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Oral Tradition (www.oraltradition.org/ot/) seeks to provide a comparative and interdisciplinary focus for studies in oral tradition and related fields by publishing research and scholarship on the creation, transmission, and interpretation of all forms of oral traditional expression. As well as essays treating certifiably oral traditions, *OT* presents investigations of the relationships between oral and written traditions, as well as brief accounts of important fieldwork, and occasional transcriptions and translations of oral texts. In addition, issues will include the annual Albert Lord and Milman Parry Lecture on Oral Tradition. Submissions should follow the list-of reference format (style sheet available on request) and may be sent via e-mail (csot@missouri.edu) or snail-mail; all quotations of primary materials must be made in the original language(s) with following English translations. Most contributions will be reviewed by at least one specialist reader and one member of the editorial board before a final decision is reached.

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Editor's Column

The present issue of *Oral Tradition* represents the end of one era and the beginning of another. Volume 21, number 2 marks the final appearance of *OT* in printed format; as of volume 22, number 1, the journal will be available only as *eOT*, an online, open-access, and free-of-charge periodical.

We are excited about the early reaction to migration from paper to electronic format—within two weeks of launching in mid-September, 2006, the *eOT* site (http://journal.oraltradition.org) experienced more than 4000 non-identical hits and twice that many page-views. Perhaps more importantly, our tracking software indicates major readerships in Asia, Africa, and South America as well as Europe and North America. Likewise, we have begun to receive submissions from scholars and researchers in heretofore under-represented areas, and we heartily encourage more voices to join the discussion. Enlarging our readership and authorship to areas usually difficult to reach through text-based Western distribution networks was and remains the primary reason for our conversion of *OT* to an online, open-access, and free-of-charge medium.

The current miscellany follows our customary pattern of offering perspectives from diverse oral traditions, in the hope that comparative observations and examples may prove broadly useful to our (ever more) diverse readership. Helen Yitah opens the colloquium with a fascinating exposition of African proverbs in social context, illustrating the power of this fundamental oral genre to contest entrenched attitudes and beliefs. Françoise Ugochukwu then provides a comparative view of color symbolism associated with the devil in French and Nigerian folktales. On another note, Michael Drout describes a new model for oral traditional studies based on the biological theory of "memes," understood as the "simplest units of cultural replication."

Two additional essays round out this issue by tackling some persistently difficult problems. In consonance with much recent research, Anthony Webster helpfully complicates our understanding of "orality" and "literacy," with special reference to Native American traditions. Finally, Ademola Dasylva explains the impact of globalization and, in particular the spread of Western-centric educational models, on indigenous culture and learning in Nigeria.

On the near horizon, *OT* will devote 2007 to two special issues on strikingly different topics. The first will focus on the American folk singer Bob Dylan and his relationship to oral tradition, deriving from a conference at the Université Caen and guest-edited by Catharine Mason and Richard Thomas. The second issue will present an in-depth view of Basque oral traditions. Guest-edited by Joxerra Garzia, Jon Sarasua, and Andoni Egaña,

it contains both analytical scholarship and interviews with practicing oral poets (*bertsolari*). We are confident that these two collections will prove interesting and valuable across the wide and multidisciplinary field of studies in oral tradition.

As always, but now with a broader purpose, we urge you to send us your work on oral tradition for publication in online *OT*. Our reviewing policy will remain the same as in the past: one specialist and one generalist will read the submission before an editorial decision is reached. But now we can offer an enormously larger and more diverse audience for your ideas, an audience that paper publication media simply can't reach. We will continue to publish online eCompanions (audio, video, and other support for text) as needed, as embedded links in articles that can be downloaded free of charge by anyone with a web connection and a browser. Please join us as the second generation of *Oral Tradition* begins in the virtual community.

John Miles Foley, Editor

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Throwing Stones in Jest: Kasena Women's "Proverbial" Revolt

Helen Yitah

"It is the stone thrown in jest that causes injury to the head."—Kasem Proverb

Albert Awedoba's recent seminal work, *An Introduction to Kasena Society and Culture Through Their Proverbs* (2000a), and his article on "The Social Roles of Riddles, with Reference to Kasena Society" (2000b) stand out as the only publications that examine the Kasena of Northern Ghana through their oral literature. Research on the Kasena has been mainly in the field of anthropology and dates back to the first few decades of the twentieth century.[1] More recently, scholars such as Fred Binka, Philip Adongo, and Alex Nazzar of the Navrongo Health Research Center have published work on health-related issues among the Kasena.[2] Although proverbs in other African cultures in general and their social functions in particular have been well documented and discussed in folklore scholarship, little attention has been directed toward the interrelationship between proverbs and social change, and, more specifically, how proverbs as a discourse in which females are portrayed based on stereotypical gender roles and perceptions function in modern patriarchal societies in the wake of gender-sensitization.[3]

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[1] See, for instance, Cardinall 1921 and Rattray 1932. Included in this category is research on Kasena funeral rites by others such as Augustine Kututera Abasi and Joseph Atadana. For other representative works by Abasi and Atadana, see Abasi 1993 and 1995 and Atadana 1987.

[2] See, for example, Adongo, Phillips, and Binka 1998 and Binka, Nazzar, and Phillips 1995.

[3] I speak here in particular about the cultures of Northern Ghana, where the stereotypical images of women in proverbs reveal the male orientation that informs such "received wisdom."

This paper looks at how Kasena women from Northern Ghana take advantage of a socially sanctioned medium, the "joking" relationship that exists between an individual and her spouse's siblings, to subvert and contradict Kasem proverbs in an effort to transcend the misogynist images and connotations of these proverbs as well as to critique patriarchal norms. In this socially approved context, the women seem to have embarked on a "proverbial revolt" that finds expression via methods that have not been practiced before. The women's disruptive strategies consist of subverting an existing proverb in a way that questions its "truth," or in employing a proverb that engages and critiques the logic of another proverb. Their "proverbial" behavior can be likened to the situation expressed by the proverb cited at the beginning of this paper: "It is the stone thrown in jest that causes injury to the head." This saying is typically employed as a warning and/or deterrent to a person who engages in an activity that appears harmless but is potentially dangerous. Its application to the phenomenon being explored here lies mainly in the idea it expresses that "joking" behavior can have far-reaching effects. For while it would require more research to determine if, and how far, such "proverbial" jesting can be taken in earnest, participation in this activity is in itself an indication of a deeper level of gender sensitivity, a kind of sensitivity that can serve as a catalyst for, if not a manifestation of, social change. This point is supported by the fact that although both men and women employ proverbs in their "joking," only the women engage in this subversive exercise, a fact that suggests their increasing awareness of their social position, particularly as it is constructed by the "original" proverbs.

The material used here comes from my observation of and participation in a culture in which I grew up. While my first encounter with the "proverbial" behavior examined here dates back a little over a decade (1994), systematic documentation of specific instances did not begin until June 2000. My method has been mainly to note down in diary form the context and content of each joking situation as I observed it and, where necessary, to interview the users for purposes of clarification. Most of the users under discussion are women of minimal or no literacy, although this situation is changing now with more girls staying in school (Mensch, Bagah, et al, 1999:97). They live mainly in and around the Nogsenia village, a largely rural area that surrounds central Navrongo, the small district capital that the Kasena share with a closely related ethnic group, the Nankana. However, Alex Nazzar seems to have taken for granted their access to the radio and television, the cinema, concerts, and women's organizations such as the 31st December Women's Movement when he claimed that they were effectively isolated from new ideas and institutions (Nazzar, Adongon, et al,

1995:310). My own observation reveals that these women are in tune with changing trends, especially those that affect their individual rights and roles in society.

Like proverbs in other African cultures, Kasem proverbs exert a strong moral force and are typically employed didactically and as social correctives; their authoritative force is strongest in proverbs having to do with women (see also Schipper 1991:5). While contemporary Kasena society has been described as occupying a rural, isolated area and maintaining its traditional institutions of marriage and family (Binka, Nazzar, and Phillips 1995:123), the people demonstrate in their daily lives an increasing awareness of individual rights that seems to threaten traditional social organization. This is especially noticeable in husband-wife and parent-child relationships. For instance, whereas in traditional society a man controlled his wife's and children's material and monetary earnings, women and children have for many decades now exercised their right to use their income as they find appropriate. Such changes are often expressed in the saying "times have changed, and everything has changed with them," and they are attributed to a socio-economic upheaval that is caused by "money, media, 'white man's values,' and family planning," among other things (Mensch, Bagah, et al. 1999:103, 106). By examining Kasena women's utilization of proverbs within the specific social context of the joking relationship, I hope to explore how these and other modern influences are manifested in one of the most conservative literary genres in this society; to demonstrate the role that gender plays in proverb use; to take the dying conversation on joking relationships, initiated by Radcliffe-Brown in the 1940s and sustained into the 1970s and '80s by others such as Regnar Johnson, into the literary realm; and to contribute to the scanty scholarship on Kasem oral literature.

It has become common in joking situations to hear Kasena women subvert both the form and meaning of existing proverbs in order to thereby draw attention to gender inequities, to address misogynist perceptions, or to arrogate to themselves certain powers not conferred by traditional society. We are inclined to interpret this emerging trend as a conscious effort on the part of the women to make proverbs reveal the *reality* of their lives rather than the *ideals* of traditional patriarchal society. By so doing the women repudiate traditional patriarchal constructions of their social role as well as articulate their preferred social position. These women, by thus deliberately disrupting the static quality of Kasem proverbs, as well as by subverting and undermining their rigid structure—what Ruth Finnegan terms their "relative fixity" (1976:393), are propelling this traditional genre into a dynamic space

that it did not previously occupy. Their action amounts to what Raji-Oyelade refers to as "a normative rupture in the production [and interpretation] of this traditional verbal genre," and it results in the emergence of "'new' proverbs with new forms, new meanings, and, perhaps, new values" (1999:75).

It is significant that the women do not renounce traditional proverbs in the course of this "rupture"; rather, they interrogate the images of women as espoused by existing proverbs and question whether they represent what Amba Oduyoye, in her discussion of Akan proverbs and female socialization, has termed "full personhood as may be experienced by the female" (1979:5). Through their subversive activity the women criticize traditional proverbs while also creating proverbs of their own. We may recall here a response to a similar situation as it is depicted in an Irish cartoon that Lady Augusta Gregory describes in her essay, "Laughter in Ireland" (1995:294):

> There was a picture long ago in some paper, *Punch* or another, in which a painter's canvas had been left on an easel in the neighbourhood of a jungle, and the lion was looking at it for it represented a lion hunt, and saying, "You'll see the other side of the story when we have a painter of our own!"

As the lion does in the cartoon, the women recognize the usefulness of the literary canvas in depicting "the other side of the story." Thus, rather than reject traditional proverbs with their one-sided images of women, they seize the opportunity offered them by the "speaking encounter" (Raji-Oyelade 1999:76) between them and their joking partners to transform the canvas of existing proverbs into "a painting of their own."

"Joking" relationships exist in many African cultures and provide a safe context for psychological release, promoting group solidarity, expressing disapproval, and sanctioning behavior. Joking relationships, according to Regnar Johnson, are "relationships in which joking or behavior deemed to conflict with the norms of social order [is] contained by its institutionalization" (1978:131). In other words, the two parties are in a relationship in which they are by custom permitted, and in some instances required, to tease or make fun of each other, without either of them taking any offense. "Joking" may be only verbal (in which case it may involve obscenity) or it may include horseplay. Therefore, the joking relationship is above all based on familiarity—or what A. R. Radcliffe-Brown calls "permitted disrespect" (1940:103)—and license. During joking, comments made to an addressee can apply to other members of the audience or

social/gender group. Thus within a joking relationship people can engage in an activity that would otherwise be condemned as disruptive. In this regard, the joking relationship becomes a convenient medium for women to interrogate the traditionally unassailable position of the proverb.

Proverbs are protected by traditional sanctions and therefore afford their users immunity from censure. According to Heda Jason (1971), proverbs constitute a very convenient vehicle because "all the connotations of a traditional expression are well known and the risk of being misunderstood is reduced. Still more important is the circumstance that the opinions expressed by the proverb, the message it carries, are traditionally sanctioned and the user can in a doubtful case hide behind this traditional sanction from public censure" (617). In order to criticize them the (female) interrogator has to look beyond the individual (male) user's immunity and examine the collective image that the proverb presents of women.

African oral literature in general, and the African proverb in particular, has been largely insulated against criticism due to the general view of folklore as a self-contained authentic peasant culture from which all references to changing social realities must be edited out.[4] For instance, feminist scholar and activist Wanjira Muthoni (1994) describes the reception, in her native Kenya, of her re-telling of traditional oral narratives and her creation of new stories following traditional oral narrative structures. Although the stories were received "very, very well by teachers," she says, a lot of male readers and even some women have looked on her work with disfavor because they see literature as "a sacred field which [she] should not interfere with" (Arndt 2000:716). Proverbs in particular have been viewed as sacred texts that must remain unchanged and unchallenged. Although they are regarded as a "mirror" of culture in contemporary society, they tend to reflect the life of the morally superior ancestors (what the Kasena call *diim tiina*) rather than that of the morally inferior people of the day (*zem tiina*). In the Kasena worldview, the ancestors, also called the people of "yesterday" (*diim*), serve as moral and social gatekeepers for the people of "today" (*zem*), and proverbs are an important means by which this relationship is maintained. *Diim tiina* as authors of proverbs are the providers of a paradigm for proper behavior, while *zem tiina* as the beneficiaries of this paradigm are instructed through the proverbs (see also Awedoba 2000a).

In African societies proverbs have been a discourse shaped by a male orientation and a patriarchal mindset, a fact that is evident from the images of women that populate this traditional form. Women exist or are referred to

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[4] An exception is Raji-Oyelade 1999; see also Narayan 1993.

only as they relate to men (as wives, daughters, or sisters) or by their "biological function" as mothers or non-mothers (Arndt 2000:713). And as Muthoni and her colleagues in the Kenya Oral Literature Association [KOLA] point out, in this literary world that purports to mirror society, women are categorized into "good" and "bad": good if they obey patriarchal norms and bad if they engage in autonomous activity, articulate their own interests, or act in line with individual and "unpredictable" demands. The speaking up and the activity of women, they argue, can be understood as symbols of women's power and influence as well as their independence from men (Arndt 2000:713). These and other similar ideas are behind the gender-sensitization efforts of KOLA as well as those of some Zimbabwean feminists (718). Antonia Kalu posits that "for the African woman's subjectivity to make sense, it has to be rooted in a convincing cultural subject that is well-grounded in an accessible world view" (1999:43). It is in this context that a project such as Muthoni's "Literary Road to Empowerment," which seeks to among other things "sensitize creative writers and the readers on gender prejudices," deserves to be appreciated (1994:58). However, the unfavorable reception of Muthoni's (re)created folk tales leads us to the conclusion that for any attempt at altering traditional oral literature to succeed, the change will have to evolve within the oral culture. To try to impose such a change on a predominantly oral society through the medium of writing, as Muthoni does, is to invite opposition from a people who see their cultural identity as inextricably linked to their traditional oral literature.

The close relationship between traditional lore and cultural identity largely accounts for the persistence of "de-womanizing" Kasem proverbs and the strong moral force that they wield as the "wisdom" of the ancestors. Male users consider such proverbs humorous rather than offensive, even when their female referents feel humiliated by them. In effect, Kasena women, like other African women, have always occupied a position in traditional society whereby, in Oyekan Owomoyela's words, they are "expected to accommodate the men's libertine [meaning bawdy] talks, even about [themselves], with good humor and demureness" (1972:752). Owomoyela refers here to Yoruba men's use of proverbs that express crudity and sex without attracting "the stigma of uncouthness traditionally associated with such talk in the genteel Western World" (*idem*). He takes for granted the silent subordinate role that traditional society ascribes to women.

Owomoyela also does not discuss the joking relationship as a social context in which such obscenity is socially sanctioned. My own experience shows that the joking relationship that exists in most African societies between an individual and his/her spouse's siblings provides a suitable

context for such behavior that is liberating to women. In such joking relationships, not only are women expected to take no offense at the men's teasing, abuse, banter, or ridicule, but they are also permitted, if not required, to tease in return. This situation is better understood in the Kasena view of fair play as imaged in the proverb: *Kukura we, to se n'dong to mo kweera* ("The dog says it is fair play if you fall and the other falls too"). To ignore such fair play is to act as if *doå yira ye luu mo* ("the other's body is made of metal"), that is, to show a lack of sensitivity for others. Such disregard for the principle of fair play would also constitute a breach of the "permitted disrespect" and familiarity upon which the joking relationship between a person and his/her spouse's siblings is based.

But such joking relations are not all about the thrill of the forbidden (Read 1977:9; Owomoyela 1972:752). The obscene metaphors, insult, abuse, banter, teasing, and ridicule, as well as the joking relationships that sanction them, may serve as "psychological release" from the constraints "placed on the individual by society" (Bascom 1969:499), but they also serve to promote group solidarity, express disapproval, and sanction behavior. Within this institutionalized practice, whoever is at the receiving end of such joking would be aware that the humiliation and/or hostility that this behavior would generate in any other social context is not to be taken seriously. It is thus within this context that the Kasena women discussed here choose to articulate their own "proverbial" protest against what they perceive as misogynistic tendencies on the part of their joking partners or their use of proverbs.

But positioning their social protest within institutionalized joking relationships should not lead us to underestimate the radical nature of these women's activity. As already suggested, in traditional Kasena society, as in most African societies, proverbs constitute cultural texts through which men act out their conditioning in a masculine, patriarchal culture that privileges male dominance and power. This is evinced by the images of women as well as the underlying connotations that are expressed in them (women bear and rear children, they are daughters/ wives). This does not mean that women are excluded from their use; however, it does mean that in order to transcend these images and connotations they must, among other things, engage in the kind of activity that the Kasena refer to as "fighting with proverbs." "A fight with proverbs" is deemed to occur when a person questions the logic of an existing proverb or proverbs, or uses a proverb in a sense that engages and critiques another proverb. It is a situation that, until recently, Kasena would avoid. Awedoba articulates this point clearly (2000a:34):

> The truth of the proverb is . . . of an order that cannot be challenged. Kasena seem by their attitudes to accept tacitly that it is unseemly to call into question the proverb and its tenets. To do so would appear to amount to a challenging of the wise ancestors, an exercise not only in arrogance, but also in itself a sacrilege. . . . This is in spite of the fact that Kasena proverbs, like most other African proverbs, do contradict. This does not however, seem to matter to Kasena. It is unlikely that Kasena proverb users would exhibit any overt interest in contradictions between proverbs, make a comparison between proverbs that are perceived to contradict or attempt to "fight with proverbs."

It is only when viewed against this background that the women's "proverbial" revolt (which ironically was already going on at the time Awedoba wrote these words) can be seen for what it is: a subversive and potentially socially disruptive act that is neutralized (or is it?) by its occurrence within a socially sanctioned context.

Perhaps it is fitting that a "paremiological revolt" (Raymond 1981: 301) within a society that is still described as "a rural, isolated area where...traditional patterns of marriage, family formation and social organization persist" (Binka, Nazzar, and Phillips 1995:123) should come from women. For on no other occasions is the moral and authoritative force of proverbs stronger than when it applies to women. Mineke Schipper shares this view (1991:5): "The proverb's authority and its evaluative nature exhort the listener to agree. Although there are cases where the authoritative aspect of the proverb is not so much stressed, in many proverbs on women it apparently plays a role." Perhaps this is to be expected, considering the prevailing form of social organization in traditional Kasena society, where compound heads, husbands, brothers, and sons all conspire in their "gate-keeping" role against women, who are classified as minors and therefore allowed very little autonomy. It is because of this authoritative function that proverbs play such a crucial role in traditional education, especially for females. In this process, the fact that the proverb only reveals the (patriarchal) ideal rather than the real, what *ought to be* rather than what *is*, is overlooked.

One of the philosophies transmitted through proverbs is the conservative worldview of gender differences and roles. The role of the female in society, as traditionally constructed by Kasem proverbs, is to provide pleasure and profit for the male, that is, to ensure his sexual gratification, bear and nurture his children, look to him for her upkeep, and boost his ego by her lack of "maleness." Thus, it is very common to come across Kasem proverbs such as the following that portray women's traditional role:

Kaane ba gu dii o gwone de yuu.
A woman who kills a python must not go on to cut off its head.

This proverb functions very much like a maxim of interdiction: it focuses on an act to be avoided by women, but implicit within it is a taboo for its violation (Kubik and Malamusi 2002:171). In other words, not only is a woman prohibited from performing an action that is traditionally reserved for men —because it is considered too daring or dangerous—but she also risks social disapproval for usurping a man's role and therefore demystifying "maleness" and threatening the boundary between male and female. Consider the following series of examples:

Kaane kuri mo lomma, se o nii ba lomma.
A woman may have a warm bottom but not a warm mouth.

This proverb is often cited by men to silence a woman to whom they do not want to listen. In two out of three situations that I observed, the proverb was used when the user felt that the woman had spoken a "truth" about his behavior that he would rather not deal with. The irony in employing a proverb that belies its own "truth" cannot have been lost on the woman whose ability to speak "rationally"—or in metaphorical terms to "have a warm mouth"—is being called into question.

Mon-jôn' gôgô veri de o kaane mo.
A sex maniac always walks with his wife.

The assumption here is that the male sex maniac must have ready access to his wife. It inherently fails to acknowledge the possibility of a female sex maniac. In his interpretation of this proverb, Awedoba explains that while the male sex maniac is free to indulge himself, he is debarred from "infring[ing] on the rights of others." Awedoba continues (2000a:79-80): "The point of the proverb is that those who have special needs have a duty to make provision for themselves; it is unacceptable to expect that society [read "other men"] should be inconvenienced on their behalf." In effect, this proverb assumes and sanctions men's sexual rights and "special needs" (*ibid*.:80). There is no corresponding proverb expressing the wife's sexual needs or rights, because she is deemed to be accorded none in a Kasena traditional marriage.

> *Kafena kalo na gabe kakwia to mo gabe kabia.*
> It is the whip that lashes the senior wife that also lashes the junior wife.

The assumption underlying this proverb is that a woman is regarded as a child, to be "disciplined" when she goes wrong. In this context there is no respite for the junior—usually (but not always) the youngest—wife who is considered the husband's favorite.

In the world outside these proverbs, Kasena women have lived and continue to live in a way that casts much doubt on the "reality" portrayed by the proverbs. In addition to catering to the needs of their husbands and their extended families, bearing and rearing children, as well as performing their household chores, women assert their independence by pursuing their own interests and earning their own income, very often by engaging in the same activities as the men. For instance, although traditional society has specified the kind of work to be done by men and women, it is common to find both genders performing tasks such as hoeing or clearing weeds on a farm, activities that have traditionally been reserved for men. This adoption of male roles by Kasena women is not a new trend; in pre-colonial times women were known to make and tend their own farms for food and for income, with or without the help of their men. The women's "paremiological revolt," based as it is on their interpreting existing proverbs from their own perspective and creating counter-proverbs that respond to existing ones, more appropriately articulates the "truth" of their lives.

