

**"MODERNISATION, NOT TO BLAME": THE SOCIOLINGUISTICS OF
SELECTED PROVERBS IN CULTURE-BASED HOMILIES IN OLA ROTIMI'S
*THE GODS***

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Abstract

*This paper explores the sociolinguistics of proverbs in culture-based homilies in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (henceforth, *The Gods*) that enact existential truths and material realities of 21st-century Africa, which has been overlooked in previous research. *The Gods* serves as a source of data elicitation. Eleven purposively selected proverbs in the play constitute the study population. The study is underpinned by Hymes' *Ethnography of SPEAKING*. Findings reveal that Rotimi's deft deployments of proverbs in culture-based homilies in the drama foreground a degree of cultural affinity and indigenous knowledge transfer in ways relatable to the socio-cultural experiences of his audience. In the play, the selected proverbs index warnings and cautions, rebuke and censure, cultural identity preservation, perpetuation of effective leadership, equity and social justice. The study also unearths how the Yoruba ideological stance captured in proverbs in *The Gods* serve as culture-based homilies in ways that intuit the minds of readers by projecting the uniqueness of Africa's native identities, indigenous epistemologies and rich cultural values in a world that inheres the unrelenting domination of skewed Western hegemony. It is argued that the gradual subjugation and erosion of Africa's cultural values, traditional orientations and primordial cherished virtues should not be blamed on the overweening effects of modernisation. It is concluded that this study expands the frontiers of knowledge in the humanities, by providing profound insights into how African drama reinvent Africa's moral wheels, legitimize social inclusiveness, and foreground the existentiality of divinity, preventing cultural contradictions in this 21st-century fast-paced world.*

Keywords: *Culture-based homilies, Ethnography of Speaking, Ola Rotimi, proverbs, sociolinguistics*

Introduction

Language serves different utilitarian purposes for its users in any human communicative encounters. As a communication facility, language can be used to achieve both good and evil causes. For instance, language can be used as a facility to foster togetherness or build walls among its users; it can promote propitious interpersonal relationships or create

conflicts and whip up tensions among individuals within the same speech environments or distant communities; it can also become a source of motivation or demotivation to other users. Additionally, it can be used for the maintenance, restoration or destruction of extant social order (Obuh and Omenogor, 2012). One of the characteristic ways by which humans, especially Africans, deploy language to achieve such utilitarian purposes within their speech communities is the utilisations of proverbs.

More often than not, African creative writers deploy proverbs to spice up and embellish their language use when communicating the thematic foci that preoccupy their literary works. These creative writers deploy proverbs, for instance, to convey deeper and profound messages, particularly extolling social virtues, but condemning vices, centering on what is right and socially acceptable or what is wrong and distasteful in human communities. Besides, proverbs are used to transmit weighty, hard-hitting messages to target audience in a mild or euphemistic way. In so doing, Nigerian creative writers such as Chinua Achebe, Elechi Amadi, Chukwemeka Ike, T. M. Aluko, Zulu Sofola, Zainab Alkali, Flora Nwapa and Ola Rotimi are prolific users of proverbs in their creative works. It is therefore evident that proverbs intersect language and literary studies in a way that stimulates research interests in the humanities.

Proverbs and African Drama

There are different scholarly literatures on proverbs from diverse disciplinary perspectives. Some of these multidisciplinary studies on proverbs focus on anthropology (Green and Korobo-Solomon, 2002; Finnegan, 1994; Mieder, 1974, 1985; Arewa and Alan, 1964); history (Alster, 1993; Mieder, 1987); sociology (Fasiku, 2006; Seitel, 1994; Taylor, 1994); medicine (Yusuf and Methangwane, 2003); education (Yusuf, 2001); philosophy (Owomoyela, 1981) and linguistics. From the linguistic perspective, scholars adopted various theoretical orientations in the contextual analyses of proverbial constructs in talks and texts, especially relying on pragmatics (Ajayi, 2018; Odebunmi, 2008, 2006; Norrick, 1994); discourse analysis (Taiwo, 2016; Ogbulogo, 2002); semantics (Adedimeji, 2003; Yusuf, 2001); sociolinguistics (Ohia, 2023; Nwabudike, 2020; Ajibiye, 2006) and semiotics (Daramola, 2013) among others. Thus, there are different definitions of proverbs by scholars (Makinde, 1986; Finnegan, 1994; Yusuf and Methangwane, 2003; Odebunmi, 2006; Mensah, 2010). According to Makinde (1986:2), African proverbs are “accumulated treasure [that] serve as a way of looking at things differently, as they draw on observations, knowledge, and the wisdom of ancestors who use short, witty phrases that could be transmitted from generation to generation.” In view of this, an understanding of the significance of proverbs as repository and purveyors of indigenous epistemologies is not in doubt. Similarly, Finnegan (1994:36) observes that African proverbs “occur on all

occasions when language is used for communication either as an art or a tool... Proverbs are used in oratory, counseling, judging, embellishing speeches and enriching conversations." Thus, proverbs are discursive tools for conveying well-thought ideas about existential truths, particularly in matters relating to elucidating and expounding pertinent issues of concerns in societies.

