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PROVERBS AS CUSTODIANS OF NATIVE WISDOM IN ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART*

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ABSTRACT

This study is motivated by the indispensable need for wisdom in humanity. Wisdom is indispensable in life, because it catalyzes positive character formation and character, as asserted by Onyemelukwe and Oriaku (2011), is everything such that whoever loses character loses everything. Consequently, this study is undertaken to explicate proverbs as custodians of native wisdom. The explication is done with reference to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart (TFA)*, purposively selected for being very rich in oral traditions and oration, especially in relation to the use of proverbs, the objective being to provide open access to wisdom for youngsters and needy adults and, by doing so, stimulate unparalleled enlightened creativity in both ideational and concrete terms. The study anchors on the theoretical premise that proverb is a rhetorical device, and therefore, a discourse strategy pregnant with meanings which holistically incubate native wisdom. An outstanding finding of the study is that native wisdom is a spark of Divine wisdom. Moreover, the study identifies three categories of proverbs: core, soft and special proverbs. Finally, the study identifies the folkloric elements of myths, legends, folktales and folksongs as alternative sources of native wisdom. Acclaiming the Christian Holy Writ as the ultimate source of Divine wisdom, which is wisdom in all its ramifications, the study enjoins global communities to continually rely on proverbs, the folkloric elements and the living Word for wisdom which serves the purpose of ensuring value-adding life.

Key words: Proverb, Native wisdom, Folkloric elements, Custodian, Rhetorical device, The Living Word

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INTRODUCTION

In chapter 1 of the Gospel according to St. John, we read:

In the beginning was the Word; the Word was with God and the Word was God...

All things were made through Him (the Word); without Him (the Word) nothing

came to be; whatever has come to be found life in Him (the Word); life, which for human beings, was also light, light that shines in darkness light that darkness cannot overcome....

The extract from the Gospel referenced above, taken together with the *Holy Book of Proverbs (Proverbs)*, especially the first nine chapters translates to the indisputable religious as well as psychological platitude that there is power in the word. According to the introductory remarks on *Proverbs* in the catholic pastoral edition of the *Holy Bible*, the sacred scripture chronicles a meditation on the Wisdom of God, noted by Christians as the source of all-inclusive wisdom.

From Biblical perspective, the power in the Word is the Wisdom of God which is evident in creation: the entire universe including the earth and all it contains. Hence, the Holy Book of Genesis records that the earth was created by means of the Word as corroborated by St. John above. It, therefore, follows that wisdom is creative, and as St. John has noted, it is also enlightening. Wisdom enlightens by dispelling darkness, i.e., ignorance. In other words, wisdom ejects ignorance by imparting knowledge which is power. The deduction arising from the foregoing authorial cogitation is that wisdom translates to applied knowledge, knowledge sourced from experience and/or pedagogy focused on the Word (supernatural affairs) or natural phenomena (temporal matters).

Given the properties of wisdom as already identified, it is indisputably desirable to be wise, wisdom being the ultimate source of power, power as a metaphor for every target achievement. It is no wonder then that the legendary Biblical Solomon asked for wisdom as a Divine gift when prompted to request for his heart-most need. For seeking and finding wisdom, Solomon went down the records as the wisest of Kings for years before the onset of his heroic flaw and had he not lost the same wisdom to his inordinate love for (alien) women, no king would have equalled his wisdom.

Because wisdom personifies power, being of Divine origin, it is indispensable to humanity. Consequently, from time immemorial, it is made freely available to whoever goes out in search of it, thanks to Divine magnanimity. Unknown to many, every generation of humanity in all ethnolinguistic territories has some measure of wisdom native to it.

The native wisdom of every ethnolinguistic entity is verbally captured in its oral traditions or folklores: folktales and folksongs as well as its ceremonial rhetoric (oration). While the former comprises myths, legends, fables and anecdotes, the latter consists of praise-songs, lullabies and dirges. See Akporobaro (2004). Each of the foregoing oral traditions deploys several rhetorical devices to unfold. The rhetorical devices, among several others, include proverbs which are shown in the first paragraph of this introduction to be conveyors of Divine wisdom. Since Divine wisdom is the source of native wisdom by reciprocation, proverbs invariably convey native wisdom, being products of the Word that existed in the beginning.

