

## THE USE OF PROVERBS IN ZULU SOFOLA'S *KING EMENE*

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### Abstract

*The use of folklore (such as proverbs, riddles, folksongs, tales and poetry) has generally influenced African literature. But there have been few studies about the use of Igbo proverbs in Literature. The reason for this paucity could be linked to the degradation of Igbo language as a result of colonialism. Colonial education discouraged the learning of indigenous languages. This is true of Igbo. Students who went to top mission secondary schools were not allowed to use the vernacular in school. This perhaps explains why Chinua Achebe and a host of other Igbo elites for instance, consciously took Igbo proverbs, synthesized and wove them into the fabrics of their literary works. Despite the effort in the use of Igbo proverbs by some Igbo novelists, plays have not received much attention. Zulu Sofola, the first Nigerian female playwright, has managed to use and codify Igbo proverbs in some of her plays. She uses Igbo proverbs for a variety of reasons: to embellish the plot of her plays, to exhort her characters, to satirize vices (foolishness and pride) and to expose to the world Igbo cultural values. The aim of this study therefore is to x- ray the use of Igbo proverbs in Zulu Sofola's KING EMENE. The play has been selected because it is Zulu Sofola's play that adequately makes use of Igbo cultural background and proverbs.*

### Introduction

The use of Igbo proverbs in Sofola's *King Emene* is typically aimed at the admonition of characters and embellishment of the plot. This study therefore aims at exploring this notion.

Sofola is the first published female playwright in Nigeria. The worldview of her plays is always carefully selected to situate her prophetic eye and cosmic consciousness of the life of the society she is dealing with in each of her plays. As a result of her traditional Igbo background in Aniocha area of Delta State and a deep understanding of the Igbo society, coupled with her potentials for research into Igbo oral traditions, one often finds her plays rooted in Igbo culture, depicting the Igbo traditional society in a superb manner.

One salient feature of Sofola's plays is her sense of historical and cultural authenticity especially in her language. Though she writes in English, she also devises an African vernacular style of proverbs which strengthens the idiom of Igbo, her native language. It is, therefore, the contention of this study that Sofola, a dramatist, achieves an appropriate language for each of her plays, largely through the use of Igbo proverbs. Sofola's use of proverbs can function as clues to an understanding of her plays because she uses them not merely to add touches of local colour but to sound and reiterate themes of human concern, to embellish the plot of her plays, to castigate or admonish the characters in her

plays, to clarify conflict, and to focus on Igbo cultural values. Igbo proverbs in the light of the foregoing provide a “grammar of values” by which the deeds of a tragic hero can be evaluated and measured. Understanding Sofola’s use of Igbo proverbs can lead to a better appreciation and evaluation of her artistic value to the Igbo community and Africa. Importantly, the Igbo proverbs in *King Emene* show the values by which the tragic hero, King Ogugua, and other characters can be measured and evaluated.

Historically, *King Emene* is set in the late nineteenth century in the ethnic Igbo part of what is now called Aniocha North Local Government of Delta State of Nigeria, Zulu Sofola’s native land. *King Emene* is a tragic play that situates an individual’s will to power in Oligbo, a traditional Igbo Kingdom. In order for the temperament of allegiance and rebellion at work in the play to be understood, it is appropriate to take into account the nature of kingship among the West Niger Igbo which in the words of Kenneth Onwuka Dike “have a society patterned after the semi-divine kingship of Benin” (26), their neighbour to the West and a source of noticeable cultural influence. Similarly, Afigbo remarked that the Obis of this area “never became even nearly half as powerful or as influential with their own people as the Oba of Benin or the Attah of Igala, no matter how flamboyantly and successfully they adopted the regalia and ceremonials associated with these two potentates”(10).

Corroborating Afigbo’s assertion, Isichei, a West Niger Igbo by marriage, observes as follows “these Kings were regarded as sacred, and lived in ritual seclusion. But they were not absolute, and took decisions in conjunction with titled men, and representatives of other groups. Their decision could be challenged, and their persons deposed” (23).