> *Kabaga na sâ åwana, ka wo sâ veåa mo.*
> Once a slave accepts chains, she/he must agree to walk [in them].

This proverb is typically used in a context where people commit themselves to an action or cause that turns out to be unpleasant, but which they are obliged to complete. I observed on one occasion that a "version" of the proverb was used by a woman in a conversation with her classificatory "husband" (a husband's sibling or a kinsman/woman of his generation). It was after the man jokingly told her that having borne several children for "him," he knew she "had nowhere to go" [couldn't leave], so he could go ahead and marry a second wife without her permission. Her response was "yes, you can do what you want. But you need to know that a slave may accept chains, but when they begin to hurt, she can refuse to walk." This woman's subversion and inversion of the proverb calls attention to two things. First, she identifies polygamy, a common traditional practice, with discomfort [slavery], and secondly, she articulates her right to reject it. An

interesting contrast can be drawn between this (and other Kasena women's) perception of polygamy and that of some Western-educated Nigerian and Kenyan women who prefer to marry into polygamous households because they see polygamy as less oppressive than monogamy (Arndt 2000:716-17).

Ko guni mo, se ko wo loge.
It has tilted, but it has not poured.

A person would use this proverb to console another that a situation is not out of hand. Its purpose clearly is to bring hope or relief. However, one woman used the proverb in a context in which it appeared to sound a warning. Here again the exchange was between the woman and a male visitor with whom she enjoyed a "joking" relationship. The woman had just returned from the bush with some firewood and teased him for not helping her put down the load. He responded that he thought she had carried too little, and declared that he would ensure that she was made to carry the right amount the next time. She then said "Do you think I was bought? If they overwork me that way, won't I return to my father? After all, it has only tilted, it hasn't poured yet. Is it not just the guinea fowls they gave to my family? They can go back for them." This woman has subverted the existing proverb so that it does not relieve her listener—or a third person, for that matter—but herself. Or rather, it announces an uncalled-for "relief" for her husband and his family who risk losing her. It is interesting that she, like her "sister" who used the previous proverb, compares oppression in the marital home to slavery.[5] But for the property-less Kasena woman it is a short leap from (dis)honor to living death. While it is not uncommon among the Kasena to draw an analogy between oppression and slavery, these women proceed more subtly, referring to situations that in traditional society would not be considered oppressive. The women's technique of critiquing existing proverbs through the use of counter-proverbs is more direct.

Proverb:
It is the patient person who will milk a barren cow.

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[5] This is entirely in keeping with the Kasena woman's increasing awareness of her position. Orlando Patterson, in *Slavery and Social Death,* presents the enslavement process as one that leads to loss of honor, respect, and property, all prerequisites to the existence of the slave as a member of "the living who are dead" (1982:45).

> Counter-proverb:
> *The person who would milk a barren cow must prepare for a kick on the forehead.*

This exchange of proverbs occurred between a married woman and her male "classificatory" husband. It began with the man breaking the ice with a question that can loosely be translated as "what's up?" When the woman asked what he wished to know by the question, he replied that he was inquiring about her health, but beyond that he was also wondering when she would bear his next child (the woman's youngest child was about 15 years old).

Here is the context:

> Woman: How should I know (when I will bear your next child)? Am I God?
>
> Man: Oh well, that's all right. I can wait. Our elders say that it is the patient person who will milk a barren cow.
>
> Woman: When it comes to milking cows, then the person who would milk a barren cow must prepare for a kick on the forehead.

The female user employs an existing proverb but deliberately subverts it to serve a specific purpose, that is, to critique the narrow construction of female role as bearer and rearer of children, as well as to warn against the dangers of exploiting others, particularly females. That she could so spontaneously rise to the occasion and make the connection between her fifteen-year "barrenness" and the barren cow suggests her awareness of her position in the society. Via her counter-proverb she both criticizes and alters the existing proverb to achieve what Raji-Oyelade terms "the radical spirit of textual/verbal liberation" (1999:76). In the words of Harold Bloom (cited in Raji-Oyelade *idem*), she achieves a

> freedom of meaning, the freedom to have a meaning of one's own. Such freedom is wholly illusory unless it is achieved against a prior plenitude of meaning, which is tradition, and is also against language . . . freedom of meaning is wrested by combat, of meaning against meaning.

She wrests from tradition "a meaning of her own" that both derives from and contests the grounds of a traditional proverb. The man, ill-prepared as he was for this counter-proverb, could only give the formulaic response: "Times have changed, and women have changed with them."

In the next proverbial exchange, the woman engages two existing proverbs in one coup:

> Proverbs:
> *Once you sleep with the chief's wife, you might as well continue until she bears your child.*
>
> *A woman who kills a python must not go on to cut off its head.*
>
> Counter-proverb:
> *If neither cutting off the snake's head nor leaving it on will bring you peace, then crush it.*

This "fight" with proverbs arose between a woman and her female "classificatory" husband (CFH) who was visiting in the house of the former. There arose an argument between the two, an argument that the woman was winning. Obviously enjoying her intellectual superiority, she taunted the CFH with more force:

> CFH: You must know when to stop in order to avoid humiliating your husband. A woman does not know more than a man [this is an existing proverb].
>
> Woman: When you speak the "truth" you are not free, and if you don't you're still not free. So let me speak my mind and whatever will be, will be. After all, is it not you people [the "husbands"] who say that once you sleep with a chief's wife, you should just continue till she bears your child? [Implying: "Why should I stop when I'm winning an argument?"]
>
> CFH: Yes, but we also say that a woman who kills a python must not go on to cut off its head. Some things are reserved for husbands.
>
> Woman: You mean things such as winning arguments?
>
> CFH : Yes.
>
> Woman: If neither cutting off the snake's head nor leaving it on will bring you peace, then crush it and be free.

The counter-proverb provides a resolution to the conflict created by the command to complete an action and the prohibition for a woman to do so. The first proverb derives from the fact that chiefs typically marry as many wives as are dictated by their whims. Very often, the chief ends up with

more wives than he can satisfy sexually, and some of these women are thought to seek sexual gratification with other men. But adultery in Kasena society attracts a heavy punishment, and cuckolding the chief comes with an even greater penalty. However, the punishment is the same for all cases and does not correlate with the frequency of the adulterous act prior to the exposure of the offenders. The proverb literally urges the adulterer not to stop after the first instance but to take his act to its logical conclusion since his punishment in either case will be the same.

Like the first proverb, the second also deals with the issue of completing an action once it is begun. To the Kasena, the action of killing a snake is not completed until its head is cut off. This perception is based on a belief that a snake that is presumed dead can survive if its head is left on. Thus, by prohibiting a woman from cutting off the snake's head, the society is denying her the right to complete an action, a right that is reserved for the man. But for this woman it is also a denial of her peace, since by leaving the snake's head on she still has to contend with a possible attack from a surviving snake. She thus finds an ingenious way to resolve her dilemma. When asked what crushing the snake's head would mean in the context of her argument with her "husband," she explained that she would show some respect in dealing with a husband but she would not compromise the "truth." For her, it is respect for her husband, rather than submission to his will as is espoused by traditional norms, that governs the relationship between spouses.

The kind of cultural activity in which these women are engaged is quite similar to the "playful blasphemy" that Raji-Oyelade delineates as occurring in the use of Yoruba proverbs by a Western-educated younger generation (1999:75). These young people who, according to Raji-Oyelade, "are cosmopolitan in consciousness" are said to distort traditional proverbs deliberately in order to "metropolize or disindigenize" their meaning (*idem*). The Kasena woman, living in what Fred Binka terms "a climate of traditionalism" (Binka, Nazzar, and Phillips 1993:123), in which a "low level of literacy, combined with a dispersed pattern of settlement" are deemed to have "effectively isolate[d] [her] from new ideas and institutions" (Nazzar, Adongo, et al. 1995:310), may yet not be too far from a "cosmopolitan consciousness." Barbara Mensch and company (1999), who conducted research on the changing nature of adolescence in the Kasena-Nankana district in 1998, report several repetitions, practically verbatim, of the phrase "times have changed, and everything has changed with them." The authors were left wondering if "it is a local proverb or saying" (see Mensch, Bagah, et al. 1999:n.110). Times, indeed, have changed for Kasena women—what with the increase in urbanization and education and the

breakdown of traditional authority structures. However, contrary to the Yoruba youth's intention to "disdindigenize," Kasena women's "playful blasphemy" with proverbs is intended mainly to foreground gender. It is a strategy for viewing patriarchy and female subjugation with "the look of surveillance [that] returns as the displacing gaze of the disciplined, where the observer becomes the observed" (Bhabha 1984:129).

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The Devil's Colors: A Comparative Study of French and Nigerian Folktales

Françoise Ugochukwu

Introduction

In the concluding chapter of her book on race in African oral literature, Veronika Görög-Karady (1976:245) remarks that "the main difficulty is to find the precise meaning of color oppositions, valorization or depreciation in African cultures." This study, mainly based on five separate published collections by Joisten (1965, 1971, 1977, 1996) and the author (1992), will compare French and Nigerian folktales, focusing on French Dauphiné and Nigerian Igboland,[1] in order to consider the role color plays in encounters with supernatural characters, revealing a complex network of correspondences that serve as a tool to communicate color-coded values. The countries' history, religious beliefs, and language development, as well as the impact of colonization on oral literature and traditional art forms, will be weighed in order to understand how all these factors affected color attribution and encoding.

In his presentation before the London Royal Sciences Society in 1671, Isaac Newton, the father of the modern science of colors, distinguished five "primary" colors: red, yellow, green, blue, and violet. By 1728, he had added another two: orange and indigo (Tornay 1978:xii). Apart from black and white, Ray (1952:xxiv) retained only four of them: blue, green, yellow, and red. Going into detail, one can divide colors into two groups: those that are named by an abstract word—blue, black, red, or yellow for example, and those whose description is borrowed from an object of the desired color,

[1] These two regions have been central to my research for many years and in each case, I had direct access to the storytellers (I collected Igbo folktales, and in the case of Dauphiné I personally knew the person who collected the texts). Collections by Joisten also include folktales from Savoie (1971) and Ariège (1965). Occasional references will equally be made to earlier published collections from Brittany (Luzel 1967), Auvergne (Méraville 1970 and Sebillot 1968), and Guyenne (Seignolle 1971).

such as orange, lime, plum, lilac, cream, violet, or saffron. Over time and especially since the industrial revolution, color terms have undergone a tremendous evolution and expansion, prompted by technological advancement and specialization in chemistry and textile manufacturing. Since Gladstone's study of Homer's use of colors in 1858 attracted further attention to color terms, those have "probably (been) the most intensely investigated words in linguistics, having been studied in over three hundred of the world's languages" (Zollinger 1999:9, 127), mostly from Europe and the Americas.

In modern French, the vocabulary of colors is rich and varied, with many hues. The Igbo language, one of Nigeria's three national languages,[2] illustrates Davidoff's point that "languages…have problems with color names" (1991:150). Igbo has a name for most basic colors, but an abstract word for only two—black and white, while the rest are named after an object that either has that color or images it: green is "leaf," red is "blood," yellow and purple draw their names from tinctorial plants, and grey is "ash." Verbs associated with colors[3] include some extra dimension of beauty, and brightness in the case of white. In Igbo, "she is black" takes the form of "she is handsome-black" (*o na-eji ojii*), and "he is white" is "he shines white" (*o na-acha ocha*)—this last verb, associated with both "warmth" and "glow," is used for all colors except black. Although the language includes no word for either "blue" or "brown,"[4] it does have words for "indigo"—referring to the tinctorial plant producing a near-black color—and for "sky"—designating its location rather than its color. Pale blue is generally perceived as green, orange and light brown as yellow, and dark blue and brown as black,[5]

[2] Nigeria possesses 510 living languages (www.ethnologue.com), with the three majority languages Hausa, Yoruba, and Igbo, having been promoted to the status of national languages in the 1970s and being taught at all levels in the country. Igbo vocabulary has seen a rapid expansion since the 1960s, thanks in particular to the work of its University-led Standardisation Committee that has been steadily expanding Igbo vocabulary by borrowing from the various dialects and coining from other languages.

[3] Verbs associated with colors are central to Igbo language.

[4] The word for "rust" has now been adopted to describe "brown" (SPILC 1985:48).

[5] Davidoff (1991:153) suggests that "in fact, blue is rare in nature, which might account for its relative scarcity as a color term." Tornay (1978:xlii), however, offers an indirect explanation for the absence of an Igbo word for "blue." Quoting Bornstein's studies, he notes that the recorded high optic yellow pigmentation in equatorial regions corresponds to a high frequency of linguistic fusion between green and blue in these

according with Goethe's opinion (1840:311) that blue had an affinity with black.[6]

Folktales from both countries could have benefited from such an available and growing vocabulary. Yet this study of more than 300 texts found them to be rather colorless, except for the occasional mention of white and black, and also red and green, those colors most easily captured by the eye (Tornay 1978:xix); other colors hardly ever appear in the texts. This situation leads one to question the role and interpretation of colors in folktales, a field that has seldom attracted attention so far, apart from Görög-Karady's work (1976) on the image of black and white in African oral literature and focusing on the relationship between Africans and Europeans.[7]

Supernatural Encounters

We will first look at the texts in order to summarize data and highlight their variety and ambivalence, meeting a number of characters in the process. The most prominent supernatural being encountered in France, whatever the region, is the devil.[8] Storytellers from Réotier (Upper Alps) variously describe the devil as a young man dressed in a monk's black frock or as a black man with red lips and protruding eyes, or as a handsome Caucasian male dressed partly in white and partly in red, or as a red-haired man (Joisten 1977:332) that lives in the thick of the forest or up a mountain that can be black, red, or green—usually green in southern France and black in the northern part of the country (Ugochukwu 1986:105, 108, 110). Although the devil is most often associated with black—a huge black man in

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zones, suggesting a geographical and genetic influence on color perception and naming. The so-called confusion or assimilation between green and blue has been noted elsewhere; in China, for example, green and blue both seem to be given the name *ts'ing* (Gernet 1999:298)—yet the Chinese language has three words for that combination. In reality, each culture perceives the spectrum continuum and divides it into arbitrary units, with sometimes only one name for the whole color zone (cf. Ray 1952:258-59).

[6] This proves the controversial nature of Berlin and Kay's color scale (1969), and supports Zollinger's opinion (1999:129) that terms for color, brightness, and hues are not universally equivalent.

[7] Very few studies touch on this subject; see Bolton and Crisp 1979 as well as Ugochukwu 1979.

[8] His presence in folktales can be explained by the early introduction of Christianity in the country.

a folktale collected in 1896 (Teneze and Abry 1982:186)—he likes other colors as well, appearing dressed in green (*ibid*.:31) or in a red coat, or as a little red man springing out of the hearth flames who later turns into a young lord clad in blue (Joisten and Joisten 1986:66). A legend from Bessans (Savoy), published in the *Almanach du petit dauphinois* in 1936, mentions a red demon who disappears in a green, sulphur-smelling flame (*ibid*.:85). In a variant, this creature is wrapped in a black mantle (88), just as frescoes from the Bessans church represent the devil as yellow and black in the midst of red flames (74).

Oral literature from both France and Nigeria records encounters with other supernatural beings and details their appearance. In Guyenne, Saint Peter is white-bearded (Seignolle 1971:79); Dauphiné fairies, the "fayes," are women dressed in white (Abry and Joisten 1992:13). Ghosts of the dead are wrapped either in a white shroud or in black linen (*ibid*.:59). Van Gennep records that, in Brittany, dwarfs carry huge and deformed heads over stunted black bodies (Teneze and Abry 1982:215). The "naroves" of the Jura legends, wild malevolent beings, are stocky and black-faced, and run bare-foot covered in rags (*ibid*.:260). Another evil being, the bogeyman, invisible except for his hand and black or green in Dauphiné folktales, drags children into torrents, wells, and abysses (Joisten 1996:231). And there are reports about green, yellow, and blue horned demons (Joisten and Joisten 1986:86).

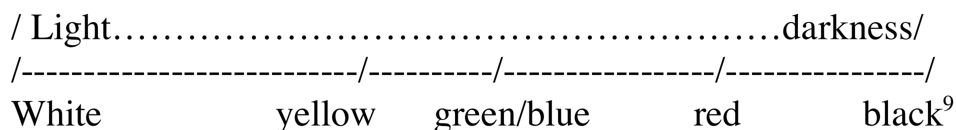
In Igboland, white is traditionally associated with ancestral spirits, as testified by G. T. Basden's (1938) photo of an Igbo initiate's ceremonial body-painting with one side painted white, the combination representing his being half-man, half-spirit. Many of these spirits are associated with animals of the same color, as they either take their form, appear in their company, or require them as sacrifices. Such spirits include black or white snakes (Ugochukwu 1992:94; Teneze and Abry 1982:37) and cats of all colors according to a legend from Saint Maurice en Valgaudemar (Upper Alps), but mostly black as noted in Dauphiné folktales (Teneze and Abry 1982:114; Joisten and Joisten 1986:64) where the devil manifests himself as a black dog or cat, with black cats or black chickens used as sacrifices to attract him. Folktales may also display a series of white animals: horses that carry their rider into a flowing river, pigeons and doves that help the hero (Teneze and Abry 1982:215; Bettelheim 1976:137), and chamois glimpsed by a dying hunter (Joutard and Majastre 1987:29).

Beauty, Darkness, and Light

In the widespread Igbo folktale of "Enendu," the ogres who decide to kill their adolescent visitor smear his face with white chalk and that of their own child with grey ashes. The aim is to enhance the color of the fair one, whose fairness is read as a threat, in order to facilitate his nighttime capture; but Enendu clears the chalk off his face and smears it with ash instead—this will result in his being spared (Ugochukwu 1992:183). In another folktale, the orphan's body color is enhanced by the water spirit smearing it with indigo (*ibid*.:197). Widely used before the introduction of modern cosmetics, indigo dye confirms black as the color of beauty (Basden 1938:330) while the bright darkness of the skin clearly marks the girl as human as she moves into the spirit world for a dancing contest.

The Bible records that the devil can masquerade as an angel of light (2 Cor.11:14), and Newton's experiments led him to recognize the relationship between color and light. Brilliance is what sets colors apart (Tornay 1978: xii; Zollinger 1999:5), while giving them a religious polarity—in Igboland, masquerades and mermaid dances, commonly associated with white, employ many mirrors stuck on brightly colored cloth. In the Igbo language "shining" does not necessarily mean that one is fair in complexion—it is more accurately associated with beauty, more precisely a beauty that oozes out of the skin and owes little to color.

It would therefore seem that folktales are more or less told in shades of black and white, with French folktales including additional references to red, green/blue, and yellow—all associated with the supernatural and endowed with an ambivalent polarity that can be measured on the following double scale, usually (but not always) read from the positive (left) to the negative (right):



As Zollinger explains, "color can be represented as a space . . .with continuous change in hue, brightness and saturation" (1999:127). The same scale is then used to interpret appearances of human and supernatural beings, with the devil at the extreme right of the scale in French folktales and the

[9] Cf. Goethe's discussion of color polarity (1840:276 n.696, 304-15).

spirits of the dead at the other end in both countries, no matter how they behave.[10]

Between Heaven and Hell

Black and white have been considered as constituting two opposite poles, with red standing somewhere in between. These three colors seem to be the most prominent and universal in all languages, possessing an ancient and powerful symbolism (Verity 1980:113). In French oral literature, the red color associated with the devil is directly inspired by the fire and flames of hell,[11] and illustrates the fact that the appreciation and reading of colors has been heavily influenced by traditional/popular and imported religions. In France, folktales record an overwhelming influence from Catholicism and the Bible, which have given white its positive connotation—associating it not only with snow but with cleanliness, innocence, and beauty—while equating black with evil, as further evidenced by French and English expressions such as "black soul," "black magic," "black market," and "dark secrets." Nederveen Pieterse comments (1992:196): "In a . . . perspective in which 'clean,' 'white,' 'fair,' 'light,' 'good' go together as the foundation of aesthetics and civilization, it is obvious that 'dark,' 'black,' 'dirty,' 'sinful,' 'evil' will be grouped together as well." Interestingly, the same reading of white prevails in Africa, both in the language and in folktales, in spite of the fact that those are laden with traditional beliefs.

Whenever she appears in folktales, the Virgin Mary is white,[12] and folktales and popular culture usually highlight the beauty of fair women, as

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[10] Considered to produce "the most significant impression that color has made on the human mind, probably on every culture on earth" and as a pathway to the other world (Zollinger 1999:21-22), the rainbow, with its array of colors, moves across the spectrum and warns against a hasty reading of color symbolism. A potent biblical symbol in Genesis, it is also revered in popular religion, as proved by both Igbo folktales and French cemeteries (Joisten 1977:305, Joutard and Majastre 1987:95, 228).

[11] According to Joisten (1996:177), the devil "is the only important supernatural being who presents the same characteristics in both folktales and hagiographic literature."

[12] Some other expressions of popular religious culture, such as ex-votos, record a shift in color-coding, with the veneration of black Virgins, also called "Saracens," in sanctuaries mostly situated in the southern part of the country and on its southern borders (cf. Joisten 1977:213-45). This inversion might have been linked to the medieval crusades or gypsy hagiographic legends, but might as well be a reminder of the ancient chthonian fairies that haunted the woods, fountains, and caves in pre-Christian traditions.

proved by the stories of Snow-White and All-kinds-of-fur (Grimm and Grimm 1976: 144, 201). In Igbo folktales and culture, the fairer a girl or a woman is, the closer she is to the spirits. Igbo masks that represent young, unmarried girls always have a white face (Basden 1938:368). In addition, white is the favorite color of the mermaid cult, associated with white handkerchief dancing, mirrors, and the presentation of white objects and fowl to the River spirits, a fertility cult prevalent all along the West African coast and the River Niger. Adepts describe mermaids or Mami Wota as both fair and European in appearance, with long, flowing hair, as described in "Uncle Ben's Choice," one of Chinua Achebe's *Girls at War* short stories (1986:79), or in Nigerian videos that depict folktales and popular religion. African myths collected by Veronika Görög-Karady (1976:220) equally associated white Europeans with water spirits.[13]

White, the color of water cults, has also been used as an alternative and a substitute for black as a mourning symbol, with expressions like "white as a sheet" evoking both the shroud that envelops the corpse and the whitish, bodiless ghost. In the course of the Igbo *ozo* title-taking ceremony,[14] the incumbent's body is smeared with white chalk to signify his being ushered, through spiritual death, into the spirit world (Basden 1938:138). Oral tales from Congo record that the dead turn white, explaining their loss of pigmentation by their long sojourn in water (Görög-Karady 1976:219). In the Igbo folktale "The Son of the Rainbow," white is associated with cruel, merciless spirits. A child's quest for his departed father brings him and his mother to the river spirit who asks her to return to the riverbank with her child, a white clay pot, a white piece of cloth, and other white objects, seven in all. She obeys. Once there, she sings a lament, at the end of which the child falls into the water and drowns (Ugochukwu 1992:227-33). Customs and traditional rites associate both black and white equally with death, as in Igboland where pieces of white cloth are traditionally brought to the deceased's house by visitors,[15] while mourners dress in either black or white. The colors of mourning clothes are the same in traditional Savoy— black for the family, white for the poor invited to the bedside, with blue worn as a substitute for black toward the end of the mourning period (Milliex

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[13] This could be explained by the fact that Europeans came from the sea, and then into Igboland by boat on the river Niger.