Consequently, this study is undertaken to explicate proverbs as custodians of native wisdom. The explication is done with reference to Achebe's *Things Fall Apart (TFA)*, purposively selected for being very rich in oral traditions and oration, the objective being to provide open access to wisdom for youngsters and needy adults and, by doing so, stimulate unparalleled enlightened creativity in both ideational and concrete terms.

Theoretical Framework: Proverb as a Rhetorical Device

Before explicating proverb as a rhetorical device, it is necessary to first conceptualise it. Grzybek (1994) as cited by Fashina (2006:170) asserts that there is no single comprehensive definition of proverb. Grzybek's assertion is valid in the light of the fifty-five various definitions of the concept compiled by Mieder and Litovkina (1999). The foregoing shows that there are as many definitions of proverb as there are scholars. Consequently, we reproduce and propound in this study those definitions of the concept which capture or approximate our working notion of it:

- (a) A proverb is commonly thought of as a phrase, saying, sentence, statement or expression of folk which contains above all, wisdom, truth, morals, experience, lessons and advice concerning life and which has been handed down from generation to generation (Mieder and Litovkina, 1999).

- (b) A proverb is wisdom expressed in a sentence (Mieder and Litovkina, 1999).
- (c) According to Padoye (2012) proverbs add poetic quality to literary works, generally, and are expressions of wisdom with connotative and contextual meanings.
- (d) Proverbs are commonly used to mark thematic shifts, indigenous high rhetoric, self-conscious speech and the intellectual sharpness of characters [or real persons] (Adeeko, 1998:50).
- (e) Proverb is a condensed text which embeds a whole gamut of historical, cultural and moral narrative with intent for didactic values as a school of philosophical thought (Fashina, 2008:314).
- (f) Proverb is a social and linguistic narrative of logical revolt against the extenuating circumstances of social and economic negation (Fashina, *ibid.*).
- (g) ...a proverb is a graphic statement that expresses the truth of experience. Its beauty and source of delight is that what it says is readily perceived and accepted as an incontrovertible truth. The truth presented in a proverb is not a logical, priori or intuitive truth. It is often an empirical fact based upon and derived from the people's experience in life, human relationships and interaction with the world of nature (Akporobaro, 2004:80).
- (h) To Ruth Finnegan as referenced in (Akporobaro, 2004:81), a proverb is a saying in more or less fixed form, marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth expressed in it.
- (i) A proverb is a traditional saying that is concise, witty and figurative in form and which usually expresses a truth derived from practical experience (Akporobaro, *ibid.*: 96).
- (j) A proverb is a generally figurative wisdom assertion equivalent to an utterance which sometimes takes the

form of an allegorical anecdote (authorial).

- (k) A proverb can be defined as a wisdom-studded corpus of verbal reasoning anchored on indigenous folk science (Fashina, 2006).

It is also pertinent to conceptualise rhetorical device before proceeding to show that it incorporates proverb. In both written and spoken English, rhetorical devices are aids to discourse. They are those linguistic resources that go with effect and beauty of expression. They generally add colour to what is stated, enhance graphic description and articulation of ideas for profound insight. They elevate the writer's expression by deepening textual meanings to make them generally connotative. Textual meaning is connotative if it is linguistically or situationally contextualized.

Rhetorical devices are essential 'condiments' of every interesting discourse, since no discourse can be effective without them. Hence, Harris (2008) asserts that in every text, they are next in importance to appropriate and clear thesis, sufficient supporting arguments as well as logical and progressive arrangement of ideas. The beauty and effect inherent in rhetorical devices reside in their being potential persuasive tools, especially in argumentative discourses, court room discourse, for instance. Consequently, Onyemelukwe and Alo (2011) identify them as indispensable 'ingredients' of court room linguistic persuasive strategies.

The foregoing indicates that rhetorical devices are discourse strategies that go with beauty of expression. This beauty of expression is a function of the colour they add to the utterances of discourse participants. That is, rhetorical devices, whether linguistic or traditional, elevate interlocutors' expressions by deepening their meanings to make them generally connotative.

A careful consideration of the foregoing definitions of proverb evinces, immediately, that it is a linguistic resource with immense discourse value. As such, it perfectly fits into the conceptualisation of rhetorical device, especially with reference to definitions (b, c,

d, i and j). As a rhetorical device, proverb belongs to the traditional category, not the linguistic type. See Onyemelukwe, Alo and Ibeana (2011) as well as Onyemelukwe and Fatuase (2012) for clear distinctions between traditional and linguistic rhetorical devices. Like other traditional rhetorical devices such as figures of speech, axioms and idioms, proverbs can be conventional or creative. They are conventional if they are commonly in use, but creative if they are creditable to the user. The latter is preferable to the former as discourse strategies. Nevertheless, the analytical interest of the study is on both varieties, the interest being strictly to show that proverbs convey native wisdom as evident in *Things Fall Apart* (TFA).

