

REORIENTATION FOR NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION: THE ROLE OF LITERATURE

Chigozie Bright Nnabuihe and Adaora Lois Anyachebelu —
University of Lagos, Nigeria

At the formative period of any human society, certain relevant orientations are conceived, designed and actualized to create awareness of what should be acceptable and/or unacceptable in human relationships. There are core values, norms and morals aimed at guiding the behaviour of the native population and making them aware of their place, time and identity within their society. The sole aim of such orientations is to ensure cohesion and a peaceful harmonious existence. Oral literature as it is referred to in this paper points to those literary artistic creations composed in oral form for the purposes of entertainment, edification and education. In the paper, we limit our discussions to the oral version of literature, drawing most of the excerpts from the works of oral Igbo literary artists. A few instances are also drawn from the written version as the need arises.

KEYWORDS: RE-ORIENTATION, NATIONAL TRANSFORMATION, ROLE, ORAL IGBO LITERATURE

Introduction

At the formative period of any human society, certain relevant orientations are conceived, designed and actualized to create an awareness of what should be acceptable and or unacceptable in human relationships. These are core values, norms and mores aimed at guiding the behaviour of the native population and to make them aware of their place, time and identity within their society. The sole aim of such orientations is to ensure cohesion and a peaceful harmonious existence.

Every human society has its distinct historical source which forms part of its ancient repertory from which its oral literatures draw. Within the large vault of oral literature the people's knowledge of those cultural and moral values dutifully aggregated for all to memorise. Hence it serves as the societal life-blood unquestionably acknowledged as one handed down by divine forces from ages. To use the words of (Emenanjo x), oral art forms have their settings dated to "a long, long time ago when the world was still young/new; at the earliest time known when breadfruit tree filled the face of the earth; when the world was blind". Thus literature in the terms used by this paper refers to those literary artistic creations composed in oral forms for the purposes of entertainment, edification and education. In this presentation, we will limit our discussions to the oral version of literature, drawing most of the excerpts from the works of oral Igbo literary artists. A few

instances may as well be drawn from oral composition in written forms as the need arises.

Oral Igbo Literature and the Igbo Society

Today, oral Igbo literature remains a living tradition popular with the Igbo who own it, chiefly because it is conceived and composed to suit the socio-cultural needs of the milieu. Hence it is imbued with deep thoughts or ideas and possesses aesthetic qualities broadly characteristic of standard literature.

Uzochukwu (1) acknowledges some relationship between oral and written or modern poetry in Igbo culture. He writes: “apart from the aesthetic use of language in both types of poetry, a modern poet makes use of traditional material; and an oral poet, like the modern poet, can comment copiously on current issues.”

Uzochukwu’s assertion tallies with a similar comment made earlier by Emenanjo who says:

“since it draws heavily from traditional literature, creative literature in Igbo cannot afford the luxury of *art gratia artis*. The literature is fully involved in the Igbo milieu which bring it into being. It is equally involved with the wider Nigerian society and with man as a universal being.” (9).

The foregoing suggests that, ideally, literature projects human conceptions and human perceptions of life within any human society. For this, there seems to be a consensus among sociological theorists like Wellek and Warren (94) and Kirszner and Mandell (2032) that the literary work cannot be separated from the social context in which it is created. The main thrust of the argument is that literature reflects society and derives its essential existence and significance from the social situations to which it responds. Wellek and Warren assert: “literature is a social institution, using as its medium, language, a social creation.”

Commenting further on this assertion, Arohunmolase (87) states:

“Literature may represent life, a social truth where human beings are regarded as objects of literary creation. Literary artists are part and parcel of society with specific social status, social recognition and reward. A literary artist writes for his society.”(87).

Given that literature is of the society and for the society, using a social instrument as its medium of transmission, it follows that all human experiences of a society can both be reflected and abstracted from it. In this sense, oral Igbo literature as a genre of Igbo literature becomes a veritable tool in the lands of oral Igbo artists for the purpose of exposing social realities within the Igbo milieu. It mirrors a society and reflects sets of values which the ancestral forebears of the Igbo accepted as an integral part of their ethos. An instrument used to inculcate clear values into the people, helping them to develop the moral values needed to guide them in their daily lives. All these constituted unwritten laws, rules and regulations are regarded as sacred. Therefore, none dare violate them.

