

Journal home page: <http://www.journalijiar.com>

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL
OF INNOVATIVE AND
APPLIED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ARTICLE

THE PALM OIL WITH WHICH EGHAGHA'S WORDS IN DEATH, NOT A REDEEMER IS EATEN

OGBEIDE O. VICTOR

Department of english and literary studies, Ekiti state university, Ado-Ekiti, Ekiti state, Nigeria.

Abstract:

As a distinct genre which expresses general truths the proverb is not only a common phenomenon in Africa but actually owes its existence to a repertory preserved by a community of speakers. African languages are characterized by a generous use of proverbs in everyday communication. Modern African writers have evolved a consciousness to recreate and revalidate the poetic and aesthetic flavours in the original mother tongue. This paper explores proverbs as a dramatic device in Eghagha's *Death, Not a Redeemer* (1998). The introductory part focuses on the proverb as a distinct genre, its characteristics, rendering and its functions. This is followed by a contextual explication of some proverbs in the play, their significance in defining characters and as a technical device to convey meaning and folk wisdom among the Urhobo people of the Niger Delta. In conclusion, the paper contends that Eghagha's use of proverbs is not only his own contribution to cultural revival in Nigeria but also as a deliberate attempt to stem the tide of the fast disappearing use of proverbs in the everyday communication of the Nigerian people due to rapid urbanization and influence of Western culture which daily detract from the use of the mother tongue.

Key words: Death, proverbs, duty, culture, tradition.

Introduction

The folks of eastern Nigeria call them the palm oil with which words are eaten. The denizens of the south west regard them as the horses of speech that are often saddled with the onerous task of locating missing words especially when truth becomes elusive. Herskovits the folklorist even called their corpus Africa's "grammar of values" (1958:56) In deed, proverbs which are pithy and terse sayings are not only a common phenomenon but generally appreciated all over Africa. As a distinct genre which expresses general truths, the proverb owes its existence to a repertory preserved by a community of speakers.

The proverb, says Ruth Finnegan (1975:389), is a "saying in more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of truth tersely in it" According to Mieder (1996:557) proverbs "contain wisdom, truths, morals and traditional views in a metaphorical, fixed and memorable form that are handed down orally from generation to generation" Although the characteristic traits of proverbs may vary from society to society there exists a certain degree of similarity as a result of shared properties which confer some kind of homogeneity especially in Africa. Peek and Yankah (2009:374) could not have been less right when they aver that "there are similar properties of content, which is understandable, given the task of the proverbs to express general truths that are the fruits of experience of the society as a whole".

Proverbs are used for rich and deep expression of nuggets of folk wisdom involved with terseness and charm. "This terseness" says Okpewho (2004:226).

Implies certain economy in the choice of words and a sharpness of focus, while the charm conveys the touch of literary or poetic beauty in the expression.

The wisdom in proverbs, however, is only accessible to those who can decipher their code-like nature for, as the Igbo of eastern Nigeria say, when proverbs are told and explained to the naïve listener it makes mockery of his mother's bride price. This is hardly surprising for by their nature proverbs are idioms whose meaning go beyond literal interpretation.

Proverbs give local flavour to writings by situating them within the indigenous societies where western education is insignificant. Proverbs are often associated with highly refined minds whose exceptional oratory in

public discussion is hardly debatable. Proverbs help to economize words as so much can be said in just one proverb; they help to convey delicate and exceptional messages in a rather instructive and innocuous manner. In deed, as the Yoruba people say, proverbs are the roots of words, when words tangle proverbs come to the rescue. The war drum among the Yoruba is said to be cryptically beaten like a proverb to which only the wise can dance and the informed can decode it.

In Africa, proverbs are commonly recognized by their formulaic turn of phrase which is characterized by notable expressions like “according to our elders” and “our elders say”. The association of adages with the elders instantly confers on them a stamp of venerableness and the sign of antiquity which Whiting (1972:302) says makes them difficult “to be counterfeited by a clever literary man” Proverbs are found all over the world. In spite of this ubiquity however, even in the same continent different groups of people may have their own approach to proverbs especially in their own philosophy and world views. For example

Yoruba: Whom the gods will kill they first make mad.

Igbo: When death beckons, the dog would hardly
perceive wastes

Urhobo: The dog that will get lost will not hear the call of the hunter’s whistle.