That proverb conveys native wisdom implies that they also serve the indispensable purpose of cultural transmission from one generation to another. See definition (a) above. In other words, proverbs catalyse the process of socialisation at community level, i.e., enculturation. Proverbs, by extension, enhances the process of acculturation. Consequently, a set of proverbs can rightly be viewed as terse expressions of the native wisdom of its host ethno-linguistic milieu as reflected in its socio-cultural consciousness. Native wisdom refers here to the worldviews, philosophies and ideologies as well as the ethos and pathos autonomous to a particular ethno-linguistic entity. Consequently, Akporobaro (ibid.) states that the beauty and value of proverbs reside in their delightfulness as well as in their moral and philosophic force. In sum, following its definitions above, (e, i, j and k) particularly, a proverb must be wisely didactic to serve as a useful discourse strategy.

Proverb as a rhetorical device can be denotatively (literally) or connotatively (contextually) interpreted. To access the native wisdom stored in a proverb, however, its interpretation must be contextualised. In other words, orators as seen in TFA use proverbs to yield pure pragmatic meanings, not literal or semantic ones. Hence, among the Igbo's it is said that whoever understands a proverb literally makes nonsense of the dowry paid on his/her mother. See Mbisike (2002) to understand the difference between semantic and pragmatic interpretations of

a proverb. The import of the foregoing is that profuse and proficient use of proverbs, especially for persuasive purposes, is an indication of maturity in public oration. Consequently, Achebe in TFA, asserts that proverb is the palm oil with which words are eaten. To help the reader access maximal native wisdom embodied in the proverbs used in TFA, the analysis section of the study focuses on those used by the most mature of speakers during such events which make the highest wisdom demand like marriage, religious observances and funeral ceremony.

Analytical Discussion of Selected Topical Proverbs Used in TFA

The purpose of this section is to analytically show that beyond serving as rhetorical devices or discourse strategies, the proverbs used in Achebe's TFA are custodians of native wisdom: African (Igbo) native wisdom, Igbo land being the geographical setting of the novel. The proverbs analysed and discussed in the study are purposively selected in line with the dictates of the concluding paragraph of the theoretical framework above. Consequently, the analysis focuses, strictly, on topical proverbs. For the purpose of this study, topical proverbs refer to those that convey utmost wisdom messages: messages that substantially constitute the thematic heart of the reference novel. Moreover, the proverbs, being samples of Nigerian ones captured in Nigerian English, are of interest because they are often humorous, delightful to hear, very morally instructive, philosophical and figuratively or allegorically framed. See Akporobaro (ibid: 97).

For reason of spatial restriction, the analysis does not cover all the topical proverbs in TFA. Hence, only the underlisted ones are analysed and discussed:

- (a) Proverbs are the palm oil with which words are eaten (p.5).
- (b) Our elders say that the sun will shine on those who stand before it shines on those who kneel under them (p.6).
- (c) As our people say, a man who pays respect to the great paves way for his own greatness (p.14).

- (d) Eneke the bird says that since men have learnt to shoot without missing, he has learnt to fly without perching (p.16).
- (e) Those whose palm-kernels were cracked for them by a benevolent spirit should not forget to be humble (p.19).
- (f) But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his chi says yes also (p.19).
- (g) He was like the man in the song who has ten and one wives and not enough soup for his foo-foo (p.37).
- (h) Where are the young suckers that will grow when the old banana tree dies? (p.46).
- (i) A baby on its mother's back does not know that the way is long (p.71).
- (j) A child cannot pay for its mother's milk (117).