The intrinsic qualities encompassed by the content of oral Igbo literature are among others, compassion, courage, fairness, honesty, humility, loyalty perseverance, prudence, and self-discipline. These qualities were diligently impressed on people from childhood to ensure proper moulding of the individuals in the Igbo society of old.

To demonstrate how the oral Igbo literary artists satisfy the required role effectively, we shall have recourse to the three main themes of admonition, satire and of praise which are prevalent in the contents of oral Igbo literature. We will then explain how these themes conform to the topic of this presentation as traditional instruments of social orientation which are still relevant today.

The Theme of Admonition

A tuorọomanu, o mara

A tuorọofeke, o sefu

As the wise is advised, he gains knowledge

As the fool is advised, he gets lost

The Igbo use oral literature to impart a humane but tough pattern of life systematised for everyone to absorb. As individuals strive to conform to the dictates of the norm, others play the role of watch-dogs. Thus, during their performances skilled oral Igbo literary artists employ admonition as a tool for social control. This is done by way of proffering thought-provoking renditions meant to stir the audience to think aloud, understand what is virtuous and what is vile and be able to recognise the difference between the two. This places the Igbo man/woman at a vantage position to embrace good deeds as well as steer clear of evil, as is exemplified in the lines below:

... Ezi omume, ezi omume, ezi omume

Yirieziomumedikauwe

Gị ! ezulaohi, ezulaohi

Gị ! agbalaamaugh, agbalaamaugh

Gị ! hunwannegin'anya, nkekachasi:

Yiri ezi omume dika uwe.

... Moral behaviour, moral behaviour moral behaviour

put on moral behaviour as a dress

You ! do not steal, do not steal

You ! bear no false witness, bear no false witness

You ! love your sibling, most essentially:

Put on moral behaviour as a dress.

The content of this rendition is meant to place before the audience, the best way to cultivate virtue and maintain harmonious relations. Anyone who deviates from this piece of advice to go a-stealing or bearing false witness is sure to lose the respect others. Moreo-

ver, such a fellow would be punished depending on the age, the kind of item stolen or the gravity of the false witness one bears against others. Notice the fact that the oral artist who painstakingly rendered this piece repeated the key words and phrases two or more times. He does this to lay emphasis on those words and phrases. Notice also the force with which the artist impresses the kernel of the message into the consciousness of every member of his audience irrespective of age, sex or status:

You ! do not steal! Do not steal!

You ! do not bear false witness! Do not bear false witness!

You ! love your sibling

The persistent repetition of those key phrases is meant to assure himself/herself that he has diligently and fearlessly impressed the importance of knowing what is good and what is evil in such a way that they will sink deep into their sub-consciousness. We should also note that “your sibling” as meant in this piece is “your neighbour” or “your fellow human being” because the Igbo would readily say *agbataobi onye bu nwanne ya* “a person’s neighbour is his sibling”.

There is no gainsaying the fact that in Igbo land a child is required, by his society, to be self-reliant. Hence he is taught to take up certain responsibilities at a young age; the washing of utensils, the fetching of water from the stream and or fagots from the forest. Therefore, as good informal trainers in their own right, oral artists render songs whose themes are directed towards encouraging their audience to be strong and hardworking. The reason is that: *onye umengwu kpuo ute, aguṣu ekpuhee ya* “when a sloth covers himself with mat, hunger uncovers it”. Thus the need to be industrious is exemplified in this piece extracted from Uṣochukwu (26 – 27):

Okeke, ... Nne gi gwa gi, nṣuru

Nna gi gwa gi, nṣuru

Onye ozo gwa gi nke di mma, che nti nṣuru

Onye ozo gwa gi nke di njo, tunye nti n'ohia.

Bie aka n'agbarijide.

Bie aka na nshinkita.

Asona oyi, na anyi anaghi aso oyi.

Were ehie muru anya.

Were anyasi rahuru ura.

O kpuru uwa, nwerekwa uwa o kpuru

Okeke ... When advised by your mother, listen,

When advised by your father, listen.

