

## Emerging Themes in African Oral Narratives: A Case Study of Abagusii Community of Western Kenya

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### Abstract

The transience and preservation of the oral heritage in Africa has not been accorded due attention. Many critics are on record arguing that the oral heritage in Africa is faced with extinction. For a long time therefore, the focus has been on mere collection and documentation of oral forms for posterity. To the contrary, however, research by such contemporary scholars as Peter Wasamba, Isidore Okpewho, Ruth Finnegan, Abiola Irele, Wanjiku Kabira, Wole Soyinka, among others has proved that the oral tradition is as vibrant as ever, and a lot more complex than presupposed. These scholars have variously argued that the role of orality need not be seen in the past but rather as an art form that serves people across generations and societies. One area that has not been addressed exhaustively, therefore, and which is the loci of this study is the resilience and transience of not just oral narratives but other oral forms as well. It is no longer tenable to argue that oral literature is passed from generation to generation without much of a change. Nor is it plausible to argue that the greatest asset for oral artists is rote memory. As a matter of fact, modern orators have risen above the limitations of memory and performed oral items that are well within the oral tradition and, at the same time, responsive to contemporary realities. In this particular paper, therefore, we seek to address ourselves to both the resilience and transience of oral narratives in the face of shifting social dispensations. Much as we recognize the significance of collecting and preserving oral forms for posterity, there is need to show how various social forces have impacted on the nature and character of the oral forms. The following questions guide our study:

- i) What is the relevance of the oral narrative in a modernizing society?
- ii) What role does the performer or oral artist play in the resilience and transience of oral narratives?
- iii) What salient elements of the oral narrative enable it to be resilient and transient?

**Key words:** traditional narratives, modern narratives, theme, motif, story line, plot, performance, philosophy, transience, variants, oral tradition.

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### INTRODUCTION

The conception of oral literature as a reservoir for a community's history is hardly disputable.

As Wole Soyinka puts it, artists act 'as the record of the mores and experiences of society and as the voice of vision in their own time' (Soyinka 1968: 21). Just like written literature, oral literature entertains, instructs and reflects the views and beliefs of the community of its origin at various points in time. In conservative outlook, however, oral literature is a fossil that denotes man's once near beastly existence; a vestige that only ought to be researched by archeologists and anthropologists. This may, partly, be blamed on some age old definitions of oral literature that portray the genre as solely emanating from a community's pre-literacy traditions and culture.

This view is notable even among contemporary oral literature scholars. Dan Ben Amos asserts:

The narrative as a genre traces back to the beginning of society itself. The pre-literate society with speech and symbols as its only tools of communication, used narration to both entertain as well as record and relay the society's values and philosophy. Such themes as etiology were crucial in appreciating and recording society's knowledge of its environment, myth to capture their history and origin and moral tales, fables and legends to communicate the core values the society esteemed. (55)

In spite of such extreme views on oral literature, the art form continues to attract more forward looking researchers, who have shown that the art is not a purview of illiterate, if ignorant, peasants as perceived, but a unique resilient and responsive art form that continues to reposition itself in a rapidly changing society. It is of interest to scholars of oral literature to follow the changing trends in oral literature, in general, and oral narratives in particular.

One of the most prevalent misconceptions about oral narratives, in a section of modernist literary scholars and critics, is that oral narratives have over time transformed into written (literacy) genres: the short story, novella and the novel and the like. Conversely, a cursory investigation points to a strong presence of the performed oral narrative, the fact that it is under the influence of emerging social forces notwithstanding. This view is strongly supported by Ezekiel B. Alembi in *Telling Tales: the use of Oral Narratives in Religious Sermons in Kenya*:

Despite the development of communications technology, some of the old means of communication are still used. These forms have been found to be valuable in terms of precision and effectiveness, and are still drawn upon in business, politics, religion and education. (104)

Further, oral literature researchers have also shown that the oral narrative is not only the oldest art form but also one to be found in virtually all communities, whether traditional or contemporary. "The earliest form of knowledge took the form of mythology," points out Boyd White in *Reflection on Theories and Methods in Oral Literature* (33). Indeed, such a strong background can only have a lasting influence.