Their different ways of rendering the above proverbs notwithstanding, the three Nigerian ethnic groups actually refer to the stupidly stubborn individual who refuses to accept any useful advice to his detriment or ruin. Proverbs are not just attempt at word play. They are functional in the realm of oratory, counselling, judging, embellishing speeches and enriching conversation. Among the Nyanga people of Malawi and Zambia, counselors and judges use proverbs meant to be understood by elders during oracle consultations. The Fante of Ghana use proverbs as instruments of child rearing, entertainment and value orientation. Proverbs help people generally to adjust to the vagaries and vicissitudes of life. In deed, in the Malinowskian socio-functional view of oral art forms proverbs like riddles and idioms go beyond sheer entertainment. They have a vital role to play in the social organization of people. “The proverb of each Nigerian community” say Akporobaro and Emovon, “is an expression of the social outlook of the people” (1994:15).

Some African languages like Igbo, Yoruba and Esan are characterized by a generous use of proverbs in everyday conversations as there is actually a proverb to meet every situation. Proverbs in speeches appeal to listeners’ imagination by the poetic effect of their expression. They lend authority and weight to arguments because they are generally recognized as eternal truth.

One is not, of course, oblivious of the complexity which the use of a foreign language like English tends to present in creativity. However, the mother tongue enriches the English language and enables the African writer to communicate local messages in a foreign language without necessarily doing away with the aesthetics of local oratory. This paper, therefore, explores proverbs as a dramatic device in Eghagha’s *Death, Not a Redeemer* (1998).

Theoretical Framework

As stated earlier, proverbs in Africa are highly functional. Like other oral literary forms they go beyond the realm of the aesthetic to the functional as they help inculcate morals and life’s lesson. This is why this paper’s theoretical framework is located within the socio-functional theory of oral art forms as articulated by Bronislaw Malinowski. Oral literary forms, he theorizes have significant role to play in the social organisation of the community. “The whole nature of the performance, the voice and the mimicry, the stimulus and the response of the audience”, he says “mean as much to the natives as the text” (1926:18) It is in this direction that William Bascom highlights the functions of oral forms like the proverb into four viz: mirroring the culture, serving as a means of psychological and emotional release, helping in education and socialization of the people as well as helping to maintain and validate the community’s beliefs and accepted patterns of life. Perhaps as a corollary to this, Ohwovoriole has affirmed that “Urhobo proverbs perform essential functions that emanate from structurally thematic reflections of the world view of the people” (2008:194).

DEATH, NOT A REDEEMER IN PERSPECTIVE

In *Death, Not A Redeemer*, His Royal Highness Oba Abednego Adamuda Okoromole the first of Ijigbo Land is dead. By tradition, Chief Karia the king’s horseman is expected to die in order to accompany the late king to the great beyond. But rather than carry out this sacred duty as tradition demands, Chief Karia reneges and converts to the christian faith. Afraid of the consequences of Chief Karia’s remorseless repudiation of tradition, the elders invite Chief Karia to a meeting where they try to make him change his mind to no avail. Chief Karia finds a willing and trusted friend in his son, Sankaria, who returns from Europe and sues the community elders to forestall their

attempt to force his father to commit suicide. The case turns out in favour of the horseman and his son. One year later, however, Chief Karia submits to the icy hand of death. But who or what is responsible for the death of the horseman? The Christians believe it is the will of God while the community elders believe the ancestors are responsible as a lesson on how not to defy an age old tradition. Eghagha's himself does not give us any clues. The play ends on a high note of a modernist riddle of artistic open-endedness.

As stated in the prefatory note by Eghagha himself, this play is a kind of reply to Soyinka's historical play – *Death and the King's Horseman* (2002) where the Elesin reneges on his life-long contract with sacrificial death. Unlike Elesin's son (Olunde) who repudiates his father's refusal to die because of his hedonistic ways and instead dies in his place, Karia's son returns from abroad to support his father's stand not to waste his life because of a barbaric tradition. Welcome to a deliberate dramatic stoking of the burlesque fire begun by the Augustan prose stylist Henry Fielding. Like Fielding who found Richardson's *Pamela or Virtue Rewarded* "so sanctimonious that he began a second burlesque of it, *Joseph Adams*" (Michael Alexander 2007:201), Eghagha too, had wondered how death can redeem a society from perdition as presented in Soyinka's play. Hear him in his prefatory note:

How can death, that evil of all evils serve as a transition vehicle, as a tool for societal cohesion? Need we burn our prophets on altars of anarchy or tradition in order to gain wisdom? What informs the decision of a youngman to commit suicide in place of his father? If youth itself reaffirms the beauty of life – the glory of the young man is his strength, the glory of the old is his grey hair-would it not be more dynamic to situate progress in the life force as opposed to "Death"? (vi)

It is pointless to say that Eghagha's questioning mind later found an outlet in *Death, Not a Redeemer* which, without undue exaggeration, is a veritable reaffirmation of the age old truism that the best criticism of a work of art is another work of art.

CONTEXTUAL EXPLICATION OF SOME PROVERBS IN DEATH, NOT A REDEEMER

Like Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman* which is greatly imbued with insightful proverbs and sundry idioms the profundity of Eghagha's proverbs in this play cannot be underestimated. In analyzing these proverbs, however, their context must be stressed. Therefore, following Malinowski (1926) and Nwachukwu-Agbada (2000), this study of proverbs in *Death, Not a Redeemer* is context based. Ethnic rather than national context is the focus here.

With the above in mind it becomes appropriate to examine some proverbs in *Death, Not a Redeemer*, their context and significance.

Philosophical Proverbs

When a man is overwhelmed by great trouble, small ones will run him over (Act one, Scene one, 2)

This proverb is made by the crying Avbero as she enters her husband's house. Ordinarily, one expects anyone who has been able to survive the big and life-threatening trials and tribulations of life to be able to regard minor ones as experiences of no consequence. But life is not always so as the so-called small trouble may be very difficult to handle for, as the East Africans say "the thing that upsets the porridge pot is a small piece of vsekera grass" (Ajayi, 2010:32). The "great trouble" in this context is the passing away of the king of Ijigboland, Avbero's father. By implication the "small trouble" is the impending death of the King's horseman which by tradition the villagers have come to take for granted as a necessary follow-up to the demise of the king. But there is a snag here: the horseman is no other person than Karia the husband of Avbero whose father, the king, has just died; so when Avbero rhetorically asks which of the troubles is small for her now, one can understand the unenviable dilemma of a woman who has just lost a father and about to lose her husband to the same merciless death.

But if she has no choice but to obey the tradition that says that her husband must die it seems that her supposedly acorn of trouble looks set to become an oak of palaver for her. Her husband has decided to remain alive rather than die as the practice demands. Hear him without any iota of doubt "I am alive and I intend to remain alive"(2)

The blindman who pretends that he is asleep when in fact he is awake, deceives himself. (Act one, Scene one, 3).

This proverb is made by Avbero in the face of her husband's refusal to commit suicide to accompany the dead king as tradition demands. To Avbero, Karia, like the blindman, is only pretending not to know what tradition demands of him as the horseman of the late king. The oath in his family requires that Karia accompanies the dead king so why pretend not to know? Avbero asks her husband. It is obvious that Avbero is yet to come to terms with the tenets of his husband's new faith. But Karia is neither pretending like the proverbial blindman nor sleeping, for his resolve to strictly obey the tenets of his new christian faith has gone beyond the oppressive ropes of tradition. His horsemanship, he says, is now of the new generation with new ethics and principles.

Proverbs of Greed and Rash Behaviour

The next dialogue between Karia and his wife Avbero no doubt demonstrates how deeply set the former is in his new faith as well as the latter is in her greed and rash behaviour.

Karia: Our ancestors, if they exist, will understand
 Avbero: If they exist ... I can see how far the fly has gone in his friendship with the corpse. If they exist ... the dog has gone to its vomit. My eyes have seen my ears.
 Karia: That is your problem. This neck of mine must continue to bear my head's burden until God says I should sleep the final sleep.
 Avbero: The fly cannot be separated from excrement
 Karia: Mind your language
 Avbero: You have no right to get angry. The people shall tear you to pieces with their curses; prepare yourself. I intend to mourn a second time.
 Nothing can stop it.
 No incantation can alter
 The course of a river
 You have eaten the lizard
 It can no longer be
 Forbidden meat (Act one, Scene one, 9-10).

