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Table of Contents

6

Drumbeats for the Divine Ofala Festival:
A Folkloric-Musical Analysis of Corpus Christi Procession in Nigeria

Jude Toochukwu Orakwe

Abstract

Festivals are natural to humanity and can be found at various levels of human existence. It has always been part of organized religion. The Catholic liturgy/practice is built around a yearly calendar that features different feasts celebrated at varying levels of solemnity. One of such feasts is the Corpus Christi which centres on the Catholic belief in transubstantiation, that is, the radical transformation of bread and wine into the true body and blood of Christ. This belief gives rise to various manners of devotions, veneration and adoration of the consecrated bread and wine, regarded by Catholics as the Body and Blood of Christ. One of the most distinctive devotions to the Holy Eucharist is the festive procession which follows upon celebration of the Mass of the Corpus Christi. In Nigeria, this procession has acquired much cultural significance that it is now presently viewed as Ofala of Christ, evoking the Igbo concept of perpetual anamnesis of the immortal reign of a traditional ruler. But at a deeper level, over time and in various places, Corpus Christi procession has become such strongly cultural event that it has become a locus of negotiation of multiple cultural identities. A critical observer begins to wonder if the procession is still only or principally about honouring the Body of Christ. The present essay sets out to reconcile such contrarieties by advertence to that phenomenological epoch characteristic of genuine participant-observation approach and concludes with the genuine present and urgent need of enrooting Christian beliefs and practices in the African native genius. There is also a recommendation for a deepening of the various modes and manners of African unique expression of Christian religiosity.

Keywords: Corpus Christi procession, Ofala of Christ, Catholic, Holy Eucharist, transubstantiation, African, folkloric-musical

1. Introduction

Issues concerning festivals of various peoples have always found a place in the discourse of anthropology and folklore. Festival, in this case, is to be understood as denoting a day or period of time set aside for religious or other forms of cultural or folkloric commemoration and celebration. On the one

hand, festivals, in many religions, are mainly marked by some forms of religious ceremonies and ritual observances, although social feasting and merriments are not thereby precluded. On the other hand, cultural festivals can include activities like processions, carnivals, music, dance and other such (entertaining) activities. The time of festival is therefore that of liveliness, merriment, gaiety and recreation.

Now, festivals understood in strict religious sense have a strong emplacement in the reckoning of the Catholic liturgical year. Within the Roman Catholic calendar, there are usually three grades of liturgical celebrations: memorial, feast and solemnity. Memorials are celebrated as minor commemorations, usually and often involving saints, whereas in the celebration of feasts (usually of the Lord Jesus Christ, the Blessed Virgin Mary, apostles and few other important saints), a further element of festive emphasis is brought forward as – for example – in the chanting of the liturgical hymns, namely, *Gloria* and *Te Deum*, at the celebration of Holy Mass and Divine Office respectively. But the highest level of celebration is the solemnity. This grade of celebration involves some very exceptionally crucial aspects of Church's belief – for example – the mystery of the Holy Trinity, Jesus Christ (especially his birth, resurrection, ascension, institution of the Eucharist, Kingship etc.), events of the Virgin Mary and some very important saints. In the celebration of a solemnity, which has the coloration of being the Catholic festival per excellence, much more ceremonies, featuring – in addition to what obtains at feasts – ampler chanting, music and ritual observances, have pride of place.

Nevertheless, it is necessary to underscore that solemnities in the Catholic Church can sometimes have lots of cultural and social implications for the wider society. One such solemnity is that of the Corpus Christi, a festival celebrated annually in honour of – and based on the belief in – the real and abiding presence of the Body and Blood of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist.

Literature Review

According to O'Leary (2008, p. 91), "the [Catholic] doctrine of transubstantiation, the transformation of bread and wine into the body and blood of Christ through the ritual act of consecration by a priest, lay at the heart of the [Corpus Christi]festival." The accompanying procession has been defined by Craig (1914, p. 600) as "a march of ecclesiastics and laity, usually the whole body of citizens, through the streets of the city; it was part of a religious service and usually comprehended a return to the place of setting out." It becomes, therefore, important to note that scholars of religion and ethno-religious folklore have concentrated their inquiry on the medieval manifestations of the Corpus Christi processions, its social effects and its early modern and contemporary evolution. Indeed, such procession in the Catholic

Church has attracted attention of anthropologists and folklorists with regard to its capacity "to express social bonding and to foster social integration" as well as its capacity to serve even "as a lightning rod for political and religious rivalries" (O'Leary 2008, p. 77). In the Hispanic-American traditional arts of Peruvian Andes, it is even noted by Dean (n.d. p. 111) that the Corpus Christi procession could be an avenue for the display of refined cultural behaviours vis-à-vis a manifestation of its lack by the various spheres or strata of the society. Artistic depiction of the uncultured behavior of "misbehaving children [at] the Corpus Christi… serves as an anecdotal acknowledgment of typical festive chaos, [while] their prominent pictorial presence also addresses the desire to control that chaos." Besides, "the Corpus Christi procession illustrates how, under favourable circumstances, public rituals could provide an avenue for expressing a minority's distinctiveness while at the same time achieving its integration in urban life" thereby contributing to the "constitution of public space as culturally plural" (O'Leary 2008, pp. 99-100).

Fig. 1: Corpus Christi procession at Bigard Memorial Seminary, Enugu

With regard to its contemporary celebration in Africa, Gregory Barz, an ethnomusicologist, was able to connect his experience of Corpus Christi procession in Tanzania with the kick off of the *Bulabo* dance festival in Sukumaland. He noted that the procession serves as an arena for open manifestation, reminiscence and strengthening of religious and cultural values (cf. Barz 2004, p. 41). Similarly, Niedźwiedź (2013), a Polish scholar, studied the procession associated with the Corpus Christi solemnity as obtained in the parish of Jemain Ghana, discovering therein a terrain for the manifestation of various layers of ethno-religious identities. For diasporic Nigerians in the city of Rome, the Corpus Christi procession is an event which in the guise of serving as a "sharing a memory of Nigeria" in a foreign land (Orakwe 2015, p.

370) juxtaposes or even fuses seemingly opposing cultural elements like religious worship and mutual entertainment, or singing of religious songs accompanied by vigorous dancing and stomping. The melding of these disparate aesthetic elements makes it difficult to delineate "the boundary between the sacred and the secular" within the one normatively religious event (Orakwe 2015, p. 243; See Waterman 1990, p. 90).

The present essay is a folkloric-musical analysis and interpretation of the great festival and procession of Corpus Christi as it has manifested annually in many parts of Nigeria where Catholicism exists. Although the feast of Corpus Christi itself is celebrated in May or June, the procession attached to it is – by a formal decision of the Catholic Bishops of Nigeria – shifted to the penultimate or last Sunday in November, being the solemnity of Christ the King. The point of departure of this hermeneutic-analytic study is the Igbo ethno-religious definition or conceptualization of the Corpus Christi procession within the context of the solemn feast of Christ the King as the celebration of ofala of Christ, ofala being a recurring annual commemoration of the office of the king in Igbo culture. However, it is quite arguable that this Igbo "ofala" definition of the event has diffused into many Nigerian cultures and could be at the cultural basis of the present manner of observance of the Christ the King/Corpus Christi festivities and procession in so many parts of Nigeria. The analysis contained in this study is based on live ethnographic evidence garnered from the author's participant-observation of the celebration of the procession at St. Joseph Parish Odoakpu, Onitsha in 2021 and 2022 as well as a review of online videos abundantly available on the issue at hand.

Theoretical Basis for this Study

It was Titon who indicated that a religious performance can be viewed as object of ethnographic inquiry on the basis of its being characteristically intentional, rule-governed, interpretable, and marked. For Titon (1988, p. 8), religious events characterized by some form of music making are not only definable as performance but, in addition, "the concept of [this] performance carries implications worth exploring." The word "implications" as used in this context bears a reference to the four characteristics of religious performance listed above. The present essay seeks to demonstrate that the hugely music-making and festive events of Corpus Christi procession, especially as observed in different parts of Nigeria, have these four features and hence deserve an ethnographic reflection.

With regard to the first of the characteristics of performance, let it be said immediately that the concept of intentionality connotes the complementary ideas of deliberation and deliberateness. Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy indicates that the term "intentionality" has root in the Latin word *intentio*, a

noun formulated from the verb *intendere*, being a reference to a performance event "being directed towards some goal or thing" (Jacob, 2010). McGann (2004, p. 146) averred that religious performances "are meant to do something, to have an impact on others." In other words, performers of religious items like chants, prayers and sermons or preaching are motivated by some specific *intentio* while engaged in such performances (Titon 1988, p. 8). In Nigerian Catholic enclaves, the music, the dance, rituals and other performances surrounding the Corpus Christi procession are not purposeless. They are meant to be utterly communicative. They have spiritual, religious, social, political, educational, psychological and aesthetic messages. It can be argued that the musically charged celebration of the procession is intended to serve simultaneously as a quiet but expressive manifestation of the spiritual and religious beliefs of Catholics, a socio-political declaration of the supremacy of Christ's kingship (over and above the corrupt political regimen in Nigeria) and a psycho-aesthetic erudition in appreciation of the beautiful.

With regard to the Corpus Christi procession being rule governed, it must be asserted that it is in itself a non-chaotic activity. Commenting on "order, chaos and 'paradox of control'" in an African-American Catholic church, McGann (2004, pp. 201-203) posits an inquiry concerning the principle of organic unity in a religious performance. The answer, according to her finding, is in what she defines as "a cultivated way of being together" or what Jantsch (1980, p. 196) designates as "dynamic connectedness" (quoted in McGann 2004, p. 202). This dynamic connectedness empowers people with the capacity of creating "positive qualities of social being [for example] timing, coordination…" (Rosaldo 1993, p. 102 quoted in McGann 2004, p. 202). Timing and coordination would imply that worship activities and religious events are usually driven or steered by rules, both written and non-written (Titon 1988, p. 8). The Corpus Christi procession, as presently observed in several parts of Nigeria, goes by some specific rules, whether documented in writing or otherwise. Irrespective of the seemingly discordant singing, dancing, wild and exuberant merriment and camaraderie by some of the participants, yet at the basis, the procession still follows the ceremonial rituals indicated in Catholic liturgical books especially with regard to the exposition and reposition of the blessed Eucharist as well as benediction at the end. By convention, it is well known that the more traditional singing is kept in the rear near the Blessed Eucharist while the more varied, gaily and percussive music performances are usually in the front. Similarly, it is nearly always the case that Corpus Christi processions in Nigeria are never complete without beautifully dressed young "flower" girls who precede the Blessed Eucharist. In this case, and to put it in the words of O'Leary (2008, pp. 88-89):

> The children's appearance mattered because it signified to participants in
> the procession, as well as to observers, that the occasion represented a

withdrawal from normal types of action and…was governed by rules of behaviour deemed appropriate for ritual actions in public space.

Adorned appropriately as they ought to be, the girls would chant mellifluous devotional songs as well as utter prayers while intermittently spraying confetti on the Blessed Eucharist or along the way, a practice well documented even in the post-medieval Polish history of Corpus Christi celebration (Dąbrówka 2002, p. 250).

Furthermore, another important facet of Corpus Christi procession as a religious performance is seen in its interpretability: "performers interpret their performance as they go along; they understand what goes on, and their continuing performance is based in part upon their interpretation" (Titon 1988, p. 9). The interpretability of Corpus Christi procession as it is celebrated in Nigeria must be situated against the background of Nigerian culture. There is something culturally unique and specific in the way the procession is observed in Nigeria. To understand and interpret adequately the events of the procession as performed in Nigeria, it is important to evoke the African cultural aesthetics of singing, dancing and festive procession. It was the advertence to this specific cultural mode of festive and expressive singing, dancing and general music making among Catholics in Igboland that led to the definition of the Corpus Christi procession among Nigerian Igbo as Christ's or Divine *Ofala*.

Finally, a critical observation of the performance events surrounding the Corpus Christi procession in Catholic communities in Nigeria shows that those events are clearly articulated in distinct sections. This is normal with liturgical celebrations in Christian enclaves given that the conclusion of an item in the event program leads to the commencement of another. In other words, Corpus Christi procession in Nigerian Catholic communities "is keyed or marked" (Titon 1988:9). Ethnographic investigation of the procession is made possible and opportune precisely because it is in itself a highly marked worship event. As such, it is well known to Catholic worshipers that the event starts with exposition of the Blessed Eucharist, then comes the procession which is internally segmented by various stops during which the flower girls throw the confetti on the monstrance encasing the Blessed Eucharist while the altar servers ring the bell and lavishly fill the atmosphere with the smoke of choice incense. The end of the procession is also clearly marked because as soon as the Latin song, *Tantum ergo*, together with the ensuing prayers by the chief celebrant is rendered, it is well known that the next item is blessing and conclusion of the ceremony.

Ethnographic Note

Sunday, 20th of November, 2021 is a day anyone, within Catholic enclaves in various parts of Nigeria, would not be in a hurry to forget. It was the day of

Corpus Christi procession, which usually comes as a follow-up to the celebration of the solemnity of Christ the King. It is a day that usually involves multi-dimensional preparations. This was precisely the case in the parish of residence of the author, namely, St. Joseph's Parish Odoakpu, Onitsha. The priests' robes or vestments for the day's liturgy were made to be in top form in terms of cleanliness and arrangement. The altar knights ensured that their service vests were kept ultra-neat and well-ironed. Their drums for the *Igba-Umuogalanya* dance were well rehearsed and the musical instruments put in optimum status. The flower girls made elaborate arrangements for their new and beautiful white wedding-like costumes. They also procured packs of confetti, perfumed sprays and other accoutrement for the procession. All the songs and choreographic displays belonging to their devotion and displays along the route of the procession were thoroughly rehearsed for many weeks before the day. It would eventually take the older ladies about an hour and half to dress and adorn them beautifully in proximate preparation for the commencement of the festive procession. The youths of St. Joseph's hired a truck (as would be usual) to transport the live gospel band that would be playing all through the procession. Every other needed musical instrument by other groups was secured and activated for the procession. Many of the Church faithful procured 'a noise making' vuvuzela.

On the day itself, the Corpus Christi procession (following the Masses in the morning) began in the mid-afternoon with the exposition and brief adoration of the Blessed Eucharist. There were arrangements for the order and line of the procession which began from the church building, passed through major streets around the parish and ended in the parish square. Children were in front, following the altar servers with the cross and torches, together with the *Igba-Umuogalanya*, a dance ensemble modelled on a pre-existing dance type known as *Igba Eze*, which typically fits and is apposite for an occasion like the "Divine Ofala". Following the children were mainly the youths of the parish together with the youth gospel live band.

At this juncture, it must be critically commented that the section of the youth represents an epicenter of carnivalesque freedom, expressive dance, camaraderie and merriment during the procession. It was like a free-for-all dancing spree with utter freedom employed by the youths in the exhibition of various and varied dancing styles. It was really an extra of mutual entertainment inserted within the sacrality of the sacred procession. Such side attractions or fringe entertainment (which the author observed in the mainly youth section of the procession) is not totally unknown or unprecedented in the history of Corpus Christi celebration. In pre-modern Poland, Corpus Christi procession featured some form of cultural dance: "the…famous folk-dance of Lajkonik (hobby-horse dance) as part of the Corpus Christi procession was first

attested in 1738" (Dąbrówka 2002, p. 248). But there were also even "the mystery play, the miracle/saint play, and the morality play" (Dąbrówka 2002, p. 259) all incorporated as side attractions or interludes within the solemn procession of the Corpus Christi itself.

Following the youths were the women, then the flower girls, the Mass servers and the priests with the Blessed Sacrament carried under the canopy. The flower girls, the Mass servers and the priests form the aesthetic epicenter of the entire procession. The Mass servers were all in their best of serving vestments (cassock and surplice), some carrying torches while others carried the thurificating paraphernalia (thuribles, incense, and charcoals) for uninterrupted working up of a *Weihrauch* (holy smoke) – as Germans would put it – and for incensing the Blessed Sacrament intermittently. The young flower girls were a group to watch, their role being that of sprinkling confetti and spraying perfumed foam-flakes on the Blessed Sacrament and priests carrying it. The deliberately aesthetic adornment accompanying their white garments made them stand out. From the stance of an active participant observer, one would argue – in agreement with O'Leary (2008, p. 87) – that the white garment serves appropriately and symbolically "to denote virginal innocence and purity" of the young girls.