While there is the existence or consciousness of solemn monarchy, royalty amongst the people as reflected in Sofola’s *King Emene*, it has little real ascription of divinity; its power is effectively contained and limited. It is limited at all times to consult and take into account the popular will; it is prevented to go against this arrangement and is also tragic to ignore, as Ogugua does in *King Emene*, the vulnerability of a monarch set against the common weal and collective will of a resolute people.

Again, Oligbo, like most traditional Igbo communities is also a priest-controlled society. The priest-politician as Amankulor has described him

controlled ritual and religious matters, was responsible... for fixing the village celebrations and festivals. Every social function was performed according to certain laid out principles, the strict performance of which enhanced the awe that surrounded the priestly functions and the invisible powers. (87)

In establishing the theme of rebellion/heedlessness; a major aspect of the conflict situation in *King Emene* is the contest between King Ogugua representing a strand of the political class divorced from the goodwill of Oligbo people and the priestly class fully enjoying the allegiance and confidence of the people of the kingdom. The conflict between the two classes centers on the ceremonial cleansing role of the latter during the week of peace. Significantly, peace week in Igboland is the week when the king or chief priest is transformed into a god and enters the shrine to carry the problems of his citizens

to their god. According to Igbo tradition, the king or chief priest must be pure and undefiled. The oracle and the goddess of the kingdom must confirm that all is well with the community before he enters the shrine. It is believed by many Igbo people that Peace Week originated after an unusual destruction by a large swarm of locusts of the crops of many tribes in Africans including Igbo and their quest for a solution. Afterwards, they decided to take a week to pray to God for good crops to come to the land the following planting season. The week of peace was one of the means of unification for the clan and appeasement for the gods in control over their crops. Blogs reveals further:

People spend time meditating and with their families in order to restore their families inner peace. This annual event is important in the Igbo culture and is followed by the sowing season for all crops. They believe that in order to have a good, clean crop, the spirit must first be cleansed. No marital relations, physical abuse, or hurtful language is allowed during this week. Spiritual purity is allowed during this week. Spiritual purity is held very important in Igbo culture and the week of peace is a prime example of this. (Net)

Comparatively, Peace Week can be compared with *Igu Aro* in most Igbo communities. According to Nwankwo, “*Igu Aro* is a festival as well as a performance of ritual worship”(85). He goes further to explain that

During the *Igu Aro*, delegates from the Igbo settlements under the hegemony congregated in the palace of the Eze Nri, bearing tribute. The Eze Nri announced the new year, gave the blessing of fertility and the yam medicine...The Nzemabua consult the *afa* diviner to determine what areas of the festival may likely cause confusion... The people express a common concern over cosmology, economics and fertility, in an expression of solidarity. (*Odinani* No.2 85-89)

The stages of this *Igu Aro* correspond to the acts and scenes in Zulu Sofola’s *King Emene*.

Moreover, the ritual/mythic significance of the week of peace as a season of rebirth, purification and reaffirmation of allegiance and loyalty to the superintending deity, has been memorably recorded in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. The overall events for the week is overseen by the members of the priestly class and the sacredness of the week denotes a communal search for peace, a restatement of the need and desire for it in a society of flawed, covetous, ambitious, mischievous and fractious men and women. This prayerful quest and supplication is made known earlier in *King Emene* in the fervent prayers of both Nneobi and the Queen. Nneobi, addressing “the water of life and peace”, asks first and foremost, for peace of mind; “give our heart rest” (1). Afterwards, she prays for the exclusion of evil from her realm. Her guilt-ridden conscience because of her murder of King Emene torments her greatly. What afflicts her most is the fear of exposure and retribution (The law of Karma).

The queen, unhindered by hidden guilt, prays to “the goddess of life and the god of All”, first for her children, and then for her husband as the father of the realm; “give him wisdom and strength to reign over his kingdom” (1). The ultimate struggle between the two women for supremacy in relation to the necessary ritual processes suggests the mythic old rivalry between wife and mother-in-law for the affection of the husband/son. Metaphorically, in this play, it is also a struggle between guilt and innocence in a context determined, in the words of Modupe Kolawole, by “the inevitable tension as a woman tries to come to terms with the tensions of tradition” (30).

