

CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION
BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

African literature consists of a body of literary works in different languages and genres, ranging from oral literature to literature written in African and colonial languages. As a result of European colonization of the continent from the 16th century to the mid-twentieth century, much of African written literature is in European languages. During the era of colonization, European culture and languages supplanted those of Africa.

The most recognized and widely used European languages in African literature are English, French and Portuguese. The literary works that were written in African languages as well as the traditional oral texts went virtually unacknowledged until the late 20th century. This situation increased the recognition of oral traditions in African literature. Akin to this fact, the use of African oral traditions such as proverbs, riddles, anecdotes, songs, tales, mythological narratives and poetry persisted and generally influenced contemporary African literature (drama, prose and poetry). Rems Umeasiegbu, a folklorist, once remarked

One cannot talk meaningfully of African literature without mentioning the oral tradition. Until comparatively recent times, most of the literature of black Africa, South of Sahara, was oral, i.e transmitted by word of mouth. Storytelling was popular and was at the time perhaps, the most widespread form of entertainment. (25)

Ezenwa-Ohaeto adds that "The exploitation of oral tradition through a synthesized creative crucible enables the modern Nigerian writer to produce fresh, exciting and artistic poetry" (23). Ezenwa-Ohaeto's assertion here clearly shows the capability of

oral traditions such as proverbs, tales, myths etc. to sustain works of African literature. Certainly African literature consists of the orality of verbal communication and absorbs extensively, several cultural elements to communicate and to give African literature a local content. Interestingly too, this consciousness exhibited by most African writers shows the need in the use of African oral traditions such as proverbs in creative works. Again, Ezenwa-Ohaeto substantiates his argument further:

The younger generation of Nigerian poets who started writing after the Biafran War deliberately situated their poems within the cultural tradition of their home regions. Themes and modes of the oral tradition of the Yoruba, Igbo, the Niger Delta or the Plateau people are recorded and transformed into modern intertextual poetic idioms (Back cover of *Contemporary Nigerian Poetry and the Poetics of Orality*).

Stated differently, Nigerian writers writing in English are more selective than those writing in Nigerian languages in the use of oral traditions like proverbs, riddles and anecdotes in their creative works. Often, the Nigerian writers who write in English relate the use of oral traditions in their works largely to the stylistic aspects of oral literature. Consequently, most of their works, with a few exceptions, make use of proverbs for purposes of localizing their works. Moreover, this relationship between oral tradition and written literature found in contemporary Nigerian literature can be said to be consistent and seminal.

Udenta agrees to the claim above when he asserts that

Modern African literature and the critical response to it are a consequence of two distinct cultural and aesthetic forces: the received traditionalist aesthetic imagination and the aesthetic over-determined by colonialism. The interplay of these two currents sometimes cripples African Creative Productions and critical practice by either confining the literature to the dictates of an immutable traditionalist aesthetic injunction or by foisting on its bastardized forms of Euro-centric aesthetic thinking.

Nnolim accentuates Udentá's standpoint when he asserts that

The good orator calls to his aid the legends, folklore, proverbs... of his people; they are some of the raw materials with which he works... They are like dormant seeds lying in the dry season earth waiting for the rain... The folk tradition in African literature has become part of the essential qualities of its literary expression, for the value of the work of art transcends its documentary function as the artist gives expression to perceptions of which he may not be entirely conscious. And judicious use of the folk tradition is at the root of the appeal of much of the literature emanating from black Africa... (AAN 16)

These critics whose opinions have been projected here are of the view that African proverbs have played a crucial role in giving the literature of the continent African identity, especially as it remains an imaginative piece that evokes emotion and promotes the beauty of African oral tradition.

In the same vein, Nwachukwu-Agbada explains that "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" (194).

One of the most compelling trends in African literature today remains the constant use of African oral traditions by literary artists. With particular reference to Nigeria, many Nigerian creative works so far produced are steeped in the oral traditions of their indigenous communities, with a strong emphasis on oral performance. As Tanure Ojaide argues this matter when he states that much of what is called modern African literature is in a way "written oral tradition" (30). This tradition of orality and performance manifests, with regard to poetry and drama, in the use of images derived from the fauna and flora of Africa. There is need for the infusion of proverbs

into the literary works and adoption of various indigenous rhythms in the use of verbal tropes and concepts of space and time to structure quality essence in Nigerian literature. In another dimension, Ojaide reveals that

An oral tradition of performance has impressed modern Africans who exploit the tonal resources of their indigenous languages, borrow the verbal dexterity of the oral traditions, story telling techniques, and others to compose poems that are dynamic and generate actions. (30)

Ojaide's perspective on the efforts of African writers to use their oral traditions is not extraneous, considering the fact that in the attempt to correct or resist the racist and jaundiced representation of Africans in foreign texts, the discourse that emerged from among the first generation of African writers like Achebe, Soyinka, Nwapa, Sofola and others in succeeding generations assumed a subversive tone, in intents, orientation and execution. This action exhibited by African writers was meant to provide resistance against incorporation into a foreign Western culture which would take diverse forms (linguistic, thematic and stylistic) that altogether constitute a counter – discourse.

What emerges from the foregoing has led Rems Umeasiegbu to question the reasons behind the use of oral lore, especially proverbs in African literature (Igbo Literature). He supplies the answer:

Obviously, the special meeting between Europe and Africa furnishes us with a part of the answer. The decision to use folklore in literary works in the first place, as is the decision to write, stems from this unique event in history, an urge to set right the centuries of damage and blackmail. (13)

Chinua Achebe, father of modern African literature, affirms that his European education and that of his fellow African writers have caused a rueful "... disaster...

upon the African psyche" (Killam ed. 3). This historical anomaly confronting African literature made Achebe, Soyinka, Nwapa, Sofola and many other writers to challenge this social problem. In what can be said to be the African Empire writing back to the Western Empire, these writers wrote literary works that redefined African people in their native and cultural setting. Though civilization in world history could be said to have its roots in Egypt, regrettably, African people have been made to believe that they had little or no contribution to world civilization and culture. On the contrary, Achebe dismisses this misunderstanding of African's role in world civilization and culture. He stoutly avers that "here is an adequate revolution for me to espouse – to help my society regain belief in itself and put away the complexes of the years of denigration and self- abasement. And it is essentially a question of education, in the best sense of the word" (Killam ed. 3).

In another article "The Role of a Writer in New Nation", Achebe buttresses his critical view when he states

... As far as I am concerned, the fundamental theme must be disposed of. This theme – put quite simply – is that the African people did not hear of culture for the first time from Europeans, that their societies were not mindless but frequently had a philosophy of great depth and value and beauty, that they had poetry and, above all, they had dignity. It is this dignity that many African people all but lost during the colonial period and it is this that they must now regain (Killam ed. 8)

In his holistic effort to make people regain their lost dignity and identity, Achebe intends to show Europeans that Africans had, and still have, culture, literature and religion of great value. Achebe explains further "a writer who feels the need to right this wrong cannot escape the conclusion that the past needs to be recreated not

only for the enlightenment of our detractors but even more for our education first (Killam ed. 9)

In whatever language African story will be told, drawing from Achebe's position above, what matters is the education of his African people. Thus, the proverb plays a crucial role in making literature of the African continent, typically African. He, however, accentuates this position when he further states "But what I do mean is that owing to the peculiar nature of our situation, it would be futile to try to take off before we have repaired our foundations. We must set the scene which is authentically African; then what follows will be meaningful and deep" (Killam ed.9)

Chinweizu, Madubuike, and Onwuchekwa remark thus:

The artist in the traditional African milieu spoke for and to his community. His imagery, themes, symbolism, and forms were drawn from a communally accessible pool. He was heard. He made sense. And again for the function of the artist in Africa, in keeping with our traditions and needs, demands that the writers, as a public voice, assume a responsibility to reflect public concerns in his writing... Because in Africa we recognize that art is in the public domain, a sense of social commitment. (74)

These three writers are in support of the view that an African writer should incorporate African oral lore into his work, to give it an African identity. This viewpoint led Isidore Okpewho to admit that traditional African art did in many instances aspire to the beautiful. That it often existed for its own appeal to the eye and that many a time it had no known ritual origin or societal, inspired functional value. In his article "The Aesthetic of Old African Art", he asserts that "The urge to create beauty will remain an integral impulse whatever the level the African artist may be involved in" (39). Having the background of African oral lore in their works,

African literary artists created beautiful African works by incorporating African oral traditions such as proverbs into their works; they spoke a private language of their own and they expressed their individuality in their creative works.

Nnolim, on his part, in *Issues in African Literature* brilliantly argues that:

To whatever society (*secret or communal*) that our traditional folkways and oral tradition appealed, they did have the appreciation of the beautiful in mind - beauty surprised at its own arrival, in addition to performing the following functions: Impart practical wisdom... Provide some didactic purpose by teaching lessons in prudence, generosity, patience, wisdom, and common sense... Point to moral through songs, sayings, legends, myths and proverbs... Make people, especially younger members of the society, aware of their ethos, their cultural heritage, tribal history, mores, laws... African folkways and their oral tradition dealt with man's dilemma in his existential being and tried to grapple with man's dilemma and adventures in life. (110)

Nnolim's submissions above is valid in all ramifications. This is because for the Nigerian writer, Africa has the tradition he needs. As he looks around at what seems to be different in geographical boundaries, he sees, essentially, the same African people, the similarity of ideas, of patterns, of thoughts, of modes of behaviour. He, thus, tries to put together the relevant ideas and thoughts in his writing. Irele, agreeing to this attitude of the African writer, asserts that "the essential direction of modern African writing of the work of the truly significant writers is towards the definition, in and through literature of a distinctive mode of thoughts and feeling towards an imaginative apprehension and embodiment of an African spirit. (*The African Experience in Literature and Ideology*, 174)

Irele stresses that the main power in doing this comes from an effort by African writers to "work out a new spiritual coherence from the historical disconnection

between their African heritage and their modern experience" (174). Adebayo believes that this integration "essentially demands a knowledge or an understanding of that vital aspect of the past culture which is to be recalled for the fertilization of the present and future. (62)

Moreover, foreign literary scholars like Dorson believe that African literature uses African oral traditions. Dorson remarks that

Modern African writing is an excellent case in point. Since the 1950's, a number of gifted African authors have composed novels, short stories, plays, and poems in English and French that frequently draw upon their own tribal traditions... Writers make use of folklore in many different ways. They may employ the structure of a tale or epic bodily and polish the rough edges into a literary gloss. Or they may incorporate proverbs, local customs, ballads, and folk beliefs into the skein of the narration. (v-vi)

All through their seminal work, *Decolonization of African Literature*, the troika, Chinweizu, Onwuchekwa and Madubuike, call for a full or total Africanization of African literature as the aforesaid critical comments show Okot P'bitek's views in this regard are similar: "The literary challenge is in collecting and translating the rich harvest" (121).

From the foregoing comments, it is clear that the use of oral traditions in African literature has made a considerable scholarly progress over the years. However, one enormous and urgent responsibility persists, namely, that of the preservation of the oral material itself. The point regarding the urgency of this great task is particularly well captured by Adali-Mortty and is quite appropriate here:

The wealth of our past in song and dance and customary usage has not yet been lost entirely. But time is running out, both in my country and in the other West African societies. There is much left which we can still retrieve, if we tackle now the job of study and research and collection. There are many precious pieces in folktales, there are madrigals, songs sung by children at play in the moonlight village squares, drum songs and drum language, hunters, songs, lullabies and cradle songs, songs for out dooring a maiden, songs to illustrate stories... songs of battle, songs of challenge and abuse, words of libation, religious prayers and songs and proverbs. It is out of these materials that modern creative writing can be built, if it is to be distinctly original and West African. (Beier ed.11)

A point is established here about the importance of the use of African oral tradition, especially proverbs by African writers. By his creative ingenuity, he should also contribute to defining the relevance of this culture in a society that is fast growing out of its past.

On this link between African tradition and literature, Killam explains that

Modern African writing has been concerned almost exclusively with the reality of African life and few African writers of English expression to date have sought their thematic materials outside Africa. Unlike some writers in some countries with similar colonial pasts, African dramatists have not turned their backs on their own culture; rather they have faced up to the problems, and sought solution for them in imaginative forms. Their fiction is a literary echo of a general culture reality. (3)

While Killam mentions only thematic material, it is understood from his perspective that African dramatists (writers) borrow extensively from their oral traditions, whether in terms of content, or of techniques. The use of language, style, imagery, form or structure in creative works most times reflects the realities of the culture of a particular artist. While Killam's comment is understandably limited to drama, it must be added that much of modern African writing - whether prose, poetry or drama- similarly owes a huge debt to the writer's oral lore. Several critical elements

are particularly prominent and, in most cases, well exploited in the works of such writers like Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Achebe, Soyinka, Nwapa, Sofola, Awornor, Okara, Tutuola, Okri, Rotimi, Clark etc.

The traditional African drama, like Zulu Sofola's dramaturgy, often associated with rituals, oral traditions and social events emphasizes mime, dance, music and costume rather than verbal art alone. Verbal art according to William R. Bascom was proposed by himself and Richard Waterman as a term to distinguish folktales, myths, legends, proverbs and other 'literary forms' from the other materials which are commonly considered as folklore, where folk refers to a group of people with common culture. The verbal art, such as proverbs, has influence on contemporary African drama and is particularly significant in Zulu Sofola's plays. Oral or aural literary forms continued to develop for radio and popular usage despite being new in African plays. Nevertheless, oral traditions including tales, drama, riddles, histories, myths and legends, songs, proverbs and other expressions are frequently employed to educate and entertain African people. Oral histories, myths and proverbs additionally serve to remind every community of their ancestors' heroic deeds, their past and the precedents for their customs and traditions. Essential to oral lore, most times, is a concern for presentation and oratory. Rems Umeasiegbu assesses this notion by accepting that oral tradition is an important aspect of African life. 'Proverbs are used in daily intercourse even in the judicial process; tales are told daily and talented storytellers are in high demand' (*Ask the Storyteller* 7).

Furthermore, almost a cliché in African literary discourse, Achebe's dictum of "where the rain began to beat us" remains an important one. Relatively, this assertion can

be viewed as the urge for cultural nationalism, which was strongest amongst the first generation of African writers. The writers emanating from the African cultural setting could be said to be adequately responding to the exigencies of the period; in other words, asserting the humanity of the African and the validity of his culture, especially for the years of denigration by others. In the words of Ola Rotimi, concerns

have appropriately, been in response to the socio cultural traumas of the African peoples themselves. In the era of colonialism, for example, the passion of African literature was for the redemption of the integrity of the black man. This fixation was quite valid in the face of sustained foreign domination. It crystallized itself in the theme of NEGRITUDE. The next epoch marked the collapse of colonialism, with an attendant state of flux caused by an encounter between old and new life-styles. The theme of 'culture conflicts' provided the rubric for the treatment of this situation in literature. (5-6)

Rotimi's viewpoint adds voice to the fact that African writers in a way of domesticating, authenticating, and indigenizing African literature, have used African folklore and oral lores, proverbs precisely, in their creative works.

In the light of the foregoing, what is then a proverb or what is an Igbo proverb? Proverb as an aspect of verbal arts tells much about a people's traditional ways of experiencing reality, about the proper or expected ways of doing things, about values and warnings, rules and wisdoms the elders want to impress on the minds of their young ones. The punch-line character of proverbs - the shorter the better - makes it easy to commit them to memory for ready recall when the occasion calls for humorous comments or admonition. Ruth and Eberhard Reichman see proverbs as words of wisdom "Created by people in high and low stations, humble folk and great authors, borrowed from ancient or neighboring cultures, and accumulating

over many centuries. Some are locally known while many are shared around the world". Nwachukwu-Agbada is of the opinion that "of all the oral legacies, it is the Igbo proverb which has continued to enjoy a high frequency of usage in spite of Western literacy and modernism".

Finnegan rightly points out that proverbs are often "marked by terseness of expression, by a form different from that of ordinary speech and by a figurative mode of expression abounding in metaphor" (399). These figurative nature or poetic quality found in Finnegan's definition clearly differentiates proverbs from other forms of everyday speech or discourse. According to Finnegan "this allied to their figurative mode of expression serves to some degree to set them apart from everyday speech" (195). Finnegan's assertion is vital because proverbs play a major role in African culture. In almost every community in Africa, people use proverbs for communication either in informal or formal settings.

