

Orality in the Era of Globalisation: A Reading of Efua Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa*

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Abstract

Oral literature has remained a source and material for African literature. It forms part of the repertoire that maintains a society aimed at curbing social ills. Hence, African writers use this form of literature in ensuring that African traditions do not go extinct. This paper interrogates the inter-textuality of the concept of orality and written literature and how in the era of globalization writers have ensured that orality thrives for the purpose of preserving and propagating indigenous values. The study observes that globalization has made it increasingly difficult for individuals to maintain their cultures and indigenous languages due to the fact that the dearth of African cultures in a global era is contending with the identity of individuals. Using the sociological theory, the paper examines Efua Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* in order to underscore the import of integrating orality in a modern context. Also, it upholds that written literature can be used in sustaining and transmitting African tradition and its values in the face globalization. Lastly, it accentuates the efficacy of oral forms of literature in redefining, sustaining and transmitting values. The paper concludes by submitting that playwrights performed a huge role in preserving and promoting the African tradition and culture in the era of globalization.

Introduction

Literature has remained a viable tool for development. Both oral and written literatures are distinct and peculiar genres that have remained relevant mediums to entertain, educate, and inform. In the recent past, African writers have engaged oral literature as an influence for written literature. This

expression of oral art form in English language and written literature is mostly aimed at upgrading and foregrounding the zest by writers on propagating the African culture as a carrier of the people's tradition and values.

It has been observed that the advancement of societies partly depends on a viable literary environment and what transpires in its literary sphere. This however, is at the instance of tradition and culture being a central theme in literature especially the canon of African literature. Okpewho (1992:293) asserts that "the 21st Centuries have witnessed growth and revolution in relation to the modern writers identifying with the literary traditions of their people in form and content". This position is relevant to this paper as it echoes the development and evolution of orality. It also relates the intersections between both written and oral forms of literature, with emphasis on the prominence of oral literature. Finnegan (1970:1) further emphasizes that "Africa possesses both written and unwritten traditions. The former are relatively known ...the unwritten forms, however, are far less widely known and appreciated." This assertion validates the existence of both forms of literature. However, the import of this paper is to bring to the fore the significance and functions of oral traditions. As a result, over the years, writers in Africa have been devoted to reflecting oral forms of literature such as proverbs, idioms, songs, incantations, etc, in their works. The complimentary function of oral and written literature is captured in the need to relish the rich cultural heritage of Africa holistically. This is validated by writers who often incorporate oral forms of literature in their works. Writers of the first and second generation such as Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo, JP Clark, Niyi Osundare, Femi Osofisan etc. were propelled by the colonial experience to promote Africa's traditions and culture. For instance, Elements of African oral traditions; folktales, proverbs, fables, and idioms, embody Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958) and *Arrow of God* (1964). This is also observed in Wole Soyinka's works such as *Death and the King's Horseman* (1975). Their works uphold the need for utilizing Africa's rich cultural values and traditional heritage, in sustaining language, tradition and culture. Osundare (2016:1) asserts that:

The argument still remains that Africans and African scholars neglected the sources of their literature for too long. It is now imperative that writers go back to it in order to ensure that their literary endeavours are made heavier and more relevant to the needs of the people..... People like me owe a lot to oral tradition. And the same goes for people like Tanure Ojaide, J.P.

Clark, Wole Soyinka, Christopher Okigbo and the younger generation of writers.

In this vein, the significance of the intersection of orality and written literature is highlighted in Iyasere (1975:107) "The modern African writer is to his indigenous oral tradition as a snail is to its shell. Even in a foreign habitat, a snail never leaves its shell behind." Iyasere (1975:114) notes further that "Achebe uses proverbs both to infuse the English language with traditional African wisdom and perceptions and – with Soyinka, Oladipo, and Christina Aidoo – to provide a 'grammar of values' of the world within the novel".

Ngugi (2007:293) in his essay 'The Language of African Literature' enunciates:

Language as communication and as culture are then products of each other. Communication creates culture: culture is a means of communication. Language carries culture, and culture carries, particularly through orature and literature, the entire body of values by which we come to perceive ourselves and our place in the world. How people perceive themselves affects how they look at their culture, at their politics and at the social production of wealth, at their entire relationship to nature and to other beings....

Ngugi (2007:295) further observes that "images are passed on through orature and literature". We deduce from Ngugi's assertions that language and literature are an embodiment of values that govern a group of people. Worthy of note also is that writers were being motivated to project the didactic essence of literature. These are often embedded in songs.

