Abstract: Along with the ecological, traditional knowledge is gradually being eroded at a fast pace, owing to the dynamics of globalization. Traditional knowledge is inherently valuable for optimum understanding of ecological dynamics. This article is a presentation of a systematic analysis of forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs, as a way of expositing Yorùbá motives in traditional Yorùbá knowledge. Four themes emerged from analysis, including tree humanization, utilitarian function of forest and trees, forest as animal and wildlife refuge as well as forest and tree as metaphors to instill apt human character. These indicate that forests and trees are deeply rooted phenomena in Yorùbá culture.

Key words: Forest, Tree, Yorùbá proverbs, traditional knowledge.

Introduction

One of the greatest concerns of our time is the loss of traditional knowledge in the face of globalization. This is considerably true of traditional ecological knowledge, which comprises indigenous people's cognitive capital about the natural world. From ancient times, people have continuous interaction with their natural environment and established cultural basis of existing harmoniously with their natural conditions. In the process of cultural adaptation to the natural world, several ideas, notions, knowledge, belief and practices are inevitably generated, hence the birth of traditional knowledge. Traditional knowledge is nurtured across many generations and its intent is to afford ecological understanding and social meaning.

Language is particularly important as the vehicle of thought, in which cognitive processes are encoded and transmitted (Harmon 1996, 1998).
degradation of traditional ecological knowledge in its pristine, language-rich form has direct negative effects on the environment. This is especially through the weakening of ties between individuals and their environmental elements like forests and trees.

Forests and trees are among the most central elements of ecosystem health and enough cannot be said of their importance. According to a report of the Rockefeller Foundation–Lancet Commission on planetary health, „humanity’s progress has been supported by the Earth’s ecological and biophysical systems. The Earth’s atmosphere, oceans, and important ecosystems such as forests (and trees), wetlands, and tundra help to maintain a constant climate, provide clean air, recycle nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus, and regulate the world’s water cycle, giving humanity freshwater for drinking and sanitation” (Whitmee et al 2015, 2, emphasis and bracket mine). In a similar fashion, it was stated in the State of the World’s Forests 2016 that „forests and trees supports sustainable agriculture by, for example, stabilizing soils and climate, regulating waterflows, giving shade and shelter, and providing a habitat for pollinators and the natural predators of agricultural pests” (FAO 2016. vi). Indeed, forests and trees are essential for humanity, providing numerous ecosystem services (Ramsfield et al., 2016).

At the same time, the Yorùbá ethnic group is endowed with a wide range of ingrained precepts and understandings (for example, Yorùbá proverbs), including those related to forests and trees and which are seemingly yet to be systematically analysed. The philosophies, motives, attitudes, values and notions of Yorùbá people are entombed in various oral resources (including non-oral resources like art works). These resources contain the wealth of indigenous traditional knowledge among the Yorùbá people and they include Ifá literary corpus, proverbs, orikì, rará chants, etc. Yorùbá proverbs constitute the key, structural materials of the Yorùbá language (Delano, 1979). Just like other forms of traditional knowledge, Yorùbá proverbs provide insights into attitudes, behaviours, practices, motivations, and salient issues; they are also omnipresent in Yorùbá social life. For instance, McIntosh (2009, vii) asserted that Yorùbá proverbs are used even in highly literate and formal settings, including academic settings. Hence, this article’s focus on forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs.

A commonly used proverb elucidates the major essence of Yorùbá proverbs:

Ọwe l’esin oro
Ọro l’esin ówe
B’ oro ba sónù
Ọwe la fi n’w a
Proverbs are the horses of words
Words are the horses of proverbs
When words are lost,
Proverbs are used to look for it.
(Harris, 1992; Delano, 1979).
The practical implication of the proverb recounted above is that proverbs serve as vehicles, like horses, through which ideas are communicated and shared. Speaking ability therefore cannot be divorced from the capacity to use proverbs appropriately among the Yorùbá. Proverbs are also prescriptive, thereby determining human conduct in multitudes of situations. In addition, proverbs are used to avoid being blunt, which is culturally appropriate when elders are addressed, even when such elders actually requested one to speak in the first instance. Typically too, proverbs are employed to alleviate obscure points in arguments. „Proverbs reinforce the value systems of communities, and often were used by the Africans to admonish community members through indirect messages that instruct but do not necessarily belittle ... proverbs function at much deeper levels and can provide the medium for the explication of esoteric concepts” (Harris, 1992: 311). Although proverbs and proverbial sayings are used in different settings or circumstances, the appropriateness of each proverb depends on the context. Each proverb is not to be used out of context (Ojoade, 1983). The wealth of knowledge provided by Yorùbá proverbs certainly needs to be continually acknowledged, to avert monumental wastage of knowledge and understanding. Fadipe (1970) aptly sums up this position: „of all African peoples the Yorùbá are probably unsurpassed for the wealth and appropriateness of their proverbs” (302). Hence, the aim of this article is to gain insights into forest and tree related expositions of Yorùbá people through a content analysis of their related proverbs. This content analysis produced four instructive themes that crystallized constellations of proverbs. These include humanization of tree, utilitarian function of forest and trees, forest and trees as metaphors to instill apt human character, as well as forest as animal and wildlife refuge. Other subject matters outside the identified are also discussed.

Humanization of tree

Trees are pervasively reflected as humans in Yorùbá proverbs, as reflected in all the proverbs presented under this theme including the following.

1. *Abínú ẹni foore ẹginígbó; ó níkeranko mu ṣe*
   He who wants no good for one does a favor for trees in the forest; he invites animals to share the favor (Owomoyela 2005, 394).

