

Indigenous Talking Tattoos in Scripted Drama: Zulu Sofola's Old Wines are Tasty and Tess Onwueme's A Hen too Soon as examples.

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Abstract

Indigenous African languages serve as modes of codification of its variegated cultural traditions, and are deeply enmeshed in its oral traditions and epistemic systems. Within the framework of cultural studies approach, this study examines how proverb, a salient tool in the culture of the people is deployed and arrayed to give and aid meaning, aestheticism and the realization of creative ingenuity and thematic thrust in scripted dramas of Zulu Sofola and Tess Onwueme respectively. The paper interrogates the utility of proverbs not just as an oral tool for beautification (indigenous tattoo) but also as a speech enhancer, as well as a compendium of the African identities markers with distinctiveness (talking tattoo). In situating, interpreting and buttressing the glowing cultural artifact as expressed in dramatic works, an exploration and analysis of two samples of scripted drama within the framework of cultural studies was done. This was done with a view to establishing the degree of relevance, importance and appropriateness of talking tattoo in depicting African cultural values, nuances and orientations in the shaping of its ideological heritages. The study concludes that the interpretation and understanding of the indigenous talking tattoos becomes the cutting expression of remarks in saving the indigenous languages and culture from going into extinction. The oral tool remains the lubricant to indigenous language and traditions in the face of corrosive post-modernity.

Keywords: culture, language aesthetics, scripted drama and indigenous talking tattoos.

Introduction: Cultural Identity and Development Culture is the basis of identity and ultimately of development. Development, as it is, is variously defined, tries to incorporate, manipulate, and draw from cultural Identity. Cultural Identity, in its formation, involves the multiple issues of history, Environment, values, social stratification, knowledge, power, and wealth, which are also the domain of development. Toyin Falola

In the words of Toyin Falola, African culture, “is akin to development, which is modernization minus dependency, as African culture is central to the process of reducing dependency in the dialectic of modernization” (49). In line with the postulations above, it suffices to intone that “cultural identity

and development are intertwined and both serve as a complete interpretant of each other” (Mabawonku 55). It is this symbiotic relationship between cultural identity and development that births the position of the Negritude writers who opine that the depiction of Africa, her cultural content and literature should be in the dialectic of African languages as doing so would not only optimally reduce the dependency on modernization but would equally showcase and celebrate Africanness, her cultural identity and development. To a very large extent, the above position propels Falola as he opines further that, “the rapid development of cultural identity in works of African writers as they use their language with so much dexterity in the colouration and development of their thematic engagements” (49). Their language especially adds to their creative aesthetics and cultural development by the way it is used as seen in its proverbial deployment in the works of Zulu Sofola and Tess Onwueme, the two selected female playwrights for this study.

Aside the quest by the Negritude writers, “cultural identification has always had a magnetic pull on even the urbane middle-to-top classes in Africa” (49) and these playwrights do not miss any opportunity to appropriate it for absolute effect in their works as they stoically align with the position that “national identity is the bedrock of continental identity” (60).

Proverb usage as dialectics of Cultural Identity and Development

In all of African cultures, proverb abounds and its usage is the fulcrum of the continental identity from which the African man is studied as a phenomenal being. The preponderance of proverbs in many African cultures and their usage dictates and shapes the cultural identity of the African man as it attracts attention to the oral art distinctiveness in language usage, brevity and aptness. As dialectic of cultural lore, a young person is not expected to make use of proverbs in the presence or gathering of elders but in situation where proverb is used by the former in the gathering of elders, the younger one is expected to acknowledge the elders by paying obeisance to them for doing so. Consequently, it is not out of place to hear phrases and statements like *tótó se biòwe o èyinàgbà* (meaning: credence to the elders' adage); *ẹnuàgbàniobìtíngbó* (meaning: kolanut ripens in the mouth of the elders) and 'a child that sits with an old man, if he does not chew pepper, he chews kolanut'. This therefore makes proverb usage to be the exclusive preserve of the adults.