Fig. 2: Young girls in Corpus Christi procession in Germany (Credit: Jens Meyer/AP)

Following immediately after the Blessed Sacrament is the choir with its usually solemn and melodious songs. The solemnity of the choir songs can be explained by the fact that this section represents the soberer segment of the procession, dominated by members of usually "conservative" societies such as Sacred Heart League, the Precious Blood Sodality, the knights and members of the Catholic Men Organization who are usually more interested in the interior

devotional aspect of the event than in the externalized expressive behavior as typically found in the youth section. The above exposition serves to open a critical inquiry into the appropriateness or justification of the designation of the Corpus Christi procession as a "Divine Ofala".

Ofala in Igbo Culture

As I argued above, it was the manner of celebrating the Corpus Christi procession in Igboland that led to its being defined as an Ofala. But what does the term Ofala signify? Etymologically, it has been argued that "the term *Ofala* is derived from the words, *ofo*, meaning authority, and *ala*, meaning land. A merger of both words therefore means authority of the land" (Ottah 2016, p. 13). In this guise, ofala can then be defined as the recurring annual commemorative celebration of the institution of the kingship as well as the authority of the reigning king. Ofala in Nigerian Igbo culture has to do with remembrance. It is therefore an anamnesis or anniversary of the accession of the king to the throne of his ancestors. Within the celebration of the ofala itself, there is ingrained the belief that the king's authority is perpetual and undying. In Igbo culture, when a king dies, his funeral is celebrated as his last ofala. As such, his demise is neither mentioned nor projected as having occurred since the king, his kingship and kingly authority are deemed immortal. From the Christian theological perspective, Christ, having died and risen again, reigns forever as an immortal king. Hence, his Ofala has no finale but is everlasting and ever recurring, annually and in perpetuity.

Describing the Ofala festival to an American audience, Nwafor (2019) gave the following account:

> In Nigeria, we have a long-standing tradition that once a year the king… domicile will host the Ofala Festival. Our king is sheltered in his palace, no one sees him throughout the year. But on the day of the Ofala Festival, he will come out in public, feed the citizens and visitors, install chiefs, award titles, reward good deeds, break the new yam, pray over the whole community, and dance for the public. It is a whole day event that takes months of preparation.

Ofala in Igbo culture is therefore an important annual feast that is very central to the construction, preservation and perpetuation of a kingdom. In that guise, "it is celebrated annually to showcase the rich cultural heritage of the Igbos and also foster unity and love among them" (Ottah 2016, p. 13).

Further, Ottah (2016, p. 13) gives a description of the 2013 Ofala celebration of Obi of Onitsha (which, because of the crowd it draws, is usually celebrated in the stadium):

> Five days to the Ofala, the Obi goes into seclusion or isolation. The 2013

edition of the festival commenced on Monday 7 and ended on Sunday 13 October. Inferably therefore, the Obi went into seclusion as from Wednesday 2nd October, 2013. Nobody saw the Obi within the period as he did everything strictly alone in "hiding." In fact, it is believed that the five days of seclusion was the period of intensive communion with the gods on behalf of the people. As he did everything all alone, the subjects ate the new yam. The festival usually begins with twenty-one-gun salute, followed by an all-night Ufie music and other cultural activities such as incantations, prayers, among others. Such was the case as the Obi celebrated the Ofala with the entire Igbo nation. On the fourth day, the Obi was to temporarily and briefly appear for the people to have a glimpse of him and for him to eat the yam.

While emphasizing music making as an important aspect of Ofala celebration, Ottah noted that the fifth day of the Ofala featured the performance of different cultural troupes as well as the royal dance steps performed by the Obi himself, which, as Ujummadu (2017) notes, is an important highlight of the Ofala fiesta itself. Furthermore, the following elaborations are given:

When all the *ndichie* (elders) and other leaders as well as different cultural troupes were gathered, the Obi came into the square taking dancing steps and receiving cheers from the crowd. His emergence was heralded by thunderous rendition of traditional music which he danced to, waving his royal sword (*ada*) in… salute of his subjects who joyously cheered him (Ottah 2016, pp. 13-14).

As part of the Ofala festivities, masquerades are also in abundant display, especially the famous Igbo *Ijele* masquerade. According to Ujummadu (2017), "Ofala festival is an occasion for age grades to showcase their masquerades as a great way of keeping the heritage of the people alive." In essence, therefore, Ofala in Igboland fits into the category of events characterized by liveliness, merriment, gaiety and recreation. It can be summarily reckoned as one of the arenas in which various strata of Igbo cultural uniqueness "are created, re-created, discovered, revealed, and shaped through social and cultural actions" (Niedźwiedź 2013, p. 8).

Understanding the Corpus Christi as a Divine Ofala

The solemnity of Corpus Christi, being a festival in honour of the abiding presence of Body and Blood of Christ in the Blessed Eucharist, is usually celebrated on the second Thursday or Sunday after the Pentecost. The variation depends on local conditions and the decision of Bishops of a given ecclesiastical circumscription. Working as an ethnographic researcher in Tanzania, Barz (2004, p. 41) noted that the solemnity of Corpus Christi is "celebrated in the Catholic tradition throughout the world on the Thursday after Trinity Sunday, the first Sunday after Pentecost." Nevertheless, in Nigeria, the

second Sunday after Pentecost is the day mandated for the celebration by Nigerian bishops. The Corpus Christi celebration has two major parts, namely, the Mass and the procession.

Fig. 3: Crowds at Corpus Christi procession in Aguleri, Anambra State.

In Nigeria, however, the Corpus Christi procession is usually detached from the Mass of Corpus Christi (celebrated on the second Sunday after Pentecost) and transferred to the solemnity of Christ the King which coincides with the last Sunday of the liturgical year, usually towards the end of November. In consequence of this transference, but more precisely because of the new inner connection established between the solemnity of Christ the King and the transferred Eucharistic procession – normally celebrated in Nigeria with a befitting paraphernalia or accoutrement of kingly royalty and majesty – there is the generally established practice of designating the day as that of Ofala, that is, a commemoration of the immortal and everlasting kingship of Christ. This Nigerian link of the Eucharist to the concept of Christ the King bears semblance to Niedźwiedź's (2013, p. 8) finding in his study of Corpus Christi procession in Ghana, where she discovered that "in popular Ghanaian theology, the concept of Christ as king, which recalls a familiar figure of ɔhene (king, chief), is more readily comprehensible than the abstract concept of Christ present in the Eucharist."

Corpus Christi eucharistic procession – now transferred to the solemnity of Christ the King – has become an annual event in Nigeria and one looked and longed for by Catholics and, perhaps, non-Catholics who are attracted by the

trappings of cultural, aesthetic and musical accompaniments of the celebration. From a closer observation and deeper reflection during the November 2021 procession (and its 2022 replication), it became clear to the author that something much more extended in latitude – than the merely liturgical and devotional – is going on in the background. People were really engaged in highly varied manners of singing, dancing, camaraderie and even mutual entertainment that give the impression that a secular and social event is also going on. And yet within this apparent and subtly deceiving social stance is to be located the spiritual depth and seriousness of the event being celebrated – namely, the Ofala of Christ the King. However, it was not too difficult to appreciate the unfolding scenario given that in African and African derived cultural performance "there is… little difference… between sacred and secular usage" (Waterman 1990, p. 90). Therefore, an appropriate appreciation of the musical folklore, together with the elaborate music performance that unfolds at the Corpus Christi celebration in Nigeria, becomes possible within an understanding of the cultural paradigm of "ofala," celebrated in the Christian context as the festival of the undying kingship of Christ.

Corpus Christi Procession vs. Ofala: Towards a Comparative Analysis

Now, it is possible to argue that parallels exist between the Igbo concept of Ofala and the manner in which it is extrapolated to the understanding of the feast of Christ the King versus Corpus Christi procession as Ofala. For example, Ofala as an Igbo celebration per se is a way of accentuating the immortality of the King. Needless to say, this concept lies at the basis of the Nigerian Catholic understanding of the Corpus Christi procession as Ofala parade in honour of Christ, the immortal King of kings and Lord of lords. This understanding creates the epistemological backdrop against which and on the basis of which there erupts and can erupt an avalanche of wild joyful musical celebration that sometimes seems to traverse the boundary of the sacred. It can be argued that the sheer numerous varieties and styles of dance and other forms of choreographed performances accompanying the procession are not accidental or unintended outbreaks of religious enthusiasm but are encapsulated seminally within the very concept of Ofala of the Divine King. It bears repeating that a symphonic heterophony of varied musical ensembles and sounds is precisely central to the very process of eventuating the Ofala event.

Next, the centrality accorded to the Ijele masquerade in Igbo celebration of royal Ofala can be gleaned in the awesomeness, majesty and sacrality surrounding the Blessed Sacrament during the Corpus Christi procession. Theologically speaking, of course, no Catholic would dare to equiparate the Blessed Sacrament to the Ijele masquerade since that would amount to a false analogy. However, from the perspective of cultural anthropology, it is possible to argue on the side of faint semblance or similitude between the majestically

awesome aura surrounding the Blessed Sacrament vis-à-vis the pomp and pageantry associated with the Ijele, the king of all Igbo masquerades. Similarly, Ijele masquerade features an abundant display of colours and colourfulness and a critical – even if only banal – observation of the priests carrying the Blessed Sacrament, the Mass servers, the Knights and the flower girls would seem to point to a similar colourful tendency, albeit displayed in a strictly Catholic liturgical context. A visual similarity is arguable, even if only registered in the subconscious of a casual observer or participant.

Aside from the foregoing observations, anthropologists have argued that the Catholic feast of Corpus Christi – especially, as it has been conceived and celebrated in so many parts of Africa – has become a locus of negotiation of multiple identities. According to Barz, Corpus Christi procession in Sukumaland – despite being a fundamentally para-liturgical and spiritual event – is one in "which community values… are displayed, remembered and reinforced" (2004, p. 41). Writing about his observation with the Jema Parish in Ghana, Niedźwiedź (2013, p. 8) indicated that although, the "Corpus Christi is a celebration connected with the Catholic understanding of the Eucharist, and, as such… unique to the Catholic Church" yet, the "feast is one of those occasions when members of the Jema parish manifest their Christian identity within the public space of their town in a very spectacular way." As far as Niedźwiedź is concerned, public religious observances, such as the Corpus Christi procession, serve "to reveal and confirm, first and foremost, denominational identities [even as] these practices very often… reveal a mixture of other identities which might appear in various configurations" (2013, p. 8). From a personal observation, the dance and music-making that is associated with the event of Corpus Christi procession at St. Joseph's Parish Odoakpu-Onitsha could be a veneer of a deeper striving at negotiation of multiple identities, even if the participants were unaware of their motivations. Such identities could be belongingness to traditional vs. modern religious praxis, old vs. young categories, exuberant vs. quiet worship styles, female vs. male, lay vs. clerical approaches, etc.

But such negotiation of identity is not limited to the African scene. Even in far-away Cardiff UK, the Corpus Christi procession "was more than an expression of the values of the processionists to themselves and to their co-religionists. [Indeed, a] Catholic procession in public in a religiously plural society inevitably implicated onlookers who did not necessarily share the values expressed by the procession" (O'Leary 2008, p. 89). The implication is that the procession in Cardiff became a means of nonviolent contestation or protest in a religiously plural society that had witnessed "the spate of controversial anti-Catholic lectures by the militant Protestant Alliance and the activities of the Welsh Protestant League in Cardiff in 1898" (O'Leary 2008, p. 93). Further,

during the time of Russian occupation of Poland, there was an attempt made by the foreign dominators to suppress the Corpus Christi processions "but this only made them a means of manifesting Catholic, and to some extent Polish national identity" (Dąbrówka 2002, p. 248). In the early 70s, under the leadership of Karol Wojtyła, then Archbishop of Cracow, the Corpus Christi processions clearly became for the Polish people "annual acts of cultural resistance" as well as a tool of retrieving and preserving "their authentic culture and their rights as citizens" (Weigel 2001, p. 192).

Conclusion

As can be seen from the above exposition, historically and in various cultures, the event of Corpus Christi procession has had lots of cultural accretions and peculiar redefinitions associated with it. In Nigeria, it has been christened the Ofala of Christ, the Universal King. This has become a way of perpetuating the very concept and institution of Ofala that has acquired a perennial collocation within the Igbo, and by extension, other Nigerian, cultures. The identification of Corpus Christi procession with the Igbo concept of Ofala responds to the call – within Catholicism – for inculturation. In the language of anthropology the exigency of inculturation has been defined in terms of Africanization, a term used by Nketia (1958, pp. 265) who had raised the "question of Africanizing Christian worship in Africa" and insisted on "the urgent need of eliminating the European cultural accretions that came with Christianity and re-clothing the Christian message with the garb of African music and culture for a more meaningful and effective contextualization of the gospel among Africans" (Orakwe 2015, pp. 29-30).

In the light of the above exposition, there is an urgent need for a more diligent study of the cultural but subtle manifestation of religiosity by Nigerians in particular and Africans in general, especially in the context of the Corpus Christi Ofala event. A question for future investigation could be on how this manifestation has really gotten or can get deeper in Nigerians' expression of their Christian faith and practice so that such religiosity does not end up being accused of being a shallow exhibition of momentary exuberance. Such a study will require a deeper immersion of the researcher into the event of the Divine Ofala in the guise of a more active participant-observation approach with an intense program of interviews and interrogations for a more profound on-the-spot unprejudiced understanding of the religious phenomena of the Corpus Christi procession.

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Impact of Kidnapping on Access to Education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State, Nigeria

Influence Ejirefe & Edward Ukwubile Egwuaba

Abstract

The study was conducted to determine the effect of kidnapping on access to education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. The major objective of the study was to determine the extent to which kidnapping activities specifically impact on access to education. The study used a population size of 11,113 and sample of 400 students to analyse the study. The researcher adopted 5 point Likert-Scale, primary data were generated through questionnaires and surveys which were analysed using Spearman's Rank Correlation analysis to determine the correlation coefficient and strength of the relationship between kidnapping and access to education. The study established that kidnapping exhibited a strong negative correlation coefficient of (-0.844) indicating that 84% of the variation or behaviour of access to education was explained by the autonomous factor (kidnapping) with a P-value of (0.004). The great impact of statistical significance of the impact of kidnapping on access to education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State, as revealed by the result analysis, was thus established. The implication is that a per cent increase in kidnapping will lead to 84% decrease in access to education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State. The study recommends that government should implement policies to eradicate kidnapping activities through direct actions in the community.

Keywords: crime, kidnapping, access, education, Etche LGA

INTRODUCTION

Crime is a globally condemned phenomenon. People condemn crime because of its adverse effect on humanity. Crime has caused injuries, loss of lives and priced possessions of victims all over the world, Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State and the rest of Nigeria inclusive. Crime is common and has come to stay and not something that can be wiped away easily in a society; whether developed or developing society. Rivers State Police Command Annual Report (2014) asserts that even in the developed world where they employ sophisticated gadgets/weapons to fight crime, it is still difficult to totally eliminate crime; at best, it is reduced to the barest minimum.

There are all sorts of crime in Rivers State ranging from theft, armed robbery, murder, rape, aggravated assault, oil bunkering, cultism, to kidnapping. Crime in Rivers State is so heightened that residents fear for their safety and security. Some crimes are perpetrated by petty criminals who ultimately grow to become crime lords in the state, with some attaining the notorious level of war lords who do as they like in the particular territories they control. Etche Local Government Area is one of the twenty-three Local Government Areas of Rivers State troubled by petty and notorious criminals. Chukwu and Elemba (2014) had described Etche LGA as a place where terror gangs struck terror into the community and set up what might be termed a parallel "government" (Chukwu and Elemba, 2014). This still remains the state of affairs in Etche LGA.

Among the crimes in Etche LGA, kidnapping for ransom is a major challenge. Most kidnapping activities in Etche LGA are perpetrated by cultists. According to Nairadiary (2022) majority of kidnapping activities and other crimes in Etche LGA are perpetrated by 'Umuoma Boys' cultist group. The kidnapping activities of these perpetrators greatly hinder the educational sector in the area. They have become a source of fear for parents who daily worry about the safety and security of their children and their teachers, some of whom might be kidnapped at home, on their way to school or inside their school premises in Etche LGA. Situations like these could create panic in the mind of students and teachers and discourage them from going back to school. It could also lead to students' poor academic performance due to fear and lack of concentration on their studies. Incessant kidnapping activities in Etche LGA has made some parents to withdraw their children from school and keep them at home because they feel it is better to keep the children at home instead of allowing them to go to school and end up being kidnapped by criminals. The kidnapping challenges have also made some rich parents to relocate their children to schools in other states in Nigeria where there is relative peace; some have even sent their children abroad.