2. *Bí a bá ní ká bé igi, a ó bee èèyàn*
   If one attempts to cut a tree, one will cut people (Owomoyela 2005, 155).

The first proverb is typically used in a situation where enemies (*abínú ẹni*) bestow favour to a recipient that is considered less-deserving. Tree in the forest (*üyügbó*) is used here to represent a human being, the less-deserving recipient. The second proverb is typically used to underscore the importance of virtues like patience. In the process of trying to avenge a wrong for instance, innocent
people could be hurt. The two proverbs are excellent exemplifications of the notion that Yorùbá people confer human attributes on trees.

3. Ṣàngó ọlè pa ịgị ọnlá
   Ṣàngó cannot destroy a huge tree (Owomoyela 2005, 235).

4. Bí Ṣàngó bá ná pà àràbà, tó ná irókò, bii tigi ọnlá kọ
   Even though Ṣàngó kills the silk-cotton tree and kills the irókò tree, no such fate can befall the huge tree (Owomoyela 2005, 206).

The third and the fourth proverbs are used to indicate the formidability of certain persons. The literal meaning of these proverbs indicates that Ṣàngó cannot destroy or kill (pa) a huge tree. Ṣàngó is an Ọrìsà (god) among Yorùbá people. Yorùbá people personify the Ọrìsás as spiritual forces and, they also believe that Olódùmarè assigned them the task of arraying the world (Schwab, 1955). Ṣàngó is the god of thunder and according to Drewal, Pemberton III and Abiodun (1989), Ṣàngó is an example of „hot, temperamental gods (orisagbigbona)” (page 70). To contend that Ṣàngó cannot kill a huge tree is an indication that the hugeness of certain trees makes them strong to withstand destructive environmental events like thunder. More relevantly, these proverbs encapsulate the notion that trees are humanized among Yorùbá people.

5. Ịgị à bá fẹhintí legúnn-ún; ẹni à bá fí nú hànn íkajọ ẹni
   The tree one would lean on has thorns; the person one would confide in is spreading evil stories about the confider.

6. A ọṣe ẹlẹlàpàlọọ ọṣọọ ẹẹ; a ọṣe ohun gbogbo fúnjú, o ọ ịgị
   We decorate a bare, freestanding wall; the result is not pleasing, but whatever decoration a tree receives becomes it (Owomoyela 2005, 346).

The fifth proverb indicates the comparison of a thorned tree with a person who spreads evil stories. The proverb adjudges the two phenomena as equivalents. The literal translation of the sixth proverb indicates that a wall is compared with a tree. However, when considered lexically, the proverb is used to affirm that energies or activities directed at improving some people will ultimately be wasted. Ẹlẹlàpà, as used in this proverb is an exemplification of an incorrigible individual, or a person devoid of basic beauty. Hence, these proverbs are embodiments of tree humanization in Yorùbá culture.

7. Ẹni tó bá ọjọ lábẹ-ẹ Jęgede ló ọpè è nígi Àràbà
   Only those whose livelihood depends on Jęgede call him a silk-cotton tree. (Owomoyela 2005, 211)

As used in the seventh proverb, Jęgede is a patron whose benevolence is enjoyed by several others. This is consistent with Yorùbá values. As Omobowale (2008) explicated in his article on patronage in Yorùbá social thought, a patron (baba-isale) is expected to be generous with material gifts, in addition to
the expectation that he should be ideal in character. Jégede, the benevolent is compared with ígiáràbà. The lexical meaning of ígiáràbà implies that it is huge and protective, as reflected in the Yorùbá saying, àràbàni baba (àràbà is supreme). More relevantly, this proverb is an epitome of a tree humanization in Yorùbá culture.

8. “Bí o bá ẹ́ mì mà ẹ́ ọ́” nígi oko-ó fi ŋdádè
   “If you injure me, I will injure you in return”; it is thus that trees in the forest sprout crowns (Owomoyela 2005, 330)
9. Èrú gba ẹdùn, ominú ńko ígi
   The axe is slipped onto the haft; the tree becomes anxious (Owomoyela 2005, 371).

The eighth proverb projects an imitation of human behaviour by forest trees. The ninth proverb directly confers human attribute on trees. When an axe is slipped onto a haft, the natural expectation is that a tree is about to be hacked. The anxiety that a tree is said to experience can naturally be expected of a human being as well. Evidently, the process of institutionalizing these proverbs is shrouded with the belief that trees and humans are closely similar.

10. Igi wọrọkú daná rú; èèyàn burúkú bàsè ẹ̀
    A crooked piece of wood scatters the fire; an evil person ruins a feast (Owomoyela 2005, 315).

In the tenth proverb, igiwọrọkú and èèyànburúkú are considered as equivalents. Although it will be appropriate in this instance to translate ígi as wood, this proverb still gives wood or tree a human face when considered idiomatically.

However, despite the humanization of tree in forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs, there exist subtle evidence suggesting that trees or logs of wood are inferior to human beings. The following proverbs attest to such perceived inferiority.

11. Èrú ki i sè ọmọ igi; èèyàn ló bí iyá-a rẹ̀
    A slave is not born of a tree; his or her mother was the offspring of a human being. (Owomoyela 2005, 429)

The eleventh proverb re-emphasizes the fact that slaves are human offspring, not the children of trees. This is a clear indication that Yorùbá confers inferior status to trees when compared with human beings. This is clearly a limitation of humanization of trees.