In African dramatic arts, proverbs are deployed profusely to communicate hard-hitting messages with deeper meanings succinctly. Finnegan (1994: 36), asserts that proverbs in African societies "occur on all occasions when language is used for communication either . . . in oratory, counseling, judging, embellishing speeches, and enriching conversations." This suggests that the peculiarities with which Africans, particularly novelists and playwrights, communicate depends on 'prevailing context-based demands' and shared situational knowledge of cultural affordances in which the discourse occurs. For example, in Wole Soyinka's *The Lion and the Jewel*, Monye (2002: 334) submits that "Soyinka has borrowed extensively from Yoruba traditional proverbs to color and enrich the language of his presentation [and] has used the traditional wisdom of the elders to show how Baroka won Lakunle in the fight for the hand of Sidi in marriage." Interestingly, there are a number of existing studies that have explored and explicated the roles of proverbs in Ola Rotimi's drama texts. These studies include Nwabudike (2020); Zakariyah (2016, 2013); Odebunmi (2006, 2008); Adedimeji (2007, 2003); Monye (2002), Bryan (2002) and Wilson (1994). However, none of these studies focuses on culture-based homilies in *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (henceforth, *The Gods*). In view of this, the aim of this research is to explore and explicate selected proverbs in *The Gods* that serve as culture-based homilies for unearthing, reconstructing and lampooning the gradual subjugation and erosion of rich Africa's cultural beliefs, native intelligence and indigenous values and virtues, a situation blamed on modernisation. This area of research interest has not received sufficient attention among scholars, especially in Nigeria. The specific objectives of the present study are therefore to:

- a. identify and categorise proverbs in culture-based homilies in *The Gods*;
- b. examine and explicate the socio-cultural paradigms of proverbs in culture-based homilies in *The Gods*.

Literature Review

Extant Studies: Ola Rotimi and Discourse of Proverbs in his Plays

Late Emmanuel Gladstone Olawale Rotimi, popularly known as Ola Rotimi, was a renowned Nigerian playwright with a number of fascinating plays, notable among them are *The Gods Are Not to Blame* (1971), *Kurunmi* (1977), *Our Husband Has Gone Mad Again* (1977) and *Hopes of the Living Dead* (1988). Ola Rotimi deploys proverbs profusely in his

plays to uncover the underlying intentions and individual perceptions of characters in his plays and provide profound insights to readers regarding the thematic foci in a way that makes his drama relatable to readers' cultural experiences and socio-political realities. Using pragmatic imports, Adedimeji (2007) thus describes Ola Rotimi's works as "English Words, Yoruba Meanings."

The discourse of proverbs in Rotimi's plays presents broad, interesting communicative environments that have been of interest to scholars. Using the combination of semantic and pragmatic theories, Adedimeji (2003) focuses on meaning explications in works of Chinua Achebe and Ola Rotimi. In a similar fashion, Adedimeji (2007) uses Universal Pragmatic principles to analyzing Nigerian proverbs in *The Gods*. The study argues that similar socio-cultural realities often appropriate the use of proverbs. Odebunmi (2008) investigates crisis-motivated proverbs in *The Gods* using Mey's pragmatic acting approach. His findings reveal two types of crisis-motivated proverbs, namely: social crisis-motivated proverbs and political crisis-motivated proverbs, characterized by praxis of counselling, cautioning, persuading, challenging, threatening and admitting. Nwabudike (2020) examines proverbs in *The Gods* from a sociolinguistic perspective. The study shows that the use of proverbial expressions frequents more in the dialogues by male characters and is conditioned by the circumstances of their users. However, none of the existing studies focus on the sociolinguistic perspective of proverbs in culture-based homilies in *The Gods* which is the focal point of exploration in this research.