[14] The highest and most revered political and religious title in Igboland.

[15] The same custom is attested by Bambara tales (Görög-Karady 1976:248).

1978:144-46), a reminder of the previously mentioned closeness of black and blue.

As for the green attire that the devil sometimes wears in French folktales, green is the hunter's color—a tradition dating from medieval times that announces him as hunting for souls to trap in the fires of hell (Tenèze and Abry 1982:31). The yellow/green color can equally be read as an image of sulphur, whose stench traditionally envelops the devil's apparitions; the same connotation is attested in the traditional Candlemas rite[16] when French rural parishioners brought green candles to church for them to be blessed in order to protect their homes from lightning (Walter 1992:237). As for red, when associated with black its traditional symbolism is reversed and, instead of ardent love, it then means hatred (Verity 1980:114).

History as Source and Key to Color-Coding

According to Bonte and Izard (2002:779), perceptual categorizers are universal and only serve as a reference; culture-coded symbolism then uses them as primary material to build on. In the end, what matters is not the color itself but the way it is read. Goethe's opinion was that "we associate the character of the color with the character of the person"; he personally considered the "white man" to be "the most beautiful" (1840:328 n. 839, 265 n. 672). In Europe, as in Africa, history has been the major factor of transformation in the reading of colors.

In that regard, the impact of religious beliefs upon the reading of colors cannot be separated from historical influences, as world events like the crusades and colonization went hand in hand with the spread of missionaries. Although Catholicism brought about a radical change in European reading of color (Verity 1980:113),

> [t]he symbolism associated with light and darkness was probably derived from esoteric tradition—astrology, alchemy, Gnosticism and forms of Manichaeism. For the alchemist, spiritual evolution proceeded from the prime, black matter, associated with fermentation and putrefaction, to the white mercury, standing for illumination, ascension and revelation, culminating in the red sulphur, suffering, sublimation and love, to achieve gold.

[16] Candlemas is the Christian version of an ancient Celtic Feast celebrated in honor of the fertility goddess Imbolc at the mid-point between the winter solstice and the spring equinox. The day takes its name from the rite.

In itself, none of that process had anything to do with skin color, but in the course of time, and as early as the fifth century C.E., it did acquire that connotation: “black became the color of the devil and demons” (Nederveen Pieterse 1992: 24). This attitude was later reinforced by European confrontation with Middle Eastern Islam and the transfer of black demon symbolism to the *Chanson de Roland*, where Moslems appear “black as melted pitch.” Threatened by heresies, confronted by Islam, the thirteenth-century Christian world gathered itself against strangers considered as monsters, those branded as “satanic” (Delacampagne 2000:80) and promised to destruction. In the sixteenth century, the introduction of black servants into European courts further reinforced that reading, while a tendentious interpretation of the Bible and of Ham’s curse (Genesis 9:25, 10:6) was used to rubber-stamp this negative color coding.[17]

On the part of Africans, interaction with the Portuguese and nineteenth-century colonization brought about, on the one hand, assimilation between white, water, beauty, power, and riches, and, on the other, between light and religious purity.[18] Yet other, negative connotations came into play, no doubt brought about by the colonial experience, connotations that match the ambivalent character of the spirits, as already noted by Görög-Karady (1976:240). In Igbo language, for example, white is associated with laziness (*ura ndi ocha* = the “white sleep,” that is, a lie-in, sleeping at a time when one is expected to be awake and busy working) and alienation (*oru oyibo* = “white work,” initiated by the white and destined to benefit them only, that is, nobody’s job, a job that neither benefits nor concerns workers). Such expressions widen the gap between blacks and whites. On the other hand, Igbo language does not restrict the term “white” to Europeans but extends it to fair-skinned Igbo and even albinos[19]—although in Nigerian English, these last two groups are more likely to be called “yellow.” This could be construed as indicating a tendency to merge/assimilate all shades of white. More importantly, the same color is also applied to those considered to behave like the stereotypical European.

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[17] The same color difference was to be crucial in the later massacres of Native Americans and in justifying the transatlantic slave trade.

[18] Research in psychology has found traces of these mental pictures in African-American children who overwhelmingly showed their preference for white dolls, whose color was found more attractive (Nederveen Pieterse 1992:11).

[19] Apart from that term, Igbo language has a specific word for “albino” that indicates the skin condition and not necessarily the color.

Whereas African traditional beliefs tended to associate white people with magic and supernatural powers, traditional natural history (*ibid*.:43) has often associated blacks with animals, and that has had a lasting effect. Europe built a profile of the African as someone "primitive," "savage," bestial, living in his impenetrable jungle, and this image is associated with those of nudity and wild dancing. Blacks' profile "match[es] those of animals, criminals, mad people, degenerates (. . .), a world of monsters and demons, which . . . must be controlled" (*ibid.*:179-80) or even destroyed (Delacampagne 2000:201). Dauphiné folktales of "The Three Cats," "The Soapy Mountain," "The Three Lemons," and "The Five Oranges" (Joisten 1971:29-40, 137-39, and 141) further prove this point. In the tale of "The Three Cats" (Joisten 1996:202), three brothers leave home in search of the perfect spouse. The youngest checks into an inn whose keepers are three ladies turned into female cats, while the two other brothers travel to China and Cochin China, Senegal, and Equatorial Africa. The folktale describes the two African women they bring back: one is chained, with a ring passed through her nose; the other is a "plated negress" who carries her baby on her back and feeds him by throwing her 60 cm. breasts backwards, a description reminiscent of those of wild fairies found in folktales from Upper Savoy. The other Dauphiné folktales mentioned above do present young, unmarried women, white, yellow, or black. The white one is the only one with a name, an avowed Catholic faith and training in good manners, the only one who can hold a conversation and offer help; the black women are again compared to wild untamed animals or presented as wicked jealous witches.

Spirits as Strangers

The color attributed to evil spirits in folktales and in the culture is globally opposed to that of the locals, that is, white for Nigerians, black for the French, whereas spirits perceived as good—the Virgin Mary, angels, fairies, and God[20]—are usually the same color as the people, even fairer. The devil is an enemy on two counts: first by status, because he is a spirit, therefore different, the great stranger, whose difference must be highlighted; and secondly by character, because he is perceived as inherently evil. Whoever is different therefore becomes the devil, and if foreigners are black, then the devil is black. Although popular religion and the belief in familiar spirits bring the French close to the Igbo, the relationship between humans

[20] A tale told in one of the Nigerian videos is entitled *God is African* (see Filmography).

and spirits is different in the two cultures considered. In the French tradition, the world of spirits is close yet rather feared and characterized by a clear duality: God and the saints are good; the devil and demons are bad. In the middle, we find familiar spirits and the ghosts of purgatory souls, whose status is rather ambivalent yet inoffensive. In Nigeria, while spirits are clearly discerned as different, encounters with them are common and reveal these beings as human-like in character—ambivalent and unpredictable, having feelings and capable of both the best and the worst. What differentiates them, in the end, is thus more their spirit status than their character.

It follows that in folktales the giving of a color or a shape to a person is not a reflection of reality:[21] it only tags the person or object as alien. Color has therefore no inherent value—it is only used as a marker of identity. Allocating a color to persons/objects amounts to extracting them from the unknown, taming them, pre-empting the harm their interaction could inflict, and disabling them by classifying them within cultural parameters. The disguise one observes in folktales, with the devil and other evil spirits opting to change their color/appearance in order to appear human, is a rejection of the categorization that would prevent them from interacting with people—just as concealment through color change is widespread in the animal world, from fish to chameleon. A folktale from Guyenne, for example, combines body and color change: on his way back from the pub, a drunken farmer meets a white dog and tries in vain to get rid of it. The dog follows him home, jumps into his bed, and holds him tight while he sleeps. In the morning, the man's wife discovers her husband strangled, still in the clutches of a black, hairy devil (Seignolle 1971:229-30).

Masquerades, whether in Switzerland or in Nigeria, also reveal people camouflaging themselves with soot, wooden masks, and cloth to embody ancestral spirits, and changing color and shape in order to interact with those spirits. Color is thus an essential tool of both categorization and communication, as color symbolism is known to be instantly read and decoded within cultures. It could further be argued that storytellers

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[21] Traditional dress-code in both countries made little use of color. In the Alps, for example, local dress was usually made of cotton or wool, and rather dull—except for shawls and headgear, clothes, even wedding gowns, were always dark (Arnaud 1983:68), both black and white being worn for mourning in France as well as in Nigeria.

deliberately choose to limit the number of colors they use in order to highlight their importance.[22]

Alternative Readings

Human beings have been described as visually oriented animals, and color has long been recognized as a dominant factor in visual perception (Verity 1980:68 and 106). Didactic in nature, folktales capitalize on that connection, with the words of the storyteller adding shape to characters' color. Whereas supernatural beings such as God, angels, the Virgin Mary, the saints, or the ancestors are usually presented as handsome or at least good-looking, Igbo evil spirits,[23] which mostly populate folktales, are always given an ugly face. As for the devil and his demons, they usually have an ambivalent appearance that distinguishes between their real appearance and their cover. The devil often disguises himself as a handsome, well-dressed, dandy-like, fair-faced young man—"camouflage breaks up the shape, outline and shadow . . . making [him] blend with [his] general background" (*ibid.*:75). He can also change into a variety of animals: cats, dogs, horses, or goats. When found out, he turns into a repulsive semi-animal being, half man and half goat; his face is ape-like with protruding lips and eyes; his legs are those of a goat, horse, cock, or cow; he has a tail, horns, or bat's wings (Joisten and Joisten 1986:74 and Joisten 1996:177); or the devil is hollow with a back devoured by worms and snakes (Teneze and Abry 1982:31). His specialty is the disguise, achieved either by covering himself with a large cape or mantle or by changing into other beings. In folktales and legends, supernatural beings as a rule do not disclose their real selves; they use another body, cover themselves, or don a mask (as we just saw with the devil)—masks embodying ancestral spirits (Chappaz-Wirthner 1974:63) variously called ancestors, ghosts, spirits, or demons. God disguises himself too, usually as a ragged old man, and fairies take the features of old women.

These appearances can be interpreted as substituting bodily shape for color-coding, in the same way that objects are named to conjure a color. Igbo folktales present evil spirits with two or more heads, or even heads all

[22] This would contradict Zollinger's findings of "a significant, positive association between the relative salience of color categories in folktales and in the Berlin and Kay evolutionary sequence" (1999:150).

[23] Spirits of the deceased who, for various reasons, were prevented from accessing the ancestors' place of rest and are left to roam endlessly on the frontier of the land of the living.

over their bodies (Ugochukwu 1992:23-29). These heads are often hollow, filled with fire, smoke, lakes, or reptiles (*ibid*.:93-97). One of the spirits is halved (257). This interpretation is corroborated by available studies on masquerades: according to Chappaz-Wirthner (1974:64), records dating back to the fifteenth century attest that, prior to the wearing of masks, people's faces were smeared with black soot or ashes. *Lötschental* masks were later carved and painted, first with red, black, and white, obtained from blood, soot, and flour (*ibid*.:40) before artists reverted to black, shapes now being read in conjunction with colors.

Whatever the type of difference highlighted by folktales—deformity or darker skin—the message is the same: "acceptable" human beings look like you and me; they share our skin color and our features and are therefore deemed acceptable, as corresponding to our canon of beauty. Foreigners, however, look different; they are perceived as animal-like or monstrous, and the reading of their features justifies their separation and facilitates their rejection. That is why the miller's wife rebukes the devil with this exclamation: "What are you here for? Blacks are not welcome here!" (Méraville 1970:158).[24]

One must say that the message from folktales is not always that clear, in that "one way literature projects its knowledge and thought is through . . . allegory" (Fletcher 1991:93). There are a number of reasons for the encoding of the message. Folktales are part of oral literature, a heavily encoded lore as one can verify from the study of traditional songs. As such, they aim at a mixed audience and thus offer several layers of meaning, which each group deciphers with the help of the social keys available to it—children usually take the text at face value, while adults and initiates read far more into it. The encoding allows the message to be delivered indiscriminately while still respecting cultural taboos. Such a rendering finally excludes outsiders, who may not possess the cues that would enable them to understand the whole meaning of the tale. The same applies to color terms; used "with a belief in their power to communicate" (*ibid*.: 101), they do so, yet selectively.

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[24] Igbo culture does have a regard for some disabilities, as we can see in folktales and in the Nri culture. In Igboland, dwarfs have long been associated with the Nri kingdom, the first and oldest of kingdoms, which controlled Igbo traditional religion. Regarded as mystical beings and much revered, these dwarfs were sent to the king, who used them as his attendants and messengers (Onwuejeogwu 1981:90).

Do Colors Really Matter?

Most of the representations that guide our personal and social behavior are built using the diversity of our sensorial experience—taste, hearing, smell, touch, and sight (Tornay 1978:l). To color space, in particular, is to throw light on it, extracting it from chaos and giving it a meaning. Black and white have often been considered as non-colors, marking a space where the absence or the profusion of light blurs all details and shapes. This practice could explain why folktales use these colors to describe aliens whose features cannot easily be read. Other colors—yellow, green, or red—serve as references, linking the person/object to one of the accepted symbols: red, for example, being usually associated with passion, danger, interdiction, violence, blood, and hell, while green has always been the color of nature and wild, untamed territory.[25] Folktales, which gather their audience as night sets in, appeal to sensorial experience and associate colors, shapes, and smells with music and vocal performance, yet encourage us to go beyond the visual and read colors to understand them as signposts and keys to the truths that lie beyond.

The folktale of "The Rat and the Pregnant Woman" (Ugochukwu 1992:248-55) illustrates the ultimate reading of colors in Igboland. It is about a pregnant woman who lives on the edge of the forest. Although she has all she needs, she always craves caterpillars (a delicacy). She eventually discovers a tree full of them and keeps going there in the hope of gathering some, but fails because of her bulging tummy. After begging all the animals in vain for help, she meets the speckled rat, who not only fills her basket but keeps bringing caterpillars to her daily until she gives birth to a baby girl. She must hand over her daughter to him in marriage, so goes their agreement, and, in due time, the mother rejects all suitors, repeating that she will give her daughter only to a speckled animal. Here, in spite of appearances, what counts is not the skin color but the person's behavior. The rat's assistance has led to his appearance being awarded the price of his good deeds—this is the lesson of folktales.

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[25] Davidoff (1991:115) warns that anthropological evidence encourages caution, since such associations have proven to be far from universal.

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A Meme-Based Approach to Oral Traditional Theory

Michael D. C. Drout

The most complex, beautiful, and longstanding tradition in the world is the great and continuous four-billion-year-old web of life, what Richard Dawkins calls "the river out of Eden" (1995). Thirty years ago he showed that the existence and interplay of replicators, entities that are able to copy themselves, are sufficient to explain, in broad terms, the workings of evolutionary biology. Dawkins, whose focus was the biological gene, also noted that there is another replicator on earth besides the gene—the "meme" (1976:203-15). A meme is the simplest unit of cultural replication; it is whatever is transmitted when one person imitates, consciously or unconsciously, another (208).[1] In this essay I will show how an understanding of the interactions of memes can do for culture what the identification of "selfish genes" (Dawkins 1976), "extended phenotypes" (Dawkins 1982), and "cooperative genes" (Ridley 2001) did for biology. Meme theory can explain the workings of several well-known and much discussed aspects of oral traditions: traditional referentiality, anaphora, and the use of repeated metrical patterns. All three phenomena, different as they are, can be understood as arising from the operations of the same underlying processes of repetition and pattern-recognition explained by meme-theory.[2]

[1] Robert Aunger goes to great lengths to determine whether or not a theorized meme is in fact a replicator (in his view, replicators must have "causation, similarity, information transfer, and duplication"), eventually concluding that memes are in fact replicators (2002:213-17). Although I doubt that everything that has been claimed as a meme is in fact a replicator, the phenomena I am discussing—traditions and their component parts—are indeed replicators in Aunger's sense.

[2] I develop this theory at much greater length with an expanded discussion of the philosophical and literary-theoretical contexts in Drout 2006.

Memes and Repetition

When one person imitates a behavior of another, a meme has managed to replicate itself by being copied from one human mind to another. The classic example of a meme is a tune, such as "Happy Birthday to You," sung by one person and heard and repeated by another.[3] Within the context of a given culture, some memes are better at getting copied than others.[4] Often the memes that are best at getting copied are those that are most effective at combining with other memes, and memes can be parasitic, commensal, or symbiotic. Replicators, competition (there is some finite limit to the number of memes, if only because we have not world enough and time; there is a limited number of human minds, and these last for finite amounts of time), and variation create a situation of "universal Darwinism" (Dawkins 1983:403). The process of natural selection will ensure that, given enough time, those memes that are better at getting copied will end up outnumbering those that are not. Memes will evolve for improved success at being copied because (by definition) those that are better at getting copied will differentially replace those that are not: all the memes in existence are dependent upon the same finite resources. The eventual result of such differential reproduction is an ecosystem of competing and cooperating memes—a culture—populated by memes that are exquisitely adapted to it.[5] An analysis of the design and engineering principles of memes, in this wider context of the memetic ecosystem in which they exist, would be a first step

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[3] "Happy Birthday to You" is a meme, but it can also be seen as an aggregation of the memes for the individual words in the song working in partnership with the already established memes of the English language. Likewise the tune itself is a meme, but so is each smaller verse. "Happy Birthday to You" could thus technically be called a "meme-plex," a complex of memes (Hull 1982). "Meme-plex" is an abbreviation of Dawkins' "co-adapted meme complex" (1976:212-13). The abbreviation was apparently developed by H. Speel in an as yet unpublished conference paper; see Blackmore (1999:19), who gives the "Happy Birthday" example. "Meme-plex" and "meme" are thus different names for the same sorts of entities, and to avoid proliferating jargon I will use "meme" in all cases.

[4] Edward Shils argues that "traditions are not independently self-reproductive or self-elaborating. Only living, knowing, desiring human beings can enact them and reenact them and modify them" (1981:14). But this view is either true only in a trivial sense (and perhaps not even trivially true, because some animals appear to enact traditions) or mistaken.

[5] This analysis is consistent with F. A. Hayek's discussion of tradition (1945). Peter Medawar also argues for analyzing tradition in terms of selection pressure (1961).

towards a cultural poetics that is wholly materialist and thus subject, at every level, to testing, falsification, and modification.[6]

A tradition is an unbroken train of identical, non-instinctual behaviors that have been repeated after the same recurring antecedent conditions.[7] The first time a behavior is enacted cannot be a tradition, but the second time can be, and the first enactment is then retrospectively defined as the origin of the tradition.[8] Repetition is the "same" action engaged in upon more than one occasion, but defining "same" is philosophically problematic: the more fine-grained the focus, the more difficult it is to define something as "same" (see Dennett 1984). Nevertheless, we seem to be able to recognize and agree upon recognizing "same" actions even when we cannot rigorously define them in philosophical terms.[9] For the purposes of this argument such consensus understandings of "same" are sufficient.[10]

In memetic terms, a tradition is a combination of several smaller memes. The traditional behavior can be seen as one meme; let us call it *actio*. The response to the given antecedent condition that triggers the traditional behavior is another meme that enables the first meme; let us call this *recognitio*. The tradition is then, the combination of these two memes: *recognitio*—"every spring equinox, enact *actio*"—and *actio*—"sing the equinox song." The *proto-tradition* (*recogitio+actio*) is: "every spring equinox sing the equinox song."

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[6] I say "first step" because untangling a cultural poetics is likely to be quite difficult. For one thing, if culture does evolve via selection and evolution of memes, it may not be very easy to fathom their underlying engineering principles (Miller 2000): "Genetic algorithms…often produce solutions that work, but one cannot quite understand how or why they work" because genetic algorithms "break the link between innovation and analysis that has been considered a fundamental principle of modern engineering."

[7] Traditions can be characterized mathematically by Markov chains: the continued maintenance of the tradition depends upon a series of successful enactments of the behavior in question (Feller 1957:338-96).

[8] Note that here I disagree with Shils, who argues that a pattern of behavior must be repeated three times to be a tradition (1981:15). It is not clear that one additional repetition makes something a tradition that would otherwise not be one. The key point to keep in mind is that a tradition is defined retrospectively.

[9] The problem of "repetition" is intertwined with the problem of "identity," usually abbreviated in the philosophical literature as the problem of "The Ship of Theseus," analyzed by many philosophers, but perhaps most famously by Hobbes in *Elements of Philosophy*. I recognize the immensity of the argument and set it aside.

[10] I discuss the philosophical problems in detail in Drout (2006:24-6), where I use Wittgensteinian "family resemblances" to provide a possible solution.

What converts a simple response to a condition into a tradition is the addition of a third meme to the complex that provides an explanation for the behavior. Let us call this *justificatio*: "because singing the equinox song makes the fields fruitful." The full complex for the traditional behavior (*recognitio+actio+justificatio*)[11] is: "every spring equinox sing the equinox song because singing the equinox song makes the fields fruitful." This *recognitio+actio+justificatio* complex is the fundamental structure from which a tradition evolves.[12]

A *proto-tradition* could easily arise in a culture from trial and error, and spread widely due to the general tendencies of humans to repeat actions that appear to lead to successful outcomes, to imitate others who are successful, and to teach valuable information to members of a younger generation.[13] *Recognitio*, *actio*, and *justificatio* are each differently sensitive to transmission error.[14] If *recognitio* (recognize the antecedent condition of "at the spring equinox") mutates, such change has a relatively good chance of not degrading the fitness of the overall meme. For example, if *recognitio* is modified in transmission so that "at the spring equinox" is replaced by "at both the spring or fall equinoxes," the overall inclusive fitness of the meme-

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[11] I believe these terms are sufficiently close to their English equivalents to be relatively easy to remember and distinguish. While it is true that *justificatio* is later Latin and *recognitio* in this sense is earlier Latin, the greater familiarity of *recognitio* over *recognosco* seems a good reason to keep the term. I have chosen Latin rather than English terms because calling something a "justification" would be a kind of rhetorical cheating.