For Umeasiegbu, "a proverb is an expression recognized by a people as embodying the philosophy and wisdom of their ancestors" (9). That is a commendable attempt because Finnegan affirms that 'the exact definition of proverb is no easy matter. There is however some general agreement as to what constitutes a proverb'. F.C Ogbalu asserts that 'proverbs constitute a language of diplomacy among the Igbo. He submits that a thorough knowledge of Ibo proverbs enable one to predict the reaction of any Ibo man to a situation' (4). P.K. Davids is of the opinion that the proverbs form important parts of certain expression which is the reason they are called the 'oil' with which words are eaten, just as one can eat yam with oil. She submits that 'the proverbs usually come to emphasize, modify, confirm, nullify and

most of all finalize topics. Intelligent people are known by the apt way they use the Igbo proverbs and are respected are such. He who speaks in proverbs, speaks with force; and does retain the attention of his hearers, hence the Igbo man said; 'Mgbe ilu m gwuru, ka uka m gwuru'. This means, 'When my proverb is finished, my whole talk is finished' (5-6). F.B.O. Akporobaro adds that 'many Nigerian proverbs are not simply nuggets of age-old wisdom but are rhetorical artistic artifacts which reveal an interest in form, humour, delightful imagery and poetry combined in one communicative process' (75), while Obiechina posits that 'Igbo proverbs supply a substratum of meaning and interpretation (and) are so much a part of Igbo oral tradition' (14). Austin J. Shelton emphasizes the unlimited relevance of proverbs as perceived by various personalities in the field of folklore. He affirms with Evans Pritchard that the proverb is a collective expression of a people, using metaphor to comment meaningfully upon a problem situation. F.C Ogbalu finally confesses that 'inspite of the influence of the West, one cannot help breaking his speech in English in order to insert one or more Igbo proverbs here and there, as there is a feeling that it is only by so doing that the point in question is completely driven home(87). Wellek and Warren stated that literature, written or oral, is all about the creative or remarkable use of language by means of imagination, in direction or suggestion (26-27).

Most proverbs teach in social contexts. They are didactic – impart moral lessons. Away from the adorning roles, proverbs exhibit enormous socialization potential. In most African communities like the Igbo, elders use them to teach the young wisdom about the world and how to behave. Regarding the educational dimensions of

proverb, Finnegan, again comments as follows "Now proverbs often imply some general comment on the way people do, or should, or should not behave" (413).

From the foregoing definitions of proverbs, indeed Finnegan's comments summarize a number of points made regarding such overlapping between oral forms, the literary quality of the proverb and its special use of language:

Proverbs in Africa are effective in a whole range of ways in life and in literature... Their literary significance emerges not only in the beauty of words and form, their sense of detachment and generalization, and their connections with other genres of artistic expression, but also in the aptness and perceptiveness with which they are used in an actual context... (qtd in Okoh 126-7)

Indeed, the comments aforementioned define proverb. But then what is an Igbo proverb? What distinguishing features make Igbo proverbs an embodiment of deep knowledge and wisdom?

All the definitions supplied above do not give a clear clue to the proper definition of Igbo proverbs because proverb welcomes a difficult definition. Even Archer Taylor, the foremost proverbian, was unable to provide an exact definition of proverb. For him, proverb is a function of perspective. A statement that could be proverbial to one person may not be proverbial to another person from a distinct cultural setting. To be precise, Igbo proverbs are pithy verbal expressions that express the philosophy and the wisdom of the Igbo. It also embodies the culture and traditions of the Igbo. Umeasiegbu states his own definition of Igbo proverb further:

The Igbo word for the proverb is *Ilu*. However, this word does not help very much in our search for definitions. Every adult knows the meaning of the word, but only few of such people are able to say what makes a statement an *ilu*. Another meaning of *Ilu* is "bitterness". The *ilu* adds some bitterness to a

speech. Just as anything bitter is accessible to a few who can withstand the bitterness, proverbs are inaccessible to most people since their meanings are not apparent to the uninitiated. (*The Palm Oil of Speech* 9)

Despite this difficulty in arriving at a proper definition of Igbo proverbs, certain factors can serve as the origin of Igbo proverbs. These are Igbo tales, customs and traditions, beliefs and religion. Speaking about the nature of Igbo proverbs, Egudu says the characteristics of most Igbo proverbs possess “epigrammatic symmetry and pithiness, balanced structure and poetic rhythm” (77).

Generally speaking, Igbo proverbs can be classified on the basis of the motives of the person employing them in speech, which are determined by the occasion on which he is using them, and which in turn determine the teleological functions of the proverbs. As for the aesthetic function, all Igbo proverbs are employed for the purpose of embellishment. On the basis of the speakers motif and the practical functions of the proverbs, three broad categories of Igbo proverbs can be identified:

- (a) Those that vindicate self (the speaker)
- (b) Those that exhort other people
- (c) Those that satirize foolishness.

For Nnolim, Igbo proverbs accepted as Igbo truths ascertained through their existentialism “were used to offer instruction on how to avoid pitfalls in life” (*Issues in African Literature* III). Lindfors states that “proverbs are used to confuse the dull-witted (*Folklore in Nigerian Literature* 428). This means that “an Igbo who is able to use the correct proverb at the correct time bestirs his listeners to his side. Failure to

use this leaves one forever in the background" (13). Umeasiegbu corroborates his argument further when he reveals that Igbo proverbs also have a didactic function.

Societal norms are expressed in them. An apparently straight forward proverbial statement may be as effective in inculcating the right ideas in youngsters as a formal instruction in school. Many proverbs, therefore, discuss such concept as responsibility, punctuality, hope, laziness, respect, foolishness and greed. Perhaps the most important function of proverbs is to promote the cause of the individual. They are often used to foster personal pains. Proverbs are used not only to justify a speaker's actions, but also to ridicule an opponent or rival. This is common in Igbo land. (*Palm Oil of Speech* 13)

For Nwachukwu-Agbada, "The proverb in the Igbo Social matrix remains a documentation of the lives of the people at a particular time. Like some of the other oral forms, it records the history, experience, the trauma and the tension of society at every stage in its evolution. (*The Proverb in the Igbo Milieu...* 194)

Arewa and Dundes in an article entitled "Proverbs and the Ethnography of Speaking Folklore" clearly state that

Proverbs may serve as impersonal vehicles for personal communication. A parent may use a proverb to direct a child's action or thought, but by using a proverb, the parental imperative is externalized and removed somewhat from the individual parent. The guilt or responsibility for directing the child is projected on to the anonymous past, the anonymous folk...it is a proverb from the cultural past whose voice speaks truth in traditional terms... The impersonal power of proverbs is perhaps most apparent in the well known African judicial process in which the participants argue with proverbs intended to serve as past precedents for present actions... In African legal ritual, an advocate of a cause uses proverbs for the same purposes. (70)

While the foregoing may demonstrate the nature, origin and function of Igbo proverbs in Nigeria/Igbo literature, it is appropriate to state here that Igbo proverbs

are most time analogical, imagistic and comic and when employed by Igbo writers, Igbo proverbs serve among other functions, the function of enlarging the plot of a story. In the main, therefore, the Igbo proverbs are didactic or instructive in their practical functions. It is in view of this quintessential role that Igbo proverbs play in Igbo/Nigerian literature that Zulu Sofola has made extensive use of them in her dramaturgy. This stylistic choice makes her plays to have the Igbo cultural background. Sofola's literary ability to use Igbo proverbs for embellishment of the plot of her plays leans on the fact that she tacitly observed and obeyed the common rules and recipes in the use of Igbo proverbs in her plays chosen for this study. Isidore Okpewho supports her decision when he comments:

(The writers) collect and publish texts of the oral literature of their people as practiced by them over time and to use that literature as a basis for writing original works that reflect, from a more or less modern perspectives, some of the major concerns of today so as to demonstrate that traditional African culture is not obsolete but relevant for the articulation of contemporary needs and goals. (293)

Given this background, the influence of traditional contents (proverbs) on African playwrights (writers) is therefore obvious. Zulu Sofola, as the first Nigerian female playwright, is blazing the trail in the use of Igbo proverbs in drama. The use of Igbo proverbs as will later be discussed, has played a predominant role in making Sofola's plays more domesticated and authentic. The Igbo cultural background portrayed in her plays shows and accentuates the myriads of opinions by the above African writers, critics or folklorists (African and non-African) on the extensive use of African folklore (proverbs) in African literature.

Achebe in his recent keynote address, "Literature and Ethnicity", presented in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, at the 2011 Garden City Literary Festival, supports Sofola's use of Igbo traditions (proverbs) in her works when he brilliantly asserts that

The cultural context within which a writer finds himself/herself is relevant in so far as it brings something of literary value - contributes to the world story - and does not claim superiority over, deny, obscure or jaundice, even oppress other perspectives or stories...Good literature, whether oral or written, will bear the marks of the author's culture as well as his or her own personal signature. (*Vanguard* March 26, 18)

Against this backdrop, Zulu Sofola emerges with her Igbo plays filled with Igbo proverbs to enlarge her plot and to Africanize her plays. This tendency on the use of Igbo proverbs by writers of Igbo extractions has made Lindfors state that

Achebe's influence on the younger generation of Ibo writers (on the use of Igbo proverbs)... has been profound, especially in matters of style. First novelists such as Nkem Nwankwo, John Munonye, Flora Nwapa, Elechi Amadi, Clement Agunwa, and Edmund Uzodimma clearly constitute what may be termed 'a school of Achebe' in African literature, for in telling stories of traditional Igbo village life they all employed stylistic techniques first introduced by Achebe. The most obvious of these techniques is the use of traditional Ibo proverbs in narration and dialogue. (*Folklore in Nigerian Literature* 168)

Lindfors is right because Achebe's influence on other writers is still felt till date. The folk tradition of a people, Nnolim says, "wears many garbs and etches itself unconsciously in the subconscious of the artist"(28). This study will later establish the many ways Sofola uses proverbs in her plays in which Igbo tradition has the pride of place. It will go further to establish that Sofola consciously uses Igbo proverbs to enrich her dramaturgy, to give it form and structure, and from there, imbue it with meaning. This is the tradition she has established in the African play.

Problem of the Study

The lack of a definite definition of proverbs in either formal or functional terms has posed serious challenge to scholars of the Igbo proverb. Most times, the Igbo know little of how, why and for whom the proverbs are used.

Though Igbo proverbs are misunderstood and sometimes underrated by some Igbo and non-Igbo scholars, some novelists like Chinua Achebe, Nkem Nwankwo and Chukwuemeka Ike, have consciously absorbed Igbo proverbs, synthesized and woven them into the fabric of their novels. Despite this effort in the use of Igbo proverbs by Igbo novelists, not much of this has been done in Igbo plays.

Based on the above, this research focuses on eliciting the extent to which Zulu Sofola, an Igbo playwright, has used Igbo proverbs in her plays in order to expose the Igbo cultural norms and values. Also to re-affirm that the female gender, just like their male counterparts, adequately make use of proverbs extensively.

Purpose of the Study

The aim of this study is to explore the use of Igbo proverbs in select plays of Zulu Sofola. The plays to be used for the critical illustration of how Sofola uses Igbo proverbs are *Wedlock of the Gods*, *King Emene*, and *Old Wines are Tasty*. The choice of these plays out of several written by Sofola anchors on the fact that these plays, more than the other plays of Sofola, make use of Igbo cultural background and proverbs. Oral literary theory forms the theoretical framework while the contextual and interpretative approach to the study of folklore will be the critical approaches to discuss these plays.

The oral literary theory was propounded by Alan Dundes to solve the problem of over emphasis on the 'recording of proverb texts without a corresponding treatment of the context. E. Ojo Arewa, in his article 'Proverb usage in a Natural Context and Oral Literary Criticism' explains that in order to undertake a full treatment of context, meanings and usage should be recorded not only from the point of view of the collector but also from the viewpoint of the group from which the collector has obtained his data.

The interpretative approach avoids over statements and masses data only when the data is useful to the argument being advance while the contextual bothers on the meaning entirely.

Significance of the Study

The African system of communication thrives on proverbs which help in driving salient points home. A study of this nature encourages other scholars to probe into the imagery of writers in Africa, Nigeria and the Igbo race since proverbs help to explore the situation the writers are depicting. Efforts may be made by a new researcher to expand the study to other parts of the country, to other regions of Africa and determine the welfare and survival of folk traditions in those areas. A future researcher could also extend the study and combine works of few other writers in order to determine their individual adaptations of this folklore genre from which a general statement could be made on the use of proverbs in contemporary scene. Again, a future researcher could look beyond proverbs and study the use of other verbal art such as riddles, songs, tales etc. This study makes an important contribution to knowledge by establishing the relevance and influence of Igbo

proverbs in Igbo literature (Nigerian Igbo plays) and serves as a resource material for those who wish to embark on further research in this area of study.

Scope of the Study

This study is limited to the study of Igbo proverbs in some select plays of Zulu Sofola: *King Emene*, *Wedlock of the Gods*, and *Old Wines Are Tasty*. These plays have been selected because they are Sofola's plays that adequately make use of Igbo cultural background and proverbs to project thematic concern and style in the plays.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT SCHOLARSHIP

In the last five decades since the birth of Nigerian literature, writers have produced an impressive collection of literature in English. Though they some how rely on European literary traditions, the use of African oral traditions like proverbs has been obvious in their literary works. On the home soil, many Igbo writers have used proverbs in their creative works. Apart from Obi Egbuna and Cyprian Ekwensi, one can hardly find an Igbo novelist who has not utilized Igbo proverbs in his works. Chinua Achebe tops the list of Igbo writers who use Igbo proverbs in their literary works. According to Umeasiegbu

He, more than any other writer has placed Igbo folklore, especially the proverbs, on a functional literary perspective. His international reputation rests partly on his ability to utilize and recreate successfully the folklore of his people in all his works. (*The Palm Oil of Speech* 13)

Achebe's influence on other Igbo writers on the use of Igbo proverbs has been commendable. From Umeasiegbu's stand, Achebe's efforts in the use of Igbo proverbs in his novels have been to Africanize or more exactly, to 'igboize' the literature coming from his Igbo region in Nigeria. Igbo writers who perhaps could be termed students of "School of Achebe" in African literature, are Nkem Nwankwo, Zulu Sofola, John Munonye, Flora Nwapa, Elechi Amadi, Clement Agunwa, Edmund Uzodimma and Chukwuemeka Ike. These griots tell stories of traditional Igbo village life by employing Igbo stylistic techniques and context such as proverbs as first introduced by Achebe in his trilogy: *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *No Longer at Ease*.

This tendency has led Lindfors to say, "The proverbs, figures of speech and the Igbo words they employ are meant to stimulate actual Igbo usage in the village. Fidelity to the common mother tongue is what matters most" (*Folklore in Nigerian Literature* 170). Achebe, also extends the use of Igbo proverbs in his urban novels. In *A Man of the People*, an old man scolds his son with Igbo proverbs:

A mad man, may sometimes speak a true word said my father, "but, you watch him, he will soon add something to it that will tell you his mind is still spoilt. My son, you have again shown your true self. When you come home with a car, I thought to myself, good. Some sense is entering his belly at last. But I should have known. So you really want to fight Chief Nanga? My son, why don't you fall where your pieces could be gathered? If the money he was offering was too small, why did you not say so? Why did you not ask for three or four hundred? But then your name would not be Odili if you did that. No you have to insult the man who came to you as a friend and let me ask you something: Do you think he will return tomorrow to beg you again with two-fifty pounds? No, my son. (135)

From the extract above, one can see that each point the father makes is underscored by an appropriate proverb. The proverbs are repetitive also. Each one is embedded with a new idea in metaphor.

However, Achebe is not the only novelist to employ proverbs in a non-village novel. Chukwuemeka Ike, in *Toads for Supper*, has his Igbo-speaking characters express themselves in a similar fashion. The words below show another father scolding his son with Igbo proverbs:

Amobi, my words are few. You have painted my face and your mother's face with charcoal. I have always pulled your ears with my hand and warned you to beware of these township girls. I have begged you to put your sword in its sheath because one day you will be tired of lying down with a woman... Now that you have eaten the thing that has kept you awake let me watch you sleep! Now that you have fallen into the hands of those township girls who help the gods to kill, you will understand why I have been warning you to avoid woman as you would avoid lepers; when a child eats a toad, it kills his appetite for meat (120)

These Igbo proverbs reviewed here enlarge the plot of the story by adding weight to each of the father's assertions. The speeches are wise and colourful.

Onuora Nzekwu is another example of an Igbo writer who uses Igbo proverbs in his fiction. His third novel, *Highlife for Lizards*, is richly imbued with Igbo proverbs, all in a bid to produce a convincing, indepth portrait of traditional Igbo society.

The use of Igbo proverbs in literature could likely be seen in Igbo novels more than any other genre of literature in Igboland. In poetry, contemporary African poets such as Chimalum Nwankwo and Ezenwa-Ohaeto in *Toward the Aerial Zone* and *The Voice of the Night Masquerade* respectively, have in a bid to expand the plot of their stories, style and thematic concerns used Igbo proverbs. The writers from this region of Nigeria and many male writers write fictional and poetic works more than dramatic works. Should the Igbo region boast of having playwrights, Zulu Sofola, Esiaba Irobi and Emeka Nwabueze standing as pioneer, are often mentioned as widely-read Igbo dramatists. These playwrights have adequately shown the importance of incorporating Igbo folklore and traditions into their plays.

ABOUT THE PLAYWRIGHT

Zulu Sofola, as she is popularly known was born on 22 June 1935 in Issele-Uku in the defunct Bendel State (now Delta State of Nigeria). Her parents were Igbo because Issele-Uku in Aniocha North Local Government Area of Delta State is an Igbo- speaking community.

Throughout her childhood and youth, she was exposed to Igbo traditional ritual drama and culture. Though she spent most of her adult life in the United States of America, she kept strong links with her Igbo/African cultural roots and remained convinced about the richness and beauty of her Igbo culture. This conviction manifests itself in her plays, for she mostly drew her theatrical materials from the indigenous traditions of Issele-Uku. She also drew from the political problems of Nigeria in adjusting to cultural changes after independence.

