

THE PRAGMATICS IMPORT OF ‘CHILD’ IN YORÙBÁ PROVERBS

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ABSTRACT

The rights of the child are central to sustainable development (Oyero, 2010): that is why the World Commission on Environment and Development (1987: 46) says that sustainable development is meeting “the [human] needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs”. Efforts have therefore been made by various nations, Nigeria included, to galvanise support for the rights of the child. In this paper, we look at the language of a section of the Nigerian population – the Yorùbá – with the aim of understanding their cultural disposition to ‘the child’ and the implications it portends for the sustenance of the rights of the child. Drawing from speech analysis and symbolic interaction theories, proverbs were collected from individuals, the elderly in particular, who are knowledgeable about Yorùbá proverbs for analysis. We found out that the Yorùbá have basic child rights tenets entrenched in their practices, thus brightening the hope for the sustenance of children’s rights among them.

Keywords: Child rights, Pragmatics, the Yorùbá, Proverbs

Introduction

This paper examines the proverbs found in Yorùbá language with the aim of determining the extent to which they share affinity with legal provisions for children’s rights. The thinking in this paper is that the proximity of legal provisions such as the UN Convention on the rights of the child to already existing cultural beliefs and practices is an advantage towards realization of the provisions of the law for children. This paper begins with an explanation of child rights, listing those elements that make them up, and describing the definition and functions of proverbs. It also describes the Yorùbá people and their oral tradition. The theoretical foundations are discussed, followed by the presentation and discussion of findings.

Explaining Child Rights

The debate on ‘rights’ has a long history in the Western world. Its foundations can be traced back at least as far as discussions of natural law among Greek and Roman stoics (Hill & Tisdall, 1997: 22). These discussions were revived, expanded and modified by such philosophers as Locke and Paine who argued for the links between natural rights, individualism and liberty.

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Hill and Tisdall (1997: 22) note that rights are fundamental and universal, and thus override other values because they are based in nature and are of divine creation. However, there are those who believe that rights are socially or legally constructed rather than natural or God-given (Jones, 1994). Some would say that rights are inextricably linked to a particular society, and thus the idea that rights can be universalised across societies is incorrect. Those who believe that certain rights are universal posit that the concept of human rights has largely replaced that of natural rights, thus avoiding the theological foundation of most natural rights theories. They rely on a concept of basic human needs to provide the basis for human rights (MacCormick, 1982; Freedon, 1991; Eekelaar, 1992). These needs are said to be irrefutable:

Certain needs are so fundamental, it may be argued, that they should be treated as a social right and society should accept a duty to provide them to all citizens (Charles and Webb, 1986: 71).

Many distinctions have been made in relation to rights. A useful distinction is made between legal and moral rights. Legal rights are those set out in law, which are thus enforceable. Moral rights are not established in law, but are put forward as what ought to be. Marshall (1963) identified three types of rights: civil, political and social. Civil rights are defined as those necessary for individual freedom. Political rights involve participation in the exercise of political power. Social rights range from ensuring a "modicum of economic welfare and security to the right to share to the full in the social heritage" (Marshall, 1963: 74).

The relationship among claims, duties and rights is another consideration:

A right is a legal capacity in one person to control or limit or require an act of another. The right resides with the first person, the duty with the second. Rights are about obligation, an obligation fixed in law or fought for on moral and legal grounds, a duty placed on someone other than the rights-holder. Rights establish and support relationships (McGillvray, 1994: 354).

Whether someone can have a right without someone else having a corresponding duty has been the subject of much debate (Dworkin, 1978; MacCormick, 1982; Olsen, 1992). With some rights, it is relatively easy to identify who is the duty-holder and what the duty is. For instance, a child may have a right to its parents' care and supervision. The child has the right, the parents have the duty, and the duty is for care and supervision. However, with some rights, identifying the duty and duty-holder can be more difficult. A child may have a right to an adequate standard of living, but who has the duty to provide the adequate standard?

