



**FOLKLORE AND CULTURAL IDENTITY:  
A STUDY IN CHINUA ACHEBE'S *THINGS FALL APART***

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**Abstract:**

Studies on folklore as the art, narratives, epistemology, and practices of a particular ethnic population (human society) are gaining much scholarly attention as an academic discipline in the humanities today and have subsequently drawn much attention to the unquestionable indigenous ethical and moral episteme it carries up within the oral (or written) medium in Africa. Despite all these, it does not seem to receive the attention it deserves from Eurocentric discourse as the recurring characteristics that enable the recognition of a group by others or themselves from their own perspectives or paradigm. In this regard, identity is seen as a characteristic of the self that is determined by the social and historical context within which that self operates. This strongly suggests that identity is necessarily generated and constructed through some form of dialectic-internal and external-within a particular environment. Logically, it therefore, follows that identity is constructed and developed through social interaction to showcase that it is not an innate quality of an individual. This study seeks to draw attention to the richness as well as the uniqueness of cultural norms and values which indigenous knowledge entails by exploring conceptual frameworks suggested by postcolonial studies in an attempt to show that African literature-oral or written-is not a series of reversals, inversions as well as subversions of European forms. In fact, this validates the significance of folklore in African literature because of its sole expression of the creative writer's socio-cultural ethos. The hypothesis of the study is that art and literature offer an analogical mirror to cultural processes in an attempt to show that African novelists rely heavily on the lore of their people. This involves textual analysis of some aspects of folklore viz. myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles,

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superstitions and the art of story-telling as can be found in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* in an effort to show that folklore is not only bound up in memory and histories; but it is also tied to vibrant living traditions and creative expression due to its incentive, didactic and aesthetic concerns. It is passed down from one generation to another through word of mouth as it is unconditionally kept active by the people in the culture. It concludes that though actual forms of folklore have varied intricate functions, it has become one of the many ways Africans communicate who they are; though the culture of today is much more polycentric or pluralistic.

**Keywords:** folklore, oral, literature, repository, cultural norms, values, transmission, generation

## 1. Introduction

In his book, *African Literature: An Introduction*, Oyekan Owomoyela (1989, pp. 272) suggests that,

*"...there is hardly any phase of tradition and life that is not affected or regulated by some aspect of the folklore, because it is the medium through which the behavioural values of the community, the cumulative wisdom and technology devised by bygone ages are made available to the present generation and preserved for posterity."*

Underlying this suggestion is the basic assumption that folklore is the tales, legends, and superstitions of a particular ethnic population. I take, in this sense, 'ethnic' to relate to a group of people having common racial, ancestral, national, religious, or cultural origins as the central root of consciousness and cultural heritage of a given milieu. In this, memory is very significant because it is the way in which tradition, stories and other cultural elements or materials are passed down from generation to generation. In this paper, some selected elements of folklore such as stories - myths and legends -, proverbs, dance, and songs are carefully analysed, to the fullest, to show the important roles they play in shaping the values, beliefs, actions and peoples' behaviour within written frameworks. Folklore, as a product of human agency, serves as a significant means to enliven an entire value system as well as a worldview. From the foregoing argument, it is, in fact, possible to argue that folk songs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, or other materials preserved in words have come down from one generation to the other through the years. In recent years, folklore has become an important indigenous subject matter for the African novelist in his/her quest for appropriate terminologies as well as approaches to promote his/her thoughts, concepts, and ideas. In this regard, it is important to note that the traditional material of folklore, myth and legend, is intimately intertwined with the life of Africans and thereafter expresses in a figurative language its ethos and as well reflects its cherished tendencies originally. These aspects of folklore are highly didactic in that they impart knowledge and initially present a way of perceiving the world or the environment through all its different aspects using language as its medium of expression. A language is a tool that constructs and as well reshapes our identities. This means using a particular language classifies one into a social category. Thus, identity attributes such as language, food, religion, music, dancing and clothing have often been used as criteria for assigning identities to people different from us. For Kroskrity (1999, p.111) identity is the linguistic construction of membership in one or more social groups

or categories. By the same token, one could say that people usually assign identities to other people on the basis of the above-mentioned traits or attributes that are supposed to characterise their assigned identities as it is acquired through social intercourse where language and accent are markers of identity. In much the same way, one could argue that language is central to human identity and becomes for that matter a linguistic construct. This brings me to say that folklore is nothing more than the tales, legends, and superstitions of a particular ethnic population. Thus, oral literature in this sense, is part and parcel of the vast knowledge known as 'oral tradition' or 'orality' or 'orature'. In other words, it is a system of communication in which information and messages are transmitted verbally from one generation to another. In this case, the terms 'oral literature', 'oral tradition', 'orality', 'orature' and for that matter, 'folklore', is sometimes used interchangeably to mean "*elements such as language and belief systems that are shared by a group; that which gives a community its cultural and national identity*".