12. Obinrin ñdá gbèsè a ní ká ba wí, ẹ̀ ní tómo ẹ̀ ní ká wò; ẹ̀yí tí ńyá iwọfà ńtín ọkọ ẹ̀ míbi iti igi ń bi?
    A woman keeps incurring debts, and we propose to caution her; you advise that we consider only the fact that she has borne some children; does the one [wife] who procures pawns for her husband give birth to logs of wood? (Owomoyela 2005, 446–7)
In the twelfth proverb, a poorly-behaved woman’s childbearing capacity is considered in order to avoid scolding her, but a superior argument is further advanced to the effect that a well behaved woman does not necessarily bear logs of wood. So, good behaviour should be a constant irrespective of whether a woman bears children or not. This story is consistent with Yorùbá’s value for children. For instance, in a study of Òrìṣà worship and other motivations of Yorùbá society, Barber (1981) asserted that “paramount among the blessings people desire is children; after that come wealth, health and long life” (735). This proverb proffer the notion that log of wood is of course, inferior to children. It is noteworthy, though, that this proverb is about logs of wood, not tree per se. The inferior conception of igi in this instance is probably born out of the fact that the argument is no longer about trees.

Utilitarian function of forest

The utilitarian attribute of forests has become a mantra. Forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs are not exemptions of knowledge sources that acknowledge the usefulness of forest for humans to thrive. Food, timber, tools, revenue2 are some of the phenomenon that Yorùbá proverbs acknowledged that forests and trees are useful for. These proverbs, beginning with the food-related, are discussed as follows:

13. 13. O kò sá igi logbe, o ò sọ ògūro lofà, o dédii ope o gbènu sókè ò níre; ope ní iro?
You did not slash the trunk with a cutlass; you did not shoot an arrow at the top of the palm-wine-producing palm tree; you come to the foot of the palm tree and raise your open mouth. Does it drip all by itself? (Owomoyela 2005, 223).

14. Igbà tí iketè odi tì dáyé, onígbó tí njẹ iketè
Long before the thick sediment of the palm oil came to earth, the lord of the forest had been eating it (Owomoyela 2005, 411).

15. Àgbìgbò, rọra fò, ode ti dé sóko; àgbìgbò tí ò bá rọra fò á bo sàpò ode
Big-headed bird àgbìgbò, fly warily, for the hunter has arrived in the forest; any àgbìgbò that does not fly warily will wind up in the hunter’s bag (Owomoyela 2005, 100).

The thirteenth proverb is very intuitive. Its primary purpose is to reveal the point that undeserved belongings are not to be expected. Beyond this purpose however, this proverb has clearly underscored food-related utility that is derived from trees, specifically the palm tree. For instance, palm wine is a food product that is derived from this tree. Although the fourteenth proverb

2 All these also point toward the livelihood function of forests.
is meant to be used to diminish the worth of a favor when the conferrer seems not to be cheerful in his/her benevolence, it highlights *ikețe* as a forest food product. *Ikețe*, the thick sediment of palm oil, is derived from palm nuts of the palm tree. These nuts drop and decay in the forest even before they are harvested, so the lord of the forest in the proverb seems to be eating it. The fifteenth proverb is typically used to caution people's overzealousness, but it named a bird, *àgbígboro*, as a food item that hunters may secure during expedition in forests. Hence, the utilitarian function of forests and trees for food purposes are exposited in forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs.

Apart from the food, Yorùbá proverbs also exposited forest trees as a resource for the making of tools or resource for gathering tools. These are examined below:

16. *Èrúkọ, ori aaka; èrú àáké, ori aaka; aaka nikan nigi tó wà nígbó ni?*
For a haft for the hoe, the choice is the aaka tree; for a haft for the axe, the choice is the aaka tree; is the aaka tree the only one in the forest? (Owomoyela 2005, 349).

17. *Ààké wọ ìgbo, a gbo ókikí*
One does not fight in the bush and lament a lack of sticks (Owomoyela 2005, 454).

The sixteenth proverb is typically used to caution individuals from being named severally in certain issues, especially issues that are socially disapproved. The proverb also literarily elucidates the usefulness of *aaka* tree for tool making, when compared with other trees. This tree is used for making the haft for hoes and axes, signifying Yorùbá proverb's acknowledgement of the utilitarian function of forests and trees, especially the tool making function. The seventeenth proverb points to the context in which a fight may occur and how such context may affect the form of the fight. When a fight takes a place in a forest, sticks are typically in abundance. The proverb even suggests that such abundance may be taken for granted.

The utilitarian function of forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs also include timber related advantages. These are discussed as follows:

18. *Bí a bá gé igi nígbó, gbòhùn-gbòhùn á gbà á*
If one fells a tree in the forest, the echo carries the sound (Owomoyela 2005, 471).

19. *Àáké wo ìgbo, a gbo ọkikí*
The axe enters into a forest, and we hear reports of its doings (Owomoyela 2005, 400).

20. *Àità ni àdánù onígi*
Failure to make a sale is the loss of the firewood seller (Owomoyela 2005, 439).
The eighteenth proverb is typically used to establish the idea that secrets are mirages thereby discouraging the keeping of secrets. Literally, the proverb indicates that when forest trees are cut, sounds are produced which are echoed beyond the forest. In the same vein, this proverb conspicuously indicates that the forest is a resource from where timbers are harvested, in consistence with everyday knowledge. The nineteenth proverb is similar to the previous. It elucidates that when certain people come around or take action, the consequence is usually widespread and well-known. Beyond this however, this proverb is another conspicuous indication that timbers are harvested from forests. Àáké, an axe, is a well known traditional tool of harvesting timber. The twentieth proverb expounds that the wood seller will only make a loss if he or she does not sell at all. This is an indication that timber is harvested as a free gift of nature. The three proverbs discussed in this paragraph reinforce the common knowledge that forests are reserves of timbers from which man derive utility.