There are those who believe that children had no rights. Hill & Tisdall (1997: 22) note that Hobbes posited that children have no natural rights and are under the absolute subjection of their parents. Locke, however, opposed that saying that children have natural rights but only adults are fully rational. Thus, parents have authority over children and the corresponding responsibility to educate children into reason. Locke's argument is the position in the fiduciary model where parents are considered the "trustees" of their children and are supposed to develop their capacities for rationality, functioning in a democratic system, and bodily well-being. Failure to care for the trust properly entails dismissal from trusteeship (Sorens, 2001: 1). Purdy (1994: 235) believes that children should have no equal rights with adults. She argues that rationality is important because a society where people behave intelligently and morally clearly works better and is more enjoyable to live in than one where

they do not. She believes that societal problems arising from inadequacies of adults are enough to grapple with and the situation would only be compounded if adults' rights are extended to children. Therefore, all children should have welfare rights or protection rights, such as the right to survival and an adequate standard of living, and, in fact, have more welfare rights than adults.

Children's rights are claims that all children have for survival, development, survival, protection and participation in community life. According to the Child Development Department (CDD) of the Ministry of Women Affairs and Youth Development, Federal Republic of Nigeria (1995: 5), the basic principles of children's rights state that:

- Every child has the right to life and to be allowed to survive and develop.
- Every child is entitled to a name, family and nationality.
- Every child is free to belong to any association or assembly according to the law.
- Every child has the right to express opinions and freely communicate them on any issues subject to restriction under the law.
- Every child is entitled to protection from any act that interferes with his or her privacy, honour, and reputation.
- Every child is entitled to adequate rest, recreation (leisure and play) according to his or her age and culture.
- Every child (male or female) is entitled to receive compulsory basic education and equal opportunity for higher education depending on individual ability.
- Every child is entitled to good health, protection from illness and proper medical attention for survival, personal growth and development.
- Every child must be protected from indecent and inhuman treatment through sexual exploitation, drug abuse, child labour, torture, maltreatment and neglect.
- No child should suffer any discrimination irrespective of ethnic origin, birth, colour, sex, language, religion, political and social beliefs, status or disability.

The realisation of these rights has been the focus of so many organisations led by the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) working in different nations. The situation of children in Nigeria, like many African countries, is either to actualise or sustain the ideals listed above. It is therefore necessary to further explore factors that would help in the sustenance of these rights. It is on this basis that this paper examines the understanding of child rights among the Yorùbá through their proverbial language.

Definition and functions of proverbs

Proverbs can be described as laconic and condensed sayings that express conventional ideas and beliefs. They are part of African spoken language and folk literature, originating in oral traditions. Often a proverb is found with variations in many different parts of Africa. Literate societies dating back to the ancient Egyptians have collected proverbs and are found useful as excellent tool for social influence (Finnegan, 1970: 389). Proverbs, according to Akporoboro (2001: 105), reveal "the people's way of life, their philosophy, their moral truth and social values." They provide a means of alluding to values and norms accepted by society without offending the beliefs of others. When a proverb is used, it is situated in the hierarchy of respect for an age-old traditional practice. The wisdom contained in proverbial expressions passes information from the wiser elders to the more incorrigible youth in a system that values age as a means of revealing intelligence and maturity. As part of society's cultural elements, proverbs divulge the attitudes, beliefs and practices of a people through creation of

images of a phenomenon. In other words, we understand people's cultural values by the meaning emanating from the proverbs that their language carries.

It is on the basis of the aforementioned importance of proverbs that we examine the proverbs of the Yorùbá with the intent of understanding their attitudes and philosophies of life. The proverbs provide us with an understanding of the Yorùbá perception and values attached to children and the import of this on the global quest for the fulfilment of the rights of the child. This paper focuses on the analysis of Yorùbá proverbs to extract the various perceptions of the child and the implications for the rights of the child. Elderly Yorùbá individuals who are knowledgeable about Yorùbá proverbs were contacted to supply proverbs that relate to children. The elders contacted were purposively selected based on recommendation. They were all over sixty years and were known to be knowledgeable about Yorùbá culture and language. The researchers only asked them to supply Yorùbá proverbs that contain child or children. A total of 51 proverbs were collected and, after review, were pruned down to 20. The pruning was necessary because some of the proverbs, though they contained the key words, were not actually related to our subject. The researchers needed to be properly guided to establish that the proverbs collected are appropriate to the subject of discussion, thus they paid attention to Yorùbá conversations over a period of six months and watched Yorùbá movies in order to settle on the proverbs to be analysed.