A surface examination of the proverbs above portrays some of them, especially (c, i and j), as being non-figurative. A surface examination of the proverbs translates to an attempt to decode them outside their pragmatic contexts of use, i.e., to decode them semantically. A profound consideration of the proverbs, on the other hand, shows very clearly that virtually all of them are figurative expressions. By such a consideration, the proverbs are contextually decoded, i.e., the messages they convey are grasped within their pragmatic contexts of use. In the light of the foregoing insights in this paragraph, (a-j) in this section will be contextually interpreted to yield their pragmatic meanings or wisdom messages. Before unfolding the detailed analyses, let it be grasped from this prelude that the figures of speech reflected in (a-j) include metaphor (all, except c, d, f and g), simile (g), personification (a and d) and hyperbole (j). Also note-worthy at this preliminary stage of the analyses is that a few of the proverbs are popular sayings or what can be termed 'local axioms' (c, f and j). Given the foregoing preliminary insights, proverbs can be conceptualised as linguistic tropes and popular sayings which collectively encode the native wisdom of a people: native wisdom as already defined which translates to the totality of positive or rational ideas required by the

people for value-adding accomplishments indicative of continual individual and societal overall growth and development. In other words, the ideas needed for civilisation at both individual and collective levels reside, substantially, in the proverbs of a given traditional society. See Ogbalu (1965) and Pritchett (2013).

Taxonomy is another matter arising from the preliminary insights above. Taxonomy is a factor here, because while majority of the proverbs analysed in this study are figurative, the remaining ones are not as already established and as reflected in the latest authorial definition of the concept. We consider as core (pure) proverbs, those that are figurative and as soft proverbs, those that are not figurative. Following this categorisation, all popular sayings, otherwise termed local axioms like those already identified in this study are soft proverbs. The core proverbs are so classified, because being figurative, they are most intellectually challenging. On the other hand, the soft proverbs are so categorised, because they are framed in plain language, and so, easily 'decodable'. Special proverbs constitute yet another category and include all allegorical anecdotes which encode native wisdom as conceptualised in this study. Before detailed analysis of (a)-(j), let it be noted that all the proverbs are of the conventional type except (h) which is creative. That is, as rhetorical devices, conventional proverbs are fore-grounded, while the creative ones are back-grounded.

(a) is a core proverb and part of the authorial account of the interaction between Okoye and Unoka, situated in this statement: Among the Ibo, the art of conversation is regarded very highly and.... Hence, it serves to underline the wisdom of being tactful during a conversation. Being tactful during a conversation is necessitated by the maxim of politeness by which the interlocutors avoid mutual verbal offence and is a discourse purpose that is best achieved by means of proverbs. This wisdom explains why Okoye danced round the object of his early morning visit to Unoka, deploying half a dozen proverbs, before finally hitting the nail on the head, the purpose of his visit being a sensitive one, namely, debt recovery. The purpose is a sensitive

one, because his debtor, Unoka is his friend. Beyond the wisdom of being tactful, (a) underscores the indispensability of proverbs as discourse strategies, generally. In this regard, it highlights the fact that the use of proverb for oratorical purposes is as much a necessity as palm-oil as a food condiment. The deduction arising from this assertion is that an oration devoid of proverb is as debased as food without oil, and so, hardly effective.

(b) is also a core proverb and of the same intra-textual context with (a). It is Unoka's justification for disappointing Okoye, his creditor that early morning. Its rhetorical effect is as sharp as it is obvious, namely, that Okoye should be patient with the speaker who has bigger debts than his to offset as graphically outlined on the latter's wall. Observe Unoka's clever attribution of the soft proverb to the elders which aptly signifies authoritative back-up. By means of this back-up, he exonerates himself, very tactfully, from blame regarding the issue at stake. He consolidates his exoneration by faulting Okoye's timing of his visit, asserting that if the man owed a thousand cowries has not paid him an early morning visit, Okoye has goofed in this regard. Okoye's unsavoury experience in the hand of Unoka serves to pragmatically instil in the reader, the wisdom stored in another core proverb among the Igbo's: the mouth with which money is borrowed is not the same with the mouth with which it is repaid. Hence, as a financial management rule, loan must never be granted beyond the creditor's endurance capacity. Endurance capacity is synonymous with the willingness to write off the loan if it proves to be a bad one. Another financial management rule arising from the foregoing proverb is that loan should not be granted to the creditor's friends and relatives including parents and children, because experience has shown that such loans always end up as bad ones. The pragmatic import of this rule is that one's friends and relatives are entitled to grants, only, if one is buoyant enough.