Besides timber, cash crop, specifically cola nut is another forest product highlighted in Yorùbá proverbs, which implicates the utilitarian function of forest and trees in Yorùbá culture. These are discussed as follows:

21. *Igí gbogbo ní ìso ọwó, òtọ ní tobi*
   All trees grow money, but the kola-nut tree surpasses all others (Owo-moyela 2005, 411).

22. *Ènì tí kò ní igí obí kí i léso*
   Whoever does not have a kola-nut tree cannot have its fruits (Owo-moyela 2005, 291).

The twenty-first proverb is a metaphorical expression that vividly signals that trees are useful and are utilized for economic purposes. The usefulness and economic viability of kola-nut tree is especially acknowledged in this proverb. The proverb is typically used to acknowledge the exceptional profitability of some trades or enterprising capacity of some individuals. The twenty second proverb is used to affirm the notion that rights to certain benefits are consequent upon ownership of certain means. Evidently, the proverb restates the idea that those who have kola-nut trees also have kola-nuts. This is an implicit explication of kola-nut as a valuable product that serves utilitarian function for people.

While virtually all the proverbs that have been considered under utilitarian function of forests and trees highlighted one product or the other, another proverb was designed to enclose this utilitarian function:

23. *Tó'jú ba n pọn ní, igbè làn ró fún*
   When one is afflicted with poverty, he speaks to the forest.

The twenty-third proverb is a personification of forest (*igbè*). It enjoins people to ‘talk’ to the forest when and if they are afflicted with poverty. This is a
clear indication that this Yorùbá proverb acknowledges the utilitarian function of forests and trees. Lexically, ‘telling’ the forest about poverty implies making use of the several forest products for economic purposes.

Despite the numerous proverbs that have supported the exposition of the utilitarian function of forest and trees, evidence suggests that such function is limited. Two proverbs representing this limitation are discussed below:

24. *Iyàn ní mmúni je èso igi-kígi*
   
   It is famine that brings one to eating the fruits of all sorts of trees (Owomoyela 2005, 374).

25. *Igí gbẹ níjù ó dègbé*
   
   The tree dries up in the forest and it becomes worthless (Owomoyela 2005, 350).

The twenty-fourth proverb is plausible on the basis that a famine is bound to make all foods appreciable. The proverb is used to underscore situations where misfortune makes people to seek assistance from apt and inapt sources. Further, this proverb indicates that not all fruits of trees are well appreciated. This is definitely a limitation of food-related utilitarian function of forests. The twenty-fifth proverb literally waters down the value of a tree when it dries up. This is logical, considering that such tree will no longer bear fruits. The efficacy of its leaves, roots and barks for certain purposes may also reduce or become extinct, though the dried tree can still be put to other uses. Hence, the utilitarian function of forests and trees is dependent of it being in certain states. This is a limitation of the utilitarian function of forests.

Forest and trees as metaphors to instill apt human character

Typical of several proverbs, forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs are invoked to build human character in a desired direction. This theme of character building function of forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs encapsulates and exposit the values of human experience, diligence, strength, mentorship, foresight, adaptability, prioritization, unity, virtue, etc, using forests and trees literally or metaphorically. Those asserting the worth of human experience are discussed first:

26. *Bí ọmọdè o rí àjẹkù-u kiniún nínú igbó, a ní kí ẹran bi ìkùn ó pa ṣun*
   
   If a child has not seen the leavings of a lion in the forest, he prays that he might be killed by an animal like the leopard (Owomoyela 2005, 159).

27. *Bí ọmọdè bà mbe igí, àgbàlàgà a màa wo ibi tí yó wó sí*
   
   If a youth is felling a tree, an elder will be considering where it will fall (Owomoyela 2005, 113).
The twenty-sixth proverb is used to reiterate the value of human experience. Literarily, the proverb posits that a child who underplays the agony of being killed by an animal like a leopard does so because such child had never seen the leavings of a lion in the forest. The lesson in this proverb is to be wary of inexperience, and have respect for unknown factors in human social life. Similarly, the twenty-seventh proverb underscores the importance of imaginativeness. The elderly, usually the more experienced, are typically more wary of the consequences of human actions. This proverb is typically used to warn against youthful exuberance and encourage younger persons to be more thoughtful in their conducts. Beyond its obvious function of character building however, this proverb draw attention to a very important aspect of Yorùbá culture and tradition: respect for elders. According to Schwab, (1955: 364), „one cannot remain among the Yorùbá for very long without becoming cognizant of the fact that a person’s attitude and behavior towards his fellow men are directly affected by the principle of seniority. The Yorùbá notions of seniority, whereby each person stands in relation to every other person as a senior, equal, or junior, are so fundamental to their world view that they are manifest in every aspect of organization– social, political, or economic”. However, Fadipe (1970, 307) asserted that „a senior person is respected only in so far as he appropriately deports himself and refrains from undignified things. Otherwise, he forfeits respect”. Other scholars like Ajala (2006) have called attention to the fact that the strength of age as a motivator in the social life of Yorùbá has been significantly eroded, owing to culture change. Nevertheless, the proverb in question reflects a central aspect of Yorùbá culture. Apart from forest and tree related proverbs emphasizing the value of experience, some others emphasize diligence and strength, including the following:

28. Àgbàká lèéfí ńgba ńgba ńgbó
It is completely that smoke fills the forest (Owomoyela 2005,201).

