by scholars that produce works about these people.

The researcher observes that some of the proverbs in *Sundiata* focus on the theme of the book which is the deeds of Sundiata. A proverb like "*The silk-cotton tree springs from a tiny seed*" (Pg.5), comments on the gradual growth of the hero, that although like a silk cotton tree, Sundiata's growth was delayed and coupled with a lot of problems, he rose up to be a great warrior and king. The proverb, "*No matter how small a forest may be, you can always find there sufficient fibre to tie a man*" (Pg.48), is also similar to the one above. Pointing out the fact that although the situations surrounding Sundiata, seems not to encourage him to attain the position of a hero and a king, he still attained his dream and destiny. "*The snake has no legs but it is as swift as any other animal that has four*" (Pg.22). This proverb as well comments on Sundiata. As has been pointed out, despite the fact that he encountered problems such as the ill treatment meted to his family by his step mother Sassouma Berete (the queen mother) and in spite of his physical disadvantage, Sundiata's popularity grew than Dankaran Touman who succeeded his father's throne

and whose mother was the queen mother. Aside these proverbs, the other proverbs in the book comment on other aspects of the society such as kinship, values, religion and customs of the society. This addresses the fact that the hero grew from a society, so there are other aspects of the society which will definitely contribute to the growth of the epic hero. This points out the relationship between epics and proverb. In that, just as the epic stories do not only relay the exploits of the hero but comment on the customs, values, histories and fears of the society it evolves from, the proverbs in *Sundiata* comment on the heroic deeds of Sundiata and other aspects of the society.

The proverbs from *TFA* and *SUNDIATA* have also exposed us to other cultures through the examples that were provided. This is because the researcher provides similar examples of proverbs from other African societies which attempt to explore themes similar to those of the proverbs in *TFA* and *SUNDIATA*. Through the study it can be realized that although the imageries used in the proverbs are associated with the day to day life of the Mande and Igbo societies, the proverbial inferences as well apply to other African societies. There is thus evidence that these themes that concern Igbo and Mande societies are not restricted to these societies but are relevant to other African societies, especially those in West African.

It is worthy of note that although the main texts of the study (*SUNDIATA* and *TFA*) have been written some decades/years ago, the proverbs in these books are still relevant in enlightening us on pertinent issues in African culture since most of them are concerned with the customs and norms that society still upholds. Those proverbs which bother on the past become reminders of past ideologies, notions and practices or realities. Anyidoho's comment accentuates this in the following:

There should be no reason to throw such items (proverbs) out of consideration labeling them as “fakelore.” Their very existence affirms the capacity of human creativity and imagination to draw on the past while moving into the future Anyidoho (1983: 137).

Most of the proverbs comment on African Traditional religion. It can be realized that, despite the influence of Western Religions, particularly Christianity on the African Traditional Religion, the Traditional religion is not entirely extinct hence these proverbs open up into African belief in reincarnation, destiny, African concept of the soul; witchcraft and sorcery. Having looked closely at the proverbs, one realizes that they make use of a lot of symbols through which the messages are presented. These symbols mostly reflect the context of the proverb. There are proverbs about the animals, plants and foodstuffs that are common in the people’s environment, thus stressing the relationship between language and society. Ecology thus adds further dimensions to the realism of traditional African literary art. It is important to note that some of the concepts and images in the proverbs may undergo some changes when used in recent times. It is therefore important for further research into proverbs in these societies to investigate the response to these new ideas and technologies that are sprawling on the African continent.

5.4 Recommendation

Oral tradition, especially proverbs, must continue to be taught (both formal and informal) as significant part of African culture because it ties the present with the past and provides a better understanding of the cultural, religious and political lives of the African people.

The research recommends that the teaching of proverbs be included in the school curriculum as a policy, and also seeks to encourage authors and language material

developers to focus attention on the production of text books and other teaching aids that will enhance the teaching of proverbs in schools.