The Concept of Culture-based Homilies

No doubt that Africa is at a crossroad in the globalized world space as many African nations still grapple with mounting challenges posed by simmering insecurities, extreme poverty and extended hunger, environmental degradation and climate change crises, kidnapping and ritualism, superstitions, religious intolerance, communal clashes, pervasive corruption, fueled by political partisanship, leadership ineptitude and cultural identity crises (Omonzeije, 2017). This study thus explores the possibility of Africa's anchorage on the intersection between language and literary productions in advancing Africa's socio-cultural realities and addressing developmental issues, which plague the continent. In today's world, with globalization and rapid changes, the concept of culture-based homilies is a corrective behavioral discourse intended to impact individuals with indigenous cultural values and virtues by encouraging positive behavior, but condemning social vices amidst cultural diversities, cross-cultural interactions and influences. Culture-based homilies focus on fostering the enactment "of a more tolerant and open society" through the espousal of positive traits (Sosnytskyi, *et al.* 2024). Positive traits in the African societies include the espousal of chastity, integrity, hospitality, rectitude, restitution, justice and equity,

protection of the female gender, respects for parents, elders and constituted authorities. However, there is a gradual subjugation and erosion of Africa's cultural values, traditional orientations and primordial cherished virtues – a situation that should not be blamed on the overweening effects of modernisation. Since culture is a key factor in the interactions between individuals and societies, the present study therefore adopts a sociolinguistic approach of selected proverbial constructs in Ola Rotimi's *The Gods* with particular reference to Hymes' Ethnography of SPEAKING.

Theoretical Orientation

Hymes' Ethnography of SPEAKING: A Sociolinguistic Theory

Sociolinguistics is an area of linguistics that focuses on the intricate relationships or connections that exist between language use and the society. Essentially, sociolinguists are interested in language use according to certain constant variables such as age, gender, economic class, religion and educational qualifications among others within speech communities. What constitutes a speech community is a group of people who use a given language or dialect as a tool for conversational exchanges for various purposes. Due to the complexities and diversities of social interactions, the field of sociolinguistics evolved to account for the schema, indices and variables that inhere such interactions. For instance, scholars in sociolinguistics have interrogated, unearthed and explicated how language use reflects differences in age, gender, education, professions, economic status, cultural peculiarities, political leanings and regional disparities within societies, especially across the global space (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2014; Ajibiye, 2006; Adegbiya, 1996; Hudson, 1980; Gregory & Carrol, 1978; Hymes, 1974; Gumperz & Hymes, 1972; Fisherman, 1971). In sum, sociolinguistics is concerned with the influence that societal indices, structures, belief systems and peculiarities exert explicitly on language use.

Ethnography of SPEAKING is a theory situated within the purview of sociolinguistics, propounded by Dell Hymes (1974) as an analytic framework for studying, describing and explicating *how*, *when* and *why* people speak, particularly in specific contexts or situations. According to Hymes (1974), the first point of 'speaking' is having the knowledge and understanding of the prevailing communication culture of a speech community. What he describes as the 'prevailing communication culture' is what people do and how they do it when they communicate with each other. Hymes later modified the theory and labeled it: 'Ethnography of Communication.' Interestingly, the focal point of Ethnography of Communication is the conceptual postulation of 'communicative competence.' Hymes holds the view that communicative competence is a product of cultural competence and native intelligence. Such cultural competence and native intelligence reflects the knowledge of the structures and systems of the language regarding *how*, *why*, *when*, and *with whom* to

speak. Thus, for anyone to be regarded as a member of a speech community, he or she must demonstrate sufficiently both the linguistic (i.e. understand the language structures and systems) and nonlinguistic knowledge (i.e. be familiar with the crucial aspects of the culture and belief systems relating to the language use) of speech situations, communicative acts and speaking styles (Hymes, 1974). Based on this premise, he invented the acronym: 'SPEAKING': **S** – setting (i.e. the physical environment); **P** – participants (i.e. the speaker); **E** – ends (i.e. the purpose); **A** – acts (i.e., the speech act performed in the speech); **K** – keys (i.e. the speaker's tone of voice or mood); **I** – instrumentality (i.e. the medium of conveying intended messages); **N** – norm (i.e. the shared cultural knowledge or beliefs); and **G** – genre (i.e. the type of speech). Thus, Hymes' (1974) Ethnography of SPEAKING is considered appropriate for our analysis in this study as it affords us valuable insights into how sociocultural variables can be situated and interpreted in dialogic constructs embellished with proverbs in the two plays.

Methodology

Rotimi's *The Gods* has been purposively chosen on the grounds that it portrays socio-cultural realities in Nigeria. For instance, the language use in *The Gods* is replete with the preponderance of Yoruba proverbs in a way that represents squarely the Yoruba socio-cultural experiences and traditional belief systems. Besides, there is a plethora of proverbs in culture-based homilies in the play that authenticates everyday life realities of the characters and enriches the dialogues in most appealing ways. For data, only the proverbs that convey culture-based homilies in the text are sampled. Using purposive sampling techniques, eleven (11) proverbs of culture-based homilies have been extracted from the play to serve as our data. For the purpose of this research, the choice of eleven (11) proverbs was necessitated by the desire to conduct a detailed analysis. Thus, the data are subjected to a sociolinguistic analysis within the purview of Hymes' Ethnography of SPEAKING. The selected data were labelled 'excerpts' as each proverb reflects and instantiates explicitly culture-based homilies, hence the reliability of the data gathered.