Further, the existence of narrative variants based on the same traditional or contemporary motif is additional evidence that a lot is happening in the sphere of oral narratives, and that, probably, oral artists are continually suiting various traditional narratives to unique emerging realities. Researchers such as Ezekiel B. Alembi, above, have shown that there exist narratives addressing all spheres of life. It may thus be argued that the oral narrative, as a flexible device in the hands of orators of successive generations, may continue to reflect the new society's emerging values and ideals. This view is supported by Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, in *The Oral Artist*, "oral narratives have always been a reflection of a people's worldview at any particular time within their dynamic and changing social spectrum." (53) This view holds true among the Abagusii of Western Kenya, as may, probably, be the case among other modern African communities.

#### **THEORETICAL AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

As already mentioned, the main objective of the present study is to examine the resilience of African oral narratives while using narratives performed among the Abagusii of Western Kenya as a case study. In analyzing oral forms, therefore, we shall be guided by the tenets of the theories of structural semiotics as well as the theory of narratology. The two theories supplement each other. Generally, proponents of structuralism, such as Claude Levi-Strauss, Roland Barthes and Michel Foucault are concerned with studying cultural artifacts using Modern Grammarians' approach that seeks to elucidate all probable sentences in a language using a finite set of structural rules. They proceed from the premises that if human actions and productions have meaning, there must be an underlying system of distinctions which make the meaning possible. In literature, the approach emphasizes examination of the essence of various elements that make the narrative a system of meaning thus allowing for textual analysis. Uncovering the systems that give meaning to Abagusii oral narratives at various points of their existence lies within the sphere of the present paper.

On the other hand, the tools of analysis obtained from the theory of narratology which focuses on the critical and theoretical study of the numerous forms of narrative discourse will enable us to view oral narratives as suited to convey more than one meaning depending on the context.

The two approaches effectively make the study comparative in nature. Moving back and forth between narratives, it is then possible to capture various performative variances in narratives, and effectively assess their significance and impact.

#### **OLD AND EMERGING THEMES**

An examination of traditional narratives narrated by narrators among the Abagusii of Western Kenya indicates that behind the unfolding events and various aesthetic strategies employed by the narrators lay serious concerns and pertinent issues that not only define a people in terms of their values and standards at various points in time, but are audience specific as well. Those concerns, values and standards have always provoked the themes that oral narrators artistically seek to deliver. Some of the traditional themes include the value of hard work, respect, obedience, social justice, the strength of wit, etc. There were also some common vices like jealous, greed, and disobedience, among others that formed the import of many narratives.

It is, however, crucial to note that changes in society have indeed occasioned changes in social circumstances, lifestyle, and even the situations in which the narratives are performed. Narrators that are still stuck with the old themes are indeed an endangered lot. In the face of social realignments, oral narrators have devised ways of remaining vibrant and relevant. Ruth Finnegan, in *Oral Literature in Africa* (1979), has talked about the resilience of the verbal art:

Oral narratives have never and will never be conservative. Contrary to popular assumptions, the possibility that folktales have been handed down through generations from the remote past in a word-perfect form is indeed very remote. Verbal flexibility of oral narratives in particular and oral literature in general, greatly empowers the competent narrator who can re-embroider a story to give it contemporary relevance as well as suit it to his audience and occasion. (318-9)

Indeed Ruth Finnegan's views resonate well with the present paper. Among the traditional Abagusii, narratives were handy in drawing a line between good and evil. A quick assessment of the motives behind the stories

narrated to us indicates that the rationale for narrating stories among the Abagusii largely remain the same: to both entertain and instill values. Nonetheless, issues the contemporary society grapples with have significantly changed. In order to meet the demands of rapidly modernizing audiences, narrators have taken measures that would guarantee their relevance.

Wanjiku Kabira in *Reflections on Theories and Methods in Oral Literature* (p.51) observes that in re-embroidering the story the narrator/artist has a wide range of choices to pick from ranging re-arranging episodes and events, cutting or increasing the number of characters, dealing with motifs differently, using authorial voice appropriately, among other strategies, in order to effectively deliver the message. Wanjiku's assertions are best illustrated in Chinua Achebe's confession of how he transformed an etiological story entitled "How the Dog was Domesticated" to reflect the prevailing conditions in Nigeria during the Biafra war. Achebe says:

It just seized on my imagination and  
It went on changing and changing  
It was almost like an obsession, and  
It was a totally different story.  
He adds:

In the previous story the dog is the nice guy who became a slave. I don't like slaves so that is why I turned the plot around 180 degrees. It was shaped in terms of dialogues, narrative sinew, cultural notions and moral values in order to suit the envisaged readership-children while maintaining an appeal to adults. The title was changed to "How the Leopard got His Claws," and it became a moral tale narrating how the animals lived together happily under the leadership of the leopard, who was kind and gentle and wise. At the animals did not fight each other because none of them, apart from the dog, had sharp teeth or claws. The animals teased the dog over the ugly teeth. The leopard persuades the other animals to construct a common shelter for relaxation and protection from rain after a request by the deer. The dog who has never liked the leopard, and the duck, which enjoys water, refuse to participate but the other animals build the house, all making their various contributions. One day while the dog is away, a heavy downpour drives the dog away from the cave and he goes to the common house where he chases all the animals away. On his return, the leopard is also met by a brutal attack and despite his pleas for help the animals hail the dog as their king. The toad calls the day great and good in a new praise song. Sadly, the leopard goes away. He travels to the home of the blacksmith and begs to be given the strongest teeth from iron and the deadliest claws from bronze. He also goes to the thunder pleading for some of its sound in his voice. After listening to his sad story the two oblige. Fortified, the leopard returns and easily defeats the dog. The leopard announces that from that day he will rule the forest with terror because he was a kind of a gentle king but the animals turned against him. The dog, who has run away, seeks protection in the home of a hunter. Today, animals are no longer friends, but enemies. The strong among them attack and kill the weak. The transformation of the story poses obvious symbolic implications. It reflects the devious and deeds that have led to the civil war while the lament of the deer reiterates the violence and dispossession associated with those deeds of social injustice. (A biography of Chinua Achebe by Ezunula Ohaeto P.125.)

We have therefore identified two main ways narrators have ensured the continued relevance of oral narratives.

- 1) They use old stories to comment on relevant old and new concerns.
- 2) They use embroidered and new story lines to comment on both old and new concerns.

#### **OLD STORIES FOR NEW SITUATIONS**

A number of old story lines have been adjusted accordingly before being applied to new situations. There is, for instance, the traditional story, *Nyariansu Nasaretie Oboko* (The Orator who spoilt a wedding) that has been used to comment on corruption and greed among modern Kenyans. The narrative was performed by a politician in the run up to the general elections in Kenya held in March 2014. The narrator, Mr. Boniface Ombori, now an elected Member of County Assembly in Nyamira County, builds on a traditional motif of the "foolish gentleman" who ends up committing foolish mistakes at the most critical of time. In the story, Nyariansu is famously known as the owner of words; a distinguished orator who made excellent company. There was even a joke that his words were capable of disarming a fierce bull on the rampage. So, when, one day, his age mate, Ochori, seeks age mates to accompany him as he goes to solicit for marriage blessings from the parents of the girl he intends to marry, Nyariansu is an obvious choice.

As expected, the talks are lengthy and even frustrating. The negotiations don't seem to make any headway. It takes Nyariansu's wit and oratory skills to persuade their hosts and see the matter through. The time to feast has finally come. All those that are present eat and drink in jubilation. The hosts had adequately prepared for the day, and there is food aplenty. Unknown to the orator's company, however, Nyariansu is a heavy but shy eater. When the meals are served, the shy Nyariansu can only manage a few bites claiming his appetite is low. Everybody

eats to their fill except the shy orator. After the celebration the guests are shown to their resting places. In the dead of the night, Nyariansu is suffering under ruthless bangs of hunger. He can't bear it anymore and he therefore tiptoes to where he thought the kitchen was situated. Before long, Nyariansu is hidden in one of the corners of the hut doing what a good number of our leaders are today doing: greedily filling pockets with money stolen from public covers. Driven by uncontrollable hunger and the delicious food, Nyariansu eats himself unconscious.

The following morning, the first woman to the kitchen is treated to a shock of all times. Before her, lay a heap of a man surrounded by empty vessels that ought to have been carrying the previous night's leftovers. After an urgent resuscitation of Nyariansu, the disgraced party were given matching orders and advised never ever to set foot in that home again. What they had done was a great abomination.

In the story above, events revolve around an old motif of popular persons who have hidden weaknesses. The narrator's concern is clearly to show the disparity between appearance and reality. On the other hand, the story also captures the value Abagusii, in their traditional cultural setting, attached to one's ability to spice up speech. Oratorical prowess was not only a mark of traditional sophistication, but a means through which Abagusii paid homage to their traditional language, as well as culture. Naturally, therefore, a good orator acquired an aura of significance, and had necessary prerequisite for being made leader. However, by making slight adjustments, such as the use of direct comments by the narrator, the scope of the story is altered. The narrator says:

Before long, Nyariansu is hidden in one of the corners of the hut doing what a good number of our leaders are today doing: greedily filling pockets with money stolen from public covers

Through the narrator's direct comment, members of the audience are transported from a rustic situation painted in the narrative to a reality they are used to: modern corruption. Listening members of the audience are warned to watch out for, not just overeating, but hypocrisy, greed, and against other selfish acts in their leaders. For sure, just as it happened for Nyariansu, the day of reckon is fast approaching for people of corrupt ways and they too are bound to be put to public shame.