In this context, there is a need to see oral literature as a discourse that has surpassed the status of being regarded as a concept rooted in the past. Although performances and genres may be traced back to previous years, the relevance of oral literature has remained veritable and authentic. In authenticating the quintessence of oral literature, Okoh (2008: 226) posits: ".....We emphasize that the whole idea of essentially tying up oral literature with *pastness* to be challenged. At best, such thinking is one that any scholar cannot but consider with a good degree of circumspection."

We infer from Okoh's statement that precaution be taken so as not to consider or place oral literature on a pedestal or platform that would aid its

extinction. Nevertheless, our interest in this paper is to ascertain how oral forms can be woven into written literature for human, individual and societal development. In this vein, some critics argue the potency of oral literature as more viable as compared to its written counterpart. For instance, P'bitek's submissions are clearly stated by Okoh (2008: 228) thus:

Even military repression and dictatorship, such that have been visited on several unfortunate and poor Africans cannot prevent the phenomenon of oral literature, nor can they suppress its performance It is quite easy to destroy books or other published material, but it is impossible to effectively exterminate such an evanescent phenomenon as oral literature.

Although the aim of this paper is not to measure the effectiveness or efficiency of both genres by certain parameters, the intention is to identify the relevance of orality in a society that is fast globalizing. Nevertheless, oral tradition serves as a veritable means of sustaining and preserving cultures. This could be in form of folktales, proverbs, songs, incantations etc.

Consequently, orality should not be termed as a genre that has lost its significance but rather as a genre that continues to be relevant. Songs are mostly didactic mediums employed to provide solutions or panacea to societal issues and ills. In other words, these songs are readily available for all purposes. With didactic motives they serve as deterrents, and advisors, restricting individuals who go beyond the limits and against the norms of the society. Thus, these songs engage the minds of the readers serving as reflections for achieving social standards. Relatively, these standards are essential in curbing menace in the society.

In describing Sutherland's contemporaries in Nigeria, Obafemi (1996:67) observes that,

The intellectual dramatists ... are in many ways, the products of western education and their dramatic and aesthetic visions have, in fact, been developed from a fusion of western dramatic models and the traditional African dramatic heritage.

This gives the impression that there is a fusion between traditional and western models. His assertions only buttress the possibilities of an intersection of both oral and written drama. Furthermore, in his article "The Yoruba Operatic Theatre: A World in Search of Harmony and Social Order" Obafemi (1996:13) observes that the theater in Africa is a blend of both traditional and

western modes. He refers to this position as a 'dual heritage'. He further states that "this dual heritage' is seen in the integration of the themes, materials and the form of traditional drama with additional elements adopted from western dramatic experience..."

This synthesis between written and oral literature is buttressed in Odekunle-Awoyale's (2000: 206) assertions that: "...the two cultures inevitably and inextricably co-exist peacefully since literature and orature are two indivisible features of culture and more and more literary artists continue to use the written medium to portray culture through orature." We infer from his remarks that traditional and western dramas do supplement each other. Likewise, Olorunyomi (2008: 190) avers that "The concept of orality continues to shape scholarly discourses besides informing creative production." We observe here some essential concerns of oral literature. Firstly, it is a relevant phenomenon. Secondly, its imaginative, original and artistic characteristics produce new resources and constituents through songs, proverbs incantations and other forms in literary discourses.

Social vices and irregularities have been portrayed in *The Marriage of Anansewa*. Through songs, Sutherland criticizes and condemns irresponsibility, and individualism. Through songs, individuals are advised to shun greed and frivolity. It is pertinent to note that, apart from the entertainment value of songs, attention is given to their educative utility.

The didactic import of literature has been adjudged by critics as superseding the entertainment utility. Shittu, (2000:180) asserts: "the content of the songs reflect the issues the playwright projects. The issues are accompanied with appropriate songs." This is reflected in *The Marriage of Anansewa* as the songs are appropriate to the playwright's ideology. The songs referred to as *Mboguo* are appropriate to dramatizations in the play. Based on Odekunle's (2000:206) affirmation that "...literature must not only entertain, it must be ready to expose the inadequacies, the injustices and the corruption in the society with a view of proffering solutions" the intention of this paper is to expose the shortfalls in the society, greed, craftiness, and corruption in particular, through the use of songs as it has employed in *The Marriage of Anansewa*.

Globalization and Orality

Globalization as a concept has been defined by numerous scholars from different perspectives. However, Onyeoronu's assertion on globalization is relevant to this paper. Onyeoronu (2003:23) views globalisation as the

intensification of world-wide social relations which link distant localities in such a way that local happenings are shaped by events occurring many miles away. Robertson (2015:1) avers that “globalization as a concept refers both to the compression of the world and the intensification of consciousness of the world as a whole.”