In literary discourse, the oral art has been copiously used by writers not just to mirror the cultural values of the people but more importantly, to showcase and achieve aesthetic effect in their works. To this end, this research effort examines the aesthetic values of proverbs in the explication of the thematic, theoretical and socio-cultural relevance of the oral art in contemporary society as viewed from the lens of two contemporary playwrights, Zulu Sofola and Tess Onwueme. The two playwrights explore the rich traditional motifs, symbols and rhetorical nuances predominant in their cultural milieu in articulating their topical, socio-political viewpoints and experiences as they relate in the contemporary society. Consequently, the duo have been chosen for this paper mainly because of their importance in the Nigerian literary dramatic sphere, their attitude to the African culture and ideology as well as their dexterity with African language usage in their works.

Wolfgang Mieder, a renowned paremiologist, says:

Proverbs are the wisdom of ages gone by, though they are meaningful and relevant in the modern era, they are based on observations and generalisations about basic human behavior and the trials and trepidation of human life. They are never fixed in context and content. (143)

What this means in essence is that proverbs are limitless and timeless in projecting and interpreting the traditional values and the cultural heritage of the people as well as situating this within the ambience of the contemporary issues in order to bring its essence to bear on the current realities in the society.

Gbemi Adeoti posits that proverbs are indexes of a people's language, history, literature and culture as they are associated with 'elders' who are deemed to be wise with age and not expected to speak in "plain' terms" (83). Adeoti's position correlates with Falola in strengthening the quest for cultural identity and development which the latter advocates in his dialectics. There is therefore "no aspect of life that escapes the sharp eye of the proverbial, whether private or public" (83). In an attempt to project the socio-cultural realities of life through drama in contemporary society, proverb usage forms a significant part of verbal collage in scripted African drama from the stable of playwrights of African descents. Adeoti says this is so because proverbs serve as "expressions of social realities, cultural practices as well as definer of identities within the social milieu wherein 'man' has found himself" (83).

Following from the above, this paper is anchored on the premise of the new wine in the vestibule of the old wine with a view of finding expression for its present reality as it re-echoes the oral nature of the art which Wale Adegbite says "serves as a linguistic window through which attitudes and beliefs of the society can be viewed" (51). This prism shapes the dialectics of linguistic uniqueness and cultural identity that permeates African literary writings.

Proverb: Definition and a Strategic Literary Discourse

Olowonihi in his 'A Literary study of Owe Proverbs,' asserts that the word proverb is derivative of the Latin word 'Proverbium' (Pro- which means publicly and verbium- which means a word) (15). This proverbium "embodies a saying where in place of the plain word proverb, a figurative expression is used. From this, one can say that proverb is an embodiment of wisdom" (Agu et al. 1). Appiah-Adjei sees proverbs as:

short pithy statements or pieces of traditional wisdom, philosophy, or advice which have passed into general use from generation to generation. They are often expressed in metaphor, rhyme or alliteration, and refer to some common human experience. They are often satirical or mocking intention... (21)

Yisa Yusuf sees it not differently as he intones that "proverb may be regarded as a short, repeated, witty statement of experience which is used to further a social end" (45). According to him, "proverbs originate from individuals, in reaction to specific situation, and are internalized by society only after a period of use" (45). His position is tandem with Adegbite which was earlier quoted. To Dumebi Osani however,

Proverbs cannot be defined satisfactorily as it shares certain elements in common with other forms such as idioms, maxims, aphorisms, epigrams and apophthegms and it differs from these in subtle ways. A proverb can be described as a short witty saying which expresses a general truth. It is usually figurative and assumes specific meanings that are determined by the contexts in which it is used. (96)

From the definitions above, it is sacrosanct to it all that proverb is a communal property and is closely linked to the language of the people. The two concepts have a symbiotic relationship as posited by Mabawonku that "both relies on each other and is an interpretant of one another" (55). What this

means is that the beauty of the language comes to the fore through the proverb usage while the proverb used showcases the dynamics and aesthetics inherent in the language in a delightful and figurative way. Hence, language and proverb intertwine to preserve the cultural heritage of the people across generations through constant usage.