Data Presentation and Analysis

This section presents the categorizations, and communicative functions of proverbs in culture-based homilies in *The Gods* through the theoretical lens of Hymes' Ethnography of Speaking. Based on the data selection, the categorizations and analysis are explicated below:

Proverbs of Warning and Caution

Freedom and justice are undoubtedly among the first principles of humanity. However, living in a society without the benefits of warnings and cautions is tantamount to living a

life of rollercoaster – a situation that undermines primordial communal values and impedes the wheel of social progress. Thus, the selected proverbs under this section are meant to warn the addressee(s) on the grounds that something bad may happen, especially in order to enable the addressee(s) to avoid the risks involved in taking an action, decision or task that may jeopardize the humanity in communality. The excerpts and analysis are below:

Excerpt 1: "He who pelts another with pebbles asks for rocks in return."– (P.7)

In excerpt 1, the Setting is the town of Kutuje. The Participants include the speaker, Odewale addressing the townspeople after the utter defeat of Ikolu warriors, who had previously invaded and taken captives of Kutuje. The End of the proverb is to bolster the Kutuje people's confidence in self-belief, especially when faced with an unrelenting attacker. The Act is directive (i.e. an act of warning and advising); while the speaker's Key (i.e. tone of voice) is temperate and exudes self-confidence that comes with unexpected victory. The Instrument is verbal. As a warrior, Odewale demonstrates his knowledge of the cultural Norm that a frontal revenge is a normative war strategy to regaining freedom and securing peace from unrelenting attackers or invaders. The Genre is the discourse of violent-indicative constructions. In Yoruba culture and traditional beliefs, such a proverb is used during the delivery of a victory speech, sending warning signals to possible future enemies. In this context of speaking, cautionary messages are meant to forestall any premeditated attacks or foretold war against a peace-loving people.

Morals: This proverb teaches us that whatever you do to others comes back to you with greater consequences. If Africans must live and co-exist peacefully as a people in a global community, we must restraint our actions, words and deeds so that others, including our fellow compatriots, are not hurt or humiliated by our actions and speech, a situation that threatens cordiality and undermines peaceful co-habitation. The reason is that whatever we mete out to others comes back to us frontally.

Excerpt 2: "Until the rotten tooth is pulled out, the mouth must chew with caution."– (p.21)

In excerpt 2, the Setting is the palace. The Participants are the Priest, three Chiefs, Aderopro, Queen Ojuola and King Odewale. The speaker is Aderopro, the prince of late King Adetusa, who had died mysteriously. The mysterious death of King Adetusa is linked with the protracted sufferings and calamities in the town of Kutuje. Aderopro is sent as an emissary to find out the cause of the late King's death from the Oracle. When Aderopro returns from the trip, he uses the proverb as a verbal indirection, leaving everyone present confused and King Odewale, visibly impatient. The End of the proverb is to raise apprehension as well as call for caution. The Act is assertive (i.e. an act of suggesting); while the speaker's Key (i.e. tone of voice) is calm and respectful. The Instrument is verbal.

With Aderopo's knowledge of conversational Norms, he employs the proverb to achieve verbal indirection, rather than being direct or confrontational in the delivery of the anticipated message from the gods. The Genre is the discourse of violent-indicative constructions.

In Yoruba culture, an unresolved weighty matter triggers a feeling of apprehension and despondence, and creates an atmosphere of uneasiness that often overwhelms those involved or affected by the puzzling situation, especially when the life of a human is involved. The people often seek ways and adopt diverse methods to clear the air or unravel the puzzle in order to put the matter to rest. In this context of speaking, using a proverb to achieve verbal indirection is a factor.

Morals: This proverb teaches us that weighty matters require personal discretion. Our world would be a better place when people learn self-restraint, especially when making statements that could have spiral effects on the strained social fabric of a united global community. Making unguarded statements that severe long-standing ties or strain long-term relationships for personal benefits would only undermine our collective sensibilities and impede our shared aspirations as a people living in a global space.