In Language and literature, culture and tradition, globalization constitutes a threat to the advancement and sustenance of orality in Africa, in other words, the infusion of cultures which is focal in globalization would likely create a decline in the propagation of cultural identity. Writers and scholars have advanced various arguments on the impact of globalization on indigenous African cultures. Some of these arguments hinge on efforts to sustain indigenous culture in the era of globalisation. In line with this, Ogunjimi and Na’ Allah (2005:36) opine that:

The peculiar Nigerian cultural values, like languages, are being eroded by the pop culture brought about by globalization. Greeting norms, cuisine, appareass (that is, appearance and dress), custom, occupations, religion and cultural components are giving way to acculturation “the suppression and subjugation of African culture,” a tragic phenomenon that is fast destroying the original.

Thus, it is observed that exposure to modern literacy and techniques are imposing a threat to African values. Therefore, the essence and relevance of incorporating orality in written literature is to preserve and propagate indigenous cultures. In view of this, emerging writers in Africa need to consolidate the efforts of early writers by consciously entrenching orality in their works.

Akande (2002:1) posits that “it may sound extreme but academic language studies have proven that particular aspects of culture can and do disappear forever; even optimistic estimates suggest that as many as 90 percent of the world’s languages will disappear in the next century.” The essence of orality in the era of globalization is validated by the commitment of writers to the reconstructive and instructive essence of indigenous literary traditions. Achebe’s (1988: 103) assertion that, “Literature serves as a vital tool for social building and reconstruction.” proves instructive. This also is validated in MSC Okolo’s (2007: 19) observations that “literature provides a framework for articulating our daily experiences; it

becomes an instrument for the discovery of new ideas..... it promotes our social consciousness." We infer from the foregoing the vital role of literature and its aim at ensuring social order, change and stability. This can be achieved when right standards and principles are acquired. However, individuals can only achieve right standards when they are exposed to the right mode of conduct. Literature in turn can be used to achieve this end. In other words, literature should be used as a medium to pass principles, morals and lessons.

According to Okpewho (1992:293) "the 20th and 21st centuries have witnessed growth and revolution in relation to the modern writers identifying with the literary traditions of their people and content". This assertion authenticates the relevance of the fusion of oral and written forms of literature in the articulation of its essence. The values in a society shape the kind of songs produced in that society. Furthermore, the dramatic genre accommodates the traditions of songs, music, and dance. These accounts for the reasons playwrights such as Sutherland embellish their works with these elements.

Embellished in these songs, drama, incantations, proverbs etc. are values that are original and cherished by Africans. The need for these values to be sustained and passed across to the younger generation explains the compulsion and commitment of writers. This is further enhanced by the need for the survival and sustenance of the cultures that serve as communicative mediums.

Gunner (2007:70) asserts further that "in an era of globalization, orality has not disappeared but has often adapted itself in its many different forms to become a vehicle for the expression of the fears and hopes of new generations of Africans." The foregoing implies that orality is and has to be reorganized and reconstructed to conform to current trends. Efforts should be made in preventing the extinction of oral tradition. Even in the face of advancement, its importance has to be recognized.

Africa's rich literary forms such as proverbs, folktales, and incantations have been explored by writers such as Wole Soyinka, Femi Osofisan, OluObafemi, NgugiwaThiongo' etc; however, the discourse has not been exhausted. This calls for the active participation of African writers especially those of the contemporary generation to consciously incorporate oral literary genres in their works.

It is pertinent to state that, Sutherland employs oral literary forms most importantly folk songs to mirror man and to explore the issues that slow down development. "As a committed writer, Sutherland indicates possible

repercussions of failure to behave correctly. Sutherland's commitment is reiterated by Etherton (1982: 216) "Efua Sutherland is herself a socially committed playwright, keen to seeing Ghanaian drama depicting Ghanaian social reality and cultural identity." We deduce from this observation that, the society is critiqued through the dramatization of social problems. Etherton (1982: 317) further opines that:

The study of drama is primarily a study of its function in the society. Such a study does not exclude the content of the drama whether this is available in a specifically literary form or not. Indeed, many African playwrights have been concerned to relate their art to their societies much more directly..... to reflect social change...