The discourse on proverb may not be complete without mentioning how Chinua Achebe sees it. To him, “proverb is the palm oil with which words are eaten” (6). While Achebe sees it as the condiments of oral expression, it is “the “horse” that carries words to a different level, investing them with meaning, enrobing the user with the garment of wisdom... the purpose of talking is to create an effect...” (Falola 53). It is described as “the social mode of communication in oral societies as it is not only reflective of life but part of life” (Penfield and Duru 119).

Mokitimi, on his part in African Proverb series, remarks that “proverbs act as catalysts of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals” (xii). Muhammad lends credence to the above as he opines that “proverb is a stylistic/literary device which people apply in their daily discussions in order to, among others, warn, advise, support, reject or remind a listener/reader” (43144). Onyejekwe sums up the discourse in his definition which he sees as “a tool for maintaining traditional norms and values in asarcasticmanner to redirect an erring individual” (129). This is the case with Sofola's protagonist, Okebuno, in *Old Wines are Tasty*.

Suffice it to say that proverb is often linked with wisdom in talk or utterances as people are regarded as being wise and well-grounded in tradition of the peoples' culture when they lace their statements with proverb. However, proverbs are better understood when presented and treated in the context in which they are used as it emphasizes on aptness and effectiveness. Hence, its use by the playwrights is to reinforce position, emphasize a point, and give warning or advice as well as give prominence to the indigenous language which is partly in extinction and the dwindling ethical standards in contemporary society. With this hindsight, proverb usage by these playwrights enhances their deployment of characterization; conflict development and denouement as they elicit emotional responses from the scripts and the readers respectively. Their ability to accommodate various linguistic and literary devices makes most proverbs highly imagistic. These, the playwrights successfully explore to the optimum as they effectively boost the aesthetic quality of their dramatic enactments not only in terms of their speech enrichment but also marks the distinctiveness as a talking tattoo.

It is not gainsaying to reiterate it again that proverb emanates from the reservoir of ancient wisdom and therefore, has the force of tradition behind it. It may be used to either justify an action or to make a point. The play, *Old Wines are Tasty* can best be described as the pitching of old ways as represented by tradition against the New Order which is seen as a classless and orderless era. Olona depicts the old way while Lagos represents the orderless new era. In making a point about the Old Order and showing off its significance as one that thrives on culturalrelevance and importance, Anyasi, Okebuno's mother retorts:

Olona is not Lagos where nothing matters. I know our people... Lagos way will not fit here; our elders must be shown respect; our tradition must be respected and observed. Everything counts here and anyone who shows no respect for all these things does not have solid ground to stand on. You have already started on the wrong path by letting people come here in vain. (11)

From the above, one could decipher that Olona is astutely reveling in its cultural tradition and this reflects the ethnography of the people as the name connotes. Literarily, the name, Olona means 'the owner of the road' and a folk proverb says, 'èlérùlómòbíwòn se ñ ò ò' (meaning: it is the owner of a load who knows how to package it). Ordinarily, Okebuno, being an indigene of Olona ought to know the road (culture and tradition of his people) and again as his name depicts (which in Igbo language means 'a son is the root/head of a family') but he lost it all as he was consumed in and overwhelmed by the chaos and orderless society which Lagos, the new era represents. By extension, this strengthens the tradition of the society as it focuses on the norms and acceptable creeds needed therein.

This statement by Anyasi could be tagged as the prologue of the play as she wraps it up proverbially by saying that, 'it is not all that smile that wear a clean heart' (11). She expresses a salient point through her native intellectual and emotional attitude in sounding a note of warning, sympathy and regret to her son, Okebuno. The chaos and noisome pestilence that dominate the orderless new era which characterize Lagos life becloud his senses hence; he did not see reasons to heed to all the points and warning signals which the numerous proverbs used in the play point at him until he triumphantly and gloriously walks to his doom.