29. Ọkùnrin ki i ké, akọ igi ki i ọsoje
A man does not cry; hardwood does not ooze sap (Owomoyela 2005, 84).

The twenty-eight proverb is literarily simple and unambiguous. It is normal for smoke to fill the forest when fire burns. Lexically however, this proverb means that nothing should be spared in working hard. The task of achieving success is usually bombarded with lots of obstacles that can make individuals give up their aspirations. This proverb is a veritable tool of awakening the achievement drive and inspiring individuals to give their best effort in every task. The twenty-ninth proverb is quite similar to the previous. The proverb was designed to literarily assert that hardwood (akọigí) does not ooze sap, hence, men should not cry. It emphasizes strength and is specifically addressed to males. Traditionally, crying connotes weakness, and it is almost exclusively reserved for females. This proverb is certainly useful as a tool for building strong character among both males and females. Though the Yorùbá
society is patriarchal, Yorùbá women are noted for their high level of relative independence. In an exemplification of the ‘independent’ status of Yorùbá women, Caldwell, Orubuloye and Caldwell (1991) stated that „Yorùbá women enjoyed a good deal of independence in the outside world”. They further asserted that trading among women is common, as well as that polygyny enables successful women to concentrate on their businesses, so that”husband benefits from their wealth and even takes loans from them” (Ibid: 235). McIntosh (2009) swiftly noted in the preface to her book on Yorùbá women, work and social change that when „she wanted to identify a society in which women were active participants in the market economy and played important roles in other aspects of community life during the pre-colonial and colonial periods, Yorùbá women quickly emerged as ideal candidates” (page vii). So while the proverb in question appears to downplay female strength, the reputation of Yorùbá culture actually upholds such strength, though when considered on a whole, men are still culturally superior to women in Yorùbá society. In addition to forest and tree related proverbs emphasizing strength and diligence, some emphasize strong mentorship, including the following:

30. *Igi tó tó erin lerin ñfara rọ*
   It is a tree that is as mighty as the elephant that the elephant leans on (Owomoyela 2005, 333).

31. *Igi tí a fehinti tí ò gbani dúró, bó wó luni kò lè pani*
   A tree that one leans on but that cannot support one’s weight, if it falls on you it will not crush you (Owomoyela 2005, 485).

32. *Eégún tí yó gbeni là ńdáṣọ fún; òriṣà tí yó gbeni là ńsin; bi igí bá gbè mí mà kó obi mà bọ igí*
   It is the masquerader that succors one that one makes shrouds for; it is the god that succors one that one worships; if a tree succors me, I will take kola nuts and worship the tree (Owomoyela 2005, 114).

The thirtieth proverb is very intuitive. It simply asserts that an elephant would naturally lean on a mighty tree. Beyond the surface however, the proverb reiterates the value of strong mentorship. Only persons of strong character and enviable records of achievement are worth relying on as role models. This lesson may appear unnecessary but individuals are typically drawn towards more permissive models/mentors as opposed to those who are more demanding. This is typically not in the interest of success or accomplishment. The thirty-first proverb is also very intuitive, indicating that the fall of lean trees which are ineffectual to support one’s weight cannot cause one’s death. It is similar to the previous but it has deeper message that proffers the naught of persons or forces that are not strong enough to be relied on in the first instance.

The thirty-second proverb is similar to preceding one. It exerts the value of fighting battles with the right tools. Literarily, only a capable masquerade (*eégún*) and a god (*òriṣà*) should be so honoured. The proverb ended with an
assertion to the effect that if a tree provides succor then it should be worshipped by offering it kola nuts. The message in this proverb is acknowledged in the literature as a central attitude of Yorùbá people. According to Barber, the Yorùbá people ‘make’ their gods, they are „maintained and kept in existence by the attention of humans” (1981, 724). Barber further contended: „an òrìsà’s power and splendour depend on its having numerous attentive (and wealthy) devotees to glorify its name. An òrìsà without devotees fades into insignificance as far as the human community is concerned. The devotee can choose, within limits, which òrìsàshe will devote herself to. If her original òrìsà fails to give her what she desires– a child, success in trading, recovery from a protracted illness– she may approach other òrìsà until she finds one that responds to her request” (1981, 724–5). Morton-Williams also corroborated Barber’s thesis when he asserted that „a god is worshipped for his power to sustain life in this world” (1960, 39). The lesson of the proverb in question is that individuals should restrict their efforts to profitable ventures. This proverb can be designated as an essential value in the success formula making it very relevant in building human character. Beside this, other forest and tree related proverbs useful in motivating the character of a successful person include the following:

33. *Igi ganganran má gün-ún mi lójú, òkèèrè la ti ńwò ó wá*  
„Protruding twig, do not poke me in the eye”; one must keep one’s eyes on the twig from a distance (Owomoyela 2005, 171–2).

The thirty-third proverb is literarily about protruding twig of trees. One has to take precaution from a distance in order to avoid one’s eye from being harmed by such twig. Lexically, this proverb was designed to underscore the necessity to forecast problems and prepare to solve problems early. Well managed problems are from counteracted from becoming crisis. This is the essence of foresight. Hence, this proverb is a tool of building apt human character. The following proverb is also *sine qua non* in the success equation:

34. *Bí ilẹ̀-ẹ̀ bá laná, ọpọlọ́ á fò gun igo*  
If the earth catches fire, the toad will hop on a tree (Owomoyela 2005, 111).

