

## Deploying Orature to Meet the Challenges of Unemployment in Nigeria

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### ABSTRACT

Nigeria in the last three decades has had to grapple with the perennial problem of unemployment. This is not uncommon among developing nations considering the legacy bequeathed by the colonial masters. The widespread exploitation and misadventure in the African continent, defective political structure and the political elites that continued the exploitative tendencies of their masters remain a sad commentary. It is on this premise that this study intends to interrogate the problem of unemployment from within. The literary theory is pluriversalism while the teaching learning theory adopted was the behaviouralist approach. A noteworthy realisation is that Orature is the verbal artistic product that encapsulates the sensibility and knowledge production of the African world view that shows that native intelligence can positively contribute to national development. The study concludes that Orature, if properly deployed could be a plausible solution to unemployment particularly among the Yoruba youths in Nigeria.

**Key words:** Unemployment, Pluriversalism, Orature, Native, Intelligence

### INTRODUCTION

Yoruba is the language of the Yoruba people who are predominantly settled in south-western Nigeria, the nation which has most populated black people in the world. It is one of the three major languages in the midst of Nigerians' four hundred languages. Yoruba is used as medium of instruction at Yoruba native speaking schools and study as a school subject up to University degree level. It is a language with codified orthography. The Yorubas are also found in large number in other nations of the world like the Republic of Benin, Brazil, Gabon and United States of America. The Yoruba culture include traditional mode of greetings, governance before colonization, wedding, naming and religious ways of life with series of oral traditional renditions (orature). In the Yoruba culture, there are gods and goddesses who are believed to be the disciples of the main god known as 'Olodumare'. The gods and goddesses in Yoruba land have different oral praising poems, songs and chants which in the context of this article are classified as oral literature and orature. In addition, Yoruba have family praise poetry and other traditional renditions for merriments and festive gatherings. This study centres on training the Yoruba youths on the utilization of their numerous family traditional verbal arts as source of livelihood particularly in the recent period of unemployment.

#### Statement of Problem and Background of the Study

There is an undoubted need to encourage the promotion of African oral literature particularly among the African

youths in order to save many African languages from going to extinction because of the influence of western education. The reactions of students to traditional oral literature (orature) as a course of study shows their lack of interest in African traditions and culture due to the powerful influence of western education and its accompanied perceived civilization. For example, their responses to questions that demand fascinating answers on their family verbal art reflecting their socio-cultural milieu such as: eulogies, (*oriki*), wedding chants (*ekun(iyawo)*), god of thunder chants (*Sango pipe*), poem (*ewi*), hunting chants (*Ijala*), masquerade chants (*esagegun*) etc. prominent among the Yoruba speech community were shabbily done. The students often come up with such flimsy excuses like "I am sorry sir, we are Christians in our family, so we do not attend such programmes". Another student once said "Islam has taken over such practices in my family. In fact, the masquerade costumes and her paraphernalia in our family compound have been burnt and destroyed." Other students described performances in Yoruba oral literature as fetish exercises that may lead one to hell in the heaven. These responses and actions are glaring signs that Yoruba oral literature and verbal arts are gradually dying if the new generation of the Yoruba people are not encouraged to keep them alive. In Nigeria, in the recent time, issue of youth unemployment has been considered as veritable source of youth restiveness and display of unruly behaviours, hooliganism, killing, kidnapping and political thuggery. Many of the hawkers on the Nigerian streets are Nigerian youths with Bachelor Degrees in Arts, Sciences and Social

sciences making their living on running after passengers to hawk their commodities daily because they cannot get employed or even been empowered to be on their own. According to one of them, he makes about one thousand naira (less than 4 USD) daily in this tedious attempt. Therefore, the need to encourage additional sources of self-employment opportunity informed a study of this nature. Also, this study stands out as another effort in the promotion and protection of African and Yoruba traditional verbal arts through formal training of Yoruba youths.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This research among others is aimed at training Yoruba youths on the use of Yoruba orature as veritable source of employment in addition to their acquisition of Western education at the Universities. The natural creativity in the youths were elicited through trial performances of students' choice of their respective verbal acts. The use of electronic devices such as android phones, video clips and recording of the displayed verbal arts in the class was also to promote the students skills in modernisation of traditional performances of Yoruba oral traditions and verbal renditions. The main purpose of this study is to prepare Yoruba youths to be enlightened on alternative means of getting self-employment after university education through the acquisition of good performance skills in Yoruba verbal arts (orature). It is also the intent of this research work to promote and protect Yoruba oral literature.