Nneobi is determined to take, albeit temporarily, control of the libation / cleansing rites at the palace for the duration of the peace week because she knows what the queen does not know that she, Nneobi herself, has committed an abomination which only time will unveil. However, it is on this basis that the oracle has sent a frightening message. Her prayer shares some ironic light into the evil she has committed and the calamity that awaits her and her son, King Ogugua. Nneobi does not pray for true peace in the realm, after all, she murdered Chibueze not only to discomfort Obiageli (Chibueze’s mother), but to pave the way for her own son’s enthronement. While this act of usurpation is adequately exposed in the play, it is obvious that Nneobi’s idea of peace arises from her maternal commitment to her son and her son’s umbilical link to her. Hear her prayers;

Protect my son  
Guide my son  
Let the sun never set on his reign  
Let the new year see him tower  
among his peers  
Turn his foes into his footmat  
(*King Emene* 8)

The god and the people of Oligbo want Nneobi’s evil exposed as the only alternative or panacea for peace in the community. Unfortunately, King Ogugua, her son, perceiving his political insecurity, organises his own responses to galvanize himself to fight rebellion by the people of Oligbo.

As heedlessness is the greatest tragic flaw of King Ogugua, Sofola employs some Igbo proverbs to portray the character of Ogugua and even castigate him. Such Igbo proverbs found in the play are listed below:

... It is the way a woman dances that the music is made for her (19)

...it is the tree that makes the forest, and the king of the trees does not grow in a desert (18)

...if we don’t eat yam for the sake of the palm oil, we eat the palm oil for the sake of the yam (20)

...it is only the living person who consults the oracle to know if he will be tall or short (20)

...it is the way a child opens his hand that a piece of  
meat is given to him (20)

...Anyone who toys with his god toys with his destiny  
(34)

The last Igbo proverb, “Anyone who toys with his god, toys with his destiny” can also be found in Chinua Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart*. In this novel, Achebe has cited an Igbo proverb which states that “when a man says yes, his chi also says yes” (*Things Fall Apart* 23). This proverb is used to castigate Okonkwo and to depict him graphically. Throughout the novel, he is pictured as a wrestler, hunter, warrior and a cultural nationalist. It is an appropriate image not just because he is a powerful man or a famous wrestler, not just as a result of the fact that his life has been a ceaseless struggle for status, but because in the eyes of his people, he brings about his own downfall by challenging too powerful an adversary. This enemy he, Okonkwo, fights is not the white man in some cases, but rather Okonkwo’s *chi*, his personal god or guardian spirit. A replica of one fighting or opposing one’s ‘chi’ is also seen in *Arrow of God* when Ezeulu goes against Ulu’s warnings of leaving the battle of the gods for the gods. According to Ulu (the god):

“Ta! Nwanu”! Barked Ulu in his ear, as a spirit would  
in the ear of an impertinent human child. ‘Who told  
you that this was your own fight?’...

I say who told you that this was your own fight to  
arrange the way it suites you? You want to save your  
friends who brought you palm wine he-he-he-he!...  
‘Beware you do not come between me and my victim  
or you may receive blows not meant for you! Do you  
not know what happens when two elephants fight?  
Go home and sleep and leave me to settle my quarrel  
with Idemili, whose envy seeks to destroy me that his  
python may again come to power. Now you tell me  
how it concerns you. I say go home and sleep. As for  
me and Idemili, we shall fight to finish; and whoever  
throws the other down will strip him of his anklet!’  
(191-192)

But inspite of this stern warning, Ezeulu still goes out of his way to punish the people according to the dictates of his mind, and tragedy befalls him, Obika’s sudden death and losing his mind.

However, there have been some presumptuous controversy about the meaning of *chi*. Shelton (36) and Nwoga (5) in their separate essays have debated on the meaning of *chi*. Shelton prefers to translate it as “God within” but Nwoga, an Igbo, supports Achebe’s translation of it as “personal god”. Victor Uchendu, an Igbo anthropologist, describes *chi* as “the Igbo form of guardian spirit” (16). Okonkwo in *Things Fall Apart* and Oguagua in *King Emene* are crushed because they tried to wrestle with their *chi* and Ezeulu in *Arrow of God* loses sanity for going against the advice of Ulu. An Igbo folktale provided below is glaring enough to depict these two characters who wrestled or toyed with their god.