35. *Bí igí bá wó lu igo, tokè là ko gbé*  
If trees fall atop one another, one removes the topmost one first.

The thirty-fourth proverb is quiet straightforward. A toad’s innate capacity to hop on a tree will become obvious if the earth catches fire. The proverb is a call for individuals to be adaptive to their situations. Seeking alternative path and approach is a hallmark of success, making this proverb useful in building healthy character. The thirty-fifth proverb literarily enjoins individuals to pick the topmost tree first if trees fall atop one another. The deeper meaning of this proverb underscores the importance of prioritizing tasks. These forest and tree related proverbs are excellent tools of awakening apt human character,
specifically success driven character among individuals. Meanwhile, all the proverbs considered so far appear to be more relevant for the youth population. Some forest and tree related proverbs are relevant to character building of community members as a whole. These are discussed as follows:

36. Ọpọ lešú fi ya igi lóko
   It is by means of their numbers that locusts tear down a branch on the farm (Owomoyela 2005, 318).

37. Igi kan o le dágbóse
   A tree cannot make a forest.

The thirty-sixth proverb tells the story of how locusts are able to tear down tree branches owing to their numbers. The proverb directly recounts the value of unity which enables people to come together and achieve desirable goals. The thirty-seventh proverb is very similar to the previous one. It asserts the fact that a tree cannot make a forest. An individual might be able to achieve lofty goals but this cannot be compared with what multitudes of people could achieve. Great men of history achieved success owing to their capacity to involve droves of people. These proverbs convey central ideas that define ideal human character.

38. Àfomọ níse ara-a rẹ, ó ní ọún níse igi
   The creeper is destroying itself, but it thinks it is destroying its host (Owomoyela 2005, 99)

The thirty-eighth proverb recounts creepers’ usual pursuit of clinging unto their host. Eventually, this pursuit is bound to result to the death of the host and ultimate death of the parasite itself. The proverb is designed to sensitize individuals to the idea that whatever evil they commit will ultimately haunt them. Seen the other way, the proverb affirms that those who engage in virtuous acts would reap its gains eventually. This proverb is an essential ingredient of building an apt human character. Other forest and tree related proverbs warn against engaging in activities that could result to dead-ends in people’s lives:

39. Obinrin tó gégi nígbó Orò, ó gé àgémọ
   A woman who cuts wood in the grove of Orò has cut her last (Owomoyela 2005, 182).

40. Igi tó bá bà Sàngó lèrì, gbígbé ní ìgbẹ
   Whatever tree engages in a contest of threats with Sango will suffer the fate of drying up (Owomoyela 2005, 172).

41. Ènikan í pé komọ o mọ dẹtẹ, tó ba tile dágbógbé
   No one warns the child against being afflicted with leprosy as long as such child can live alone in the forest.

The thirty-ninth proverb warns against pursuing dangerous adventures, especially those that are apparently dangerous. The proverb recounts the
Yorùbá’s practice of designating some forests as ‘orò’ forest, and forbidding women from entering such forest. Women who go against this practice are said to have committed taboo which is punishable by death. The lesson of the fortieth proverb is very similar to the previous. The proverb literally asserts that trees that contests with Sàngó will suffer the fate of drying up. This proverb is a reminder of ‘tree humanization’ that was discussed earlier on in this article because contesting is a human attribute. Given Sàngó’s prowess (see earlier discussion on Sàngó) and his capacity to use ‘fire power’ to its advantage, the tree that fails to humble itself before Sàngó is bound to dry up. This proverb is a stern warning against battling with superior people or forces. Meanwhile, this proverb is a furtherance of the third and fourth proverbs that were analyzed in this article. These proverbs literally assert that Sàngó cannot destroy huge trees. Huge trees then, are exceptions in this (fortieth) proverb. On the whole, one should consider one’s capacity before choosing battles to fight. The forty-first proverb was designed to literally assert that children should not be prevented from having leprosy if they can live alone in the forest. In Yorùbá culture those who become afflicted with leprosy are sent into the forest to avoid afflicting others with their ailment. Lexically however, this proverb is used to scare individuals away from committing socially disapproved conduct, with the implication that such individuals will be left alone to bear the consequences of their actions. This deeper meaning is recourse in preventing individuals from becoming defiant.

So far in this section, the character building functions of forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs have been exposited. The content analysis of forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs yielded another theme concerning how forests serve as haven for animals and wildlife. This is the crux of the next discussion.

Forest as animal and wildlife refuge

Another constellation of forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs produced the theme elucidating forest as animal and wildlife refuge. This buttresses the notion that proverbs are produced from everyday experiences of individuals in traditional society.

42. *Igbó lẹranko ũgbé*
   The forest is the home for animals to live in (Owomoyela 2005, 124).

43. *Igbó níla la ti nírí eyẹ-keye*
   It is in a huge forest that one finds all sorts of birds.

44. *Aaka ọ gbé odàn; igbó ní ńgbé*
   The hedgehog does not live in the grassland, only in the forest (Owomoyela 2005, 46).
45. *Pálà-pálà nilé ígóln, igbó rere nilé ahún*

The home of the snail is ever disorganized, but the home of the tortoise is a tidy bush (Owomoyela 2005, 272).

The forty-second proverb simply recounts that animals live in the forest. The forty-third proverb also recounts that variety of birds are to be found in forests. The forty-fourth is more specific by recounting that hedgehog resides in forest. The forty-fifth proverb also specifically named tortoise as an animal that resides in forest, while also recounting that snails are fond of disorganized environments. All these proverbs vividly indicate the designation of forest as animal refuge.