The use of proverbs should not be considered solely as the preserve of the elderly but rather children should be encouraged to use them in order to preserve the language and other linguistic items from dying out, particularly when the older generation is no more. Engaging proverbs in a dialogue help to beautify the language and then help preserve the ideology and belief systems embedded in them. It is important to point out that some of the local names are proverbial and point out important aspects of the culture of Africans hence people should desist from changing their local names to Western names since this will lead to the loss of important facts about the people and their environment. Every name has a meaning, character, and history. As Kyereboah puts it, “do we ever think of the meanings of our names? An African child is forever reminded, by his given name of who he is and who he represents (Kyereboah 2006: cover page). Parents must continue to assign local names to their children, devoid of mystical connotations, to demonstrate their African identity.



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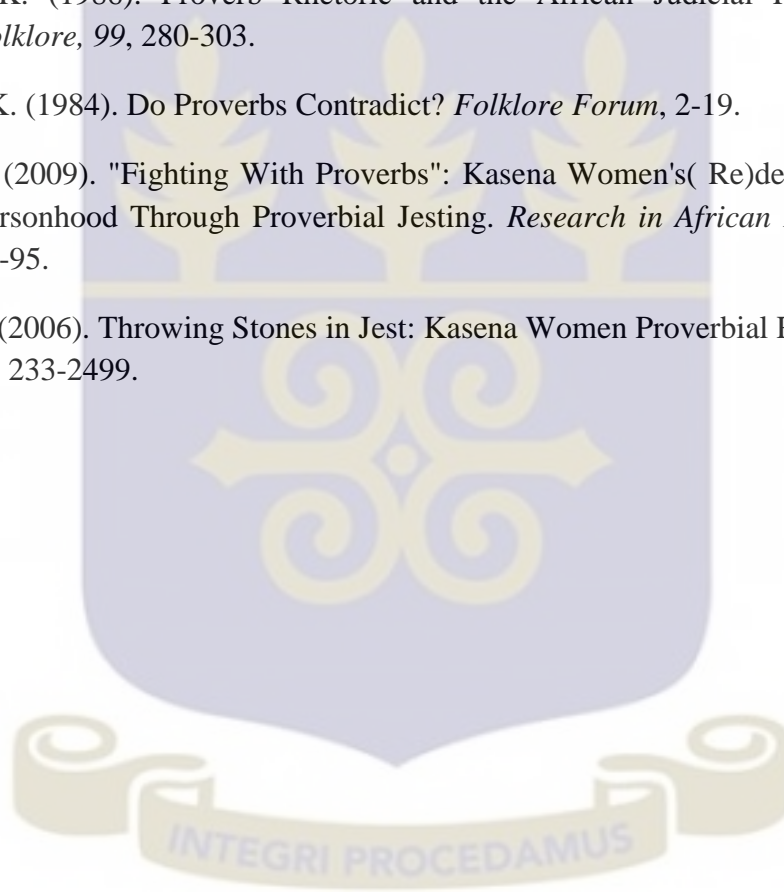
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APPENDIX

LIST OF PROVERBS IN TFA

“Proverbs are regarded as the palm-oil with which words are eaten” (Pg.5).

The sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them.”(Pg.6).

“If a child washed his hands he could eat with kings” (Pg.6).

“When the moon is shining, the cripple becomes hungry for a walk” (Pg.7).

“Let the kite perch and let the eagle perch too. If one says no to the other let his wing break” (Pg.14).

“A man who pays respect to the great paves way for his own greatness” (Pg.14).

“A toad does not run in the day time for nothing” (Pg.15).

“An old woman is always uneasy when dry bones are mentioned in a proverb” (Pg.15).

“The lizard that jumped from the high iroko tree to the ground said he will praise himself if no one else did” (Pg.16).

“Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has also learnt to fly without perching” (Pg.16)

“You can tell a ripe corn by its look” (Pg.16).

“Looking at a king’s mouth, one will think he never sucked at his mother’s breast” (Pg.19).

“Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble” (Pg.19).

“When a man says yes his chi says yes also (Pg.19).