Once there was a great wrestler whose back had never known the ground. He wrestled from village to village until he had thrown every man in the world. Then he decided that he must go and wrestle in the land of spirits, and become champion there as well. He went, and beat every spirit that came forward. Some had seven heads, some ten but he beat them all. His companion who sang his praise on the flute begged him to come away, but he would not. He pleaded with him but his ear was nailed up. Rather than go home he gave a challenge to the spirits to bring out their best and strongest wrestler. So they sent him his personal god, a little, wiry spirit who seized him with one hand and smashed him on the stony earth. (qtd in *Arrow of God* 31-32)

A variant of this tale can be found in Cyprian Ekwensi's *Ikolo the Wrestler and Other Ibo Tales*. Another variant of this Igbo tale is also found in F. Chidozie Ogbalu's *Niger Tales*. Although this tale does not appear in *Things Fall Apart* or *King Emene*, there is sufficient evidence in the works to suggest that Okonkwo and Ogbu are likened to people who dare to wrestle with their god. Okonkwo is sometimes addressed as little bird *nza* who so far forgot himself after a heavy meal that he challenged his *chi* (*Things Fall Apart* 26). One can therefore agree that the Igbo proverb, "when a man says yes, his *chi* also says yes" is an Igbo proverb motif. It runs through Sofola's dramaturgy, though there is often deviation from the words that make up the proverb. Again, it is important to add that Chinua Achebe uses Igbo proverbs to reinforce the image of Okonkwo as a man who struggles with his *chi*. Notice in the following passage how properly this is done and provides enough ground for Sofola's deconstruction of the proverb motif

But it was really not true that Okonkwo's palm-kernels had been cracked for him by a benevolent spirit. He had cracked them himself. Anyone who knew his grim struggle against poverty and misfortune could say he had been lucky... That was not luck... At the most one could say that his *chi* or personal god was good. But the Ibo people have a proverb that when a man says yes his *chi* also says yes. Okonkwo said yes very strongly; so his *chi* agreed. And not only his *chi* but his clan too, because it judged a man by the work of his hands. (*Things Fall Apart* 22-23)

This was the case of Okonkwo whose life has been dictated and determined by the proverb motif cited above. After several years in exile, he returns to his clan with much fortune and begins to feel "that his *chi* might now be making amends for the past disaster" (154). He returns with the expectation to resume his former position of leadership but change in his society proved his effort abortive. Truly, Okonkwo is a man that says yes very strongly, his *chi* and his clan say nay. Okonkwo the wrestler is at last defeated.

The proverb “When a man says yes, his chi also says yes” is also deconstructed in another of Achebe’s urban-rural novel *No Longer at Ease*. Here the proverb is “A man does not challenge his chi to a wrestling match” (40). Certainly, this proverb is used to depict the character of Obi Okonkwo. In this novel Obi Okonkwo is portrayed as a crook because he stoops to take bribes. However, it is not only this avarice nature seen in him but the contemptibility of his ways that many of the Igbo proverbs in the novel help to underscore.

It is in the light of the foregoing, that Zulu Sofola has reconstructed or deconstructed the proverb motif cited in Achebe’s *Things Fall Apart* and *No Longer at Ease* into “Anyone who toys with his god, toys with his destiny” (*King Emene* 34). As a dramatist, she uses this Igbo proverb to castigate and reinforce the image and character of Ogugua as a man who struggles with his *chi*. On the other hand, such an Igbo proverb depicts the values of Igbo society, values by which Ogugua lives and dies.

Moreover, an Igbo proverb also serves as a thematic statement to remind one of the major motifs in the plays; for example, the value of genuine achievement, where no evil done by man will go undetected and unpunished and the idea of man as the architect of his own destiny. Thus, on a general note, the Igbo proverbs employed by Sofola in *King Emene* play a major role in setting the tone of the story appropriately, the embellishment of the plot of the story as well as development of characterization. Some of the proverbs cited earlier comment or warn against foolish and unworthy actions of King Ogugua. Possessing a limited knowledge of his past and of the manner of his becoming king of Oligbo community, and even of the true nature of the heinous crime committed by his mother, King Ogugua would suspect no evil in his mother. He frowns at the way the oracle and the Olinzele treat his royalty and gives up the dire message from the oracle as spurious, in putting all to a malicious conspiracy by Olinzele members against him. His banishment of Omu (leader of the women’s section of the government) from Oligbo is a political game plan to neutralize the Olinzele of which the Omu is a prominent member. It is an effort to undo what he cannot undo, as Ifemesia has noted in his study of Igbo society, the Omu on account of her enormous ritual role and the sacredness of her being cannot be deposed (47).

