

Orature and African Indigenous Economies: An Ecocritical Reading of the African Folktale

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Abstract

The sluggish pace of economic growth in the African world has, partly and justifiably, been blamed on the ignorance and lack of hard work on the part of her indigenous populations. One of the greatest and sometimes the only source of income in most ethnic groups south of the Sahara is subsistence farming. Unfortunately, it seems that a majority of the subsistence farmers in this part of the globe do not see farming as a great economic and preoccupying activity in which precious time must be regularly spent for greater productivity. Such an indolent attitude often results either in acute food shortage, abject poverty or that precarious standard of living that has, generally, been described as hand-to-mouth. No doubt, government policies, non- governmental organisations, the World Bank and other international organisations interested in indigenous wellbeing have, with varying but limited degrees of success, endeavoured to encourage greater agricultural productivity in Africa. One of the sensible solutions to this problem could be to demonstrate through folklore which has a stamp of traditional authority that their oral tale possesses wisdom that could be exploited to improve on their deplorable economic condition. Consequently, this study rests on ecocritical underpinnings and posits that the indigenous knowledge harboured in African oral traditions such as folktales could be systematically exploited to intensify farming and promote economic development.

Key words: oral tale, development, indigenous knowledge and economy

This paper is premised on the view that some African oral tales transmit vital economic knowledge that can be exploited to stimulate and enhance economic growth in Sub Saharan Africa. It posits that oral tales express indigenous knowledge systems that can function in complementarily with other scientific and technological inventions to stimulate economic growth in African communities. The study, therefore, falls in line with the following observation by J. Lin Campton in *Indigenous Knowledge Systems and Development*:

Increasingly, concern is being expressed that mankind's existence upon this globe will be contingent upon how quickly and how well we can discover and make use of ways and means for resolving the large-scale problems of poverty, ignorance, disease, and civic inertia common to the majority of the world's population. At the root of this concern is a serious need to rethink our definition of development and the means by which we measure its attainment. Certainly, the measurement of development solely in terms of GNP is insufficient. We have come to realise that a much greater emphasis must be placed on the social and ecological conditions of development. We have learned that social development does not automatically flow from economic improvement. We have found that the neglect of human problems in social-psychological terms and the systematic mutilation of the natural environment are loosening man from his age-old moorings. We are finally realizing that man cannot find his salvation in technology and concrete alone. (1980: 308)

On the basis of literary ecology, this paper analyses some African oral tales that may promote basic economic activities like farming, environmental protection and those aspects of human behaviour expressed in the tales that normally impact positively on indigenous economic activities. The objective is to corroborate the views of other scholars on oral narratives and economy such as those expressed by Brian Mckenzie in the following excerpt:

Organization theorist Ellen O'connor views organizational decision making as the convergence of oral narratives claiming that the narrative's power comes from its ability to simultaneously render information and the meaning of that information. Jan Kelly found that stories were used in high-tech firms to address equality, security and control. David Boje has observed that storytelling in organizations has two intertwined components, stories as texts and stories as performance. The majority of references that the entrepreneurs in this study made to storytelling used as a way of organizing referred to stories as text. This would explain the logic of Keffer's wrting down his narrative of the history of Rogue Wave. By solidifying the story, he hoped to create a stable, predictable organizational culture. (www.sbaer.uca.edu/research)

In the above quotation, Mckenzie mentions scholars such as Jan Kelly and David Boje who have insinuated that story-telling can improve an economy. Even though Mckenzie fails to explain the possibility of his assertion, it opens the way for further enquiry and that is where this paper finds its relevance. In this study, that assertion is explicated in the light of the concept of economic development in Africa especially in Sub Saharan Africa where oral tales, because of socio-cultural similarities, easily transcend ethnic boundaries and acclimatize in their new environments. The concepts and approaches to economic development are broad and differ according to economic standard of each community. Economic growth in this part of Africa is marked by peculiar paradigms that should be considered in order to contextualise the discussion in this paper.