Today, or in contemporary usage, 'folklore' means popular and group-oriented expressions of culture as "*Africa is littered with oral literature*" (Ngugi 1995, pp.438-442). Thus, African oral tradition as people say carries with it not only the African oral tradition paradigm of story-telling which is tainted with the African belief system but also its general attitudes to life. While myths, legends and tales carry the historical realities and general attitudes to life, folklore on the whole constitutes an account of an asserted fact or circumstances. However, they transmit their values and experiences by telling the tales to the younger generation. It is worth mentioning that there are other oral forms such as folktales, fables, proverbs and idioms which help establish the genuine development of the African novel after the emergence of writing through western formal education. During the era of independence when Africa's cultural values were eroded by foreign incentive culture, African writers sought to draw from sources like the oral tradition or folklore tainted by the many-layered rituals of rites de passage, pagan or heathen worship. Thus, at the vanguard, writers like Chinua Achebe, Amos Tutuola, Ngugi wa Thiong'o, Elechi Amadi and Flora Nwapa, to mention just a few, write fictional works wherein people associate freely with mythology: demons, monsters, and dragons. These myths reflect the disintegration of the individual and community. Most of the leitmotifs of these literary works incorporate refrains of traditional songs about metaphysical and mythical phenomena fraught with issues sometimes difficult to understand; but which nevertheless echoes the harmony of a paradise lost.

This paper explores how a critical reading of the novel *Things Fall Apart* can inform readers when discussing identity issues. The main questions being investigated are how *Things Fall Apart* reveals social regulation and control by folklore through myths, legends, riddles, story-telling, and how a critical reading of the novel can be used when teaching and informing others about virtues such as love, kindness, obedience, pride, hard work, obedience, gratitude and spiritual sanity. In this study, the material for analysis is collected through a combination of personal attributes that influence the possibilities for interpersonal relationships based on a postcolonial reading of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The themes and folkloric elements discussed and analysed from the novel regard identity as an attribute or characteristic of the self that is determined by the social and historical context within a particular environment though it is not fixed; but fluid. There is now a large body of scholarship focusing on concepts like folklore, orality and oral literature in an attempt to conceptualise and establish that identity as a mark of

civilisation is constructed and developed through social interaction and is not an innate quality of an individual. Once we enlarge our gaze beyond issues pertaining to folklore, it becomes meaningfully clear that the most inclusive part of folklore is the folktale which is most often considered as a popular tale handed over from one generation to the other orally through mouth-to-mouth contact so as to draw people's attention to their plight and to teach moral lessons. In relation to the literary analysis conducted, practical implications and possibilities are discussed and considered. A number of conclusions are drawn from the analysis in this study. Firstly, the literary analysis establishes that *Things Fall Apart*, as a primary source, indeed can be regarded as a critique of post-colonialism. Secondly, by making connections to a modern-day example of Eurocentric views on Africans in terms of using this novel when discussing identity issues. This paper shows how Chinua Achebe's writings have been able to corroborate the paradigm that Africans did not hear of culture for the first time from the European colonizer. This has been made possible by the incorporation of folkloric materials along with many other cultural artifacts in his novels with much attention and emphasis put on mythology as vital ingredients in the creating and shaping of the plot of the narratives and as well showcase how it provided a rich background.

## 2. Conceptualizing Folklore (Oral literature)

J. Brunvand (1978, pp. 2–3) makes it understandable that:

*"Folklore is the traditional, unofficial, non-institutional part of culture. It encompasses all knowledge, understanding, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by customary examples. Many of these habits of thought are common to all human beings, but they always interact with and are influenced by the whole cultural context that surrounds them. Folklore manifests itself in many oral and verbal forms (mentifacts), in kinesiological forms (customary behaviour or social facts) and in material forms (artifacts), but folklore itself is the whole traditional complex of thought, content, and process which ultimately can never be fixed or recorded in its entirety; it lives only in performance or communication as people interact with one another."*

C. E. Nnolim (1987, pp.35-47) is of the view that:

*"By folklore we mean the unrecorded tradition of a people as they appear in their popular fiction, custom, belief, magic, ritual, superstition and proverbial sayings. Folklore also includes myths, legends, stories, omens, charms, spells found among a homogeneous group of people; it is a major component in the total folk culture of such a homogeneous group of people. The most inclusive part of folklore is the folktale; a popular tale handed down by oral tradition from a more or less remote antiquity and usually told either about animals or the common folk, to draw attention to their plight and to teach a lesson."*

According to both J. Brunvand (1978) and C. E. Nnolim (1987) folklore comprises the unrecorded traditions of a given people and as well includes both the form and content of these

traditions and their style or technique of communication from person to person. In sum and substance, it encompasses all knowledge, understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted in traditional forms by word of mouth or by any customary means. Brunvand sees folklore in general terms, as comprising the unrecorded traditions of a given people including both form and content of these traditions and their style or technique of communication from generation to generation. Generally, it has been argued that the word "folklore" was first coined and introduced in folklore studies by W. J. Thoms in *The Athenaeum* (1846); an association for the advancement of learning, particularly in science and literature. Initially, the term refers to the traditional beliefs, legends, and customs current among the common people and their study. In the words of Benjamin Botkin (1901-1975), an American folklorist and scholar, "folklore" is a body of traditional beliefs, customs, and expressions, handed down largely by words of mouth and circulating chiefly outside of commercial and academic means of communication and instruction.