46. *A ki í bá eku du igbó, a ki í ba efón du odàn, a ki í bá Olúkóre du ipò-o baba-a re*

One does not dispute the bush with the rodent; one does not dispute the grassland with the buffalo; one does not dispute Olúkóre’s patrimony with him (Owomoyela 2005, 432).

47. *Ó wu ẹtu kó gbé ogún odún nígbó, ṣúgbọn ó wu onípàkité kó dojá lọla*

The antelope would like to live for twenty years in the bush, but the setter of snares would like it to reach the market on the morrow (Owomoyela 2005, 353).

48. *Ká to rí erin ó digbó; ká to refon ó dòdàn; ká to rí eye bí ọkin ó di kése*

Before one can see the elephant, one must go to the bush; before one can see the buffalo, one must go to the wilderness; before one can see another bird like the egret, one must await the end of time (Owomoyela 2005, 413).

The forty-sixth proverb plainly indicates rodents’ and buffalos’ entitlement to forest and grassland respectively. The proverb is actually meant to dissuade people from contesting other people’s natural rights. The forty-seventh proverb is lexically used to express differential interests or priorities of individuals. However, it literally indicates that antelopes reside in forests. The forty-eighth proverb is figuratively used to affirm the distinctiveness of certain individuals. Literarily, it indicates that elephants reside in forests, buffalos in grassland. These proverbs aptly signal that forests serve as refuge for animals. Forests are also of tremendous significance to wildlife. This is indicated in the following proverbs:

49. *Ejó ò kó omó e lehin je yoo-yoo-yoo kánú igbó*

A snake does not wander in the bush with all its young in train (Owomoyela 2005, 366).

50. *Kiniún ki i s’egbe eran keran nínú igbó*

The lion is more than the equal of any other sort of animal in the bush.
The forty-ninth proverb vividly indicates that snakes do not wander in the forest with their young ones. This literal meaning shows that the forest remains the refuge of wildlife, specifically snakes. Figuratively, this proverb expresses the idea that individuals pursue their destinies differentially. The fiftieth proverb clearly asserts the headship of the lion amidst other animals in the forest. At the same time, it reflects that they belong to the forest. The proverb is typically used to advance the idea that one is superior to another person. These proverbs have demonstrated the traditional connection of animals and wildlife to forests.

Other subjects in the content analysis of forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs

Other than the themes that emerged in the analysis of forest and tree related Yorùbá proverbs, disjointed subjects were perceptible from this analysis. These subjects included forest conservation, forest density and noise pollution:

51. Bí a bá gé igitúgbó, ká fi oràn ro ara ènì wò
   When one cuts a tree in the forest, one should apply the matter to oneself (Owomoyela 2005, 256-7).

   This proverb could be interpreted in several ways: one should avoid falling trees; one should fall trees empathetically by, may be, supporting the falling tree to prevent sharp fall, one should use sharp tools in cutting trees; one should not cut trees needlessly; one should consider the age of trees and avoid cutting younger ones; etc. However it is interpreted, the proverb is a direct proclamation of the need for forest conservation. This represents a strong instance of congruence between Yorùbá culture and the essentials of forest conservation. The following proverb is an addition to such instances:

52. Igi tí baba ènì bá lọ, a ki í fà á tu, bíi tẹ́gẹ́ kọ
   A tree that one’s father plants one does not uproot, but that does not apply to cassava (Owomoyela 2005,485).

   The fifty-second proverb plainly expresses that one should not uproot a tree that one’s father plants, but, cassava root is an exception. The deeper implication of this proverb is that traditions and heritage should be treated with reverence, though there should be exceptions to such reverence. This proverb is undoubtedly sympathetic towards forest conservation. Another proverb indicates that forests used to be typically dense:

53. Igbó rúrú níwajú ọlọdẹ, èèyàn ṣùṣù lèhin ọlọtẹ
dense forest behind the hunter; teeming crowd in the wake of a schemer(Owomoyela 2005,291–2).
The fifty-third proverb literarily shows that forests use to be dense (rürü) before an average hunter, in the same way that schemers use to command teeming crowd of supporters. This proverb was borne out of such denseness. Another related proverb speaks of how forests may serve charm-like refuge for humans:

54. Àṣẹẹrí kan ṣe ju ká rí ẹgbó ńlá bọ sí ọ; ẹbọ kan ṣe ju opọ èèyàn ọ; “Oríṣá gbé mi lé àtètè” kan ṣe ju orí ẹsin ọ

There is no disappearing trick better than the availability of a dense forest to disappear into; there is no sacrifice more efficacious than having many people on one’s side; there is no „The gods have elevated me” that is higher than the back of a horse(Owomoyela 2005,98–9).

55. Igbó ńlà ní múmu ènì mú orí

It is a huge forest that swallows a person, including the person's head (Owomoyela 2005, 486).

The fifty-fourth proverb is an indication that forests used to be dense, just like the previous proverb indicated. In addition, forests may serve as a refuge for humans, as it does for animals and wildlife as earlier discussed. The fifty-fifth proverb shows that a huge forest swallows a person as well as its head. This assertion also implies that forests used to be denser than today; however it also indicates that forests may arouse fear (swallowing a person along with his or her head is ordinarily a frightening phenomenon). The deeper meaning of the proverb is to assert that huge tasks place great burden on individuals. Apart from denseness, forests are serene environments, as reflected in the following proverb:

56. Òyìnibó ọ fáriwo, ọ kólé sígbó

The white man dislikes noise; therefore he built his house in the bush (Owomoyela 2005, 317).