When advised well by a stranger, hearken.

When advised badly by a stranger, turn a deaf ear.

Soil your hands in earthworm’s burrow.

Soil your hands with dog’s faeces.

Exhibit no sign of laziness, for it’s not in our character.

In the afternoon keep awake.
 In the night stay asleep.
 Let the creator of the world take full possession of it.

A child who understands and heeds these words of wisdom is not expected to depend on his fellow man – sibling, parent, kinsman, or friend as he grows. It is because any of these can fail, being mere human that the oral Igbo literary artists warn:

Nwanne m, atụkwasịla m obi
Nwanne m, atụkwasịla m obi
Anyị niile yiri okooko osisi
Mgbe anwụ waara
Anyị adaa n'ala kpɔnwuọ

My sibling, do not depend on me
 My sibling, do not depend on me
 We all are like flowers in a tree
 When the sun comes:
 We fall down and dry up.

Such warnings remind individuals that no matter how wealthy one's parents or relations may be, *nke aka m akọla m* “may I not lack my own”.

The Theme of Satire

Ntị chie ekperima,
O buru ogbu n'aka
A na-arata orụ anụ n'ofe
Ka a na-agbata ohi ji n'osọ?

If a criminal turns deaf ears,
 He gets his hands tied with ropes
 Can one enjoy cow limbs in stolen soup
 Or can one escape from the shame of yam stealing

The Igbo literary artists are fast to admonish, yet faster to condemn. They condemn through the use of satiric expressions. There seems no limit to who or what can be satirised. The aim is not to kill but to be patriotic and expose evil deeds, shame the evil doer, deter further occurrences and where possible, redirect the steps of those who do evil. Citing Nwaozuzu (1986), Onuogbu (2008) points out that “in satirical songs, the follies and foibles, vices and perversions of a person, mankind or an institution are held up to ridicule or scorn with a view to correcting them.” The Igbo would say: *mmebọ e mebọrọ nwaamadị n'ohaizugbe ka ogbugbu e gburu ya n'ohaizugbe* “the public ridicule of a noble fellow is worse than his public execution”. The satirist is no respecter of person, position or profession. At one time, there was a renowned traditionalist who deviated

from the norm. At the advent of Christianity in his community, he desecrated the communal shrines by selling them off and quickly runs to the church as a convert. The guild of satirists in his community who go by the appellation “Ndom Lọlọ” reacted:

*Obodozie Egemba o!
Eze mkpokomkpoko o!
O rere Ogwugwu Okwu o!
O ree Onumonu Eke o!
O repuga gbawij n'ulouka o!
O repuga gbawij n'ulouka o!
Ndiuka lekwarakwanu anya o!
Ndiuka lekwarakwanu anya o!
O gahu ererekwe ulouka o!
O gahu ererekwe ulouka o!
O repuga o gbawij n'okummuo!
O repuga o gbawij n'okummuo!
Osis e ji amaatu be Egemba
O nwekwere onye ma ya ni o?
Obodozie Egemba o!*

Obodozie Egemba o!
The haughty boastful one!
He sold OgwugwuOkwu shrine!
Sold Onumonu Eke shrine!
He thereafter plunges into the church!
He thereafter plunges into the church!
Christians be very very careful!
Christians be very very careful!
He will soon sell off the church building!
He will soon sell off the church building!
Thereafter he will plunge into the hell-fire!
Thereafter he will plunge into the hell-fire!
The very role model in Egemba's household
Does anyone still know him?
Obodozie Egemba!

From the content of this piece, we notice that evil is evil irrespective of the perpetrator's creed, sex or status. A sinner who profanes one religion and switches to another rather than to atone for his sins remains a sinner. Traditionalists believe that whoever sins should pay and repent for his sins or face the wrath of the deities and ancestors. Obodozie feels that running to the church is the answer to his crime against the local deities he has desecrated. The oral artists who serve as watchdogs warn the members of his new converted religion to beware; that he is just the proverbial *onyeohi ji e jidere ya ewere obi na-api*

mbazu o ji ezu ozo “yam thief who when caught, instead of being remorseful, fashions diggers in his heart to engage in further stealing”. The message is that having dared the local deities, he would equally someday dare the foreign deity.