As the first published female playwright in Nigeria, Zulu Sofola has broken into and pulled tremendous weight in a male-dominated Nigerian literary arena. The disturbing evidence of paucity of plays by Igbo men and women led her to write plays. On this score, she proffered two reasons:

The first is that in the past traditional set up of Nigeria, men were educated at the expense of the women. Secondly, women are more burdened with humdrum of daily life than men. Therefore it takes extra effort on the part of the female to write... (qtd in Otokunefor and Nwodo eds. 60)

Sofola has managed to make this extra effort to write through a female voice, reaching from the traditional back seat of women to steer the wheel of her creativity to productive pastures, both on the stage and in publishing houses.

So far, she has published many plays among which are *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas* (1971), *Wedlock of the Gods* (1972), *King Emene* (1974), *The Wizard of Law* (1975), *The Sweet Trap* (1977), *Old Wines are Tasty* (1981), *Memories in the Moonlight*, *Song of a Maiden*, etc.

Obafemi in his article "Zulu Sofola's Theatre" asserts that

Sofola's plays show an uncanny propensity for the magical, the mythical, the legendary and the traditional. Generally, she counterpoises the old against the young, new ideas versus old tales. Her attitude seems to favour a preservation of the old even when this is untoward. This is clearly demonstrated in *Old Wines are Tasty*...perhaps Sofola's Christian background coupled with her already demonstrated uncritical acceptance of tradition which she must have imbibed from Igbo/Edo origins is a major influence in the generation and sustenance of conflict in her plays. (60 & 63)

Sofola's writing could be divided into two groups. Plays based on the traditional society if viewed from the position of a critic who wishes to see the people within a society examine their plight, struggles, beliefs, folklore, sociological organization and social control methods can be seen as really relevant to contemporary society. If the past and the present are but one continuum, and the past can be used to examine the present so as to make projections into the future, then these plays serve a very relevant purpose. Equally, Akinwale in his article "Zulu Sofola: Her Writings and their Undermeanings" asserts "that these plays also rely heavily on Igbo proverbs, myth, ritual and the traditional setting; a style which makes her pre-occupation in this direction quite a unique one. Such plays include *King Emene, Wedlock of the Gods, The Sweet Trap, Old Wines are Tasty and Memories in the Moonlight*" (68).

Akinwale reveals further that "The second category consists of plays that tackle straightforward modern-day problems about societies and do not make the kind of statement that we find in earlier plays. Such plays include *The Disturbed Peace of Christmas, Song of a Maiden, etc.*" (69). Dapo Adelugba, however, in his essay, "Three Dramatists in Search of a Language in Theatre in Africa", says that "the plotting is altogether too simple and transparent to merit serious consideration in the genre of tragedy..." (201). He goes further to agree that Sofola's handling of society

is superb. He extols her use of Igbo proverbs in her dramaturgy and use of language which is highly communicative and extremely lucid.

However, Iloeje avers that "the appositeness of the plays of Zulu Sofola could be grasped, within the context of Nigeria's search for codes and mores for collective and individual responses and postures, within the psychology of our self-imaging and myth-making" (Emenyonu ed. 157). It was this perspective that Echeruo described as "the archetypal meaning derivable from the structure of ideas, proverbs and action in a given work of art" (136). Sofola herself did insist on the dramatist's use of proverbs and mythopoeia obligation to interrogate the human contingency through the envisaging of a 'living organic image', 'a collective corpus' of humankind construed as:

The articulator of group experiences from which ideas, philosophy and metaphysical thoughts and concretized and codified as the community attempts to make statements on life, the destiny of man, its social institutions and moral values, and the machinery through which they are maintained as well as how they may be modified or changed. (68-9)

On a critical plane, Olu Obafemi remarks that "We encounter in Sofola's plays, a simple and even simplistic plot all geared towards a thesis or advocating submission to the whims and caprices of age-old demigods or custodians of bogus tradition". (62)

Due regard should also be accorded to Ayo Akinwale's view expressed in an essay which suggests itself as a rejoinder to Obafemi's "the world of her plays are [sic] always succinctly chosen, her prophetic eye and cosmic consciousness of the life of the society she is dealing with in each of her plays is handled with a clear understanding of that society" (68).

Akinwale goes on to urge a contemporary relevance for Sofola's plays about Igbo oral lores and culture when he says "If the past and the present are but one continuum, if the past can be used to examine the present so as to make projections into the future, then these plays serve a very relevant purpose (68)

It is against this backdrop that Iloeje states that

King Emene...has the honour of being Sofola's most intense work, possessing a degree of gravitas not noticeable in her other plays. It embodies the most profound formulation of her notion of our past and the crisis-ridden mores that sought to secure its self-definition. (Emenyonu ed. 157)

As earlier stated, many African plays showcase African past; an era when African culture and tradition was given its recognition by all. Colonialism in Africa has done a lot to the decline and sudden death of African traditions and culture. Sofola as a humanist and playwright thus writes her dramaturgy to engage most Africans to have a rethink about their lost cultural values like proverbs.

According to Iloeje;

King Emene is set in the late nineteenth century in the ethnic Igbo part of what is now Delta State of Nigeria, Sofola's home, prior to her marriage into Yoruba land. There is no mention of the European colonial, missionary or commercial enterprises in this play; rather *King Emene* is a play on the tragic operation of the singular will to power in Oligbo, a traditional Igbo kingdom. (Emenyonu ed. 159)

For Odiri S. Ejeke, "*King Emene* dramatizes the story of Emene who, due to his youthful exuberance, pride, raw determination and perhaps destiny, to do what he wants, leads him to his sudden death". He asserts that the Aristotelian principle of tragedy is followed where tragedy affects a character of noble background, or the aristocratic class, bringing about the tragic hubris with its concomitant purgation of emotion(3).

With her cultural background in Aniocha, and her western education, Sofola was able to start writing at an early age. She grew to cherish her Niger Igbo folklores and culture because her father was a village chief. It is this affection and passion for her Igbo culture that she incorporates into her plays. Sofola gives her reason for using Igbo culture and oral traditions in her plays in the following terms:

It appears that my stay in the U.S at such an early age inspired me. Actually, it seems rather strange that it would, but it is the main thing that inspired me, because people were constantly asking me about my country, my culture and so forth. And I found myself wanting to know more and having the desire to tell the people. The more I explained, the more I found that if I went into writing I would do more. (qtd in Obafemi & Yerima 35)

The art form which she chose to express her ideas is drama. This was because, as she says:

I see drama as an attempt on the part of the sensitive artist to try to present the human condition so that man might observe and see if he can find answers to the questions that he has always asked. (Agetua ed. 21)

Obafemi and Yerima have this to say:

The main thematic concerns and pre-occupations of her textual/dramatic output are to utilize tradition to address various contemporary issues and concepts such as the woman condition in modern African society, the individual and contending western and indigenous African cultures and individual and group moralities. All these were influenced and determined by religious persuasion, social and communal as well as history. (36)

Zulu Sofola's attempt in combining inherited African and western conventions of theatrical performance is reflected better in her thematic preoccupations. As earlier stated, Sofola depends very much on traditional materials such as proverbs, religion, the customs and then human emotions of her Aniocha people. She attempts to place these traditional materials within Nigeria's contemporary society. Each play

introduces new social values that have affected the lives of each individual. In an interview in 1982 for a Nigerian magazine, Sofola remarks

There are three categories right now from which any writer, creative writer, can take his material. It can be strictly traditional. It can be conflict in cultures. Or it can be strictly the western educated, western-oriented African situation, so you have the elite. Now I write within the three worlds but deal with problems that I find that are somehow strong in the daily lives of the people. (qtd in Obafemi and Yerima 37)

For Sofola, it is within the three worlds she mentions above that she is able to achieve the sense of immediacy, which her plays possess. In most of her plays, Igbo proverbs, Igbo traditions and customs are presented as the set of moral guide of the characters in the plays. She highlights these traditional materials with the will of the nemesis. The protagonist is punished by nemesis when he or she breaks or goes against the customs of the society.

Old Wines are Tasty has a sober resolution and Sofola calls it a tragedy. The play is experiential, in which women dominate the actions of the play as well as take part in achieving the moral theme which most of Sofola's plays are pre-occupied. Obafemi and Yerima remark that "with a painful naturalistic setting, Sofola's dramatic intent was to show the audience a play which represented their social life and from which she was soon to highlight her moral message" (42).

It is in *Wedlock of the Gods* and *King Emene* that Sofola's ability to blend inherited conventions of African theatrical performances and Western drama is best actualized. The thematic concern of *Wedlock of the Gods* is based on a cosmic lore of the Aniocha people, which explains why there are lightening, thunder, and the rainbow. In an interview at Ibadan in 1982, Sofola says:

I wrote *Wedlock of the Gods* as a celebration of the cosmic myth of the fatal end of two lovers who explain for us, Aniocha people, the existence of lightning, thunder, and the rainbow. For me the play was written to explore the roots in the ritual of death and mourning. (Sofola qtd in Obafemi and Yerima 45)

The other play, *King Emene*, according to Obafemi and Yerima "is used by the playwright to explore the action of an individual against the practice of the Aniocha people, which forbids the killing of a human being" (47).

What emerges from the foregoing is an exploration that Sofola's writing support enlightened traditional society; she believes in and affirms the value and spirituality of African traditional life above western conventions. She writes specifically from the point of view of an educated woman in a patriarchal society. She is individualistic in her writings. She neither sides the Marxist, the feminist, nor the traditionalists. To her, traditionalists are simply reactionary.

Furthermore, the simplicity of language in Sofola's plays reflects the single-mindedness of meaning and theme. This means that unlike in Soyinka's dramaturgy especially *The Road*, in which meaning is often lost in the symbolic search for the meaning of the 'word', Sofola's plays deal with one major theme and provide the characters an opportunity to partake as uneducated members of the audience, as in Soyinka's difficult plays.

In maintaining the dramatic convention of the Nigerian playwrights including Soyinka, Obafemi and Yerima state that "Sofola uses African speech pattern and proverbs in her plays."(66). *Wedlock of the Gods* can serve here as an example.

Ibekwe: (Standing) Diokpa Ata, members of Onowu family, welcome. The tortoise says that his problems are his problems and therefore cannot be crushed by them. So, he carries his problems on his back where he goes. (*Wedlock of the Gods* 25)

The use of this Igbo proverb which comes from the traditional speech convention enables Sofola to put more meaning into a speech without making it longer than the normal speech in dialogue. A non-African reader may experience difficulty in understanding the proverb(s) but the direct translations of her proverbs usually help to carry the meaning through. According to Obafemi and Yerima, Sofola's "use of the traditional speech pattern in proverbs allows for the inclusion of the English in the dialogue of some of her characters" (66). Her use of Igbo proverbs also helps to portray her characters more vividly. In this case, the reader is able to identify with the character and it also shows a realistic presentation of the manner most Nigerian elders speak.

Generally speaking, Zulu Sofola's use of Igbo proverbs is summarized in this light embellishment of the plot of her plays, proverbs as a stream of consciousness technique, for exhortation of characters in her plays, for vindication of self (the speaker) and for satirization of foolishness and pride.

It is against this backdrop, therefore, that the rest of this study will be based to produce an authentic exploration of the use of Igbo proverbs in Zulu Sofola's plays.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical and empirical principles in the research of the use and functions of proverbs in social interactions for decades now show the common use of proverbs and everyday thinking in its cultural and social contexts. The role of language and

cultural mores as tools to understand proverbs is often reconsidered as key factors to aid the understanding of their social interaction. Hence, any social or personal context where people use proverbs in different cultures arouses the question of why a proverb emerges in a speech situation. Umeasiegbu admits that

The meaning of a proverb depends on its context; isolated from this context, it becomes lifeless and even meaningless. Admittedly, one can occasionally guess its meaning without this all-important background information, but then, there is no way of ascertaining if the interpretation is the correct one. An aphorism used in one context may be complimentary but used in another, it may become derogatory. This reality has made it necessary to discuss proverbs in terms of their contexts, and some folklorists have insisted on this as the only meaningful and valid way of studying the genre. (15)

For the study of contexts, the term, 'the proverbs speech', comes to mind. It can be defined simply as a kind of speech where a proverb or a proverb-like saying is used in speech. By building a many-sided classification of the use and functions or proverb speech based on the material of context examples, it could also be better explained why proverbs have special linguistic structures. At least the emotional tendencies and social strategies of people to recall proverbs could be better understood. However, there has been overemphasis on the recording of proverb texts without a corresponding treatment of context, a problem Alan Dundes discussed in an article entitled "Texture, Text and Context". Agreeing to this attitude, Ojo Arewa in his own article entitled "Proverb Usage in a Natural Context and Oral Literary Criticism" remarks that

The few scholars who have examined the place of context in the analysis of proverbs have only done what can be described as a partial treatment of context. In order to undertake a full treatment of context, meanings and usage should be recorded not only from the point of view of the collector, but also from the viewpoint of the group from which the collector has obtained his data. In other words, the meanings and usage of a

proverb, and of other forms of folklore for that matter, must be obtained from the folk. (429).

Umeasiegbu on his part supports Arewa's perspective on the importance of the context of proverbs to create their understanding when he says:

The idea of relating proverbs to their cultural and contextual background is not a new one. It certainly was recognized by Archer Taylor when he wrote *The Proverb*. What is new is this concerted effort to emphasize once again the importance of context (15).

According to Umeasiegbu, the context of a proverb is very important in creating the meaning of the proverb. In order to succeed in defining narrative modes of thoughts in the use of proverbs, different theoretical approaches ought to be looked into.

Worthy of mention are several theories/approaches to the study of folklore as enumerated by Robert Diyanni in his text, *Literature* (Reading, Fiction, Poetry and Drama). They are:

1. Formalist Criticism: emphasizes the form of a literary work to determine its meaning; focusing on literary elements such as plots, character, setting, diction, imagery, structure, point of view etc. The proper concern of literary criticism here is with the work itself rather than with literary history, life of the author or a work's.
2. Biographical Criticism: argues that the background of the writer should be known for a better appreciation of his work.
3. Historical Criticism: strives to explore the background information necessary for understanding how literary works were perceived in their time. How they reflect ideas and attitudes of the time in which they were written, analyzing every literary work as a product of its time and its world.

4. Psychological Criticism: approaches a work of literature as the revelation of its author's mind and personality. The critics see literary works as intimately linked with their author's mental and emotional characteristics.
5. Psychoanalytic Criticism: by Sigmund Freud, explores the position of an unconscious element of the mind towards sex as opposed to the moral in the society.
6. Sociological Criticism: states that literary works should not be isolated from the social contexts in which they are embedded and focuses on the values of the society and their reflection on literary works.
7. Marxist Critical Perspectives: by Karl Marx, examines literature's value in promoting social kinds of economic and political changes that conform to Marxist principle of classless society.
8. Feminist Critical Perspective: examines the social, economic and cultural aspects of literary works, but especially for what those works reveal about the role, position and influence of women. They also see literature as agent for social transformation.
9. Reader – Response Criticism: by David Bleich and Wolfgang, raises question of where literary meaning resides – in the text, in the reader or the interactive space between text and reader.
10. Mythological Criticism: is concerned with stories that represent universalities such as birth, death, sex etc and how they represent religious beliefs, social customs, and cultural attitudes.
11. Structuralist Criticism: finds all kinds of opposition in literature, from letters and syllables through symbols, time, places to elements of plot and character such as changes of feeling and reversals of fortune. For structuralist critics,

the notion of structure has another meaning which derives from linguistics and anthropology and which refers to the systems of signs that designate meaning.

12. Semiotics: is the study of signs and sign systems. It is concerned with how the workings of sign systems in various disciplines such as literature and psychology, enable us to understand the richly textured significations of all kinds of cultural texts.
13. Deconstructive Criticism: by Jacques Derrida, looks for opposition in literary works and emphasizes on difference or the structure of constituent opposition in a text.
14. Cultural Studies: indicates a wide range of critical approaches to the study of literature and society. It is more broad and refers to a wide range of interdisciplinary studies like women's studies, African-American, Asian etc.

Although each of these approaches has its specific features, there is a great deal of interdependence among all the approaches. A folklorist might encounter an interface of two or more of the approaches in folklore studies. This idea is consolidated by the words of Dorson. According to him, these approaches are ' Not mutually exclusive, and ...an eclectic folklorist may find all of them useful at one time or another ...he will at least need to be acquainted with them if he wishes to become a knowledgeable student of folklore and folk life.

However, in spite of the above mentioned theories, there are some other theories which according to Lindfors are better approaches to the study of folklore in African literature. He opines that 'There appears to be three basic critical approaches to

folklore in African literature: the impressionistic, the anthropological, and the interpretative. These may be arranged in a hierarchy with "impressionistic" at the bottom and "interpretative" at the top, for each successive level seems to require a greater degree of critical sophistication and cultural expertise (8).