Drama then cannot be studied in isolation of the society. The purpose for drama is to effect change and actualizing desired improvement in the society. In enunciating the aspects of social drama, Way (1967:287) recognizes three ways in which social drama can be considered they include "Manners and behavior, Aspects of general living, and Broader social awareness." All three categories enunciate and reflect the subject of development. All three are geared towards developing individuals and the society.

Songs in the *Marriage of Anansewa*

Songs are appropriate mediums for curbing societal menace and instilling values that would long be upheld by individuals. Songs have the ability of being retained in the individual's reservoir of knowledge. In this vein, when individuals are exposed to songs, what these songs represent is always applicable and significant at appropriate times. Nevertheless, we argue that in a modernized and globalized society, there is a need for conscious effort for songs to be entrenched in the learning process of individuals especially children.

Our focus here is on the didactic element of the songs in question and how they promote societal values in instilling good ethics and ideals that contribute to the advancement and development of a society even in the era of globalizations. These songs expose unacceptable behavior, especially in the Ghanaian society. With the tool of satire, Sutherland's *The Marriage of Anansewa* sheds light on the issue of greed and avarice. These societal issues are what compel the main character Ananse to pursue his ambition to become wealthy..Sutherland's drama demonstrates commitment to examining social issues posing a threat to positive values in the society. These songs function

as instruments of change, development and transformation. Hence, the playwright employs the songs for entertainment, and for purposes of didacticism. In Sutherland's words:

that Ananse is, artistically, a medium for society to criticize itself can be seen in the expression 'Exterminate Ananse, and society will be ruined' (29).

This implies that Ananse is a means by which the society views its shortcomings and then corrects itself. Thus, Ananse is a prototype and representative of individuals.

A more complex parallel of Ananse's schemes in the African society is the menace of corruption and stealing of public funds. Thus, the character of Ananse serves as a deterrent to individuals who are sly, greedy, and selfish. Young ones, who engage in "get rich quick" schemes, are admonished to work hard. This is seen in the song below:

Who doesn't like work?
Oh, I love work!
Work, work-
This work that I do-
Yes, yes-
Supplies my clothing....
Supplies my food.....
This work that I do supplies my cash....
Who doesn't like work? Oh, I love work!
Work work (36)

Work is meant to provide the needs of individuals, without working, individuals would be stirred to engage in different vices. Sutherland's major intent is to encourage hard work as the ideal. In this regard, the workmen in the play: the Painter, Mason, and Carpenter are used in the play to emphasize the value placed on hard work. This is to provide an alternative and panacea to man's greed depicted in Ananse, the protagonist. As such, the virtues of hard work are encouraged. This is in contrast with Ananse's opinion on how wealth should be acquired.

The *Mbogu* work songs are employed to motivate individuals on the value of work. However, aside the motivating essences, the utilitarian value of

these songs are commendable and useful. While this song encourages hard work, it instructs individuals to shun greed. Greed is a vice that leads to corruption, bedeviling the society. Here, hard work is given prominence and should be embraced. The virtue of hard work is disappearing fast from a globalized society, this may likely affect the young generation who are most vulnerable to this threat, as a matter of urgency. Most youths engage in stealing, armed robbery, deceit, kidnapping and as thugs to politicians thereby abhorring hard work. What this entails is that there is no limit to hard work and especially in a globalizing world. Sutherland's presents the ideal in that a hardworking individual is full of expectations and detest envy as the song below indicates:

I say, Kwabonyi
I'll never envy your wealth.
Kwabonyi, when you toil
Do lift your head for he
Who will spend it
Sits idle somewhere (37)

Envy is a hindrance to individual and societal development in the society. When individuals envy others they are instigated to explore negative avenues to get rich too. This can pose a threat to the society. The song also reveals the vanity of wealth. A situation where one acquires wealth, and does not enjoy it, is vanity. The intention of the playwright is to castigate the pressure individuals bear in the process of acquisition of wealth and affluence. Ironically, the possibility of those rich individuals not enjoying what they had labored for is sometimes inevitable. The next song extols patience as a virtue to be upheld:

Oh, some time ago
It was bad at home
But maybe now it's getting better
Oh, friends, do look at KwekuAnanse's amazing ways.
It's with craftiness solely that he manages his life.
Oh, sometime ago
It was bad at home
But maybe now it's getting better
Oh, sometime ago

It was bad at home
But maybe now it's getting better
Oh, sometime ago
It was bad at home
But maybe now it's getting better
Oh, sometime ago
It was bad at home
But maybe now it's getting better.
Oh, friends, do look at Kweku Ananse's amazing ways.
It's with craftiness solely that he manages his life.
Oh, sometime ago
It was bad at home
But maybe now it's getting better.
Oh, sometime ago
It was bad at home
But maybe now it's getting better. (38)