[12] This tripartite view of tradition is not incompatible with Popper's two-part description. Popper notes that traditions are transmitted with a "silent accompanying text of a second-order character" (1965:127).

[13] In *The Descent of Man* Darwin discusses the way that imitation would spread "the habitual practice of each new art," and would thus be linked to the development of culture through natural selection (Ridley 1987:151).

[14] For the fundamental theory of information transmission and degradation, see Shannon and Weaver 1949:34-48. See also Khinchin 1957. Here I part company from Aunger, who insists that "information is physical" (2002:136-58, 193). Aunger's use of quantum theory is provocative, and for a somewhat similar discussion see Pesic 2002. However, my reading of the mathematical literature and my discussions with mathematicians have convinced me that the majority position in information theory is that information is "substrate neutral." Turing's development of the "Universal Computing Machine" (now called the "Universal Turing Machine") seems to support this side of the argument (Turing 1936-37).

plex may be improved, especially if the new *recognitio* is easier to remember.[15]

Actio, on the other hand, is less likely to mutate successfully. Although fitness-improving mutation does of course happen, positive mutation is comparatively unlikely because random deviations from an adaptively effective practice are likely to be less adaptive than the original practice. *Actio*, then, appears to be somewhat more sensitive to mutation than *recognitio* because the ways in which it can vary are more likely to lead to a decrease in fitness.

Justificatio, however, can mutate substantially without necessarily damaging the fitness of the overall meme-plex. Humans can invent a multitude of explanations for their actions even when these explanations have nothing to do either causally or historically with the action in question. Thus there seems to be strong selection pressure on *justificatio* to mutate in ways that lead to a decrease in the possibility of individuals ignoring the entire meme-plex. If we take a meme's-eye view of the situation, we see that the stronger a form of *justificatio* is, the more likely the entire meme is to be preserved.[16] Conditions that affect *justificatio* could also threaten the reproduction of the entire meme. For example, if the meme is enacted but the crops do not thrive, the "fitness" of the meme-plex suffers; people will be less likely to act upon the instructions if their very reason for so acting (given in the *justificatio*) is not borne out by experience. Following John L. Austin (1979) and John Searle (1998), who follows him, we can call this the Word-to-World fit condition.[17]

Word-to-World fit implies the existence of a world that includes the physical world as well as social and cultural worlds, and it also must include the *weltanschauung* held by individuals by means of whom the tradition

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[15] Dawkins (1986:99-100) discusses how the 13- and 17-year life cycles of cicadas serve to protect the adults against predators, because all emerge at the same time ("swamping" their predators with more food than they can consume). The 13- and 17-year life cycles (and there are no 14-, 15-, or 16-year life cycles) seem to have evolved because 13 and 17, being prime numbers, are not multiples of shorter (say, 2-, 3-, 4- or 5-year) life cycles. Memes whose *recognitio* components mutated to unusual periodicities would be unlikely to be remembered.

[16] There are limits, however, to how imperative a *justificatio* can become. If there is selection pressure for memes to become more and more emphatic, then human minds will evolve defenses against such extreme positions lest a single, imperative meme capture the entire organism to that organism's detriment. See Dennett 2003:150-56.

[17] See also Anscombe 1957:56-57.

meme is attempting to replicate.[18] Note that if a *justificatio* is sufficiently vague, it will more frequently fit the world than if it is precise.[19] We could expect, then, that there would be selection pressure not only to make *justificatios* more emphatic, but also more vague. However, extreme specificity in *justificatio* would make a meme-plex more fit by making the *justificatio* more convincing; at the same time that specificity would risk the Word-to-World conflict that could reduce the meme's fitness. Successful memes must negotiate a balancing act between specificity and vagueness.

The need to balance between these two poles creates the opportunity for the Universal Tradition Meme to replace the specifics of any given *justificatio* with a new explanation: "because we have always done so" ("because it is traditional to do so"). At first the Universal Tradition Meme appears to be a variation of vagueness and subject to the same difficulties (a vague explanation may lose out to a specific one if the two are competing). The Universal Tradition Meme is indeed more vague than any specified *justificatio*, which is why it is unlikely to out-compete a narrowly specific *justificatio* when a meme-plex first evolves.[20] But the Universal Tradition Meme should, over time, out-compete a more specified *justificatio* because the more iterations of transmission of the meme, the more true the Universal Tradition Meme becomes: it is more specifically true because the pattern *has* been enacted previously and thus can withstand detailed Word-to-World comparison.

The Universal Tradition Meme makes a given meme more likely to be replicated; thus those memes that are able to be joined to the Universal Tradition Meme are more likely themselves to be replicated. Once the Universal Tradition Meme has evolved in a culture, therefore, it will cause

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[18] For a good discussion of the interaction of the constraints of the physical world with culture (real-world constraints are "non-negotiable and universal"), see Vincenti 2000:174. Pascal Boyer argues that "for anthropologists, the fact that something is culture is the very *reason* it does not vary that much. Not everything is equally likely to be transmitted, because the templates in the mind filter information from other people and build predictable structures out of that information" (2001:47, his emphasis). I agree, but would note that Boyer's conception needs to be linked to the physical constraints of the real world as well as those of the cultural world and the individual human psyche. *Word-to-World fit* subsumes these multiple categories.

[19] A vague *justificatio* allows for a wider range of interpretation, and thus more possibilities of "fit" than does a specific *justificatio*.

[20] On the first or second iteration of a meme, the Universal Tradition Meme should not work as a *justificatio* because it will not fit the world ("we obviously haven't always done this new thing").

the agglomeration of more and more memes together into larger and larger complexes of tradition. But the Universal Tradition Meme is not the culmination of the cultural evolution of a tradition.[21] There is a straightforward evolutionary progression of *justificatios* from "we have always done so" to an unconscious sublimation of that idea, eventually reaching the point where the traditional behavior itself becomes interpreted (when even noticed) as part of the cultural identity of the individuals who engage in it.[22] We can call such an unconscious sublimation the Unconscious Imperative and recognize it as the ultimate *telos* (goal) of the Universal Tradition Meme. But the Universal Tradition Meme can always be reinstated if the Unconscious Imperative fails: if someone were to question an Unconscious Imperative action, a participant in the culture could reply with the Universal Tradition Meme: "we have always done so." Thus, while all traditions are not accessed self-consciously (if they have attained Unconscious Imperative status), they all have the capability of becoming self-conscious at any time and their *justificatios* then again being the Universal Tradition Meme.

Repeated actions will tend toward the Universal Tradition Meme for their *justificatios* (because the longer a practice continues, the better the Word-to-World fit of the Universal Tradition Meme *justificatio* for the practice will be), and therefore repeated actions will tend to become traditions. Given the fallible nature of human memory, it is not surprising that it takes only a few repetitions of some behaviors to generate the idea of tradition (that is, to push the *justificatio* towards the Universal Tradition Meme). This process may appear paradoxical, because the fallible nature of long-term, distributed memory would seem to lead to the loss of traditions. But in fact the combination of fallible distributed long-term memory with the ability of individuals to recognize patterns quickly, and with the human tendency to repeat actions that have had previous success—the "stick with a winner" tendency, leads to the creation and maintenance of traditions. Repetition thus not only leads to stability, but generates the impression that a repeated practice has always been repeated. This idea in turn creates continuity, because we are more likely to see ourselves as being fundamentally like them if we believe that individuals in the past were

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[21] Although it appears to be an Evolutionarily Stable Strategy (Maynard Smith 1982:10-27).

[22] Cf. Lord 1960:220: "For it is of the *necessary* nature of tradition that it seek and maintain stability, that it preserve itself. And this tenacity springs neither from a perverseness, nor from an abstract principle of absolute art, but from a desperately compelling conviction that what tradition is preserving is the very means of attaining life and happiness."

performing the same actions as we are today. Repetition and also identity are thus projected back into the past and forward into the future because participants in a tradition also imagine their descendants continuing their practices.

The effects of tradition and its associated repetitions on culture are substantial. Repetition improves the mnemonic retention of information. Repeated memes, therefore, are more likely to be mnemonically stable than unrepeated ones. The more a tradition is repeated (that is, the shorter the intervals between repetitions) the more likely it is to be mnemonically retained, because if repetition is mnemonically effective, frequent repetition (within some limits) is even more so.

Repetition reinforces not only the *justificatio* component of a tradition (by improving its Word-to-World fit as it evolves towards the Universal Tradition Meme) but also the *recognitio* component, because a repeated *recognitio* is more likely to be entered into and retrieved from long-term memory. Repetition creates patterns, and human brains, among their other talents, are sublime pattern-recognizers. The combination of the patterns created by repetition with the human ability to recognize patterns means that in a culture that includes repeated traditions, information (memes) may be encoded and transmitted in significantly compressed form. Memes can also be retrieved from incomplete or noisy data, allowing traditionally encoded patterns to be transmitted and received in many different situations.

Traditional Referentiality

Once a meme has been stored in a person's memory, and if that meme is part of some kind of repeated pattern, it can be called back into conscious perception by some smaller critical portion of the meme. A poem could be invoked by one or two lines; for example, the phrase "'twas the night before Christmas" may bring up the memory of the entire poem. If the short sequence that operates as a cueing mechanism is distinctive enough, this triggering meme can be very short. In the case of "'twas the night before Christmas," for many people "'twas" is probably sufficient.[23]

The triggering or cuing meme (the "'twas") is called, in oral traditional studies,[24] the "traditional referent." A traditional referent invokes

[23] If "'twas" does not immediately bring to mind the correct poem, it at least narrows down the search space to either this poem or "Jabberwocky."

[24] I recognize that the exact contours of oral traditional theory are a matter of some contention. For the purpose of this argument I invoke the theory as originated by Milman Parry and Albert Lord, summed up by John Miles Foley (1988), and having its

the much larger meme complex with which it is associated by the process of metonymy: the part stands for the whole.[25] Thus the use of a specific formula or type-scene (a repeated traditional meme) can invoke, *pars pro toto*, "a context enormously larger and more echoic than the text or the work itself" (Foley 1991:6-8). A formulaic epithet or "tag-line" like "grey-eyed Athena" or "Hector of the glancing helm" invokes not merely one attribute of a well-known character, but that character's entire persona as developed throughout the epic corpus (Foley 1995:5).

A functioning tradition consists of a set of aggregated *actios* all utilizing the Universal Tradition Meme (or its unconscious *telos*) as their *justificatio* components and all using the same (or harmonized) *recognitios*. Thus the traditional meme-plex exists not only as the historical fact of a series of repeated actions, but also as the memory of those repeated actions. Because one significant problem for traditions is to ensure that they are brought to mind (that is, that the *recognitio* components are triggered so as to enact the tradition), features that would more frequently bring the memory of the tradition to conscious perception would work to make the tradition more likely to be enacted and re-enacted. Traditional referentiality is just such a structure. It works as a meta-*recognitio* component: although the traditional referent does not in itself trigger the tradition, it triggers knowledge of the tradition and thus makes that tradition more likely to be replicated, and, in bringing the tradition to mind, strengthens the association between the tradition and the traditional referent.[26] A traditional referent, then, which is most likely some portion of the conglomerated *actio* components of the traditional meme complex, can bring into conscious perception the entire complex. Therefore traditional referentiality is not only a by-product of the repetition generated by tradition, but also serves to reinforce the tradition itself. The generation of this cycle by the structure and

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current state represented by Foley 1990, 1991a, and 1995. Oral theory now focuses on the ways that orally composed verbal artforms are created and how they make meaning for the "readers who hear" them (to use Foley's evocative phrase), that is, those who are participants in the tradition (Foley 1991b). See also Foley 2002.

[25] Cf. Foley 1991a:7: "Traditional referentiality, then, entails the invoking of a context that is enormously larger and more echoic than the text or work itself, that brings the lifeblood of generations of poems and performances to the individual performance or text. Each element in the phraseology or narrative thematics stands not simply for that singular instance but for the plurality and multiformity that are beyond the reach of textualization."

[26] The traditional referent does not merely repeat the networks of inherent meaning; it *recreates* them (Foley 1991a:10).

elements of tradition, repetition, and traditional referentiality explains in part the ubiquity and persistence of traditions.

The ability of the traditional referent to summon to working memory a much larger complex of memes is enabled by repetition: for a component part to become a traditional referent it must be a recognizable part of some whole, and the best way for the association of the part to the whole to be made is for the whole to have been repeated. Thus traditional referentiality enables some small subset of a larger meme to awaken the referent to conscious memory in the mind of a participant in the tradition. The ability of the traditional referent to summon entire complexes of memes by metonymy means that the use of traditional referents is an enormously effective means of communication (provided that both interlocutors are participants in the tradition).[27]

Oral theory has analyzed the aesthetic effects of traditional referents, but for our current purposes it is more important to note that the combination of traditional referentiality with the repetition inherent in traditions and with the human brain's ability to recognize patterns leads to an incredibly rich and complex network of associations.[28] Within this network not only traditional meme-plexes, but also subsidiary networks of traditional referents (at times decoupled from the traditions they represent, because not every individual is equally participatory in every tradition) can create associations between themselves and other sets of traditions and their referents. The brain's pattern-finding abilities can also recognize patterns in these meta-networks, and the same process of metonymic traditional referentiality can in turn invoke these associations.

The most significant problem for the analysis of networks of traditional associations is the identification of traditional referents. Any feature of the meme can conceivably become a traditional referent as long as this feature is repeated and is susceptible to being recognized by the brain's

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[27] Foley calls this process "communicative economy" (1995:93-95). Note that the communicative economy of oral tradition does not violate any of Shannon's rules about the transmission of information (Shannon and Weaver 1949) because the units of information have previously been transmitted over long periods of time. The triggering meme simply recalls them to memory. See also Aunger 2002:255-67.

[28] I am avoiding using Foley's term "immanence" to describe these networks. Foley is concerned to describe the way that the networks convey *meaning* while I am at this point only discussing the way they are formed. It is nevertheless worth quoting Foley's definition of immanence as "the set of metonymic, associated meanings institutionally delivered and received through a dedicated idiom or register either during or on the authority of traditional oral performance" (1995:7).

pattern-recognition mechanisms.[29] Trying to construct a universal definition of the traditional referent in terms of formal characteristics is thus unnecessary, primarily because the formal characteristics of the referent are determined by the particular network of associations in which it operates. Depending upon the makeup of the memes that are being referenced and the larger network of associations in which they exist, different features of language, style, image, and so on will be "marked" and will work as traditional referents. The technical term for this specificity is "tradition-dependence."[30]

This is a complex but necessary way of approaching the problem of style. A style is a network of traditional referents and associated memes that are recognizable as being related.[31] In many cases the traditional referents to the style will be so subtle and the network so distributed that we may find it difficult to articulate our reasons for seeing one work as included in a style while another very similar work is not. Styles can be conceived of as a series of ever-larger nested sets. The individual style of all the works of James Joyce might be subsumed in the larger set of all the works of early twentieth-century, English-speaking modernists, which might be included in

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[29] Here my approach contrasts with that of Foley and others working on oral tradition and performance studies. The oral traditionalists focus on the notion of performance as being the "enabling event" that informs readers/hearers that they should "interpret what I say in some special sense; do not take it to mean what the words alone, taken literally, would convey" (Bauman 1977:9). Foley, Bauman, and others are undoubtedly correct in noting that the performance arena serves to suggest to hearers/readers that they recognize utterances in that arena as being specially marked. My point is that this process is not limited to performance, but can also include other social contexts, textual presentation and layout, and even verbal style; performance is merely one important subset of the patterns by which human brains recognize traditional referents. See further Foley 1995:28.

[30] Failure to recognize the tradition-dependence of the formulaic style has led to logically flawed analysis of Anglo-Saxon texts in terms of other oral traditions (such as Benson 1966; for a critique of Benson see Foley 1995:75, n. 32). Certain features in certain traditions probably cannot be "marked" due to their potential to be swamped by an unfavorable signal-to-noise ratio. Thus standard grammatical features such as articles or pronouns (in Modern English; Old English dual forms may in fact be marked) probably *cannot* become traditional referents because there are simply too many of them in any given collection of sentences.

[31] My use of "style" is basically equivalent to Foley's use of the more technical term "register" (1995:49-54). Foley intentionally limits the notion of register to traditional oral performances. I want to point out that style works the same way in many other contexts. For a technical definition of register, see Halliday 1978:111.

turn in the set of all twentieth-century, English-speaking writers.[32] Other sets of relationships may be noted by comparing Joyce's style to that of other Irish writers, or other men, or other members of his circle of friends. These sets of relationships may be further ramified by subsequent writers who adopt the style of Joyce (by reproducing some of the same memes).

The recognition of style is possible due to the repetition of elements (traditional referents and the traditions they refer to), which leads to the recognition of similarities. The network of meanings established by the traditional referents can eventually become completely free-floating: traditional referents can refer to other traditional referents in relationships that, once established, do not need to be tied to any existing tradition. The referent is not only a signifier that is linked to the existing tradition to which it refers; the process of cultural evolution can create networks on top of networks on top of networks, thus making it potentially very difficult to move from signifier to signified.[33]

A traditional referent need not be a specific word, phrase, or formula but can amount to the use of certain grammatical constructions in certain situations ("a figure of grammar") or the tendency to use long or short sentences or to invert subjects and verbs or any other feature that serves to mark the text in the minds of readers or hearers.[34] The diffusion of the marked elements throughout the network of associations that makes up the style is limited only by the pattern-recognition abilities of the brain. Someone with a good "eye" can pick up on patterns (repetitions) among two

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[32] Within the "style of James Joyce" set there might be subsets of "early Joyce," "later Joyce," "Joyce writing on days during which he had read Dante," and so on. The subdivisions, because they are products of post-facto analysis, can be infinitely fine-grained.

[33] This analysis appears to contradict Foley's contention that oral theory presupposes that signifiers are linked to signifieds (1991a:xiv), but Foley is explaining how traditional referents would work for original participants in the tradition, while I am trying to show how they work in general. Foley explains how oral traditional texts can "speak to readers who hear"; I am explaining how texts speak also to readers who do not know how to listen, those who are ignorant or partially ignorant of the tradition, as well as those who are full participants in the tradition. From the point of view of any one individual in any one tradition, the signifiers of traditional referents do in fact link to signifieds: whatever the individual believes the meaning of the signifier to be, whatever associations it metonymically invokes, may be the signified. My analysis points out that the networks of signifieds that undergird the system can in themselves be signifiers of another system because conjoined meme complexes can exist at a nearly infinite number of nested and interpenetrating levels.

[34] For syntax as marking allusions in Latin poetry, see Wills 1996:15.

paintings that are not necessarily known to be related to each other and find that they were created by the same artist, or by an artist and his or her teacher. Style, then, is in the eye (and ear) of the beholder. Regardless of what the traditional referent is, the way it works is the same: it invokes the entire larger tradition.[35]

If the tradition referenced by the style is large, no one will be able to hold it completely in working memory. One may be able to recognize the style of James Joyce from a small sample of text (the traditional referent), but that does not mean that the entire texts of *Dubliners, Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man, Ulysses*, and *Finnegans Wake* are transferred into working memory. Rather, some reasonable subset of the diagnostic features of that tradition exists in the working memories of a diffuse network of individuals and in the textual record. This memory of the tradition must be encoded in radically compressed or abstracted forms. Thus different individuals reading the phrase "forge in the smithy of my soul" may reference different parts of the tradition.[36] The tradition so referenced, via the metonymic power of traditional referents, then, is the population of tradition-fragments and elements—along with the traditional referents that are associated with them—that is spread through all the various human minds that have been exposed to enough of the memes in the tradition to be able to recognize the style.[37] That the tradition is a *population* of things being remembered, written, and talked about by various individuals does not make it any less real.[38]

To review, any functioning tradition produces patterns via repetition. Humans recognize these patterns, and therefore the traditions that generate them can be invoked metonymically via traditional referentiality. Traditional referentiality mnemonically reinforces the tradition to which it refers and

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[35] Note also that "style" therefore does not need to be under the *conscious* control of an author.

[36] Some individuals may even pull up the "wrong" tradition, confusing Joyce with later imitators or with, say, Morrison or Faulkner or some other Modernist writer.

[37] Cf. Foley 1991a:xv: "any single performance merely instances an unexpressed, and inexpressible, whole, a larger story that will forever remain beyond the reach of acoustically recorded, oral-dictated, or even written textualization."

[38] Wittgenstein's concept of "family resemblances" is useful for explaining how we sort out the various memes in the population into somewhat discrete traditions, but this fallback position merely shows that the "essence" of a tradition is a post-facto construction, not a natural kind: we can come up with rules for recognizing and delimiting traditions, but any groups we define are likely to be fuzzy around the edges.

also reinforces the link between the tradition and the referent. Thus traditions that are particularly good at producing repetition, and those that are particularly good at throwing off traditional referents (having consistent recognizable parts) are more likely to maintain themselves and to be replicated. Memes that are able to become linked to such traditions are themselves more likely to be replicated. And because very subtle variations in style can become traditional referents, memes that can imitate certain already established styles are themselves more likely to be replicated. Thus, all else being equal, memes that imitate a traditional style are more likely to be replicated than memes that do not. A meme's imitation of a traditional style, which parasitizes an existing tradition and joins the meme to that tradition, is a version of the same process by which meme-plexes utilizing the Universal Tradition Meme or the Unconscious Imperative become conjoined. Networks of traditional referentiality, generated by the repetitions created by tradition, thus provide a niche for parasitic imitative memes. This process creates additional selection pressure on memes to evolve into harmony with the existing traditional style.

So while there is no reason to discount the fact that individual writers intentionally imitate authoritative styles, from a meme's point of view whether or not the imitation is deliberate is beside the point.[39] Something that imitates the traditional style is simply (in the right context) more likely to be replicated. Note that the Word-to-World fit constraints we have previously discussed are still operational. Memes that clash with ideology, aesthetics, or mnemonic tendencies violate the Word-to-World fit condition and are unsuccessful. But when the parasitic meme is sufficiently "fit," it can get itself incorporated into the network of referents by imitating an already existing style.