The aesthetics of the indigenous talking tattoo according to Adeoti is that "it confers some naturalness on characters and the spaces they inhabit" (83). This naturalness is indexical as it is direct with actual and causative relationships maintained with the referents. In Onwueme's *A Hen too Soon*, the caustic influence and havoc of materialism as an offshoot of Modernism is flagrantly displayed in the admonition by Tuluchor to Anyasi, Gladys' mother, the former retorts:

... you have sent her to school. You must not only count your blessings, but cash in on them. The world needs change; clothes need change and our palms also need change.
(2)

From the statement above, one could see the extent to which materialism and its inordinate love has eroded deeply into the fabrics of the modern day society to the extent that money now occupies the pride of place as it displaces morals and good conscience. The deliberate play on the word 'change' by Tuluchor strengthens the notion of dual nature of meaning in African language usage. Tuluchor affirms that the world needs change as no society desirous of growth must remain static. Clothes need change at the family (home) level as the economy must thrive so as not to be impoverished and decked in rags. In like manner, our palm also need change is a metaphoric representation of the mentality of the modern man in the world of the new era which Lagos depicts. To further affirm the space occupied by the characters as one that is bedeviled with lustra of materialism, Okigwein Onwueme's *A Hen too Soon*, tells Nketa, his wife that:

you smell nothing because you just have no nose to smell. Only the rich can smell...
(10)

Onwueme succinctly points at the decadence in modern day society which she attributes to decline in cultural awareness. As she says in the Preface of the play that "the play dramatizes the conflicting influences of traditional norms against modernity as represented by the characters, it is also a social comment on our present materialistic tendencies which have now spread to the villages... an emphasis on the status of the character in the society..." (n.p).

In stressing the supremacy of the talking tattoo as a natural phenomenon, Onishe, a chief of the land,

says, 'a well-trained son does not play with grey heads' (21). What this indigenous tattoo means is that elders must be respected and accorded their rightful places in society. No one needs to be told that in public cum social gatherings, the Elders and Traditional rulers are usually called to the high table and/or given prominence on the frontal rows of seats. In the case of Okebuno, just as Falola in *A Mouth Sweeter than Salt* describes the educated elites as “having their wisdom on their wrist” (48), sees nothing amiss in having the Chiefs and Elders sit among the congregation without giving them any special seats. Though educated, Okebuno is thoroughly deculturated! All indications are made to redirect Okebuno to his roots and to see that indeed old wines are tasty (pp. 10, 44). However, just as Akuagwu, his maternal uncle has described him as culturally confused; he could not separate his views and perception of life in Lagos from that of his rural community, Oloṣa. In his community, elders have more powers than the young (10).

Proverbs conceal and at the same time reveal information which more often than not leaves one with a question that one has to answer by self. It functions metaphorically the same way that visual communication does. In expressing her sudden fortune of being an in-law to a man with rich sons, Nketa asserts, “the water one would drink never flows past one” (12). One is left with the question whether Gladys' mother already sees into the future to know what would happen between Gladys and Amuzia and which would ultimately see to the end of the Old man, Oboli. It is not just enough that Gladys gets pregnant for Amuzia, Oboli's son but after being self-exiled from the village, Abor, Amuzia as Ogbe, the new Diokpa(chief) says, “... Amuzia whom we thought was our great son came in the night to steal Ga-la-disi away...” (48). This act buttresses Nketa's earlier assertion as she ultimately becomes an in-law to a rich man as the play ends. Despite being insulted by Okebuno, when the latter's arch rival, Okolo approached Odogwu, a member of the Izuani Town Council, Odogwu's stance is a reflection of the indigenous talking tattoo which shows that indeed, 'òbè ò kínminíkùnàgbà' (meaning: the soup does not stir in the elders' belly) as he replies Okolo that “no matter how mad a child is his mother must not reject him” (15). The implication of the above is that despite the fact that Okebuno is regarded as an adult-boy who is yet to be made a man (14), the Elders' are still ready to align with him and give him the chance to prove his mettle before them. As a corollary of this function of the talking tattoo, Akuagwu follows suit by remarking that, “you own the yam and you have the knife with which to share it” (33). This witty statement carries the same weight and meaning with the ones like: 'ògèdèdúdú ò yab'ùşán, òmòburúkú ò yalùpa' (meaning: an unripe plantain is not worthy of being eaten, a bad child is not worthy of being killed); 'òmòenikìiburútítík'áfíékùn pa (meaning: one's child cannot be so bad that we overrun him/her to the lion as a prey) and 'one does not throw the baby away together with the bath water'. The saying by Akuagwu is a subtle form of appeal before the Elders'. The appeal is to consider Okebuno as their son and not to look at the insult that he has heaped on them.