He observes that the impressionistic approach to folklore in African literature involves assumptions and suggestions rather than facts and proofs. A critic that follows this approach makes generalizations on the basis of impression and not on the basis of a profound research. Lindfors asserts that such criticism is "superficial and highly unreliable". He further states that the anthropological approach is just the opposite of the impressionistic approach since the critic is "obsessed with documentation. He wants to verify the legitimate ancestry of every item of folklore he comes across; tracing it back to published collections of oral data, to unpublished field notes, or to testimonies. Lindfors also observed that followers of this approach often reduce their works to commentaries on African literatures. He further says, "in a sense, it is an elaboration of the obvious, an illustration of an accepted truth, and as such, informative only to other outsiders" (1). He makes an analogy that "an essay which merely documents Chinua Achebe's use of traditional Ibo proverbs would tell an Ibo nothing that he did not already know", and suggests that there may be a place for such criticism outside Africa. In the end it was the interpretative theoretical approach that Lindfors suggests is the best among the three. Incidentally, it is one of the approaches adopted by this researcher. Lindfors observes that the interpretative approach, "avoids careless overstatements and amasses data only when the data is useful to the argument being advanced" (12). He further states that the interpretative critic who studies traditional elements in

contemporary African literature is more likely to be investigating their artistic functions or their aesthetic and metaphorical implications than in merely validating their existence.

Unlike analytic thinking, this mode of reasoning concentrates on the functioning of things and thoughts and requires an ability to make synthesis. Geoffrey White (38) calls it 'personal rationality'. Melvin Pollner (12) speaks about 'mundane reasoning'; Golwyn Trewarthen (45), about 'a dialogic mind' and Mark Turner (78), about 'a narrative mind'. All these synonymous modes of reasoning deal with broader and more intuitive structures of thought than analytic and binary thinking. These thoughts strengthen the argument above about contexts of proverbs.

This chapter is therefore an attempt to re-emphasize the significance of context and to demonstrate the overall importance of oral literary criticism as well as interpretative approach in the analysis of Igbo proverbs found in Sofola's plays selected for this study.

Malinowski, for many years, has remained a strong voice in the importance of context in understanding proverbs of any kind, culture notwithstanding. In one way, Malinowski observed, "The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context, it remains lifeless" (104). Bascom on his part has continued the call for context. Arguing well for future field research in proverb studies, is Goldstein's praiseworthy concern for context in his treatise entitled *Valuable Guide for Field Workers in Folklore*.

The interest in the collection of context, however, has partially obscured the equally necessary and important task of collecting the meaning(s) of folklore. In this regard, it is important for one to distinguish between the use of proverbs and meanings of proverbs. Usage and meaning of proverbs differ, thus there is need to stress their difference always. The collection of context and most preferably a number of different contexts for the same proverb is certainly helpful in ascertaining the meaning or meanings of an item of proverb. Although this is true, it cannot be assumed that the collection of context perse ensures the collection of meaning automatically. While the meanings of a proverb are unarguably involved in an individual's decision and interpretation whether or not the quotation of particular proverb is appropriate in a given context, the folklore collector may lose or miss the meaning(s) even though he has adequately recorded the text and context. This means that one cannot always guess the meaning of a proverb from the context. This tendency has led Dundes in his essay "Texture, Text and Context" to assert that "Folklorists must actively seek to elicit the meaning of folklore from the folk" (263). One of the most critical statements made in contemporary folklore research comes from Bronislaw Malinowski. In his study of Trobriand oral narratives, he was struck by how much was lost in the reduction of the oral text to print and the subsequent analysis of the material divorced from the context that gave it life in the first place. Okpewho says this ugly development in proverb studies has led Malinowski, father of modern ethnography, to "stress the need for a rehabilitation of that context for a proper understanding of the meaning of the text" (*The Oral Performance in Africa* 1). The perspective of Malinowski is again captured below:

The text, of course, is extremely important, but without the context it remains lifeless. As we have seen, the interest of the story is vastly enhanced and it is given its proper character by

the manner in which it is told. The whole nature of the performance, the voice and the mimicry, the stimulus and the response of the audience mean as much to the natives as the text, and the sociologist should take his cue from the natives. The performance, again, has to be placed in its proper time – setting - the hour of the day, and the season, with the background of the sprouting gardens awaiting future work, and slightly influenced by the magic of the fairy tales. We must also bear in mind the sociological context of private ownership, the sociable function and the cultural role of amusing fiction. All these elements are equally relevant; all must be studied as well as the text. The stories live, in native life and not on paper, and when a scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they flourish, he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality. (24)

Though Malinowski speaks of the importance of context towards understanding folktales, one thing that adds meaning to the focus of this study is that for any oral narrative to be understood, the context of that narrative must be given its appropriate priority.

Obviously, the fieldwork of Malinowski and his contemporaries, notably R. Radcliffe-Brown, was more or less a reaction against the then prevalent tendency on the part of comparative ethnologists (especially Sir James George Frazer) to make sweeping cultural statements, without much basis in empirical evidence about societies they had no experience of. Frazer, for one, never visited any of the “primitive” societies whose mythologies he wrote so learnedly about, but Malinowski believed that only first - hand experience of a society and careful study of the various forms and aspects of its cultural life would qualify folklorists to make categorical statements about any one aspect of its cognitive system. In the same vein, the burden of Malinowski’s mission, as revealed by the above extract, is to emphasize the study of the proper social setting of a cultural act (e.g. proverbs or storytelling) as an aid to a reliable understanding of its meaning and effectiveness.

It is against this backdrop that Arewa and Dundes examined a whole spectrum of Yoruba proverbs in terms of "how and when they are employed in particular situations" (70-85) relating to traditional child-rearing among the Yoruba. Ben-Amos is also a notable advocate of the contextual approach to proverb studies. In his study of Bini oral narrative performances, he has been inclined to see generic distinctions of the tales only within the system of classification recognized by the Bini themselves, and in his general study of ethnic systems of communication, he has lamented that "in our zeal for scientific methodology, we have abandoned the cultural reality and striven to formulate theoretical analytical systems". (3).

In a more recent statement credited to Ben-Amos on the subject of performance, there have been points to these dynamic possibilities and even to their implications for conventional interest in linguistic research:

The contextual approach in folklore narrows the perspective of social linguistics somewhat, focusing not on the entire network of culturally defined communicative events but upon those situations in which the relationship of performance obtains between speaker and listener to those of performer and audience. The nature of this transformation is one of the main analytical tasks for the study of the communicative process of folklore. The discovery of the attributes of speech and behavior changes reporting into narrating, stating fact into stating proverbs, inquiring into riddling, and describing this transition as it happens, is one of the main objects of the study of folklore in context. (4)

The point made in Ben-Amos' assertion above is that in proverb studies, the context of a particular proverb is very vital in producing the meaning of the proverb.

More significantly, a terminological aid for the collection of meaning has been proposed by Alan Dundes "Oral Literary Criticism" (23). In another publication,

Dundes sees oral literary criticism as a term derived from "literary criticism" which refers to

a host of methods of analyzing and interpreting works of written literature. Even a beginner in literary criticism soon discovers that there are alternative and rival interpretations of one and the same work of art. The identical phenomenon occurs in the case of folklore which for the sake of the discussion we may call "Oral Literature" (although this unfortunately tends to exclude non-verbal folklore). For each item of oral literature, there is a variety of oral literary criticism. This is an important point in as much as folklorists, despite the fact that they are accustomed to thinking of variation in the texts of folklore, often wrongly assume that there is only one correct meaning or interpretation. (507-8)

From the foregoing, Dundes is of the opinion that there is no specific interpretation of an item of folklore (proverb). Occasionally, what is seen in most proverbs are multiple meanings and interpretations. For instance, in the collection of proverbs, one could ask ten different informants what each thought a given proverb meant and the researcher might obtain ten different answers. This attribute of proverbs is also associated with Igbo proverbs. It is in line with this fact that Dundes explains that "it is difficult to determine the gamut of interpretations because there has been comparatively little collection of oral literary criticism" (508). However, in some cases, there is an indication of subjectivity in suggesting the meaning of a particular proverb because the interpretation is inevitably made from the collector's point of view and understanding. Oral Literary Criticism which is a literary theory that explains the nature, content and context of a people's folklore, is limited in this regard. Certainly, it is difficult to collect or have a comprehensive oral literary criticism of a community's oral traditions because it has probably never been consciously developed.

Oral literary criticism also provides little assistance in suggesting the exact interpretation of Igbo proverbs. This trend has been possible over many centuries now because the meanings and traditional interpretations of Igbo proverbs are transmitted from individual to individual and from one generation to generation just as folklore itself. In some cases, the meaning of a proverb, may be fairly constant, but the evaluation of the common meaning may vary. For example, the proverb "A rolling stone gathers no moss" means that a person who moves around from place to place, not staying in any one place for a very long time is like a destitute, and will never belong to a place. The oral literary critical theory may consider this proverb a good or bad one. Certainly, in the older tradition, it was bad and the proverb might be used or cited to keep someone from roaming too far and wide but rather to stay at one place. The contemporary usage of this proverb may have a positive implication, because the accumulation of moss is considered to be a negative characteristic and the phrase 'rolling stone' is conceived of as the ideal unencumbered life. Essentially, these differences could be gleaned from printed contextual instances of the proverb in prose narratives, plays, or newspapers, but one point here is that proverb collectors ought to obtain direct oral interpretation of the proverb at the time of collection.

Uwatt's concern in oral literary criticism stresses at one point the limitation of the theory. According to him, "oral literary scholarship is full of unproven clichés about voice, gesticulation, histrionics, dress and other factors – devices which the performer employs outside of the tale to ensure the success of this enterprise" (38)

Corroborating Uwatt's position, Okoh remarks:

Criticism in African Oral Literature cannot be called a full-blown discipline, compared to the situation in written literature in which yearly considerable criticism floods from the world's major literary publishers. This is not to say, however, that African oral literary criticism is not developed, or that African cultures are lacking in critical activity. (101)

To whatever extent Uwatt's and Okoh's assertion may seem to speak of African oral literary criticism, they have not ruled out the possibility of the theory in explaining the diverse aspects of the oral lores of Africa. Their contribution only condemns the inadequate use of the theory in the critical analysis of African oral literature. The discussion of African oral literature has sometimes led to biased and unbalanced opinions on the validity of oral traditions (proverbs) in the African society. As oral literary theory seeks to study the lore of a community, Arewa and Dundes in their critical essay "Proverbs and Ethnography of Speaking Folklore" suggest that "the study of folklore should include both the study of lore and the study of folk" (82). By this assertion, Arewa and Dundes have shown that understanding the culture and traditions of the folk community is an important aspect in understanding the meanings and usage of the community's lores (proverbs). They are of the opinion that proverbs and other verbal arts of traditional expression are related to the value structure of the community and the daily workings out of institutional life. They have also demonstrated that one cannot really know what a proverb means until the person finds out the contextual information surrounding the proverb. Often, this attribute, as stated earlier, is found in Igbo and Yoruba proverbs than proverbs in English.

Furthermore, it is important to note that for a folkrist to make responsible literary interpretations of proverbs, the folkrist has to make a careful study of an author's

culture. For example, Austin Shelton in his essay "The Articulation of Traditional and Modern in Igbo Literature" which focuses on the study of Achebe's use of Igbo proverbs is a model of informed analysis. For Shelton "the ethnocentric application of European criteria of cultural and literary criticism to African writings leads to false, misleading and irrelevant evaluation of African oral/written literature" (9). Shelton advises other critics of European origin to remain committed to African aesthetic criteria in order to have balanced criticism.

Bernth Lindfors sees a critic of this nature as an interpretative critic of a people's folk culture/tradition. In his words:

The interpretative critic who studies traditional elements in contemporary African literature is more likely to be interested in investigating their artistic functions or their esthetic and metaphysical implications than in merely validating their existence. He seeks to go beyond the obvious into less accessible regions, sometimes even venturing to use his tools to probe the mysterious inner works of the human mind. (13)

By this act, such a critic, African or non-African, has taken the study of folklore in African literature to new levels of profundity, "advancing far beyond the surface manifestations of indigenous culture to the deeper realms of subconscious psychological and socio cultural awareness that characterize the Africa worldview" (20). This conforms to Nwachukwu-Agbada's submission that the first of the sources of the popularity of the proverb in Igbo culture is its philosophical content at which he emphasizes that the Igbo revel in connotative and subterranean meaning which is akin to philosophical prevarication. According to him, "The Igbo culture, in spite of modernism, is still largely on oral milieu in which uttered words remain as influential if not more influential than written symbols" (194)

On this premise, the interpretation of the Igbo proverbs in Sofola's plays selected for this study will solely depend on the aforementioned explanation of the lead literary theory for this study-oral literary theory while the critical approach for the interpretation of the proverbs is contextual approach. As context plays a major role in projecting the understanding of proverbs, this study will incorporate Igbo worldview to aid the interpretation of Igbo proverbs in Zulu Sofola's *King Emene*, *Wedlock of the Gods* and *Old Wines are Tasty*.

CHAPTER THREE

THE USE OF IGBO PROVERBS IN SOFOLA'S *KING EMENE*

"Among the Ibo the art of conversation is regarded very highly, and proverbs are the palm-oil with which words are eaten"

Chinua Achebe: *Things Fall Apart*.

The use of Igbo proverbs in Sofola's *King Emene* is to advise the young against taking rash decision and to embellish the plot. In Proverb use, the important thing are the messages conveyed. The vehicles which convey the messages and the appropriateness of both message and vehicle move according to the context. This makes the size of the proverb irrelevant because proverbs are often epigrams; that is, all unnecessary weight (words) are thrown off. This makes proverbs short and weighty, as affirmed by Halliday when he states that 'it is the text and not the super sentence that is the relevant unit because as a functional semantic concept, it is not definable by size (107).

The Igbo proverbs in Sofola's *King Emene* point out the themes; that of heedlessness, youthful exuberance, pride and raw determination. In conversations, they lubricate dialogues and equally form warnings as well as guides which lead the protagonist to the provocations and resolution of the conflicts.

Some of such proverbs in the play are:

- i. It is the way a man dances that the music is made for him (19)
- ii. An upstart whose umbilical cord is not yet cut wants to eat meat before he grows teeth (25)
- iii. Anyone who toys with his god toys with his destiny (34)
- iv. The earth said that a corpse is not a new thing to her (32)
- v. It is a truism that the person you pity and help is the same one who slaps your face afterwards (28)
- vi. The person whose god does not want him to see is the one who has a blind man for a god parent (34)
- vii. It is he who has a back that can challenge death himself (29)

- viii. Something made the house rat fall from his hiding place in broad day light (28)
- ix. It is a castrated man who shudders at the sight of a woman (27)
- x. A message does not kill the messenger. The messenger delivers his message, but whether or not the receiver likes it, is not the messenger's problem (24)
- xi. If the heart is heavy, the body will not receive the best of foods (36) etc.

It is observed that Sofola distanced herself from the proverbs used in her plays by employing wellerisms as negotiation of authenticity for the wise saying. Again, there is no formal introduction of proverbs or the proverb user in Sofola's works rather her work is more like Achebe and Soyinka's works in which proverbs are smoothly woven into speeches and conversation. For instance in *A Dance of the Forest*, Agboreke, the elder of the sealed lips advises Obaneji:

The eye that looks downward will certainly see the nose. The hand that dips to the bottom of the pot will eat the biggest snail. The sky grows no grass but if the earth calls it barren it will drink no more milk. The food of the snake is not split in two like a man's or in hundreds like the antipede's but if Agere could dance patiently like the snake, he will uncoil the chain that leads into the dead... (38)

In the chain of proverbs above, Agboreke advises the old man to be patient as his age dictates because when he does, he will be able to understand the mystery of "the gathering of tribes".

In *Kongi's Harvest*, the opening lines read;

The pot that will eat fat, its bottom must be scorched. The squirrel that will long crack nuts, its footpad must be sore. The sweetest wine has flowed down the tapper's shattered shins (1)

The barrage of proverbs reflects the speakers sophistication as well as points to the great task ahead for Kongi – each activity is imbued with danger and difficulty. Sofola's use of proverbs are in line with Soyinka's which emphasizes aptness in that language use.

According to Akiwale, Sofola is the first published female playwright in Nigeria. The worldview of her plays is always carefully selected to situate her prophetic eye and cosmic consciousness of the life of the society she is dealing with in each of her plays(68). As a result of her traditional Igbo background in Aniocha area of Delta State and a deep understanding of the Igbo society, coupled with her potentials for research into Igbo oral traditions, one often finds her plays rooted in Igbo culture, depicting the Igbo traditional society in a superb manner.

One salient feature of Sofola's plays is her sense of historical and cultural authenticity especially in her language. Though she writes in English, she also devises an African vernacular style of proverbs which strengthens the idiom of Igbo, her native language. It is, therefore, the contention of this study that Sofola, a dramatist, achieves an appropriate language for each of her plays, largely through the use of Igbo proverbs. Sofola's use of proverbs can function as clues to an understanding of her plays because she uses them not merely to add touches of local colour but to sound and reiterate themes of human concern, to embellish the plot of her plays, to castigate or admonish the characters in her plays, to clarify conflict, and to focus on Igbo cultural values. Igbo proverbs provide a "grammar of values" by which the deeds of a tragic hero can be evaluated and measured. Understanding Sofola's use of Igbo proverbs can lead to a better appreciation and evaluation of her artistic value to the Igbo community and Africa. Importantly, the Igbo proverbs in *King Emene* show the values by which the tragic hero, King Ogugua, and other characters can be measured and evaluated.