Traditional referentiality thus explains the persistence of formulaic elements even long after the oral component of a traditional text has been eliminated by textual copying and reading. It also shows some of the ways that memes may spread themselves from one mind to another and integrate themselves into a culture. Traditional referentiality, and the poetics developed from this notion by Foley and others, also links memetics and mnemonics: not only are memes that are mnemonically stable more likely to be propagated, but those memes that are linked to other mnemonically

[39] And in fact a memetic analysis need not discount intentional imitation at all. We simply need to note that in memetic terms "authority" is the tendency to be replicated. Writers adopt a certain style because they want people to enjoy what they write, believe it (copy it into their memories), act as if it is true (increase its Word-to-World fitness), and spread it to other people. From a meme's point of view, then, whatever style is authoritative is simply an improvement in its memetic fitness.

important elements are more likely to be able to be re-transmitted and thus spread to other individuals. Thus this cultural poetics helps to explain how information gets put into and accessed from what Maurice Halbwachs in 1950 called the "collective memory."[40]

Anaphora

Foley has discussed the way traditions create the effect of what he terms "anaphora" (1991a:9-10). As a poetic figure, anaphora is used to describe the repetition of elements at the beginning of a poetic unit. For example, the Anglo-Saxon poems "The Gifts of Men" and "The Fortunes of Men" both contain long lists of potential outcomes for human lives, each of which is introduced by some variant of the words *sum sceal* ("a certain one shall"), followed by a description of the specific outcome.[41] Likewise in Runo 10 of the Finnish *Kalevala*, which describes the forging of the enigmatic Sampo, the Smith Ilmarinen repeats the same actions over several days. Each stanza begins and ends with repeated actions: Ilmarinen looks at the underside of the forge, removes an object (a crossbow, a boat, a heifer), then is unsatisfied, breaks the object, and pushes it back into the fire.[42]

[40] I invoke Halbwachs (1950/1980) here not because I agree with his analysis, but because his phrase "collective memory" has been so influential. One of the great benefits of memetics is that it enables us to replace fuzzy "collective" abstractions with a more philosophically rigorous analysis of *populations* of memes in *populations* of individuals. Rather than a collective memory, which is a nebulous term, we can instead note that there are specific memories (memes) in the minds of various specific people in a social group. If an individual has not encountered the meme in question, he or she has no memory of it. The "collective memory" (if we must keep the term) is then made up of only those individuals whose brains contain the meme in question, but it is still not in any real sense "collective," because it is not clear that all the individuals share the full context and content of each others' memories. In fact, as traditional referentiality shows, the situation is more complex because individuals may have more or less of the total cultural context of a meme-plex activated by traditional referentiality.

[41] For example, lines 67-71 from "Fortunes of Men" (Krapp and Dobbie 1936:63-64, my translation): "To one, wealth; to one a share of miseries. To one glad youth; to one glory in war, mastery in battle. To one skill at throwing or shooting and glorious fame, to one dice-skill, talent at chess." These poems are not oral, but they are certainly traditional (cf. Howe 1985).

[42] Kaukonen 1956; for an English translation, see Bosley 1989:114-17. I recognize that the *Kalevala* is not a primarily oral traditional text because it was greatly revised and re-worked by Elias Lönnrot, but the ontological status of the *Kalevala* is not particularly relevant for this portion of the argument, and the particular section of

Similarly, in the South Slavic *narodna pjesma* about Marko Kraljević entitled "Marko drinks wine during Ramazan," the same list of prohibitions and Marko's violations of those prohibitions are repeated while the actions between the repetitions varies (Foley 1983). And in the Zuni tale "The Women and the Man," the repeated greetings and colloquies with each of the animals (mountain lion, bear, badger, eagle, crow, mole, hawk, owl) are not used for the coyote (Tedlock 1972:87-132).[43] These repeated constructions are examples of anaphora, and the repetition serves to link together the non-recurring parts of each poetic unit as well as the repeated elements.

Foley's description of anaphora extends beyond the poetic line into formula, scene, and theme. Because the repetition in a tradition creates anaphoric effects, readers who are literate in the tradition end up reading differently than readers who are not. Encountering the repeated initial element, the reader who participates in the tradition is able to infer the rest of the unit via the metonymic process of traditional referentiality (Foley 1995:13). So when readers encounter a type-scene that they have previously encountered in an oral traditional poem—for example, the "beasts of battle" or "hero on the beach" in Anglo-Saxon, the "shouting in prison" theme in South Slavic oral epic, or the feasting scene in Homeric Greek epic (Foley 1991:33-35)—they can bring to mind the other "conclusions" to the anaphoric line, formula, or scene that had obtained. The presence of anaphoric elements thus causes readers not only to "fill in the gaps" in the current text with the traditional elements invoked by traditional referentiality, but also to forecast the shape of portions of the narrative that they have not yet encountered.

Anaphora also provides a means by which a parasitic meme that is contradictory to something elsewhere in the meme complex may nevertheless get itself incorporated into that complex. An otherwise conflicting or non-traditional meme that is similar in form to the anaphoric elements of an existing style can be included in a meme even if it did not organically evolve as a traditional referent for the elements that it invokes via anaphora. Because an existing style is, by definition, sufficiently fit to have spread through a culture via tradition and repetition, imitating that style is a strategy with a high likelihood of success. Using a traditional style creates an anaphoric environment that reduces cognitive demands (that is,

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interest, the forging of the Sampo, is not under suspicion as having been invented by Lönnrot (see Kaukonen 1956).

[43] The use of anaphora in these widely varying traditions supports the idea that anaphora is a feature of tradition in general, since there is no genetic connection or direct influence among the specific traditions noted above.

the reader knows what to expect next) and it is an effective strategy for a meme to get itself copied. And there are other good reasons that memes that imitate a traditional style are likely to be copied. A new meme is, by definition, not part of an existing traditional complex of memes. Thus a new meme in the process of parasitizing an existing tradition needs to disguise itself. Imitation is a very effective form of disguise.

In the Anglo-Saxon "The Gifts of Men," the Latinate catalogue form (Howe 1985:108-9) of the poem is filled mostly with traditional, Germanic skills, gifts, or talents (Russom 1978). The catalogue is characterized by the use of distributive *sum* ("a certain one") followed by a description of the individual's particular talents. This formula, which is obviously anaphoric, is repeated 40 times in the poem. The great majority of the descriptions are in fact traditional Germanic, aristocratic skills such as swimming, fighting, and horsemanship. But in the last section of the catalogue these warrior attributes are augmented with five sentences, still in the "*sum* x" form, in which the gifts and skills are obviously Christian and perhaps even monastic (lines 86-96):

Sum her geornlice	gæstes þearfe
mode bewindeþ,	ond him metudes est
ofer eorðwelan	ealne geceoseð.
Sum bið deormod	deofles gewinnes,
bið a wið firenum	in gefeoht gearo.
Sum cræft hafað	circnytta fela,
mæg on lofsongum	lifes waldend
hlude hergan,	hafað healice
beorhte stefne.	Sum bið boca gleaw,
larum leoþufæst.	Sum biþ listhendig
to awritanne	wordgeryno.

One here eagerly embraces in mind the needs of the spirit, and he chooses for himself the favor of God over all the earth-riches. One is brave-minded in devil-struggles, is always ready in the fight against sins. One has strength in many church duties, is able to praise loudly the Ruler of life with praise-songs, has an elevated, bright voice. One is book-wise, lay-fast in lore. One is skillful at writing word-mysteries.[44]

Here we see how anaphora enables one very elaborate complex of memes (Benedictine Reformed monasticism) to incorporate itself into

[44] Text from Krapp and Dobbie (1936:139-40); translations are my own.

another tradition (the Germanic catalogue of aristocratic gifts and talents).[45] The recurrent anaphoric element, the "*sum* x" formula, is easily repeated, with new material readily incorporated into what would appear to be—even to a primary participant in the tradition—a traditional form.

Anaphora also requires less memory to store the same length of poem: the repeated element only needs to be stored one time and then can be accessed in the form of *repeated element* + *novel element*, where the entire repeated element needs only to be stored one time regardless of how many iterations of it are used.[46] This communicative economy also enables memetic parasitism and hybridization, as new memes and complexes of memes attach themselves to existing meme-plexes by being incorporated into the existing forms. Anaphora and traditional referentiality, then, help to generate stylistic inertia because the imitation of style is a way for memes to increase the likelihood that they will be replicated and passed from mind to mind. In fact, one characteristic of traditions, particularly oral traditions, is their stylistic conservatism: this is one of the ways we recognize traditions. But we should not expect to see no changes in style whatsoever. To be reproduced, memes must find ways to be imitated. While mimicking an existing style is one way to accomplish this goal, it also risks leaving the mimic unnoticed and therefore unimitated and unreproduced. There are therefore advantages to standing out just as there are advantages to going unnoticed. The successful meme negotiates a balancing act between making itself a very noticeable signal and hiding in the noise, and that balancing act must change over time, because the presence of new memes and new minds and new combinations of memes and traditions is constantly changing the memetic landscape, making memes that were adaptive today maladaptive tomorrow. Styles are therefore likely to develop via hybridization, as some memes incorporate themselves anaphorically, while the major elements of the style remain.

Repetition of Metrical Patterns

One of the major features of any traditional poetic style is meter, however construed (whether by stress, quantity, syllable count, and other

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[45] I discuss the Benedictine Reform connections of this poem in much greater detail in Drout 2006:242-50.

[46] It is this form of communicative economy that enables a reasonably long children's story, *Green Eggs and Ham* by Dr. Seuss, to consist of only 50 different words.

tradition-dependent criteria).[47] Meter serves as an important feature of poetic, traditional language that marks it as belonging to a special category. It thus promotes, in the case of traditions, recognition of that tradition. The *recognitio* component of the traditional poetic meme-plex can be:

> *Recognitio*: when you hear metrical language,
> *Actio*: interpret the words as important, traditional poetry.

If the meter is a marked feature of the poetry, then it is likely to be imitated, and in fact this is exactly what we see across oral traditions: meter is strongly conserved, so strongly, in fact, that conservation of meter is taken as one of the tests of traditionality of poetry.

Our meme-based theory can explain how such strongly conserved metrical patterns may have arisen. Meme-theory interprets the memetic ecosystem (human culture) as arising from differential imitation of human behaviors. Imitation spreads memes throughout cultures and causes them to evolve according to Word-to-World fit conditions. If the foundational imperative of tradition is to imitate, then we can expect to find people imitating the speech of others. Let us assume that a prestigious or talented individual makes up a phrase that is imitated by others, and that imitation first occurs as direct copying of the word or phrase. When there is direct imitation, the copying manifests very high fidelity, but as the copying spreads throughout a human group, people who did not hear the original do not necessarily know what exactly they are copying; they do not know if they are copying the entire phrase or some aspect of the phrase such as its intonation. Some feature of the phrase could then be imitated and spread even if the original phrase was no longer being copied exactly. Those features would then become marked and would be more likely to be copied. If a new phrase mimicked those particular features, even if it was not similar to the original phrase in any other aspects, it too could be copied. Thus marked features of the original phrase could provide a pathway that other phrases could imitate in order to be successfully copied. If the marked elements of the original phrase happened to be its stress patterns, then repetition of those particular stress patterns would be the origin of a metrical tradition.[48]

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[47] The scholarly literature on meter in various traditions is vast and far beyond the scope of this study. Even in the more narrow field of metrics in Anglo-Saxon, Middle English, and Modern English a massive bibliography exists; I have found Woods 1985, Bliss 1962, and Fulk 1992 to be particularly helpful guides.

[48] These metrical traditions are obviously language-dependent as well as being tradition-dependent: a language (such as Japanese) that is not stress-based, for instance,

Metrists will note that I have just reinvented the "Word/Foot" theory of Germanic metrics. Word/Foot theory postulates that all allowable metrical patterns in Germanic poetry arise from the abstracted metrical profiles of allowable words in the language (Russom 1987). Although metrics is a particularly contentious field, with many scholars supporting Eduard Sievers' (1893) theory of "types" (allowable lines) for Germanic meter, Word/Foot theory has the benefit of explaining how repeated metrical patterns might arise with Germanic languages and at the root of Germanic poetic traditions.

The combination of memetics and Word/Foot can explain the evolution of metrical patterns, even the Sievers Types. A word's stress profile provides a template for a particular foot. Once these templates are integrated into a tradition, their imitation will produce "types" founded on the metrical profile of the original word even if that original word has been forgotten. A Sievers Type is merely an abstracted pattern that is being imitated (regardless of how that pattern was originally generated). Memetics and Word/Foot thus show how an underlying simple process of imitation can generate the sophisticated and conserved metrical patterns that characterize traditional poetry.[49] Thus there appears to be a consilience between meme theory and a pre-existing, well-developed approach to understanding the genesis of metrical patterns.

This evolutionary speculation supports the idea that specific metrical patterns are traditional referents, but rather than referring to some particular content of the tradition they invoke the tradition in broad terms. There is no evidence that a Sievers Type A line, for example, is a traditional reference to any one part of the Beowulfian epic tradition (although there is much speculation that hypermetrical lines may have had a traditional association, there is no agreement as to what that association might be). Particular meters also mark specific traditional genres in traditions other than Old English. For example, the "heroic decasyllable" or *junački deseterac* marks South Slavic oral epic; likewise the "Homeric hexameter" (Foley 1990:61, 85). When someone begins to sing in the meter of *Beowulf* or in *Kalevala* meter, expectations and pre-existing knowledge are invoked in the audience (here is an epic and these sorts of things are likely to happen), in the same way that "Beowulf maðelode, bearn Ecgþeowes" ("Beowulf spoke, son of

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will not develop stress-based poetry but will instead use other formal criteria, such as syllable-counting.

[49] I also want to note that I arrived at this theory independently of my original knowledge of metrics (which was scant) and my knowledge of Word/Foot (which was even more limited).

Ecgtheow") or "Vaka vanha Väinämöinen" ("steady old Väinämöinen") invokes, *pars pro toto*, the epic personae of the two characters. The part is the traditional, metrical pattern, abstracted from the metrical patterns of allowable words. The whole is the metrically bound tradition.

Conclusions

Meme-theory as I have discussed it above can explain three separate and distinct phenomena of oral tradition: traditional referentiality, anaphora, and the repetition of metrical patterns. The theory, even in these early stages, thus appears to demonstrate a *Zussamenhang* or consilience. If meme-theory is correct in its general contours, then a literary scholarship built on the theory could serve as an additional fruitful approach toward understanding oral- traditional artforms.

A criticism based on memetics would give us additional ways in which to "read an oral poem." The approach of oral traditional scholarship—understanding the aesthetics of oral traditions as perceived by participants in the traditions—is the absolutely essential first move toward a more complete understanding of oral traditions. The next step is the analysis of oral traditions in terms of some underlying principles. This can be accomplished using memetics, which can decompose traditions into their component parts and explain how these parts combine, recombine, mutate, and remain stable. Reading oral traditional literature in light of memetics suggests ways to argue whether or not something was aesthetically successful even from outside the tradition by examining what memes turned out to be most frequently copied or adapted and by investigating the ways in which they were adapted. This approach is in fact essential (and already practiced, though perhaps not consciously) when dealing with traditions in which no living participants remain (Homeric Greek, Old English). Memetics does not provide a prescriptive aesthetics, but when applied to literature from the past a memetic aesthetics at least provides us some small scaffolding upon which to base aesthetic judgments.

I am hopeful that the time is right for the development of a cultural version of the neo-Darwinian synthesis, a synthesis of the study of culture that brings together the disparate observations of various fields and shows that they are all variations of the same underlying processes. To my mind memetics is thus far the closest anyone has come to finding such an explanation for human culture. Memes are the atoms and their combinations are the molecules of culture, and, now that they have been recognized, our

next task is to figure out the regularities by which they mix and recombine in the continually evolving chemistry of the cultural world.[50]

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Keeping the Word: On Orality and Literacy (With a Sideways Glance at Navajo)

Anthony K. Webster

"Writing, when properly managed (as you may be sure I think mine is) is but a different name for conversation."

Laurence Sterne, *The Life & Opinions of Tristram Shandy*

This article investigates the relationship between "orality" and "literacy." I take as my starting point the discussion by Walter Ong (1982) of the shift in "consciousness" that resulted from the movement from an "oral culture" to a "literate culture." I discuss a number of specific examples of the relationship between orality and literacy. My purpose in these examples is to suggest that literacy and orality are kinds of specific linguistic ideologies (see Silverstein 1979) and that we need a much more complex understanding of literacy as an ideological position than Ong has offered. In this article, I wish to explore orality and literacy as complex and interacting notions. My purpose is not so much as to critique Ong (though there will be some of that), but rather to elaborate what we might mean by "orality" and "literacy" as on the ground, linguacultural phenomena (see Friedrich 1989).

I will begin, however, with a discussion of Ong's critique of the use of the term "oral literature." I will then turn to the relative fixity of oral literature. In doing so, I suggest that to fully understand "oral cultures" we need to have a more empirically based understanding of oral literatures and orality more generally. I then discuss the various ways that literacy is articulated. I argue that we cannot assume *a priori* that literacy everywhere means the same thing. What does it mean to write poetry in Navajo? Or in Kuna? What does literacy mean to Navajos versus the Nukulaelae (Besnier 1995)? Finally, I take up some of the implications of literacy as a way of artifacting "the word." Much of this section will be based on specific examples from a wide variety of sources. I believe this is needed as a corrective to the grand theorizing that Ong has put forward. The devil, as they say, is in the details.

On Oral Literature and Orality

Ong spends much time discussing the term "oral literature," which he considers a "strictly preposterous term" (1982:11). He bases this assertion on etymology, tracing the word "literature" back to the Latin root *litera*, "letter of the alphabet." Ong goes on to state that (12):

> One might argue…that the term "literature," though devised primarily for works in writing, has simply been extended to include related phenomena such as traditional oral narrative in cultures untouched by writing. Many originally specific terms have been so generalized in this way. But concepts have a way of carrying their etymologies with them forever. The elements out of which a term is originally built usually, and probably always, linger in subsequent meanings.

Leaving aside Ong's lack of evidence offered for this assertion and the almost metaphysical quality of meaning and etymology, there are a number of ideas that deserve some unpacking. First, etymology, the search for a word's "true meaning," is a linguistic ideology (that is, beliefs concerning the form, function, and use of language [see Silverstein 1979 and Rumsey 1990]). This ideology is based on the assumptions of the primacy of the referential or denotational meaning of a word, and represents only one possible linguistic ideology. Alan Rumsey (1990), for example, has suggested that among the Ungarinyin, a northwestern Australian group, there is a focus on pragmatic meaning over wording, on the enactive power of words over their referential function. Similarly, Gary Witherspoon (1977) and Margaret Field and Taft Blackhorse, Jr. (2002) argue that such an enactive ideology is found among Navajo peoples (see also Reichard 1944; Murray 1989). As Witherspoon writes (1977:60), "By speaking properly and appropriately one can control and compel the behavior and power of the gods. This is the ontological and rational basis of the compulsive power of speech." A crucial feature of this enactive, efficacious, compulsive power of language can be found in the use of metonymy in Navajo ritual prayers (Field and Blackhorse 2002; see also Reichard 1944). Field and Blackhorse describe the dual function of metonymy this way (226):

> In Navajo prayers it [metonymy] serves two overlapping functions: it serves as an aesthetic form that marks ritual language as a special genre, lending continuity over time, and it serves a performative function, lending compulsion to the power of the words to summon deities and their protection.

Etymologies, on the other hand, are based on a referentialist (non-performative) and fixed (if not essentialist) view of words (perhaps a by-product of literacy?).

Second, etymologies are naturalizing origin stories (Herzfeld 1997a). Ong traces the root of "literature" to Latin. This is a motivated stopping point, rather than being arbitrary or neutral. By stopping here, Ong privileges certain assertions about the origins of knowledge: we are therefore the intellectual progeny of Rome (and all that might entail). That the root might be traced back further, back into other Indo-European and proto-Indo-European languages, is not addressed. Furthermore, to suggest that, "the elements of which a term is originally built usually…linger" (Ong 1982:12) is to naturalize the relative arbitrariness of any etymological investigation. The truth, if one can still use such a term, is that—granting some use of etymologies to find *Ur*-meanings and not present-day usages (where meaning is created)—we will never know what a root "originally" meant for two reasons. First, we cannot trace a word to its source; rather, we will always make judgments about where to end our search (connecting High Roman Culture with English seems an obvious choice). Second, we cannot assume that a word had "a" meaning; rather we should suspect that words have always had multiple semantic domains, fuzzy boundaries, as well as pragmatic meanings. In short, etymology seems a weak argument for eliminating "oral literature" (see Bauman 1986).

Recent discussions have begun to attend to "literature" as a privileging of certain stretches of language use (discourse). I would now like to take up a useful discussion of literature by Donald Bahr (Bahr et al. 1997:174): "Oral *literature*, including song, arose as a means to fix those thoughts in memorable, recoverable, keepable forms…namely 'stretches of language (discourse) kept in memory or (later) writing;' or more simply, 'kept language.'" He adds that "by 'keeping' I mean 'keeping for *reenactment*,' including retelling and rereading." Bahr goes on to discuss three levels of fixity within—specifically—Native American oral literature (174-75). First, he suggests that the highest level of memorization can be found in song, stating "this is the level of perfect (sound for sound) recall." Indeed, Bahr argues that exact replication of sound over time is a by-product of the song structure—a structure that cements sounds to a repeatable/memorable form (literature). Bahr cites instances of the replication of Pima songs as evidence for the exact reproduction of sounds.

The second level of fixity involves the use of chants, prayers, spells, and orations. According to Bahr (1997:175), "these attain…word-for-word (less rigorous than sound-for-sound) memorization." Comparing a Pima

oratory recorded in 1901-02 and then again in 1903 by Thin Leather, he concludes that they "were in fact recited verbatim from memory" (1975:10). Correspondingly, Joel Sherzer (1990:240, n. 1) describes how he was able to elicit a verbatim reproduction of a puberty rite chant nine years after the original performance. Greg Urban (1991) compares Shokleng chants recorded in the 1930s by Jules Henry and chants he collected in the 1970s to show the relative degree of overlap between the versions. Finally, Gary Witherspoon (1977) has pointed out that exact repetition in Navajo prayers (*hatáál*) is the ideal.[1]

The third level concerns longer stretches of narratives (myths, for example) and "are memorized at the level of the episodes: the teller is sure to give essential facts, but there is no guarantee, or intent, that the telling will repeat exactly the same words that were used in previous telling" (Bahr 1997:175). Dell Hymes (1981) has termed this type of memorization "measured verse" and has investigated it in numerous Native American languages (see also Hymes 2003). Hymes has also offered preliminary analysis for Na-Dene (1995). Barre Toelken and Tacheeni Scott (1981) and Anthony Webster (1999) have looked at ethnopoetic structuring in Southern Athabaskan languages (Navajo and Chiricahua Apache, respectively).

Bahr's distinctions are useful in exposing the variation within oral literature, that is, the variation within oral compositions. Ong seems to assume that orality is everywhere the same, an assumption underlying Milman Parry and Albert Lord's "oral-formulaic theory," which they sought to apply to all oral narratives. This position has been usefully critiqued by Ruth Finnegan (1977) and Paul Kiparsky (1976). Both point out that the term "orality" subsumes under its umbrella a wide range of practices, and that some of these practices resemble literacy to varying degrees. It should be added, linguistically speaking, that most language use is in some manner "formulaic." When one combines various syntactic constituents one is applying a formula. When one uses various phonological rules one is applying a formula. For example, in Navajo there is a tendency in nouns for a word-initial voiceless continuant to become voiced and intervocalic. Thus we find *saad* ("word") becoming *bizaad* ("her word") or *łį́į́* ("horse") becoming *bilį́į́* ("his horse").