The elderly people interviewed included Olori Yetunde Gbadebo, an octogenarian and wife of former Paramount Ruler of Egbaland; Alaja S.A. Akamo, Iyaloja (Market Women Leader), Itoku Market, Abeokuta; Madam Patrician Olafimihan, former Director, Ogun State Television; Mr Ebenezer Meroyi, Olori Ebi (Family Head), Obafemi Owode Village, Ogun state; Mr Abayomi Olufemi, Principal, Reverend Kuti Memorial High School, Abeokuta; Mr Seyi Olafimihan, Director, Yorùbá Programmes, Ogun State Television, Abeokuta; Mr I. Odebode, Yorùbá language teacher; and Mr A. Adeniyi, English language teacher, College of Education, Osiele, Abeokuta. Yorùbá movies watched included *Ategun* by Omega Films and directed by Adebayo Tijani; *Alajobi Ni* by Orisunmbare Movies directed by Musibau Raheem Abiogun; *Banjoko* produced by Millenium Films and directed by Rasaaq Aberuagba and Akeem Alimi; and *Maami* and *Arugba*, both by Mainframe Films and directed by Tunde Kelani.

The Yorùbõ of Western Nigeria

According to New World Encyclopedia (n.d.), the Yorùbá are one of the largest ethno-linguistic groups in sub-Saharan Africa. Yorùbá constitute about 21 percent of the population of modern day Nigeria, and are commonly the majority population in their communities. Many of the Yorùbá in West Africa live in the states of Ekiti, Lagos, Ogun, Ondo, Osun and Oyo, making these political areas decidedly in the control of the numerically superior Yorùbá.

Yorùbá can be found throughout West Africa, even reaching into Benin, Ghana and Togo, but the greatest concentration of Yorùbá is found in Yorùbáland, an area in western Nigeria. Yorùbáland is bordered by the Borgu (variously called Bariba and Borgawa) in the north-west, the Nupe and Ebira in the north, the Èsan and Edo to the south-east, and the Igala and other related groups to the north-east.

The origins of the Yorùbá may be traced to the ninth century A.D. From the beginning, Yorùbá culture has been characterized by an urban lifestyle and a political system of sacred

rulers. Between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries, the political/cultural position of the Yorùbá city of Ile-Ife had developed to a point where an artistry of extraordinary technical skill and imagination created the famous Ife bronze and terracotta sculptures, and there were other artistic centres at Esie in the north-east and Owo in the south-east. By the seventeenth century, Oyo, a city in the north-central Yorùbá region, was emerging as a significant political power that over the next century would establish itself as the centre of an empire.

Concerning their geographical spread, Morton, cited in Fakoya (2005: 55) notes that the Yorùbá people constitute one of the major ethnic groups in Africa – 25 million people, whose cultural history extends across a large area of West Africa – and that “today, it is not easy to define the area of Yorùbá cultural influence”. However, he affirms that on account of common language, traditions, origins of the traditional ruling class, political institutions and organizational patterns, religion, morals and the geographical contiguity of the lands occupied by the different Yorùbá groups, a measure of agreement may be presumed about the definition and boundaries of the core. The Yorùbá are known for their excellent craftsmanship, considered to be the most skilled and productive in all of Africa. Traditionally, they worked at such trades as blacksmithing, leatherworking, weaving, glassmaking, and ivory and wood carving. The many densely populated urban areas of Yorùbáland allow for a centralization of wealth and the development of a complex market economy which encourages extensive patronage of the arts.