Proverbs of Rebuke and Censure

A society without an operational mechanism of checks and balances would consequently and hopelessly degenerate into a state of doom, fatalities and internal wrangling. Thus, the selected proverbs in this section are discursively constructed to reprimand the addressee(s) or express disapproval of something done by the addressee(s) that could have far-reaching negative effects on peaceful cohabitation and inhibit mutual cooperation and collaboration as members of a speech community. The excerpts and analysis are below:

Excerpt 3: "We have left our pot unwashed, and our food now burns."– (p.21)

In excerpt 3, the *Setting* is the palace. The *Participants* are King Odewale, Queen Ojuola, the Council of Chiefs and Aderopo. The speaker is Aderopo as everyone present anticipates the message from the gods to the people, regarding the cause of the troubles and calamities in the land. The *End* of the proverb is to express disapproval of the people's prolonged inactions, regarding the mysterious death of their former king – King Adetusa, whose murderer still lives and holds a prominent position in the town. The *Act* is assertive (i.e. an act of reporting and concluding); while the *Key* is ambivalent and edgy. The *Instrument* is verbal. Aderopo's knowledge of cultural Norm is demonstrated by his use of verbal indirection in reporting the message from the gods so as to rebuke the people for their prolonged silence and inactions about the mysterious death of King Adetusa, making a bad situation become worse. The Genre is censure discourse.

Morals: This proverb teaches us that preventive measures are better and cheaper than curative measures. Africans have largely abandoned their core cultural values and belief systems, by allowing overweening western influences and lifestyles to replace, suppress and erode, over the years, our unique cultural identities and cherished virtues. Consequently, "our food now burns" because we are treated with much disdain and as an after-thought by advanced nations, especially in matters that affect members of the global community. If Africans and their leaders had walked the path of honor by building human development capacities and creating powerful institutions rather than building dynasties of godfathers and emperors, our situations would not have gone from bad to worse. In other words, Africa would have been granted a voice and become a force to reckon with in the global economic and political space.

Excerpt 4: "The hyena flirts with the hen, the hen is happy, not knowing that her death has come." – (P.30)

In excerpt 4, the Setting is the palace. The Participants are King Odewale and Council of Chiefs. The speaker is King Odewale. The End of the proverb is to express his feeling of personal insecurity and lack of confidence in the people of Kutuje, as their sitting King. The Act is expressive (i.e. an act of complaining and scolding); while the Key is aggressive and aggrieved. The Instrument is verbal. With his knowledge of cultural Norm, King Odewale understands that enthroning a man from a different tribe as 'King' would invariably attract feelings of envy and uneasiness among some native people, making such envious individuals seek furtively devious ways to dethrone, disgrace or destroy the reputation of the 'foreign King.' The Genre is censure discourse.

Morals: This proverb underscores deception and smokescreens are disguised, potent weapons wielded in the dynamics of global power and foreign relations. With Africa's unpalatable experiences of transatlantic slavery, serial colonization, neo-colonialism and, specifically, racism and mental slavery in recent times is thus the potent weapon being wielded against Africans as members of the global community through cultural imperialism. In the economics of global power and international politics, the colonial imperialists are "the hyenas flirting with the hens of Africans" through the promise and delivery of foreign aids, especially food reliefs, medical supplies, military interventions, and international loans. With all these foreign handouts, "the hens" of Africans are "happy", thinking that foreign aids are targeted at ending poverty, hunger, and chaos in the Continent, "not knowing that her death has come."

Proverbs of Cultural Identity Preservation

Africa indexes multiculturalism. Sadly, the overweening presence of white colonialists and capitalism has pressured sizeable number of governments in Africa to adopt languages and

cultures of their colonial imperialists as against native languages and indigenous cultures. Thus, the selected proverbs in this section emphasize the necessity of cultural identity preservation as Africans, particularly to avoid the conflict of interests between Africa's unique cultural heritage and Africa's modern identity. The excerpts and analysis are below:

Excerpt 5: "Can the cockroach be innocent in a gathering of fowls?"– (p.53)

In excerpt 5, the Setting is the palace. The Participants are King Odewale, Queen Ojuola and Council of Chiefs, who just arrive at the palace. The speaker is King Odewale. The End of the proverb is to express his doubt and sense of insecurity as a King over a group of people from a different tribe as his. The Act is expressive (i.e. an act of complaining and scolding); while the Key is firm and coarse. The Instrument is verbal. King Odewale relies on his knowledge of cultural Norm on the dangers associated with living in a foreign land, knowing that your economic status and political positions may not guarantee your personal safety and affirm your legacy, especially when you are surrounded by intolerant and hostile people of the land. The Genre is the discourse of identity portrayal.