Likewise, when one writes a sonnet, a haiku, or a *villannelle*, one is using nothing more or less than a formula (the artistry derives from the creativity employed within the formula). The point is that such practices and

[1] I say "ideal" here because, as Faris (1990:103) points out, such "deviations" may have pragmatic functions (dealing with the sickness, the patient, the surroundings, and so on).

their relative local creative merits—however we define them—need to be investigated. Only then can we make claims about the effects of orality on something called "consciousness." Sherzer (1990) provides a number of useful empirical examples from the Kuna of the variety of forms that oral literature can take. He makes clear that written and oral literature use devices freely; there is no strict division between orality and literacy (43).

A related notion inspired by Ong and articulated by Dennis Tedlock (1983) is that metrical verse does not occur without alphabetic or syllabic writing forms. This is a curious claim, given that a metrical verse would be following a "formula." Rumsey (2001) offers a compelling instance of metrical narratives among the Ku Waru. The genre, *Tom Yaya Kange,* has a clear metrical formula. Rumsey argues that it is the aesthetics of Ku Waru that make such a metrical genre possible. He compares it to the Kaluli, another New Guinean people, who do not share the Ku Waru aesthetic of "overwhelm[ing] the audience with a ceaseless flow of sound that keeps their attention focused on the story" (2001:218). Colleen M. Fitzgerald (1998) has also pointed to the meter in Tohono O'odham songs. Metrical verse does not seem to be associated only with "literate" peoples.

I want to now turn to a specific example of the relative fixity or flexibility in oral literature. Sherzer (1987, 1990) has discussed such variation among the Kuna of Panama. He notes that among the Kuna there are two general categories of texts: those that are relatively flexible and dependent on the situation at hand, and those that are fixed or relatively fixed. The first type includes narratives and stories told in gathering houses (Bahr's third level of fixedness). The second type comprises curing chants, magical chants, and puberty rite texts. However, there is variation in the level of accepted fixity within this second type. For example, Sherzer states that, "not the slightest linguistic variation is tolerated in the puberty-rites texts" (1987:103). On the other hand, he notes (104):

> The Kuna also consider curing-magical texts to be fixed. But although curing-magical texts and puberty-rites texts are both memorized directly from a teacher specialist, there are interesting differences in their actual performance. In curing-magical texts, slight variations of an essentially nonreferential nature are tolerated, involving very superficial aspects of the phonology and morphology of the noun and verb suffixation. Thus there exist at least two types of memorization in Kuna.

Clearly we have a difference here in relative fixity. On the one hand we have a fixed text without linguistic variation, and on the other hand we have a relatively fixed text that allows for some non-referential variation. To treat both "fashions of speaking" as if they were the same oral phenomenon

would be to miss the subtle ways that oral literature is circulated, replicated, and perpetuated (in other words, the ways that literatures are variously "kept").

Concerning the distinction between orality and literacy, Ong has argued that (1982:78): "Writing establishes what has been called 'context-free' language (Hirsch 1977, pp. 21-22, 26) or 'autonomous' discourse (Olson 1980), discourse which cannot be directly questioned or contested as oral speech can be because written discourse has been detached from its author." However, this distinction seems to be challenged by the work of Mikhail Bakhtin and Charles Briggs. Bakhtin suggests a distinction between "authoritative discourse" and "dialogic discourse," positing that authoritative discourse "permits no play with the context framing it, no play with its borders, no gradual and flexible transitions" (1981:343). Bakhtin goes on to state that authoritative discourse "remains sharply demarcated, compact and inert" (*idem*). The authoritative discourse is often a word uttered in another language.[2] This is an example of the spoken word—the oral—as "context-free" language. Further, we can also examine Bakhtin's distinction between the "epic" and the "novel." For him the epic is a distanced genre not readily connected to the moment, not "close at hand" (23). The novel, rooted in the "folkloric traditions," is connected to the here-and-now (21) and (though the form of writing) is not—according to Bakhtin—"context-free." Similar claims about the dialogic nature of satire or parody could also be made. The epic, on the other hand, here an oral phenomenon, is an "autonomous discourse." Indeed, it is in the orality of the folkloric tradition that we find connections with the novel.

A further example can be found in Briggs (1988), where it is pointed out that among Mexicanos[3] in Northern New Mexico, speech genres range from those that do not allow for critique—"autonomous discourse"—to those that are opened up to a dialogic contextualization. Briggs summarizes (351): "I have argued that the more contextual realm plays a smaller and smaller role in the genres that lie more toward the textual pole of the continuum…the loss of contextual focus is balanced by an increase in the stylistic and ideological stratification of the textual realm." Note that in both cases these are oral phenomena (be they proverbs or jokes). The clear-cut

[2] See, for example, the use of Navajo words in English dominant poems. See Webster 2006.

[3] These are not the same Mexicanos that we find in Hill and Hill 1986. Those Mexicanos are Nahuatl-speaking peoples who live in Central Mexico. These Mexicanos live in Northern New Mexico and speak Spanish. The reasons for the overlapping terminology are fascinating but wholly irrelevant to this article.

distinction between literacy as an autonomous discourse and orality as uniquely "grounded" discourse seems spurious.

Another difference between orality and literacy that Ong claims concerns the concept of the "word." He asserts (1982:91) that

> I cannot have all of a word present at once: when I say "existence," by the time I get to the "-tence," the "exis-" is gone. The alphabet implies that matters are otherwise, that a word is a thing, not an event, that it is present all at once, and that it can be cut up into little pieces, which can be written forwards and pronounced backwards: "p-a-r-t" can be pronounced "trap."

Leaving aside Ong's claim that the phonology of the first part of a word has no residual effects (phonetically speaking) on the second part of a word and that the different ways that languages piece together linguistic resources (that is, the relative complexity of morphology for verbs, nouns, etc. and the presence of verbs, nouns, adjectives, etc. in a given language), one can offer a critique of this position by examining the play languages of putative oral cultures. One can also see Ong's position as an expression of a linguistic ideology concerning the "objectification" of words—the turning of words into objects, into things of value (see Silverstein 1979, Moore 1988). This ideology is not unique to literate societies. Robert Moore (1988) has shown how certain "old words" can become objectified as objects of value during language shift.

Consider the evidence from play languages. Sherzer (1976) has shown that among the Kuna the word is a salient unit that can be manipulated for playful expression. For example, among the Kuna there is a play language called *sorsik summakke* ("talking backwards"). The rules for this play language are as follows: take the first syllable of a word and move it to the end of the word. Here are a few examples (21):

> *osi* ("pineapple") > *sio*
> *takke* ("to see") > *ketak*
> *ipya* ("eye") > *yaip*
> *uwaya* ("ear") > *wayau*

This play language is based on an understanding of a unit that we might term the "word" (based on prosody, phonological changes, and morphological inflections). The first syllable is moved to the end of the "word"—that is, the word can be taken apart and rearranged by an "oral culture." The object-ness of the word, then, appears to be less a case of "literacy" than of the saliency of a prosodic unit termed the word (that is, the word is an oral phenomenon that writing attempts to replicate).

Finally, I want to turn to another claim by Ong (1982:123, first developed by Goody 1977), namely that "lists begin with writing." Sherzer (1990:249) has shown how the Kuna curing chants deploy, through parallelism, a complex encoding of the body parts of a snake. This displaying of body parts is nothing more or less than the creation of a list within a specific semantic domain. Likewise, in Navajo curing chants a metonymic catalog is created and the four sacred mountains are enumerated from east to north (Field and Blackhorse 2002: 221). Again, both of these examples present lists in putative oral cultures. Keith Basso (1979) describes a game played by young Western Apache children that involves one youth calling out a lexeme from an inclusive semantic domain (animate sky-dwellers such as *mbúh* ["owl"]). A second child then responds with another lexeme from a different domain that includes one vocalic segment found in the first lexeme. The first youth calls out a lexeme from the original semantic domain that includes a non-vocalic segment found in the second lexeme. The game continues until one player can no longer think of a word within the specific semantic domain with an equivalent vocalic or non-vocalic correspondence that has not been previously used. The game is clearly a compilation, the equivalent of a list. The children must form lists of lexemes within specific semantic domains based on certain phonological criteria. The list did not begin with writing.

The Interactions of Literacy and Orality

In the previous section I discussed the levels of fixity in oral literatures and the variability of orality in general. In this section I want to discuss literacy as a multifaceted practice as well. My point is that just as Ong has assumed homogeneity within orality, he has also assumed homogeneity within literacy. This section attempts to add complexity and heterogeneity to that view.

I begin this discussion with a look at another claim by Ong as to how oral cultures have approached literacy (1982:175): "Oral cultures today value their oral traditions and agonize over the loss of these traditions, but I have never encountered or heard of an oral culture that does not want to achieve literacy as soon as possible." Few would disagree with the first part of this statement. Many Native American groups with which I am familiar do agonize over the loss of their oral literature. I would be careful, however, about the relationship between literacy and the decline of oral traditions. Many Navajo poems are inspired by the oral tradition (in specific ways such as the use of particles, parallelism, metonymy, and themes; see Webster

2004). However, an increase in the amount of Navajo poetry written in Navajo has occurred simultaneously with a decline in spoken Navajo (see Hale 1998). Literacy does not entail language maintenance; at best it is a form of language preservation.

Further, as Elizabeth Brandt (1981) points out, not all Native American groups in the southwest have been eager for literacy in their Native languages or for their oral literatures to be written down. As Elizabeth Brandt notes, due to a "Pueblo secrecy complex" where information needs to be controlled by a select few, there has been general resistance to creating orthographies for writing in Native languages as well as to recording them in English.[4] For example, she observes that (1981:190-91)

> Bilingual programs and other programs that necessitate the development of materials are often opposed or severely restricted if they are in the native language and use writing. There is less opposition to the oral mode, particularly if it is not recorded . . . there is generally opposition to writing in both vernacular and in English.

A specific example can be found in the language maintenance programs of the Cochiti Pueblo (Benjamin et al. 1999; see also Benjamin et al. 1998). The Cochiti have intentionally rejected using writing as a way to teach Cochiti. They have done this because of religious concerns too complicated to summarize here with any justice (see Benjamin et al. 1999). However, even without written texts in Keres (Cochiti), there is an active language revitalization program in both the Cochiti schools and in the community more generally. The Cochiti have not "jumped" at the opportunity to change an oral culture in Keres into a literate culture.

Not all "oral cultures" have embraced literacy. On a more complex level, not all "oral cultures" have approached literacy in the same way. For example, many Navajo see literacy as crucial for language maintenance programs (Dick and McCarty 1997; Austin-Garrison et al. 1996), while the Cochiti have eschewed written forms of Keres. Literacy has been imbued with ideological presuppositions. In other words, literacy does not always mean the same thing to everyone.

I turn now to an example from the Arizona Tewa. Paul Kroskrity (1992) reports on an interesting way that he was allowed to record oral narratives in the Arizona Tewa language (106):

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[4] Whiteley (1988) gives a superb account of the different levels of access to knowledge among the Hopi. He goes on to show how this unequal access to knowledge can sometimes explain the events (such as the Oraibi split) in Hopi history.

> The data for this paper are not the result of naturalistic collection, but rather the product of elicitation sessions. The chants below are re-creations of recent announcements heard and reperformed by Dewey and Juanita Healing of Tewa Village in July 1979. In addition to the purely technical problem of recording a chant that occurs on a rooftop of a house located in a busy and noise-filled Pueblo, the Arizona Tewa forbid the recording of public performances of any type. This cultural aversion to recording and other literacy-related attempts to "fix" or "capture" performances is well established for both the Arizona Tewa . . . and the Indians of the Pueblo Southwest in general.

What we have here then is a distinction made by some Arizona Tewa between performance and reporting or displaying (in the Hymes' sense [1981]). It is as if some Arizona Tewa require a removal from the author—the original chanter—to a reporting of the chant in order to allow it to be written down. Written Arizona Tewa must be mediated from its situated, context-dependent usage to a reporting of that usage in order for it to be inscribed. In a way, it must already be decontextualized (detached) and artifacted in order for it to be written down. This is a literacy distinct from Western conventions.

Continuing in the Southwest among the Pueblo peoples, I next consider the Hopi of Arizona. Armin Geertz discusses the use of writing by Hopi "traditionalists" to stake out a political-religious position. Geertz states that (1994:98)

> One of the main political tactics employed by the Traditionalists was the frequent use of letters, petitions, statements, and communiqués sent to U.S. government officials as well as to English-speaking support groups. The use of English gave access to an arena otherwise unattainable for an opposition group that chose not to participate in the democratic system.

In other words, the use of writing by Hopi "traditionalists" has been strategic.[5] As Geertz notes (104),

> Traditionalists were constantly plagued by legitimate criticisms of their claims to power, which rested on highly questionable grounds, and yet they criticized the members of the Tribal Council on exactly the same grounds. Writing gave them a chance to create the trappings of power through consistent use of the rhetoric of power. Their audiences were non-Hopis, who by definition were ignorant of Hopi affairs.

[5] I retain "traditionalists" in quotes because the term describes what can best be described as a kind of political party that opposes the "progressives." The use of "tradition" is used as a rhetorical device, a validating claim, and a complex of beliefs that I do not have the knowledge or space to describe.

He goes on to point out that the "traditionalists" have been in favor of bilingual education programs and literacy programs on the Hopi Reservation. They also founded an English language newsletter in the 1970s (107). Finally, "traditionalist" Hopis have written down a number of esoteric prophecy narratives that outline what the Hopis should do today. In so doing, they have committed secret knowledge to a written form. The esoteric prophecy narratives have thus gained a wider distribution than was heretofore the case.

The Hopi, like the Arizona Tewa, and other Pueblo peoples, have what Brandt termed a "secrecy complex" (1981) that restricts certain kinds of esoteric knowledge to certain people. Writing such knowledge down "fixes" it and thus opens up the possibility that people who do not have the right to such knowledge will be able to gain access. We have seen here how three Pueblo groups have responded to the introduction of literacy. Each response has been different. They have varied from refusing to allow materials to be written down at all to permitting a mediated version to be written down to using writing as a strategic device in gaining politico-religious authority. In each case we cannot assert a single model of literacy.

The Hopi Reservation surrounds the Arizona Tewa and I have moved from the Arizona Tewa to the Hopi. It would thus seem natural to move from the Hopi to the Navajo, whose reservation surrounds the Hopi Reservation. It is also where I conducted fieldwork.

There is a small cottage industry of Navajo literature. Many of the written materials have been produced by the Navajo Community College Press in Tsaile, Arizona and Salina Bookshelf in Flagstaff, Arizona. The corpus of written Navajo materials includes a collection of poetry by Diné College students (Begay 1998), collections of poetry by Rex Lee Jim (1989, 1995), children's books (Thomas 2000, Clark 1994, Emery 1996a, 1996b), an oral history of uranium mining on the Navajo Nation (Brugge, Benally, Harrison 1997) a Navajo version bible (American Bible Society 1985), academic articles on Navajo language and philosophy (Suen-Redhouse 1990, Austin-Garrison 1991, and Silentman 1993), a play in Navajo (Mazii 1993), and a number of Navajo-English Dictionaries (Young and Morgan 1987, Neundorf 1983).[6] The above is only a brief sample. There is also now a CD called *The Navajo Language* (Young and Morgan 1999). Navajo language poetry can also be found on the internet (for example, Red Mesa's

[6] There are other dictionaries that have been published, but I chose these two because at least one author was Navajo (the late William Morgan and Alyse Neundorf).

webpage[7] and at the MIT tribute to Ken Hale[8]). Navajo can also be found on t-shirts today, such as those from the Navajo Language Academy,[9] from the protest around Arizona Proposition 203 "English for the Children"—which includes the provocative slogan *saad naakigo 'ayóo nihiłʼílį́* ("two languages are better than one")—and from *Béégashii Bikooh* ("Cow Canyon") trading post. There are also a number of children's stories available at the Teacher Education Program at the Diné College website, where some of these stories are available on CD (*Hane' Yázhí* 2001).[10] My point here is not to be comprehensive, but to indicate the variety of forms that Navajo literacy has taken. With new digital technologies such as the Internet and CDs, Navajo literature has expanded into these media as well.[11]

I should add that Rex Lee Jim has read his poems on KTNN, thus interweaving orality and literacy. Likewise, many of the children's books produced by the Diné Teacher Education Program can also be listened to as one reads along. Ann Nolan Clark's *Who Wants to be a Prairie Dog?* (1994) comes with a CD of the story being read aloud by Maybelle Little. Here again we see literacy and orality connected, enmeshed with each other.

While Navajo literacy is expanding in certain areas, it has not been universally accepted and appreciated. When a Navajo language page was introduced in *The Navajo Times*, there were some Navajos who wrote to the paper (in English) in order to criticize the page. One criticism held that by publishing Navajo language texts, the newspaper was opening the language up to being expropriated by non-Navajos. That criticism, no doubt, could be leveled against me.

Daniel McLaughlin (1992) has produced the most complete study of Navajo literacy practices in a community referred to by the pseudonym "Mesa Valley." He looks at literacy as a set of practices that can be best understood from a sociolinguistic perspective, arguing against a "special

[7] http://www.redmesa.k12.az.us/writers/poems.htm

[8] http://web.mit.edu/linguistics/www/ken/posted/posted.html.#neundorf

[9] Thanks to Carlota Smith for providing me with both of these shirts.

[10] The full title of the CD is *Hane' Yázhí: Children's Books in Navajo* (2001) and is a collaborative project by students and staff at the Center for Diné Teacher Education at Diné College, in collaboration with the Navajo Education Technology Consortium. I thank Clay Slate for providing me with a copy of this CD.

[11] See Silverman 2001 for an interesting discussion of Sepik River narratives and the introduction of cyberspace.

diglossia" where Navajo is used in oral communication and English is the language of written communication. While this distinction is generally true, written Navajo can be found in sites of power such as schools, missions, and the government; more importantly, however, Navajo is also used "in traditional domains, to record ceremonial procedures, for example, and in the home, to write letters, lists, journals, and notes" (151). Several poets with whom I conducted interviews, such as Bernice Casaus and Martha Jackson, kept journals that included their poetry (in Navajo). McLaughlin also notes a general shift in attitudes occurring among the residents of Mesa Valley. No longer is written Navajo seen simply as an aid to record "traditional culture"; rather, the written language is also becoming associated with "thinking it useful primarily for the promotion of self-understanding" (156). Nowhere, perhaps, can this be better seen than in the emergence of Navajo poetry. In such ways, as McLaughlin argues, literacy is an empowering practice for Navajos.[12]

Galena Sells Dick and Teresa McCarty (1999) come to a similar conclusion when discussing bilingual education at Rough Rock demonstration school. They argue that Navajo literacy can be seen as a form of resistance against a dominant Anglo educational system. In their words, "as their classrooms evolve away from the English-dominated routines of basic skills, bilingual teachers are creating new academic contexts for Navajo literacy—their own indigenous literacy, and that of their students. In doing this, they have in effect reclaimed oral and written Navajo for academic purposes" (83-84). Such empowering by-products of Navajo literacy help explain the emotional investment a number of Navajo language instructors had in stopping Arizona Proposition 203, a proposition that could cripple bilingual programs (see also House 2002).

According to McLaughlin (1992) and Dick and McCarty (1999), literacy in Navajo can be seen as an empowering practice. It gives voices to people and possibly aids in "self-understanding." I want to reiterate that even with the rise of written Navajo (there are more "artifacts" being produced in Navajo than ever before), there is still a language shift to English occurring.[13] The above authors are not unaware of this shift. Dick and McCarty (1999:69) describe the Navajo language as "imperiled."

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[12] See also Bahr 1992 and Anderson 2001 for two other examples of empowering uses of literacy. Bahr discusses the use of Tohono O'odham legal writings, and Anderson discusses the conversion of liturgy by Northern Arapahos. In both cases, native language literacy has empowering ramifications.

[13] See Slate 1993; Lee and McLaughlin 2001; Spolsky 2002.

Wayne and Agnes Holm (1995:160-63). have looked at the decline of Navajo for young speakers, observing that children are simply not learning the language at the same rate they were in the 1970s. The percentage of children entering school with some command of the language is declining. Holm and Holm suggest that one way to reverse this shift is to make Navajo “cool” to young people (164). Poetry, rap, and the Internet may provide such an avenue.

I also want to pause here and make an important point that must be kept in mind: many of the Navajos whom I heard speak during the debate on Arizona Proposition 203 argued that the Navajo language was crucial to being Navajo. This is an essentialist position because it assumes an inherent characteristic of Navajo identity is the ability to speak the language. This is a common phenomenon (see Herzfeld 1997b) and, given the circumstances—a perceived and real attack by the dominant society on their language, an understandable rhetorical position. However, one can be Navajo and not speak Navajo. We do not want to fall into the old trap of creating a checklist of features to demarcate who is and is not a Navajo. Thus, while I have focused here on literacy and poetry in Navajo, I am also concerned with poetry written by Navajos in English. This poetry is not more or less authentic than poetry written in Navajo (see Webster n.d.). Navajos have appropriated poetry as a written form in Navajo, English, Navajo-English, and combinations of the three.

Of course, Navajos are not the only indigenous peoples of the Americas currently writing poetry. Ofelia Zepeda (1982) has described Tohono O’odham poetry or “thoughts.” Not only does Zepeda write about Tohono O’odham poetry; she has also published her own poems (1997) composed in both Tohono O’odham and English “translations.” Daniel Lopez (1995) has also published poetry in Tohono O’odham. Likewise, there is poetry composed in Hualapai (see Watahomigie and Yamamoto 1992), in Kuna (Sherzer personal communication), and Yaqui (Molina 1995), among others.

Let us now return to a review of literacy practices and their interactions with orality. Having discussed in some detail a number of Southwest Native American responses to literacy, I want to discuss other ways in which literacy has been actualized. Lisa Valentine (1995) has described the use of hymnals among the Severn Ojibwe of Canada, hymnals written in Cree syllabry. The people speak Ojibwe but read Cree. Valentine points out that while the hymns are often memorized, the hymnals are still used, a practice that within the religious experience seems to ratify the

sincerity or religious efficacy of the hymn.[14] Note that Walter Ong (1982:32) suggested that among oral cultures words—because they were not written—had power. Yet in this case, it is through the enactment of the written word (reading) that religious efficacy is actualized (see, however, Ong 1982:74-75). It is precisely because the word is written that it gains "power."