Historically, *King Emene* is set in the late nineteenth century in the ethnic Igbo part of what is now called Aniocha North Local Government of Delta State of Nigeria, Zulu Sofola's native land. *King Emene* is a tragic play that situates an individual's will to power in Oligbo, a traditional Igbo Kingdom. In order for the temperament of allegiance and rebellion at work in the play to be understood, it is appropriate to take into account the nature of kingship among the West Niger Igbo which in the words of Kenneth Onwuka Dike "have a society patterned after the semi-divine kingship of Benin" (26), their neighbour to the West and a source of noticeable cultural influence. Similarly, Afigbo remarked that the Obis of this area "never became even nearly half as powerful or as influential with their own people as the Oba of Benin or the Attah of Igala, no matter how flamboyantly and successfully they adopted the regalia and ceremonials associated with these two potentates"(10).

Corroborating Afigbo's assertion, Isichei, a West Niger Igbo by marriage, observes as follows "these Kings were regarded as sacred, and lived in ritual seclusion. But they were not absolute, and took decisions in conjunction with titled men, and representatives of other groups. Their decision could be challenged, and their persons deposed" (23).

While there is the consciousness of solemn monarchy, royalty amongst the people as reflected in Sofola's *King Emene* has little real ascription of divinity; its power is effectively contained and limited. It is limited at all times to consult and take into account the popular will; it is prevented to go against this arrangement and is also tragic to ignore, as Ogugua does in *King Emene*, the vulnerability of a monarch set against the common weal and collective will of a resolute people. Again, Oligbo, like

most traditional Igbo communities is also a priest-controlled society. The priest-politician as Amankulor has described him

controlled ritual and religious matters, was responsible... for fixing the village celebrations and festivals. Every social function was performed according to certain laid out principles, the strict performance of which enhanced the awe that surrounded the priestly functions and the invisible powers. (87)

In establishing the theme of rebellion/heedlessness; a major aspect of the conflict situation in *King Emene* is the contest between King Ogugua representing a strand of the political class divorced from the goodwill of Oligbo people and the priestly class fully enjoying the allegiance and confidence of the people of the kingdom. The conflict between the two classes centres on the ceremonial cleansing role of the latter during the week of peace. Significantly, peace week in Igboland is the week when the king or chief priest is transformed into a god and enters the shrine to carry the problems of his citizens to their god. According to Igbo tradition, the king or chief priest must be pure and undefiled. The oracle and the goddess of the kingdom must confirm that all is well with the community before he enters the shrine. It is believed by many Igbo people that Peace Week originated after an unusual destruction by a large swarm of locusts of the crops of many tribes in Africans including Igbo and their quest for a solution. Afterwards, they decided to take a week to pray to God for good crops to come to the land the following planting season. The week of peace was one of the means of unification for the clan and appeasement for the gods in control over their crops. Blogs reveals further:

People spend time meditating and with their families in order to restore their families inner peace. This annual event is important in the Igbo culture and is followed by the sowing season for all crops. They believe that in order to have a good, clean crop, the spirit must first be cleansed. No marital relations, physical abuse, or hurtful language is allowed during

this week. Spiritual purity is allowed during this week. Spiritual purity is held very important in Igbo culture and the week of peace is a prime example of this. (Net)

Comparatively, Peace Week can be compared with *Igu Aro* in most Igbo communities. According to Nwankwo, "*Igu Aro* is a festival as well as a performance of ritual worship"(85). He goes further to explain that

During the *Igu Aro*, delegates from the Igbo settlements under the hegemony congregated in the palace of the Eze Nri, bearing tribute. The Eze Nri announced the new year, gave the blessing of fertility and the yam medicine...The Nzemabua consult the *afa* diviner to determine what areas of the festival may likely cause confusion... The people express a common concern over cosmology, economics and fertility, in an expression of solidarity. (*Odinani* No.2 85-89)

The stages of this *Igu Aro* correspond to the acts and scenes in Zulu Sofola's *King Emene*.

Moreover, the ritual/mythic significance of the week of peace as a season of rebirth, purification and reaffirmation of allegiance and loyalty to the superintending deity, has been memorably recorded in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The overall events for the week is overseen by the members of the priestly class and the sacredness of the week denotes a communal search for peace, a restatement of the need and desire for it in a society of flawed, covetous, ambitious, mischievous and fractious men and women. This prayerful quest and supplication is made known earlier in *King Emene* in the fervent prayers of both Nneobi and the Queen. Nneobi, addressing "the water of life and peace", asks first and foremost, for peace of mind; "give our heart rest" (1). Afterwards, she prays for the exclusion of evil from her realm. Her guilt-ridden conscience torments her greatly. What afflicts her most is the fear of exposure and retribution (The law of Karma).

The queen, unhindered by hidden guilt, prays to “the goddess of life and the god of All”, first for her children, and then for her husband as the father of the realm; “give him wisdom and strength to reign over his kingdom” (1). The ultimate struggle between the two women for supremacy in relation to the necessary ritual processes suggests the mythic old rivalry between wife and mother-in-law for the affection of the husband/son. Metaphorically, in this play, it is also a struggle between guilt and innocence in a context determined, in the words of Modupe Kolawole, by “the inevitable tension as a woman tries to come to terms with the tensions of tradition” (30).

Nneobi is determined to take, albeit temporarily, control of the libation / cleansing rites at the palace for the duration of the peace week because she knows what the queen does not know that she, Nneobi herself, has committed an abomination which only time will unveil. However, it is on this basis that the oracle has sent a frightening message. Her prayer shares some ironic light into the evil she has committed and the calamity that awaits her and her son, King Ogugua. Nneobi does not pray for true peace in the realm, after all, she murdered Chibueze not only to discomfort Obiageli (Chibueze’s mother), but to pave the way for her own son’s enthronement. While this act of usurpation is adequately exposed in the play, it is obvious that Nneobi’s idea of peace arises from her maternal commitment to her son and her son’s umbilical link to her. Hear her prayers;

Protect my son
 Guide my son
 Let the sun never set on his reign
 Let the new year see him tower
 among his peers
 Turn his foes into his footmat (8)

The god and the people of Oligbo want Nneobi's evil exposed as the only alternative or panacea for peace in the community. Unfortunately, King Ogugua, her son, perceiving his political insecurity, organises his own responses to galvanize himself to fight rebellion by the people of Oligbo.

As heedlessness is the greatest tragic flaw of King Ogugua, Sofola employs some Igbo proverbs to portray the character of Ogugua and even castigate him. Such Igbo proverbs include;

... It is the way a woman dances that the music is made for her (19)

...it is the tree that makes the forest, and the king of the trees does not grow in a desert (18)

...if we don't eat yam for the sake of the palm oil, we eat the palm oil for the sake of the yam (20)

...it is only the living person who consults the oracle to know if he will be tall or short (20)

...it is the way a child opens his hand that a piece of meat is given to him (20)

...Anyone who toys with his god toys with his destiny (34)

The last Igbo proverb, "Anyone who toys with his god, toys with his destiny" is also found in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. In this novel, Achebe cites an Igbo proverb which states that "when a man says yes, his chi also says yes" (*Things Fall Apart* 23). This proverb is used to eulogise Okonkwo and to depict him as an assertive person. Throughout the novel, he is pictured as a wrestler, hunter, warrior and a cultural nationalist, which are attributes to reckon with. On the other hand, Okonkwo is indicted because although he is a famous wrestler whose life has been a ceaseless struggle for status, in the eyes of his people, he brings about his own

downfall by challenging too powerful an adversary. This enemy he fights is not the white man in some cases, but rather his *chi*, his personal god or guardian spirit. A replica of one fighting or opposing one's 'chi' is also seen in *Arrow of God* when Ezeulu goes against Ulu's warnings of leaving the battle of the gods for the gods. According to Ulu (the god):

"Ta! Nwanu"! Barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would in the ear of an impertinent human child. 'Who told you that this was your own fight?'

I say who told you that this was your own fight to arrange the way it suites you? You want to save your friends who brought you palm wine he-he-he-he!... 'Beware you do not come between me and my victim or you may receive blows not meant for you! Do you not know what happens when two elephants fight? Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel with Idemili, whose envy seeks to destroy me that his python may again come to power. Now you tell me how it concerns you. I say go home and sleep. As for me and Idemili, we shall fight to finish; and whoever throws the other down will strip him of his anklet!' (191-192)

But in spite of this stern warning, Ezeulu still goes out of his way to punish the people according to the dictates of his mind, and tragedy befalls him at Obika's sudden death and his losing his mind.

However, there have been some presumptuous controversy about the meaning of *chi*. Shelton (36) and Nwoga (5) in their separate essays have debated on the meaning of *chi*. Shelton prefers to translate it as "God within" but Nwoga, an Igbo, supports Achebe's translation of it as "personal god". Victor Uchendu, an Igbo anthropologist, describes *chi* as "the Igbo form of guardian spirit" (16). Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Ogugua in *King Emene* are crushed because they tried to

wrestle with their *chi* and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* loses sanity for going against the advice of Ulu.

The proverb "When a man says yes, his chi also says yes" is also deconstructed in another of Achebe's urban-rural novel *No Longer at Ease*. Here the proverb is "A man does not challenge his chi to a wrestling match" (40). Certainly, this proverb is used to depict the character of Obi Okonkwo. In this novel Obi Okonkwo is portrayed as a crook because he stoops to take bribes. However, it is not only this avarice nature seen in him but the contemptibility of his ways that many of the Igbo proverbs in the novel help to underscore.

"Anyone who toys with his god, toys with his destiny" (*King Emene* 34) shares similar context with "When a man says yes, his chi also says yes". As a dramatist, Sofola uses this Igbo proverb to castigate and admonish and character of Ogugua as a man who struggles with his *chi*. On the other hand, such an Igbo proverb depicts the values of Igbo society, values by which Ogugua lives and dies.

Moreover, an Igbo proverb also serves as a thematic statement to remind one of the major motifs in the plays; for example, the value of genuine achievement, where no evil done by man will go undetected and unpunished and the idea of man as the architect of his own destiny. Thus, on a general note, the Igbo proverbs employed by Sofola in *King Emene* play a major role in setting the tone of the story appropriately, the embellishment of the plot of the story as well as development of characterization. Some of the proverbs cited earlier comment or warn against foolish and unworthy actions of King Ogugua. Possessing a limited knowledge of his past

and of the manner of his becoming king of Oligbo community, and even of the true nature of the heinous crime committed by his mother, King Ogugua would suspect no evil in his mother. He frowns at the way the oracle and the Olinzele treat his royalty and gives up the dire message from the oracle as spurious, in putting all to a malicious conspiracy by Olinzele members against him. His banishment of Omu (leader of the women's section of the government) from Oligbo is a political game plan to neutralize the Olinzele of which the Omu is a prominent member. It is an effort to undo what he cannot undo, as Ifemesia has noted in his study of Igbo society, 'the Omu on account of her enormous ritual role and the sacredness of her being cannot be deposed' (47)

King Oguagua shows an absolute confidence in the oracle. His appointment of Nwanu as a substitute for the Omu, with a promise that she will deliver the message tomorrow (6) is evidence of this. Having dispatched his own emissary who is not a member of Olinzele, he now expects a favourable message from the oracle. His own sense of his noble programme of rule and promotion of the welfare of his people and realm is undiminished – "I shall purge the kingdom and save myself and my innocent citizens" (6). This is the point of his irreversible alienation from the priestly class represented by Ezedibia, the palace medicine man, who unwilling now to further waste royal medicine on defiled king" (21) rescinds his allegiance in order to eventually to lead the popular insurrection against the king.

To further illustrate heedlessness and obstinacy in Ogugua as contained in the proverbs, Sofola presents Ogugua as a character who has some grievance against the Olinzele for having killed his father "I am not a child. I know how the Olinzele

members killed my father with their deliberately planned evil advice. I know how the Omu in collaboration with Olinzele people colluded to kill my father. (II)

The Olinzele, who allegedly ruined the previous king, is now being thought of as having plans to dethrone his son, Ogugua. "they have advised me to do what has never been done before in Oligbo. They have advised me against the week of peace and ushering in the new year and the Omu has foolishly allowed herself to be used as their mouth piece. (II)

Ogugua's fight against Olinzele is therefore a fight to save his life. It is also part of a perceived duty to a wronged father and the legacy that his father has left behind.

Zulu Sofola, similarly, depicts the processes by which King Ogugua, fully obsessed with power and inordinate ambition, moves toward solitary life and death. Heedlessness and obstinacy are the two factors that control Ogugua's life. His ill-planned dismissal of the Omu, his brusque repudiation of his own godfather and his rejection of the appeal by Diokpa are other factors that contributed to king Ogugua's tragic end. "What the oracle says or does not say is beyond your concern" (*King Emene* 21), he informs Diokpa. These diverse appeals by the people of Oligbo reminds one of the distraught chorus early in Sophocle's *Oedipus Rex* and the fearful women in T.S. *Eliot's Murder in the Cathedral*. The lament of Oligbo people is adequately captured below:

Since your coronation, fears have rent our heart. Disaster and destruction knock at every door. We sleep in fear and rise in fear. The gods continue to warn us, we have come to touch a soft part in you for our sake. But alas, we find a wall of unyielding rock. (20)

Comparatively, the obstinate priest in Chinua Achebe's *Arrow of God* can be compared to King Ogugua in this context. Reminiscent of the inhabitants of Umuaro in Achebe's novel, the people of Oligbo in King Emene reject their king in order to save themselves, their hopes and their aspirations as a community. In addition, the subsequent encounter in Act II Scene II between members of Olinzele and King Ogugua sets out in grief longer than ever before what the line of dissonance is between the king and his advisers. The commitment of Olinzele members to salvage Oligbo community led to sending emissaries to consult the oracle, Mkpitime. The message Mkpitime gave to them to deliver to the king is similar to Nwanu's:

We have a saying that a message does not kill the messenger. The messenger only delivers his message, whether or not the receiver likes or not, it is not the messenger's problem... A certain member of the royal family has to make a vital public confession, and appropriate sacrifices have to be performed before your reign will bear fruit. It is also only after this confession and sacrifices that you can enter the peace week. Anything other than this will bring doom to you and all our people. (24)

The first few lines are proverbial in the extract above; "A message does not kill the messenger" (24). This Igbo proverb shows the courage displayed by the members of Olinzele to fight a common cause against all odds. They are fearless in presenting their problem to King Ogugua. Oligbo belongs to all, not only to the king. In this case, if the king commits a sacrilege, the entire community will suffer impending doom and calamity that will affect everyone. So, in a bid to avert this forthcoming doom in Oligbo, the members of Oligbo met the king to persuade him not to enter the peace week without obeying the directive of Mkpitime. After all, "It is a castrated man who shudders at the sight of a woman" (27). The action of the members of

Olinzele is poised to bring a total change in Oligbo because wisdom is not freedom until the oppressor is dead.

Again, it should be noted that what are being stipulated in the message of the Olinzele members to King Ogugua above are confession and rites of expurgation. Importantly, the oracle demands neither the execution nor the punishment of the malefactor, nor indeed, the abdication of the king to whom the foul deed has given the crown. The king does not think of the possible avenues to social reconciliation and well-being; he still considers the message he has received to be of doubtful veracity, as part of the hostile plan of the members of the Olinzele.

ODOGWU: Ta, small boy! I say listen to good sense. Apart from pushing us about like small children, he has also exiled and desecrated the sacred Omu of Oligbo and has chosen someone who would tell him what he wants to hear. Even then, your chosen Nwani has not brought any message different from what we have been delivering to you. But in your frenzy you have missed the meaning of the message brought from the oracle by Nwani.

KING: It is you who have missed....

ODOGWU: (*To the audience*) A small boy enthroned only yesterday does not want any advice. An upstart whose umbilical cord is not yet cut wants to eat meat before he grows teeth. (*To the King*) I tell you, we had enough of your father and we don't want any shit from you at all. If the sense of your lineage was put in their anuses and not their heads, then for God's sake, step down and let better people step in (25-6)

Odogwu's ominous outburst about Emene's father and immediate predecessor on the throne adds certain validity to King Ogugua's fear that his late father had been a victim of the Olinzele.

Significantly, Odogwu's outburst, "An upstart whose umbilical cord is not yet cut does not eat meat before he grows teeth" is proverbial and it means that wisdom in most Igbo communities is an intrinsic character trait of most elderly people in Igboland. In this light, it is important for the young ones/youths to listen to the voice embedded with Igbo lore and cultural values which helps to restore unity and sanity in any Igbo cultural area.

Finally, in the worldview of the play, when the obstinate King enters the shrine at the end as advised by Jigide, to commence the necessary rites to usher in the peace week "a dark circle" girdles the sun, symbolizing that the gods are angry" (43) and that the community is in danger. Metaphorically, it could have existed even as the action opens in the play; an evil mother encircle and so is about to ruin her own son, the King and "son" of Oligbo. Ogugua, still blinded by his own will to mere power, states; "I am king of Oligbo and must reign "(44). This extract shows that he does not, even as he reaches his tragic end, realize that he has been the victim of his own mother's wickedness and the great but sinister force she embodies.