African culture, Costandius asserts is seen as being “based on symbolic or metaphorical language as the language enhances the conceptualization of abstract ideas” (4). As metaphor reveals only part of the answers, proverbs too encourages a curiosity about their meanings as they communicate in a symbolic way. In abhorring the deeds done by Okebuno not only to the Elders' but also to the community, Ogbelani retorts, “it is when the earth sees what the eyes should not see that mother hen crows” (33). This witty statement can be likened to a popular folk song in South-west Nigeria with the lyrics:

Mo r'éèmòl'Ágege*
Ajáw'èwùór'òşo

I see a strange thing in Agége
Dog kits up in clothing and wrapper

Òbọ́nmusigá

Monkey smokes cigarette.

Okebuno's deeds are sacrilegious and grievous enough to warrant a human sacrifice to appease the gods and ancestors in times of old but in the new era dominated by chaos and lack of order,

Agége: Is the name of a densely populated suburb in Lagos State, Nigeria.

what wonder would the eyes not see as captured by the folks' song and the statement by Ogbelani above? Furthermore, in communicating the grievous offence of Okebuno to him and to make him realize the severity of his action in desecrating the tradition, a near impossible fine is levied on him as pronounced by Ogbelani:

Men of the council, I said early that when the land sees the impossible mother hen crows. This small boy has done as he pleased and we shall give him the treatment he needs (37)

A look at the list of the items to be paid as ransom actually shows that the fine is not a child's play and it is more than getting water out of a rock! Or, how could one explain the possibility of getting a young hen to a new neighbourhood whose only one foot has touched the ground and another newly hatched chick whose beak has never touched the ground? These fines as levied are a sign code, a metaphor and an abstract idea to the mind to understand that each of the items conveys a prior knowledge about its importance and significance in the culture that produces it.

In enhancing the conceptualization of abstract ideas which the indigenous talking tattoos does, Ogbe in announcing the tragedy that has befallen Oboli's family and the village, Aborsays, "Ga-la-disi has delivered her baby and it is neither boy nor girl" (46) As a speech enhancer, the proverbs by Nketa could be easily alluded to in explaining the kind of Gladys' baby that Ogbe refers to. Nketa earlier asserts that, "the fowl has not gone to the conference but its feather has attended" (17) and somewhere else she remarks, "whom does a husband build a mansion for and she prefers to live in a shack?" (17). These metaphoric statements by Nketa unravel part of the conflicts in the play as her role has a symbolic stance. She stands as an iconic figure representing both the prologue and epilogue of the play. Her indigenous language usage serves as a speech enhancer as it gives an insight to what to expect in the play and thereafter. She is equally a cultural ambassador and a womanist. As a culture ambassador, she supports her husband even at the detriment of her own happiness. No wonder she intones, "I have been married for 20 years and have never known real happiness" (16) yet, she maintains peace and tranquility at the home front as the culture dictates. As a womanist who prides herself in the sanctity of family living, she asserts, "I supported you only because I knew that if I did not, you will kill me and sell my daughter all the same" (42). As the play ends, she becomes not only an in-law to a rich man, she equally have her daughter alive unlike her husband, Okigwe, who could not achieve his selfish motive of wanting to marry another wife and getting a chieftaincy title (20).