Having sold the traditional places of worship and plunged himself into a place he earlier dreaded, he could still sell off the cathedral and run to embrace the most dreaded place by Christians because his greed is insatiable. This is the type the Igbo call *baa taanwuqechi* “be rich today and die tomorrow” or *lee ulo elu ya, leekwa alaili ya* “behold his storey building, behold as well his grave-mound”.

Quite often, we see people in positions of authority who use their advantages to loot public funds entrusted to their care. To some local chiefs who cheat and threaten people with customary court action and possible imprisonment, the artists have chants such as this:

Ndieze ndiobi, ndiologha oka!

Ndiezen diobi, ndiologha oka!

The chiefs are mere thieves and rapacious!

The chiefs are mere thieves and rapacious!

It is common knowledge among the Igbo that during the period of indirect rule local chiefs committed many atrocities on the account of rapaciousness.

Dioka (563) records the case of a certain warrant chief who had a little misunderstanding with his kinsman because the latter challenged him openly. He writes:

Consequently, the chief contacted seventeen people who issued false summons to Egbuhuzor in one day. The most significant was the one from ... a native doctor who ... sue Egbuhuzor for refusing to pay after curing him of madness. Egbuhuzor was never mad.

It is the aim of the local chief who instigated others to slam seventeen false court summons on an individual in one day to extort money from the poor native in the name of bail fees. Unsavoury activities of leaders like this do not escape the satirist’s invective. At one point, people in a community had to disown their representative in government with a satiric song that goes:

Obij agaghị ichi anyị ozo lee

Obij lee!

Obij agaghị ichi anyị ozo lee

Umunna kwuru ekwuee

Si ya ghaara anyị ochichị lee

Obij lee!

Obij will not rule us again

Oh Obij!

Obij will not rule us again

The people unanimously have
 Asked him to relinquish rulership to us
 Oh Obijj.

The evil deed of a leader was on another occasion criticised by an oral artist as follows:

Igbo daalunụ oo!
Ndeewonụ oo! Daalunụ oo!
Onye anwula ibe ya efula.
Anyị chọrọ udo n'obodo anyị
N'ebe Najirịa na-achị onwe ya
Ka obodo mehee anya a!
Anyị chọrọ pompụ n'ala
Ya na koleeji na ụlọọgwụ
Ka obodo mehee anya a!
Anyị ukwu adighị mma, ewo o!
Okwuazụ adighị mma, ewo o!
Na wuruwuru, o jọka m m!
O jọkakwa mm ! O jọka ...
Wuruwuru ajọka a!

Oji ụmụnna ya eriju afọ
Okwu n'azụ ekwughị n'ihu
E nye ya ego oha ya erichaa
E dobee nkwa e dobee enyi m a lawa
O jọka mm! O jọkakwa mm!
O jọka, wuruwuru ajọka a!

Igbo, greetings!
 Welcome! Greetings!
 May it be well with us all
 We want peace in our country
 Since Nigeria is now independent
 For development to thrive!
 We want tap water in Igboland
 Including colleges and hospitals
 For development to thrive!
 Avarice is unwholesome, o yes!
 Blackmail is unwholesome, o yes!
 Including sharp practice, it is bad!
 It is very bad, it is bad ...
 Sharp practice is bad.

He who feeds fat on his kinsmen
 A blackmailer who pretends
 When entrusted with public fund he squanders it
 Who takes his leave when it is party over
 It is bad! It is very bad!
 It is bad, sharp practice is bad!

Deviation from the norm in the form of stealing, corruption, murder, promiscuity, etc. rarely escape the sharp eyes of the oral literary artists who do not hesitate to expose them in satiric commentaries. The way in which oral literary artists admonish, and condemn is similar to the way in which they eulogise. Encomiums are usually lavished on individuals or groups who heed the words of admonitions imparted into their hearts and thus excel in their undertakings.