In sum and substance, Botkin's idea that folklore is, in fact, basically a creative expression used to communicate and instil social values, traditions, and goals, is widely accepted by folklorists. This is reminiscent in what one finds in socialisation and education. As a result, every group bound together by common interests and purposes, whether educated or uneducated, rural or urban, possesses a body of traditions, which may be called its folklore. In these traditions, many elements, are individual as well as popular, but all of them are absorbed and assimilated through repetition and variation into a strict pattern, which has value and continuity for the group as a whole. In this regard, folklore embodies the totality of the people's existence, worldview and outlook to life. It comprises all the lore, rich cultural heritage and rich traditions of the people handed over to them from generation to generation orally, that is through mouth-to-mouth and hand-to-hand contact or relationship. This lore makes a given set of people or communities unique and distinguishable from other people and other communities.

While Brunvand, in his argument, reduces the different materials and manifestations of folklore into three groups such as: what people say (verbal folklore), what people do (customary folklore), and what people make (material folklore), Bascom (1953, p.283), draws inspiration from Brunvand's first category, namely, 'what people say'. And this explains why he sees folklore from a different perspective. He sees it as "*part of culture, but not the whole of culture which includes myths, legends, folktales, proverbs, riddles, the texts ballads and other songs.*" Ben-Amos (1974, quoted in Lindfors 1977, pp.1-2) also adopts the general definition of folklore advanced by Brunvand. He therefore espouses and even goes beyond Brunvand's definition of the term to make interesting comments on the functional aspects of the lore of the people as well as its context of performance. Thus, he states:

*"The forms of folklore as speakers delineate and recognize them have cultural and symbolic meanings. Texts, framed into genres and performed in socially defined communicative situations, acquire significances beyond the literal meanings of their constituent words. Ritual songs, for example, which abound with repetitions and obscure terms, are rendered meaningless outside their verbal or social contexts; or in other cases, their transition, from one context to another involves a transformation of meaning. Genealogies and legends function towards the promotion of social stability because they are symbolic expressions of political power and historical truth; parables are*

*effective in settling personal disputes due to their capacity to symbolize moral truth, and talks and riddles can entertain because of their inherent ability to unsettle reality."*

From these critical insights, one may argue that the crux of Ben-Amos's argument touches on some key features of oral literature or orality. For instance, he sees folklore as folk literature that is socially conditioned, secular in intent, and which performs perfectly social, political and economic functions. In this regard, it is this association of oral literature with folklore that has given to literature, oral or written, its special status of a work of art expressed in the carefully selected language (spoken or written) and for that matter deals with the thoughts, concepts and ideas of an individual or a people couched in figurative language. Language is in fact effectively manipulated in ways that signal it as different from ordinary language.

All the terms listed by Bascom (1953), Ben-Amos (1974), Jan Brunvand (1978) and Nnolim (1977), as elaborated earlier on, are incorporated under the umbrella term "oral literature" or better, what Brunvand calls "verbal folklore". In this regard, oral literature is considered part of the vast field of knowledge known as 'oral tradition' or 'orality', that is, a system of communication in which information and messages are transmitted verbally from one generation to another. The term 'oral literature' is, in this case, sometimes used interchangeably with 'folklore' or such elements as language and belief systems that are shared by a group; that which gives a community its cultural and national identity. In contemporary usage 'folklore' simply means popular and group-oriented expressions of culture. Hence, when a literary piece has been composed orally, transmitted orally, performed orally and presented in a special literary language, it is often considered to be oral literature. The crux of the argument is that oral literature is not only delivered by word of mouth but it also aims at the ear to move the whole body. Instead of doing it on paper or text, "*it relies for propagation and preservation on performance and memory*" (Clark 1965, pp. 282). Finnegan (1970, p. 2), in this regard, argues that oral literature "*is by definition dependent on a performer who formulates it in words on a specific occasion — there is no other way in which it can be realized as a literary product*". In her assessment of the importance of performance in oral verbal arts, Finnegan once again stresses that "*full appreciation must depend on an analysis not only of the verbal interplay and overtones in the piece, its stylistic structure and content, but also of the various detailed devices which the performer has at his disposal to convey his product to the audience*" (Finnegan 1970:13). In this case, African folklore has become part and parcel of what many literary African artists weave in their works so as to give it a true touch of beauty, glamour and identity; something African; that is to say very close to their own hearts. Folklore is then passed down from one generation to another and is kept active by the people in the culture using language.

In fact, language and style in fictional works or literary pieces as novels never move beyond a concentration on the supremacy of words; but somehow contain the meaning of style with the language used by creative writers. Language is to a greater extent both a carrier of folklore and a cardinal element of nationhood in that it allows people to give meaning to their lives as well as their environments: since every culture has different historical backgrounds and traditions; folklore has a different definition to each culture. Literature, which is known to reflect society, has as raw materials wo/man and his/her environment. The fact of the matter is that, people and culture are inseparable; language and culture underpin values that are

distinguishing features of a community. This explains why the folklore of any people serves either as an image or a mirror with which the identity of that community can be established.