In a contemporary society, patience is a virtue to be upheld. The song explores the place of patience which is very important as in this present age. In this song, the technique of repetition is used to give emphasis to the subject or lesson intended. Apart from being a musical technique, individuals especially children learn faster through repetitive techniques. Satire as a corrective tool is deployed in this play. In correcting this ill, the playwright projects songs that expose the consequences of greed on the individual:

Who is knocking?
Who is knocking?
It's me.
It's me.
Who is knocking?
When I'm thinking
It's me.
It's me.
I'm ailing,
I'm ailing.
It's me.
It's me
Stop disturbing.

Stop disturbing.

It's me.

It's me. (42)

The aftermath of the schemes and the webs Ananse spins is highlighted in the song above. He is in a confused state at this point and longs for a way out. The effects of craftiness are also realized in this song. Ananse is perturbed as a result of his tricks; therefore, he is alienated from his society at some point. Etherton (1982: 224) opines that Ananse is not to be taken seriously except as a satirical reflection of hopes and fears of "ordinary people" who are hoping to get on in this world, 'this world' is very much the contemporary world of Ghana: the world of cars, electric fans, refrigerators, of EP's Secretarial School, the institute for prospective Brides, casual tradesmen and socializing Christianity.

Etherton (1982: 218) with satire, questions Ananse's aspirations as he observes that "where is the money to come from so that he can lift himself out of the mire of poverty and acquire the consumer durables and social perquisites which are the mark of a successful Ghanaian?" (218)

We infer, from the excerpt above that success is defined by affluence and wealth acquisition. The quest to access basic amenities and modern gadgets usually inform individuals to strive for more wealth. Ananse represents every man, a prototype employed by the playwright to reflect the characteristics of man and his ambition. The aftermath is that Ananse is up the ladder of affluence. He is able to make donations in church and also renovate his house.

There is a religious dimension which also indicates the filth that has crept into religious institutions. Religious institutions thought to be upholding truth and good values, have assumed the status of a point for social gatherings where donations are accepted even when the source of those monies are questionable. It is observed that from the time of Sutherland's writing till this present time, not much has changed as regards the filth that has crept into religious institutions.

Ananse's speech in the excerpt below reveals materialism and affluence as the centre in religious institutions:

'Will I be able to go to memorial services this week in a fine cloth, next week in a suit or a different cloth? Will I be able, if I go, to thrust my hand confidently into my pocket in public and take out a five-guinea donation?'
(12)

As captured in the song below, Ananse eventually succeeds in his scheme, his intention of going to church and to be associated with the 'best of the spenders' is actualized.

I'm heading for town on a buying spree
I'll be seen with the best of the spenders
And when I return expect me to bring
The latest cloth in town,
The latest suit in town
Yes, tomorrow, I go to church
To deposit with the best of the spenders...
Those born on Wednesday-
You'll see Kweku depositing
Alongside the best of the spenders...
Tomorrow I go to church,
Tomorrow I go to church,
Tomorrow I go to church. (34)

While it is obvious that Ananse's money is gotten out of greed and deceit, he intends to spend the money on religious activities. Furthermore, communality restricts and limits strife, greediness, jealousy, stealing, craftiness and other vices therefore, ensuring collective efforts for societal development. Therefore, the song below extols communal living and abhors individuality.

Is love's power so strong?
Is love's power so strong?
So strong
Is love's power so strong?
Let's relate in love
That we may thrive
True love is rare.....
True giver is rare.....
True helper is rare.....
Let's relate in love
That we may thrive
Thank you, chief so rare
Let's relate in love
That we may thrive. (92)

Keeping alive the components of the African culture is vital in the sustenance of Africa's rich values and the development of the individual and society. These values are entrenched in oral forms with emphasis on songs.

Conclusion

In this paper, we maintain that even in a fast globalizing world, the role of oral literature in development is still thriving. This paper establishes that oral literature is not an ageing concept even in the face of a globalized world. Its rich aesthetics are relevant as they are entertaining and educative used to sustain moral and social values which are at the risk and danger of extinction. Through some songs, selected from Sutherland's *the Marriage of Anansewa* this paper maintains that orality can be used as a tool through which certain values that form the bedrock of the society are instilled. These values are capable of propelling sanity in societies, setting high standards thereby causing retrogression in acts that violate moral, ethical and societal standards, curbing the effects of such. They teach individuals the need to adhere to societal standards.

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