All the idiomatic expressions in this extract are attributed to the hypocritically traditional Avbero. The fly's unflinching friendship with the corpse is Avbero's metaphor for her husband's disgraceful refusal to compromise his new faith for the sake of the community. To Avbero, her husband's stubbornness to carry out his sacred duty is not only unbelievably strange in the history of the king's horsemanship but even more unabashedly disgraceful in the annals of Ijigboland. This is certainly an impossible stranger than fiction. This is the reason Avbero says that her eyes have seen her ears which is literally well nigh impossible.

Karia's new found faith notwithstanding, Avbero is convinced that her husband's destiny as the king's horseman can never be changed. This is because, like a river whose course can never be changed no matter how hard the traditional medicine man tries, the oath binding Karia as a horseman can never be wished away. In fact, the lizard becomes the oath which Karia has eaten through his progenitors and can therefore not call it forbidden meat. In Avbero's understanding there is no way her husband can now shirk his responsibility as horseman of the late king because it has become a family inheritance he can hardly run away from.

Avbero is relentless in her objective to make sure her husband does not renege in his duty as a horseman. If her feminine wiles and tongue lashing of her husband to take the fatal plunge have so far met a brick wall of resistance then she must change her tactics. Perhaps her theory about sacrifice may persuade Karia to obey tradition after all. If she, a princess can descend so low as to marry a horseman like Karia which is a lot of sacrifice on her part, logic and the principle of reciprocity demand that he, Karia should imbibe the spirit of sacrifice too by sacrificing himself for the ultimate good of the community of Ijigboland. But Chief Karia can see through Avbero's diabolical logic:

Karia: A big bribe indeed! But I can't be hoodwinked. Your children are the least likely to become horsemen.
 Avbero: The thief must first proclaim the owner thief in order to escape being beaten.
 Karia: One should not argue at the side of a stream whether soap lathers or not.
 Avbero: A man with black blood in the stomach cannot spit out white saliva.

Karia: A false friend deceives one into fighting a tiger and puts broken sword in one's hand (Act one, Scene one, 11).

Chief Karia himself is not a novice in the act of turning logic on its head. According to him if indeed she Avbero only came to marry him out of sacrifice rather than out of love then her marriage to him was nothing but a "big bribe". But Avbero is in deed a princess. Therefore, it will amount to time wasting to continue to split hairs over such a matter. The man with the black blood who must spit out black blood rather than white saliva in this context is Chief Karia. This is because since he is bound by the oath taken by his progenitors which he inherited he is not expected to perform otherwise but according to the dictates of the oath which requires complete obedience. Since Avbero does not even seem to be giving emotional support to her husband in his hour of trial as demanded of a genuine wife, she is, therefore, the equivalent of a false friend who deceives his friend into fighting a dangerous animal like the tiger with a broken sword. Only a fool does not know the dangerous consequences of such an evil act. And with a wife like Avbero who, with a hidden agenda is too ready to do her husband in so she can forever be with her lover Jolomi, Chief Karia certainly does not need an enemy. But truth, as the Chinese say, is the daughter of time. She cannot continue to pretend forever. After all, she herself has said earlier in her deliberate feminine mischief that when the wind blows the anus of the hen becomes public property. The Urhobo of the Niger Delta certainly hit the bull's eye: *Esegbu yota* (meaning, you cannot kill the truth, for truth is immortal)

Proverbs of Patience and Perseverance

No matter how long agaracha wonders, Agaracha must return
A ship sailing from Kwatung port in China will eventually reach Burutu in
Nigeria. It is only a question of time (Act one, Scene two, 15).

Jolomi, Avbero's lover is in an upbeat mood here. For, having waited for ten years for Avbero, the death of the king has brought the green light at the end of the tunnel. His amorous calculation looks perfect in every way for the king's death automatically means the death of his horseman, Chief Karia, whom he sees as a mere usurper. Therefore, Chief Karia off the way means that Avbero can now be his forever. So, one is little surprised that he goes riddling and proverbial in his flight of fancy.