From Afrocentric viewpoints, this idea has never been contentious. In their endeavor, they of course, connect folklore with the rhythms and even scenarios of very distant or past cultures. Today, many African writers document folklore in their fictional works so as to preserve their language and culture lest it would be lost forever. To avert this, some writers such as Flora Nwapa in her *Efuru* document any folklore they come across, even if it means repeating them in their fictional works. Since then, it has become increasingly clear that some researchers use these fictional works as documentation since they expose through them the history and culture of their originating community to enhance the understanding of and entertain their readers or audience in their endless effort to preserve their culture for the future generation. Thus, folklores -- tales, legends, and superstitions -- used in creative works of African writers do not occur by accident; rather, they are being used for specific purposes and as well quintessentialise African cultural patterns. In Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*, Elechi Amadi's *The Concubine*, and Amos Tutuola's *Palmwine Drinkard*, and Flora Nwapa's *Efuru*, to mention just a few, the reader is presented with various rich oral heritages. In these, the novelists feature and as well discuss manifold sessions where folktales, myths and legends are narrated and various songs and poems rendered according to the required circumstances. All these oral narratives are manifest in Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart*. The fact of the matter remains that Chinua Achebe was born and brought up in a claustrophobic African setting and was one of the fortunate recipients of western formal literary education. As a result, he writes as an African in the English language and the resultant effect is that he brings, as most African writers, his personality and culture to bear in his literary works, mostly novels, despite the fact that imperial power and its canon imposes itself as the only original way of thinking and as well posits that any authentic art must not be sought far from the centers of the "civilized world" despite the fact that its language and tradition shared very little with African ones.

In a very striking manner, most oral genres serve as repositories of historical knowledge; a tool for both social criticism and didacticism and as well as a medium for the edification of the audience. As can be inferred from this discussion, authenticity is very important in the selection of literature as folklore concerns itself with issues of culture, history, politics, stereotypes, sociology, psychology, religion, wisdom, pedagogy and language reflected in narratives, literature and worldview. In this sense, Chinua Achebe with his *Things Fall Apart* gives critical insights into the preservation of cultural and societal values through the appreciation of the myths, legends, stories, omens, charms, and spells (oral literary genres) they featured therein. These oral elements try as much as possible to show that there is no difference between appreciation of folklore and appreciation of culture. Whereas myth has at its core the origins of a people and is often sacred, folklore is a collection of fictional tales about people or animals. The society Achebe is delineating is an oral one; a society untouched by any knowledge of writing. This type of society is one in which sound and speech are extremely powerful and are for that matter a means to store and retrieve knowledge across time. Ong (2002) believes that knowledge in this type of society is stored in highly memorable ways by using mnemonic devices, specific, repetitive, standardized formulas, rhyming, songs, verses, proverbs, and connections to day-to-day life. Understandably, oral communication and traditions have for a

long time been important modes of social dialogue and transmitting history in African societies. Oral traditions comprise oral narratives namely epics, legends, and explanatory tales, poetry - praise poetry, chants, and songs -, and epigrams-proverbs, riddles, puns, and tongue twisters and serve to link the past and the present, construct collective worldviews and identity, educate the youth, express political views, and provide entertainment and aesthetic pleasure.

According to W. Bascom (1953), D. Ben-Amos (1974), H. J. Brunvand (1978) and C. Nnolim (1977), it makes sense to establish grounds for argument as to their clear, convincing and fascinating arguments on what folklore entails. Basically, their pronouncement carried great authority as "folklore" encompasses all knowledge, understandings, values, attitudes, assumptions, feelings, and beliefs transmitted by word of mouth. As a corollary, it is used to educate the young and subsequently help to establish social norms. Folklore is an oral history that is preserved by the people of the culture, consisting of traditions belonging to a specific culture. These traditions usually include music, stories, proverbs, history, legends, idioms, folktales, riddles, myths, customs, legends, beliefs, magic, folksongs, charms, spells, incantations, superstitions and myths. Myth is one of the important elements of folklore worthy of critical attention and study for it is the prime mover of many plots in fictional narratives. The idea of myth has been given various interpretations and analysis by Afrocentric or Eurocentric writers and critics who obviously define it from the angle, viewpoint and dimension it best suits their purposes. This accounts from the varying degree of definitions and analysis of myth in many scholarly publications.

In this context, this is the much we can take from the bulk of definitions of 'folklore' that replete many literary productions and publications. Chinua Achebe incorporates many folkloric materials in *Things Fall Apart* not only for entertainment purposes but also for cultural preservation in the context of post-colonialism. It is a fact that in oral cultures, acquired knowledge had to be constantly repeated or it would be lost. In this regard, fixed formulaic thought pattern was essential for wisdom and effective administration. The analysis of these folkloric materials is based on a theoretical framework proposed by postcolonial studies with the intent and purpose of discovering the extent of which featuring folklore in fictional writing can help stakeholders to establish a convincing understanding of Africa and Africans. Many African writers have made abundant use of folkloric materials such as proverbs, tales, riddles, myths, and folksongs in their novels. A close analysis of all these mnemonic devices shows that folklore, on the whole, is a tool for both cultural preservation and entertainment. This leads me to take a quick critical look at some of these definitions as a way of adding insights and providing a better atmosphere as well as a common ground of understanding relevant issues raised and used as the basis for argument in this paper. With *Things Fall Apart*, *Arrow of God* and *No longer at Ease*, Chinua Achebe has much, sufficient and adequate knowledge of certain areas of the culture as well as the folklore of his own people. In these novels, he is very comfortable with the subject matter which has unconsciously shaped the context, background, and several thematic issues he handles in his novels. This shows how he attached much importance to his traditions for having consciously or unconsciously made good use of abundant folkloric materials to show in part that every human society has its own culture, religious and ritual practices worth considering.