### **Theoretical Frame work and Methodology**

In securing a sound base for this study, the adopted theories were pluriversalism and the behaviourist approaches to learning. While the pluriversalism theory was used in laying emphasis on evidences that confirm the world view on the prominent position of African oral literature and the contributions of African literary scholars in literary studies, the behaviouralist stimulus response aspect was favorably utilized as a base for teaching orature practically as means of securing self-employment by the youths used for this research and others as it assisted students to learn from each other. The stimuli involved in this study include the exposure of the students to practically documented performances of their choice areas of orature. Another stimulant used for the students was seeing the practical performances of actors, traditional singers and dancers who are globally acclaimed celebrities. The video clips and photographs used include the ones of: 1. Yoruba unemployed youths hawking along streets in Lagos, Ibadan and Oyo cities; 2 the video clips of ARAGA SUPER BAND of Modakeke performance at Oyin Akoko in Ondo state Nigeria; 3 The video clips of traditional drummers in Alaafin of Oyo town palace; The recorded clips of the known traditional dancers celebrities like the Ilesha (a town in Nigeria) performance of OMOGBOLAHAN OLUOMO High life Juju Band and 4 The recorded video performance of youth traditional drum(Bata) on the live television programme of Orisu Television station in Lagos. These provided a ray of hope for students and thereby as-

sisted in enlisting their interest and cooperation throughout the exercise. This approach was informed by the behaviorist assertion as claimed by Strinivsan that:

“Learning is a complex stimulus which Skinner referred to as the three term contingency comprised of discriminative stimuli” However, in this research, the choice of theoretical framework did not make us lose sight of Joseph Muleka’s (2014) opinion on the challenges of choice of theories for African oral literary works thus:

“Owing to the centrality of the performer, in an African performance, choice of theory in respect of oral literature put the artist at the centre, because application of the Western theories to African oral literature becomes difficult because most of such theories are not designed to cater for oral nature of African literature”. The Social learning method of Albert Bandura in which learners learn through each other was also adopted. This theory has often been called a bridge between the Behaviorists and cognitive learning theory because it encompasses attention, memory and motivation. Each student’s presentation encouraged others such that more interest in other verbal arts were developed by the students. Six class sessions of 22 undergraduate Yoruba youths of the Federal University Oye Ekiti, Nigeria were organized. Each student presented his/her community oral verbal arts. Wedding chants, traditional drums and dance steps were prominent among the presented orature. Observations and suggestions for improvement on each performance were made and students learned from each other as expected in Badura’s behavioural principle of teaching and learning. The whole class was then constituted into performing group schedule to entertain guests at the University’s forthcoming convocation and graduating ceremony. The students involved are all Yoruba natives and of between eighteen and twenty years of age presently in the 300 level.

### **Review of Literature**

The political situation in Nigeria like in most Third World Countries that had once suffered colonialism cannot be left undiscussed in a study of this nature. For example, according to Oke et al (2008, p. 54), the colonial administrators realized there was a need to study and appraise their educational policy instead of considering the actual needs of the people living in their colonized colonies. This led to the coming of The Phelps-Stokes Commission under the leadership of Thomas Jesse Jones. Part of the findings of the Commission was once put thus:

“it was hard to vouch for the quality and value of the education that was provided for the Africans”.