Understanding the hidden meaning in a given proverb therefore transcends its surface meaning. Rather, recourse must be taken to both the context of its usage as well as the content of the words or issues alluded to. Therefore, these metaphors which are wrapped up in the indigenous talking tattoos are an essential source in the composition of oral narratives which the playwrights have explored in building up their thematic concerns, as a speech enhancer and as a compendium of African identities that marks its language distinctiveness as a talking tattoo. Consequently, in the Preface to the play, A

Hen too Soon, Onwueme admits that the play is written in terse language which Isidore Okpewho in *African Oral Literature* says identifies proverb “as a piece of folk wisdom expressed with terseness and charm. The “terseness” implies a 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” (226) that serves as the indigenous talking tattoos. She says further that her use of terse language is to depict emphasis and the status of the characters in the society. This goes to show that its economy of words as saying much like a narrative but with few words which its poetic rhythm guarantees expresses cross-cultural experience thereby making them applicable to the whole of humanity.

As a literary discourse strategy, proverbs are used to educate, manipulate and persuade. Its value in literary discourse cannot be ignored or diminished. This is so as Costandius remarks that “proverbs are mostly something that the people draw on when they need emotional support” (21). The playwrights deploy their use of linguistic knowledge, competence and artistic prowess to decorate, manipulate and spice up their creative cum dramatic spheres in the use of language as seen through the lens of their plays. Costandius concludes that proverbs serve as “documentation of African tradition” (3). The compendium of African tradition as aptly documented in both oral and written forms as showcased in the texts selected in this analysis. However, in *African Wisdom*, Kuzwayo retorts that “many problems are caused by lack of cultural pride and values” (20). This is aptly demonstrated in *Sofola* Old Wines are Tasty as the tragedy that falls on Okebuno could have been averted if he had assimilated the deeds and dictates of his culture. He became oblivious of the fact that no man can grow taller than the tradition that produces him/her just as “no matter the level of achievement and prominence, a man would still be traced back to his roots” (Mabawonku 78). This is pointedly made clear by Ogbelani, a member of the Izuni Council of elders to Okebuno, so that he is reminded of his background: “Lagos is a no man's land. Small boys become kings there but not here in Oloona. We have tradition; we have a system...” (35)

To further stress the supremacy of a system as claimed by Ogbelani, a paramount chief, in the above statement, Onishe, another chief of the land, says, “a well-trained son does not play with grey heads” (21). All indications are made to redirect Okebuno to his roots and to make him see that indeed old wines are tasty (pp. 10, 44). However, just as Akuagwu has described him as culturally confused, he could not separate his views and perception of life in Lagos from that of his rural community, Oloona; hence, his tragic fall. In his community, ‘elders have more powers than the young’ (10). Though philosophy is the search for knowledge and which he has attained, but he failed woefully in the use of the tools of the attained knowledge which proverb represents.

In essence, the use of the indigenous talking tattoos by the playwrights according to Falola's voice restores pride, provides the basis of identity, “enhances the struggle to attain mental liberation, and provides the framework for development” (64). This is so as the ‘ogre’ dubbed as culture remains relevant through language usage in the modern era and has to be integrated into all aspects of socio-cultural and economic life. In a nutshell, borrowing should be adaptive and creative and not as an imitator. This is exactly what the indigenous talking tattoos do in Modern African drama as replicated through the works of the selected playwrights.

Sofola's drama is pitched within the cultural tradition of her society and people. It should be mentioned that just as texts speak to one another, culture too in a given society speaks to another in other societies. This, therefore, makes Sofola's work as well as Onwueme's to be relevant in other African cultural society as the issues discussed in the works are central and peculiar to other African cultures. It follows, therefore, that Black women affect one another globally and culturally. This

assertion is given further corroboration by Mary Kōlawōle who puts it in this way that, “Sofōla focuses on a tragic theory in giving expression to the African woman's situation and African people's global human condition”(142). Black women's choice to be concerned with everything that concerns their community makes them indispensable agents in the fight for the total liberation of men, women and children just as they continue to be the burden bearers and progenitor of cultural values in the society.