Oral Tales and the Concept of Economic Development

In "The Question of the Search for Development Alternatives," Emmanuel Yenshu (2006:19) deviates from Western oriented development approaches and sees development as a movement from a set of conditions

(social, material, political, cultural) seen as inadequate to another deemed necessary for promoting wellbeing. This definition, unlike others, is not dictated by overriding notions of modernism and capitalism that have dominated world economic discourse. Yenshu's definition is englobing and accommodates the African conception of economic development. It tactfully subsumes the progress in rudimentary economic efforts in Africa such as subsistence farming, carving and trade which form part of the basis of the African economy. Guided by similar considerations, Walter Rodney cogently provides the following explanation of what it means for a society to develop economically:

A society develops economically as its members increase jointly their capacity for dealing with the environment. This capacity for dealing with the environment is dependent on the extent to which they understand the laws of nature (science), on the extent to which they put that understanding into practice by devising tools (technology) and on the manner in which work is organised. (1986:10)

It is worth recalling that before the development of writing, Africans consciously expressed vital economic knowledge through folklore, especially the oral tale. In "The Relevance of Folklore in the New Millenia", V. Vachaspati notes, with regret, that many of the innovations for economic development in Africa are tailored specifically for the needs of the world market, and accepting them very often means accepting a variety of other related innovations and an ever-increasing dependence on the world economy. The subsistence character of economy is on the whole declining (<http://www.telugupeople.com/discussions>). In a related argument, Vachaspati observes that the only identity left with tribal people today is their existential situation – increasing poverty, unemployment, illiteracy and destabilization including the depending nature resulting from dispossession of land and increasing marginalisation. The African philosophy of development is being disfigured and their indigenous knowledge systems downplayed. In the face of this predicament and considering the availability of sources of indigenous knowledge such as oral tales, Vachaspati recommends that social scientists be enlisted in the effort of creating an interdisciplinary curriculum for the training of development advisers, rather than technical project administrators. In the African oral tale, this view is carefully raised, logically sustained and comprehensibly concluded in a manner that communicates to the indigenous people the relationship between the fauna and flora and the essence of environmental protection. Here, the contributions of sociology, folklore and anthropology are potential to link education to the cultural goals of the society and perhaps to draw attention to some skills and incentive orientation embodied in oral tales which might be over-looked by advisers of purely scientific strategies. The tales expressed the economic potentials of their natural resources and laws of nature that ought to be respected in economic operations.

The African cultural values that are abundantly embedded in the oral tales can form the basis of a progressive economy in the context of African economic development. The tales highlight African ethics and communal actions that boost economic activities in Africa. According to J.K Kigongo, there is a persistence and relevance of traditional thought to the contemporary milieu that plays a significant role in influencing change in African society (www.crvp.com/topic). It is by emphasizing the wealth and diversity of African cultural heritage expressed in the tales that African communities can develop those activities that enhance social and economic wellbeing. Communities and rural development specialists need to understand and learn to capitalize on the strength of community solidarity and culture expressed in the tales. The African oral tale as a repository of socio-cultural values can, therefore, provide the savoir-faire that C.G Knight points out in his study:

In practice, a number of studies have suggested the positive, focal role of the small-scale farmer in development, such that enhancing his contribution to development planning is an increasingly important imperative... First, local farmers are often aware of problems and constraints on productivity. Second, ample evidence has accumulated to suggest that they respond positively to opportunities that are environmentally, economically, and socially sound, given appropriate material and institutional necessities. Third, much of the gains in productivity of cash and food crops in developing areas have been achieved by small-scale farmers (Wilde). Finally, in traditional technologies potential new ideas of wider applicability may be found. The interaction of the external (scientific) and internal (ethnoscience) viewpoints may be crucial for maximizing these opportunities. (1980:207)

The African oral tales express economic knowledge that can be exploited and applied for economic development at a local level. On the basis of the indigenous knowledge embedded in the tales, one can argue that the integration of such indigenous knowledge interacting with the scientific knowledge is crucial for the planning of economic development in Africa.

Ecocriticism and Economic Development

Ecocriticism has been described as the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment. Here, much effort is expended on examining nature writing and more recent “green” writings of ecologically-minded poets and novelists. Ecocritically, the relevance of the African oral tales in economic development can be assessed from the perspective of farming, exploitation of natural resources, division of labour and environmental protection. Gregory Knight's assertion in *Ethnoscience and African Farmers: Rationale and Strategy* also provides some justifications for the use of literary ecology in a study like this:

A successful agricultural system must be ecologically rational. It must successfully articulate environmental processes for human well-being using crops, livestock, and accompanying technologies. Scientists have given increasing attention to the ecological functioning and inherent rationality of traditional systems (Igbozurike, 1971). Internally, these systems are based upon perceptions and cognitions of environment, and on decision-making built from cultural "rules" for agricultural behaviour. (1980:306)