King Oguagua shows an absolute confidence in the oracle. His appointment of Nwanu as a substitute for the Omu, with promise that she will deliver the message tomorrow (6) is evidence of this. Having dispatched his own emissary who is not a member of Olinzele, he now expects a favourable message from the oracle. His own sense of his noble programme of rule and promotion of the welfare of his people and realm is undiminished – “I shall purge the kingdom and save myself and my innocent citizens” (6). This is the point of his irreversible alienation from the priestly class represented by Ezedibia, the palace medicine man, who unwilling now to further waste royal medicine on defiled king” (21) rescinds his allegiance in order eventually to lead the popular insurrection against the king.

To further illustrate heedlessness and obstinacy in Ogugua as contained in the aforementioned proverbs, Sofola presents Ogugua as a character who has grievance against the Olinzele for having killed his father “I am not a child. I know how the Olinzele

members killed my father with their deliberately planned evil advice. I know how the Omu in collaboration with Olinzele people colluded to kill my father. (*King Emene II*)

The Olinzele, who allegedly ruined the previous king, is now being thought of as having plans to dethrone his son, Ogugua. “they have advised me to do what has never been done before in Oligbo. They have advised me against the week of peace and ushering in the new year and the Omu has foolishly allowed herself to be used as their mouth piece. (*King Emene II*)

Ogugua’s fight against Olinzele is therefore a fight to save his life. It is also part of a perceived duty to a wronged father and the legacy that his father has left behind.

Zulu Sofola, similarly, depicts the processes by which King Ogugua, held hostage at different levels by inordinate ambition, moves toward solitary life and death. Heedlessness and obstinacy are the two factors that control Ogugua’s life. His ill-planned dismissal of the Omu, his brusque repudiation of his own godfather and his rejection of the appeal by Diokpa are other factors that contributed to king Ogugua’s tragic end. “What the oracle says or does not say is beyond your concern” (*King Emene 21*), he informs Diokpa. These diverse appeals by the people of Oligbo reminds one of the distraught chorus early in Sophocle’s *Oedipus Rex* and the fearful women in T.S. *Eliot’s Murder in the Cathedral*. The lament of Oligbo people is adequately captured below:

Since your coronation, fears have rent our heart. Disaster and destruction knock at every door. We sleep in fear and rise in fear. The gods continue to warn us, we have come to touch a soft part in you for our sake. But alas, we find a wall of unyielding rock. (*King Emene 20*)

Comparatively, the obstinate priest in Chinua Achebe’s *Arrow of God* can be compared to King Ogugua in this context. Reminiscent of the inhabitants of Umuaro in Achebe’s novel, the people of Oligbo in *King Emene* reject their king in order to save themselves, their hopes and their aspirations as a community. In addition, the subsequent encounter in Act II Scene II between members of Olinzele and King Ogugua sets out in grief longer than ever before what the line of dissonance is between the king and his advisers. The commitment of Olinzele members to salvage Oligbo community led to sending emissaries to consult the oracle, Mkpitime. The message Mkpitime gave to them to deliver to the king is similar to Nwanu’s:

We have a saying that a message does not kill the messenger. The messenger only delivers his message, whether or not the receiver likes or not, it is not the messenger’s problem... A certain member of the royal family has to make a vital public confession, and appropriate sacrifices have to be performed before your reign will bear fruit. It is also only after this confession and sacrifices that you can enter the peace week. Anything other than this will bring doom to you and all our people. (24)



The first few lines are proverbial in the extract above; “A message does not kill the messenger” (24). This Igbo proverb shows the courage displayed by the members of Olinzele to fight a common cause against all odds. They are fearless in presenting their problem to King Ogugua. Oligbo belongs to all, not only to the king. In this case, if the king commits a sacrilege, the entire community will suffer impending doom and calamity that will affect everyone. So, in a bid to avert this forthcoming doom in Oligbo, the members of Oligbo met the king to persuade him not to enter the peace week without obeying the directive of Mkpitime. After all, “It is a castrated man who shudders at the sight of a woman” (27). The action of the members of Olinzele is poised to bring a total change in Oligbo because wisdom is not freedom until the oppressor is dead.