Through the use of indigenous talking tattoos, the richness of African culture is portrayed in the plays. The playwrights project their culture as one that thrives on respect. It is in the strength of this that the playwrights use the indigenous talking tattoos not just to colour their characters' speeches, but to depict the richness of the culture that produces them and upon which their plays are anchored. These witty sayings have to be learnt and understood in association with the ideas they are used to express. Sofola's *Old Wines are Tasty* which is a three-act play is symbolic in itself. On the one hand, the three acts represent the facet of human life: the past, the present and the future while on the other hand, they equally represent the time frame in human life: time of innocence which is the teething stage; time of experience which represents adulthood; and the restoration time which is the period of transition. Innocently, Okebuno comes to Olona with the childlike belief that being among his people he would be able to get their consent and votes to become their representative at the Government level in Lagos. He puts behind him his culture and discountenances the communal belief that says:

the kolanuts ripen in the mouth of the elders.

He wants to get to the future without looking into the past to explain the mystery of the present period. It follows, therefore, that, the playwrights dexterity in the use of language as wrapped up in proverb can only be comprehended in association with the meaning ascribed to it in the African society that produces it.

In essence, this paper shows the use and relevance of the oral art in contemporary society in serving as an anecdote for culture preservation as well as serving as an amalgam to its language distinctiveness. Its foray in scripted drama as seen through the lens of Zulu Sofola's *Old Wines are Tasty* and Tess Onwueme's *A Hen too Soon* shows that the talking tattoos as a spoken language is wave-like and it gains power by its intricacy of language uniqueness. The intricacy created by the talking tattoos which are indigenous marks African language and its users as one that speaks with double meaning. Just as the culture thrives on binary fusion of existence (good/evil; id/quintessence counterpart; death/hereafter etc), the language too has a dual nature. To this effect, the use of the indigenous talking tattoos in scripted drama by the two playwrights transcend just enriching/enhancing their characters speech pattern but also to array their cultural projection, thereby saving it from going into extinction!

From the works of the playwrights as shown in the paper, the indigenous talking tattoos code named 'the spoken words' is believed to express more than what it reveals. This is so as it bears more in words and images. A typical example is Sofola's 3 Acts play titled *Old Wines are Tasty*. The three Acts are the hearth that does not pour the soup pot away. The hearth in *A Hen too Soon* however is represented by the characters Nketa, Gladys and Amuzia. This, in essence, showcases the uniqueness and dynamism of meaning and living in African culture. This uniqueness and dynamism also reflects in its language which has hitherto been seen as vilifying and barbaric by the Eurocentric critics of the region. Given these perspectives, the paper reveals that proverb usage in the plays elicits emotional responses from the scripts and the readers alike as the warnings encoded in some proverbs can be

averted as seen in the case with Okebuno in Old Wines are Tasty when Anyasi says, “it is not all that smile that wear a clean heart” (11). In like manner too, disaster through errors of judgment can be avoided as depicted through Nketa statement that, “the fowl has not gone to the conference but its feather has attended” (17).

Conclusion

In all, the exploration done in this work has demonstrated the uniqueness and utility of African indigenous talking tattoos as carriers of enduring cultural traditions conveys complex messages of modernity whose expressive styles, content and contours defy the Weberian tradition as much as they challenge any essentialist attempt to frame the cultural scopes of African languages and literatures. African writers and dramatist particularly have continued to appropriate indigenous languages and literary heritages as buffer resources and as instrument of emancipation and self-affirmation. The two female playwrights' studied in this work stand as veritable cultural ambassadors and models in the propagation of the heritage of the people for the sustenance of indigenous identities in the face of the corroding contemporary modernity.

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