The Theme of Praise

*E too onye na nke o mere,
 O meekwuo ozọ tinye*

When one is praised for his many good deeds,
 He does more in addition

The Igbo are a people who accord recognition to both individual and collective achievements. Every achievement, once its source is ascertained to be right and proper, attracts appreciable eulogy. It is important to note that the Igbo oral artists praise all worthy achievements and accomplishments in any human endeavour approved in the society. We cannot all be farmers, blacksmiths, traders, fishermen, etc. The important thing is for one to engage himself meaningfully, honestly, diligently and excel. This means that such a person has not gone against the advice of the literary artists; hence through his actions he would strive to bring honour, fame and progress to himself, his family and community. This is why the great achievement of Chidozie Ogbalu in Igbo language studies has benefitted the entire Igbo as a people. Maduekwe (56 – 57) extols Ogbalu thus:

*Kà m jaa gị ike à m bù n'obì kemgbè, dịānyị;
 Ọ bughị mgbè dum kà a nà-àhụ ọwa na-eke kà gị.
 I bụrụ kpakpandò nyeàlà ndịIgbo,
 A gà-àkpọ gị "oti kà ọnwà" n'ètiti ndị Igbo.
 I bụrụ ọnwà tiri otù ogè n'àlāIgbo,
 Ọ gà-àbụ ọnwà nke ịrị kpọrọkù kà i bụrụ;
 Mà ọ bụ ọ bụrụ nke ịrị na otù n'ime afọ,
 Igirigi ekpùchìghị gị, urukpū ekpùchìghị gị.*

*I warabàa n'òchichiri nye anyị mbombo ihè.
 I nyèrè ànyị ọgụ, nye ānyị mmà nà ògwu, m̀bàrìbà;*

*Kuọ mpara gi n'okwu Ịgbò, sị ̄nyị:
“Sụonụ! Dèenụ! Mụonụ kwèenụ! ...*

*... n'ihì olu itī mkpugị rūrū oji, ruoocha.
Mkpòròhìhì ì fùrù rùrù Olu, ruoỊgbò.
Udè ì sùrù n'Ịsuamā kà a nùrù n'Ofemmīrī,
Nuyā n'Ịgweocha, nà nà Ñsukkā nà n'Ịka.
Ñdidi ginà iherē emeghigin 'ahā Ịgbò,
Bàrà mmadụ n'ụmì ọkpukpu, bàammuō n'imenchichè.
Ju Oluafọ, metụ Igbo n'obi.*

Nwokē m Chièdozie Ọgbàlụ n'Àbagàna,
Chi gī èdozierela Ịgbò asùsụ nà òmenàlà o nwèrè.
Nūrja, ofe itèrè àtòwala nenene.
Asùsụ nnà gị sùrù àgawala ijè ibè ya gàrà.

(Let me accord you this praise I have long nursed in my mind, our man;
It is rare to come across a torch that shines like you.
You are a star to the land of the Igbo,
You shall be called “the one who shines like moon” among the Igbo.
Were you to be a moon which shines at a particular time in Igbo land,
It would have been the hot tenth month that you were;
Or it would be the eleventh month of the year,
Dew covers you not, cloud covers you not.

(You penetrated the darkness for us to have bright light
You gave us hoes, gave us cutlasses and diggers, and shovels;
Stamped your authority on Igbo language and urge us:
“Speak! Write! Study! Chorus!)

(... Because your call reached black and white.
The whistle you blew reached both Olu and Igbo.
The sigh you heaved at Isuama was heard overseas,
Heard at Igweocha, and at Nsukka and at Ika.
Your patience and you're not being ashamed of the name Igbo,
Got into the human marrow, and spirits.
Madethe Olu satisfied and heart-strong to be Igbo.)

(My man Chiedozié Ọgbàlụ of Abagana,
Your God has positioned properly the language and culture the Igbo have.
Rejoice, the sauce you prepared has begun to be sweet.
The language your father spoke has begun to progress like its other counterparts).

In this excerpt, we see that the poet extols the accomplishment of Ogbalu, the renowned “father of Igbo language studies”, who spent his life, time, energy and resources championing the cause of Igbo language studies, even though he was not trained in the literary studies. His efforts in the propagation of Igbo language studies began in 1949 with the formation of *Otu Iwelite Asusu na Omenala Igbo* “Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC)” which was his brainchild, and the establishment of the University Publishing Company, Onitsha which was his personal press. Through these media, much has been achieved in the areas of orthography development for Igbo language standardisation, research, workshops and publications aimed at the sustenance of the Igbo language, literature and culture.