Paul Kroeber reports (1997:283) on a writing system developed by an elderly Thompson Salish woman for herself and notes that "it was not used for communication with other speakers of the language, or, for that matter, with professional linguists." Indeed, the writing system amounted to glossing; that is, it was a metalinguistic system used to record information about the language. Kroeber goes on to describe how it was used (283-84):

> On being presented with an English expression, she would first write it down; then pause for a considerable length of time to consider what the "proper" (her term) Thompson equivalent of that English expression would be . . . then, she would write down the Thompson expression. . . . As she did this, she often whispered that expression to herself in a syllable-by-syllable form, apparently deciding on the spot how it should be written. . . . Only after completing each of these steps would she finally read aloud the Thompson expression.

Here we see a fascinating writing system developed for a unique contact situation (the linguistic elicitation session). This is a different kind of literacy than the literacy discussed by Ong. It is a literacy of the moment, based on a metalinguistic interaction between a linguist and the elderly Thompson Salish woman. It was not a writing system meant to be shared and came into Kroeber's possession only after the elderly woman had died.

Ronald and Suzanne Scollon (1981) discuss the emergence of literacy at Fort Chipeywan among Athabaskan-speaking peoples, clearly following in the tradition of Jack Goody and Walter Ong. For the Scollons, literacy—essayist Western literacy—has become a "crisis in ethnic identity" (53). They argue that Athabaskan discourse patterns cannot be replicated in written forms (*idem*): "an Athabaskan cannot, as an Athabaskan, write easily about Athabaskan things." From the foregoing it should be obvious that I am dubious of such claims. Clearly, Navajos have been able to use literacy as a way of indexing and asserting "ethnic identity." Poems, for example, concerning the Long Walk build on a tradition of storytelling and of identity making through stories. Likewise, Sherwin Bitsui's (2003) deeply personal poems are ways to explore identity. For Bitsui, literacy becomes an avenue

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[14] Ward Keeler (personal communication) reports a similar example of reading in Java.

for investigating and asserting identity. Still further, Navajos do write about "things Navajo." The crisis the Scollons report does not seem to exist for the Navajo, for, as McLaughlin (1992) notes, literacy has become an "empowering" practice for the Navajos with whom he worked.

Broadening the scope of examples, I would now like to look briefly at Niko Besnier's discussion (1995) of literacy on the Polynesian atoll of Nukulaelae. Besnier shows the relationship between literacy and gender. Among the Nukulaelae, men write sermons and women do not. He also shows how letter-writing can become an "emotionally cathartic communicative event" (93).[15] Letters frequently are ways to express emotional affect. Likewise, they are forms of gossip. Finally, letters serve as vehicles for making economic requests that might be more difficult in face-to-face interactions. The Nukulaelae write down traditional esoteric knowledge, but these textual artifacts are hidden from others; they are not to be shared. Besnier (1995) shows that literacy on this tiny atoll is complex and multifaceted, "embroiled" in the beliefs and values of the Nukulaelae. There is no single view of literacy among the Nukulaelae.

Don Kulick (1992) offers a fascinating study of language shift among the Gapun of Papua New Guinea, explaining the phenomenon as a social process that raises a number of issues concerning literacy. In a survey of the village, Kulick found 84 pieces of printed material. By far the most common forms were liturgical pamphlets and hymnals written in the creole Tok Pisin. However, there were two items that were in English. One of these was an automobile maintenance manual and the other was a book called *Daisy Sing-Along*, which contained a number of songs like "Yellow Rose of Texas" (169). The automobile maintenance manual was occasionally "read" (adults and children sometimes ran their fingers over the drawings of various gears and sockets). The songbook was not read.

Kulick points out that the Gapun villagers do not actually read the religious materials written in Tok Pisin (the native language is Taiap). Rather, they are far more interested in understanding the accompanying pictures in their booklets than in deducing knowledge associated with Christianity and "white" ways. As Kulick states (171), "Gapuners actively and creatively attempt to exploit the links they perceive between the written

[15] I have several examples of this practice, where the writing of poetry allows Navajos—especially Navajo women—to express and release deeply emotional feelings. For example, one Navajo woman read me a poem she had written concerning the death of her sister. Still others explained to me that they sometimes wrote poems about personal frustrations. Nia Francisco's collection of poems, *Carried Away by the Black River* (1994), deals with a number of deeply emotional issues, including sexual assaults, alcoholism, and domestic violence.

word, Christianity, and cargo in order to bypass the priests and find their own ‘road’ to the millennium.” Literacy, for the Gapuners, is a way to become “white” and obtain cargo. Kulick notes that recently male Gapuners have spent a great deal of time “wondering how they can obtain the ‘forms’ that they have heard will bring them the cargo if one fills them in correctly” (174).

Bambi Schieffelin (2000) outlines influences on Kaluli literacy, focusing on sites. For example, she discusses the importance of missionaries in regulating and introducing Kaluli literacy practices. Due to the nature of missionary activities, many Kaluli associated literacy with orality. Written forms, such as sermons, were to be performed orally. Furthermore, the Bosavi mission focused Kaluli literacy on reading over writing. This situation differs, for example, from both the Navajo and the Nukulaelae, where there is a great deal of writing. Like the Gapun, most of the texts in Kaluli (and Tok Pisin) are produced by outsiders. They are not emergent literary traditions such as those we find among the Navajo, the Tohono O’odham, and the Nukulaelae. Thus, while missionaries such as Father Berard Haile produced Navajo language texts (see Haile 1984), a lively Navajo literature by Navajos has also developed.

For the Navajo, literacy means something different than it does for the Cochiti, the Arizona Tewa, the Nukulaelae, the Gapuners, the elderly Thompson Salish woman, the Kaluli, or the Severn Ojibwe. We should not be surprised at the diversity. These examples suggest that literacy is not a single concept, approached everywhere in the same manner. Rather, literacies are a complex of ideological presuppositions that are implicated in various social, religious, and political milieus. These ideals and milieus vary from place to place, from one domain to another, and literacy—whatever that may mean—varies as well (see Street 1993; Haviland 1996; Collins and Blot 2003). If it varies as an on the ground practice, we cannot assume that literacy will everywhere have the same effects on “consciousness.”

On Literacy

I have argued so far that literacy and orality have much more internal variation than Walter Ong seems to suggest. My purpose has been to document concrete examples of the variability of both orality and literacy. That is, I have tried to problematize these notions of a neutral or natural framework. They are anything but neutral or natural. However, I wish to

conclude this section by discussing some of the implications of literacy as a variable phenomenon and ideology.

Clearly, the above discussions of literacy have shown that "artifacting" the word on the page has implications. I do not know if they so much change "consciousness" as they involve social, political, religious, and linguistic consequences (both intended and unintended). The writing of Hopi prophecies has, according to Geertz (1994:114), broken down the "traditional" distinction between esoteric knowledge and common knowledge: "the written texts impart the illusion of permanence, but they also provide ease of review for the reader. Thus the metaphors of consistency and permanence, upon which prophecy makes its claims to authority and power, seem to disappear in the face of historical and comparative criticism." The fixation of prophecy narratives has had religious and political consequences. In a similar vein, the Pueblo aversion to fixing their language suggests that they see writing as a way of destroying the esoteric domain of knowledge but also as a way of "capturing" the word. The Arizona Tewa have developed an interesting way to deal with the tension between the spoken and the written. The Cochiti have simply not accepted the necessity of writing Keres down in order to revitalize it. We can also see how writing and literacy have had profound influences on the Gapuners of Papua New Guinea. Literacy, or printed material, is an avenue by which Gapuners may become "white" and receive cargo. Literacy has been situated and incorporated into Gapuner views of the world and the importance they place on change as cultural reproduction.

Literacy also has more immediate ramifications. As Bambi Schieffelin (2000) notes, literacy is also about orthographies, which, she argues, "are never neutral in terms of their logic" (300). This is, to borrow a notion from Mary Bucholtz (2000), a part of the "politics of transcription." Which spelling acquires the veneer of "correctness" or "standard"? Which orthography gains currency? Does it matter that Gladys Reichard's Navajo orthography has fallen into disuse and that the Young and Morgan orthography is now current?[16] When Rutherford Ashley (2001:14) writes *hajinei* in a poem ("the place of emergence"), should I also note that Young and Morgan (1987) give the form as *hajíínáí*? Am I not falling into the trap of "the standard?" Do I privilege one form over the other? Or can I say that Ashley writes in an idiosyncratic Navajo or that he follows a different orthographic tradition? Certainly, many of the Navajo language instructors I have met would mark Ashley's form as incorrect. I think it pretentious for

[16] See Young and Morgan 1993 on the history of Navajo orthographies.

me to say that one spelling is correct and another incorrect. Clearly, I figured out what the form meant (in that respect it communicated something).[17]

One constant criticism I heard from various Navajo language educators concerning the poetry of Rex Lee Jim (1989, 1995) was that he spelled words "wrong." This pronouncement did not contradict the fact that many Navajo language educators were quite proud of Jim's writing in Navajo and were quick to mention his work when they heard I was interested in Navajo poetry. They also used his poetry at the Navajo Language Fair at Diné College in March of 2001. High School students recited his poetry. The overall judgment was more a matter of "yes, Jim writes in Navajo but he does not spell 'correctly.'" In essence, this was an assertion of authority.

Literacy can erase linguistic diversity and dialect diversity by creating a norm. Young and Morgan (1987) is based primarily on the Chinle Valley dialect of Navajo. There are other dialects, and some of that dialect variation is presented in that same resource. However, other than an early study by Gladys Reichard (1945), there has been little investigation of the linguistic diversity within Navajo. One clear example, still retained in Young and Morgan, are the two pronunciations for "snow": *zas* and *yas*. However, as Reichard noted, there was a whole array of linguistic features that distinguished *zas*- and *yas*-speakers. Does one become the "standard" and the other relegated to the margins? Literacy has ramifications here again.

During my work with Mescalero Apaches on a medical dictionary, I conducted a standard linguistic elicitation session with two elderly Mescalero women, concentrating on body-part terms. At certain points they would disagree on how a word was pronounced. I, of course, was interested in what potentially could have been dialect variations and tried to note both forms. However, the two ladies with whom I was working wanted a decision made concerning the "correct" form. They asked if I had a copy of the *Mescalero Apache Dictionary* that they had worked on a number of years earlier with Scott Rushforth (who was in charge of the medical dictionary project as well). These women were a rarity among the Mescalero Apaches, being literate in both English and Mescalero. I had a copy of the dictionary, which I then produced. From that point on, whenever there was disagreement about the form of the word, they would refer to the dictionary.

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[17] I asked Rutherford Ashley the meaning of the word in an interview at the Inn of the Navajo Nation on May 15th, 2001. Ashley actually apologized for the spelling, noting that he had not taken classes in writing Navajo and this was his way of writing the form. The standard creeps in yet again, influencing one's own view about one's qualifications for writing Navajo.

When one of them happened to have produced the "correct" or dictionary form, the other would suggest that she had misremembered the form. The dictionary became the arbitrator. On a small scale, this is how "standard languages" get created.[18] I have had similar experiences with Navajo consultants who turned to Young and Morgan (1987) to confirm a particular form. The implications of writing down words in a specific way tends to freeze the words in that form. Dictionaries, by their nature, tend to give the illusion of authority. In this way the act of language preservation—the act of writing down words—creates a stratification within languages, distinguishing a "standard" and a "non-standard" form. In so doing, it lends legitimacy to one group of people and excludes or marginalizes another group or groups. Linguists are thus, in the process of artifacting the word, complicit in the act of prescription that so many of them decry.

There has been much discussion concerning language maintenance and literacy. Some have argued that the only way—or the primary way—to ensure that a language is maintained is to write it down, to create indigenous orthographic literatures. Others have suggested that literacy is not essential to such projects (see the Cochiti example). Some of them look to radio, music, rap, and new literacy technologies such as the Internet as vehicles for language maintenance. Bernadette Adley-Santa Maria, a Western Apache who has been involved in the language preservation project for her tribe, has discussed the concerns she has with literacy and what linguists do to Western Apache when they write it down (1997:135): "I do not want our language exploited and also believe that study of our language should be done only for our people who want to learn their language and not for the wider audience." Such views can also be found in *The Navajo Times* concerning the Navajo Language page. Adley-Santa Maria, however, is resigned to having Western Apache recorded in writing in order to preserve the language for future generations of Western Apaches. As she remarks (137), "I saw documentation of our language as 'tools' for the future because of the rapid acceleration of shift to English occurring in Western Apache." Literacy here can be a route for both language preservation and maintenance, but it can also be a mode of exploitation (see also Axelrod et al. 2003).

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[18] There is also another reason the dictionary was produced. This was the first time I had ever worked alone with these two women, and they were far more used to working with Scott Rushforth. His ability to hear the sounds of Mescalero Apache is much better than mine was or is. I had to repeatedly ask for a form before I felt confident that I had heard it correctly. The dictionary was a shortcut for them. They could always bring it out to end a long series of repetitions of the same form. (The term "correctly" is used here in an ironic sense.)

One distinction, noted by Andrew Cowell (2002), is between locally produced indigenous texts and non-local, large-scale production of indigenous texts (40):

> Jeffery Anderson's analysis [2001] of the role of literacy in Arapaho life seems to me largely correct in that literate forms of knowledge are generally detrimental to the traditional, oral-based culture. But we can now begin to see that this is not a feature of literacy *per se*, as many scholars have argued. Rather it is a function of the specific forms that literate texts and knowledge take in large-scale, capitalist societies. In contrast, literacy in small-scale, face-to-face societies in local contexts offers a potential for Arapaho users to become "empowered disputants" rather than mere passive receptors of texts.

Such small-scale collections of poetry in Navajo, like the collection published by the Diné Teacher Education Program (Begay 1998), are then literate, intracultural, communicative acts. This is locally controlled literacy in the indigenous language. One can also look at Vee Browne's (2000) self-published book of poetry, *Ravens Dancing*, which includes a set of limericks in Navajo. One limerick is about Diné Bizaad. More recently (2005), Rick Abasta (a Navajo) has begun producing a "zine"—*Terra Incognito*—that includes poetry, photography, and other visual arts. These are also examples of locally controlled literacy. There are, of course, other sites of literacy production that are not locally controlled. As Cowell (2002) notes, such distinctions in the sites of production of literacy materials may affect the ability of such literate forms to become "empowering." Again, the fact that there are more poems being written in Navajo than ever before, but that the language is still declining, calls into question the viability of any literacy program for indigenous languages to be considered in any measure a "cure-all." We need to better understand the politics of poetry production and the circulation of Navajo poetry, both as a "text artifact" and as a potentially performable oral phenomenon.

Literacy has both social and political consequences. Therefore poetry written in Navajo, as a form of literacy, must be understood as also having political and social consequences. To put it more boldly, written poetry as a form of literacy must be understood within its socio-politico-historical milieu. To write something down—to create a textual artifact—is not a neutral or benign act. It has ramifications, both intended and unintended. Perhaps these are not the ramifications that Ong had in mind when he discussed the issue of literacy. I do not know if literacy causes a profound change in consciousness, as he suggests. However, I suspect that because literacy and orality are both heterogeneous phenomena, not readily isolatable

as either-or categories but existing rather as complexes of practices and ideologies, a single cause such as literacy will be insufficient as an ultimate explanation. That said, I do believe that Ong was right (write?) to ask what the effects of this shift to literacy might be—to ask why and how it matters when we artifact the word, when we keep the word. My position has been to sketch out the ways that they imbue the printed word with ideological significance as well as the ways that they actually employ literacy. I have argued that literacy and orality are implicated in ideologies concerning language and what language can and cannot do.

A number of years ago Keith Basso (1974) urged anthropologists to take up the investigation of what he termed an "ethnography of writing" as a companion to Dell Hymes' (1974) notion of an "ethnography of speaking." We need to recognize, I think, the ways that other peoples understand and give meaning to literacy, as well as how literacy and orality are connected in practice. It is only by looking at literacy as an on the ground practice that we may more fully comprehend the implications as a complex of social and ideological phenomena and, perhaps, as a motivator of cognitive changes. In this respect, we need ethnographies of literacies.

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"Culture Education" and the Challenge of Globalization in Modern Nigeria

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Introduction

Let me begin with a quotation from Frantz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* that I find quite apposite to the main thrust of this paper (1967:168):

> … the passion with which the native intellectuals defend the existence of their national culture may be a source of amazement, but those who condemn this exaggerated passion are strangely apt to forget that their own psyche and their own selves are conveniently sheltered behind a French or German [or any western] culture which has given full proof of its existence and which is uncontested.

I must also confess that the full import of the above statement by Fanon did not occur to me until I came across the same reference again in Toyin Falola's *The Power of African Cultures* (2003:49) while in the course of preparing the present article. Fanon's treatise is not only relevant to the present discourse but also directly foregrounds this paper's philosophy.

For the purpose of clarity, let me explain the term "culture education" as it is intended herein. If "education" is the process of knowledge acquisition, "culture education" emphasizes the peculiar means and methods of instruction by which a society imparts its body of values and mores in the pursuance and attainment of the society's collective vision, aspirations, and goals. Thus, anyone who demonstrates a degree of knowledge of his or her societal values and general education is said to be educated. In other words, "culture education," as intended here, presupposes conscious and refined methods of acquisition and/or dissemination of the knowledge of societal values, philosophy, hermeneutics, and so on. "Culture education" is the means by which skills are developed in such areas as language, oral

traditions and customs, music, dance, rituals, festivals, traditional medicine, foodways, and architecture, as well as the internalization and socialization of societal values and skills by individuals in a way that engenders cultural adaptability, flexibility, and societal cohesion. Thus, "culture education" ultimately refers to a people's pedagogy of cultural values, the teaching methodologies and means of dissemination, the acquisition of culture for the purpose of socialization, and the promotion of an ideal social order.

The Domains of Culture

Using UNESCO's general definition,[1] domains of culture includes distinctive spiritual, material, intellectual, and emotional features of a society or group, in addition to its art and literature, lifestyles, ways of living together, value systems, traditions, and beliefs. In other words, culture is life; it defines a people and an identity. In discussing identity, Falola (2003:51) opines: "Culture shapes the perception of self and interaction between people and their environment. It [culture] explains habits…[and] defines norms of behavior…boundaries among people…. It is the basis of identity and ultimately of development." Culture is the pulse of a living society. A "living" society, in this sense, is one that implies a transcendence of mere existence. Rather, it is a state of completeness and a consciousness that is holistic. A "living" society is one that is conscious of its beginning, its present location among a comity of societies, and one that progressively and determinedly charts its self-defined purpose and course that ultimately guarantees an ideal future—a future strengthened by meaning.

Culture defines a people's civilization and determines its identity. Marriott (1963:34) puts it more succinctly: "No state, not even an infant one, is willing to appear before the world as a bare political frame. Each would be clothed in a cultural garb symbolic of its aims and ideal being." By implication, while it is generally believed that so-called "modern" Western civilization serves as the apogee of cultures, I must add that a society which handles the affairs of its culture with levity, or unwittingly leaves its culture unprotected in the hands of uncultured politicians, all in the name of some covert globalization, risks cultural denigration (and subsequent miscegenation), decay, and imminent extinction. Césaire's warning (1956:15) is apposite here: "There are two ways to lose oneself: by a walled

[1] More information about UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage Division can be found online at http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/.

segregation in the particular or by a dilution in the 'universal.'" And now, in this age of globalization, the threat of cultural miscegenation and loss of identity is arguably far more pronounced than it has ever been before.

The Culture of Education in an Indigenous African Setting

In his 2003 Nigerian National Merit Award winner's speech, entitled "Limits of Tolerance: the Future of African Cultures," Akinwumi Isola argues that before the incursion of the West into the cultural nerve center of the now extant great African Empires, these Empires were dynamically culturally developed. According to Isola (2003:3), evidence for this cultural development abounds in the relics of the civilizations that existed then, including indigenous technologies in farming, architecture, music, textile production, sculpture, and warfare, among a host of others. Isola goes on to note that before the incursion of the West there existed a consistent tradition of knowledge dissemination and acquisition (3):

> From the very first day in the life of an African child, they [*sic*] started hearing poetry performed, meant for their delight. It would usually be by the grandmother or some other women welcoming the new member by chanting the family *oriki*. During childhood, a proper and effective mode of socialization was ensured through the use of literature. So much essential information meant to ensure continuity of traditions and customs was packed into children's literature.

According to Isola, information about plants, trees, and animal life, philosophical remarks about the language of nature, and the nature of language including non-verbal media of communication, mnemonics for counting, and moral instruction were integral in poems and stories for children: "Folktales were rich resources of night entertainment and there were folktales for every conceivable moral lesson…[that] immensely accelerated the process of socialization because they created unique occasions for moral lessons that might not occur so frequently in normal life" (4-5).

Commenting further on the process of socialization and the generation of socio-economic and moral awareness through literary education, Isola states (5):

> Folktales introduced children to the socio-political problems of the society because the folktales of a society tend to reflect the fears and aspirations

> of the people. A poor community would create reversal of roles in its folktales: the affluent prince became a slave and the hapless farmer suddenly came into riches! The arrogant was humiliated and the cheated avenged. Among the Yoruba, the various adventures of the tortoise demonstrated how dirty tricks in any form would always land the culprit [trickster] in trouble.

The effect of the educational process on the child was total; this was because of its all-embracing nature (5):

> Listening to those tales the child began to feel the nature of some of the socio-political and economic relations existing in the society. Folktales in general, because they contain allegorical fantasy, tend to stoke the child's creative capabilities, and they [*sic*] got ample room for practice when they took their own turns at story telling sessions in the evenings.

"Literature," Isola notes (5), "played a servicing and monitoring role to all the other aspects of culture in traditional African society." The "other aspects" referred to here include religious worship through praise poetry, record-keeping through oral poetry, and curative and prophylactic healthcare through incantatory poetry. Isola concludes (7) that "up to the fifteenth century many African Empires had developed forms of state structures with effective political, legal, economic and other systems in a thriving culture," all of which had been established and had become common knowledge before a great dislocation caused by the forced incursion of the West set in.

Central to the ongoing USA/Africa Dialogue Series, a discussion group made up of academics from all over the globe and moderated by Professor Toyin Falola, are scholarly discussions on issues surrounding both Africans and Africans in diaspora. This series has proven to be quite revealing. Paul Zeleza's contribution entitled "A Historical Accounting of African Universities: Beyond Afropessimism," for example, addresses the problem of the so-called "falling standard" of education in Africa by tracing its origins and offering a possible long-term solution to the hydra-headed problem (2006). In Zeleza's article, the author identifies two wrongly held assumptions being peddled by Western critics and their African adherents on the subject of African tertiary education: first, that university education was introduced entirely by Europeans; and second, that the educational system has declined since independence. According to Zeleza, African higher education, "including universities," long antedated the establishment of "Western" style universities in the nineteenth century; in addition, the post-independence era was a period of unprecedented growth during which the bulk of contemporary African universities were established. Zeleza's

assertion is true not only of African universities, but of education at every level, as there is a long and established knowledge dissemination and acquisition tradition preceding the trans-Atlantic slave trade.