### 3. Significance of Folklore in Written Medium

To start, what is the significance of folklore in African literature? In a convincing manner, African folktales - part of culture - are often seen as means of entertainment as well as of education. However, they play even a significant role in educating the people, especially the younger ones about morality, ethics, and wisdom. Each folktale is an oral "text" taught by the old (elders) and studied by the youth for lessons of life in society. Since education is at the center of this discussion, let's start this by briefly focusing on the term "education", which, to some extent stands, in this context, for socialization. What impacts us as human beings from the day we are born to the day we die is what Castle (1966) terms "education". To a greater extent, this involves the relationship between a person and society, things and ideas. Castle's critical insights, obviously, recall the transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and patterns of behavior imparted in the process. For a society to be harmonious, certain codes of conduct have to be adhered to. Cultural practices are unique in different societies; but there are very often, some common values that run across societies. Classically, the aim of "education" is to produce a good citizen fitting in society with acceptable characteristics in a society as good neighbourliness involving responsibility or helpfulness. Oral education is achieved through the transmission of cultural and societal values generationally through folklore. Formal education is transmitted through institutions while culture is transmitted through, among other things, like music, dance, drama, folktales, legends, myths, proverbs, idioms, riddles and rhymes. Thus, through folklore, values, beliefs, traditions and history are taught and preserved from one generation to another. In pre-colonial as well as contemporary Africa, oral modes of cultural transmission continue to have validity wherever group life is sustained. Most African countries have made their educational policies to recognise indigenous languages as official ones in their countries. In this paper, folklore, despite the bulk of definitions given, is presented as an oral education that is held in high esteem and considered as vital in people's lives as it forms the gist of humanness; since its lack has often led to the degeneration of morals. Datta (1984) does not make any meaningful distinction between the different types of education that exist in human society. In his *Education and Society: A Sociology of African Education*, a book he published in 1984, he argues that both formal and informal processes of education are used for the transmission of knowledge, skills, ideas, attitudes and patterns of behaviour. The contention that Africa was ontologically oral has had two important implications-positive and negative - on the African worldview. On the negative side, it oversimplified both African histories and narrative traditions and as well reinforced the classical or old-age analytical dichotomies in the conceptualization of African in relation to Europe. Positively, it led to the valorization of oral sources in reconstructions of African history and of oral narratives—what was to become known in the process as oral literature, or orature—in African literature.

To support this assertion, one has to resort to the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* (1978), which defines folklore as the scientific study of all the knowledge, beliefs, habits, etc., of a racial or national group, still preserved by memory, or in use from earlier and simpler times. In the same line of thought, culture is defined by the same dictionary as the particular system of art, thought and customs of society; the arts, customs, beliefs and all the other products of human thought made by a people at a particular time. From these definitions, we discover

that culture is transmitted through oral tradition which includes among other things, music, dance, drama, folktales, legends, myths, proverbs, idioms, riddles and rhymes. Through folklore, values, beliefs, traditions and history are taught to the people who are eventually called upon to transmit, to hand over, to give for safekeeping. From this, it is interesting to note that folklore in novels written by African novelists instructs and entertains as well. Thus, E.N. Obiechina (1968) comments on "Amos Tutuola and Oral Traditions" is congruent:

*"Within the folklore, the essential factors are the moral lessons conveyed by the particular story and its entertainment value. Where and when the story takes place is not important. Instead of the novels interest in a particular character, the folktale is interested in morally defined character-types... heroes and villains of all kinds."* (p.122).

#### 4. Chinua Achebe's Literary Use of Folklore in *Things Fall Apart*

Wole Soyinka, the Nobel Prize winner, has argued that, "...the artist has always function in African society as the record of the mores and experience of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time" (1988, p. 20). When the writer in his own society can no longer function as a conscience, he must recognise that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of chronicler and post-mortem surgeon (1988, p.20). African folklore is a story or legend that is passed down orally from one generation to the next and becomes part of a community's tradition. These folktales often explain why nature is the way it is. They often have some important moral to learn within the story. We can also learn some morals like a lesson about life and so many more. The stories are not only entertaining but serve to teach a lesson as well; sometimes of a moral value and other times of survival. There are even stories of animals who help humans. Folklore asserts group identity, challenges cultural norms, and provides examples for ways of living a decent life. It is generally recognized today that any accepted pattern of behaviour, way of speaking, or complex of ideas that shape action can be called "tradition," regardless of the length of time it has been in existence. African folklore is a story or legend that is passed down orally from one generation to the next and becomes part of a community's tradition. These folktales often explain why nature is the way it is and often have some important moral to learn within the story; that is to say, learn some morals like a lesson about life and its peripeteia.