Agaracha in common parlance is the traveller or wanderer who must come home at last. In this context, however, Avbero is the "agaracha". In Jolomi's estimation, Avbero's marriage to Karia, is her wandering. But since every folk knows that agaracha's return is not negotiable, the king's death and the horseman's impending death constitute an opportunity for her eventual return to Jolomi; her supposed real home. But just in case Avbero does not get his passionate drift he goes lyrical on the virtues of time and patience. If the slowest of ship will eventually get to its destination with time he, Jolomi and Avbero will eventually get married with time. In fact, that time is at hand since Chief Karia will soon join his master the late king in the other world in his estimation. How devilishly optimistic can a man be!

But as Jolomi soon learns, there are complications even in immoral love. It is now Avbero's turn to needle Jolomi with her barrage of riddles.

Avbero: The squirrel confesses that the nut which he has been given cannot be cracked

Jolomi: Try another route

Avbero: The horse refuses to leave the stable, even after the rider has reached his destination (Act One, Scene Two, 16)

The "squirrel" here is Avbero herself while the "nut" is Chief Karia. She is not able to crack the nut in the sense that she has failed so far to convince Chief Karia to carry out the much awaited ritual suicide. Chief Karia is the stubborn horse who has refused to leave the stable (earth/life) even after the rider (the late king) has reached the great beyond.

It is obvious now to Jolomi the adulterous lover that his battle to own Avbero at all cost has not yet been won. If he still has any illusion on this matter then Avbero has no choice but to bring him to the world of reality by her next thought provoking proverbs:

A man who wants a piece of diamond hidden inside a rock must do some hard
work, real hard work.
He who wants to eat honey inside a rock will not mind the effect of the hard rock
on his axe (Act one, scene Two, 17).

The essence of Avbero's proverbs is unmistakable: if he Jolomi truly wants to covet Avbero he must be ready to work hard to make her his. It is only true self exertion and perseverance that can bring about the most desired thing in life.

Proverbs of Caution and Discretion

In Africa, proverbs and sundry idioms are almost the exclusive preserve of elders whose grey hair is presumed synonymous with wisdom that comes with old age. At the conclave of elders to discuss the horseman's refusal to carry out his sacred duty and the way forward, one is hardly surprised at their turns of proverbs whose appropriateness no doubt, helps to emphasize the seriousness of Chief Karia's action. By their not taking necessary action to checkmate Chief Karia when he joined Pastor Nehemiah's Church the elders unwittingly "encouraged" him to "grow long teeth" (21), an abnormally strange thing in the history of Ijigboland. Now the worse has happened as there are "no lips to cover Chief Karia's overgrown teeth"; a metaphor for the elders' helplessness in the face of Chief Karia's outright destruction of the tradition of which he is the custodian.

Amidst accusations and counter accusations among the elders Otota says that they should "just chase away the fox and decide on what to do with the chicken". This means that the elders should first come together as a matter of urgency to profer a solution to Chief Karia's challenge after which they can then settle down to settle their own differences. Whatever the case, all the elders agree without any equivocation that Chief Karia's case is a very sensitive matter for which they must tread carefully. This is the implication of Otota's saying that "a bee has perched on our scrotum" (23) The fourth chief is even more emphatic on this matter. Since whatever they choose to do will definitely attract attention from the public like the rump of the chicken that must be exposed no matter which way the wind blows, caution is the word. While the people must not be given the impression that they the elders refrain from tackling the Karia challenge out of cowardice it should equally not be said that they decided to handle the matter in a rash manner. Whatever they choose to do must be done with discretion for "an elder does not speak with all his mouth" (23). Chief Otota again cannot but reemphasize the need for caution:

The matter which we discussed has developed legs and pregnancy at the same time. We must nurse the matter properly so that it does not give birth to a monster.(26)

This means that as unusual as Chief Karia's case is it should be handled with care in order not lead to more baffling unusualness. This situation itself is an irony for, a matter that has already developed "legs and pregnancy" at the same hand is nothing but a monstrous situation. To plead, therefore, that the matter be carefully handled to avoid a monstrous situations is irrelevant. Perhaps it is just the elders' way of saying that as bad as things are they should not be made even worse.