The import of this finding is that the education given to the natives was not thorough enough for them to respect themselves and appreciate their native culture and nor to conceive productive ideas since Africans were trained as consumers and not producers and manufacturers. Emphasis was on theory rather than practicals. Poorly educated political elites, therefore, cannot be expected to do better than they were irrespective of availability of abundant human capital and natural resources at thier disposal after independence. Early African elites ignorantly allow the human and natural

resources at their disposal to be frittered away as a result of poor management and maintenance culture. This ineptitude has impoverished the masses more than before hence the submission in the poem- Rhythms of Creation, of Nwoga 1982 titled: 'I Live on the Tail-end of the World'

i live...  
 i know I live  
 i live like a piece of rag  
 i live like the remnant of hope  
 i live like the amputated tail, on the tail-end of life  
 (Rhythms of Creation, Nwoga(ed) 1982, p. 116)

The repetitive use of the expression "i live" is symbolic". It shows the poet is conscious of his oral tradition and rhythmic pattern of oral representation in Africa. Also, the use of simile "like" is a marker of the pathetic situation the persona in the worldview of the poet finds himself. To liken one's self to a rag, the remnant of hope and an amputated tail, on the tail-end of life reflects the hopelessness and life of servitude the masses are forced to live amidst abundant natural resources. A particular case is the Niger Delta region in Nigeria. The place as a rain forest region once had a very robust aquatic life with various species of fish, flowers, birds and was widely reputed for its large quantity of Iroko trees that the people are aptly called "children of Iroko" as Ojaide (2010) once submitted through his poem thus:

The roaring flames are no sacrificial bonfires,  
 not the annual congress of devotees and their pantheon;  
 The thundering blaze is not a series of festival canons  
 to serenade providers of communal plenty, health and happiness.  
 No more the divine bounty all year round to brag about;  
 it all went up in incessant gas flares and oil blowouts.  
 (p.64)

The metaphors of 'roaring flames' in the first stanza, 'thundering blaze' in the second stanza and "incessant gas flared and oil blowouts" in the third stanza; vividly describe the devastation and destruction the oil exploration and exploitation of the multinationals have inflicted on the ecology of this hitherto serene community. A place that was once reputed as "divine bounty all year round": All that has become a thing of the past. What the people have instead is an ethnic group divide, and disenchanting as a result of the antics of the exploiters as represented by the multinational oil companies operating in the area. Similar to what they did during the era of slave trade, the West entices the monarchs with gifts and in return takes over their land and people. This is succinctly projected by Ojaide in the text, *The Activist* (2006);

"...When I am offered a gift, I take it, you know that it is not customary to reject a gift". Chief Tebele said.

"Not from your robbers or enemies", Chief Ishaka responded...

"We have no robbers or enemies here", the monarch intervened. "Bell Oil is our friend and partner in progress"  
 "Your Royal Highness", Chief Ishaka replied, "I will like them to be friends and partners, but they are not now. Unless we are unequal partners that they take away our wealth and leave us tidbits to quarrel over as we are doing now"! (p.137)

This dialogue between two traditional rulers undoubtedly mirrors the anger and hunger of the people as their resources are being depleted without any physical development and employment opportunity for the youths. What they get instead are ecological problems that make life unbearable for the masses. Hence, the agitation of writers from that region as noted in works of Ken SaroWiwa, John Pepper Clark Bekederemo and Tanure Ojaide to mention a few.

According to Dasylva (2017, p.21), pluriversalism as a relative theory used in this study can be definitively captured as shown below:

The term "pluriverse" from which "pluriversalism" was conceptualized was first used by Janet Conway and Ja-keet Singh, in their joint publication: "Radical Democracy in Global Perspective: Note from the pluriverse" (2011). Pluriversalism, as opposed to universalism, was conceptualized and recently consolidated, expanded, advanced and popularized.