Efforts have been made to tackle this problem. However, in spite of the Etche America Foundation (EAF) Community Development Initiatives, which include the award of scholarship to intelligent indigent students, provision for healthcare services, provision for employment to reduce the crime rate in Etche LGA (https://www.thisdaylive.com), and stringent measures such as life imprisonment, confiscation of monies and destruction of property acquired through kidnapping, as stipulated in the Rivers State Anti-Kidnapping and Cultism (Prohibition) Amendment Law No.7 of 2018 (Ejirefe and Aruwa, 2022), kidnappers refused to turn a new leaf and continue to destabilise Etche LGA learning environment.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What is the impact of kidnapping on access to education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State?

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is to evaluate the impact of kidnapping on access to education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

The hypothesis stated in null form was tested in this study.

Ho^1: Kidnapping does not have significant impact on access to education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

This study is significant to the Federal and Rivers State governments, especially to Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State, because it will help them to formulate policies and strategies on how to curtail the menace of kidnapping. The results of the study will add to the existing literature on kidnapping and serve as reference material for researchers.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study on impact of kidnapping on access to education is limited to secondary school education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Crime

Crime is relative and has been conceptualised in different ways by different scholars. Isiaka and Okaphor (2018) defined crime as acts or omissions forbidden by law that can be punished by imprisonment or fine. Similarly, Marchuk (2014) conceptualised crime as a socially harmful act or omission that breaches the values protected by a state. It is an event prohibited by law, one which can be followed by prosecution in criminal proceedings and, thereafter, by punishment on conviction.

Furthermore, Imhonopi and Urim (2012) conceptualised crime as an action prohibited by law or failure (omission) to act as required by law. Though, for an act to be a crime, it must possess certain elements, such as harm or injury inflicted on the victim; it must possess legality in the sense that the act must be prohibited by the state; it must possess the element of *Actus reus*, that is the physical element or guilty act which requires proof; and it must also have *Mens*

rea, meaning that the perpetrator must have planned to commit the crime intentionally and knowingly for the act to be considered a crime.

Concept of Kidnapping

Odomemene (2014) defined kidnapping as the act of holding a person captive in order to make him offer material or non-material payment for his or her release. Just like what is happening in Rivers State, the motive here is economic exploitation and greed. Similarly, Section 364 of the Criminal Code Act also conceptualised kidnaping as: Any person who unlawfully imprisons any person, and take him out of Nigeria without his consent; or unlawfully imprisons any person within Nigeria in such a manner as to prevent him from applying to a court for his release or from discovering to any other person the place where he is imprisoned, or in such a manner as to prevent any person entitled to have access to him from discovering the place where he is imprisoned is guilty of a felony and is liable to imprisonment for ten years (Olakanmi and Co, 2016: 116-117).

Furthermore, United Nations Economic and Social Council (2012) defined kidnapping as unlawfully detaining a person or persons against their will (including through the use of force, threat, fraud or enticement) for the purpose of demanding for their liberation an illicit gain or any other economic gain or other material benefit, or in order to oblige someone to do or not to do something, and resolves to treat it henceforth as a serious crime, particularly when it is connected with the action of organised criminal groups or terrorist groups.

Concept of Education

Ajuzie (2017) defined education as a process of imparting knowledge and skills to younger generation of a society. Similarly, MBN (2022) conceptualized education as the process or act of learning or teaching, that is, acquiring or imparting knowledge. It includes the preparation of children for mature life. It also involves developing people's powers of reasoning and judgment. Additionally, education is a method or practice that aims at teaching an individual a new skill or new principles (John, 2022). Furthermore, Ololube (2011) defined education as any act or experience that has a formative effect on the mind, character or physical ability of an individual (for instance, the child is educated by his environment through interaction with the environment). In conclusion, Ogbondah (2016) suggested that education is the process for transmitting culture in terms of continuity and growth and for disseminating knowledge either to ensure social control or guarantee rational direction of the society or both.

There are three levels of education in Nigeria: primary education, secondary

education and tertiary education. However, this study is specifically concerned with secondary education as specified by the scope of the study.

EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Jimoh, Gyan and Adeniyi (2022) evaluated the impact of insecurity (kidnapping) of school environment on the academic performance and school enrolment of secondary school students in Katsina State, Nigeria. The study adopted exploratory sampling method. A structured questionnaire tagged "Impact of Insecurity" questionnaire was used to collate data from 159 respondents which consist of teachers, parents and guardians that had students in secondary schools or children of secondary school age. Descriptive statistics and Chi-square test was used for data analysis. The findings revealed that insecurity (kidnapping) impacted negatively on secondary school students' academic performance, school attendance and enrolment rate in Katsina State. The study recommended that government and other stakeholders should make serious effort to promote safety in secondary schools.

Additionally, Maiangwa and Agbiboa (2020) examined the impact of the extremist group called Tanzeem-ul-Islami-ul-Furqan activities on girls' education in Pakistan. The study showed that the existence of the extremist group in Pakistan is a threat to girls' access to education as they have earlier issued a warning letter to all girls' schools to shut down or face being kidnapped. The findings of the investigation also revealed that the threat made all government and private schools to close down in Panjgur for several days. The findings also revealed that a bus transporting some secondary school female students and teachers to a private school was attacked by unidentified gunmen for flouting their stay at home order. The terrorists group took this action just to deny the girls access to education.

Furthermore, Global Coalition to protect Education from Attack (2018) examined the impact of kidnapping on education in South Sudan and Libya. Interview method was used to solicit information from the respondents who were both students and teachers in the study areas on the kidnapping activities of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and militants during the Libya conflict. The findings indicated that over 2 million children in South Sudan were out of school because of the SPLA's destruction of 800 schools, kidnapping of over 300 students and several teachers. The findings also indicated that during the Libya conflict militants used kidnapping in extorting money from professors, teachers and students in the primary, secondary and tertiary school levels, which has kept many educational resources and students away from schools.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Crime Triangle Theory

The theory used to anchor this paper is the crime triangle theory which was developed from one of the environmental theories of criminology - the Routine Activity Theory (RAT) originated by Felson and Cohen in 1979. The principle of the crime triangle states an easy way to visualize and understand crime problems: three things must exist in order to have a crime: an offender, a victim, and a location. Lacking any one of these, a crime will not occur (Inderbitzen, Bates, and Gainey 2016). According to Melanie (2018) the term target here refers to the victim who must be at the scene of the crime. Felson and Clarke (1998) assert that offenders will only be interested in targets that they value for whatever reason. The desire of the perpetrator (kidnapper) is to commit the crime. The victim/target must appear to be gullible or easy prey while the opportunity is the various loopholes in the environment. Melanie (2018) argued that the three elements must be present for a crime to occur. Melanie argued further that we have control over two of the three elements but we do not have control over the desire of the criminal to commit the crime, that once the criminal has made up its mind to commit a crime he start looking for the target or victim and the opportunity to commit the crime.

The diagram below is a demonstration of crime triangle:

Figure 1

Offender's Desire   Crime   Opportunity

Victim/Target
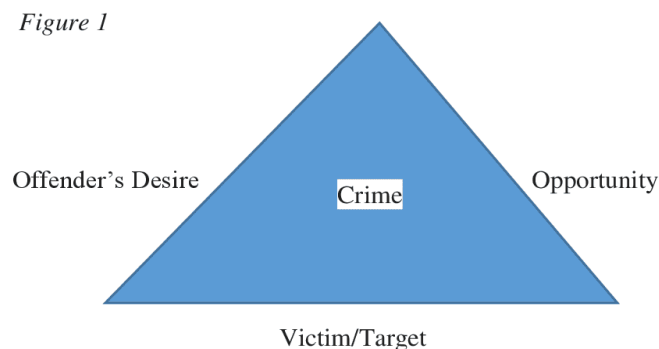
Source: Fightuntilthefinish.com

METHODOLOGY

The study used survey design. The population of the study is 11,113 students from the 18 Government Senior Secondary Schools in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State (Planning, Research and Statistics Department, Rivers State Senior Secondary School Board, 2022).The sample size was 400 using Taro Yamane formula:

$$n = \frac{N}{(1+N(e)^2)}$$

Purposive sampling method was used to select 8 senior secondary schools. The selected schools were Community Secondary School Egwi, Community Secondary School Isu, Community Secondary School Egbu, Community Secondary School Igbo Etche, Community Secondary School Nihi, Community Secondary School Obite, Community Secondary School Okoro-Agu and Community Secondary School Ulakwo-Etche. The selection was informed by the predominance of kidnapping in these communities of Etche Local Government Area. Questionnaire instrument was adopted for the study. 400 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents, out of which 392 filled questionnaires were collected from the field but only 380 were good enough for analysis. Simple regression method was used in the analysis and testing of hypothesis.

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Spearman's rank correlation coefficient measures the strength of the association between two variables and is represented as $r_s = 1 - {}^{6[\sum di2}/_{n(n2 - 1)]}$.

The test of significance of the independent variables at 5% level is used in the analysis.

Spearman's Rank Correlation Result

				ACCESS _ TO_ EDUC	KNPT_ACT
Kendall's tau_b	ACCESS _ TO_ EDUC	Correlation Coefficient		1.000	-.767**
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.	.008
		N		360	360
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias	.000	.064
			Std. Error	.000	.225
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	1.000	.371
				Upper	1.000	1.000
	KNPT_ACT	Correlation Coefficient		.867**	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.007	.
		N		360	360
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias	.064	.000
			Std. Error	.225	.000
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	.371	1.000
				Upper	1.000	1.000
Spearman's rho	ACCESS _ TO_ EDUC	Correlation Coefficient		1.000	-.844**
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.	.004
		N		360	360
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias	.000	.078
			Std. Error	.000	.173
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	1.000	1.000
				Upper	1.000	1.000
	KNPT_ACT	Correlation Coefficient		-.844**	1.000
		Sig. (1-tailed)		.004	.
		N		360	360
		Bootstrap[a]	Bias	.078	.000
			Std. Error	.173	.000
			95% Confidence Interval	Lower	.511	1.000
				Upper	1.000	1.000

EDUC = KNPT (- 0.844**)

Test of sign = (0.004)

The above table shows the test of Spearman's rank correlation test carried out for the purpose of the study. The test results show that there is a strong negative correlation between kidnapping and access to education in Etche Local Government Area with the coefficient of correlation of (-0.844) designating that 84% of the variation or behaviour of access to education was explained by the autonomous factor (kidnapping). It is clear from the result that 1% increase in kidnapping activities will trigger 84% decrease in access to education in that community. Again from the result, the significant level or P-value of kidnapping (0.004) indicates that there was specific impact as the statistical significant is clearly below the 5% level. Although the exit rate is high, the analysis shows that there is a strong negative or inverse correlation between kidnapping and access to education. The study, therefore, rejects the null hypothesis and accepts the alternative hypothesis that there is a significant relationship between kidnapping and access to education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

CONCLUSION

Kidnapping has remained at the frontier of policy debates in developing economies like Nigeria. This study, anchored on the theory of crime triangle, explored the impact of kidnapping on access to education in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State, whilst access to education was specifically utilized as the measure of educational performance. The primary survey method, direct interview, structured questionnaire, Spearman's rank correlation and Likert Scale were applied as data analysis techniques. It was found that kidnapping activities strongly impact negatively on access to education. The result also shows that kidnapping was significant in negatively driving educational build-up. The implication of this finding is that kidnapping activities create a great deal of social instability and shocks that hinder educational growth in Etche Local Government Area of Rivers State.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

5.3.1 Policy Recommendations

(i) Government should implement policies to eradicate kidnapping activities through direct actions in the community.

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Vital Force, Personhood, and Community in African Philosophy: An Ontological Study

Innocent C. Ngangah

Abstract

Vital force is believed to be a peculiar trait of African philosophy and the cosmology which defines and shapes the framework within which the interwoven concepts of personhood and community, as extensions of Africa's concept of "being", are founded and reified. Vital force is at the core of Africa's understanding of life which is deemed to begin from the creator, from whom all created spring. Vital force permeates all creation, including every aspect of the environment from where the person and the community jointly suck sustenance. Identifying this force as the core of the key differences between African and Western philosophies, the study underpins certain fundamental distinctions, namely: Africa's dynamic notion of being vs. the static concept of Western philosophy; the inclusive view of community in African philosophy vs. the reductionist notion dominant in Western societies; and Africa's notion of human rights as a derivative of communal rights vs. Western notion of human rights as individualistic rights.

Keywords: vital force, personhood, community, African philosophy, Western philosophy, ontology

1. Introduction

Ontology, the study of the nature of being, is the most general subdivision of metaphysics (Wallace 2011). Since Parmenides' claim that being is fixed, changeless and imperishable (DeLong 2019), philosophers have continued to grapple with the intrinsic meaning of reality which, according to Heraclitus, is in a constant state of flux (Graham 2019). Of the many debates provoked by this issue, Plato's theory of forms (Mason 2010) and Aristotle's contradictory response to it (McMahon 2007) have remarkably shaped the thinking of many Western philosophers as well as influenced their appreciation, or lack thereof, of African ontological categories. Even African philosophers, who have tried to redefine being within the context of African experience (Kanu 392), beclouded by Aristotelian dogma on the question of substance and accident (Ogbonnaya 108), have failed to share a common perspective on what constitutes Africa's notion of "being".

Given the foregoing, this paper sets out to posit that in spite of ingenious attempts by many African philosophers to define "being" in the light of their respective ethnic cosmologies, Tempels' oft-maligned rendition of the Bantu, nay African, concept of "being" as "vital force" (Tempels, 1959), if appropriately interpreted outside the standpoints of colonial discourse, may well serve as a genuine Africa-wide concept of being, albeit one that has diverse linguistic expressions in different African countries.

Vital force, taken as the epicenter of Africa's ontological scheme, is fundamental to a proper understanding of the inter-related and sometimes fused nature of the concepts of personhood and community in traditional African societies. Although the individual and the community act upon each other, the latter exacts a subsumable force on the former in traditional and urbanized African environments.

To further strengthen its claim that vital force is a peculiar trait of African philosophy, this paper, towards the end, will feature a comparative analysis of Western and African concepts of "being", with emphasis on the ontological core of the latter as vital force (Tempels, 1959).

2. Tempels' Notion of "Being" in African Philosophy

Placide Tempels' notion of "being" in African philosophy is contained in his epochal work, *Bantu Philosophy*. The book, first published in Dutch and later translated into French (Rubbens, 1952) and English (1959), is widely regarded as the first major book on African philosophy. It was written by a European missionary who worked among a group of Bantu-speaking Africans during the colonial era. The book, in both content and title, shocked the average Westerner whose prevailing mindset was aptly captured in the preface written by Prof. E. Possoz:

> Up to the present, ethnographers have denied all abstract thought to tribal peoples. The civilized Christian European was exalted, the savage and pagan primitive man was denigrated. Out of this concept a theory of colonisation was born which now threatens to fail everywhere. (Tempels, 1959)

With all its limitations, Tempels' book, in general, ran contrary to this mindset. His *Bantu Philosophy* made him the first philosopher to formulate a logically coherent African ontological system. His methodical research, conducted among ordinary Bantu-speaking Luba people, resulted into a dynamic ontological structure which is theoretically different from Western philosophy's static concept of "being", challenged racist misgivings about the philosophical acumen of the African, and led to global awareness of African philosophy. Tempels' book proved that the African's "philosophical categories

can be identified through language, culture and metaphysical attributes of their lives" (Nkulu-N'Sengha, 2017).

Tempels made the following basic observations about the philosophy of the Bantu people:

> The transcendental and universal notions of being and of its force, of action, and of the relationships and reciprocal influences of beings make up Bantu philosophy. This domain is accessible to the ordinary intelligence of every normal "muntu"… The subjective point of view of the Bantu founds the general principle and notion of being on the argument of authority and on their own observation of the constitution of the universe… The general conception of being which one may hold and the knowledge of the particular qualities of each individual being are two distinct things (51).

Tempels' book is in 7 chapters, namely, in chronological order, "In search of a Bantu philosophy", "Bantu ontology", "Bantu wisdom or criteriology", "The theory of the "Muntu" or Bantu psychology", "Bantu ethics", "Restitution" and "Bantu philosophy and our mission to civilize". The last chapter, a repudiation of Western colonial attitudes, began with these sentences:

> If we are justified in the hope that we have plumbed the depths of the primitive soul in this treatment of Bantu philosophy, we shall be obliged to revise our fundamental ideas on the subject of "non-civilized" peoples: to correct our attitude in respect of them. This "discovery" of Bantu philosophy is so disconcerting a revelation that we are tempted at first sight to believe that we are looking at a mirage. In fact, the universally accepted picture of primitive man, of the savage, of the proto-man living before the full blossoming of intelligence, vanishes beyond hope of recovery before this testimony (Tempels 109).