(c) proceeds from Okonkwo, the protagonist of *TFA*. It is a soft proverb which captures the speaker's willingness to serve his addressee, Nwakibie, in his search for greatness as a farmer. Consequently, he offers sharecropping services to the latter, such that

the proceeds will be shared between the two of them in the ratio of 67:33% in favour of Nwakibie, his benefactor who provides him with eight hundred tubers of yam, very willingly, Okonkwo being a hard-working young man. It, therefore, follows that the proverb incorporates a socio-economic advancement principle which anchors on service. So the reader learns that by productively serving the rich, one becomes rich as demonstrated in the life of Okonkwo. The proverb can also be deconstructed as an omnibus success (greatness) principle. Deconstructed as such, it follows that to achieve success one should and must first recognise and acknowledge success in somebody who is already successful, understudy that person's accession to success and follow suit. This deconstruction is precisely what Okonkwo appropriated in relation to Nwakibie to become a 'diji' like his benefactor quite unlike his father, Unoka, a hedonist and chronic debtor. By and large the practical implication of the proverb is that result-oriented service is the gateway to success which is derivative of Divine wisdom. Hence, the Lord, Jesus Christ enjoins his disciples: Let the greatest among you be your servants (Mt.20:27).

(d) is an utterance from Nwakibie and a core proverb. It serves to explain the speaker's refusal of yam seedlings to many young men. Okonkwo is among the lucky few to benefit from his rich barn on account of his diligence and steadfastness. He is so diligent and steadfast that Nwakibie, his benefactor, offered him double the quantity of yam seedlings he requested for. Those whose request was turned down were notoriously lazy, prompting Nwakibie to hold on to his yam instead of lavishing it in the name of sharecropping with zero profit prospects, hence the utterance. This disclosure from Nwakibie identifies Okonkwo indeed as a man of character deserving expedited success such as credited to him in the novel. This assertion indicates that character which here incorporates steadfast diligence and integrity is a predisposing platform for success. Deconstructed as a general rule, (d) underscores the wisdom of constant strategic adjustment in the face of changing attitudinal tides.

(e) is a core proverb which the oldest man used to chastise Okonkwo at a kindred meeting for being brusque with less successful men. Osugo is one of the victims of Okonkwo's arrogance. Okonkwo, having become one of the lords of the clan within a record time, is now arrogant. He has forgotten his many years of abject poverty, no thanks to the unprecedented failure of his father, as well as his dependence on some already successful men like Nwakibie. So he calls Osugo a woman, i.e., a weakling for opposing him at the kindred meeting. Consequently, the old man promptly deploys (e) to sharply remind him that his success is not by his might, but simply a 'divine' favour. Hence, (e) embodies a fundamental Christian notion, namely, that people achieve success by the grace of God. In other words, our help is in the name of God who made heaven and earth. This Christian philosophy of attributing human success to God translates to an indirect command to everybody never to fail to be humble. The command is indispensable for virtuous life, generally, humility being the mother of all virtues.

(f) is an authorial soft proverb which embeds the wisdom that the first principle of success is desire which goes with faith: faith in oneself; faith in God; faith in specific set goals driven by a thoughtfully worked out realistic action plan. In other words, it pragmatically asserts that success must first be determinedly desired to be achieved. The deduction arising from the foregoing is that there is a psychological dimension to success, i.e., value-adding achievements. The psychological dimension is simply that success begins in the mind. Let it be emphasised here that success begins in the mind but does not end in the mind. Beyond the mind is the field which harvests the requisite efforts in line with the action plan which must be relentless, else it remains a mirage. See Hill (1983). The foregoing postulations are quite applicable to Okonkwo, even though Achebe creates a contrary impression by means of this same (f) which signifies that Okonkwo's success is strictly a product of his personal effort. This assertion is premised on Achebe's own narrative remark in the novel that Okonkwo's personal god (chi) said yes to his determined will to succeed in life. The accent of

Okonkwo's personal god is indisputably a *sine qua non* for his success, otherwise the god would have held back the accent, and of course, personal gods equivalent to guardian angels in Christianity are part and parcel of the multiple deities recognised and worshipped in African (Igbo) traditional religion (ATR) all of which are 'servants' of the Almighty God. Hence, Divine favour as deduced can never be ruled out as a fundamental prerequisite for success.