Proverbs of Indecision

The late king himself truly lived up to his billings as an old man whose mouth "wisdom flowed like the gushing stream of Obako" (Act one, scene four, 32). On the need for the horseman to make up his mind whether to keep to the demands of tradition or obey the tenets of his new faith he tells him:

A dog cannot
guard two houses
at the same time (Act one scene four, 33)

This proverb is a clarion call for the horseman to make up his mind and stick to it. But the wise, dynamic and visionary old king has not yet finished with the confused horseman:

When the storm rages
and the tree of your life
bends to the north
do bend with it (Act one scene four, 33)

As observed earlier, old men do not "speak with their whole mouth". They speak in riddles, proverbs and idioms to stimulate thinking in their hearers. On his request for the "antidote to termites" which his dying father said should not be allowed to eat him up, the old man had simply told him that it was in his blood and that at the right time he would have the strength to bear it. Over the years the storms of life have raged and he Chief Karia has had some time to do some thinking on the matter of horsemanship and tradition. His revolutionary conclusion is that it is

unfair for the horseman to terminate his life as soon as the Oba concludes his enjoyment on earth. The scriptures, therefore, only enriched his doubts with salvation in the bargain. The new generation has come to regard sacrificial death of the horseman as nothing but a piece of anachronism. He has learnt to bend or go with the new dispensation as wisely advised by the late king himself who must have had a few lessons on cultural dynamism. This is why the horseman says that “If he (late Oba) could speak from the dead today, he would tell his fanatic chiefs: let Chief Karia alone” (33).

Proverbs of Courage Against Intimidation

At the conclave of elders where Chief Karia is invited to defend himself we are once again treated to the proverbial ways of the old men in Ijigboland. Unconvinced by Chief Karia’s explanation and visibly angry Otota bellows:

Enough! Enough of this rigmarole, Karia! The redness of a cock’s eyes does not scare a native doctor A woman who has given birth to twins is not frightened by the size of any man (Act Two, Scene Four, 55).

The main point of emphases here is intimidation. Just as the native doctor and a mother of twins are never intimidated by the cock’s red eyes and the size of any man respectively they the elders are not intimidated by Chief Karia and his talk of crazy born againism and changing times. He should simply go and prepare himself for the journey to the great beyond. But Otota is even more livid with rage as soon as Chief Karia hands him the letter from his lawyer urging the Chief to hands off his client. His frustration is summed up in his rhetoric of an adage:

If the string of a loin cloth breaks when a man has tasted only a sip of palmwine, what will happen when he actually takes a keg? (Act Two, Scene Two, 55)

This implies that Chief Karia has gone too far in his confrontation with the community elders in his bid to prevent them from forcing him to commit suicide. They must, therefore, act fast in invoking the ancestral powers on the stubborn horseman. This, in their reasoning, is necessary and urgent for if Chief Karia had more powers he would not bat an eye lid in consigning them, the chiefs and the community traditions to the dustbin of history.

Proverbs of Commonsense

When a masquerader is disrobed and his nakedness becomes communal embarrassment, then it is time for the handlers to drag the masquerade from the arena (Act Two, Scene Five, 73).

A disrobed masquerade is an abomination rather than an entertainment and when such a cultural misadventure occurs, elders instantly spring into action. Avbero applies this proverb to herself to justify her next action which is to abandon Chief Karia her husband. To her, her husband has committed an abomination by refusing to commit suicide and even suing the community which is a taboo in Ijigboland. This has never happened in the annals of the community. Avbero calls it the equivalent of “the eye striving to see inside of the ear” (75) Since this is abominably strange, Avbero decides to “do something” by abandoning her marriage. Her selfishness has blinded her to the signs of the times.

In explicating these proverbs in the play one is certainly not oblivious of the problems of loss of absolute meaning, evolution of multiple meaning and shift in the intended meaning which often attend translation or transliteration. However, as stated by Catfort (1965) correct translation is possible if the translator is able to find an “equivalent textual material in the target tongue” to replace the one from the source language. This paper is convinced that within the context of explication here, Eghagha has met the above criteria. Whatever the case, however the problems associated with translation should not blind us to the need for translation. Neither, in the persuasion of Tradiakovski, should the fear for loss of meaning make us to question the legitimacy of translating.

ANALYSIS AND SIGNIFICANCE OF PROVERBS IN THE PLAY

Eghagha’s play is studded with Urhobo proverbs. Most of these proverbs are philosophical in that they express general truths. They portray self evident truths that are discernable and observable. However, my extensive reference to the meaning of these proverbs is in context in which they are used in the play. Many of these proverbs are rendered by the elders. Apart from their ignorance of proverbs, and their penchant for action, the youth’s

philosophy seems to be summed up in Sankaria's thesis that "the world would be a better place if we all spoke straight" (41).