Again, it should be noted that what are being stipulated in the message of the Olinzele members to King Ogugua above are confession and rites of expurgation. Importantly, the oracle demands neither the execution nor the punishment of the malefactor, nor indeed, the abdication of the king to whom the foul deed has given the crown. The king does not think of the possible avenues to social reconciliation and well-being; he still considers the message he has received to be of doubtful veracity, as part of the hostile plan of the members of the Olinzele.

ODOGWU: Ta, small boy! I say listen to good sense. Apart from pushing us about like small children, he has also exiled and desecrated the sacred Omu of Oligbo and has chosen someone who would tell him what he wants to hear. Even then, your chosen Nwani has not brought any message different from what we have been delivering to you. But in your frenzy you have missed the meaning of the message brought from the oracle by Nwani.

KING: It is you who have missed....

ODOGWU: (*To the audience*) A small boy enthroned only yesterday does not want any advice. An upstart whose umbilical cord is not yet cut wants to eat meat before he grows teeth. (*To the King*) I tell you, we had enough of your father and we don't want any shit from you at all. If the sense of your lineage was put in their anuses and not their heads, then for God's sake, step down and let better people step in.  
(25-6)

Odogwu's ominous outburst about Emene's father and immediate predecessor on the throne adds certain validity to King Ogugua's fear that his late father had been a victim of the Olinzele.

Significantly, Odogwu's outburst, “An upstart whose umbilical cord is not yet cut does not eat meat before he grows teeth” is proverbial and it means that wisdom in most Igbo

communities is an intrinsic character trait of most elderly people in Igboland. In this light, it is important for the young ones/youths to listen to the voice embedded with Igbo lore and cultural values which helps to restore unity and sanity in any Igbo cultural area.

Finally, in the worldview of the play, when the obstinate King enters the shrine at the end as advised by his godfather, Ojei, to commence the necessary rites to usher in the peace week “a dark circle” girdles the sun, symbolizing that the gods are angry” (*King Emene* 43) and that the community is in danger. Metaphorically, it could have existed even as the action opens in the play; an evil mother encircle and so is about to ruin her own son, the King and “son” of Oligbo. Ogugua, still blinded by his own will to mere power, states; “I am king of Oligbo and must reign “(*King Emene* 44). This extract shows that he does not, even as he reaches his tragic end, realize that he has been the victim of his own mother’s wickedness and the great but sinister force she embodies.

Nneobi, the tragic mother of King Ogugua, in a bid to confess her evil deed before Ogugua was enthroned, introduced this Igbo proverb to enlarge her story; “The rat did not fall from the ceiling without a cause” (*King Emene* 44). A collaborative evidence of this proverb can be seen in Umeasiegbu’s *The Palm Oil of Speech: Igbo Proverbs*. Umeasiegbu, records that “No fire, no Smoke” (45). In Igbo language, it is written as “Anwuru oku apughi i di ma oku a dighi”. Nneobi gains knowledge of this proverb motif and uses it to embellish the true account of her heinous crime and evil. Her woeful tale is captured below:

I suffered in my childhood with a poor mother of twelve children. I saw my mother cry bitterly night and day when she had no food for her hungry children. I could not bear this, so I started praying very early for a better life. My prayers were answered. Your father married me. My fortune and that of my children changed. I promised myself that I will never return to those miserable days... It happened that you were born the second son. This worried me very much. I decided that it was better to be the king than the brother of the king so I did the deed. Never did I foresee this. (*King Emene* 44)

Nneobi killed the late King’s first born, Chibueze, so that her son might become King. Ogugua after hearing Nneobi’s confession makes a sudden break from his Ojei who was restraining him, takes one of the daggers hanging on the wall of the palace and dashes towards his mother with it. He, at the end, commits suicide as the final act of expiation for the sins of his wicked mother, Nneobi. The social significance of this exposition is that truth is never hidden in this world.