The fifty-sixth proverb must have been produced after the Yorùbá society started experiencing colonialism because white men are mentioned in it. The proverb points to the calmness of the forest neighborhood.

Further Discussions and Conclusions

Tree humanization is a dominant and the most unique theme that emerged from identified proverbs. It strongly suggests that trees are compared with human beings in Yorùbá culture. However unique it may seem, the theme is consistent with the worldview of the Yorùbá. In his qualitative report of the Yorùbá cultural construction of health and illness, Jegede (2002) described an essential aspect of Yorùbá’s world view: „for the Yoruba, ... the invisible world
is symbolized or manifested by visible and concrete phenomena and objects of nature. ... the invisible world presses hard upon the visible, and the African people ‘see’ that invisible universe when they look at, hear or feel the visible and tangible world” (323). In a similar vein, Lawal (2001) asserted that the Yorùbá have „a strong belief in an interface of the visible and invisible, the tangible and intangible, the known and unknown makes it evident that the act of looking and seeing in Yorùbá culture is much more than a perception of objects by use of the eyes” (521, emphasis mine). These accounts support the notion that forest and trees are accorded reverence among the Yorùbá. They are perceived beyond the physical realm. When the Yorùbá interact with trees for instance, they are seeing them beyond tangible entities. As Jegede (2002) further contended, „nature (including forests and trees) is not an impersonal object or phenomenon” (323, bracket mine).

Fadipe (1970) also asserted that „there is a saying among the people, ‘Kòsíòrìsàtíkòniìgb ẹ’ (lit., there is no òrìsà which has no bush— ‘bush’ meaning trees, roots, and leaves” – 299). This shows that Òrìsàs are associated with forests and trees. Meanwhile Yorùbá people have confidence in the belief that the Òrìsàs once inhabited the earth like humans, though they are personified as spiritual forces (Schwab 1955). Like human attributes, every Òrìsà originated from a town possessed unique temperamental characteristics, precepts, distinctive qualities, proscriptions, rituals, and its own collection of oríkì (praise epitheths). According to traditional myths, several Òrìsàs are affiliated with physical/geographical features like rivers, hills, mountains, trees, forests, thunder, etc. (Barber 1981).

These accounts support the notion that the Yorùbá are awed by forest and trees. The reverence accorded trees in Yorùbá culture is prospectively immutable. This is because human life is seen as scared among the people, while trees are ‘humanized’. „According to Yoruba ontology, when the Supreme Being, Olodumare, decided to create man, he asked one of the gods, known as Obatala, to mould man’s physical body from clay. And after Obatala had created the image, Olodumare breathed life (emi) into it ..., so that man is a sort of sculpture animated by the breath of Olodumare” (Lawal 1977, 51).

Moreover, the ideology of Yorùbá people remains central to them even as most of them are Christians or Muslims. Olurode and Olusanya (1994) asserted that „while the Yoruba may profess Islam or Christianity because it is the mark of a ‘civilised’ man to do so, at heart he is a traditionalist in the sphere of the supernatural” (91–2). In addition, Opefeyitimi (2009) asserted that „in spite of modern science...many mythological ideas and beliefs continue to stand the test of time and trouble the minds of men, like bad dreams” (121). The enduring capacity of several aspects of Yorùbá culture has engendered cultural survivals among them. Hence, the thesis of tree humanization is a monumental resource that speaks in favor of ecosystem health among the Yorùbá even in contemporary times. If trees are ‘seen’ as humans, then trees are sacred, like human life.
The themes of elucidating utilitarian function of forest and trees as well as forest as animal and wildlife refuge are largely illustrative of everyday life in Yorùbá society, even in contemporary times. The later provide impetus to the notion that wildlife’s presence in human abode is an indication that humans are encroaching on wildlife’s natural habitat through deforestation. The theme expounding forest and trees as metaphors to instill apt human character is a reflection of Yorùbá’s passion about the concepts of ìwà and ọmọlùàbí (literarily, character and goodness). The two concepts go hand in hand, as only those who have ìwà, or its equivalent—ìwàrere—can be said to be ọmọlùàbí. Abímbolá (1975) expounded the concept of ìwàpèlè and asserted that „a man’s ìwà is what can be used to characterize his life especially in ethical terms ... the Yorùbá regard ìwàpèlées the most important of all moral values, and the greatest attribute of any man” (393–5). Hence, as phenomenon, forests and trees are deeply rooted in Yorùbá culture.

References


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*Ôwe l'ësin orọ:: Analiza poslovica o šumi i drveću kao tradicionalnih znanja kod Joruba naroda.*

**Apstrakt:** Uporedo sa ekološkim, i tradicionalna znanja ubrzanim ritmom erodiraju, zahvaljujući dinamici globalizacije. Vrednost tradicionalnih znanja ogleda se u razumevanju ekološke dinamike u nekoj lokalnoj sredini. Ovaj članak predstavlja sistematicnu analizu izreka Joruba naroda o šumi i drveću, u cilju otkrivanja lokalnih motiva u tradicionalnim Joruba znanjima. Analizom su ustanovljene četiri teme koje obuhvataju očuovečenje drveća, utilitarnu funkciju drveća i šume, šume kao skrovišta za životinje i divljač i drveće kao metafora za oblikovanje prikladnog člana društva. Ovo ukazuje da su šume i drveće duboko ukorenjeni fenomeni u kulturi Joruba.

**Ključne reči:** Šuma, drveće, Joruba izreke, tradicionalna znanja.