This positive tone, notwithstanding, a number of African philosophers have expressed reservations about some aspects of Tempels' findings while others have endorsed his main conclusions about Africa's notion of being. We will review some of the objections raised against Tempels' work later but let us discuss first his key conclusions about African ontology.

African ontology, according to Tempels, is the foundation of African philosophy. The African's notion of "being" or reality shapes his thought and behaviour, and this notion, asserts Tempels, is "centred in a single value: vital force" (29):

> Certain words are constantly being used by Africans. They are those which express their supreme values; and they recur like variations upon a leitmoti present in their language, their thought, and in all their acts and deeds. This supreme value is life, force, to live strongly, or vital force.

> … Force, the potent life, vital energy are the object of prayers and invocations to God, to the spirits and to the dead… In every Bantu language it is easy to recognize the words or phrases denoting a force, which is not used in an exclusively bodily sense, but in the sense of the integrity of our whole being.

He says this vital force or "vital energy", to the African, is the focus of "prayers and invocations to God, to the spirits and to the dead" and that this notion of "being" is not just limited to the Luba linguistic group but that "In every Bantu language it is easy to recognize the words or phrases denoting a force, which is not used in an exclusively bodily sense, but in the sense of the integrity of our whole being" (31).

Before we go further, we need to note the significance of the phrase, "In every Bantu language". Although Tempels' research was primarily centred on the Luba, he corresponded with missionaries in other Bantu-speaking parts of Africa, and some evidence of such correspondences on the topic of "vital force" are preserved in his footnotes. Perhaps, this was what led to his use of this phrase. "In every Bantu language" indicates a plurality of languages under this vast language group. As Bendor-Samuel (2017) explains:

> Bantu languages, a group of some 500 languages belonging to the Bantoid subgroup of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family. The Bantu languages are spoken in a very large area, including most of Africa from southern Cameroon eastward to Kenya and southward to the southernmost tip of the continent. Twelve Bantu languages are spoken by more than five million people, including Rundi, Rwanda, Shona, Xhosa, and Zulu. Swahili, which is spoken by five million people as a mother tongue and some 30 million as a second language, is a Bantu lingua franca important in both commerce and literature.

As will be noted later in this paper, Tempels' fortuitous use of a Bantu language group has both philosophical and linguistic significance.

Meanwhile, let us see what nature of beings possess the aforesaid vital force: "In the minds of Bantu, all beings in the universe possess vital force of their own: human, animal, vegetable, or inanimate" (31) and this vital force springs from God – "the Bantu speak of God himself as 'the Strong One', he who possesses Force in himself. He is also the source of the Force of every creature." (31) Tempels' Bantu (African) hierarchy of beings emanates from his belief that "the key to Bantu thought is the idea of vital force, of which the source is God… The fundamental notion under which being is conceived lies within the category of forces." (32) This "category of forces" can be represented as follows:

	Being	**Category of Forces**
1	God	"the great Force… who is stronger than all other" (31)
2	Spirit of the first ancestors	"the founders of the human race and propagators of the divine inheritance of vital human strength" (31)
3	The other dead	"esteemed only to the extent to which they increase and perpetuate their vital force in their progeny" (31)
4	Human being	"the strongest being of all creation" (32)
5	Animate being	"possess vital force of their own" (31)
6	Vegatative being	
7	Inanimate being	

All these beings exact force on each other with God disposing the highest influence of all. Next to God in influence is the human being: "Each being has been endowed by God with certain force, capable of strengthening the vital energy of the strongest being of all creation: man." (32) So, Tempels' scheme of forces is essentially anthropocentric: "Vital force is the reality which, though invisible, is supreme in man. Man can renew his vital force by tapping the strength of other creatures." (32)

Tempels then made an interesting comparison between Western and African concept of "being", describing the former as "static" and the latter as "dynamic". He said that the West, borrowing from Greek philosophy, defines "being" as "what is" or "anything that exists" and wrongfully presumes that this "static conception of being" is universally applicable.

> Herein is to be seen the fundamental difference between Western thought and that of the Bantu… We can conceive the transcendental notion of "being" by separating it from its attribute, "Force", but the Bantu cannot. "Force" in his thought is a necessary element in "being" and the concept "force" is inseparable from the definition of "being".

He described the Bantu as having "a double concept concerning being" and warns that describing Bantu notion of being as "being is that which possesses force" would be inaccurate:

> "Force is not for them an adventitious, accidental reality. Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force… in contradistinction to our definition of being as "that which is" or "the thing insofar as it is", the Bantu definition reads, "that which is force", or "the thing insofar as it is force", or "an existent force" (34).

The foregoing are the key aspects of Bantu notion of "being" as analyzed by Tempels. Some African philosophers have objected to some of Tempels' conclusions while others have not only done so but have also offered alternative ontological viewpoints they consider more authentically African.

3. African Philosophers' Counter Notions of "Being"

The three main non-theological objections to Tempels' conclusions regarding Africa's notion of "being" can be itemized as follows:

- Tempels makes the African notion of "being" an accident (force) rather than an essence thereby leaning it towards magic and denying it of all abstract value.
- If the African notion of "being" is dynamic, as Tempels posits, in denoting this notion as "force' he has contradictorily made it a fixed entity.
- Tempels modeled his ontology after Western (Aristotelian) system of thought.

We will consider each of these objections as they arise in our highlight of alternative notions of "being" projected by some African philosophers. Below are the views of representative African philosophers who have written about this issue from different parts of Africa. We will begin with Alexis Kagame, whose view of Africa's notion of "being" is closest to Tempels'.

In 1956, Kagame published his PhD thesis, *La Philosophie Bantu-Rwandaise de l'Etre*. That notable work of ethno-philosophy became his major contribution to African philosophy. His views are not, strictly speaking, a critique of Tempels' but rather a variation of the latter's theory. Kagame, based on his study of the Bantu people of Rwanda, categorized African philosophy into four principal forces: Muntu (human being), Kintu (thing), Hantu (place and time), and Kuntu (modality). What this means, in Kagame's ontological scheme, according to Janheinz Jahn, is that "Everything there is must necessarily belong to one of these four categories and must be conceived of not as substance but as force." (Negedu, 2014) Common to and qualifying these four forces is not the prefix of each word but, rather, the determinative, "Ntu".

Each of Kagame's four forces represents more than their bracketed meanings indicate on the surface. For example, "though all human beings are Muntu, not all Muntu (Bantu) are human beings, as Muntu includes the living, the dead and spirits" (Negedu, 2014). However, all muntu possess human intelligence; this makes the other categories mentioned above to be dependent on muntu. As for Kintu, what it represents includes animals, plants and all inanimate objects. All of these are energized by "Ntu":

> Hence, in the opinion of Kagame, the underlying category of being is Ntu. Ntu is the ultimate cosmic principle that permeates every nature… Ntu, therefore, is a force that manifests itself in individual beings or things. It does not exist alone. This is why it is seen attached to categories such as Mu, Ki, Ha and Ku. (Ogbonnaya 111)

Ogbonnaya rightly regards "Ntu" as "the spiritual dimension of being or reality while the four categories of being are the physical dimensions of being or reality." (112) However, in reflecting some of the aforesaid objections to Tempels' ontology (Kagame's primary inspirational root), he erroneously asserts that:

> (Ntu) is like the Tempels' vital force or force. But it goes beyond Tempels' force as he (Kagame) notes that it is not just a physical force. Kagame gives this force an ontological meaning rather than a physical meaning.

This is a widespread but incorrect view. Tempels never created the impression that his force was "just a physical force". Rather, he said that the Bantu have "a double concept concerning being", which leads to the understanding that although the Bantu force is physical, embedded in their "force is being, being is force" notion is a potential for philosophical abstraction. That is why Tempels says that "Force is not for them an adventitious, accidental reality. Force is even more than a necessary attribute of beings: Force is the nature of being, force is being, being is force". In other words, adapting the context of the Aristotelian principle, "being" is "what is" and "force" is equally "what is"; so, for the Bantu, "what is" is ontologically "being" and epistemologically "force". The dynamic unity of this Bantuan wedlock of substance and accident is often lost to Tempels' critics who refuse to accept that there are other concepts of being other than Aristotle's. Although Aristotle posits that substance can exist independent of accident, in Bantu concept of being, as documented by Tempels, substance and accident co-exist as two sides of the same coin.

The obvious difficulty we experience here in interpreting the Bantu concept of "being" indicates that nobody can replicate the Bantu concept of existence using Western ontological categories. However, the Bantu notion of "being" as it pertains to human beings ("the strongest being of all creation") can be better

understood via Heidegger's expression, "*Dasein*" (1962, 27). This is a German compound word whose components are "*da*" (there) and "*sein*" (being). Together they mean "being there"; to exist is being there. But in Bantu cosmology, muntu (Bantu word for human being) cannot be "*da*" (there) without being inseparably an "existent force". Therefore, for the Bantu, being there (*dasein*) is being an existent force. This being-force fusion is particularly appropriate for muntu who, like Heidegger's being, is a practical being of the world (Collins and Selina 61).

Apart from Kagame, other African philosophers who tried to interpret Africa's notion of "being" ended up, basically, giving us their ethnic group's translation or extension of the word, "being" (Edeh, 1985 and Iroegbu, 1995) or some ethno-philosophic attribute(s) of "being" (Ramosa, 2002 and Asouzu, 2011).

Edeh in his book, *Towards an Igbo Metaphysics*, essentially conducted a linguistic analysis centred around his "onye" (person) and "ife" (thing) hypothesis that ultimately led to the Igbo word, "ifedi" ("ihedi") which literally means "what is", an everyday Igbo expression, not one coined by Edeh. This is rather curious when it is noted that Edeh began his enquiry by claiming that "the Igbo has no word that exactly translates the English word 'being'" (1985, 93). Apart from translating being as "ifedi", Edeh failed to tell us what Being ("ifedi") means in Igbo cosmology. He did say that within that context the "notion of being could be derived from our concept of man" (1985, 100) but never told us what that notion is.

Iroegbu (1995), sharing the same cultural roots with Edeh, disagrees with the latter's approximation of "being" as "ifedi"; he prefers another Igbo word, "uwa", which literally means "world". Iroegbu invests the term, *uwa*, with ontological meaning, pointing out that:

> The entirety of existence, from God the highest being to inanimate beings of our cosmos can be summarized in the englobing concept of the Igbo term Uwa. Uwa is all-inclusive. It mirrors being, existence, entity, all reality…animate and inanimate, visible and invisible. It is comprehensive, universal…It has transcendent and immanent scope as well as explicative and progressive elasticity. (1994, 144)

According to Iroegbu, uwa has 15 connotations but in time-space context it has six zones, five of which are located in spiritual realms and only one of which is earthly. In Iroegbu's opinion, uwa is "being", any form of being, and none of his beings are supposedly bifurcated since they are all enclosed in his ontological globe. The fact is that Iroegbu's book is an interesting piece on the metaphysical connotations of the Igbo word, "uwa", but he certainly did not succeed in turning that word into an acceptable definition of "being".

The next African philosopher who tried to redefine "being" is the South African philosopher, Mogobe Ramosa. His views reflect his pan-Africanist

inclinations. His book, *African Philosophy through Ubuntu* (2002), positions "ubuntu" as the foundation of African philosophy. In spite of sharing the same stem, "ntu", with the four words representing Kagame's four forces of African philosophy, Ramosa's "ubuntu" concept is clearly different from Kagame's notion of being as "force". In Kagame's, the fundamental category of being is Ntu" (force) while Ramosa's "ubu" is the essence of being. It should be noted, however, that Ramosa's "ubu" cannot manifest in concrete form except through "ntu" (the epistemological being). Both are bound together and none can exist independent of the other, just as Kagame's "ntu" can only manifest as a concrete being only when bound to Mu, Ki, Ha and Ku. This two-in-one reality makes Ramosa to conclude that:

> ubu-ntu is the fundamental ontological and epistemological category in the African thought of the Bantu–speaking people. It is the indivisible one-ness and wholeness of ontology and epistemology. (2002, 41)

One should add that Ramosa's "ubuntu" concept makes sense only when narrowed to a specific being – the human being ("umuntu") – for the word, "ubuntu" literally means "humanity". Since not all beings are human beings, this cannot be an all-inclusive meaning of "being".

Innocent Asouzu's notion of "being" is an all-embracing one. Using the Igbo aphorism, "ibuanyidanda" ("nothing is too heavy for Danda, the ant"), he conceptualizes an elastic ontology that stretches its scope, in the spirit of cooperation and complementariness, to accommodation all forms of existence within a non-bifurcated, unified whole. As he puts it:

> If now a philosophy of essence polarises reality, ibuanyidanda philosophy explores a method and principles for coalescing the real and the ideal, the essential and accidental into a system of mutual complementing units. It is a challenge to show how philosophy can be relevant to all units constituting a whole, such that the essential and accidental, the necessary and contingent, the universal and the particular, the absolute and relative…the transcendental and world-immanent, can more easily be between being and its negation. This is why within this context the negation of being is nothingness. (Asouzu 101-102)

Asouzu sees every being as an agent performing a role that fills a vacuum in the theatre of reality and, from this standpoint, opines that beings essentially exist to perform functions that close gaps in reality's interconnected chains:

> In Ibuanyidanda philosophy, I see it otherwise. Hence, I dare define the idea of being; here I claim that being is that on account of which anything that exists serves a missing link of reality. In other words, within an Ibuanyidanda context reality presents itself to us as missing links of

reality within whose framework the idea of being reveals itself and is defined.

Asouzu (2007) is known to have criticized Temples' categorization of beings as forces, and this could be one of the reasons he articulated his own vision of being in African philosophy. In making his own notion of being non-bifurcated, he cleverly guided it away from the strong pull of Aristotle's substance-accident concept. But "ibuanyidanda" definitely is not being, although it could be said to be an extended attribute of being.

4. Vital Force and Africa's Concept of Community, Personhood and Human Rights

We will explain here how Tempels' vital force thesis is reflected fundamentally in Africa's concept of personhood, community, and human rights. Africa's "dynamic" notion of "being" as vital force determines the nature of its social organization. How expansive is this dynamic concept of being? Tempels expatiates:

> African peoples…still preserve their essentially dynamic concepts of being, of growth and diminution of being, of the interdependence and interaction of beings, of vital ranks and of the ontological hierarchy. Their ontology remains over attached to their ancient and indestructible faith that all life proceeds from God or from our own conformity with the laws of the natural order of things. (Tempels 115)

Below, we will look at how this conformity with natural vital forces is expressed with regard to the way the community is organized, the way the individual is conceived, and the way human rights are understood and administered in the African traditional setting.

(a) Vital Force, Community and Personhood in African Philosophy

For Tempels, as earlier noted, the key to the African's thought and behavior is "the idea of vital force" and "the fundamental notion under which being is conceived lies within the category of forces." Of the seven forces that make up Temples' hierarchy of forces, of which the first is God, three are essentially human. These three are: spirit of the first ancestors, the other dead, and living human beings. Beneath these three human forces are three non-human forces, namely, animate being, vegetative being, and inanimate being. These three non-human forces "possess vital force of their own" but are under the control of the human forces.

The anthropocentrism inherent in this hierarchy of forces is very glaring but there is an underlying framework that ensures that human beings' governance of the human and non-human forces, under God, is spiritually and socially streamlined. That framework is founded on the communal understanding that

all beings are spiritually interrelated forces that exact consequential influence on all individuals within a given spiritual, ethical and social order. According to Encyclopedia.com:

> *Spirits* may be divided into *human spirits* and nature *spirits*. Each has a *life* force devoid of physical form. Individuals who have died, usually *ancestors* in particular lineages, are the *human spirits*. These *spirits* play a role in community affairs and ensure a link between each clan and the *spirit* world. Natural objects, such as rivers, mountains, trees, and the Sun (as well as forces such as wind and rain), represent the nature spirits. Africans integrate this religious worldview into every aspect of life. (2019)

Community life in traditional African society is governed via a customary hierarchy of forces. This force-driven order is defined, sustained, administered and enforced by the community through folkloric practices that involve verbal, material and customary artefacts employed to institutionalize the people's traditional ways of worship and social system.

The individual cannot exalt himself above his community's religious and social practices because of the hierarchy of forces that ensure communal control over the behaviour of persons and groups. So, as Odozor (2019) has observed, Tempels' hierarchy of forces is more than an abstract spiritual reality:

> This hierarchy is also evident in human society, where there are chiefs, clan heads, family heads, older siblings, and so on. Second, Africans believe in a moral order given by God, stipulated by the ancestors in the past. Observing this moral order ensures harmony and peace within the community.