Nneobi, the tragic mother of King Ogugua, in a bid to confess her evil deed before Ogugua was enthroned, introduced this Igbo proverb to enlarge her story; "The rat did not fall from the ceiling without a cause" (44). A collaborative evidence of this proverb can be seen in Umeasiegbu's *The Palm Oil of Speech: Igbo Proverbs*. Umeasiegbu, records that "No fire, no Smoke" (45). In Igbo language, it is written as "Anwuru oku apughi i di ma oku a dighi". Nneobi utilises the knowledge of this proverb motif to embellish the true account of her heinous crime and evil. Her woeful tale is captured below:

I suffered in my childhood with a poor mother of twelve children. I saw my mother cry bitterly night and day when she had no food for her hungry children. I could not bear this, so I started praying very early for a better life. My prayers were answered. Your father married me. My fortune and that of my children changed. I promised myself that I will never return to those miserable days... It happened that you were born the second son. This worried me very much. I decided that it was better to be the king than the brother of the king so I did the deed. Never did I foresee this. (44)

Nneobi killed the late King's first born, Chibueze, so that her son might become King. Ogugua after hearing Nneobi's confession makes a sudden break from Ojei who was restraining him, takes one of the daggers hanging on the wall of the palace and dashes towards his mother with it. He, at the end, commits suicide as the final act of expiation for the sins of his wicked mother, Nneobi. The social significance of this exposition is that truth is never hidden in this world.

Essentially, every race or community in the world has different ways of describing concepts that are central to the existentialism of the people. For the Igbo, the concept of truth has continuous significance in their lives hence it has been characterized in various ways: in wise sayings, in proverbs, moral maxims, even in myth.

Moreover, truth which is *eziokwu* can be characterized as *ezi okwu dika afo ime, adighi ekpuchi ya aka*. The literary translation is 'truth is like pregnancy'; it shows even if covered. This means that truth cannot be covered for a long time, before it uncovers itself again before everyone.

In addition, the cosmological concept of truth by Igbo has made them to compare truth to afternoon. *Ezi okwu dika ehihie, ejighi oku enyo ya*. Literally translated, it becomes; "truth is like noonday, one does not look for it with lantern". In most speech events especially about arbitration, what is true is never mistaken for a lie. This happens because truth is self-evidential, resilient and self-explanatory. That is why the Igbo say: *Anaghi eli ezi okwu n'ala, maka na e mee nke a, o puta ome*. This translates to; truth cannot be buried in the ground or destroyed, because, if it is buried, it will germinate. Sometimes when it germinates it carries retributive justice with it just as seen in the case of Nneobi and King Ogugua in Sofola's *King Emene*. Besides, the Igbo have this proverb, *Anyika ka eji ama oka chara acha*. This means that, it is with the eyes that ripe maize is known. The truth about the wicked nature of Nneobi is exposed in the beginning of the play but the King and his subjects failed to notice this truth until the denouement of the play.

Furthermore, in Igboland, truth is revealed to man or members of a particular clan through the oracles, divinities or elders who are inspired by the gods. Some call it revelation, exposition or intuitive truths. This is also exhibited in the worldview of *King Emene*.

Nneobi's confession manifests itself to the destruction of his son, King Ogugua. On his part, Ogugua is arrogant and very obstinate. His inordinate ambitions ruled and destroyed his life. It is through his actions in the play that the Igbo proverb motif "Anyone who toys with his god, toys with his destiny" (34) becomes more meaningful. Ogugua toyed with the powers of the gods in protecting his destiny, so at the end, his misguided ambition destroyed him. Painfully, Ogugua has forgotten

the Igbo proverb "A parcel is like a wife while the cord used to tie the parcel is like a husband" (34). It is in these terms that the Igbo proverbs inherent in the play become more meaningful and useful in making pertinent assertions about Igbo cultural existence.

In conclusion, Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, Chukwuemeka Ike, Rems Nnayelugo Umeasiegbu and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo have used proverbs in their works but despite this effort, not many Igbo playwrights have used Igbo proverbs in their plays like Zulu Sofola. It is sometimes speculated that it is easier to infuse proverbs in fiction than in play. For example, Achebe, Ike, Umeasiegbu and Adimora-Ezeigbo, write prose fiction, a pliant form of literature which gives them the opportunity to insert Igbo proverbs into narration as well as dialogue. Sofola, writing as a dramatist, must put all her words into the mouths of her characters. She can never speak in her own voice or in the guise of an omniscient chronicler. She employs Igbo proverbs in situations where they are dramatically appropriate and in situation of dynamic human interaction in which proverbs are expected to influence the course of subsequent events in the play.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE USE OF IGBO PROVERBS TO CLARIFY CONFLICTS AND CASTIGATE CHARACTERS IN SOFOLA'S *WEDLOCK OF THE GODS*

It has been stated that proverbs used by most traditional conversationalists and literary artists often reveal and convey the cultural and traditional ways of life of the said writer's origin. Zulu Sofola in her play, *Wedlock of the Gods*, uses Igbo proverbs to castigate the characters as well as to clarify conflict. The overall implication of this notion is that, by studying how Igbo proverbs function in a speech situation seen in her plays, one can gain not only a better understanding of her intentions but also a deeper appreciation of her art and craft as a playwright.

According to Ejeke, Sofola sees tragedy as a collective affair and not as an individual experience because it results from ignorance or abuse of culture, which affects the whole society (13). The play under discussion is no doubt a collective or societal tragedy stemming from the abuse or ignorance of culture. Sofola believes that the degeneration of the culture of the people, which leads to moral and spiritual decadence, is the beginning of tragedy. Here, Ogwoma and Uloko are aware of the custom of their people and the tradition of a woman to mourn her dead husband but consciously deviate from upholding such norms, which exemplifies moral decadence. Such decadence leads to spiritual rumbling and chaos, resulting to the death of the two lovers. To re-establish Igbo cultural context on widowhood practices, Sofola uses *Wedlock of the Gods* to capture widowhood practice in Igboland. Though these days, widowhood practices have become an intrinsic part of overall social dynamics all over the world. The exploration of widowhood practices in Igboland in the

following terms captures the cultural contexts to discuss the use of Igbo proverbs in Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*. The significance of the exposition of this cultural background is that it serves as an evidence to depict the intents of Sofola in the play and the Igbo proverbs inherent in the play geared towards exposing Igbo cultural values of upholding the stipulated norms of the land.

Okodo defines widowhood as:

The state of a man or a woman whose spouse has died. So widowhood concerns both the man and the woman. One adage of the Igbo people of Nigeria states that one does not need the services of a diviner in order to be a widow rather it is she whose husband has died that becomes one...widowhood practices are meted out against women in various parts of Nigeria. (50)

Okodo's viewpoint shows that widowhood practices in Nigerian communities are spiteful and excruciating experiences which Nigerian women suffer. When one looks at widowhood in most African societies, it would be possible to give an immediate criticism on the matter (22). In Igbo, as in several other societies, human greed in many families and the death of a male member of the family offers an opportunity to other males of the family to increase their hold on the scarce and inelastic commodity - land. The commodity now in question could mean other items of property. "It is acquisitiveness" writes Nwoga, "which basically controls the treatment of widows"(19). All other activities serve the same purpose and any mystification and other rituals, superstitious sanctions are geared towards the oppression of the widow. Dehumanized and humiliated by the religious rituals and other practices, Nwoga continues, the widow becomes more amenable to keep silence over other forms of oppression which end up ultimately as economic disposition.

Nzewi has noted in certain zones of Imo state:

The widow's ordeal begins immediately the death of her husband is announced. The in-laws demand a list of the man's property, holdings, investment, bank accounts etc. She is further required to take an oath as a proof that she has not concealed any relevant information on her husband's wealth. (11)

However, there are a lot of similarities in the rituals undergone by widows in the different parts of Igbo societies. Widows are maltreated and often blamed over the cause of their husband's death.

In most African societies, like the Jukun of Western Sudan for example, "formed lamentation for the dead man" according to Meek:

is kept up by the female relatives for a period from three to six days. It is the Jukun practice for the female mourners to sleep in the hut of the deceased... The women give expression to loud cries of grief everyday at sunrise when relatives and friends come to salute them. Among some of the Jukun, a grave digger would periodically strike at the roof of the hut in which the women are sleeping. This was taken as signifying a knocking by the soul of the departed. At each of these knockings, the women led by the wife, wives of the dead man, would break out into loud lamentation. (67)

Basden described the practice among the Niger Igbo in this form:

It is when the moment of death arrives that the tumult begins. There is an out-burst of wailing, the women particularly giving full vent to their grief. Sometimes a wife or mother will rush from the house heedless of direction waving arms, and beating her breast as she bemoans her loss at the top of her voice. (19)

Basden's assertion shows that, among the Igbo, this kind of bitter wailing is expected to go on until the remains of the man has been buried. After that, the wife or wives are expected to enact a wail or two every morning for a period of four days or more, depending on the community.

In Igbo tradition, generally, the patrilineal daughters, otherwise referred to as *umuokpu* or *umuada*, have intense influence over what happens in the family in which they were born. In certain cases, this means near tyrannical power over the women married by their brothers, particularly at the death of any of these brothers. Felicia Onyewadume explores such in her play, *Clutches of Widowhood* as published in her collection of plays titled *Echoes of Hard Times*, where the *umuada* make the widow, Lilian, miserable with their unending ridiculous demands and subjections simply because she lost her husband. The dialogue between the *umuada* and the widow:

Leader: From tomorrow, you will bath once a week and it must be before cock crow. You will use neither soap nor sponge. If you must eat, the food will be served in a discarded plate and you must not wash your hands before or after meals.

Lilian: Is that 21st Century version of slavery or something?

1st Woman: Hey, hold it there! How many times will you be...

Leader: Please leave her to me... I am sure she will take them gradually. As I was saying, if you have any cup that is very old and leaking, it will serve you for drinking water. It must be unwashed. If you have none, we shall provide you with a small calabash for the purpose. For seven days, we shall come here every morning to clean and smoothen our brother's grave. It's your voice that will invite us each day. If you fail to invite us here with your cry and we come on our own, it will be serious problem (131-132)

However, the exercise of the power of *umuada* is contrary to what Njaka has described them to be in relation to their authority. In the words of Njaka "they usually insist on establishing that the wife has not come from another family to kill some members of their family in order to carry the wealth from their family over to her own. (260)

In whatever way the activities of the umuada could be ascertained, one fact remains that these umuada administer rules and regulations with vengeance either out of spite for the widow, or to satisfied their selfish interests.

Another horrifying experience of widowhood practice in Igboland, according to Tony Ubesie, is ritual seclusion "I no na nso". This is the period of mourning after the deceased has been buried. Before the burial and immediately after the burial, up to seven to fourteen weeks while funeral visits still take place, the widow is supposed to be secluded in a most restricted manner. Tony Ubesie defined this process as "i no na nso" - a period of ritual seclusion when the widow is seen as unclean and must not have contact with other people" (68). Ubesie's postulation on widowhood practices can be seen in Awka area of Anambra State, Enugu Agidi in Anambra State, Mbaise in Imo State, Aniocha area in Delta State, Nsukka area and other Igbo cultural areas. This attitude tallies with G.T Basden's description of Igbo widowhood practices in the early twentieth century. It also agrees with Talbot's description of Kalabari people in Delta area:

Essentially, in many Igbo cultural areas, the early part of this period is usually rigorous and spiteful for the widows. There are so many limitations to her freedom and other human rights. Certain rituals must be performed at the aspiration of the seclusion period before the widow can be allowed to perform normal activities. (226)

Moreover, there is also the issue of widow inheritance (*Nkushi*) in practice in Igboland. Like many other African societies, the pre-colonial and post-colonial Igbo required that a widow be inherited by her deceased husband's kinsmen. It is pan-Igbo for a widow to be inherited by her late husband's brother. Though in contemporary Igbo society, there are restrictions to this Igbo custom for certain social factors which in many situations do not favour the person inheriting his dead

brother's wife and children. Such social factors are western education, civilization, Christianity, scarce resources to maintain such a marriage, family conflicts etc. Despite this horrifying experience by widows in Igboland, in a traditional Igbo society, the widow has the right to remarry an outsider, especially if she is still young or of child bearing age. However, social circumstances, the close-knit ties created by the marriage system between mother and child as well as the husband's family put a constraint on options open to the widow.

From the foregoing, Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods* will be critically discussed to project Igbo customs on widowhood and Igbo proverbs inherent in the work to give the play the status of Igbo literature.

Wedlock of the Gods is a tragedy characterized by the ritual of death and mourning. Zulu Sofola, at the Prologue of the play, states that 'the traditional solemnity that follows the ritual is distorted however for, rather than engaging in the normal funeral rites and rituals which should have cleansed her and send the spirit of the deceased to the world of the gods, Ogwoma, the widow, expresses a sense of liberation from unwanted marriage'(1). On the otherhand, the mother of the deceased performs rites meant to destroy her son's widow as an act of vengeance for supposedly killing her son.

The conflict in the play is exposed in the opening scene of the first act of the play. Odibei, the mother-in-law of Ogwoma, starts the play with Otubo, her neighbour, in an angry mood. It builds up to the frenzied state, which seizes her at the scene where she makes Ogwoma kill herself. The opening conflict instructs the audience of the ensuing bitter danger:

- Odibei: (Thinking aloud) my son cannot die a shameful death. It must be somewhere. (Footsteps are heard. She stops and waits to see who it is)
- Otubo: (Calling from outside) Ogwoma, is Odibei with you? (No answer)
Ogwoma...
- Odibei: Come in if you like (Otubo enters)
- Otubo: Are you alone?
- Odibei: (Still searching) what do you want?
- Otubo: Odibei, people are born and people die.
... Ogwoma could not have killed Adigwu
- Odibei: My son cannot go like that.
- Otubo: He was sick. The sickness refused all the medicines, and so he ...
- Odibei: Adigwu died of a swollen stomach. A man who died like a pregnant woman did not die a natural death. Somebody killed him. (5-6)

The statement "A man who dies like pregnant woman did not die a natural death" seen in the excerpt above, depicts the conflict in the play and shows in further terms, Odibei's suspicion that Ogwoma killed her husband. Odibei felt Adigwu killed her son in order to reunite with her first love, Uloko. This suspicion forms a destructive anger in Odibei. Such destructive anger which is what Otubo later referred to in a later scene when she states

- Otubo: This will not do. Anger leads nowhere. We cannot set fire to a whole house first to kill one rat because when the house is on fire the rat runs into the bush. (50)

This advice cautions Odibei to suppress her anger and not to take laws into her hands. Possibly, if Odibei kills Ogwoma to avenge the death of Adigwu, she (Odibei) may

also die and Adigwu will remain dead. This warning yielded no result as Odibei remains resolute and determined to avenge her son's death.

In Act three, Scene two, Odibei fights back and is transformed into a witch. Here, her language changes to re-enact the voice of vengeance from gods or people of the underworld. Odibei stoops near an oozing pot, which smoked and with blue lights to create an eerie atmosphere. Odibei's speech also contains a fresh flavour of supernatural command and Igbo proverbs.

Odibei: My God, the worst is done! Ogwoma walks on the path that reeks with blood. (She picks up the snail shell and blows the powder)
 Let me feel your power! (She puts it down, looks directly into it. She shakes the gourd at appropriate intervals.)
 The vulture does not see the corpse and resist it.
 The dog does not see human dung and resist it.
 The antelope does not hear its death and refuse to dance;
 Ogwoma cannot hear you call and refuse to answer!
 Bring her here!
 Lead her to me;
 Bring her here not knowing what she is doing!
 Lead her and make her do whatever I bid!
 Ogwoma, your soul is summoned!
 (Ogwoma appears in a trance and walks towards Odibei).
 Your soul is wanted; Come! Come! And not look back! Come Ogwoma, Odibei wants you! Come and answer your call! Come and not look back. (Ogwoma reaches her and stops).

Ogwoma: (Still in a trance; she remains so until she gets home and does what she is asked to do. speaking slowly.)
 I am here.
 (52)

One remarkable thing about this excerpt is the proverbs embedded in Odibei's incantations above to invoke the soul of Ogwoma to bid her command. The proverbs are:

The vulture does not see human dung and resist it.

The dog does not see the corpse and resist it

The antelope does not hear its death and refuse to answer! (52)

The literary significance of these three Igbo proverbs is that they serve as a stream of consciousness technique employed to reveal Odibei's inner thoughts. Her inner thoughts are preoccupied with vengeance and wickedness. Her incantations produce trance-like mesmeric effect on Ogwoma. The incantations also help to create the magical effect on Ogwoma especially as one finds Odibei speaking profusely to an oozing pot filled with smoke. It is in this scene that the images of William Shakespeare's three witches in *Macbeth* are recalled. There is semblance between Odibei's and the witches 'cauldron'. Viewed from any perspective, most African writers have often displayed intelligence in projecting the traditional theatrical entertainment of their African societies despite adapting, adopting and assimilating European dramatic traditions. Wole Soyinka, J.P. Clark, Ola Rotimi, Zulu Sofola etc are clear examples of African playwrights for this notion.

In *Wedlock of the Gods*, Odibei, like the witches in *Macbeth*, talks to her victim through a cauldron, and wonders as enchantment sets in. Odibei, with her evil powers is able to put Ogwoma into a trance and make her obey her desires.

Odibei: Go to your house, open the door and enter. Behind your water pot is another small pot. Open it and say into it once, "I have done what the land forbids". Cup your hand thrice saying before each drink, 'I have done what the land forbids, let me perish. Let my blood appease the disgraced spirit of my husband'. Close the pot and wait for whatever comes. Is that clear? (Each phrase is said only once, a phrase for a drink).

Ogwoma: it is clear

Odibei: Good. Go now, and do everything.