Like greed, jealousy had no place in the traditional African society. The negative, and often destructive, nature of jealousy has always been brought out prominently in traditional stories. As it often happened, the jealous character was punished, while their victims escaped or were rescued. In an etiology from Abagusii: *Eng'areka yagerete bokayia* (Jealousy initiated the cooking of food), events revolving around the equally common traditional motif of a "jealous childless co-wife" help demonstrate how at times jealousy may turn out to be a blessing in disguise to its victims. In the narrative, a jealous co-wife prepares stiff-porridge on fire thinking that when her co-wife, who has just delivered, eats the meal her still frail insides would be burnt by the steaming meal, leading to her instant death. The jealous co-wife leaves immediately the young mother starts to sweat profusely and then sits innocently outside her own hut. Returning after a short while prepared to scream and notify the rest of the villagers what evil has done to the young mother, she is shocked to find an upbeat mother who not only thanks her mate for a delicious meal but who also requests that her meals should always be prepared that way. Beaten, the woman gives up her ill motives, and soon every other household had heard about her "great discovery": everybody in the village wanted food that was prepared on fire.

The ending of the story is ironic. In the spirit traditional natural justice, the audience expects nothing but commensurate punishment for covetous co-wife, more severe than the mere disappointment she experiences. Whether childless or not her actions are unjustifiable, and the ending is, therefore, rather anticlimax. Nevertheless, the culmination of the story is true to the perennial dilemma Abagusii faced when deciding conflicts related to sibling rivalry. The following old adage brings us closest to what the traditional Abagusii thought about family feuds: *monto tanya goiterwa kebe kemo* (a single sin is not enough to kill a brother). In the contemporary society, performers use the above story to encourage competition among siblings. The message then becomes: prosperity is much closer (read cooked meal) for people who are competing than for those who are contented. Some capitalist ideas and cut-throat competition for material gain may therefore be excused.

## NEW STORY LINES FOR NEW SITUATIONS

As above mentioned, another way stories have been made relevant is through embroidery of old story-lines and motifs to suit new concerns and environments. Maxamed Daahir Afrax in *Rural Imagery in Contemporary Somali Urban Poetry: A Debilitating Carryover in Transitional Verbal Art* supports this view when he argues:

The skilful and conscious use of certain elements of tradition and legendary characters...could be useful in terms of linking the past and present, especially in the case of a society experiencing the transition from a traditional to a modern way of life". (4)

In the many performances we attended, it became explicit that a number of story-tellers have suited old stories to new situations by slightly adjusting certain elements and details in the original storylines.

Among the traditional Abagusii, gullibility was regarded a serious flaw. The youth were often warned against blindly trusting anyone. In various traditional narratives, jealous fathers, for one reason or another, fooled and killed their sons while gullible young men lost valuables and chances to succeed in their endeavors due to their stupidity. There was therefore need to exercise caution in each of their undertaking. In a fairly modern narrative, an educated man tricks his friend to close his eyes as he spoke to the latter's fiancée. The educated man says many good things about the suitor, who, though with closed eyes, can still hear the compliments. Unknown to the suitor, however, every statement his friend makes is negated by a counteractive gesture he secretly makes. When they leave the fiancée, the suitor is convinced that their mission has been a great success. When the woman later turns him down, he simply cannot understand what may have gone wrong. In the above narrative, the fact that the characters have an education gives it a modern outlook. Nonetheless, the story-line clearly follows "the jealous father versus the gullible son" motif. The storyline parallels those of two other stories from the Abagusii as narrated to us by Tyson Nyariki, a form four student at Gesiaga Secondary School in Nyamira County, and elder Benson Omariba, respectively. The first one, an etiological trickster fable, explains the origin of the enmity between Hare and Hyena. The story says that once upon a time Hare and Hyena were the best of friends. They did everything together, and even had common wealth in form of several head of cattle. They were indeed wealthy, but Hare did not like the fact that he had to share "his" wealth with Hyena. So, Hare spent many days thinking how to trick Hyena. One day, when it was Hyena's turn to take the animals to the river, Hyena heard cries coming from the direction of the river: "Hyena, Hyena, our cows, they are all sank in the swamp! Help! Help! Hyena came running down, and when he got to where Hare was he clearly sees for himself that a serious catastrophe had befallen them. Only tails were sticking out of the swamp! Hare continued with his cry: "Stop staring, Hyena, do something! Come, let's pull them out". Hyena obliged, but every time they pulled, only the tails came out leaving the rest of the body stuck in the swamp. After several attempts they realized all their cows were gone, and only a heap of tails was left. Both of them were devastated. They sat down and cried like babies after which they went different ways. When Hare was sure Hyena was completely gone, he got into a thicket nearby, untied the cows and drove them away into his new home. Hyena came to know the truth of what had happened through a friend who pumped into Hare grazing his cattle and that when he asked him about the missing tails, Hare answered: "A cow is still a cow, even without its tail, especially when you didn't sweat to get it". Now Hyena knew the truth, and since that day Hare and Hyena don't look eye to eye; they are sworn enemies.