In a similar vein, Ejiogor (123) bestows these accolades on Ogbalu:

Ogbalu towers shoulder higher like a great iroko tree in an Igbo forest land. Mazi Ogbalu, how you had the courage to write your short stories at a time when to do just that was stupidity in itself, an evidence that you did not “know book”, I do know. But your effort has now turned out to be the proverbial mustard seed.... You are now occupying places of honour ... take it from me, you will yet be awarded honorary degrees, streets, and places will be named after you. You merit all these, and when these honours do come, thousands of your readers will rejoice.

There is the conviction that an individual who receives these glowing tributes would surely strive to improve in his good deeds. On the other hand, other members of the society would like to emulate him so as to be praised as well, or even accorded greater accolades.

The Need for Reorientation

Among the Igbo, each of the three traditional instruments of social orientation explained above has a specific purpose in engendering peaceful coexistence, cooperation, progress and development within a nation.

Pieces of advice are posited beforehand to forestall unconventional behaviour or practices in the society. In so doing, the good, the bad and the ugly are spelt out in unambiguous terms for everyone. The reference is always to two contrasting ideas, characteristics or behavioural patterns. The individual or public is urged to embrace virtue and abhor vileness which might attract evil.

At a time a boy went to his father to learn more about the traditional orientations of his people as he was to leave home. His father took him to one of the custodians of the people’s ethos. The man, a local priest at the village shrine, praised the boy for his love for the ancient way, blessed him and offered him words of advice in the manner of a stern warning to desist from evil. To that effect, the following was recorded by Ugonna (4 – 5, 11):

*O bu nwa Achumba Ezenwaka,
O bu ya biara achọ omenala mbu, omenala egede,
Ka e si eme ihe ochie*

*Ọ bụ ihe dị mma ka ọ chọrọ bịa ...
 Nga a ọ na-achọ ya ka ọ mara,
 Ọ ga-ahụ ihe dị mma dị ya nụ.
 ... ùsu mmụọ agaghị esu ya,
 Ûsu mmadụ agaghị esu ya;
 O kpuru ọhịa, ịha
 O nwere ndụ, ịha
 Ọ nọrọ n'ụlọ, ịha
 O nwere ndụ, ịha
 O jewe ejewe, ịha
 O nwere ndụ, ịha
 Ọ lawa alawa, ịha
 O nwere ndụ, ịha ...
 Chidi,
 Ihe ị kwara ka ị ga-ènwe,
 Akụkwala ùzùrù mmụọ
 Akụkwala ùzùrù mmadụ*

It is the child of Achumba Ezenwaka.
 It is he who came to seek the ancient tradition, tradition of old;
 The way things were done before.
 It is a good thing that he came to seek for...
 As he seeks it, that he may know,
 He will see the positive things in it.
 ... misfortunes from the spirit forces
 will not befall him,
 Misfortunes from human forces will not befall him,...
 As he enters a bush, so be it
 He will have life, so be it
 As he stays at home, so be it
 He will have life, so be it
 As he goes out, so be it
 He will have life, so be it
 As he returns home, so be it
 He will have life, so be it...
 Chidi,
 Whatever you attract, is what you will have
 Attract not the wrath of spirit forces,
 Attract not the wrath of human forces....

Any individual who is impressed with such words of blessing, admonition and warning as he leaves his parents, relations and kinsmen to go into the world will certainly be careful

as he plants every step on his way. He will be extremely cautious not to throw overboard these elders' admonitions which would bring shame on himself, his parents and community. Should he later resolve to look down on his father/elder's advice, he would have only himself to blame. The Yoruba have a rendition which carries similar message. It goes:

Omọ tó m'óyarè l'ójú o.
Òṣì niyó t'omòndà pa.
Omọ tó mó'barè lóyú o.
Òṣì nì yó t'omò náà pa.
Ìyá tó jìyà pò lóri narẹ, 5
Bàbá tó jìyà pà lóri rẹ.
Omọ tó m'óyarè l'ójú o,
Òṣì niyó t'omò náà pa.