Ogwoma: I will do everything. (53)

Having obeyed Odibei's wish, Ogwoma begins to die slowly. Uloko, her lover, who has been looking for her, comes, sees what has happened and, in anger, kills Odibei. In the play, what is more glaring is revenge and unforgiving spirit as the spirit of transformation, and how it blinds the sense of reason, and renders the characters concerned savages consumed by passion in their quest to get even with the offenders, and ultimately drives them into fury and terror. At the end of the play, the two lovers, Uloko and Ogwoma, died. The manner the lovers die, especially through poisoning, can be compared with William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*. What informs the dissimilarities of the two plays is that for Shakespeare's play, it is the family feud that ultimately caused the death of Romeo and Juliet and not the traditions of a society. Towards the denouement of *Romeo and Juliet*, the only reason for the death of the lovers is the mistake in the timing and the impatience to allow the sleeping drug to wear off. Catharsis is largely seen at the end of the play to make it an emotional intense tragic drama.

On the local scene in Zulu Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*, the lovers are destined to die, either by the evil magical trance of Odibei or by the unlawful action they have committed, which is punishable by society. The traditional audience's catharsis can be controlled and measured against the broken taboo. The contemporary audience will be moved more by outrage than catharsis.

Another major difference is the effect of the tragic actions in both plays. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the two families end their feud, but the three families of Ogwoma, Odibei and Uloko will forever remain in enmity throughout the worldview of the play.

As a coin has sides and most times in Africa, duality is the essence of life, the rest of this study will critically discuss Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*, to uncover and explain some Igbo proverbs in the play, as used to castigate characters, and the Igbo traditions/customs in the play, especially on widowhood practices.

Originally, the play is based on a cosmic love of the Aniocha people in Delta State, which explains why there is lightning, thunder, and the rainbow. In an interview at Ibadan in 1982, Sofola says:

I wrote *Wedlock of the Gods* as a celebration of the cosmic myth of the fatal end of two lovers who explain for us (the Aniocha people) the existence of lightning, thunder and the rainbow. For me the play was written to explore the roots in the ritual of death and mourning. (qtd in *Ideology and Stage Craft* 43)

The plot of this Aniocha myth revolves around the violation of age-long traditions and tragic repercussions. In this tale, a very young girl falls in love with a man she had wanted to marry but the parents of the girl refused to grant the lovers permission to marry. The saddened girl, Ogwoma, goes under a tree where she cries endlessly. The god of the sky sees her crying, takes pity on the lovers, and decides to take them to the sky where they can continue their love. The mythopoeic significance of this myth is that it demonstrates the existence of gods in Igbo world, but in contrast to the Yoruba world, Sofola's gods are reproduced on stage as characters just as one is likely to find in the deployment of Yoruba gods by Ogunyemi in *Obaluaye* and *Eshu Elegbara*, and Soyinka's Ogun in *A Dance of the Forests*. The god of the sky in the myth makes the bride the goddess of lightning and the bridegroom the god of thunder and when they embrace in the sky, there is the rainbow.

The Aniocha myth Sofola says she depended on to write *Wedlock of the Gods* is not properly used, reflected or even reproduced in the play to make one fully accept that her play is used to celebrate the cosmic myth in Aniocha area of Delta State. As a matter of fact, the only importance of the exploitation of the myth in *Wedlock of the Gods* is in the portrayal of two lovers, Ogwoma and Uloko, who are involved in a continuous struggle for survival after committing a taboo, and who die vowing to continue their love and romance in the heavens as thunder and lightning. This is brilliantly captured in Uloko's words in the final scene before he dies, having drunk the potent potion of slow death of Odibei:

Ours is the Wedlock of the Gods.
 Together we shall forever be lightning and thunder –
 inseparable!
 Our love shall live forever;
 your light to keep it aglow, my thunder to demolish all
 obstacles.
 We shall leave this cursed place; we shall ride to where there is
 peace!
 The rain shall cool our sweats and pains.
 The sun shall dry our tears;
 The stars shall crown our heads;
 The night shall hide and protect us;
 Over and around we shall together roam; beautifying, as we
 impress! (56)

Thus, the plot of *Wedlock of the Gods* can be said to be simple and straight forward. It is not as complex as that of Soyinka's, Rotimi's and J.P. Clark's tragic plays. Ogwoma, the heroine, is a young, pretty girl passionately in love with Uloko, who is unable to pay the high bride price Ogwoma's family demands. Essentially, the practice of paying bride price, for example, is seen to have an overt, negotiable exchange value, turning marriage, in a fundamental sense, into a commercial transaction. Buchi Emecheta, A Nigerian feminist, has written many novels that portray the marriage systems in Nigeria. Many of the marriages in Buchi Emecheta's

fiction portray women as 'money-machines' for their families rather than a full recognition of their humanity.

Perhaps the most obvious way in which Emecheta contests notions of the concept of marriage is to demonstrate its amorphousness even within the restricted settings of rural Ibadan and urban Lagos. Her novels depict the workings of a bewildering array of marital unions, including arranged marriages, levirate marriages, wife capture, church and registry (court) marriages. This diversity is a reflection of the circumstances which necessitate them and then consequently varying expectations they give rise to. A defiant Adah in *Second-Class Citizen* marries the man of her choice to the fury of her family; in *The Bride Price*, Aku-nna is kidnapped by a suitor who avails himself of the traditional customs that sanction it; *The Joys of Motherhood* portrays women in traditionally arranged marriages, unconventional, albeit sanctioned, sexual relationships and marriages which emerge from Western-style romantic relationships.

Such variety of marriages in Emecheta's fiction is also paradoxically demonstrative in Sofola's *Wedlock of the Gods*. Ibekwe, the father of Ogwoma, gave out the hand of Ogwoma in marriage because he needs a large sum of money as bride price to help him pay for the treatment of his son's sickness. Ibekwe's son, Edozie, was sick. His sickness was severe and his father needed much money to carry out certain sacrifices or rituals to free him from the sickness.

Ibekwe: Death hears nothing. My son, Edozie, was nearly dead when the oracle stated very clearly that a seven-year old ram had to be sacrificed to Ikenga, our family god. In addition, it also stated that he must be initiated immediately into manhood

before he could recover. We had no money for these things, and I knew the type of family I belonged to (30).

In the following excerpt, Ibekwe speaks more on why he allowed his daughter Ogwoma to marry against her wish "So I gave my daughter away against my wish and hers to the man from whom I could get enough money to add to what I had to save my son's life" (30).

From the foregoing, Anwasia proverb becomes relevant. She says

Ogwoma, our people say that a man's daughter is a source of wealth to him. Your parents needed the money for a very expensive sacrifice for your brother whom sickness almost killed. You should have been happy that your money saved the life of your own brother. (9)

In Act two, Okolie gives further clarification to Ibekwe's action of allowing Ogwoma to marry a man against her wish. His words are captured here "It is true that a man's daughter is his source of wealth"... (28). The Igbo proverb cited in Anwasia's advice to Ogwoma depicts the importance of female children to parents but this notion becomes useless and condemnable when it is combined with greed in most families. Many modern families in Igboland are not exonerated here when they commercialize the joys (marriage) of their daughters to rich in-laws. This "arranged" marriage sometimes favours no one as it ends in disaster and broken homes. At a point, this situation is taken as violence against womanhood.

In view of this, Ogundipe-Leslie believes that once a woman becomes a wife, "she becomes a possession, voiceless and often rightless in her husband's family, except for what accrues to her through her children "(qtd in Davies 68).

In the play under discussion, Ibekwe neglected the assistance his fellow kinsmen could give him in providing the money to heal his son. In a presumptuous manner, he reasoned that his kinsmen will not offer help to him and so he married off Ogwoma to Adigwu instead of Ogwoma's first love, Uloko.

Udo: When Diokpa Ibekwe was giving Ogwoma to her husband, she came to me several times in tears because she did not want to marry Adigwu. She begged me many times to talk to her father about it. I did so without any success. Ibekwe did not want to listen because, as he said, it was he who fathered Ogwoma and it was he who gave her away,... Ogwoma was led to her husband still protesting and I did not as much as look through the door to see if she was tied and carried to Adigwu or whipped along the way like a ram to the altar. (26)

Odibei, the mother of Adigwu, is able to find the money as bride price and marries Ogwoma for her son. The play begins with Adigwu's mysterious death and Odibei's resolution to find out who killed her son or what circumstances led to his death. Ogwoma is portrayed afterwards as a woman who has committed a taboo. She gets pregnant for Uloko, her lover, at a time she is supposed to be mourning her husband. Odibei discovers this inordinate act, and tragedy sets in. Tragedy, according to Sofola is a

situation within the human condition wherein the spiritual and moral essence of a people, a family, or an individual, is disrupted adversely to a point where its consequences propel an individual or a group of individuals into a life-saving action volitionally entered into, but whose consequences in the course of action, overwhelm the tragic hero, causing him great suffering, even death... (The Artist and the Tragedy of a Nation 11)

This scene reviews the early background set in this chapter about Igbo customs on widowhood practices. Umeasiegwu in his treatise *The Way We Lived: Ibo Customs and Stories* avers that a widow in Igboland "For the first week following the

bereavement..., remains indoors” (17). Ogwoma violated this Igbo custom and allowed Uloko to come into her late husband’s house to sleep with her and even get her pregnant. Umeasiegbu states further;

Neighbours and sympathizers bring food to her because she is not allowed to cook. If she is an unpopular woman she may not get the complete three meals daily. She relied exclusively on the generosity or benevolence of her late husband’s relatives. She does not talk to any man unless such a man comes from either of the two families. At the end of the mourning period she has to decide whether to re-marry or not. If she has already had a child, she may not remarry. In this case, if she insists on getting a new husband, one of her late husband’s brothers takes her as one of his wives. Generally, she is free to remain a widow and invite men of her choice to keep her company. (17)

In consonance to Umeasiegbu’s view, Okodo reveals that

...once a man dies, his wife stops stepping outside the compound. The widow, *ajadu nwaanyi*, stays in the house as women stay. She would be accompanied if she wants to go out for an important Issue... The system is not far different from the Igbo people of other states like Enugu, Imo, Ebonyi, Abia and Delta. There could be minor changes from place to place. For example, in Awka and Enugu-Agidi, the widow will sleep with the priest of some deities before she completes the cleansing else any man that sleeps with her would die. (54)

There is an impending doom and consequences for Ogwoma in breaking the tradition of her people; she breaks her mourning period and commits adultery with Uloko which gave a serious worry to her immediate family. In a family meeting, Ibekwe is accused of abandoning his kinsmen earlier when he needed money to cure his sick son.

Ata uses proverbs to castigate Ibekwe for abandoning his kinsmen when he says:

...Our people say that the man who ignores his family is the one who stands alone in the rain...We say that when a brother is dancing badly in the presence of observers, his relatives scratch their own eyes for shame. (25)

These proverbs emphasize the importance of unity in a family and in Igboland. They can be compared to those found in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* "When one's eyes cry, the nose follows it to cry... when one finger attracts oil, it soils others" (123). Ordinarily, Ibekwe was expected to seek financial assistance from his kinsmen to cure his sick son but he ignored them. They concluded that Ibekwe decided to solve his problems alone "and so he should be left to stand alone in the rain"(28). They feel that now that the strong-willed Ogwoma has committed an abomination in her matrimonial home, they should not be involved in finding a solution on how to appease the gods of the land.

The conversation between Nneka and her daughter, Ogwoma, below show the taboo Ogwoma committed during mourning.

Ogwoma: You knew about me and Uloko. You could have given me away to him and received whatever money he could bring. But no, you were hungry for money because you had never seen money before. Now you tell me that you cannot walk on the road for shame.

Nneka: You are a man's wife, not a harlot.

Ogwoma: Adigwu is dead and I am free.

Nneka: Adigwu has a brother..

Ogwoma: Uloko's child lives in me and I will bear this child for him as his wife.

Nneka: Oh, my God! You let that beast touch you even in mourning?

Ogwoma: He is my husband.

Nneka: Do you know that the punishment for this deed is a swelling of the body with water leaking from everywhere? Do you know that nobody will agree to treat you for fear they might also catch your curse? Do you know that even after death no forest will accept your body? Oh God, what shall I do?
(19-20)

Ogwoma's parents continue to search for a solution to appease the gods before they punish Ogwoma. Ogoli, Uloko's mother, is on the other side, condemning her son's actions. Her reaction is captured below:

Ogoli: Ogwoma was his wife and is still his wife. Any other man who touches her is inviting the anger of the gods. I told you this many times. I cried enough to your ears about it. You did not listen. Now you have done an abomination. You have planted a foul seed in the womb of a woman in mourning. You planted a poisonous snake in the womb that has not been purified. You have touched what belongs to a man whose spirit is still finding its way back to the world of the gods. (42)

Odibei uses an Igbo proverb below to scold Uloko for having made a widow pregnant just to show the power of his manhood;

Odibei: Some of you young men need to be reminded that not all cutlasses that went to the farm are used. A man is not a man simply because he parades an okro sprout. (15)

This Igbo proverb is used here to castigate Uloko and serves as a caution for Uloko not to be mindful of how he displays his manliness and brevity where Odibei is. Odibei can be devilish and wicked when pushed to the wall. This Igbo proverb in the excerpt above reveals the success in Sofola's use of proverbs and metaphor. She compares Uloko's manhood to an okro sprout. The success of such special use of the English, which hinges critically on Sofola's translation from the vernacular, is that it makes meaning to the Nigerian local audience in performance, despite the linguistic problems her use of English may have. Udo even scolds Uloko when he says "What often destroys you young men is rash and hasty action" (36).

The law of the land, "nso ala", is that the woman in mourning must never allow another man or visitors to visit her. Custom also has it that on the death of a young

woman's husband, she should be taken over by the brother of her late husband if he has one, and where none exists, sacrifices and ceremonies have to be made to free her and allow her to marry into another family. Sofola appears critical of the custom where the woman is handed over to her late husband's brother. She does this by eliminating the thought from the minds of the lovers. Uloko and Ogwoma do not even consider this alternative to their getting married after three years of waiting because Ogwoma's late husband, Adigwu, has a brother to whom Odibei is ready to make her over. Again, in making the lovers break this Igbo custom, Sofola is able to continue to seal their fate, by increasing their sins against the society. Therefore, another custom is violated by the lovers and the tragic end sets in appropriately. Odibei's only mistake is in her haste to punish the lovers. She takes the laws into her hands, and dies in the process; for, in accordance with Igbo tradition, he that kills must die. This almost mathematical and logical sequence of action and its result is the core of the social concept of tragedy, which Zulu Sofola has contributed as an alternative to the inherited conventions of Greek tragedy.

Zulu Sofola's tragic vision is anchored on the African perception of reality, which is quite different from the Western and Oriental modes of perception of the world (2). This means that for a tragic action to occur to a character, they need not possess the 'magnitude' of either being a 'Queen' or 'King' as in the Greek plays Sophocles's *Oedipus Rex*. Uloko the lover of Ogwoma, the widow in *Wedlock of the Gods*, is a mere hunter and farmer. But by being a tragic character in Sofola's play, he is still as powerful a protagonist as most of the Greek tragic heroes such as Prometheus and Oedipus, especially in the quality of characterization, thought and language. The strength of such tragic and dramatic qualities of the chief character in *Wedlock of*

the Gods must be viewed within the 'tragic concept', which she possesses. At the end of the play, the catharsis developed by the audience, is measured against the law of the society, which the lovers have flouted. Throughout the play, Ogwoma's action of allowing Uloko to defile her is condemned by all characters including her friend Anwasia. They feel that Ogwoma should not have considered herself free of her late husband's family after his death. She should have completed the period of mourning and been inherited according to tradition by her husband's brother in the tradition of leviration and that she should never have become pregnant by her lover who, from the beginning of the play, holds her heart. It is against this backdrop that the audience is left to judge the character of Ogwoma in the play.

To gain a balanced scale of literary judgment of the play as regards the use of Igbo proverbs in projecting Igbo traditions, it is glaring therefore, that Zulu Sofola's cardinal aim in the play has been to question the rationality of two aspects of her Igbo culture and tradition. She views the conservative aspects of her people within the conflict of the more radical minds of the young people of Aniocha who have liberal ideas about the untamed and sacred traditions, just as the two lovers in the play do. The two aspects are, first, the effect of arranged marriages and problems that follow this type of marriage when the forced bride is in love with another man and wants to break away from the arranged marriage. Secondly, the pains and sorrows, which usually come with adultery, which is a forbidden practice in a close – knit society such as the one seen in the play; in all, defiance to some traditional codes and mores is explicated in the play.

Above all, Sofola's use of her traditional Igbo background shares affinity with Soyinka's use of his Yoruba cosmological and traditional background to buttress human concerns in his dramaturgy. The difference (that lies) between Sofola and Soyinka is that while Sofola is preoccupied with the constant call of the respect of Igbo traditions, Soyinka seems to take a step forward in his attempt in his plays like *The Bacchae of Euripides* and *Death and the King's Horseman*, to draw parallels; what he calls co-incidences and correspondences of beliefs and African cosmic pantheons and their Graeco-Roman equivalent.