Pluriversalism is a distinct agenda for advancing clearly defined methods and episteme for Africa's intellectual autonomy in world culture and knowledge production. Besides addressing some aspects of restoring and reclaiming Africa's lost centrality through a properly channeled, recouped energy, Pluriversalism imbues Africa with the capacity to originate, adopt and adapt, invent and renew such knowledge, such that, rather than work with a handed-down "perspective" it emphasizes the epistemic difference for creating an alternative knowledge system for interrogating the intertwined concepts of coloniality and modernity to which Africa's fate seemed, to date, to have been cruelly and intricately consummated (p.21).

Unemployment is defined as a situation where someone of working age is not able to get a job but would like to be in full-time employment (Pettinger, 2017). In Nigeria, the labour force, as contained in the National Bureau of Statistics record, comprises persons between ages 15 and 64 years who are willing and able to work regardless of whether they have a job or not. Being employed, underemployed or unemployed are measured differently based on availability of the job, the number of hours for which a person is able to work, the subsisting regulations, cultures and the social contexts. (Akanji, 2018, p. 28) Unemployment in Nigeria has assumed a worrisome dimension in recent time because the youths constitute the bulk of the working population. There is looming population explosion, with the current estimation put at about 198 million by the National Population Commission (*The Guardian*, April 12, 2018, front page). Hence, the appellation of the most populous black nation and giant of Africa.

However, high rate of unemployment among the youths, inadequate government programmes to accommodate this teeming population and poor social infrastructure to meet the challenges at hand has resulted in the emergence of miscreants and ethnic militias such as area boys in Lagos, Niger Delta and their environs. In the Eastern part of the country they have theirs; same goes for the North and South. This set of people become ready tools for politicians to carry out dirty deals like stealing ballot boxes during elections and

other criminal activities. It is in light of this that a labour and security expert and scholar Akanji (2018), warns that;

It has been proved that poverty, which is the imminent result of unemployment among this age categories, can be a potent driver of insecurity in the society. The people in these categories may, in order to impose their wishes, engage in violence by the use of physical force which causes hurt to others and the nation at large. This is an early warning to the country that another form of violence may erupt from this age category if their under-employment status is not seriously addressed. (p.30)

While this research aligns with the position of this erudite scholar, it equally intends to extend the frontier of the discourse by addressing youth unemployment from two diverse perspectives. The first is the uneducated/half educated. This group of youths usually constitute the bulk of the population that are prone to criminal acts which Akanji (2018) eloquently spoke about. They are the type that get enlisted for petty theft on the streets, motor parks, markets etc. after dropping out of school. They later graduate to become political thugs, hired assassins, bunkerers participating in nefarious activities as evident in Ojaide (2006): In this fictive text, the head of the area boys named 'Pere' went through all these activities and crowned it with a seven-year jail term. He returned an ex-convict and a hero of the boys of the underworld as reflected below;

Pere fought his way to the headship of the area boys' group. This was done beyond the pale of public eyes. Since the inner core of the area boys' association operated like a secret society, only very few would know Pere closely; he might be doing some job in the day but was often a cover for his real important position among the area boys. Neighbors and relatives would not know his real identity; he would remain just a neighbor or a relative. (p. 81)

The second category of unemployment/underemployed is the educated class. This set of people are enlightened, sophisticated professionals who under normal circumstances should constitute the intellectual that would propel the nation to greater heights. They range from academics, medical practitioners who went overseas in search of better condition of service; literary writers who were forced to seek refuge on foreign shores and become diaspora writers as noticed in Wole Soyinka (in the past), Chinua Achebe Ben Okri, Niyi Osundare, Tanure Ojaide, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie and a host of others. It is this category of youth unemployment that constitutes the thematic preoccupation of Chimamanda, Ngozi Adichie in *Americanah* (2013). The protagonist in the worldview of this literary piece is 'Ifemelu' an educated young lady from Nigeria who goes in search of greener pastures in the USA. Another major character in the text is 'Aunty Uju' a medical doctor by training and profession. But she like the protagonist has to endure all forms of racial discrimination not because of incompetence in her chosen career, but because of her colour as reflected in the following dialogue:

Later she (Aunty Uju) said, "I have to take my braids out for my interviews and relax my hair. Kemi told me

that I shouldn't wear braids, they will think you are unprofessional" "So there are no doctors with braided hair in America?" Ifemelu asked.