What instruments are used to maintain this moral hierarchy. As in every other society, laws basically are used, but these are laws, notes Odozor, that derive their power more from tradition than from coded rules:

> The moral and religious order in the universe is articulated and expressed in a variety of taboos and customs that prohibit specific actions contravening such order. Taboos and customs cover all aspects of human life: words, foods, dress, relations among people, marriage, burial, work, and so forth…

This brings us to the question of personhood in African societies. Whereas in the Western world every individual is assumed to be a person by the mere fact of being an individual human being, in Africa personhood is defined within the context of societal expectations and the significant filfillment of those expectations by the individual. In the West, personhood is attributed to

anyone by the mere fact of their being a human being; in Africa, personhood is invested on deserving individuals by the community. John Mbiti (141) has famously framed it this way: "I am because we are, and since we are, therefore I am." This means that, in Africa, the individual is not defined apart from his or her society. Rather, it is the society that informally invests him or her with personhood upon their performance of certain social-cum-personal obligations (such as rites of passage, marriage, participation in communal functions, etc) and/or demonstration of competence in the acquisition/awareness of critical lore (such as the community's oral history and customs). Everyone who qualifies to be regarded as a person, in a cultural sense, is seen and known to have done so through their general conduct and quality of interaction with other members of the community.

The mere fact of being an adult does not automatically confer personhood on an individual; often one hears the community referring to an adult who does not play any responsible role in the society as "*onye a akaro bulu mmadu*". What this means is that "This being (in spite of his or her vital force) is not yet a person". (Brackets mine) So, the vital force of the individual only elevates him or her to the level of personhood when the` overarching force of the communal authorities deems them to have qualified for such honour.

In the traditional African setting, a person is a subset of a community in an ontological and epistemic sense whereas in the West a person, in both senses, is not regarded as a subset of the community. In Western societies, every individual is a person whether they conduct themselves in line with or against the norms of their community. Using set theory, we can represent African and Western notions of personhood as follows:
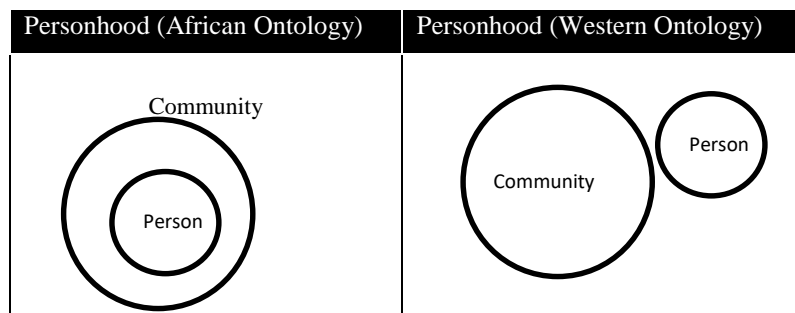
In Africa, personhood is conferred on the individual by the community based on his attainment of a prescribed level of social force, and not based on "some isolated static quality of rationality, will, or memory" (Menkiti 1984). We conclude this segment of our discussion with Menkiti's reference to the incisive distinctions made by Tempels' Luba people:

> This is perhaps the burden of the distinction which Placide Tempels' native informants saw fit to emphasize to him--i.e. the distinction between a *muntu mutupu* (a man of middling importance) and *muntu*

mukulumpe (a powerful man, a man with a great deal of force)…the word "muntu" includes an idea of excellence, of plenitude of force at maturation…Thus, it is not enough to have before us the biological organism…We must also conceive of this organism as going through a long process of social and ritual transformation until it attains the full complement of excellencies seen as truly definitive of man. And during this long process of attainment, the community plays a vital role as catalyst and as prescriber. (Menkiti 1984)

(b) Vital Force and the Concept of Human Rights in African Philosophy

The superiority of communal force over the individual's force, as epitomized by the power of the community to act as the prescriber of personhood criteria, also places the community over the individual in matters of human rights. In the traditional African setting, the rights of the community incorporate, and sometimes supersede, that of the individual. The individual's rights are governed within the context of communal rights, duties and obligations, as enshrined in the community's customs and traditions, and in recent communal decisions.

In African traditional environment, rights are conceived to preserve and sustain communal living, thereby ensuring that the wellbeing of the majority of communal dwellers is protected against the excesses of any individual. Laws are aimed at preserving the common good over and above the unbridled ambition, exploits and deviant lifestyle of the individual. As a guiding principle, communalism is elevated over individualism. This is in sharp contrast with what obtains in the West where the rights of the individual are deemed as the fundamental natural rights, with negative implications for the quest to build a more egalitarian social order:

> Human rights ideas in international for a have historically been derived from a Western natural rights perspective. The perspective indeed denies the existence of the needy's right to economic sustenance and society's obligation to satisfy this right. The African sense of community obligation that goes beyond charity is just what is needed to foster economic rights and push the idea of economic rights beyond the demands of human rights activists and human rights textbooks. We need to take such non-Western conceptions seriously. Western social scientists are increasingly questioning the sanctity of the liberal individualist paradigm in their search for answers to contemporary Western problems. (Cobbah 311)

It should be noted that the supremacy of the communal rights over the individual's rights does not necessarily approximate to oppression or suppression of any individual. Fair play, fair hearing and due process are integral aspects of the traditional rule of law. The Ghanaian scholar, Asante,

who conducted a research on this topic, refreshes our memory in Bennet (1993):

> The notion of due process of law permeated indigenous law; deprivation of personal liberty or property was rare; security of the person was assured, and customary legal process was characterized not by unpredictable and harsh encroachments upon the individual by the sovereign, but by meticulous, if cumbersome, procedures for decision-making. The African conception of human rights was an essential aspect of African humanism sustained by religious doctrine and the principle of accountability to the ancestral shades (73-4).

5. Conclusion:

We have shown, as observed by Tempels, that African ontology is the foundation of African philosophy and that the concept of vital force, governs personal and social lifestyles and organization in traditional African societies. While a number of African philosophers have propounded their own versions of the African concept of being, none of them has come up with a notion of being definite, authentic and widespread enough to uproot the belief that vital force encapsulates Africa's notion of being.

Indeed, vital force is what sets African ontology apart from Western notion of existence. We have also tried to demonstrate this through our comparative analyses of African and Western notions of personhood, community and human rights. In the light of all this, "We might say that in African conception the capacity for doing is identified with being and therefore with act or perfection…" (Rush in Ogbonnaya 2014). To sum up, we have argued, and hopefully also demonstrated, that in Africa a being is essentially what it is, and what it is also amounts to what it can do.

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Themes and Settings in Nigeria's Heritage of Folk Narrative

Bukar Usman

Abstract

This paper, explores Nigeria's heritage of folk narrative as elicited from the outcome of the pan-Nigerian folktale-collection research sponsored by the Dr Bukar Usman Foundation in 2013. The nation-wide research lasted for three years and its outcomes have been collated, edited and published in five voluminous books by the author of this paper. The paper, part of the author's *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings*, is his introductory insight into the nature of themes and settings found in thousands of folktales collected from folktale traditions across Nigeria. The paper is in six parts. In part one, he provides a historical survey of folk literature in Nigeria. In part two, the author states and analyses the significance and defining traits of the folktale genre. The author's motivations for embarking on the research as well as his research methodology are discussed in part three. The cultural and narrative similarities found in the about 4,000 tales collected from communities across Nigeria are highlighted in part four. Part five discusses issues connected with the classification of the collected tales; it throws light into the author's decision to classify the 700 tales of his *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings* into 18 classes. The author's concluding remarks constitute part six. It should be noted that all references to specific folktales, unless otherwise stated, are pointing to folktales published in *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings*, the first published book of the five books that emerged from the author's momentous nationwide folktales research effort.

Keywords: folk narratives, folktales, themes, settings, Nigeria, folktale classification

1. Introduction

Almost every human society, from the most unsophisticated to the most urbane, has a heritage of folk narrative. It may be a living, dying or dead heritage but folk literature has always been a vital aspect of the oral tradition of most societies. Cultural expression among literate people is largely written or electronically transmitted whereas oral tradition is the most dominant form of cultural transmission among non-literate people. The Nigerian society is partly literate and partly non-literate, and this mixed reality is reflected in the quality, quantity and demographic spread of its folk narratives. To what extent these factors have affected the thematic concerns of the country's oral narratives may not have been nationally surveyed, but various collections have shown that Nigeria has a vast and remarkably rich folk narrative tradition.

Although moonlight tales, told mostly to the young by older family members, come to the mind of many when folk narratives are mentioned, folk literature covers a much-wider area of cultural expression. It includes tales of cosmic, *historical*, mythic and ritualistic value, and children are not the target audience of these types of tales. This category of tales belongs to adults and is the philosophical and religious foundation of the ethnic or sub-ethnic group. Elders, not children, are the traditional audience and guardians of these tales of primary social and customary importance. The values the moonlight tales espouse are rooted in the tenets enshrined in these elders' tales which, unlike the common folk tales, are communally respected as non-fictional facts. These non-fictional tales are not included in this anthology. Being tales of "history," they will be documented in Book 4 of this series (Treasury of Nigerian Tales). The tales in the present collection, representing the age-old narration of Nigeria's common folks, constitute Book 2, which is devoted to the everyday tales of the people.

Nigeria's folklore (traditional knowledge, beliefs and practices) has largely survived by word-of-mouth transmission. But certain aspects of our lore have been documented by cultural anthropologists, missionaries, who pioneered Western education in the country, and other scholars and authors. The motivation, for the foreign enquirers, was their desire to access the core of our people's values through a researched exploration of our folkloric expressions, particularly our rituals, mythologies and folktales. Accessing and understanding the latter, in particular, became the key to their understanding of the moral values of the people they had colonized. Bridging the cultural divide was a major challenge for the foreigners, who tackled the matter primarily by observing, learning (via interpretation), and documenting the local languages and some aspects of the people's way of life.[1] Those of them who could speak the local languages played pioneering roles in linguistic and other forms of cultural documentation..

Available records show that the missionaries, who were more interested in the social circumstances of the people, paid more attention to folklore, education (including practical language studies), and health than colonial government anthropologists who emphasized issues of political institutions, geography, mineral resources, trade and linguistics. Because of the earlier-stated reason, their interest in the folktales of our local communities gained prominence over the attention, if any, given to other aspects of our folklore, such as traditional art, music, dance, rituals, architecture, and medicine.

Folktales were so overtly emphasized by the colonial educationists that even the neglected aspects of our indigenous folklore were indirectly acknowledged through the tales they promoted. For instance, the core of the community programme drawn for schools ran by the missionaries in colonial north-eastern Nigeria included a folktale-based "curriculum with specific objectives." In actualization of that novel educational approach, Babur-Bura

folktales were collected and classified under sub-headings such as Health Folklore, Agriculture and Livestock Folklore, Crafts Folklore, and Home and Social Life Folklore.[2] Among many Nigerian groups, there were similar research interests in related aspects of our folklore, one of the most notable being Kay Williamson's studies in the language and proverbs of Ijaw people of south-southern Nigeria[3] and Susan Wenger's participant-observer lifelong promotion of south-western Nigeria's Yoruba groves and divination practices.[4] Divination tales, which shall be collected in Book 4 of the Treasury of Nigerian Tales series, usually come out of such practices.[5] Fortunately, these foreign researchers left written records of their findings.

Hence, the first exercise in researching and publishing aspects of Nigerian folklore were undertaken by foreigners, although few of these foreigners, markedly Wenger and Williamson, ended up, by their passionate involvement, being deemed authentic indigenes. Some notable publications by these European authors wholly or partly devoted to folktales include *African Stories*[6], *In Sunny Nigeria*[7], *Hausa Tales and Traditions*[8], and *Education of Primitive People*[9] There was hardly any missionary group that did not publish some folktales in their magazines and special publications.

Before and after Nigeria's independence in 1960, a number of Nigerians who had acquired Western or Arabic education took ownership of this cultural documentation and gave it indigenous flavour in their fictional works. These works were published in English and in the indigenous languages. Such indigenous works from the northern part of the country would include Abubakar Imam's books, the most notable of which was *Magana Jari Ce*. In southern Nigeria, Pita Nwana's 1935 fantasy novel, *Omenuko*, made enduring impact in the Igbo-speaking parts of the country. These publications drew significant inspiration from motifs closely associated with folk narratives. In pre-independent South Western Nigeria, the effective writer, D.O Fagunwa, showed "an extensive use of proverbs, riddles, traditional jokes and other lore central to Yoruba belief."[10] That writers from Northern Nigeria made an early but modest mark in novel-writing in an indigenous language is attested to by the following:

> In various parts of the country, novels developed around 1930. Centered upon fantastic, magical characters of humans and fairies, Hausa novels, called "non-realistic novels," were based on folktales. The "mysterious" characters transmuted into other beings; fairies, animals, and humans all conversed among one another.[11]

On Muhammadu Bello's fantasy novel *Gandoki*, Bade Ajuwon comments, "One is led to say that the book is a reduction of Hausa oral tradition to written literature."[12]

Amos Tutuola was a notable Nigerian writer who drew fundamental inspiration from the folktale genre but communicated his tale in a unique brand

of the English language. His *The Palm Wine Drinkard* was among the first books that introduced Nigeria's folk narratives to English readers. In structure and motif, Tutuola's stories were inspirationally pulled from the traditional repertory of Yoruba folk narratives. Tutuola's English-language style did not attract followership but his bold recreation of indigenous oral narratives inspired writers from other parts of Nigeria. An example of a similar narrative from south-eastern Nigeria was Uche Okeke's *Tales of Land of Death.*

Because the folktale in its more complex form shares striking resemblance with the short story, a number of Nigerian writers easily turned to the modern short story as a narrative option in the 1960s and 1970s. Their stories were published in *Okike*, *Black Orpheus*, *West Africa*, *The Nigeria Magazine*, and a few other magazines. Some of those whose short stories were featured in those periodicals later published individual books of short stories. One of such short story writers was Cyprian Ekwensi whose *Lokotown and Other Stories* was published in 1966, four years after the publication of Chinua Achebe's *Sacrificial Egg and Other Stories*.

All of these and subsequent literary developments in Nigeria were preceded by, and indeed had their roots in, the oral tale. The oral tale is the precursor of the modern short story and, indeed, of the novel. For many people around the world, their first understanding of what life is all about began with their introduction to the morals of the oral tale. For many generations of Nigerians, the moonlight folktales they had relished as children became the bedrock of their social, psychological and ethical development.

Across Nigeria, in different families, folktale narration was a regular nightly experience. Unfortunately, the practice is dying out in the villages and is almost non-existent in the cities. Even if we must lose the tale-telling sessions to the exigencies of urbane life, it is the overall goal of this anthology to capture in print, for the present and future generations, a translation of various folktales collected from different parts of Nigeria. This editor and his team of resource persons embarked upon the project because of their passionate awareness of the importance of folk narratives in personal and societal development.

2. Significance and Defining Traits

It is difficult to value something without first understanding its defining traits and significance. The oral nature of the folktale and the anonymity of its author or authors are its most basic defining traits. All the tales of this anthology were orally transmitted from generation to generation. Following the invention of printing, folktales have been collected and published in different countries. Even in print, the authors of those generational folktales remain anonymous. A folktale belongs to its communal origin even where its elements have been changed by different narrators who introduced one form of embellishment or the other as the story is retold from generation to generation. This is why it is

difficult to ascribe the authorship of a folktale to one individual. An individual, however, may write a tale, as Aesop did, but that would be a literary tale, not a folktale. A folktale, strictly speaking, belongs to the community.

This brings us to the question: why folktales? What is the significance of the folktale? In the past, it would have been unnecessary to ask this question. From their early childhood to their teenage years, children in Nigeria were accustomed to listening to folktales every night and just grew up knowing that folktales were important building blocks in their lives.

Things have now changed. Television, the internet (especially Facebook and YouTube), mobile phones, and computer games are now alternative and easier-to-access forms of entertainment. In those days, one would need to have members of a story-telling audience gather in one place and a willing story-teller to hear and enjoy a story. In these days of electronic gadgets and the web, today's teenager, for instance, can with the tip of the finger personally access various forms of entertainment and miscellaneous data, including indecent and unhealthy information and images.

And this typical teenager's younger siblings, who are not yet above ten years, also exercise their own reckless independence. With the remote control, they can easily comb through their family's satellite television, watching immoral or violent programmes from channel to channel. They know little or nothing about the symbolic heroes of their indigenous folktales but are very familiar with electronic characters like Tom and Jerry, Ben 10, and Spider Man. Unless parents and guardians have a way of administering parental control and also ensuring that sound moral training accompanies their children's electronic attractions, their children are likely to grow up morally and culturally imbalanced.