Culture of Higher Education: A Legacy the World Learned from Africa

Zeleza (2006) traces the origin of higher education in Africa to three institutional traditions: the Alexandria Museum and Library, which was established around the third century BCE in Egypt and grew to become the largest center of learning in the ancient world; the early Christian monasteries, which began in Egypt around the third century CE, while during the fourth century CE the monastic tradition spread to Ethiopia; and the Islamic mosque universities that gave Africa its first *institutional* form of higher education, which has endured to the present. It is common knowledge that Africa has the world's oldest Isalmic university, and some of the world's oldest surviving universities, including Ez-Zitouna Madrassa in Tunis (established in 732) and al-Qarawiyyin mosque university at Fez (founded in 859). Zeleza emphasizes the fact that the "Western" university––which was introduced to Africa in the nineteenth century—had definite Islamic roots. Her further observes that Europeans had "inherited from the Muslims a huge corpus of knowledge," all of which later became central features within the "Western" university tradition that were exported to the rest of the world in the course of promoting western imperialism. Zeleza's article serves as a strong corollary to Isola's argument that the "culture of education" did not begin with Africa's first contact with the West.

The number of tertiary institutions that existed in post-World War II Africa was deliberately limited to a few, and largely existed for the purpose of fulfilling the agenda of the colonialists and their missionary agents who established a number of them. This strategy grew out of a suspicion that a "modern," educated African could be a possible threat and competitor. This suspicion was later proven correct as the graduates of some of these universities were at the vanguard of the nationalist struggle. The capitalist-based colonial policies produced a complete psychosocial disorientation and dislocation of existing indigenous African communal structures—economic, political, ritual/spiritual, and so on—that culminated in a direct assault on the African psyche and a greater cultural disintegration. In other words, the informing philosophy of the colonial authorities made graduates of the colonial institutions serve only the imperialist vision, and as it were, made them cut the image of the proverbial "carrier of water and hewer of wood,"

engendering vulnerability for further exploitation of the colonial and post-colonial African by the colonial government and its agents. Again, this strategy is indicative of the enduring problems facing the adopted western educational system today in most African states, including Nigeria.

So far, three issues have been emphasized: that Africa in general—and Nigeria in particular—had strong indigenous systems of knowledge dissemination and acquisition prior to contact with the West; that the idea of the university education began in Egypt, not Europe; and that the intervention of the imperialist West and the subsequent imposition of its rather alien educational system and policies were largely responsible for cultural disorientation and general decay with which colonial and post-colonial Nigeria had to contend.

A Legacy Africa Lost to the West

Since culture is the aggregation of what defines a people, and "culture education" is the method of dissemination and acquisition of cultural heritage, I would like to discuss a very significant event that took place in 1977. In that year Nigeria played host to the black peoples of the world during a festival of arts and culture. Prior to this time, very little importance was attached to the study of indigenous African cultures and oral literary performance in most schools in Nigeria and, I suspect, elsewhere in Africa. Okpewho (1990) rightly observes that FESTAC '77,[2] as this festival was called, helped to recover Africa's lost, or eclipsed, cultural pride from ages of denigration and contempt. It was also of significance that FESTAC '77 devoted a considerable portion of its activities to oral literary performance, and this focus is the primary reason why this unique festival becomes a significant reference point in this paper.

As of 2007, FESTAC '77 took place three decades ago; the lingering question remains as to how oral performances and scholarship have fared in the interim. Undoubtedly, there exists a tendency to assume that Nigeria has made "considerable progress" in the area of culture propagation through the work of government agencies, voluntary organizations, and cultural associations. This assumption could be further buttressed by the fact that there has been a steady promotion of oral literature scholarship in a number of Nigerian universities. Although the national policy on culture is very clear regarding the need to teach Nigerian cultural history and tradition from the

[2] This acronym refers to the Festival of African Culture held in Lagos, Nigeria in 1977.

primary school level onward, implementation of the policy at the primary and secondary levels of education—arguably because of lack of political will—has hardly been conducted properly, given adequate attention, or handled with the seriousness it deserves by the stakeholders involved (proprietor-government and policy makers, parents, and teachers). Again, I do concede the fact that culture, as perceived through oral literature scholarship—and which hitherto has been one of the many sources of cultural discredit—has ironically been metamorphosed into a digging tool of enlightenment. A certain amount of important work has been done, however, thanks to the invaluable contributions of the Ibadan School of History and the work of Adeboye Babalola, Afolabi Olabimtan, Oludare Olajubu, Wande Abimbola, Olatunde Olatunji, Oyin Ogunba, Isidore Okpewho, Toyin Falola, Romanus Egudu, Godwin G. Darah, Ropo Sekoni, Onuora Enekwe, Oyekan Owomoyela, Benedict Ibitokun, Idris O. Amali, and a number of others. The argument for the claim of "steady progress" would be slightly more convincing were the number of local and international laurels won by the nation's cultural troupes—dancers, masquerades, and so on—and the mass "exportation" of Nigeria's cultural experts and oral literature scholars to foreign universities been taken into consideration. All of these factors then prove to be sufficient testimonies to justify the government's otherwise incredulous assumptions.

Undoubtedly, Nigeria's government has done something laudable in the publication of periodicals such as *Nigeria Magazine* and the various other books and journals that have been commissioned. Universities and academic associations have also held conferences, as often as funds would permit, both at local and international levels, during which cultural experts and oral literature scholars often pooled valuable ideas for the purpose of extending the frontiers of cultural studies, especially oral literature scholarship. Unfortunately, the beneficiaries of the dividends of such efforts, which otherwise could have been accrued by Nigerians as national gains, are the foreign universities and cultural studies centers scattered all over Europe, America, and Asia. These foreign universities continue to recruit Nigerian cultural experts and scholars that our own local resources have helped to develop. Besides having a tradition that recognizes the necessity for relevant infrastructures, or the adequacy of relevant tools for researchers to work with, "foreign institutions" operate under a system of incentives, moral support, and adequate remuneration, and because of these factors—with only a few exceptions—lecturers usually have little reason to go on strike.

The situation is very different in Nigeria. On matters relating to policies on education, for example, the government is hardly responsive or

responsible, kowtowing to the bidding and the fancy of its "benefactors": the IMF, the World Bank, USAID, and so on. It is common knowledge that such recommendations have only succeeded in compounding the many problems of most developing nations that have fallen for their poisonous bait. Aside from the efforts of many university educators in Nigeria, stakeholders like the government and individual families behave generally as if they had nothing at stake! Thus, university lecturers must often embark on indefinite strikes in an attempt to compel the government to act on such crucial issues as inadequate infrastructures, lack of funding, and other related difficulties. Recently, the Nigerian government (under President Olusegun Obasanjo) appointed Chief Earnest Sonekan to head a committee to review the existing salary structures of its public and civil servants. The committee came up with a series of recommendations that equalize the salaries of a university Vice-Chancellor with a Brigadier-General in the Nigerian Army, a Professor with a Colonel (or with a Deputy Registrar in the same university), and a Deputy Vice-Chancellor with a Registrar. The complexity of such recommendations helps us to appreciate the many predicaments of oral literary performance and the challenges to its scholarship in Nigerian institutions. Unfortunately, neither the President nor Chief Shonekan were products of university education and therefore seemed not to appreciate what goes into the making of an academic, or a university professor—that is, before the Nigerian university was robbed of its true tradition in the course of the thirty-six or so years of military misrule.

With the incursion of the conquering Islamic jihadists and subsequent establishment of Sokoto Caliphate in northern Nigeria, there evolved an arabicized Hausa/Fulani culture, through the imposition of Islamic religious values and practices, Arabic language, and literature. However, according to Jegede (2004), despite apparent stiff opposition and threats of miscegenation, the pre-Arabic culture of the Hausa oral literary performance tradition continued to grow and develop side by side with literate Arabic culture. This has been made possible through the insistence and sheer determination of the Hausa traditionalists (Kukah 1993; Omobowale 1997; Jegede 2004).

The situation in the South was not too different. The southern part of Nigeria came into contact with Europeans first, through trans-Atlantic slavers. Following the abolition of the slave trade, legitimate trade began to flourish, pioneered by the United African Company (UAC), especially in cash produce, the influence of which spread to the north long before the amalgamation of the colonial Southern and Northern Protectorates in 1914. The steady injection of a capitalist economy and consciousness into the

indigenous cultural artery through the activities of outside multinational corporations had an understandably devastating effect on the general communal psyche, structure, and spirit of Nigerians and, subsequently, on the indigenous subsistence economy. Nigerian cultural values, under aggressive pressure from their European counterparts, had given way to accommodate the new spirit of "survival of the fittest" and other Western values that have since proved tragic to the continued health of the nation. The consequence was immediate: hunger, starvation, greed, avarice, self-centeredness, poverty, and diseases that became established in a previously unimaginable way. Farmers had to neglect their indigenous systems of food production and become actively engaged in the mass production and exportation of cash crops in order to remain viable on even the most basic level. Shortly after Independence on October 1, 1960, the nation's leadership, inherited from the colonial government, became largely unresponsive and irresponsible, as a number of delinquent adults and charlatans infiltrated the ranks of the nationalists. The apparent socio-mental dislocation that had characterized direct colonialism is even now noticeably evident in post-colonial Nigeria.

Western education was formally introduced to Nigeria through the establishment of Christian mission schools. Regardless of the arguable advantages of this introduction, it also initiated an ever-mounting threat to the survival of non-literate indigenous traditions and cultures, especially oral literary performance. By the time Christian missionaries had quite literally colonized the psyche of the people through Western educational and religious doctrines, cultural values, belief systems, and philosophical hermeneutics had been completely ruptured. Indigenous belief systems had become "taboos" that "civilized" people (whom missionaries called "God's people") must not associate with any longer if they wanted to "get to heaven." To a large extent, the introduction of Western education through the Christian mission schools marked a genesis of severe culture denigration.

Transculturation in Nigeria, especially through the influence of Islamic and Christian religions in the north and the south, respectively, has assumed frightening proportions to the degree that locating the "authentic" Nigerian citizen has become steadily more problematic. For example, most Nigerians, including those that are regarded as custodians of culture—*obas, obis, emirs*, priests of local shrines, heads of traditional cults, herbalists, oral literary performers, and so on—are Arab, Jewish, or Brazilian (or European or Asian) by name. The Nigerian situation is one in which a nation unwittingly compromises its identity and allows itself to be harassed by a dilution in the so-called "universal," to use Césaire's statement quoted

earlier in this essay. This dynamic portends sadly predictable consequences for the nation's identity and destiny, which are steadily dissolving into insignificance.

The state of Nigeria's cultures in general—and oral literature scholarship in particular—needs urgent attention, as my findings in recent investigations have revealed. Forty-six years after Independence, and three decades after FESTAC '77, culture, especially oral literature scholarship, has not attained an adequate level of development. Notwithstanding efforts on the part of the government, universities, voluntary organizations, and professional associations, there are several apparent problems that have endured to date. Such efforts as have been currently in vogue, such as conferences, workshops, and national/state festivals of arts and culture, now moribund, have usually not yielded expected dividends, and where they have, the country has not directly benefited. The likes of Soyinka, Okpewho, Falola, Irele, Ayindoho, Osundare, Sekoni, Owomoyela, Garuba, and Biakolo, among others, are abroad servicing African and African-American cultural studies. As far as these culture experts are concerned, except in a few cases like that of Osundare and Falola who are "oral" performers, critics, and theorists, most efforts thus far have been classroom/textbook-based and teacher-oriented, and have in turn helped to produce written literary theorists and cultural critics. Unfortunately, there are still few efforts to ensure the continuity, growth, and development of oral performance, even at the grassroots level. Unlike those few cases acknowledged above, scholars have seemed to be content with their reliance on archival resource materials. Furthermore, the total number of government-sponsored book projects, periodicals, and institutional and scholarly published journals are hardly adequate, available, or affordable. For example, to date, besides the Department of English library and lecturers' personal copies, not a single copy of Okpewho's valuable books is available in the main library of the University of Ibadan! I single out the scholar Okpewho because he was educated and even taught as a lecturer and served as head of the Department of English at this university. Using this as an example, one can clearly see how scholarly publications by other great scholars in oral literature might be severely limited in libraries such as these, despite repeated requests and recommendations to the contrary.

Similarly, promotional activities for cultural studies, especially oral literature scholarship, seem to have been limited, more or less, to the universities. Students very often come into contact with Nigerian and other African cultural products and oral literatures as an interesting and significant field of study for the first time in the university. It often requires a

significant effort on the part of teachers to correct students' initially negative impressions and attitudes, and to impart interest and excitement in the subject. At Nigeria's premier university at Ibadan, where I teach oral literature and other literature courses, the Department of English offers three courses at the undergraduate level: two introductory 300-level courses, "Oral Literature in English Language Expression" and "Heroic Poetry in Africa," and a 400-level course called "Folklore and African Literature." Only one such course exists at the graduate level, a class called "Oral Literature." The situation is much better in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, however, where courses on differing aspects of indigenous African cultures are offered and taught at both undergraduate and graduate levels. Similarly, there are graduate courses being offered on different areas of African culture at the Institute of African Studies at the same university. These facts notwithstanding, the teaching of culture and oral literature must be introduced at the primary and secondary school level, as directly stipulated in Nigeria's cultural and educational policies. The intention of the policies is, of course, to provide students with the needed exposure and relevant knowledge for cultural integration and psychological stability, for the purpose of coping sufficiently, for example, with the rigors of the short but intense courses on African cultures in the university, and/or for the more important purposes of inspiring national cultural cohesion. Unfortunately, teaching of Nigerian cultures from the grassroots level, as required in the national policies on education and culture, is hardly given any priority at all by relevant agencies saddled with the responsibility of implementation in the nation's educational sector.

Undoubtedly, judging from the quality and scope of cultural studies and oral literature courses being taught at the tertiary level, these classes often do equip students with needed basic knowledge and research skills. Nonetheless, the duration of one semester (three months) is certainly inadequate to cover the material sufficiently in each of the courses. Besides, the course instructors/lecturers, though experts in their respective fields, lack the basic tools with which to work in the nation's poorly funded universities and colleges of education. Often lecturers have had to resort to teaching only theoretical approaches, primarily because of time constraints and the lack of availability of teaching materials. Thus, collective fieldwork and practical laboratory work that ought to constitute substantial first-hand experience for students are often skipped. This critical gap denies students the full value of the courses. It is sufficient to state that studies in African cultures and oral literatures, without the accompanying relevant fieldwork, amount to teaching modern poetry or a Shakespearean play without students having

access to the primary text.

At the level of theory and criticism, publications (including recent journals, books, and so forth) that are necessary for updating the knowledge of recent developments in the field of cultural studies and oral literature are either unavailable or too expensive for the home-based, poorly paid, and poorly equipped Nigerian educators to afford. A teacher may, however, be fortunate enough to have friends or colleagues who might send relevant books, journals, and other needed materials. Even then, such materials are hardly accessible to most students. Unfortunately as well, most university libraries are mere archives due to poor funding and thus recent publications become an uncommon phenomenon. For the past two decades or so, students have had to depend almost entirely on their lecturers' dictated notes, and sometimes on loaned books and other borrowed materials from a few generous lecturers. Fortunately, however, these difficulties have been avoided in the few Nigerian universities where internet facilities do exist, and relevant materials are often accessible on the internet by subscription; this is, of course, if Power Holdings Limited of Nigeria can guarantee electricity while the browsing lasts.

Quite often, the university calendar has often proven unfavorable due to its irregularity. Semesters in which relevant oral literature courses and fieldwork are scheduled have rarely corresponded with the existing calendar of institutional festivals. This irregular timing has often denied students who might be interested in gathering field materials the opportunity to experience the natural setting of live performance or to collect direct primary materials. I must also add that some institutional festivals, chants, and so forth are by tradition locked under an oath that forbids their celebration outside their calendrical schedule. If for any reason a makeshift performance is required by students conducting research, necessary rituals must be performed to unlock the oath and neutralize its consequences on the community or the individual(s). Besides the gravity of such rituals and their expense, permission is seldom granted by traditional authorities.

Similarly, most universities in Nigeria where oral literature is taught do not have back-up digital studios/laboratories with relevant equipment (audio-visual recording/playback tools, high-resolution digital camcorders, overhead projectors, and other equipment that course instructors need to process fieldwork data) for normal class instruction, auditioning, or general viewing. It is sad enough to note that in most cases there are no computers to facilitate data processing, no funding assistance at all to students conducting field research either from government, corporate bodies, individuals, or from the universities themselves, and no official vehicles to convey students to

field locations as often occurs in other countries. Since they have had to manage under these difficult and sometimes hazardous conditions, many students are unable to produce competitive work.

Sourcing, or developing primary materials for oral performance, growth, development, continuity, and sustenance, is under serious threat from the forces of globalization and capitalism. Although indigenous resources and knowledge still abound—especially in rural communities—these areas have suffered, and still suffer, gross neglect in the areas of basic infrastructure and social support in the hands of successive governments. Many rural communities are either inaccessible for lack of (good) roads and are untraceable, or have ceased to exist entirely. A good number of indigenous traditional leaders referred to by UNESCO as "living human treasures"[3] have died and been buried with their irretrievable and valuable wealth of native knowledge. As the great Malian oral historian Amadou Hampate Ba famously described it, the death of an old man in Africa as a whole library set ablaze (Diallo 1992:13)! Some indigenous leaders have converted to either Christianity or Islam and/or have joined others forced to migrate to the cities in search of employment and other opportunities. Many feel stripped of their past glory, or feel that their skills are now irrelevant, and that their services as performers are no longer needed or remunerated. The implication is that their livelihood can no longer cope with the demands and daily needs of a global capitalist economy.

Worse still, there is the overwhelming impact of developments associated with new information and communication technologies on indigenous oral performers, including global challenges of religion and transculturation via digitalized technologies such as cable satellites, Western music and media, and so on. In light of this fact, as well as the overexposure of the nation's children to foreign cultures and education, children are either unwittingly denied access to, or are no longer interested in, "local" or indigenous festivals, oral performances, moonlight stories, and so forth. Nor are they interested in taking up their parents' professions as oral performers such as singers, poets, drummers, and storytellers. Many childrens' minds are now broadened through the acquisition of a *globalized* knowledge, and imposed multiculturation encourages them to unwittingly "yank off" their cultural identity. Nigerian youth steadily become self-alienated and lose touch with their indigenous roots as a result of global culture and the capitalist economy, which severely mitigate the existing indigenous social

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[3] More information about UNESCO's "Living Human Treasures" division can be found online at http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/.

order. Aimé Césaire (1956:15) identifies two means by which a people can suffer a miscegenation of cultural identity: “by a walled segregation in the particular or by a dilution in the universal.” The latter describes the direction in which Nigeria is headed if the country’s cultural situation remains unchecked. This reality is a serious threat to the continuity of indigenous African cultures in general and Nigerian cultures in particular.

A Crisis of Cultural Consciousness and the Way Forward

The previous discussion has illustrated only a few of the difficulties encountered in teaching students about fieldwork methodologies in Nigeria. By way of providing a conclusion for this discussion, then, and in view of the fact that culture defines the framework of a nation’s development, I would like to suggest a few possible ways to actively negotiate the present national predicaments.

Agencies that hold the responsibility of implementing the nation’s educational and cultural policies must develop a more responsible attitude toward their positions and must have the political will to execute several aspects that have to do with the promotion of indigenous Nigerian cultural systems. A two-way approach is necessary in this regard: the first must occur at the level of sourcing and encouraging the growth and development of primary materials, as well as human resources; the second must be negotiated at the level of cultural scholarship.

Under the sourcing of primary educational materials, the government must begin to do more than it is seen to be doing at present. It is not enough to maintain cultural centers where a handful of professional entertainers on paltry stipends serve the sole purpose of entertaining audiences at political events, or government VIPs, tourists, and other visitors. Promotion of culture goes far beyond such superficial activities.

At the level of Wards and Local Governments, existing indigenous institutional festivals that are rich in culture must be properly organized and supervised. Government, corporate bodies, and private individuals are required to make an input in the area of funding in order to insure the overall success of such festivals. For example, *Ogun* festivals in Ondo and the neighboring Ile-Oluji, both in the Ondo State, and the *Oloolu* masquerade in Ibadan (Oyo State) do have the potential to generate revenue as rich cultural events fit for tourism. Unfortunately, they have often been celebrated in a most disorderly and “uncultured” manner, resulting in violent clashes and even death in the recent past. Furthermore, since it is the annual practice of

the Nigerian government at the local, state, and federal levels to spend huge sums of tax payers' money to finance pilgrimages and Muslim and Christian Pilgrims Boards, as well as sponsor visits for friends and/or religious and political associates to Jeddah and Jerusalem, it is not unreasonable to recommend that the government should pay similar attention to funding and facilitating indigenous festivals and other traditional events.

Additionally, experts belonging to the same discipline should be encouraged to form associations and facilitate periodic competitions, which could be organized by the government at every level in conjunction with private companies and groups of individuals. These competitions could engage professionals such as traditional poets, chanters, dancers, singers, storytellers, acrobats, or wrestlers, as well as experts in, for example, indigenous cuisines, cloth dyeing, pottery, cloth weaving, hair dressing, and so on, for the purpose of enhancing skills, promoting a competitive spirit, and creating general awareness. At another level, competitions could be used to facilitate the training of new generations of performers. Such competitions, I suggest, should be funded by both governmental and corporate bodies. They should be elaborately staged and the winners should be greatly rewarded and celebrated.

The government should also consider the establishment of "summer schools," using experts from different associations to teach school children traditions of indigenous Nigerian cultures (like cane crafts, calabash and wood carving, cloth weaving, pottery, indigenous dance, drumming, storytelling, poetry, and so on), which they are not likely to have learned within the confines of regular school education. The government could be actively involved in funding and supervising these indigenous schools. In order to achieve success, the government may have to appoint coordinating boards to oversee the organization, management, and general conduct of all these different activities.

Similarly, at the level of cultural scholarship, there is the urgent need for better funding—at all levels—for cultural studies programs in the nation's universities. This increased support is needed for the basic acquisition of relevant digital research equipment, bibliographical materials, and so forth. Second, there is need for a general revision of the existing university course content in order to determine and accommodate new and effective scopes and practices. The teaching of culture and tradition must begin at home and must be continued into primary and secondary education. School curricula must be made to reflect the necessity of cultural values, national pride, and integrity. Such curriculum must be capable of giving the Nigerian child a new and positive consciousness of self as a Nigerian. I

would like to end this article with a quotation by Ali Mazrui (1996:17) that summarizes my present argument: “A non-Western route to modernity is possible for Africa [and I specify here, for Nigeria], provided African culture is fully mobilized as an ally in the enterprise.”

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