A child who looks at his mother with contempt,
 Will forever be impoverished.
 A child who looks at his father with contempt,
 Will forever be impoverished.
 The mother who suffered greatly for your sake, 5
 The father who suffered greatly for your sake.
 A child who looks at his mother with contempt,
 Will forever be impoverished.

It follows therefore, that any individual who heeds and lives his people's approved pattern of values is more likely to shun evil habits. No matter how hard a situation or how pressing the temptation, he will rather cultivate the urge to be humane, hardworking, resilient, respectful, responsible, honest, just, fair and confident. That way, no one will ever associate him with criminal, corruptible or contemptuous acts. Back at home his parents and kinsmen will not lose sleep because as the Igbo would say: *anyi amarala nwa anyi ga-ejeru mba rifò nri, marakwa nke bu nwa e ji ejemba* "we know our child who could not comport himself outside and as well the one who is disciplined"

A properly orientated child will not easily slide into crime on account of want or hardship no matter how excruciating. He will also not be easily carried away by anything entrusted in his care. Contentment would be his watchword and guiding principle. For that, he will discharge whatever duties assigned to him to the best of his ability. Because everybody is required to conform to these norms, it follows that everything will naturally move in the right direction. In the absence of any deviants, honesty, truth, justice, and fairness will thrive. Everyone would have his fair share of the responsibilities, rights and privileges in the society.

When members of a society conform to the societal norms, there will be few evil doers, a situation that sees the realisation of the aim of oral literary artists. The achievement of that aim will definitely gladden their hearts, boost their morale and stimulate them to advance in their utilitarian role of ensuring a society devoid of deviant behaviour.

In the joy of a mission accomplished, the literary artists would redirect their focus to poems and expressions which are panegyric. Panegyric expressions serve as a means of encouraging the right behaviour in a society (Uzochukwu 22). Egudu observes that:

“praise abounds in almost all types of oral Igbo poetry, as many occasions in the life of the Igbo are marked by exuberant praise songs and verses, with masquerades and *ozo* title candidates praising themselves and others, with people praising famous runners, farmers, wrestlers, and people renowned for other achievements, and with admirers praising beautiful and charming ladies when occasion arise” (104).

From the foregoing, it is evident that there is no limit to the showering of praise in oral Igbo artistry. It explains the rationale behind the numerous praise and heroic names the Igbo bear. Names like *Ogbuagu* “Leopard Killer”, *Ekwueme* “one who honours his words”, *Ebubedike* “the aura of a hero”, *Okpeudo* “the peace maker”, *Dimgba/Okamgba* “master wrestler”, *Ezeji* “yam lord/yam tycoon” and *Eziokwu bu ndu* “truth is life” are pointers to this truism. Thus, we can assert that every worthy achievement among the Igbo is praise-worthy for the Igbo literary artists.

Generally speaking, eulogies instil “hot blood” in achievers to aim at achieving greater feats. They prompt others to view those being eulogised with great admiration. Hence, the people are spurred to strive to achieve even greater acts to earn such accolades themselves. By this means, more people are inspired to think and act positively. When this feat is successfully achieved, the society is better for it - virtue will triumph over evil perpetually because good people will abound.