Yorùbá is a dialect continuum of West Africa with over 50 million speakers. Fakoya (2009: 55), citing **Gordon (2005) notes that** there are 18.8 million first-language speakers of Yorùbá in Nigeria. It is spoken among other languages in Nigeria, Benin and Togo and traces of it are found among communities in Brazil, the United Kingdom, and the U.S., Sierra-Leone (where it is called Oku), northern Ghana (where it is spoken by urban migrant Yorùbá communities alongside Hausa and local languages) and Cuba (where it is called Nago)(World Access, 2010). Yorùbá is an isolating tonal language with SVO syntax. Apart from referring to the aggregate of dialects and their speakers, the term Yorùbá is used for the standard, written form of the language. Yorùbá is classified as a Niger-Congo language of the Yoruboid branch of Defoid, Benue-Congo. Yorùbá is the third most spoken native African language (Nethelper, n.d.).

Theoretical basis

This section discusses the theoretical foundation of the article as well as the functions of proverbs as propounded by different scholars. The paper is based on conversation analysis and symbolic interaction theory. As proposed by Sacks, conversation analysis entails observing and recording conversation as a basis for developing a more formal understanding of regularities (Boden, 1994: 141). It means that by observing conversation, we are able to derive certain meanings that explain the reality of the situation under consideration.

Symbolic interaction theory analyzes society by addressing the subjective meanings that people impose on objects, events, and behaviours. Subjective meanings are given primacy because it is believed that people behave based on what they believe and not just on what is objectively true. Thus society is thought to be socially constructed through human interpretation. People interpret one another's behaviour and it is these interpretations that form the social bond. Blumer, cited in Griffin (2012: 55-58), came up with three core principles to this theory: meaning, language, and thought. The first core principle, meaning, states that humans act towards people and things based upon the meanings that they have given to those people or things. *Symbolic Interactionism* holds the principal of meaning as

central in human behaviour. The second core principle is language, which gives humans a means by which to negotiate meaning through symbols. Naming assigned meaning, thus naming was the basis for human society and the extent of knowledge. It is by engaging in speech acts with others, *symbolic interaction*, that humans come to identify meaning, or naming, and develop discourse. The third core principle, thought, modifies each individual's interpretation of symbols. Based on language, thought is a mental conversation or dialogue that requires role taking, or imagining different points of view. By examining the language of the Yorùbá, especially their proverbs, we are able to extract meaning that gives understanding of their perception about children and their attitudes to the rights of the child.

The ability to apply proverbs properly in a given situation is a skill that is developed through time and experience. Story-tellers rely upon their knowledge of many proverbs as well as their ability to read a social situation to provide the wisdom these proverbs contain. Once the proverbs have been used, it is important to understand why they were used in the first place. For example, the Akan use proverbs "1) to persuade, 2) for social prestige, and 3) to embellish discourse" (Yankah, 1989: 109). Proverbs reflect the language and culture of the social context. They are intended to be fascinating and provocative while still acting as a channel of social wisdom. A mature participant in a dialogue or public discussion always strives to use vivid language because his audience is continually making a folk-literary analysis of his speech. The importance attached to brilliance and imaginativeness in public speech leads those who aspire to enter traditional public life and hope to exert influence, especially in the courts and in politics, to cultivate the use of striking images (Boadi, 1972: 186).

It is noted in *Afritopic* (n.d.) that proverbs provide wonderful nuggets of discussion-provoking wisdom. Although proverbs are from various distinct cultures, they speak to widely shared, perhaps planet-spanning, truths. According to the Ghanaian researcher Kofi Asare Opoku, "The Yorùbá of Nigeria emphasize the value of proverbs with a proverb, saying, 'A proverb is the horse that can carry one swiftly to the discovery of ideas'" (*Afritopic*, n.d.). Proverbs can paint vivid pictures of precepts which enhance understanding.

In *Afritopic* (n.d.), it is observed that proverbs can be used for many pedagogical purposes:

Proverbs can provide focus to gatherings and closings, either used singly to emphasize one idea, or with individuals or groups getting and asking a few people to share ones that are meaningful to them. If you have more time, each pair or group could lead a discussion about the meaning of their saying. Proverbs can be used in character colloquies (intellectual discussions) as part of character education programmes. Additionally, they are useful as springboards for discussions of the implications and ethical dimensions of literature, historical events, scientific and technological controversies, while they still retain their traditional communication significances as reflectors of our own beliefs, our learning styles, our attitudes; our value system and our own behaviour (*Afritopic*, n.d.: para 2).