For the sake of convenience, we will focus on some selected elements of folklore such as stories, proverbs, dance, songs, rituals, folktales, anecdotes and folksongs and ceremonies which seem to provide a medium for experiencing reality in the novels. In fact, folklore is found to be a favourite indigenous resource for an African novelist that s/he draws on for molding the aesthetic concerns in novel writing. First, folklore denotes oral narration, rituals, crafts, and other forms of vernacular expressive culture and constitutes a fundamental part of what it means to be human. Every group with a sense of its own identity shares, as a central part of that identity, folk traditions—the things that people learn to do largely through oral communication. These are grouped in terms of belief, action, knowledge, craft and personal experiences. In terms of belief, we may talk of religious customs, creation myths, healing charms; of action, we have dance, make music, sew clothing; of knowledge how to build an irrigation dam, how to nurse an

ailment, how to prepare barbecue; of making architecture, art, craft, music; of saying personal experience stories, riddles, song lyrics. Considerable critical interest has grown around analysing the nuances of oral tradition, society and the novel in the context of Africa. For Chinua Achebe (1964), "*A writer who feels the need to right this wrong cannot escape the conclusion that the past needs to be recreated not only for the enlightenment of our detractors but even more for our own education. Because, as I said, the past with all its imperfections never lacked dignity*".

In a foreword to *A Selection of African Prose: Traditional Oral Texts*, Achebe (1964) states that he considers oratory one of the most important contexts for prosaic verbal art in Africa. Thus, in carving his characters he endows them with the ability to make extensive use of oratorical embellishments, like the following one, in order to make their arguments lament more powerful:

*"I fear for you young people because you do not understand how strong the bond of kinship is. You do not what it is to speak with one voice. And what is the result? An abominable religion has settled among you. A man can leave his father and his brothers. He can curse the gods of his fathers and ancestors like a hunter's dog that suddenly goes mad and turns on his master. I fear for you; I fear for the clan."* (TFA the end of part II. p.150)

Achebe uses of several wellerisms, a sort of specialized proverbs, to incorporate a quote makes sense:

*"Eneke the bird was asked why he was always on the wing and he replied: "Men have learned to shoot without missing their mark and I have learned to fly without perching on a twig.""* (183)

Apart from these oratorical embellishments to make a point, the novelist uses proverbs (See Kammampool, 2022) to embellish oratory. This is because proverbs are used to get into and explain matter better. They suggest meaning by use of indirection, invention and imagination. R. Finnegan (1970:393) argues that a proverb is "*...a saying in a more or less fixed form marked by shortness, sense and salt and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it.*" Finnegan's statement contains some pointers to the analysis of proverbs. These include shortness, terseness, fixity and poetic (aesthetic) quality in style and sense. In proverbs, many abstract ideas, values, and emotions are represented by certain emblems. In some proverbs some animals, birds with some peculiar attributes are used to symbolize some actions and used to compare the proverbs in progress to some other happenings. Symbols could be fixed or unfixed. The unfixed symbols are some emblems and actions which are symbolic in their context only, while fixed symbols are those emblems, actions and values which are culturally recognized anywhere and anytime. Indeed, a user of proverbs has the arduous task of ensuring that his usage is appropriate and suitable for the occasion he is using it (Hymes, 1974; Bashir and Idris-Amali, 2012: p. 495).

The language used by the novelist is closely related to the speech of the Igbo characters featured in the novel. Expressions and proverbs used by characters are repeated or echoes by the narrator and this accounts for him/her appearing as a spokesman for the community. Alluding to folktales is another important device in oratory. It allows for a symbolic and often

indirect criticism can be made of someone's behaviour. Charles Nnolim believes that, "*The most inclusive part of folklore is the folktale; a popular tale handed down by oral tradition from a more or less remote antiquity and usually told either about animals or the common folk, to draw attention to their plight and to teach a lesson*". But there are other contexts for folktales such as entertainment and, to a lesser degree, the education of children. Achebe employs several kinds of complete, albeit reconstructed, folktales as well as the often-quoted allusions. The most common kind of tale he uses is fable, or didactic animal tales. Thus, Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* tells a story/tale/myth (cosmic myth) of "how" Earth and Sky quarreled and "why" Sky withheld rain for seven years and "how" vulture was asked to go to the sky to ask for rain. Thus, Vulture was sent as an emissary to soften the heart of the Sky with a soothing song about the suffering of humanity as a result of their misunderstandings. The author uses this story to castigate Nwoye, Okonkwo's son who listens to what his father calls "women's stories"; stories meant for foolish women and children. Meanwhile, Earth's emissary, Vulture, sang pityingly a song that was full of desperation and hopelessness for mercy. In the process, the sky had mercy on the fate of human beings to avoid euthanasia. Sky moved to pity and gave Vulture rain wrapped in cocoyam leaves. But on his way, his long talon pierced the leaves and rain fell as it had never fallen before. (46). In fact, songs incorporated in creative writing not only make reading pleasurable but also marks the structure of the story in a more and attractive way. They also add to the musical aspect, an extra dimension of skill and for that matter enjoyment. So, whenever Nwoye's mother sang vulture's song about the predicament of men under drought, he felt carried away by the rhythm to the distant scene in the sky where the vulture sang for mercy on behalf of human beings. The link between the song and the story lies in the wordings which express the aesthetics of the suffering of the people on earth. In Africa, oral modes of cultural transmission continue or will continue to have validity wherever group life is sustained.