In conclusion, therefore, it is important to note that in keeping with the dramatic convention of the Nigerian dramatists including Soyinka, Osofisan, J.P. Clark, Rotimi e.t.c., Sofola uses African speech patterns and Igbo proverbs in *Wedlock of the Gods* to castigate characters and embellish plot. Many can be seen in the explorations earlier deposited. A remarkable example can be cited below at the meeting of the elders who have to be Ibekwe's Kinsmen:

Ibekwe: (standing) Diokpa Ata, members of Onowu family, welcome. The tortoise says that his problems are his problems and therefore cannot be crushed by them. So he carries his problems on his back where he goes. (28)

Ibekwe uses this proverb to justify his action of letting his defiant and strong-willed daughter whom he loves so much to be married to Adigwu instead of Uloko. He thinks of the consequences of his action of arranged marriage and decides to face the outcome all alone. This proverb negates unity in a family because it emphasises on solitary living as against communal living which the Igbo exhibits. It thereby suggests a negative image in Ibekwe's character. It is certain in Igboland that a man's daughter is a source of wealth to him but Ibekwe's kinsmen felt Ibekwe should have sought for their financial assistance to heal his son than to allow

Ogwoma marry a man against her wish, all in a bid to obtain the funds to finance Edozie's treatment. They condemn his action and suggest that he faces the consequences of his actions alone. The consequence, however, later manifests in the play is Ogwoma getting pregnant by Uloko while she is still mourning her departed husband, Adigwu. The death of Ogwoma and her unborn child, as well as Uloko became the consequences of Ibekwe's action.

It is important to note that the use of such Igbo proverbs above, which comes from the traditional Igbo speech convention, enables the playwright, Sofola, to add more meaning into speech without making it longer than the normal speech in a dialogue. This may be a constraint in terms of the understanding by the non-African readers, but the direct translations of her proverbs usually help to carry the meaning through. Zulu Sofola's use of Igbo traditional pattern in proverbs allows for the inclusion of the pidgin in the dialogue of her characters.

THE SATIRIC AND SARCASTIC USE OF IGBO PROVERBS IN ZULU SOFOLA'S *OLD WINES ARE TASTY*

According to J.O.J Nwachukwu-Agbada in his text *The Igbo Proverb*, satire is the aim of a substantial number of Igbo proverbs in context which serve corrective ends but are largely punitive in application (187). So is it applied in Sofola's *Old Wines are Tasty*. The play is set in Aniocha area of Delta State, Nigeria. The historical setting is 1960-65. The playwright makes good use of elements of time, place and traditional theatrical convention of music.

The first act shows the arrival of Okebuno and his wife, Ndudi at the village. His mother, Anyasi, receives them happily along with his uncle, Akuagwu. Okebuno is an educated young man and a no-nonsense man who is widely travelled. When elections approach, however, he returns to his village to seek the candidacy of his local government area but he is not prepared to be the typical Nigerian politician who has to bribe his way through an election, and an African politician who canvas for votes with an awareness of the financial, cultural mores of people on his person before he is nominated. One can compare Okebuno with Chief Nanga in Chinua Achebe's *A Man of the People*. The latter is a typical Nigerian politician who can use money politics to win elections. Okebuno, rather than try to understand his people and possibly use the influence of his uncle, Akuagwu, to win his people's support, decides to handle the matter his own way. At the second scene of the first act, the audience learns of the proposed meeting with some elders of his village to introduce his political ambition to them. His relatives, Ego and Akuagwu, think that the meeting is too soon and that Okebuno ought to have given his villagers time to understand and come to grips with his political ambition and vision. It is during this

conversation that the audience learns of Okebuno's defiant behaviour, which his mother, Anyasi, blames on his western education.

You are not in Lagos. We are here in our home town among our people. I have told that boy what well-trained people do. That he has Whiteman's education does not wipe out our ways.

He must respect our people. A man stays in the house to welcome his visitors when he comes home on leave (9)

Okebuno is impatient. His people's strict adherence to tradition appears awkward to him and he would not condone it. He insults the elders of Izuani town council. Okolo who attended the meeting, aware of Okebuno's defiant character and unreasonable disrespect for tradition, decides to exploit Okebuno's flaws to gain his own nomination from the elders of Izuani town council. Although not academically qualified like Okebuno, it was glaring that Okolo will win the election. Two reasons that will propel Okolo into winning the election are his indept knowledge of the culture and the tradition of their people and his deep respect for the elders which Okebuno knows not.

Okebuno's uncle's admonition is disregarded and his mother's desperate plea also falls on deaf ears. He persists in taking every available wrong step until he ultimately discovers his actual status as an illegitimate child. Frustrated from this agony, he decides to return to Lagos, his base, where upon he has an accident and dies.

The moral lesson in the play is graphically illustrated with Akuagwu's speech with a slower local music to show the tragic mood and also to move the audience to pity for Anyasi who has lost a son and who, in the background of the play, shows grief by crying.

Akuagwu: And he won't humble himself and learn. Those boys know that one who calls an Idegbe child a bastard is made to pay the worst fines in the land because it is a crime but they threw it into his face with impunity because they know how the elders feel about him. They know that no elder would take up arms to protect the dignity of a son who has no respect for the tradition of the land. (56)

From the foregoing, it is important to state that Igbo proverbs and long speeches are inherent in the play to satirize Okebuno and give the audience a lot of information, but over-bloated verbiage dulls the sharp edge of dramatic action. In another way, it is the long and prosaic informative speeches, which provide the moral lessons in the play. The proverbs and anecdotes that Akuagwu and other elders speak depict Sofola's brilliant attempt to translate her native language into English.

It is equally important to reveal that she uses her dramaturgy to counterpoise the old Igbo traditions against the newly inherited western traditions. Her overall attitude seems to favour a preservation of the old Igbo customs and traditions. This is evident in *Old Wines are Tasty*. Akuagwu advises Okebuno who, after several years of sojourn both in Lagos and overseas, has become alienated from his people. Akuagwu uses the proverbs below to castigate and advise Okebuno over his chosen actions.

It is old wines that are tasty not the new. You have tasted in white man's country wines brewed only yesterday, but know our wine so that you may know what to mix with it. (44)

Keep quiet! (A pause). A madman who does not know that he is mad cannot be cured. This boy is mad but doesn't know it. I saw the shame and tried to cover him with my cloth, but he turned it back at me; threw his nose in the air and fouled the air with his return. The elders took to their heels leaving me standing with a crown of shame. (41)

..But no matter how sweetly music sounds outside, if it's not equally sweet in the house, it is not a good music. (26)

...It is from the way a child whistles that one can determine how well he may play the flute (21)

All these proverbs depict the stubbornness of Okebuno. The proverbs are used sarcastically to caution Okebuno and advise many other cultural collisionists in Africa to return to African rich cultural heritage. *Old Wines are Tasty* as a tragic play makes Okebuno to be totally insensitive to the voices of reason around him. Being defiant, his fate is sealed to rise and fall. He shuns all advice and move on inexorably towards self destruction. All the aforementioned proverbs help to set the tone of the story and warn against Okebuno's foolish and unworthy actions. Okebuno's individualistic attitude is probably the factor that heightened the conflict in the play; the clash between African and Western culture or old values and new values.

The central Igbo proverb in the play. "...old wines are tasty..."(44) which is the title of the play is an important theme in Chinua Achebe's *No Longer at ease*; the conflict between the old and new values. Obi Okonkwo's people tax themselves to raise funds to send him to England to study law. Though he later chose to study English, the scholarship they award him is to be repaid both in cash and in humanitarian services when he graduates. When Obi returns home with a university education in

English studies against the expectations of his kinsmen, he starts to pay back the loan but prevents his kinsmen from intruding into his private life. He stoutly resents their efforts to dissuade him from marrying Clara, a woman who has unusual and forbidden ancestry (Osu caste). Having adopted western values, Obi believes that an individual has the right to choose his own wife. As Obi's parents and kinsmen adhere to communal values more than individual values, a major conflict thus ensued between Obi Okonkwo and his kinsmen. Chinua Achebe thus deployed proverbs to castigate the character of Obi Okonkwo and embellish the plot of the story:

When a new saying gets to the land of empty men
they lose their heads over it. (48)

A person who has not secured a place on the floor
should not begin to look for a mat (60)

...The little bird Nza who after a big meal so far
forgot himself as to challenge his *chi* to single
combat. (163).

A man does not challenge his *chi* to a wrestling
match (40)

The last two Igbo proverbs cited here remind one of King Ogugua in Sofola's *King Emene* and on the other hand, Okonkwo, in Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. But no one can substitute Obi for his grandfather. Okebuno erred by daring to attempt to be the leader of his clan, something he did not have the power to achieve. He died as a tragic hero. Obi, on his part, erred by stooping so low to take bribes and attempting to disintegrate the customs and traditions of his people (by his marital proposal to Clara). To this end, many of the proverbs in *No Longer at Ease* help to underscore this salient point.

By and large, Zulu Sofola's handling of Igbo proverbs in *Old Wines are Tasty* is splendid and suggests that her dramaturgy is more subtle and highly sophisticated as regards the use of Igbo oral lore. Her ability to utilize Igbo proverbs in this play helped to embellish the plot of her story, satirize, and take punitive measures on the character of her tragic-hero, Okebuno. Therefore, it is from this frame work that one can say that *Old Wines are Tasty* makes a social commentary on the need for one to preserve and respect his cultural and oral heritage despite the acquisition of western values/ civilization.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

This study examined the use of Igbo proverbs in Sofola's tragic plays: *King Emene*, *Wedlock of the Gods*, and *Old Wines are Tasty*. Significantly, the postulations, discussions and generalizations of facts that Zulu Sofola truly deployed Igbo proverbs in these plays are presented with some confidences whereas some of the notions in this study represent more tentative forays into problems that for the moment are difficult to conceptualize.

However, the interpretation of the Igbo proverbs seen in this study depended on oral literary theory and contextual framework as the theoretical/empirical frameworks for this study. The first theory suggests that oral lore or traditional contexts are present in all human societies and largely shapes, influences and adorns the literary works of many authors or folklorists. Its importance in folklore/literary studies suggests that cultural mores, traditions and cosmological values used by an author can go a long way to inform the audience on the cultural background and contextual background of the creative work. For the contextual framework serving as the critical approach of this study, it is imperative to restate that the meaning of a proverb of any kind depends on its cultural and social contexts. Equally important is the fact that a proverb isolated from its context(s) certainly becomes lifeless and even meaningless. To this end, the Igbo proverbs found in Sofola's plays selected for this study have been explained on the cultural and social contexts they appear.

As a matter of point, Zulu Sofola's sense of Aniocha's historical and cultural background enabled her to exploit the proverbs in circulation in the traditional Igbo society of Aniocha area of Delta state. The Igbo proverbs deployed in her plays function as clues to the understanding of the plays and she uses them to show the Igbo cultural background of the plays. In another way, the proverbs help to reiterate the themes of the plays, clarify conflicts and explain Igbo cultural values/mores.

It has been stated that *King Emene* is set in the ethnic Igbo part of Aniocha local government of Delta state, Zulu Sofola's native land prior to her marriage into Yorubaland. As a tragic play, it situates heedlessness of King Ogugua and his singular will to power in Oligbo, a traditional Igbo kingdom. The play ends by projecting the consequences of king Ogugua's inordinate and misguided attributions. He pays the ultimate price through his tragic end and that of his mother, Nneobi, who engineered his ill route to power.

Wedlock of the Gods, the second text used in this study, is a tragedy which depicts the ritual of death and mourning in a typical Igbo community. According to the worldview of the play, the solemnity of the ritual is distorted, however, for rather than engaging in the normal funeral rites and rituals for cleansing herself and sending the spirit of the deceased to the world of the gods, the widow (Ogwoma) expresses a sense of liberation from unwanted marriage by allowing herself to be impregnated by her lover, Uloko, while the mother of the deceased (Odibei) forms rites meant to destroy her son's widow as an act of vengeance for supposedly killing her son. From this instance, the rest of the action in the play is a struggle for

survival on the part of the defiant lovers who die after committing taboos and vows to continue their love in the heavens beyond.

On the other hand, Sofola's third tragic play is *Old Wines are Tasty*. Here, Okebuno, an educated young man who has traveled to many places in Western Europe can be compared to Obi Okonkwo in Achebe's *No Longer at Ease*. The approach of elections made Okebuno to return home and canvas for votes but because of his long years of separation from home, he finds himself out of place among his people. Impatience and stubbornness are his tragic flaws. His people's strict adherence to customs appears unreasonable to him and he would not condone it even against his mother's and uncle's admonitions. He insists on taking the wrong pathway to win elections in his community but soon discovers to his chagrin that he is an illegitimate child. Frustrated by this discovery, he decides to return to Lagos, whereupon he has an accident and dies.

In conclusion, therefore, the proverbs cited in this study are used generally to project cultural contexts and reiterate major human concerns. Equally important is the fact that some of the proverbs are used to sharpen characterization especially in the case of casting the protagonists or major characters such as King Ogugua, Ogwoma and Uloko, and Okebuno in *King Emene*, *Wedlock of the Gods* and *Old Wines are Tasty*, respectively. As Igbo proverbs provide a grammar of values, the proverbs in the three plays are used to clarify the conflicts in the plays and show the conflicts and tragic flaws of the protagonists which culminated into their sudden rise and fall.

In summary, Zulu Sofola's handling of Igbo proverbs in her three aforementioned plays suggests that her plays are more subtle and highly sophisticated with regard to the use of Igbo proverbs. Her ability in the utilization of Igbo proverbs in her plays shows her intention to preserve and respect her Igbo cultural and oral heritage in spite of her acquisition of Western education (civilization.)

The vacuum and question often raised in African literary studies about the fact that the Igbo do not write plays or incorporate Igbo proverbs in their plays can plausibly be answered by reading Zulu Sofola's *King Emene*, *Wedlock of the Gods* and *Old Wines Are Tasty*.

What emerges from the foregoing is that, Nigerian literary artists of Igbo extraction, Chinua Achebe, Rems Umeasiegbu, Chukwuemeka Ike and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo, have displayed much strength in the use of Igbo traditional prose style; proverbs. Despite their exploitation and incorporation of proverbs into their literary works, not many Igbo dramatists have used Igbo proverbs in their dramaturgies as Zulu Sofola has done. It is certain that one finds it easier to infuse proverbs in fiction than in plays. This explains in further terms why Achebe, Ike, Ezeigbo write in the genre of prose which gives them the opportunity to use Igbo proverbs in their narratives. On the other hand, Sofola as a dramatist has to put all her words into the mouths of her characters. Despite this restriction, Sofola has been able to use Igbo proverbs in her plays and they have worked in her advantage as she employed the proverbs in situations appropriate and dynamic in human interaction.

All these characteristics of Sofola's plays make her one of the strong voices amongst Nigerian post-colonial female playwrights like Tracy Utoh-Ezeajugh, Tess Owueme, Onyeka Iwuchukwu etc.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The findings of this study reveals that the degradation of Igbo language and culture as a result of colonialism, has affected the efficient and effective use of Igbo proverbs in Igbo/African literature, this research therefore recommends that Nigerian literary artists especially the Igbo writers ought to use the oral traditions of their various communities in their creative works. This effort is expected to go a long way in exposing the untold truth of the Igbo cosmological worldview.

Moreover, Government, education administrators and indeed the Nigerian universities, should consider introducing oral literature in the post-primary and universities curricula. African oral literature has been completely denigrated because most universities in the continent, study foreign written literatures; English, French and German more than African oral/written literature, perhaps to help Europeans promote racial inequality in post-colonial African societies. This is disservice that demands a rethink especially in the twenty-first century where there is much talk about rediscovery of African identity. Emenyonu once remarked:

If we can teach, in African and Western universities alike, courses in Hausa Language and culture, Swahili Language and culture, Igbo Language and culture, Yoruba Language and culture, Wolof Language and culture, why can't we also teach the rich cultures of the same cultural groups- some of which are bigger in land mass and population and have longer histories than some of the European ethnic literature that adorn the catalogs and programmes of many Western universities? But African universities themselves, however, must set the pace for such an endeavour, and this they have yet to do. Such an approach to the study of African literatures, would provide the much needed diversity for graduate students in universities throughout the United States and Europe who now seem compelled to combine the study of African Literature with the study of other Western and non Western literatures to guarantee themselves employments after their studies. (qtd. in Okoh 253)

Okot p' bitek also joins Emenyonu to lay a charge of discrimination against African oral literature when he revealed that:

...there is obvious discrimination against the people in the countryside by those in the seat of power, in the towns. Take the situation at the university, for example. There, you have professors and lecturers who are virtually ignorant of African music or poetry, and who purport to teach these subjects. The great African dancers and singers, the carvers, the pot makers and the story-tellers are in countryside. And they are kept out of our schools and colleges and universities. Is this not discrimination? (qtd. in Okoh 264)

P'bitek proposes an answer to the rhetorical question he posed above. His words are captured below:

In the educational section, break down the walls that surround our schools and universities, and let the people who know our culture teach our people. Let us Africanise our curriculum in a meaningful manner. Let African culture form the core of our curriculum and foreign culture be at the periphery... (qtd. in Okoh 264-265)

As a matter of fact, cultural studies are important for the socio-economic development of Africa. The place of oral literature in nation building or development is never in doubt. When this is done, more writers especially Igbo writers will adequately use Igbo proverbs and other oral traditions of Igboland to enrich their literary works and portray Igbo culture and traditions.

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