(g) is a similitude core proverb uttered by Okonkwo as he cogitates on the future of his son, Nwoye, as a family head, following Nwoye's attitudinal signal to the effect of being a potential patriarch or family head. Wishing strongly that his son grows into a proper patriarch, he utters the proverb in denigration of the contrary, thus, depicting the pitiable living condition of a false man in the like of Obanua in the world of Isidore Okpewho's *The Victims*, i.e., a womanly man, the Osugo's in Okonkwo's own parlance. Such a man as vouchsafed in the proverb is destined to die of hunger for failing to be in effective control of his many wives. Hence, the proverb highlights the indispensable need for a man to truly be a man. A man who is truly a man is a proper patriarch. Such a man is expected to 'lord' his wives and children such that nothing goes amiss in his family, especially feeding. Nothing in the foregoing empowers such a man to enslave (terrorise) his wives and children as seen in Okonkwo's household, because as postulated by Onyemelukwe, Ogunnaike and Ekechi (2013:86) patriarchy is in place to protect women and children. Nevertheless, following the postulation of the trio, we aver that polygamy as part of native wisdom is no longer valid, being an evil wind that blows nobody any good, i.e., a monster that victimizes everybody, beginning with the polygamist himself. See Onyemelukwe 2013 and Okpewho (1970).

(h) is a core proverb and the only creative one that reflects two figures of speech: metaphor and the rhetorical question. It can, therefore, be said to embed rhetorical metaphor. As such, it aptly captures Okonkwo's apprehension regarding who will succeed him when he is no more. Hence, it connotes and foregrounds his irritating

dissatisfaction with Nwoye, his first son, as sharply opposed to Maduka, Obierika's son who proves very promising by every standard. For this reason, he strongly wishes that Ezinma is a son. He strongly so wishes, because Ezinma is very agile, intelligent and loving. In other words, she is down to earth. A socio-psychological situation like this typical of many African men promptly calls to mind the nature-nurture controversy which is about whether a person's character (good or bad) is strictly a product of genetic configuration or training. This controversy is a factor here, because Nwoye and Ezinma are siblings of the same parents being brought up in the same domestic atmosphere under the same parental influence, but still sharply contrast with each other character-wise. Unconsciously though, Okonkwo and Obierika, his bosom friend, concurrently resolve the controversy in favour of nature, reasoning that there is too much of Unoka in Nwoye: Unoka as a metaphor for biologically rooted weakness and failure. Without quashing the logic of the two patriarchs, one can also trace Nwoye's character deficiency to poor parenting. Obierika himself signals this by reminding Okonkwo that Nwoye is still growing.

To Okonkwo, howbeit, Nwoye's character is already formed as he proverbially asserts: *A chick that will grow into a cock can be spotted the very day it hatches*. Nevertheless, reasoning with Obierika, it follows that Okonkwo is yet to play full parental role on Nwoye, Nwoye still being a child, indeed. For instance, who and who are his friends? This rhetorical question throws up the place of peer group influence in character formation along with the parenting responsibility of monitoring children's company, since bad company corrupts good manner. Hence, the underlying wisdom in (g) is that rather than fruitlessly lamenting character deficiency in a child, parents should embrace aggressive principled parenting as substantially chronicled in Christian Holy Writ and several conventional texts such as Templar (2008) without jettisoning the positive aspects of native wisdom which in the register of Religion make up the gospel before the Gospel.

(i) is a soft proverb with which Chielo, the priestess of agbala literally offers consolation to Ezinma whom she takes from the mother against her wish to the shrine of the goddess. The proverb is, therefore, used to keep Ezinma in a relaxed mood, assuring her that she will be saved the physical stress of trekking to the very distant shrine. It must be pointed out, however, that the proverb is not always literally understood. In another context, it can pragmatically be decoded as a solemn reprimand against an extravagant dependant or an unappreciative beneficiary. The signification in such a situation is that the reprimanded is unaware of what it takes to be a benefactor. Hence, such a fellow is akin to a child whose immature mind is unable to comprehend circumstantial challenges.

(j) as a soft proverb is a fascinating expression of Okonkwo's appreciation to his maternal relatives shepherded by Uchendu. His maternal relations deserve such profound appreciation, having kindly sheltered and assisted him during his seven years of exile in their Mbanta homeland. He went there on exile, immediately after accidentally killing the sixteen years old son of a diseased patriarch during the patriarch's funeral/burial ceremonies. It is worth-noting that (j) is part of Okonkwo's opening remark as he rises to formally present the merriment he prepared for the populous extended family as a parting gift. As unfolded in *TFA*, every variety of food and drink is in abundance during the party and there are assorted varieties. In other words, Okonkwo's appreciation is quite a generous one, especially in the light of (j).