Myth is one of the elements of folklore which fulfills the crucial function of cultural interpretation and reflection which folklore fulfills in any given human society. Myth is an important element of folklore that accounts for the origin of things, and events and tries to answer the very important 'why questions' on 'how' several events and phenomena came into being. Myth is one of the important elements of folklore worthy of critical attention and study. The idea of myth has been given various interpretations and analysis by writers and critics who obviously define it from the angle, viewpoint and dimension it best suits their purposes. That's why the myth is always associated with philosophical wondering. This accounts from the varying degree of definitions and analysis. In the traditional setting described by the novelist, there is a lot of what William Johnson calls 'gestural folklore'. In *Things Fall Apart*, Achebe makes material folklore combined with gestures on many occasions. One such occasion is when Okonkwo drinks "*palm-wine from the skull of his first war victim*" (10). Another feature of folklore carefully used by the novelist is when Nwoye was captivated by the "*poetry of the new religion*" brought by the coloniser. For the novelist, *the poetry of the new religion* was something Nwoye felt in the marrow; "*the hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and in fear*". In fact, the wordings of the hymn poured into his patched soul as they dropped on him as frozen rain melting on the dry palate of the panting earth (p.132) and of the image of the lost sheep:

*"But there was a young lad who had been captivated. His name was Nwoye, Okonkwo's first son. It was not the mad logic of the trinity that captivated him. He did not understand it. It was the poetry of the new religion, something felt in the marrow. The hymn about brothers who sat in darkness and fear seemed to answer vague and persistent questions of twins crying in the bush and the question of Ikemefuna was killed. He felt a relief within as the hymn poured into his patched soul. Nwoye's callow mind was greatly puzzled."* (p.132)

With the song sung by the vulture to sooth the sky and the song sung by the new converts or neophytes, the novelist wants his readers to understand the *"power of the word"*, written or spoken, at its highest level. Just like the rain referred to in the story of the quarrel between earth and sky, the gospel of the imported religion poured like drops of rain on the neophyte's body and soul. In fact, it is not exaggerated to say that *"the power of the word is mysterious and enigmatic"* (Innes 1978: p. 119). In fact, conversion to the new faith was soul-destroying for the neophytes: the neophyte is no longer the easy-going person after joining the new creed with its incentive and demanding attitudes. The fact of the matter remains that s/he must be faced with oath-taking just like the one taken initially. Oath-taking, either in the oral or written tradition or culture, combines verbal and gestural folklore like greeting ceremonies and the hymn sung by neophytes to mark their commitment to the new creed highlighted in the Trinity. This corroborates the fact that poetry, myth, and fiction are all associated with the spiritual, sacred, the feminine and is totally reflected in songs used by the new converts from heathenism to mark their uncompromising commitment to it. We are told right from the beginning of the novel that Okonkwo was a stammerer, and *"whenever he was angry and could not get his words out quickly enough, he would use his fists"* (TFA p.2). Okonkwo's rejection of the power of the word means rejection of the words of the gods and of poetry for the factual and the historical can be associated with his general suspicion of words and his feeling shared by other Igbos, that language tends to evasion of action (Innes *ibid*). Curses, prayers as well as blessings are legion in Achebe's fictional works to show that poetic forms are prolific types of African verbal art. Abundant verbal folklore permeates his works.

As had been discussed by Kammampool & Laar (2021), gestural forms of traditional decent behaviour concern the breaking of the kola nut. Traditional greetings amongst Achebe's people are accompanied by a lot of gestures. On entering Achebe's compound in his fictional works one is captivated first of all, by the architecture of the compound with its *"obi"*, or main hut, barn and outer walls (TFA pp. 49-50) and a shrine hut. (TFA pp.13-14) which he carefully describes. One important material folklore is man's traditional belongings in the community as a human being or a man. This comprises a *"goat skin bag"*, (58), *"a snuff bottle"*, *"drinking horn"*, *"drinking gourd"*, *"carved wooden stool"*, etc... and an Igbo woman's adornment includes *"body painting with chalk and cam wood"* with *"various coiffures styles"* (pp.64;92) and titled elders and wives have special markings such as *"caps"*, as well as *"eagle feather for the cap and a bronze or beaded band worn on the ankle"* (p.18). One field where folklore is very striking in Achebe's novels is the religion which regulates people's life. The belief system is concerned with artifacts such as symbols of one's personal god and ancestors (p.118) which are *"masks"*, (81), *"amulets and charms"*, *"the sacred bullroarer"* (p.169), the ancestral staff and a statue.

For Ngugi (1995, pp. 438-442), oral tradition or religion is a living tradition. Even now there are songs being sung in political rallies, in churches, in nightclubs by guitarists, by accordion players, by dancers, etc. Another point to be observed is the interlinked nature of art forms in traditional practice. Verbal forms are not distinct from dance, music, etc. For instance, in music there is a close correspondence between verbal and melodic tones; in 'metrical lyrics' it has been observed that poetic text is inseparable from tune; and the folktale often bears an operatic form, with sung refrain as an integral part. The distinction between prose and poetry is absent and fluid. Though tale, dance, song, myth etc. can be performed for individual aesthetic enjoyment, they have other social purposes as well. Dance, for example, has been studied 'as a symbolic expression of social reality reflecting and influencing the social, cultural and personality systems of which it is a part. The oral tradition also comments on society because of its intimate relationship and involvement. The production and conservation of oral traditions often involved performance based on a participatory ethic as there were highly trained and esteemed custodians of these traditions. They were historians, advisers to rulers, patrons, and other members of society, spokespersons, diplomats, mediators, interpreters and translators, musicians, composers, teachers, exhorters, warriors, witnesses, praise-singers, and ceremony participants during namings, initiations, courtship, marriages, installations, and funerals. Through their oral accounts they have been entrusted with the role of interpretators of history and have since then taken advantage of twentieth-century technologies including novels.