Conversely, when a person or group deviates from the norm and falls short of the tenets of the traditional values, the oral Igbo artists do their best to address such anomalies. This is seen in the form of satire. The basic need for satire is to nip unconventional acts in the bud, re-orientate a nonconformist who slides into any form of evil activity, and to deter others from being part of such. It is further meant to expose the harm any act of wrongdoing causes in a society. Evil could portend a change in the overall wellbeing of a community. However, when evil practices in all their shades are allowed to creep into a society, the people will become disorientated. A disorientated people are sure to lose all sense of direction. In a short time, evil consequences would envelop such a community. Today, our country, Nigeria, is enmeshed in a world of crime and criminal activities. Individuals, groups, and organisations, our men/women in positions of authority, our spiritual and temporal leaders alike, are involved in the crass craving for mundane fame, power, protection, and wealth. Only a timely reorientation can transform the nation from the current widespread greed and lust. The situation has *ipsofacto*, robbed the country of its much needed peace, security and progress. It has also denied it the opportunity to achieve economic growth and empowerment, political stability, industrial development and scientific-cum-technological breakthroughs capable of according it a place of honour in the world comity of nations.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Uba-Mgbemena (58) affirms that “the traditional attitude of Igbo society towards art is that it is socially functional, instead of being merely individualistic ‘art for art’s sake’. They carry messages and are communal in what they portray”. By reviewing the socio-cultural functions of oral literature in the life of the Igbo people of Nigeria, we have revealed how oral Igbo artists engage their artistry as a functional means of entertainment and didacticism. Their renditions are directed towards teaching the populace what they should and should not do, and to guarantee suitable mental and psychological development. We have shown that proper absorption of the valuable messages contained in Igbo oral literature helped the Igbo ancestral fathers to cleanse human relationships within the society because they guided the characteristic behaviour of the people. We have also pointed out that the traditional tools literary artists used in the past to control the behavioural attitudes of people in the Igbo milieu remain a living tradition that could be further harnessed to tame the human excesses in our contemporary Nigeria society.

From this observation, it is evident that the depth of disorientation which the Igbo society and by extension the Nigerian state has suffered is enormous. It would be very hard to achieve commensurate reorientation that can adequately transform the nation. Yet, should we fail to sufficiently reorientate the people and so ensure satisfactory transformation, there will be serious consequences. Moral standards will continue to decline while decadence will continue to grow in its intensity. We will continue to experience indiscipline which breeds greed, corruption, brigandism, militancy, instability, intolerance, bigotry, hatred, arson and assassination, all of which are antithetical to mutual cohabitation, co-operation and contentment. All these hinder mutual understanding among citizens; frustrate progress, technological advancement and the overall development of the nation. We therefore recommend that there should be a reorientation for all, through the use of oral literature in various ethnic communities and government parastatals such as the National Orientation Agency. This will help to provide the citizens with value support system. Nigerian citizens should be re-orientated in the traditional ideals of ancient ancestral life. We strongly recommend the continued use of oral literature at homes, at schools, at the local, state and federal government levels as an apparatus of civic, cultural and mental training and development.

References

- Arohunmolase, L.O. “The Sociology of Literature: Issues in Literary Theories and Literature in Nigerian Languages”. *Journal of Nigerian Languages and Culture*. Vol. 2, 2000. Print.
- Dioka, L.C. *Geneology and Oral History of Obetti Nguru*. Enugu: De-Verge Agencies Ltd, 2008. Print.
- Egudu, Romanus N. “Social Values and thought in Traditional Literature: The Case of the Igbo Proverb and Poetry”. *Nigerian Libraries*. Vol. 8, No. 2. 1972. Print.
- Ejiofor, Peter N.O. *Cultural Revival in Igboland*. Onitsha: University Publishing Company, 1984. Print.
- Emenanjo, E. ‘Nolue. “The Artist and His Society: The Situation in Creative Literature in Igbo”. *Black Orpheus*. Vol. 6, Nork, 1986. Print.
- Ed. *Omalinze: A Book of Igbo Folktales*. Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1977. Print.
- Kirszner, L.G. & Mandell, S.R. *Literature, Reading, Reacting and Writing*. Third Edition, New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc. 1997, Print.
- Maduekwe, J.C. *NkaOkwu*. Ikeja: Longman Nigeria. 1979, Print.

- Onuegbu, Martina Chinelo “Igbo verbal Art: A Satirical, Counselling, Educative and Informative Means”. In Ikwubuzo, I. *et al* (eds.) *UdezuluigboFestschrift in Honour of Sam Uzochukwu*. Lagos: Green Olive Publishers, 2008. Print.
- Uba-Mgbemena, Asoonye. “The Role of Ífò in Training the Igbo Child”. *Folklore The Journal of the Folklore Society*. Vol. 96, 1985. Print.
- Ugonna, Nnabuenyi. *AbunaEgwuregwuQdinala Igbo*. Ikeja: Longman Publishers, 1980. Print.
- Uzochukwu, Sam. (2004). *Oral Poetry and National Development: the Igbo Example* (Inaugural Lecture Series) Lagos: University of Lagos Press, 2004. Print.