Many *owe* (proverbs) and *oro* (verbal expression) communicated through the Yorùbá language are derived from *asa* (tradition) and *riroko* (culture) of the Yorùbá people (Olajubu, 1978: viii). Like stories, folktales, poems, riddles, narratives, songs or other verbal forms of expression, proverbs are referred to as "shorter or minor forms because they are frequently used in normal, everyday speech situations, and they are cherished because of their neatness of structure, shortness, and sharpness of poetic appeal" (Okpewho, 1992: 226). Thus proverbs

remain essential verbal communication forms derivable from Yorùbá and African oral literatures. Nketia, in his article "Folklore of Ghana", sees proverbs not only as "a model of compressed or forceful language, words of wisdom, body of short statement built over the years and which reflect the thought and innermost expression of people, but also a technique of verbal expression ... greatly appreciated ... a living tradition in Ghana" (Nketia, 1958: 21). Nketia's comment stresses the value of Ghanaian proverbs and their use among poets and oral artists. Ruth Finnegan, in her classic book *Oral Literature in Africa*, attenuates the literary features and relevance of proverbs as sources "of imagery and succinct expression" for elaboration (Finnegan, 1970: 389). She observes that proverbs are differentiated from other literary expressions among the Yorùbá and Zulu people, while their allusive, metaphorical expressions are considered generally as speech mode translated from native words which are regarded as near-equivalent to proverbs.

The indigenous communication system poses challenges of primitiveness and difficulty to western minds through comparative tendencies used for assessment (Laurence, 1968; Ong, 1982; Mudimbe, 1997). Stressing the prominence and status of proverbs, Okpewho believes it is an everyday verbal communication and "the most popular" of oral literary forms. Although proverbs have been widely studied by scholars, their values have been downplayed "from poor understanding of their cultural and aesthetic backgrounds" (Okpewho, 1992: 226). This paper highlights the English translation/interpretation, typical contextual situations and functionality of performance or usage of selected proverbs on children in the Yorùbá speech community.

An articulation of Yorùbá proverbs provides a platform for policy makers, government functionaries, non-governmental bodies and analysts to formulate child rights policies through a synthesis of traditional values projected in every society. To this end, some Yorùbá proverbs reflect the desires of the adult members of the community to situate or place the child within the larger society. Proverbs act as one of the forces of positive (extrinsic) motivation to check peer influences, to enable a child to figure out ideas necessary to propel his/her thought(s) to succeed, to conceptualize the larger world of the adults in everyday speech forms and to encourage proper development and responsible citizenship.

The concern of this paper is the semantic interpretation and functionality of Yorùbá proverbs related to children. In a way, it shows the perception and attitude of the Yorùbá mindset towards children and the significance attached to such verbal expressions in relation to the rights of the child. The knowledge will promote individual/child rights, social responsibility of the society and ethical development of individual members in the community towards the stability of the society in relation to children.

Findings and discussion

Here we present the proverbs collected in Yorùbá language, their translation to English, followed by a discussion as related to the focus of the paper. From the twenty proverbs analyzed for this paper, we can make some deductions that can help us to understand the attitude of the Yorùbá towards children and how that affects their rights. The proverbs are grouped according to their emerging themes, while the discussion focuses on how the proverbs support the themes.

1) Priority for care for children

- *Omo eni kiisedi bebere, ka f'ileke sidi omo elomi* – You don't decorate another man's child with beads when your child needs them. (Talks of giving priority to taking care of one's own children.)
- *Agbomojo l'omo n m oju* – One who carries a baby and dances with him/her is the one the baby will be familiar with. (Implying that it is the person who takes care of the child that will be recognized by the child.)
- *Agborodun bi iya ko si, eni to ba ni baba lo n tara a re* – An advocate like a mother does not exist, a child that has a father has confidence. (Signifies the reliance of children on their parents.)