I have told you what they told me. You are in a country that is not your own. You do what you have to do if you want to succeed..." (p.119).

The dialogue above aptly depicts the agony Nigerian youths undergo in a foreign land all in their bid to earn a living.

The term 'orature' or 'folklore' or 'oral verbal art forms' refers to that corpus of imaginative expressions realized verbally in traditional society. It is performed verbal art and is distinguished from the modern and written African literature. It existed before the written forms and our contact with the western world. It served and still serves as entertainment and education to both the urban and sub-urban communities. As a cross-genre study, orature cuts across the three basic genres acceptable in modern literary studies such as prose (story telling techniques—itan, legend, myth, proverbs etc.), drama (cultural festivals e.g. marriage, burial, naming ceremonies, masquerade performance, ancestral worship, ritual performance etc.), poetry/praise poetry (oriki, workplace poetry—*ewi*), hunting chant (*Ijala*), god of thunder chant (*Sango pipe*), wedding chant (*ekun iyawo*), incantation (*ofo, ayajo*), play song (*rara*), Perhaps, the multifarious dimension of African oral literature best explains the diverse approach of scholars to the study. For example, while Ajadi (1995, p. 2) attempts an interpretation of orature from the various aspects of the taxonomy of African oral literature; Okpewho (1992, p. 3) critically interrogates the Eurocentric perception of orature as 'folk literature', 'folklore or traditional literature'. To avoid any ambiguity, Dasylya (2017, p. 12) makes it explicit by describing orature as:

'an exploration of shared human experiences of tangible and intangible materials, embodied in orally expressed diverse contextual lives and shades of creative skills and molds'.

It is on the basis of this that the researchers adopt a working definition of orature as the verbal artistic product that encapsulates the sensibility and knowledge production of the African worldview (native intelligence). This type of knowledge is called native intelligence because it is indigenous wisdom restricted to the socio-cultural milieu that it emanates from as Barber (1991) discovered with the concepts of 'itan' (narratives) and 'oriki' (praise poetry) among the people of Okuku in south western Nigeria. She espouses that:

Eulogy (*Oriki*) commemorate personalities, events and actions that people consider important. They provide a way of thinking about social relationships within and between families, and a way of promoting and expressing the rivalry of ambitious individuals. They are the living link through which relationships with the (*orisa*), the 'gods', are conducted. And it is in eulogy (*oriki*) that the past is encapsulated and brought into the present, where it exercises a continual pull. Eulogy (*Oriki*) then, are one of the principal discursive mediums through which people apprehend history, society, and the spiritual world (p. 4).

This inevitably explains Karin Barber's vivid projection of an aspect of the robust nature of African orature as it involves the ritual of waking up in an African palace setting. It begins with salutation by the trumpeter with the saying:

*Dide, dide, o bosokoto,  
enikan ii fiseigbonse ran omoeni*".

English translation:

"Get up, get up, put on your trousers,  
no one sends someone else to excrete for him.

After this, the king (Oba) is serenaded with the trumpeter's performance of *ofo* (incantations), *iwure* (blessings) and the royal praises (*oriki*). Also, were the drummers who came every morning to sit at the palace doorway playing phrases from the Oba's *oriki* on the talking drums, saluting the town chiefs when they arrived on their customary morning visits. (p.11)

African culture is deeply rooted in tradition as reflected above. Similar to this, is the way male children prostrate, while the females kneel down when greeting their elders. And in return, the adults, especially among grandparents chant the *oriki* of the family. In some cases, that of the child (based on type of birth) precedes the family, before that of the community. However, this culture is fast fading away as most youths can barely recall their family praise songs (*oriki*). An example of individual family praise songs (*oriki*) is Ige Aubi family praise song (Ige Adubii):