Morals: This proverb reminds Africans of their history – history of transatlantic slavery in which innocent people were forcefully extracted from their native lands; history of colonization and deprivation; history of mineral exploitation and economic manipulations by imperialist Europeans and exploitative Americans; history of forceful disparage of our cultural heritage and traditional belief systems; history of the subjugation of Africa's cultural identities. African leaders must understand that the white colonialists, who acknowledge the atrocities and inhumanity that Africans had endured for centuries under the white rule, are terrified at the rising prospects of Africa's economic freedom and cultural identity preservation in the global space. Thus, these colonialists would do everything with the ambits of their powers to keep Africa in perpetual subjugation. In the light of this, African leaders should seek and proffer solutions to the gnawing problems of Africa within, with little or no foreign interference because how "can the cockroach (i.e. Africans) be innocent in a gathering of fowls (i.e. the colonialists)?"

Excerpt 6: "The monkey and the gorilla may claim oneness, but the monkey is Monkey and the gorilla, Gorilla."– (p.51)

In excerpt 6, the Setting is the palace. The Participants are King Odewale, Queen Ojuola and Labata. The speaker is King Odewale. The End of the proverb is to express his doubt and sense of insecurity as a King over a group of people from a different tribe as his. The speech act is expressive (i.e. an act of complaining and scolding); while the Key is firm and coarse. The Instrument is verbal. King Odewale relies on his knowledge of cultural Norms on the dangers associated with living among a people of different tribal extraction, especially holding a vantage position in such foreign land. In this context of speaking, all

entreaties and assurances from Queen Ojuola fails as King Odewale has refused to accept the notion that he is truly one of them even though he has ruled the land for more than a decade, especially the way he has been treated surreptitiously as an 'outsider', whose presence spells doom on the land. The Genre is the discourse of identity portrayal.

Morals: This proverb reinforces the uniqueness of Africa's cultural heritage and distinct traditional belief systems. It is a fact that Africa had existed independently before its encounter with the Europeans and Americans – an encounter that culminated into decades of transatlantic slavery and exploitative business of indentured servitude in a way that advances the mineral and economic wealth of Europeans and Americans. Despite decades of large-scale mineral expropriations and human exploitations of Africa, these white colonialists and capitalists would ensure the continuity of subjugating the potential of Africa using Africans and their leaders. Today, the advanced economies claim to be constructing a global space in which achieving oneness and equity in terms of foreign relations is paramount. However, African leaders must realize the truism in this proverb: "The monkey and the gorilla may claim oneness, but the monkey is Monkey and the gorilla, Gorilla." Thus, Africa should consider the productions, renewal, exchanges and preservations of her core cultural values and indigenous epistemologies in the global space, especially at the regional and international arenas.

Excerpt 7: "The snail may try, but cannot cast off its shell." –(p.60)

In excerpt 7, the Setting is the shrine of Ifa. The Participants are the Priest of Ifa and young Odewale. The speaker is the priest, being consulted by young Odewale in his desperate search for self-discovery. The End of the proverb is to discourage young Odewale from considering the thought of breaking free from his premeditated fate since he now knows what fate has in store for him. The Act is assertive (i.e. an act of asserting and concluding); while the Key is quirky and firm. The Instrument is verbal. The priest of Ifa relies on his knowledge of cultural Norm that humans possess the instinctive will to escape imminent danger that may threaten their survival or make living a life of purpose unbearable. The Genre is the discourse of identity portrayal. In this context of speaking, the priest's disclosure of a curse placed on young Odewale from birth is unsettling and makes Odewale uneasy, especially knowing that the pronouncement from Ifa, as a young man raised in Yoruba culture, is sacrosanct.

Morals: This proverb is a wakeup call to Africans, especially those in Diaspora, who prefer the western lifestyles to Africa's cultural values. This preference is a function of their firm beliefs in the superiority of western choices, values and lifestyles. A number of Africans would rather denounce or distance themselves from their ancestral roots than associate and show any affinity with Africa. Such questionable disposition is a resultant effect of mind conditioning (i.e. mental slavery) that makes Africans still living a life, that they claim have

gained freedom from. This proverb: "The snail may try, but cannot cast off its shell" reminds such Africans that home is home; ours is ours, regardless of how we feel about it. Additionally, with the progressively waning interests in the promotion of Affirmative action and Critical Race Theory, a situation resulting in growing racist ideology and white supremacist rule, the best disposition is for Africans to embrace, promote and preserve Africa's multicultural heritage and unique traditional identities wherever and whenever in the global space.