The use of ecocriticism in this study is also partly explained in the following argument advanced by Michelle Scalise Sugiyama in a review to Glen A. Love's *Practical Ecocriticism* published in 2003:

This is an argument no literary scholar can ignore. All works of fiction take place in an environment (i.e., setting), and that environment impacts character, action, conflict, mood, theme, and so on. Moreover, the environments depicted in literary works are tacitly understood to correspond to what Love calls the “enveloping natural world”: with few exceptions (that prove the rule), the phenomena and characters depicted within literary texts conform to the same laws of physics and biology that exist without them. It follows that literary interpretation can be greatly enriched by an understanding of ontogenetic and phylogenetic interactions between humans and their environment. (<http://www.human-nature.com/nibbs>)

It is in light of ecological wisdom embedded in the African oral tales that this study also attempts to attain its objective. It seeks to examine their role in enhancing some indigenous economic activities expressed in the tales. Consequently, an ecocritical reading of literature examines how nature is represented in literature, how physical setting influences literature and how the values expressed in literature are consistent with ecological wisdom. Based on these tenets, this section seeks to demonstrate that oral tales are couched in ecological wisdom or that the natural environment depicted in the oral tale can promote economic development if properly exploited. It is also hinged on the opinion that all works of fiction take place in an environment and require an ecocritical reading and that environmental considerations can provide economic insights into the oral tales. It is intended to justify the view that a study of oral tales from an ecological perspective can provide a more rewarding appraisal of their economic significance since that economy is based on the exploitation of nature.

Some African oral tales raise questions about human interactions with nature, while also motivating audiences to live within a limit that will be binding over generations. In other words, the oral tales show the relationship that exists between the natural environment and the human world. An African tall tale entitled, "The Quarrel Between the Cows and the Grass" which is common amongst the indigenous population of the Grass Fields of Cameroon in Central Africa tells the tale of a dispute that arose between the cows and the grass. Even though the tale is couched in phantasmagoria, it ends with the unmistakable message that the cows need grass and the grass needs the cows. Farmers are made to understand through their folklore and native wisdom that a careful preservation of grass also ensures a better life for the animals. The same message is clearly expressed in another tale entitled the "lumber man" in which the lumber man and the entire community finally regret a great loss through environmental destruction. In the tale "Many Things go Wrong". The farmer is the first to cry, "I have discovered that I am facing a lot of problems since you started felling the trees. I have come to beg you to stop." In this tale, the farmer finally admits the interrelationship between humans and the environment and that to grow economically requires that one intensifies efforts at environmental protection. This contention is also underpinned in the following online quotation:

One of the objects which played a prominent role in African storytelling is animals. Animals also played a prominent role in ancient African people's daily thoughts, conversations, and oral literature, due to the fact that African people lived their lives in close proximity to the wild animals that shared their land. In many of these tales, Africans attributed human feelings and desires to particular animals, and even derived ethical ideals from their behaviour. Animals are the source of many African tales, and they also figure prominently in religious rites and myths. There are also innumerable animal fables, some of which are pure fantasy, and others which are projections of human desires. There are also many African stories explaining the appearance, behaviour, or origin of certain animals, such as "How did the leopard get its spots?", "How was the goat domesticated?", or "Why is the tortoise taboo?" Some of the more popular animals in African mythology include the snake, the spider, the chameleon and the antelope.

(<http://arted.osu.edu/kplayground/storytelling.htm>)

In the same way, general studies of characters in the oral tales reveal that little or no demarcation exists between the beasts and humans. In the tales quoted above, cows communicate with people and grass

communicates with cows. This manner of characterisation in which beasts and objects are imbued with reason to articulate philosophical ideas demonstrates the inextricable link between the humans and the natural environment which is considered in this study as one of the main approaches that can facilitate subsistence farming and consequently economic production in sub Saharan Africa.

Some African tales affirm the view that the wellbeing of indigenous people rests on their ability to assiduously exploit the resources of nature. This view is buttressed in “The Quarrel Between The” *Cows and the Grass* and “The Story of The Lucky Tree” told in the Grass Fields of Cameroon. Here, emphasis is placed on environmental protection and soil conservation. In *the story of the lucky tree*, the personified tree declares:

The wind was also kind to me; it did not blow too strong on me. And so I was never pulled down. The wind, especially in the evenings sang sweet songs to me. With a peaceful sleep, I grew up fast and well [...] Because of the friendly sunlight, rainfall, soil and wind, my roots grew big and strong and could support my body.