Essentially, every race or community in the world has different ways of describing concepts that are central to the existentialism of the people. For the Igbo, the concept of

truth has continuous significance in their lives hence it has been characterized in various ways: in wise sayings, in proverbs, moral maxims, even in myth.

Moreover, truth which is *eziokwu* can be characterized as *ezi okwu dika afo ime, adighi ekpuchi ya aka*. The literary translation is ‘truth is like pregnancy’; it shows even if covered. This means that truth cannot be covered for a long time, before it uncovers itself again before everyone.

In addition, the cosmological concept of truth by Igbo has made them to compare truth to afternoon. *Ezi okwu dika ehihie, ejighi oku enyo ya*. Literally translated, it becomes; “truth is like noonday, one does not look for it with light”. In most speech events especially about arbitration, what is true is never mistaken for a lie. This happens because truth is self-evidential, resilient and self-explanatory. That is why the Igbo say: *Anaghi eli ezi okwu n’ala, maka na e mee nke a, o puta ome*. This translates to; truth cannot be buried in the ground or destroyed, because, if it is buried, it will germinate. Sometimes when it germinates it carries retributive justice with it just as seen in the case of Nneobi and King Ogugua in Sofola’s *King Emene*. Besides, the Igbo have this proverb, *Anya ka eji ama oka chara acha*. This means that, it is with the eyes that ripe maize is known. The truth about the wicked nature of Nneobi is exposed in the beginning of the play but the King and his subjects failed to notice this truth until the denouement of the play.

Furthermore, in Igboland, truth is revealed to man or members of a particular clan through the oracles, divinities or elders who are inspired by the gods. Some call it revelation, exposition or intuitive truths. This is also exhibited in the worldview of *King Emene*.

Nneobi’s confession manifests itself to the destruction of his son, King Ogugua. On his part, Ogugua is arrogant and very obstinate. His inordinate ambitions ruled and destroyed his life. It is through his actions in the play that the Igbo proverb motif “Anyone who toys with his god, toys with his destiny” (34) has therefore become meaningful. Ogugua toyed with the powers of the gods in protecting his destiny, so at the end, his misguided ambition destroyed him. Painfully, Ogugua has forgotten the Igbo proverb “A parcel is like a wife while the cord used to tie the parcel is like a husband” (34). It is in these terms that the Igbo proverbs inherent in the play become more meaningful and useful in making pertinent assertions about Igbo cultural existence. Certainly, some of these proverbs may not be accepted in some quarters as Igbo proverbs but because of the content of the story, setting, the biographical background of the playwright and the Igbo cosmological worldview they seek to project, one can at one moment see these proverbs as Igbo proverbs whether they have corroborative evidence in the form of having English equivalents or equivalents in any Nigerian language.

In conclusion, therefore, Nigerian writers like Chinua Achebe, Flora Nwapa, Zulu Sofola, Chukwuemeka Ike, Rems Nnayelugo Umeasiegbu and Akachi Adimora-Ezeigbo have displayed much strength in the use of Igbo oral traditions like proverbs. Despite this effort, not many Igbo playwrights have used Igbo proverbs in their plays like Zulu Sofola. It is sometimes speculated that it is easier to infuse proverbs in fiction than in play. For example, Achebe, Ike, Umeasiegbu and Adimora-Ezeigbo, write prose fiction, a pliant

form of literature which gives them the opportunity to insert Igbo proverbs into narration as well as dialogue. Sofola, writing as a dramatist, must put all her words into the mouths of her characters. She can never speak in her own voice or in the guise of an omniscient chronicler, lest, this formal literary restriction stops her from getting more acquainted with the use of her African oral art (proverbs) like other Nigerian writers. Indeed, the restriction has worked in her advantage, since it makes her employ Igbo proverbs in situations where they are dramatically appropriate and in situation of dynamic human interaction in which proverbs are expected to influence the course of subsequent events in the play.

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