Folktales play a fundamental part in this moral and cultural balancing exercise. Below, we will look at four basic functions of the folktale in terms of the benefits an audience could derive from listening to an oral tale or reading/listening to a documented one. These benefits are applicable in developing societies, such as ours, as well as in highly industrialized ones. There are many benefits of the folktale but we will look at four key advantages below.

a. **Promotes a Sense of Community:** Traditionally, folk stories are orally transmitted from generation to generation within a group or groups of people. This could be people within a clan, tribe, nation or people of a common background within a plural urban setting. It is within such groups that folktales are orally narrated or read out from a printed text for the common enjoyment of the audience. Apart from the stories, other group activities, such as exchange of riddles and jokes, quizzes, and pleasantries, take place. A lot of laughter accompanies story-telling sessions and the cordial environment, sometimes, is made more exciting by the provision and sharing of light refreshment. All of these generate a feeling of camaraderie, oneness, unity, love, and group loyalty

and dedication.

This story-hearing engagement within a mass of people of shared cultural interest gives every involved individual a sense of togetherness and social relevance. Such a story-telling engagement fosters a sense of community in children and lays a sound moral foundation on which they could grow to become responsible citizens. This benefit conforms with the integrative role of this mass but oral media, according to the individual differences theory which

> proposes that individuals respond differently to the mass media according to their psychological needs, and that individuals consume the mass media to satisfy those needs. The need may be for information (e.g. providing statistics about players and teams), integrative (offering a sense of belonging to a group of similarly interested people), affective (e.g. by providing excitement), or escapist (helping to release pent-up emotions).[13]

There is need to revive in our homes the traditional story-telling sessions as a basic way of countering two of the most negative disadvantages of our so-called globalized but highly individualistic society, namely, acute selfishness and inequality. Excessive individualism, with the selfishness, greed and other social vices it breeds, is ruining societies today. Collective story-telling sessions engender rapport among members of the audience and other social groups with whom transmitted folktakes are later shared. Furthermore, sharing folktales, and the cultural education conveyed thereby, reinforces the precept that every member of the community is connected and bonded to another. Such sense of identification with a communal group is naturally extended beyond the scope of the story-session group to the wider society.

b. **Imparts Positive Common Values:** Folktales, whether orally delivered to a group audience by a story-teller or individually accessed through printed or audio/visual means, impart positive social values as well as the particular beliefs of a given ethnic group, nationality or culture. The values being referred to here go beyond the morals sometimes drawn at the end of a folktale. What we have in mind here are the recognizable values and beliefs built into the fabric of the tale. These values are embedded in the tale through its various elements and a single tale might contain more than one of such values or customary beliefs. For instance, universal values such as respect for elders as well as culturally-oriented beliefs, such as the belief in many communities that the youngest sibling is usually the smartest, can be re-echoed in the same folktale.

Positive values clearly identifiable from the theme, plot, characterization and cultural components of folktales can be broadly grouped into family values, social values, religious values, economic values, educational values and aesthetic values. The specific traits emphasized would depend on the cultural preferences of the story-teller and those of his listeners.

The above reference to "religious values" does not necessarily point to the major world religions but rather refers to the indigenous gods, myths and rituals of a given group or story-listening audience. Understanding these cultural aspects and their symbolic significance is necessary for a culturally-relevant appreciation or interpretation of a folktale. For instance, a non-Babur/Bura listener may fail to interpret an appropriate crocodile character in a given tale as being the spiritual or symbolic double of the Biu Chief just as an uninformed non-Yoruba listener may miss the symbolic representation of Ogun as the Yoruba god of iron. So, there are more to folktales than the fairies, animals, and strange creatures that characterize them.

Tales contain societal values and cultural beliefs, and it is important to underscore this by citing verifiable examples from the stories published here. In "The Goat with Three Tails" (Story No. 32), we see the interesting scenario where the killing of a goat by the chief priest of a shrine attracted the death penalty and led to his instant execution. The story highlights the cultural as well as the universal value of fair trial. Most readers would recognize the universal dimension but may miss the cultural.

Let us distinguish the cultural value from the universal. An abnormally-born wild goat ("the goat with three tails") was brought by hunters in critical fulfillment of the chief priest's sacrificial requirement for the healing of the community's terminally-afflicted king. But the goat, speaking for itself, had requested that it should be spared and offered its captors a forest herb which it swore would heal the king. At the shrine where the goat was to be sacrificed, the goat's captors pleaded with the chief priest to administer *first* the recommended herb: if the herb revived the king, the goat would be freed; if not, it would be sacrificed. That was the agreement the captors, acting on behalf of the community, had reached with the goat. But the chief priest refused to give the captured animal the benefit of doubt and, against all entreaties by its captors, killed and sacrificed the goat with three tails. And immediately the king's health became worse. Pressurized by the goat's captors and the elders of the community, the chief priest reluctantly administered the goat's recommended herb on the king. He instantly became well. Infuriated by the avoidable slaughter of the benevolent goat, the villagers killed the chief priest.

The cultural precept executed here is what might be called the life-for-life, death-for-death principle. At the back of the story-teller's mind is the traditional understanding of the nature and power of spiritual covenants. The captors had covenanted with the goat that administering the magic drug while sparing the goat's life would revive the king's own life. The chief priest invited criticism upon himself when he refused to respect this covenant. But the more covenant-minded villagers knew that slaughtering that goat was ominous. Had the obstinate chief priest been kept alive, the stability of the king's health might not have been guaranteed since a vital aspect of the covenant (sparing the

goat's life) had been violated. The chief priest's head had to roll after the head of the mysterious goat. This is a crucial cultural dimension of the value imparted by this story, and it is different from the universal fair-trial precept which this story also communicates.

"Lala and Lele" (No. 38), "The Ikuoku Leaf" (No. 85), "The Man who Became a Chimpanzee" (No. 146), and "The Fat-Lips Woman" (No. 688) are some of the stories of this collection that illustrate both universal and unique cultural values.

Whether universal or culturally localized, the values the listener or reader of a folktale, such as "The Goat with Three Tails," derives are often common, communal, and socially stabilizing. But there are also uncommon individual virtues which can be drawn from folktales. While collectivism is emphasized, personal traits of courage, creativity, and compassion, among others, are also portrayed and encouraged. Similarly, dimensions of wickedness hatched in the hidden heart of the individual are flatly condemned by the manner story resolutions are appropriately plotted to disfavour the unjust. In tale nos. 106, 110, and 213, among several others, evil is punished. Tale no. 213 fittingly ends with the Babur/Bura proverb: "Let a man dig the hole of wickedness shallow because he may fall into it himself."

c. **Teaches Ethical and Practical Lessons:** It is a universally-assumed fact that folktales teach ethical lessons, but not all tales are narrated for the primary purpose of communicating a moral. Although life's lessons can be gleaned from many tales, only the fable (tales that feature mostly animals and illustrate a moral, such as "The Lion and the Playful Mouse" [No. 381] and "The Hyena and the Monkey" [No. 402]) is essentially crafted to communicate morals. Others may simply aim to entertain or amaze the listener or reader; but even here, a meditative audience can draw practical lessons which may illustrate some realities of life.

In many fables and other moralizing tales, the morals are stated at the end of the story and cannot be divorced from the story. Nowadays, story-tellers would simply tell their tale and expect the listeners or readers to draw the morals. In such cases, different morals can be drawn by different audiences. Indeed, there are stories that are told with the objective of posing a moral question at the end of the tale. A good example is "The Three Slaves" (tale no. 610) where a complex web of relationships between Gumsa, the central character, and four women dictated the really hard-to-answer question: "Among the four wives, who will be the wife after Dala's heart? You think that you are clever, then who of the four shall be first of all?" We implore you to read this story and you will be amazed by how difficult answering this question, arising from a folk narrative, can be. The artistic complexity of the story itself indicates that not all folktales are simple straightforward narrations aimed at children. There are folktales for adults, and "The Three Slaves" is a good example of such tales.

d. **Entertains the Audience:** Both the audience listening to the oral narration and the private reader of a folktale derive immense pleasure from the story. Although stock characters often feature in folktales, this does not detract from their entertainment value. What a character symbolises is already known to the audience familiar with the cultural interpretation attached to that character. Because of this cultural meaning imposed on it, a mere mention of a popular character, especially animal character, at the beginning of a story creates some excitement and suspense among the audience.

Characters may mean different things in different cultural backgrounds. Every animal featured in a folktale has certain characteristics attributed to it by the local environment. For instance, in north-eastern Nigeria, the hyena is a symbol of greed, meanness and clumsiness. Among the Fulani, the rabbit is a symbol of cleverness, selfishness, and depravity. The tortoise, among all Nigerian groups, is a popular trickster and is noted for its cunnying, dubiousness, creativity, and breach of mutual agreements. Since the behaviour of such characters are fixed, the story-teller would usually rely on plot and surprise resolutions, among other devices, to enhance the effect of his tale.

The story-tellers or oral narrators were usually older members of the family or the extended family: grandparents, parents, older siblings, uncles, aunties or any other person competent enough to narrate to the younger generation the imagination and wisdom of the ethnic group as embedded in the folktales. The story-telling sessions took place at night and the setting could be indoor or outdoor, the latter being the obvious choice in the dry season. In traditional environments, the indoor setting was usually inside a hut big enough to accommodate the group of young listeners from different families. The outdoor setting could be in the open in front of one of the closely-spaced huts within a fenced or an unfenced compound.

In those days, right from the start of the tale, every narrator tried his or her best to carry the audience along. There were no dull moments. The children expected fresh entertainment and were hardly disappointed as they were fed with different kinds of stories each night. Even where the story had earlier been narrated, there was no loss of excitement, particularly where the current narrator was some one adept at refreshing a well-worn story by creatively stretching its plot to accommodate new characters, new conflicts, fresh suspense and surprising resolution. Every new narrator, by his or her own method of oral delivery as well as gesticulations, usually told the same story differently. There were narrators who occasionally engaged some members of the audience by asking them to guess a character's next move out of a tight situation, and there were those who incorporated new choruses to cheer up their audience and enliven their tale. These were some of the reasons oral performances were so wonderful in those days when folktale narration was a regular nightly programme of families in many communities across Nigeria.

Uche Ogbalu captures a typical experience among the Igbo, but this is

also true of folktale story-telling sessions among other Nigerian ethnic groups:

> a careful observation of the folktale performing sessions show that neither the performer nor his audience is ready to move out of the scene. None shows sign of getting tired of either telling the story or listening to the story. The folktale narrator is able to hold his audience for hours…without the audience getting tired. Folktales are introduced to a traditional Igbo child from infancy. This means that the traditional Igbo child starts appreciating folktales from infancy to adulthood… In performance, the audience participation is assured. The audience sings the chorus, claps hands and even corrects the performer whenever he deviates from the normal routine of the story. That is why one can rightly assert that folktales are communally owned.[14]

One of the reasons the audience's attention was retained over a long time during an oral performance was the fact that the same story was hardly re-told to the same audience. Each narrator often tried to tell a story he believed an earlier narrator might not have relayed to the given audience. This writer, as a child growing up in Biu, in north-eastern Nigeria, was a regular member of a folktale audience, and had some times wondered how the narrators' resource of folktales seemed so inexhaustible. There were not just many stories but an interesting diversity of them. The *makumtha*, as the folktale is called in Babur/Bura, remains an educational and entertaining evening programme, although story-telling sessions are no longer regular events in most families.

During group story-telling sessions, which are still held in some communities, much of the entertainment value comes from the dramatic aspects of the session. One is referring to the narrator's vocal and body orchestrations, to those junctures in the story when the narrator and the audience jointly sing choral songs, and to the segments of riddles, quizzes and jokes that usually accompany such oral performances. In some communities, the folktale is further advanced into outright drama, especially in a situation where a standing performing troupe is in existence. Themes covered by such dramatic performances may be stretched to include some current realities, thereby making the show satiric and more entertaining. As Peek and Yankah have observed, folktales, in traditional communities, are inseparably linked to other forms of folk performances:

> The sheer diversity of folklore forms is striking. Puppet theatres still perform among the Tiv and Ogoni of Nigeria and in Mali. Masquerades continue to develop and adapt new characters in the rural areas and to find revitalized expressions among urban populations. Synthetic raffia, enamel paints, plastic parts, whatever: all can be used. The increasing use of Theatre for Development has revitalized traditional drama forms, from masquerades to folktalke sessions…Narratives filled with the exploits of tricksters and heroes entertain and advise their audiences.[15]

Outside the traditional environment of a given folktale, school or youth groups can still take the printed folktale and bring it to life through exciting oral narration or guided dramatization. But most readers of a good folktale will find that merely reading the folktale is itself entertaining.

3. Research Origins, Objectives and Methodology

The folktale, though a useful tool of character formation, moral transformation, cultural authenticity, communal harmony, and educational entertainment, is endangered today. In spite of the beneficial nature of Nigeria's oral narratives and the creative spin-offs noted above, little is being done by governments, communities, schools and parents to preserve and promote our rich heritage of folk narratives. Inter-generational transmission of these tales via nightly story-telling sessions is a rarity these days. Very few children are today regaled with tales by moonlight, and this is the traditional mode of the folktale's intergenerational transmission! A lot of parents and guardians, overwhelmed by the challenges and pressures of today's urbanized world, have little or no time to be with their children, let alone tell them stories. Young people, too, have their own distractions and alternative forms of entertainment.

This situation is worsened by the fact that many of the original languages of these tales, the indigenous languages, are either endangered or disappearing. Many youths no longer speak their mother tongue. In many homes in Nigeria, English or pidgin English is the language of communication because of the failure of parents to teach their children their mother tongue. And since, among Nigerian groups, folktales are rendered in the mother tongue, it follows that language endangerment or disappearance corresponds to the endangerment or disappearance of an ethnic group's folktales and other aspects of its folklore. This writer has examined this matter in greater detail elsewhere.[16]

It should be enough to observe here that these issues of urbanization, nationwide failure in the intergenerational transmission of folktales, and the reduction in the use of the indigenous languages (the original and generational narrative vehicle of the tales) have made it necessary to collect and preserve Nigerian folktales for the present and future generations. To do this would entail extensive nationwide research in the collection and documentation of Nigerian folk narratives. This was the task the Dr Bukar Usman Foundation (DBUF),[17] presided over by this editor, chose to undertake in 2013. For the original inspiration for this and related compilations, we need to go back to 2005, the year *The Bride without Scars and Other Stories*, this editor's first book of modified folk stories, was published in English. Two English-language story books and 14 Hausa-language story books (now collected under the title, *Taskar Tatsuniyoyi*) were later published.

It was while working on these books that one became fully aware of the nation's enormous folklore resources and decided to begin the exploration by unearthing our rich but neglected folktales. The folktales field is a very wide

one and the deeper one went the more one realized that the tradition has extensive dimensions. This editor began his exploration in Biu in 2004/2005 and was hoping to collect only a few tales for his first short-story books. The field proved richer than he had imagined. He collected over 1,000 stories within two years from Biu alone! Over 800 of such Biu stories were collected in the 1920s by the pioneer missionary, Dr. Albert Helser. Amazingly, as further investigations reveal, the Biu findings exemplify the abundance of folktales in many communities across Nigeria. This editor was further stimulated by his close association with the Nigerian Folklore Society and the Linguistic Association of Nigeria. The need for a nationwide exploration beckoned, and the Dr Bukar Usman Foundation considered it worthwhile to sponsor the project.

This led to the inauguration, in early 2013, of the Nigerian Narrative Project (NNP or simply the Project in this report). The Foundation spelt out the following as its objectives for inaugurating the Project:

- To collect and preserve in writing the folktales of various Nigerian ethnic groups as the age-old tradition of transmitting and preserving such tales from generation to generation through oral narration is fast disappearing.
- To publish in English, without prejudice to possible indigenous-language publications, the outcome of this research, in order to make it available to a wider audience.
- To develop some aspects of the research findings into entertaining and informative story books targeted at the youths with the aim of enhancing their appreciation of folk narratives as a worthwhile cultural heritage.
- To promote across Nigeria an awareness of the shared cultural values the nation's folktales represent and to, thereby, promote cross-cultural understanding and mutual respect.
- To employ the moral probity espoused by the tales as a tool for the moral regeneration of the larger society.
- To utilize the outcome of the research in any other way that will enhance the realisation of the above objectives.