Economic adversities caused by the excessive exploitation or environmental destruction are captured and condemned through the Lumber man who is presented in this tale as a predator:

One afternoon, I saw a stranger. He was Lumber man. He was carrying a strange sharp instrument. He called this instrument “an engine saw.” He used this instrument to fell my brothers. The sound from the instrument frightened the animals and birds and they escaped. The Lumber man cut most of the trees which fell down and destroyed many of the young ones that lived around them. You could hear my brothers, the trees weeping all over the forest.

The effect of such destruction is that the beautiful birds that used to attract tourists escaped and when it rained the rain washed away good soil because there were no trees to prevent soil erosion. The economic strength of the tale rests on the fact that indigenous economic precepts are expressed via an indigenous language and in a manner that is consistent with the local culture. It is from the perspective of literary ecology that one can appreciate the interplay between man and his environment expressed in the tales which results in economic development. It is noticed that literature and nature have been intimately interlinked in the long history of literary production throughout the world, especially when oral as well as textual forms of literature are taken into account. While one might say that nature has always permeated literature, it has done so in varying degrees and has been critically received in vastly divergent ways. The aforementioned tales succeed in sensitizing people against the dangers of environmental destruction and their damaging impact on economic growth in Africa. The need for environmental protection is also stressed in the tale when the fauna and flora agree not to destroy each other:

‘Cows, you must learn to respect one another. Remember that for every wicked thing you do to someone, be ready to receive wickedness in return. You were wicked to the grass and now others are wicked to you,’ replied the Master. The cows were very worried. They begged the Master saying, “Master all that you have said is true. Nobody wants to see us. The insects attack us now, the wild animals

also attack us. You are ready to shoot us to death if we eat any maize. Master, Master, please make peace among us.”

The Master invited the grass, insects and women and told them, “Please, women and insects, I have invited you here, so that you can listen to how I shall make peace between the cows and the grass. The cows asked me to make peace between them and the grass.”

Through oral tales, it is noticed that the African indigenous economies are also hinged on nature which affects man and is affected by man. If we agree with Barry Commoner’s first law of ecology that “everything is connected to everything else,” we should conclude that literature does not float above the material world but rather it plays a part in an immensely complex global system in which energy, matter and ideas interact (www.vcu.edu/engweb/eng385/ecocrit). Based on the foregoing discussion, it is noticed that some African oral tales as literature, possess the capacity to stimulate and enhance economic growth. This conclusion also agrees with Ruekert’s opinion that “poems, like plants store energy from their respective communities and that this energy can be used in the world outside of where it is stored” (www.asle.umn.edu/archive/intro/estok/htm).

The oral Tale and the Exploitation of Environmental Resources

We have already mentioned that farming is one of the main economic activities in the Sub Saharan Africa. Men and women are involved in subsistence farming even though a majority of the men cultivate cash crops for commercial reasons. As reflected in oral tales, men, women and young people have separate roles to play at various stages of cultivation throughout the year. Despite some improvement on the farm implements nowadays, African oral tales depict rudimentary farm implements. However, over the years, without any scientific or highly technological methods of agricultural production as it is the case in the Western world, most ethnic groups in Sub Saharan Africa have survived economically by dint of their rudimentary instrument and indigenous knowledge carefully deployed in farming. We do not claim here that indigenous knowledge alone tapped from African folklore can satisfactorily boost economic development but that the application of such indigenous knowledge systems can complement scientific innovations and increase food production for local consumption.

It is necessary at this point to mention the following definitions of indigenous knowledge which is a recurrent expression in this paper. This definition is necessary because it fits neatly into the context of this paper and because it illuminates the central objective of the paper:

Indigenous knowledge (IK) is the local-knowledge that is unique to a given culture or society. It contrasts with the international knowledge system generated by universities, research institutions and private firms. It is the basis for local-level decision making in agriculture, health care, food preparation, education, natural-resource management, and a host of other activities in rural communities.
(<http://www.worldbank.org/afr>)

The so-called peasants have accumulated experiences (indigenous knowledge) in the area of farming which are useful even in the contemporary world. In a tale entitled, “The Overzealous Farmer Boy” the young hero is obsessed with farming as an economic activity. He rises early in the morning to ensure that his crops are not destroyed by wild beast. Even though the tale, at a superficial level, undercuts overzealousness, one

cannot lose sight of the insistence on the knowledge of hard work expressed in the tale as fundamental economic practice:

In those days of old, the people of Kom had farms very far away from home. The farms were mostly located in the forest lands because the soils were fertile. Although the yields were good, there was a lot of work to be done on this farm. From the planting to the harvesting season, there was little time set aside for rest as people were constantly needed on the farms. They had to work very hard to keep watch over the fields else birds of prey and wild animals would destroy the crops. Men and women did the farming but the boys and girls kept watch over the fields. The boys and girls set out early and returned sometimes in the evening. Where there were huts for sleeping on the farms, some slept there. In large fields requiring many boys on the farm they often set out in the morning, in a group and returned in like manner except in situations where some people expressed the wish to stay away.

Most of the indigenous groups in Sub Saharan Africa cultivate maize, tomato, groundnuts, huckleberry, yams, and cocoyams and so on, and many tales are coined to encourage the cultivation of such crops. “A Boastful Son-In-Law” and “The Talking Skull” for example, are concerned with subsistence farming. The tales are intended to inform the audience that farming is the economic life wire of the ethnic groups within which the tales are told. The tales, especially, “The Dishonest Child” emphasise the fact that devoted farmers are more comfortable than lazy and idle people. What is evident is that numerous African oral tales raise serious ecological concerns. Ecocritically, they depict the natural or physical world as the basis of economic progress. Tales such as “The Egg of Life, Rice Farmer, The Overzealous Farmer Boy And The Dancing Palm Tree” commonly told in most African ethnic groups possess the potential to encourage economic activities. The tales demonstrate that man’s economic satisfaction is dependent on his ability to exploit his physical world. Even though farming, as expressed in the oral tales, is apparently rudimentary, the fact remains that when the knowledge of farming is imparted into young malleable minds, it is likely to develop into intensive agriculture and other macro- economic thoughts and activities. This opinion tallies with the following view which emphasises the significance of indigenous knowledge expressed in the tales:

In the emerging global knowledge economy, a country’s ability to build and mobilize capital, is equally essential for sustainable development as the availability of physical and financial capital (World Bank, 1997). The basic component of any country’s knowledge system is its indigenous knowledge. It encompasses the skills, experiences and insights of people, applied to maintain or improve their livelihood. Significant contributions to global knowledge have originated from indigenous people, for instance, in medicin and veterinary medicine with their intimate understanding of their environments. Indigenous knowledge is developed and adapted continuously to gradually changing environments and passed down from generation to generation and closely interwoven with people’s cultural values. Indigenous knowledge is also the social capital of the poor, their main asset to invest in the struggle for survival, to produce food, to provide for shelter or to achieve control of their own lives. (<http://www.worldbank.org/afr>)

This means that micro-economic activity in every economy ought to be promoted, partly, because it lays a solid foundation for macro-economic activities and partly, because it provides a forum for rural populations to participate in the development of rural and national economies. Britha Mikkelson (1995) shares this view when he opines that “what the current development issues have in common is that they address the macro as well as the micro level and have policy implication”. Given that the oral tales possess serious economic undertones, they should be revived, encouraged and transmitted as micro economic activities to foster the economy. This conclusion tallies with C. Gregory Knight in *Ethnoscience and the African Farmer: Rational and Strategy* who holds the following contention:

African societies, as all others, are rooted within and dependent upon environment. Environment provides matter and energy essential for survival, and a major human task is the channelling of these environmental resources to provide physiologically – and culturally-defined prerequisites for life. The supply of food can be seen as a reflection of the structure and dynamics of an adaptive man-environment system. The laudable goals of agricultural development – providing adequate, reliable food supplies and marketable surpluses – are frequently implemented by policies to change the objects, information, and activities by which food is produced; new ideas and crop varieties are disseminated; new modes of farmer behaviour are proposed. (1980: 205)

The themes expressed by the oral tales under reference testify to Ruekert’s opinion in ecocritical studies that the stored energy of literature can be fruitfully turned into effective action in the real world ([www.asle.umn.edu.archive](http://www.asle.umn.edu/archive)). The African oral tales evidently possess the energy that can be turned into economic action. Through farming, they depict environmental impact on economic growth. African oral tales can, effectively, serve as factors of economic progress and should be included on lessons in the economic development of Africa.