The second narrative is fairly modern, though still based on the traditional trickster motif. A man that is in love a lady that speaks English wants to impress his lover by learning the language. He therefore hires a teacher that will equip him with the necessary skills. Behind the man's back however his teacher and girlfriend grow very close, and soon they become lovers. The man realizes he has been conned only too late after the two had eloped. The stories above have clearly been cut from the same cloth; they are woven on the same motif or pattern, but their appeal is different. They form a perfect example of how narrators embroider stories to realize new effects, and appeal to different audiences. This second narrative was narrated to a group of class seven pupils from Bobaracho Primary school by elder Benson Omariba, to whom he was pressing the need to work hard at school. Benson Mageto Omariba was born in 1931 at Bobaracho—Kisii County—to Abagusii's biggest clan, Abagetutu. *Mzee* Mageto has no formal education. He has however privately learnt to read and write and now has a modest collection of written records and documents on various aspects of Abagusii culture, and even beyond, under his custody. He is of the opinion that society has to adapt itself to changing realities while still seeking to understand why our forefathers' had certain views about life. Elder Benson Omariba recalls a humorous incident in the 70s when he saved a colleague by simply uttering an English word. On this fateful day, Makori recalls, he was walking home a few metres behind his colleague when heard him call for help. He had been mugged. He rushed there and shouted, "Why!" thinking the police had come the muggers abandoned their mission and made good their escape. Of course, Makori did not know the meaning of the word he had uttered, but he knew the word had saved a friend. From this experience, Makori thinks children should given an education by all means.

Another traditional motif that has seen many modifications is that of the unfaithful spouse which warned people against the false allure of adultery. Such stories revolved around a "treacherous-woman" motif. In one of the variants, a woman allows Dog to lie on her husband's hide (traditional bed) in return for fish, her husband's favorite dish. Her blacksmith husband was returning home the following day after days in the jungle, and therefore deserved a delicious meal. The husband, of course, enjoyed the meal but was immediately alarmed by the mysterious flea bites upon lying on his bed. Suspicious, the man lays a trap and, on discovering the truth, he puts both the dog and the woman to death. Fleas are discovered soon after the woman has heinously allowed Dog to lie on her matrimonial bed; a selfish act that grievously affects her otherwise innocent husband. It is herein notable that there can be no justification for adultery, and that adultery has grave consequences, including death. The modern day narrator that performs this narrative has in mind other consequences rather than an attack

of fleas portrayed in the old narrative. The modern-day consequences may range from family break-ups, HIV/AIDS infections or even death as is tragically common in love triangles. To this effect, the above traditional treacherous woman motif has been modified to address HIV/AIDS in a variant story. In the variant story, the husband is happy to devour the delicious sun dried tilapia (*obambire*) whose source he hardly knows. Unknown to both of them the fish is poisonous and it eventually causes their death. The man perishes because he lacks vigilance and he is too trusting.