As observed in this study, proverbs are not only used to disseminate traditional wisdom; they can also be deliberately misused to express certain views and beliefs or even to reinforce prejudices or stereotypes. All Avbero's proverbs are of this hue. All her proverbs define her as greedy and rash. The elders' proverbs on the other hand portray them as incurably traditional and conservative of the old order where taboos, human sacrifices and rituals preside.

The new generation exemplified by born againism and changing times has little or no time for the slow but deep folk wisdom inherent in proverbs. In fact, members of this generation, a huge percentage of the educated youth of elite background can hardly speak their indigenous languages effectively having been brought up in the cities. According to Iwuh (2011:73).

The loss of the rich, spoken texts of these languages also means the loss of the fundamental resource of discrete proverbs inherent in them.

Despite the above situation however, no one can underestimate the overall significance of proverbs in this play. Eghagha's proverbs serve as keys to our understanding of his play. This is because he uses them not only to add touches of local colour but also to sound and reiterate themes, to sharpen characterization, to clarify the conflict in the play and to focus on the fast fading values of the traditional society of the Urhobo people. Through these proverbs Eghagha is able to present "a thoroughly African world in thoroughly African terms" (Lindfors, 2000:92).

Conclusion

This paper does not pretend to have carried out an exhaustive explication of all the proverbs in Eghagha's *Death, Not a Redeemer*. What has been done is to reveal Eghagha's mastery of appropriate idiom, riddles and proverbs to convey his ideas in an appropriate situation. Broadly speaking however, this paper sees Eghagha's use of proverbs not only as his own contribution to cultural revival in Nigeria but also as a deliberate attempt to stem the tide of the fast disappearing use of proverbs in the everyday communication of the Nigerian people due to rapid urbanization and the influence of Western culture which daily detract from the use of the mother tongue.

REFERENCES

- Ajayi, O. "Proverb Use in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods are Not to Blame*". Being a Master's Thesis submitted to Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Ado-Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti. (2010).
- Akporobaro, F.B.O. and Emovon, J.A. *Nigerian Proverbs: Meaning and Relevance*. Lagos: Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture (1994).
- Alexander, M. *A History of English Literature* (Second Edition) New York: Palgrave Macmillan (2007).
- Eghagha, H. *Death, Not a Redeemer*. Lagos: Xcel Publishers (1998).
- Finnegan, R. *Oral Literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press (1970).
- Herskovits, M.J. quoted in Lindfors, Bernth *Folklore in Nigerian Literature*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications Nig. Ltd (2002).
- Iwuh J. "Contextual Explication of Idioms: Igbo Proverbs in African Drama" *Oye Ogun Journal of Arts*. Vol. XVII June 2011. (pp. 74-91) (2011).
- Kolawole S.O. "Fidelity in Translation: Reality or an Illusion?". *Obitun* Vol. 3 No. 1 (pp. 16-30) (2000).
- Lindfors, B. *Folklore in Nigerian Literature*. Ibadan: Caltop Publications Nigeria Ltd (2002).
- Malinowski, B. *Myth in Primitive Psychology* New York: w.w. Norton co (1926).

Mieder, W. *Proverbs*. Jan Arnold Brunvand (Ed) *American Folklore: An Encyclopedia*. New York: Garland Publishing (1996).

Nwachukwu – Agbada, J. “The Igbo Proverb: Communication and Creativity in Traditional Art” Being an unpublished Ph.D. Dissertation submitted to Department of English, University of Ibadan, Ibadan (1990).

_____ *The Igbo Proverbs: A Study of Its context, Performance and Function*. Enugu: John Jacob (2002).

Ohwovoriola, F “Animal Imagery in Selected Urhobo Proverbs and their Educative Functions” *Ihafa: A Journal of African Studies* Vol. 5, No 3 (pp. 189-205) (2008).

Peek M. and Yankah, K. (Eds) *African Folklore. An Encyclopedia* London: Routledge (2009).

Soyinka, W. *Death and the King's Horseman* Ibadan: Spectrum (2002).

Whiting, B. “The Nature of Proverbs” *Harvard Studies and Notes in Philology and Literature* 14, 301-302 (1972).