(j) is particularly note-worthy, because beyond maximally signifying the speaker's gratefulness, it foregrounds and lauds the fullness of affection enjoyed by every native folk in his/her maternal home which is sharply at variance with the reality of one's paternal home in this regard. Hence, it is also said among the Igbo's that a child in trouble is never denied succour in its maternal home. Another pragmatic decoding of (j) unfolds an undeniable platitude, namely, that no favour granted a mother by her son or daughter is ever too much. This platitude brings to the fore the indispensable place of maternal care in the life of everybody, especially in relation to early childhood. Hence, (j) as

Okonkwo's highly philosophical appreciative local axiom is a celebration of responsible motherhood which as such enjoins everyone to continuously appreciate his/her mother in lofty manners, materially and non-materially. Neglecting this injunction is unthinkable, because just as (j) asserts, a mother's breast milk is invaluable, indeed. In addition to the celebration of responsible motherhood which is strictly matrimonial with zero tolerance for divorce, (j) implicitly serves to generally remind Achebe's audience to generously appreciate favours, appreciation being an open gate to more and more favours in line with the native wisdom of the Igbo's. This implicit wisdom in (j) stems from the fact that Okonkwo's maternal relatives, thereafter, offered him immense assistance in order to facilitate his return journey to Umuofia.

It must, however, here be observed that as appreciative as Okonkwo has proved to be, he did not tap the fullness of wisdom accessible in his maternal home, the wisdom of necessary silence, for instance. The fullness of wisdom in his maternal home is personified in Uchendu, his maternal uncle. As soon as he sets foot on Mbanta, Uchendu exposes him to the wisdom of necessary silence which is golden, but he fails to access it. Uchendu also availed him with the wisdom of calculated reaction to a baffling situation, but also to no avail. Consequently, he leaves Mbanta for Umuofia still a rash irate man who reacts to situations on the spur of the moment, never keeping still for necessary reflection. The foregoing native wisdom is embedded in the core proverb deployed by Uchendu, while in an early audience with Okonkwo. Anecdotal in form, the proverb narrates a story about the kite's predatory expedition to the roosts of the hen and the duck with the latter at an advantage for keeping silent when deprived of one of its young ones quite unlike the former which made useless noise, and consequently, lost its snatched chicken.

CONCLUSION

This study has analytically shown that proverbs are indeed the custodians of native wisdom which refers to wisdom for life, the semantic import of

Okonkwo's uncle's name: Uchendu. Wisdom refers to applied knowledge generated from actual life experiences in addition to the insights drawn from the living Word. The living Word is the same which came into existence on its own volition in the beginning as expounded in the introductory section of the study. In other words, God is the source of native wisdom as for non-native wisdom much of which is encoded in the Holy Book of Proverbs as exhaustively enshrined in the other sacred scriptures of the Christian Holy Writ. It then follows that native wisdom in totality constitutes what in Religion as a discipline is technically termed 'gospel before the Gospel'. Nevertheless, the analysis section of the study further discloses that some aspects of native wisdom such as polygamy are invalid, and so, are not parts of the gospel before the Gospel, because they add no value to life. Such aspects are usually ratified on the table of culture, but are really aberrations of native wisdom, especially such ones as obnoxious widowhood practices including widow inheritance, exclusively victimising women for childlessness and concubinage. See Onyemelukwe, Ogunnaike and Ekechi (ibid.) who have identified these aberrations as constituting the root of feminism, an otherwise unnecessary ideological movement in Nigeria as across the globe.

The pragmatic import of the foregoing highlights of the study is that the global community should continually rely on proverbs and the living Word for all-inclusive wisdom, i.e., native and non-native wisdom. All-inclusive wisdom is indispensable, else, positive character formation will always be a mere dream. Positive character is necessary, because character is everything as has analytically been established by Onyemelukwe and Oriaku (2011). Hence, whoever loses character loses everything.

Let it, however, be stated that proverbs alone do not constitute the human source of native wisdom. The source also includes all folkloric elements such as folktales like myths and legends and folksongs, especially lullabies and dirges. Nothing in this conclusion ratifies ATR as being authentic in the name of cultural nationalism or native identity. This caution is necessitated by the tendency of ATR to

monopolise folklore for the reasons already averred. In other words, in the context of the study, religion and cultural nationalism are sharply at variance with each other.

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