*Ige Adubi, Atesebi,  
Ige to nibiyaa le ku, koku  
Bi baba le lo, komaa lo  
Ohuntii Ige Adubi o je o won  
Elegede n be oko  
Gboro Adubi n be lakitan  
Odaju omo ti n nase e waye)*

(Culled from (Eko Ede Yoruba Titun for Junior Secondary School p. 20)

English translation

Ige, the special child  
Ige that cares not for his mother's survival at birth  
What Adubi will eat is never scarce  
The elegede vegetable is in the farm  
He bothers not about his father's existence  
A wicked child born with leg out of the mother's womb.

### Economic Imperatives of Orature

Ju African culture-by implication orature is very rich and can be commodified, if placed in proper perspective. For example, two major incidences have proved the international acceptability and yearning for proper understanding and by implication continuous research into orature. The first is the motivation of the likes of Karin Barber to leave the United Kingdom for Nigeria. In fact, she settled in a remote town of Okuku in today's Osun State to actually acculturate herself to the Yoruba language where she bagged a PhD in Yoruba from the University of Ife now Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU). Today, she is a professor of Yoruba language in United Kingdom. In addition, arts enthusiasts scholars and researchers from all parts of the world come to Yoruba land to immerse themselves in the profoundly rich

and stimulating cultural practices of the Yoruba people. This shows there is a renew interest in orature which the youth could carefully access and develop e.g. Yoruba legend and myth. A typical example is what the Ooni of Ife has done by re-awakening the mystery surrounding Moremi myths through a magnificent statue. This has turned Moremi status site to a tourist attraction creating jobs for those who will serve as interpreters, tour guides, producers and sellers of artifacts including such items as our local fabrics, adire, ofi, sanyan, aran, local beads, drums, sekere, Yoruba hairdo especially for women, sales and promotion of Yoruba literature, Yoruba orthography, dictionary, texts., Other major traditional towns could do same e.g. Oyo town could build its tourism industry around the myth of Oranmiyan and Sango. Ibadan could employ the myth of Ogunmola, Lagelu, Aare Ona Kakanfo etc. as legendary warlords. To promote feminist discourse, Efunsetan Aniwura Iyalode Ibadan becomes a ready source of research material.

Tangentially related to the above is the re-discovery of their root by the South American country of Brazil by adopting Yoruba as their official language (As reflected in The Nigerian Voice, 2018, September, 7). This is a laudable development and a ready source of employment opportunity for the youths of Nigeria. The import of this pronouncement is that, the Brazilian government and citizenry would promote bilateral trade relationship between Nigeria and Brazil. This implies both tangible and intangible aspects of orature i.e. language experts to teach their youths in the school system, interpreters, writers, curriculum developers, instructors, story tellers, essayists, dramatist, drummers, poets, singers, cultural experts, especially on artifacts etc. would all be needed to facilitate the language immersion program of Brazil. It is even plausible to adduce that if it succeeds in Brazil, in the nearest future the wave of change may spread of other nearby nations with same historical antecedent.

### Implications of the Study

This study stands out as another empirical attempt towards preservation of African culture whose continue existence today is daily threatened with effects of European civilization imported through colonization. This study also developed the youths innate skills in Yoruba verbal arts like the wedding chants hunting chants family eulogies dundun dancing steps and Yoruba traditional songs leading to creation of more self-employment opportunities.

### CONCLUSION

Finally, a good understanding of orature can generate employment both locally and globally if properly managed and mastered by the African youths in particular. It would not be to our advantage if we allow aliens to take away opportunities available from us. Every bonafide citizen of the country should be a cultural ambassador. Orature can be promoted by showcasing the didacticism in our cultural values; through self-reliance, respect for elders, goodness to every creature whether human or animal, cultural festivals and all facets of black aesthetics either tangible or intangible. This will serve

as a radical departure to the western concept of a single story of Africa and all the negativities attached to it. Orature is an avenue to authenticate our natural identity and native intelligence.

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