Proverbs on the Perpetuation of Effective Leadership

A cursory glance at modern-day Africa reveals a continent bedeviled by grossly insensitive and self-serving leadership – political, business, religious, and traditional. Thus, the selected proverbs in this section address concerns regarding the perpetuation of effective leadership in Nigeria, specifically, and Africa by extension. The excerpts and analysis are below:

Excerpt 8: "When rain falls on the leopard, does it wash off its spots? Has the richness of kingly life washed off the love of our King for his people?" –(p.10)

In excerpt 8, the Setting is the palace. The Participants are King Odewale, Queen Ojuola, Council of Chiefs, Ogun Priest and two citizens. The speaker is the second citizen. The End of the proverb is to entreat King Odewale to take urgent steps in ameliorating the ravaging epidemic in the land. The Act is directive (i.e. an act of requesting and pleading); while the Key is ambivalent and sympathetic. The Instrument is verbal. With the speaker's knowledge of cultural Norms, the political head, especially in an oligarchic system of government, retains the executive power to adopt appropriate measures and make decisions that would assuage the people's gnawing pains and address their grief and concerns by providing rapid responses to halt the outbreak of epidemic diseases. The Genre is the discourse of leadership orientations.

Morals: This proverb teaches us that political leadership is about service delivery and taking responsibilities, especially securing lives and properties and providing social welfare schemes to the people. However, Africa is 'sick' today due to bad leadership that has drained off the 'health' of Africans despite the massive human, mineral and natural resources. Sadly, "the richness of kingly life (i.e. ostentatious lifestyle) has washed off the love of our king (i.e. political leaders) for his people." For instance, a number of African leaders have shown lack of capacities, competence and political will to respond to the common yearnings and collective aspirations of Africans in terms of cultural emancipation, economic development, mass security and improved living conditions.

Excerpt 9: "For only a madman would go to sleep with his roof on fire."—(p.11)

In excerpt 9, the Setting is the palace. The Participants are King Odewale, Queen Ojuola, Ogun Priest, Abero – the queen's maid, and the townspeople. The speaker is King Odewale in the presence of the townspeople, who just arrived at his palace. The End of the proverb is to express his sense of empathy and compassion to his people as their King. The Act is assertive (i.e. an act of asserting and claiming); while the Key is firm and coarse. The Instrument is verbal. King Odewale relies on his knowledge of cultural Norm about leadership, knowing that it is his duty to proffer remote solutions to the outbreak of epidemic among the people in the land under his watch. In this context of speaking, a leader who folds his or her arms while there is trouble in the land attests to the leader's inexcusable sense of irresponsibility and lack of capacities. The Genre is the discourse of leadership orientations.

Morals: This proverb addresses issues of leadership in Africa. African leaders must take responsibilities for their failings and inadequacies that have put the African continent on the rear seats at the global arena. Leadership is about taking responsibilities, particularly when the chips are down or credits in times of shared prosperities and equal economic opportunities because the buck stops at the leader's table. However, nothing is more disturbing than having leaders who lack competencies and capacities, and are unwilling to accept responsibilities when "the roof is on fire" as a result of their own failings and inadequacies. Today, the "roof of Africans are on fire" with low life expectancy, absence of quality and qualitative education, provision of inadequate basic amenities and public infrastructure, state-sponsored violence, attacks on democracy and rule of law through limitations of critical voices and restrictions of civil engagements, erosion of cultural values and subjugation of traditional knowledge among others. With the roof of Africa on fire, African leaders must live up to their responsibility because it is "only a madman [that] would go to sleep with his roof on fire."

Excerpt 10: "Meat that has fat will prove it by the heat of fire!"— (p.37)

In excerpt 10, the Setting is the palace. The Participants are the Royal Bard, King Odewale, Queen Ojuola and his four children. The speaker is the Royal Bard, eulogizing King Odewale in the presence of Queen Ojuola and his children. The End of the proverb is to praise King Odewale (i.e., a monarch) who has proven beyond reasonable that he is a trustworthy traditional leader, especially during hard and trying times. The Act is assertive (i.e. an act of reporting and concluding); while the Key is cheerful and appreciative. The Instrument is verbal. With the drummer's knowledge of cultural Norms, King Odewale is born to rule, not just a monarch. The Genre is the discourse of leadership orientations. In this context of speaking, King Odewale represents metaphorically "the meat that has fat"

and based on his selflessness, integrity and organizational skill, has proved himself “by the heat of fire” as troubles and calamities befall the land of Kutuje under his leadership watch. *Morals:* This proverb teaches us that leadership at any levels is not just about title, but about selfless service delivery at critical times, especially. African leaders must understand that the perennial problems of insecurity and terrorism, biting poverty and extended starvation, environmental degradation and climate change emergencies, pervasive corruption and greed, injustice and inequality among others in Africa are solvable with right leadership that possess the capacities, competencies and political wills to drive developmental innovations across different strata of the societies. Thus, African leaders need to rise to the occasion in order to prove to the global community that they have what it takes to transform the continent from a third world to a first world in terms of promoting indigenous technology, cultural innovation and traditional epistemologies. In so doing, African leaders would prove that they are "meat that has fat, proving it by the heat of fire!"