To carry out the tale-collection exercise in different parts of the country, the Foundation commissioned field teams led by informed co-ordinators who reported directly to Dr Bukar Usman, the Editor and President of the Dr Bukar Usman Foundation. Each team was asked to gather authentic folktales directly from the local folks. According to the guidelines, the tales should preferably be captured in the indigenous language of the narrator before being transcribed into English. Where practicable, every tale was expected to be captured during

story-telling sessions, and such sessions were to be audio-recorded or videoed. In translating a story in an indigenous language into English, the translator was expected to reflect as much as possible the spirit and letter of the tale, its original idiom of expression, structure, and theme, and resist the temptation to over-summarize the story.

Ten teams of researchers led by academic and cultural experts conducted tale-capture, tale-collection, and tale-translation exercises in various parts of Nigeria. Many tales were orally recorded. The field officers who worked under the coordinators utilized knowledgeable resource persons who were culturally conversant with the local communities. These local resource persons were responsible for organizing story-telling sessions which the field officers electronically captured. These local facilitators were also helpful in transcribing and translating the stories from the indigenous language into English. The outcomes of the field research were sent to the coordinator who compiled and sent them to the President of the Dr Bukar Usman Foundation, the Project's initiator and Editor. This was the recommended procedure.

Compliance in this regard varied from team to team. Some teams found it quite easy to adhere to the guidelines while others met on-the-field realities which made strict adherence to this methodology very challenging. Recording and collecting tales from the North-East was particularly difficult because of the activities of insurgents in the area. However, through informal means, and utilizing some documented sources as well, we were able to collect tales from some communities, and a number of tales from the troubled North-East are included in this anthology.

Nigeria is a very vast country and while each team was encouraged to spread their tale-collection exercise to as many diverse communities as possible, logistic and other handicaps made it practically impossible for the Project to cover every ethnic or linguistic group. With over 350 ethnic groups and about 500 languages,[16] Nigeria is remarkably ethnically and linguistically diverse. Suffice it to say that tales were collected from all states of the federation and the federal capital territory, Abuja.

All in all, the Project's dedicated teams operated creditably thereby fulfilling the Foundation's dream of organizing an open, purely culture-driven, nationwide exercise that gave as many ethnic/linguistic groups as possible the opportunity of contributing their oral narratives. Some of the teams listed above went beyond their assigned areas to ensure that the oral narratives of many minority groups were captured. None of the teams concentrated their effort in the urban areas; all dutifully conducted research also in the rural or semi-urban areas.

The researchers were required to spread the tale-collecting exercise into the communities in the remote areas because it would enhance their understanding of the cultural and traditional context of the tales. Some teams incorporated such cultural backgrounds in their report. It has been

acknowledged that such cultural knowledge deepens the interpretation of a folk narrative and makes it meaningful to everyone, especially those who may not have been acquainted with the traditional values of the tale's anonymous authors.

4. Cultural and Narrative Similarities

After months of field work in their designated areas, the research teams altogether turned in about 4,000 tales collected from communities across Nigeria and translated into English. Going through these stories was a wonderful experience. One could not but wonder why such cultural wealth was allowed to lie dormant for so long. While it must be acknowledged that some individuals and groups have collected and published Nigerian folk narratives in the past, most of the collections were based on the folktales of a particular group. The few volumes that included tales from different groups in the country were too slim to accommodate tales from most areas of the nation. Yet, judging from the outcome of this exercise, a sufficiently large pan-Nigerian collection is an educational, cultural, and social necessity.

a. **Common Narrative Attributes:** One of the most unmistakable observations on reading these stories is the similarity of some of the tales across the ethnic groups. Linguistic differences, apart from their reflection in the naming of the characters and the wording of the songs, do not appear to be significant in terms of the nature and structure of the tales. Although this may sound surprising, especially in our ethnically diverse environment, many tales and episodes are common to many ethnic and linguistic groups. This and other common narrative attributes indicate that Nigeria has a unifying force in its folk narratives, a positive cultural bond Nigerians have failed to adequately acknowledge or celebrate.

Many tales, as the reader himself would discover, can be cited to prove that certain episodes are common to more than one cultural group. An exciting example is "Why the Pig is always Digging" (tale no. 115), a tale collected from north-central Nigeria but is very similar to "Tortoise and Pig" (tale no. 130) from the south-eastern area. There are many tales that share such similarities across geographical and cultural boundaries. As to why such tales from different social contexts share similar episodes, two American anthropologists who had conducted research in West Africa offered this illuminating explanation:

> Our hypothesis is that this is to be explained by several factors: a relatively common historical experience, association with other clans (ethnic groups) through marriage, the incorporation of ingenious and appealing exploits attributed to another clan (ethnic group) into a new mythological system, and above all the play of the imagination on the traditional thematic resources...[18] (*Brackets mine*)

Common motifs are also noticeable across the collection. Some of the prominent ones include the cruel stepmother, the clever younger brother, the helpful ancestor, mermaid spirit, among others which will be listed, with examples, later in this write-up. These are motifs that spring from the cultural beliefs of the people or motifs adapted to suit such beliefs.

Apart from common episodes and motifs, there is also similarity of character symbols. In most places in Nigeria, the main character of a typical folktale is the tortoise, and almost all the time the tortoise plays the role of a trickster. This is why the section on trickster tales is one of the longest in this collection; every segment of the country is represented here. Another common character found everywhere folk tales are narrated in Nigeria is the old woman, a symbol of benevolence who usually steps in to save embattled underdogs just when they are about to be drowned by the waters of antagonism or cruelty.

There are some cultural and geographic variations, though. Among the Fulani, the tortoise is displaced by other animal characters such as rabbit and squirrel. And the section of this collection devoted to fisherman tales is dominated by stories from the south-southern part of Nigeria because of the preponderance of creeks and rivers in the area.

In noting the above common features, warns the seasoned dramatist and literary critic, Ben Tomoloju, one should not deny the various cultural groups their own native creativity:

> a note of caution has to be sounded against comparative imputations that undermine the distinction of cultural expression. Even as migrations, borrowings and cross-cultural influences are major factors in cultural mobility, there are arguments for the distinction in the creativity of autocthonous communities.
>
> For instance, Ulli Beier notes that 'similar ideas will occur to human beings in different places and at different times independent of each other.' He illustrates this with the building of pyramids by the Azteks of Mexico who could not have had any contact with Ancient Egypt.
>
> As such, comparatism should not be so free-wheeling as to obliterate authenticity and originality…[19]

b. **Common Cultural Attributes:** Cultural diversity is a well-celebrated feature of the Nigerian society. Cultural similarities, while acknowledged, are not given the prominence they deserve. Some of the outcomes of the folk narratives project are close relationships in communal behavior noted by the researchers. Some of the observed common or similar cultural features noticed in these areas are: nature and style of traditional religious beliefs, family structure, social organization in rural communities, ritualistic practices, patterns of wealth acquisition and distribution, hero worship, and herbal medicine.

We need not discuss all of these in this brief narration but we would

further examine the issue of nature and style of traditional religious beliefs because of its broad narrative implications, as could be elicited from many tales. We would restrict our discussion to the relationship between the dead and the living, for this is our area of immediate concern as it will enhance the reader's understanding of many of the tales published here. This is a concept of fundamental cultural and artistic importance the non-Nigerian or non-African reader of this collection will find helpful as background information.

Among devotees of traditional religion in different parts of Nigeria, the living members of the community are not isolated human beings. In spiritual terms, they are believed to be linked to past and future members of their families, clans and the community in general. In other words, the dead, the living, and the unborn are believed to be in spiritual communion. The dead dwell in the world of the clan's earlier dead and this world is ruled by ancestors. From this spirit world, the ancestors oversee the activities of the living, intervening now and then, mostly for good, in their lives. Within the context of African traditional religious worship, who are ancestors and what benefits do they serve?

> Ancestors…serve as mediators by providing access to spiritual guidance and power. Death is not a sufficient condition for becoming an ancestor. Only those who lived a full measure of life, cultivated moral values, and achieved social distinction attain this status. Ancestors are thought to reprimand those who neglect or breach the moral order by troubling the errant descendants with sickness or misfortune until restitution is made. When serious illness strikes, therefore, it is assumed that the ultimate cause is interpersonal and social conflict; serious illness is thus a moral dilemma as much as a biological crisis.[20]

From the devotee's viewpoint, ancestral worship is the way the living acknowledges this special relationship. There is an aspect of this relationship which is not mentioned in the above quotation: some ancestors or some other dead member of a given clan may re-emerge in the world of the living through reincarnation. This is the traditional belief of some ethnic groups in Nigeria. Reincarnation is not essentially punitive and children believed to be "re-born" souls of ancestors are accorded special respect in many traditional settings.

However, some of these children present special difficulties by the manner in which they die young and re-enter into their mother's womb repeatedly. The Igbo call such a spirit-child *ogbanje* while the Yoruba call the spirit-child *abiku*, but belief in this phenomenon is not restricted to these two ethnic groups. Why does the *abiku* come and go? Traditional religious priests have many explanations but all are shrouded in mystery. One of the proffered reasons is that the *ogbanje* is visited upon a family when the ancestors want to punish the parents of this spirit-child for some moral foul they have committed or for habitually failing to appease the ancestors.

Another set of heart-breaking children are the abnormally-born ones. They are believed to be a clear warning from the gods, particularly when they are born very deformed. These ones do not die young but grow up to become assertive individuals in spite of their handicap. In some parts of Nigeria, particularly among some communities in the South South, twins were once considered abnormally born children and their birth was seen as an evil omen. Attitudes towards twins have since changed and many families today cherish them as special blessings.

Unlike twins, deformed or abnormally-born children are believed to possess supernatural powers which they can use against their enemies. They are typically seen as enfants terribles, and conflicts involving this group of characters are spread across many sections of this collection, especially the Enfant-Terrible subdivision. Tale nos. 87 and 104 are examples of stories featuring abnormally-born characters.

5. Classification of the Collected Tales

As earlier noted, about 4000 tales were collected across Nigeria. Most of the tales were narrated in the languages of their communal origin before being translated into English to make them accessible to all Nigerians and to the larger worldwide audience. The collected tales are not only many but diverse. To document them along the line of their cultural orientation as well as enhance the reader's appreciation of their narrative import, we opted for a broad-based method of categorizing the tales. First, the collected tales (to be documented for record purposes) were sorted into two genres: Fictional Tales and *Historical* Tales.

Historical tales, as their communal owners believe, consist of myths, clan or settlement chronicles, tales related to rituals and traditional religious practices, narrations about epochal historical events, origin and cosmic tales, creation tales, tales about legendary heroes and heroines, tales that explain the origin and nature of the world, tales about the exploits of the gods and about the Creator Himself. This category of tales is deemed to be factual even when the presumed facts seem too unfounded or too exaggerated to be considered true outside the cultural context of the tales.

The other wide-ranging genre is the Fictional Tales class. This broad group refers to the common tales narrated by the common folks about the ordinary everyday experiences of the people. The range of themes or motifs covered by these tales include moral questions, human foibles, inter-personal relationships, kings and subjects, encounters with spirit beings, and journeys to the land of the dead, among many others. This category makes up the bulk of the tales gathered during the tale-collection exercise. The non-factual stories of this genre feature a variety of characters – human beings, animals, spirits, objects or a combination of one or more of these character types. These tales of anonymous authorship are, in terms of narrative form, mostly fairy tales,

fables, ghost and mystery tales, and other story types. It is from the fictional tales class that the 700 tales of the anthology, *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings* were taken.

A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings, being Book 2, contains 700 tales which are grouped using parameters different from those used in classifying the tales slated for Book 3. The emphasis here is primarily themes and secondarily settings. Accordingly, the tales of this anthology are grouped into 18 categories based on culturally-defined convergence of themes and, to a lesser extent, settings. Why is theme of premier importance here? Theme is a major cultural component of Nigerian oral fiction. In fact, the non-literate person in the community and a typical folktale narrator do not believe that a story without a theme is worth telling.

So intrinsically is a folk story connected to theme that every story, not just a fable, is expected to have or inspire some moral at the end of the tale. A tale may not be entertaining and its narrator may not be a good oral performer but, if it teaches a great lesson, the audience may overlook the shortcomings of its narration merely because of the powerful impact of its theme. In the various cultural environments where the tale-collecting research took place, tales are culturally distinguished by their themes. This is why we have placed primary emphasis on themes in categorizing these tales. Moreover, a theme-based categorization gives greater latitude for broad-based grouping of the collected tales.

Theme, as applied in deriving the 18 categories, is defined in a narrative sense and, at times, is loosely interchangeable with motif (recurring elements), except in areas where the meaning of the latter is evidently more encompassing. In its usage in categorizing sets of related tales, a thematic concept (covering tales that make various moral statements) is loosely implied. Theme, in this loose sense, could sometimes be as much about *what* each set of stories is broadly about as about *who* (in a generic sense) a set of categorized tales is about. Theme as used in the 18 categories does not imply the thematic statement expressly stated in the concluding part of few of the stories, especially the fables. Theme has a conceptually broad application in the naming of these categories, and this is why tales under the same category can make different thematic statements.

Setting, as it relates to the categorization of the tales, is a somewhat subordinate parameter and not all the elements that make it an important literary component are implied. The main elements of consideration in grouping the tales were the elements of culture and geography, with the latter overwhelmingly determining the selection of the set of tales placed under "Palace Tales." Setting is also a contributory factor in the naming of the "Fisherman" and "Hunter" tales categories as the overriding physical setting in which the stories develop is the river (in the case of Fisherman tales) and the forest (in the case of Hunter tales).

In the sense of the overall social environment, there is a covert influence of setting in the naming of all the categories, and to help readers familiar with the Nigerian social landscape further appreciate the social context of each tale, we have indicated under every tale the geographic area of the country where it was orally collected. For this purpose, we adopted the country's six well-known geographic divisions which, in alphabetical order, are as follows: North Central, North East, North West, South East, South South, and South West.

The stories in the afore-mentioned collection are featured according to the above alphabetical order. In other words, tales from the North Central come before tales from the North East, and so on. The above are purely geographic areas, not the politically charged geo-political zones under which Nigerian politicians negotiate federal largesse.

We avoided using the states of the federation as units of social context in identifying the tales because a state is a political division that may not strictly represent a *unique* socio-cultural context. For instance, the milieu of each of the states in the South East can, generally speaking and for purposes of fictional setting, be interchanged with that of any other state in the zone. The same can be said of the states of the South West and, to some extent, of the states in each of the other geographic areas. Moreover, states are not fixed or permanent geographic entities as their continued existence, maps and numerical number are subject to unpredictable political events, such as boundary adjustments, creation of new local government areas, creation of new states or adoption of entirely different political units or labels (after all, we used to have provinces and later regions). None of these changeable political situations is likely to affect the relevance of the above six areas as easily identifiable geographic areas and as unmovable indicators of which part of the country any given tale is coming from.

Indeed, it has been widely acknowledged that cultural differences are "often geographic (and that) …aspects of the general culture of an area (or a people)…may well be quite independent of political or linguistic boundaries."[21] (Brackets mine) Folktales are very mobile and have been proved to be no respecters of linguistic boundaries. Story lines move across ethnic and linguistic boundaries and variations of the same tale are retold in many languages and climes so that at the end of the day the only thing we can be certain of is where a story is coming from (its geographic source), its linguistic and ethnic origins having being blurred by its spread across different cultures over the years. And it will not be improbable to suggest that the originators of few of these tales might be long dead speakers of those Nigerian languages that have disappeared. Should this be true, how would one ever trace the linguistic origin of such folktales?

This is not to say that certain elements of the tale cannot give reasonable clues as to its original source. That is possible but in situations where cultural symbols are interchanged with the transplanting of a tale from one culture to

another, the results of such enquiries will at best be academic and inevitably controversial. Even within the same cultural context, it is sometimes difficult to establish which tale is the first to be narrated and which is a variation of it. For instance, which of these similar tales from south-western Nigeria is the original tale: "Tortoise and Buje" (No. 581) and "The Story of Tortoise and Kerebuje" (No. 583)? A similar challenge can be posed regarding "The Lion and the Playful Mouse" (No. 381) and "The Lion and the Mouse" (413), two tales that demonstrate that no one is too strong to need help and no one is too weak to give help.

These similarities arise partly because of the nature of folk narration. Since folktales are anonymously authored, each narrator usually introduces his or her own elements within the story. However, as earlier noted, a variation from the original tale is ideally usually created without changing the story's symbolic characterization and overall cultural idiom. When variations cross cultural boundaries, even this rule can be dispensed with. For instance, "The Boy and the Tiger" (tale No. 21) is well known in many cultural traditions of the world. Its first version dates back to 5th century BC when the Greek fable writer, Aesop, wrote the original tale titled "The Boy Who Cried Wolf," a story many oral traditions of the world have copied and changed to suit their indigenous cultural references. From this original Aesop tale was derived the English expression, "to cry wolf" (meaning, to give false alarm). The tale has been adapted into songs and films within and outside Europe, one of the best known being the 1973 film, "The Boy Who Cried Werewolf." Anyone familiar with the original Aesop story will know that this book's Tale No. 21 is a nigerianized version.