In fact, folklore is found to be a favourite indigenous resource for an African novelist to draw on for moulding the aesthetic concerns in novel writing. Thus, considerable critical interest has grown around analysing the nuances of oral tradition, society and the novel in the context of Africa. Scholars such as Walter Ong, Dell Hymes, Isidore Okpewho, John Iroganachi, Theo Ekechukwu, Romanus Egudu, Rems Umeasiegbu, E. Nolue Emenanjo, and Ruth Finnegan have raised questions or attempted to answer questions related to these interconnections. As pioneer novelists, their texts have historical perspectives. Although the texts might not be precise history, they at least contain much reliable information concerning the folk interpretation of colonialism and its aftermaths, wars, and other events. The fact that these matters were crystallized into mnemonic devices brought about the remembrance and memorability of such historical facts in a primarily oral culture. It is interesting to note that unlike Chinua Achebe and many others just document folklore which eventually does not make for only pleasurable reading. It is also worth recalling that critics like E. Obiechina have confirmed that African oral tradition has survived in spite of the introduction of 'writing' as a Western phenomenon as well as a foreign tradition that it bears. But I think this means more than this limited analysis and explanations. In the past fifty years or so, oral literary specialists have been engaged in exploring the connection between the oral performance of literature and the production of its written counterpart.

In Achebe's novel, it is found that some of the elements of folklore featured therein are the **act** of story-telling. Many of the stories embedded in the novel play a set of functions. While some make moral or didactic comments on issues pertaining to societal norms and serve as a medium of entertainment, others disseminate knowledge about the legends and glories of the past. The novel contains an innumerable number of folktales and stories-part of folklore- set in oral cultures where memory was very important because agricultural techniques are passed

down from generation to generation to memorise because one needs to know when to cultivate the land, plant and harvest, or else it could lead to mass starvation of society as is found in the myth of the quarrel between the Sky and the Earth. Undoubtedly, oral communication and traditions such as epics, legends, myths, tales, poetry praise poetry, songs, folkloric materials have been important modes of social dialogue in the process of transmitting history in African societies for a long time. When combined, these oral traditions served and still serve to link the past and the present, construct collective worldviews as well as identity, educate the youth, express political views, and provide entertainment and aesthetic pleasure.

## 5. Conclusion

The use of folklore in the novel has a close relationship with myths and folktales. Apart from their didactic purposes, their goals are first of all to provoke vigorous discussions by challenging participants' moral values, secondly, to sharpen their argumentation skills, and thirdly prepare them for effective dispute management in tribal or marital life. Achebe's fiction is set in a harmonious and balanced Igbo society. Understandably, it arises basically out of Igbo life and language in suggesting better alternatives. In reporting experiences in Igbo life, Achebe has had to alter the English language so as to include elements of folklore such as stories, sayings, proverbs, riddles, songs, folktales, and witticisms drawn from Igbo language to make some points clear to Eurocentric critics. This has made Achebe's style and language a significant distinguishing characteristic of his literary art in that it provides, exclusively, an accurate medium for experiencing reality. For a society to be harmonious, certain codes of conduct (or norms) have to be upheld and thereafter, taught to the younger generation. This recalls the real role of education, oral or written. Oral education or informal education is achieved through the transmission of cultural and societal values generationally through folklore. While formal education is transmitted through institutions culture is transmitted among other things, through music, dance, drama, folktales, legends, myths, proverbs, idioms, riddles. Through folklore, values, beliefs, traditions and history are taught and preserved from one generation to another. Achebe uses all these elements to showcase that, in oral cultures as well as written ones, oral modes of cultural transmission are still valid.

Critics and writers have made comprehensive analysis of the influence of folklore as a reservoir of cultural ethos that constantly enriches the novel and novel writing in Africa. Literature, we all know, reflects society, and derives raw material from the society to which it responds. Of course, people and culture are inseparable because culture is the aggregate of concepts and values which characterize a community. That explains why the folklore of any people can serve as an image or mirror with which that community can be appraised. In a very striking manner, most oral genres serve as a repository of historical knowledge, a tool for both social criticism and didacticism and medium for the edification of the audience. Folklorists, historians, and philologists have endeavored, in many ways, to trace the origin, history, and meaning of individual proverbs, their variants in relation to folklore. It has been argued throughout this paper that folklore concerns itself with issues of culture, history, politics, stereotypes, sociology, psychology, religion, wisdom, pedagogy and language reflected in narratives and literature. Achebe's use of folklore is regarded as the pinnacle of achievement in

the academic field for many years with regard to the fundamental principles underpinning his vision to “*labour from an inbuilt, in true responsibly, not only to himself but to his roots*” (Soyinka 1988, p.17).

### **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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