As expressed in these three proverbs, the Yorùbá believe that it is the duty of parents to take care of their children and provide all they need. This care is not limited to the provision of basic necessities of life alone but also includes the inculcation of societal values such as beauty, cleanliness and respect, into the children. And it is because parents have this responsibility that the third proverb under this category describes parents as advocates, who provide confidence for children. It is thus an aberration for a child who has parents to be left uncared for. Unfortunately, this phenomenon is found in society today. There are a number of children whose parents are still alive but they are not catered for. This could sometimes be due to the inability of the parents to perform their social responsibilities due to lack of financial wherewithal or mere acts of irresponsibility either on the part of the child or the parents and some other factors peculiar to individuals. However, the point is clear that the Yorùbá know and believe that it is the parents' duty to care and provide for their children, as most societies also believe.

2) Planning for the future of the children

- *Omo beere, osi beere* – Plenty of children leads to plenty of poverty. (Caution to avoid having to many children in order to prevent poverty.)
- *Aya beere, o si beere, bi a bi omo t'o po bi erupe, omo t' ogbon ni olu omo* – Plenty of wives breed plenty of poverty; if one has children as many as the sand, it is the wise ones that are proper children. (To discourage having many children, or many wives, but rather having fewer but well-trained children.)
- *Aimete, ai mero ni i mu k'omo iya mefa ku s'oko ofa egbafa* – Failure to establish same purpose and plan together made six children of the same mother to die as pawn in servitude on a loan of twelve thousand cowries (equivalent to 30 kobo). (To show the wisdom in planning for the future for the sake of children.)

The first two proverbs in this category are a twist to the beliefs of the Yorùbá. It used to be that the old Yorùbá traditional society favoured having many children. One major reason that informed having a large family then was the nature of their business. In the traditional, agrarian society, the practice is usually for economic reasons, where a man is expected to enlarge his income by giving birth to many children and having several wives to help in the expansion of the family farmland. However, with changes in Yorùbá society, this belief has also changed and there is a shift towards having fewer children who can be properly taken care of. One factor that would have been responsible for this change among the Yorùbá must have been their early exposure to Western ideas. No wonder they are the most educated and most sophisticated ethnic group in Nigeria (Igbokwe, 2009).

It is also seen that the Yorùbá believe that children's futures should be planned for, hence the parents are not supposed to incur debts that will put their children's future at risk. This is a factor in support of the survival of the child as a basic right for every child. The Yorùbá frown at unguided spending and financial indebtedness since they breed poverty for the

children or the family of the debtor. So parents always strive to pay their debts, or extended family members sometimes assist a family to pay in order to prevent the children from servitude. This comes along with the fact that parents could avoid poverty by reducing the number of children they bear and, ultimately, the number of wives to avoid unhealthy multiplicity of children.

3) **Emphasis on child training/education**

- *Abi-iko, ako-igba, ode ni won ti n ko ogbon wa le* – An untrained, undisciplined or intractable child learns wisdom from outside and brings it home. (A child who refuses or lacks home training will learn by force from outside through suffering.)
- *Akeju ba omo olowo je* – Over-indulgence spoils a rich/wealthy man's child. (To discourage over-indulgence of children.)
- *A kii gba, akara lowo akiti, a kii gba ile baba omo lowo omo* – Nobody can take away one's father's house (inheritance) from a child. (Signifying that education is an inheritance that cannot be taken away from children.)
- *A ti romo oba to deru ri, a si ti ri iwofa t'o d'lowo* – One had seen a prince that became a slave and one had also seen a pawn that became a rich person. (To warn that lack of education and training can turn a rich man's child to a slave and similarly turn a slave to a prince.)
- *A bi mo ko gbon, a ni ki o saa maa ku, kin ni o n pa eniyan bi aigbon?* – A parent who begets a foolish/stupid child and one who says the child should not die, what kills a person faster than stupidity? (To encourage intellectual development of the child or to inculcate discipline/wisdom in the child. It also means that intellectual development of a child comes through discipline.)

The Yorùbá believe strongly in child training and education. Education here does not mean modern formal education, but the kind of education that makes a child responsible and empowers him or her to be self-reliant. It is believed that a child who is not well trained will bring shame to the family, so emphasis is placed on training (home training, moral/religious upbringing and skill acquisition). Similarly, they frown at over-indulgence that may breed a spoiled, irresponsible child. Thus, a child must be disciplined in order to ensure compliance to the education being given at home. In the same order, the Yorùbá believe that child training/education is an inheritance that cannot be taken away from that child. It is their persuasion that even if a prince is not trained or educated, he can become a slave; and a slave that is trained can turn out a prince.