Division of Labour Expressed in the Oral Tale

A study of the African oral tales reveals a conscious organisation of labour which is intended to facilitate labour and increase efficiency and productivity. In “The Dishonest Child” characters play specific roles. The mother provides seeds for her daughter to plant. In “The Overzealous Farmer Boy” labour is divided and young people are responsible for watching over crops and protecting them against destructive animals. While elderly people like the mother in a “Boastful Son-In-Law” are involved in tilling, young people guard the farms against predators. In these tales, each age group has a role to play in enhancing the economy. In a popular tale entitled, *tfik*, the family head is compelled by famine to abandon his wife and venture into an unknown land in order to struggle for survival in a situation of extreme economic hardship. The abandoned wife is equally portrayed as using the means at her disposal to sustain a living despite the inhumane treatment she receives from the weird *Findiansoj*:

Once upon a time there lived a man in Kom called Tftk. He was married and his wife was still expecting a baby. The birth of his first child coincided with a period of terrible famine that affected the entire Kom land. In that situation of acute shortage of food, Tftk decided to travel to a distant country in search of food for subsistence.

For many years, Tftk was away in an unknown land. His wife felt abandoned and frustrated as the people of Kom became more and more famished. Matters grew worse as the soils lost their fertility. Tftk's wife carried her little son on her back every day to till an unproductive soil. One day when she returned from the farm at dusk, she was surprised to find Findyaŋsoŋ sitting by the fire inside her house. Findyaŋsoŋ was a very thin, tall and lanky mysterious woman who was notorious for wicked deeds. When she asked what Findyaŋsoŋ wanted, she declared that she had come to be part of Tftk's family and that henceforth Tftk's wife would be her slave.

It happened that Findyaŋsoŋ was always out and would only appear in the house when Tftk's wife had managed to prepare a poor meal for her son. Each time she appeared with an old basket slung across her back, she would order, "throw away that little and dirty thing of yours called baby and carry this basket to where it should be kept" Tftk's wife, for fear of her mysterious ways, would humbly heed the command and Findyaŋsoŋ would eat all the food leaving mother and son hungry. Findyaŋsoŋ continued with her wicked habit until Tftk's wife and her son were as thin as rakes. Everyday Findyaŋsoŋ would appear at meal time, say the same thing and would eat all the food.

This practice ties with Michael M. Cernea's opinion that developers should seize the long overlooked opportunity to provide useful and necessary social knowledge without blindly accepting the framework. He stresses that, "the systematic use of social knowledge as a complement to economic and technical knowledge is indispensable.

Richard Peet underscores the necessity for division of labour in low level economic activity in the following words:

A society on a low level of economic development is therefore one in which productivity is little developed. An economically highly developed society, in contrast is characterised by a complex division of labour, a relatively open social structure in which caste barriers are absent and class barriers are surmountable, in which social roles and gains from economic activity are distributed essentially on the basis of achievement. (Peet, 1998, p. 30)

These oral tales demonstrate that division of labour increases economic productivity. They reveal flaws in the economy whenever some people fail to perform their functions within a traditionally structured division of labour. The tragedy of Makoka in *The End of Makoka* is caused by his failure to perform his economic function in the division of labour:

Makoka lived happily with his family. He had a beautiful thatched house and two large farms. His family had enough food from the farms. Everyone admired this happy family.

Wibu was Makoka's childhood friend. He had left Makoka in the village and gone to live in town for many years. While in town, he led a very bad life. He drank and smoked a lot. His wife left him because of his bad habits. When his father died Wibu returned home to take care of his farms. But instead of taking care of the

farms, he sold them within a short time. He used the money to drink wine and smoke cigarettes. He was drunk all the time.

Every evening Wibu would invite Makoka to join him:

“Makoka,” Wibu would call, “join me for a drink. Let’s go out and enjoy ourselves.” At first Makoka did not drink nor smoke.

Makoka started by drinking very little beer and smoking just one stick of cigarette a day. But as he went out with Wibu always, he increased the amount of beer and cigarettes. After eight months, Makoka could drink twenty bottles of beer and smoke about ten packets of cigarettes a day. He always returned to his house very late and drunk.

He did not get up early to go to his farms. The weeds grew very tall and destroyed most of the crops. Makoka did not care for his family anymore. His children had no money for books. His family lacked oil and meat for their meals. Madam Makoka was not happy with her husband.