As if in a bid to correct apparent gender-bias, the above “treacherous-woman” motif is countered by another traditional motif woven around a “loving know-all-mother”. An example is a variant narrative where a man who cannot find himself a suitable spouse gets reprieve when his mother finally offers a solution: she gives him a concoction, an assortment of beads and teaches him a sweet song, which he can use to attract a beautiful woman. This implies that sometimes listening to an experienced mother-figure can offer invaluable and life saving solutions to ever present life problems and challenges. The story may also be used to emphasize the need for one to remain rooted in traditional tested values, in a rapidly, sometimes harmfully, modernizing world. Nevertheless, even this latter version has not been spared modification. The motif of a loving know-all-mother has undergone substantial modification in a few variant stories to address a more contemporary and fundamental issue of positive parenting. In one of the variants, a mother advises her poor son to pluck a scale from Nyanchoka, a fortune maker who lives in the forest, which will make them rich instantly. Unknown to them, anyone that tries to take a scale from Nyanchoka without her consent grows scales all over his body. This is exactly what happens to the young man. The young man, angry about his mother’s failure to caution him, requests Nyanchoka to equally send his mother as much scales as his. And since that day the mother and the son, ashamed of their deeds, only roam about at night, and whoever that is so unlucky as to meet them becomes a thief.

The contemporary ideology of gender equality has also found its way into African narratives. For instance, one of the renowned female narrators, Wanjira Warukenya, has subverted a traditional motif of the obedient girl versus the disobedient jealous step sister to capture the notion of a liberated woman. Unlike in traditional narratives, where helpless women are either rescued by either their brothers or husbands, Warukenya’s variant of the narrative presents an assertive woman capable of controlling her own situation and destiny. Kamwangirwa, the protagonist in the story, drops and breaks her father’s guard and she decides to look for a replacement in a far away land. On her journey she encounters and surmounts a number of temptations after which she is rewarded with a new guard and beautiful jewelry. Kamwangirwa’s success spurs envious reactions from her step sister who in consequence intentionally breaks her father’s guard and sets out on a similar journey. She unfortunately gives in to the temptations set on her way and instead of being rewarded she is given a dress made of wattle backs, so that when she walks she makes a lot of noise. She however, refuses to live with her misfortune, and, through trickery, manages to get rid of the wattle backs. By rejecting the punishment society imposes on her, Kamwangirwa’s step sister demonstrates that women should take charge of their own destinies and stop crying wolf all the time. Indeed, gender based violence such as circumcision and forced early marriages are to be solved by women themselves.

It may also be worth mentioning that some narrative genres have let go certain typical features in order to reposition themselves in a changing social spectrum. For instance, legends are no longer exclusively based on historic and distant supernatural heroes and warriors, but even on ordinary women and men in society who have won the communities’ admiration through their accomplishments and contributions. The new heroes may include, politicians, church leaders, teachers, health workers, members of the defense force, et cetera. For instance the Luo community, from South Eastern Kenya, has composed stories about one of their former members of parliament, Hon Raphael Tuju, whom they praise for introducing mobile clinics in their Rarieda constituency.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the foregoing, it may then suffice to argue that the message or concern a story ends up voicing squarely depends on the existing world view both society and the narrator envisage. While embroidering a story, the performer bears in mind the values and beliefs his audience holds. For instance, ‘*Nyariansu Nasaretie Oboko*’ (The Orator who spoils a wedding) comments on modern corruption quite perfectly, because corruption is a vice that the common folk detest, their cultural and tribal background notwithstanding. Common voters are used to crooked leaders who get to power by crook and crane, only to embark on indiscriminate emptying of public coffers instead of fulfilling the pledges they had made to the electorate.

It is also evident that in a bid to give narratives contemporary relevance, the original versions of narratives go through both minor and major shifts in the hands of performers in order to encompass emerging societal ideologies. From the foregoing, it is eminent that the oral tradition is not anywhere near extinction. Conversely, genres such as narratives have, thanks to their flexibility, been adapted to new and emerging situations. Ultimately, therefore, as African communities continue to change and become more complex with new frontiers of concerns and challenges, thanks to dynamic social forces, so will their oral narratives. At a time when already

we are talking about techno-orality, there shall, with all likelihood, emerge motifs built on such contemporary issues as climate change, poverty reduction, liberalization, globalization, among others, will become prominent themes in African oral narratives. With this in mind, it may be of interest to contemporary scholars of Oral Literature to interrogate the extent to which the artist's own worldview and attitude toward the on-goings in his environment impact on both the contents and the delivery of the narrative. Such questions would make it possible for researchers to venture further away from the limiting traditional methods that tend to always culturally and ethnically situate the study of oral literature. Indeed, the study of oral literature as a discipline would greatly be enriched and made more modern if it were both intra and extra ethnic.

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