Proverb of Equity and Social Justice

The guarantees of equity, social justice and fairness are parts of the social fabrics on which African societies are built. This implies that communal existence, cultural values and traditional knowledge play positive roles in ensuring equal protections, liberties and opportunities to indigenes living within the same speech communities. Thus, the selected proverb in this section underscores the necessity of equity and social justice as a prerequisite for peace and unity. The excerpts and analysis are below:

Excerpt 11: "A cooking-pot for the chameleon is a cooking-pot for the lizard!"– (p.19)

In excerpt 12, the Setting is the palace. The Participants are King Odewale, Ogun Priest, Council of Chiefs and Aderopo, who just arrives with a message from the gods to the people. The speaker is King Odewale. The End of the proverb is to encourage Aderopo to deliver the message in public rather than discuss it in private with him, as the King. The Act is directive (i.e. an act of encouraging and advising); while the Key is firm and anxious. The Instrument is verbal. King Odewale relies on his knowledge of cultural Norm of speaking, that a matter of public concerns should not be discussed in private, knowing that such as act of secrecy whips up unintended suspicions and creates an atmosphere of uneasiness, especially when those affected are within earshot. The Genre is the discourse of equality. In this context of speaking, King Odewale utilizes the proverb to foreground his sense of cultural values of equity and justice in order to dispel all forms of doubts, dissension and tensions.

Morals: This proverb teaches us that the freedom of one person should not infringe on the rights of others as a means of bringing about peace and unity in modern Africa. In other words, the outlaw of the freedom of self-expressions, equity and equality, and social justice

is a recipe for social dissension, religious intolerance, political instability and internal acrimony. Consequently, "a cooking-pot for the chameleon is a cooking-pot for the lizard" is one of the pivotal conditions for progressive, secure, peaceful and prosperous societies in the 21st century global space.

Discussion of Findings

This study has presented, categorized and analyzed eleven (11) selected proverbs in *The Gods* by Ola Rotimi, with particular reference to the socio-functional paradigms and how the renowned playwright deploys Yoruba proverbs in the play to orientate culture-based homilies towards building better African indigenous societies within the global space, especially a community of black people free from 'mad' ideological stances and extreme foreign orientations under the guise of modernization. Expectedly, the question of Africa's cultural renaissance, knowledge productions and transfer has been largely contested.

Basically, the analyses of these proverbs reveal and reinforce the Yoruba ideological stance on social interactions that orientate towards the discourse of violence-indicative constructions, discourse of identity portrayal, leadership orientations, equity and social justice. Thus, the language of creative writing by Ola Rotimi is replete with Yoruba proverbs, serving as a catalyst for positive value creations through cultural productions, knowledge transfer and deepening sense of communality of Africa's indigenous societies in the global space. Sufficed to mention here that the extra-literary values of proverbs in culture-based homilies in Rotimi's *The Gods* function to instantiate fundamental issues in contemporary African societies. Besides, proverbs in *The Gods* serve as culture-based homilies in ways that intuit the minds of readers by projecting the uniqueness of Africa's native identities, indigenous epistemologies and rich cultural values in a world that inheres the unrelenting domination of skewed Western hegemony. Thus, the gradual subjugation and erosion of Africa's cultural values, traditional orientations and primordial cherished virtues should not be blamed on the overweening effects of modernisation.

Conclusion

This present research has explored the use of selected proverbs in culture-based homilies sourced from Ola Rotimi's *The Gods*, with particular reference to the sociolinguistic perspectives. Using Hymes' *Ethnography of Speaking*, this study has unearthed the significant roles played by the deft deployments of Yoruba proverbs drawn from shared cultural values and indigenous epistemologies to impart didacticism, rectitude and cultural aesthetics. Thus, the categorizations of these proverbs serve pedagogic relevance, particularly providing valuable insights into language teaching, and serving as a viable guide to teaching and learning creative arts within the ambits of the humanities. Since

proverbs relate to appreciable socio-cultural nuances and shared indigenous knowledge systems, this paper argues that the explicit imports of proverbial constructs in social interactions can transform our world in view of the gradual subversion of cherished African values and erosion of traditional knowledge systems, represented as ‘modernization.’ It is therefore concluded that this study expands the frontiers of knowledge in the humanities, by providing valuable insights into how African drama reinvent Africa’s moral wheels, legitimize inclusive societies and foreground the existentiality of spirituality and divinity, preventing cultural contradictions in this 21st-century fast-paced world.

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