Tales can migrate from culture to culture across international, linguistic, and ethnic boundaries and, as they travel, their components are culturally transformed to make them meaningful to new sets of listeners, readers or viewers. Having said this, it should be noted that Aesop's "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" is a literary fable, not a folk narrative, even though many of his fables were inspired by diverse folk narratives of his time. Typically, folktales are of anonymous authorship.

The Aesop narrative variation discussed above is international in nature, but within a nation substantial variations also take place. Sometimes, it may be a variation centred on a given motif. In 2006, the collection of literary narratives, *The Stick of Fortune*[22] was published by Klamidas. It was this editor's second book of short stories. "The Stick of Fortune," the title story is woven around the motif of compensatory wealth generation. The story is rooted in Biu folk literature and this editor was not aware such a motif existed elsewhere. In the course of editing this anthology, however, one has discovered that this motif is not peculiar to Biu.

The boomerang tale, "The Dog's Last Compensation" (No. 5), collected from north-central Nigeria, uses the same motif but this is where the

similarities end. "The Stick of Fortune" has only human characters while "The Dog's Last Compensation" has both human and animal characters. The most important distinction lies in the dissimilar dispositions of the protagonists: whereas the main character of "The Stick of Fortune" solely relied on the goodwill of others to increase his wealth, the Dog of "The Dog's Last Compensation" manipulated his own compensation to his own peril.

Parallel motifs are common among these tales. In almost all the geographic areas are found tales that parallel tales from other areas of the country in the key components of plot, characterization and theme. Some common motifs, with two examples per motif, include the jealous elder brother ("The Jealous Elder Brother" [No. 44] and "A Jealous Elder Brother" [No. 473]), the evil junior/senior wife ("The Evil Junior Wife" [Nos. 45] and "The Jealous Senior Wife" [No. 48]), the arrogant beauty ("The Cat without Scars" [No. 50] and "The Girl without Scars" [No. 419]), the talking/singing object ("The Hunter and the Speaking Corn" [No. 256] and "The Singing Lily" [No. 468]). Others are the motifs of journey to the spirit world ("Dancing Competition in the Spirit World" [No. 75] and "The Girl without Ears" [No. 244]), nameless princess ("The King and His Two Daughters" [No. 56] and "Tortoise and the King's Nameless Daughters" [No. 59]), and magical transformation ("The Farmer's Dancing Dead Son" [No. 97] and "Kegbim, the Witch Girl" [No. 103]).

So pervasive is the spread of similar tales across the geographic areas that we decided that Book 2, being a wide-ranging collection as well as the first of the three selections of the Treasury of Nigerian Tales series, should fly the pan-Nigerian flag and serve simply as a showpiece of tales from Nigeria's diverse geographic areas.

In listing the 18 categories under which the fictional tales were grouped, we need to note that the categorization is not absolute, and that a few tales may seem to fall into two or more categories. This is where identifying the leading character(s) or the central conflict of the tale can help in determining the most appropriate category for such borderline tales. Selected fictional tales which are not placed in Categories 1-17 automatically fall into Category 18 (the Miscellaneous Tales class). Even then, one may still perceive some core elements of one or more of the 17 categories in some stories featured in the miscellaneous group. Although some stories can fit into one or more categories, we have ordered each featured tale into one category.

In all, there are 18 categories. Each category of tales makes up a Section of selected tales. Each sectional set of tales is preceded by a brief introductory write-up dubbed "Thematic Snapshot." This is a three-paragraph informative teaser intended to provoke interest in the type of tales grouped under that section. It is not a preview in the strict sense as no specific tale is analysed. Each "Thematic Snapshot" simply clarifies the meaning and focus of a given category or section. Below, arranged in alphabetical order (with the exception

of Miscellaneous Tales), are the 18 categories and the number of tales placed under each category:

	Category Name	Selected Tales	No. of Tales
I	Boomerang Tales	Tale Nos. 1-49	49
II	Contest Tales	Tale Nos. 50-95	46
III	Enfant-Terrible Tales	Tale Nos. 96-110	15
IV	Explanatory Tales	Tale Nos. 111-167	57
V	Fisherman Tales	Tale Nos. 168-181	14
VI	Fortune Tales	Tale Nos. 182-201	20
VII	Friendship	Tale Nos. 202-238	37
VIII	Heroic Tales	Tale Nos. 239-254	16
IX	Hunter Tales	Tale Nos. 255-285	31
X	Magical Tales	Tale Nos. 286-328	43
XI	Marital Tales	Tale Nos. 329-380	52
XII	Moralizing Tales	Tale Nos. 381-481	101
XIII	Old Woman Tales	Tale Nos. 482-498	17
XIV	Orphan Tales	Tale Nos. 499-516	18
XV	Palace Tales	Tale Nos. 517-541	25
XVI	Trickster Tales	Tale Nos. 542-585	44
XVII	War Tales	Tale Nos. 586-596	11
XVIII	Miscellaneous Tales	Tale Nos. 597-700	104
		Total No. of Tales:	**700**

Discounting the Miscellaneous Tales category (which is a mixture of diverse tales), the three most dominant thematic categories are the Moralizing, Explanatory, and Marital categories, in that order. Moralizing tales' premier position adds further credence to the point earlier made, that theme, particularly moral themes, are of prime importance to oral narrators of these tales.

Explanatory tales' second position reflects the fact that all over the world, across cultures, nature and the social environment have always been clothed with mystery and wonder. In earlier times, people tried to explain these mysteries in terms of stories. Such stories as "How the Cockroach Got Its Antenna" (No. 111), "Why the Moon is Partly Dark" (No. 137), "How Burial Started" (No. 138), and "Why the Hen Scatters Her Food Before Eating" (No. 162), are important, in spite of their far-fetched explanations, because they have the tendency of making the narrator's young listeners to ask further questions, in their private moments, and to seek more credible answers.

That marital tales are next in numerical terms points to the strong family values of the communal environment as well as to the social pressures that debase those values. The place of the family as the smallest unit of social organization as well as its critical relevance as the foundational school of

communal ethics is somewhat acknowledged by the impressive number of marital tales collected across the country.

Someone may ask, why only 18 categories? Well, we could have placed these tales in more or less number of categories, as there is nothing rigid about this categorization. It is merely a convenient way of presenting the tales to the reader, but it is by no means a random grouping as our categorization was informed by the types of tales we gathered during the nationwide tale-collection exercise and by the manner these tales are viewed in their cultural settings.

It is necessary to note, at this point, that presenting these tales to the reader in an orderly form is a primary purpose of this collection. This is not a morphological study and, as such, does not require technical classification along the line envisioned by the Aarne-Thompson (AT) index[23] of 1928 and its supposedly internationalized update, the Aarne-Thompson-Uther classification (ATU) index[24] of 2004. And we may also observe that even with Hans-Jörg Uther's admission of some international tales left out in the AT index, folk narratives from African traditions, including narratives from Nigeria and most of black Africa, were not included in that taxonomical exercise.

In spite of its consideration of tales from some foreign traditions in arriving at the numbers ascribed to tale types and motif types, the ATU taxonomy and the earlier AT model remain basically the same – an analytical tool which may be sufficient for Western oral tradition but very inadequate for Nigeria's folk literature and the oral literatures of other African tradtions. As Ashliman has pointed out, "The Aarne–Thompson system catalogues some 2500 basic plots from which, for countless generations, European and Near Eastern storytellers have built their tales."[25] Stith Thompson's own 1955 *Motif-Index of Folk-Literature*, while generally liberal, had similar shortcomings. Uther's 2004 attempt at internationalizing the AT taxonomy did not result into a universally acceptable classification number system.

We did not set out to embark on a systemic numbering of these tales in the manner envisaged by the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index. Our aim in *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings* is to present in English diverse fictional narratives of Nigeria. And this we have done. Scholars interested in folkloristic morphology will find in these narratives some raw materials for such structural studies.

6. Conclusion

In closing, it is good to note that the fact that folktales are transmitted from generation to generation by oral tradition does not mean the art of creating folk stories ended with our forebears. It appears that in non-literate societies, every generation not only transmits to the next generation its heritage of tales but also tells its own fresh tales which, generations later, would seem as old as any other. There are modern folk tales and some of them can be identified by

certain features which give away their period of composition. Two of the most outstanding of such features are character and place names.

Even in this collection, modern folktales abound. Tales such as "The Hyena, the He-goat and the Squirrel" (No.19), "Derek and Erik" (No. 449), "Janet, the Stubborn Girl" (No. 462), "The Singing Lily" (468), "Hyena and Spider's Business" (No. 621), and "Musa and Monster" (No. 625) can roughly be dated within the last 50 to 100 years. They are by no means pre-historic tales as we can rightly guess the relatively modern epoch when their first anonymous authors narrated the tales. Let us enquire into their probable dates of first narration. "Derek and Erik" (No. 449), "Janet, the Stubborn Girl" (No. 462) and "Musa and the Monster" (No. 625) are tales narrated after the advent of Christianity and Islam. The names of the characters (Derek, Erik, Janet and Musa) give us adequate clues, just as the "Islamic school" mentioned in "The Hyena, the He-goat and the Squirrel" (No.19) tells us that this is not a tale told at a period of pre-Islamic experience in Nigeria.

But there are other indicators beyond character and place names. The approximate date of some of the stories can be known through the characters' occupations and the kind of money used in business transactions. These two can give several clues as the age-old vocations (such as hunting and fishing) are not really many and the history of modern vocations and hobbies is well-documented. Equally properly documented is the history of money. And so we can use available records to trace with a high level of accuracy the period of the first narration of some of these modern folktales.

Let us, for example, use the occupation clue to trace the period one of the tales in this collection, "The Singing Lily" (468) was first narrated. "The Singing Lily" gives us an occupational clue in the second sentence of the tale: "Their parents loved gardening." As an activity of "growing and maintaining the garden"[26] (the garden defined as "a planned space, usually outdoors, set aside for the display, cultivation, and enjoyment of plants and other forms of nature"[27]) gardening has recorded history. Within Africa, the first gardens were reputed to have been built by the Egyptians who were conquered by the Romans in 30 BC.[28] There is no evidence that indicates that gardening, in the sense implied in "The Singing Lily," was a traditional practice of any of Nigeria's ethnic groups or that the Egyptians, Africa's earliest gardeners, introduced that concept into Nigeria before the entire area now known as Nigeria was colonized between 1861 (when Lagos was annexed) and 1898 (when the North was secured for the British).[29]

As for the "Lily" flower of this tale's title, available records show that it is not indigenous to Nigeria. According to a credible source, "There are between 80 to 100 species of lilies (Liliaceae), and most are native to the Northern Hemisphere in Asia, Europe and North America."[30] Since the Europeans who colonized Nigeria were the British, it could be said that the British most likely introduced the Lily flower into Nigeria. So, if we take into consideration the

more inclusive date of 1898, the new folktale, "The Singing Lily," cannot be more than 117 years. If we make room for the years it took the Nigerian Lily to spread across the communities to the point of being a folk reference, the date of the first narration of the "The Singing Lily" is probably less than 100 years – maybe under 50 years.

Such a historically-derived method of dating can be applied using the currency indication in a tale. And we can illustrate this with the tale, "Hyena and Spider's Business" (No. 621). Here is the opening paragraph of the tale:

> One day, a greedy spider bought a knife and a basket. Each of the two items cost him six pence. He needed manure and went to his neighbour's house to see if he could give him some. His neighbour asked him to go to the backyard and fetch as much as he wanted. When he went there, he brought out his knife, slaughtered a goat, threw it inside his basket and left.

Mention is made of a specific currency and amount in the second sentence; there we learn that the spider's newly-bought items cost him "six pence" each. "Six pence" ceased to be a legal tender in Nigeria on January 1, 1973, when the currency units, naira and kobo, were introduced to replace pounds, shillings and pence. Since folk narrators like to communicate to their audience using conversational language and the most current forms of expression, we can say that an oral narrator creating this story after 1973 was likely to have used "kobo," not "pence," in indicating the cost of the spider's items. This is a story orally narrated and translated into English in 2014; yet, the narrator used "pence" rather than "kobo," unconsciously indicating that the tale was first narrated before the introduction of naira and kobo and was simply orally transmitted to the hearing of the 2014 re-teller. So, we can establish that the earliest narration of "Hyena and Spider's Business" was in 1972 or a few years earlier.

All these enquiries about the date or period of a tale's first narration are important in that they show that regardless of the general decline in the practice of narrating folktales to children, new folktales are still being created in Nigeria. These modern folktales may not be many, and hopes of having them transmitted to future generations via the oral tradition may seem slim. However, with tales hitherto only orally transmitted now being documented in books such as *A Selection of Nigerian Folktales: Themes and Settings*, there is hope that no matter how the wind of modernity blows, our folktales may continue to be as enduring and timeless as the moon. There is need to adopt them into modern communication systems such as animations (cartoons) and film/television documentaries.

Endnotes

1. Examples of such published studies are Heinrich Barth, *Collections of Vocabularies of Central African Languages*, Gotha, 1862 (Reprinted by Frank Cass, London, 1971); Helser, Albert D., *Education of Primitive People*, Negro Universities Press, New York, 1930; Meek, C K, *Tribal Studies in Northern Nigeria*, London, 1931; and Helser, A.D, *African Stories*, Revell, New York, 1930

2. See these Albert D. Helser's publications: *Education of Primitive People*, Negro Universities Press, New York, 1930; *In Sunny Nigeria*, Revell, New York; 1926; and *African Stories*, Fleming H Revell Company, New York, 1930.

3. Freemann, R. A., and Kay Williamson. 1967. *Ịjọ proverbs*. Research Notes (Ibadan) 1:1-11.

4. See *The Guardian* of March 26, 2009, for biographical information on Suzanne Wenger.

5. Herskovits, Melville J and Frances S, *Dahomean Narratives: A Cross Cultural Analysis*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1958, gave a detailed practical clarification of this point.

6. Helser, A.D, *African Stories*, Revell, New York, 1930

7. Helser, Albert D., *In Sunny Nigeria*, Revell, New York; 1926

8. Skinner, Neil, *Hausa Tales and Traditions*, Frank Cass, London, 1969

9. *Education of Primitive People*, Negro Universities Press, New York, 1930

10. Bade Ajuwon, "Oral and Written literature in Nigeria," *Nigerian History and Culture* , Richard Olaniyan, editor. (Hong Kong: Longman Group Ltd, 1985), pp.306-318, 326.

11. Ibid

12. Ibid

13. Oxford Reference, Oxford University Press, London, 2006

14. Ogbalu, Uche Janet, "Appreciation of Igbo Folktales and Songs Versus Realism," *Unizik Journal of Arts and Humanities*, 2011

15. Peek, Philip M and Yankah, Kwesi (eds.), 2004, *African Folklore: An Encyclopedia*, London, Routledge

16. See Usman, Bukar, *Language Disappearance and Cultural Diversity in Biu Emirate*, Klamidas, Abuja, 2014,

17. Dr. Bukar Usman Foundation is a registered Non-Governmental Organisation in Nigeria (for more information visit www.bukarusman.com)

18. Herskovits, Melville J and Frances S, op. cit

19. Tomoloju, Ben, "Bukar Usman's Literary Voyage in Print," *The Guardian*, January 3, 2014

20. www.britannica.com/topic/ancestor-worship

21. Thompson, Stith, "Folk Literature," *Encyclopædia Britannica.* Encyclopædia Britannica Inc., 2015.

22. Usman, Bukar, *The Stick of Fortune*, Klamidas, Abuja, 2006

23. Developed by the folklorist, Antti Aarne, and published as *Verzeichnis der Märchentypen* in 1910, and translated and revised by Stith Thompson in 1928 and 1961

24. In the 2004 publication, *The Types of International Folktales: A Classification and Bibliography*, Hans-Jörg Uther updated the Aarne-Thompson index which thereafter became known as the Aarne-Thompson-Uther index.

25. Ashliman, D. L. 1987. *A Guide to Folktales in the English Language: Based on the Aarne–Thompson Classification System.* New York, Greenwood Press.

26. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Garden

27. Ibid.

28. http://www.localhistories.org/gardening.html

29. Usman, Bukar, *A History of Biu*, Klamidas, Abuja, 2015, p. 239-240

30. http://www.gardenguides.com/79947-history-lily-flower.html

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