Madam Makoka woke the husband up one morning. “My husband,” she called, “I want to know what is wrong with you. You always come back late and drunk and you also smoke a lot now. You no longer look after your children. The farm is covered with weeds.”

Makoka was very angry at his wife. “Look here woman,” he said. ‘You have no right to stop me from enjoying myself. I don’t get money from you to enjoy myself. My friend Wibu enjoys himself and no one disturbs him.’”

Economic Oriented Norms Expressed in Oral Tales

Some African oral tales reveal that social and cultural norms constitute an essential platform for economic growth. It is common knowledge that a successful economic progress requires hard work, communal effort, courage, commitment and motivation. Oral tales encourage hard work, perseverance, cooperation, industriousness, enterprise, and respect for the authority of elders, constitution, adventurism, courage, community norms and attitudes. While some of these are conflicting, they are not mutually exclusive of the lessons of living in all of human civilizations.

A genuine economic progress requires moral, social and cultural norms to boost economic development. In a tale entitled, “Awah and His Wives” economic productivity drops when the cordial relationship between Awah and his wife is strained. The coming in of the wicked and uncompromising Ngefore as a second wife is the beginning of trouble for the family. The peaceful atmosphere that is congenial for economic progress is replaced with bitterness and disorder which affect economic wellbeing of the family adversely. Awah’s character can only be productive when he regains his normal moral rectitude and a peaceful relationship with his family. A committed spirit is projected as an economic oriented norm in the following tale:

Once upon a time, there was a rich man. The man had everything that one could desire. One day he fell sick and died leaving his wife and son. They were very lazy and were not doing farming. They spent all the money that the man had left for them. When the money was finished, they started selling their property – cows, goats and even the land. Things became too difficult for them. The woman sent her son to go and sell the only cow that was still left. When her son asked how much he was to sell the cow. She told him to sell it for much money.

On his way, he met a man who wanted to buy the cow. When he asked him the cost of the cow, he said his mother had advised him to sell it for much money. The man gave him two silver seeds of beans as money for the cow. The woman was happy when she saw her son returning from the market. She asked him to bring the money so that they could count. When the boy gave her the two seeds of beans, she was very angry. She got the boy well beaten, pushed him under the bed and threw away the beans. She started maltreating the boy and refused to give him food.

In another tale entitled, “Achuo the Wise King” Achuo’s peaceful disposition in a turbulent arena results in the economic stability on his land. All his neighbours are involved in war but he tactfully maintains a delicate peace and avoids war. Peace is identified as the basis of development. The women in this tale confess that war does not pay. It results in loss of lives. Warring communities are backward. They lack roads, houses and farms. In the *the quarrel between the parts of the body* the resolve by the parts of the body to work in tandem with one another for a common goal, logically depicts disorder as one of the causes of economic retardation that often accompanies a dispersed and rancorous people.

It is also noticed that the values developed by the tales are honesty, courage, discretion and above all African humanism and communitarian identity. The African economic growth should be based on these indigenous values that are abundantly expressed in the African oral tale. Obotetukudo vivifies this claim when he avers:

The African philosophy of development shows that development cannot prosper in a vacuum. It needs the cross-fertilization and cross-pollination of African concepts of development and those of other peoples. There has to be a foundation upon which these ideas can be erected and/or weighted. While it is demanding of the African to live with what confronts him/her, it also imposes a 'restraining order' of some sort on the new information and communication technologies 'peddlers' to beware of the 'fight by night syndrome'. (<http://www.grossnationalhappi>)

Economic development in Africa requires certain moral, cultural and social norms which the tales abundantly express.

This leads us to the conclusion that African oral tales can be exploited to encourage economic development in African indigenous societies, especially when development is seen as a sustained strengthening of productive capacities. This conclusion is also based on the fact that education expressed through folklore has a stamp of traditional authority and is often taken seriously by the indigenes of that tradition. However, we should maintain like Brokensha et al. that such knowledge systems expressed in the tales may be futile if allowed to function in isolation but that they must be exploited to function in complementarity with modern scientific and technological inventions. Consequently, the tales deserve to be carefully collected, properly preserved and effectively transmitted through any practicable medium for the enhancement of indigenous economies. The realisation of this view may entail that the transmission and study of oral tales be instituted and intensified at all levels of formal learning in black Africa, and that emphasis on the significance of oral tales should also form the basis of global economic discourse.

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