“Where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies?”(Pg.47).

“A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches” (Pg.47).

"A child's fingers are not scalded by a piece of hot yam which its mother put's into its palm" (Pg.48).

“When a mother-cow is chewing grass, its young ones watch its mouth” (Pg.50).

“If I fall down for you and you fall down for me is a play” (Pg.52).

If one finger brought oil it soils the others” (Pg.89).

Nneka literally means, mother is supreme (Pg.96).

“Living fire begets cold, impotent ash” (Pg.111).

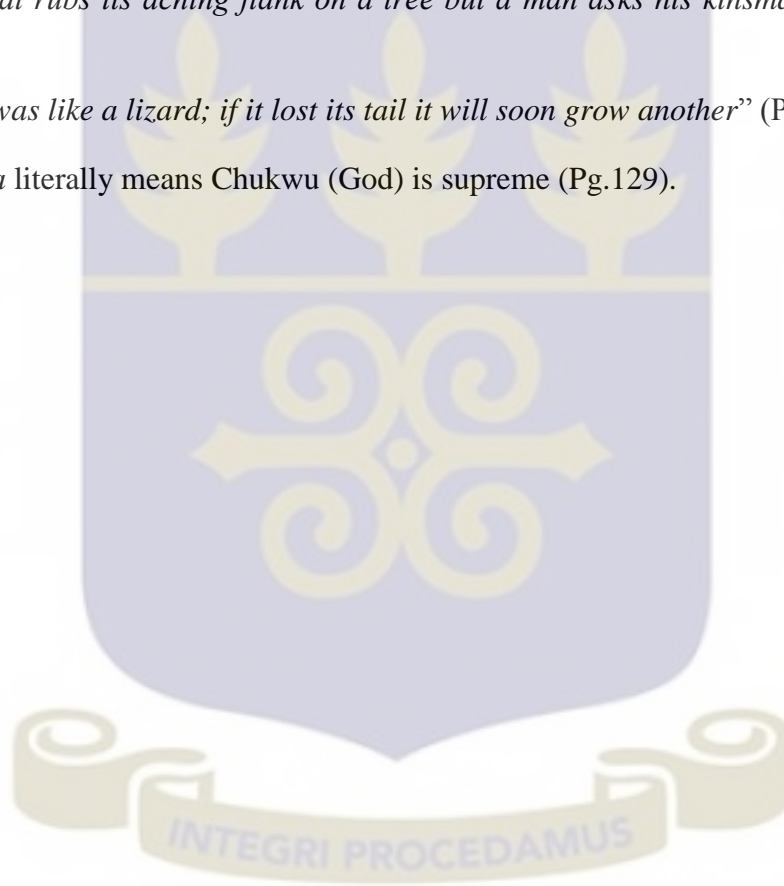
“I cannot live on the bank of a river and wash my hands with spittle” (Pg.119).

“A child cannot pay for its mother’s milk” (Pg.119).

“An animal rubs its aching flank on a tree but a man asks his kinsman to scratch him” (Pg.119).

The clan was like a lizard; if it lost its tail it will soon grow another” (Pg. 123).

Chukwuka literally means Chukwu (God) is supreme (Pg.129).



LIST OF PROVERBS IN SUNDIATA

“The silk-cotton tree springs from a tiny seed” (Pg.5).

“The waters of Niger can efface a stain from the body, but they cannot wipe an insult” (Pg.20).

“Each is the child of his mother” (Pg.22).

‘The snake seldom bites the foot that does not walk’ (Pg.24).

“You cannot choose your relatives but you can choose your friends” (Pg.27).

“Our action is not us but it is commanded of us” (Pg.28).

The tree that the tempest will throw down does not see the storm building up in the horizon. Its proud head braves the winds even when it is near its end (Pg.41).

The snake, man’s enemy, is not long-lived, yet the serpent that lived hidden will surely die old (Pg.47).

“No matter how small a forest may be, you can always find there sufficient fibre to tie a man” (Pg.48).