4) **Opposing child labour/abuse**

- *Atari ajanaku ki i seru omode* – The head of an elephant is not a load for a child to carry. (To warn parents from giving their children overly laborious tasks.)
- *Atari omode ko ru eru awo* – A child cannot dare the responsibility of *Ifa* priest (being versed in mystery). (Still stressing the limited ability of children to undertake certain tasks meant for adults.)
- *Abiyamo s'owo k oto na omo re, a fi abara gbighona na mo elomiran* – A mother hollows her palm to beat/slap her child but a hot-tempered mother beats/slaps another person's child in anger. (Warning against maltreating other people's children.)
- *Agba lo n je ori adan, omode lo n je ori eyekeye* – The elder eats the bat's head, while the child eats the head of any bird. (To acknowledge the elders' ability to handle special situations or difficult tasks that a child cannot perform/handle.)
- *Agba wa bura bi ewe ko ba se e ri* – Elder come and swear if you did not experience youthful exuberance. (To prove that certain actions of excesses by the youth are normal in

life. This proverb exonerates children from being punished for every offence they commit.)

The Yorùbá believe that children should be treated with care and dignity. Thus certain tasks are meant to be performed by adults only because children do not have the ability to perform such tasks. It will amount to abuse to give such difficult tasks to children to perform. Therefore, adults should take responsibility for them. In the saying, “the head of the elephant is not a load for a child to carry”, the elephant’s head typifies tasks that children should not be given. It means that the Yorùbá understand the limitation of children’s ability, such that an advice is given that children should not be given any responsibility that is above their physical or mental ability. It is also necessary to mention that the Yorùbá frown at child abuse. No one is allowed to maltreat a child for any reason, even if a child misbehaves, hence the saying that you cannot kill a bad or rude child.

5) Guidance for children

- *Agba kii wa l’oja, k ori omo tuntun wo* – An elder cannot be in the market and watch the head of a new-born baby bend. (It means that training/advising a child will enable him/her to act rightly and the responsibility of training a child rests on the adult members/elders in the society.)
- *Agba oje l’oje wewe n to leyin* – The chief masquerade is the model for younger masquerades. (Encouraging correct guidance and provision of effective leadership for children and youths.)

Children are expected to be guided by the adults. It is believed that children are limited in knowledge and understanding of issues, thus they are liable to make mistakes. As a result, they need to be guided and supervised. In fact, it is a responsibility placed in the custody of adults to ensure that children do not go astray by appropriately guiding and advising such children.

6) Consciousness of present action on children’s future

Agba t’o ba gbin ebu ika, ori omo re ni yoo bu le – Anyone who perpetrates evil/wickedness, the children will reap the effect. (This proverb illustrates the law

- of retribution. An elder may die before vengeance will take its toll and then the children will bear the consequence(s) of the elder’s/parents’ actions or vice-versa.)
- *Agba t o ro fo ika, omo re yoo je nbe* – An elder who prepares a vegetable soup (concoction of evil), his children will eat of it. (Warning to parents to desist from engaging in evil practices that can have negative effects on the children in the future.)

The Yorùbá are also aware that actions and inactions of the present by the parents may have an effect on the future of their children. Whatever wickedness is done in the society in the present will have consequences for the future generation. It is therefore necessary for the parents/adults to be conscious of what they do now in order to prepare a better future for their children/the upcoming generation.

From the foregoing, we have insights into the Yorùbá conception of the child and his or her rights. A closer look at these proverbs shows that all of them align with the rights of the child as contained in the Convention of the Rights of the Child (CRC). In fact, they represent most basic rights that children are entitled to and should enjoy as rights. Article 3 of the CRC emphasizes the care of children to ensure their well-being and best interest as the duties of parents, guardians or individuals that are legally responsible for them. This idea is totally embedded in these proverbs, recognizing parents as primary providers of care for children. As far as education is concerned, Article 28 stresses the rights of the child to education. The Yorùbá also believe that the child needs to be educated and trained in order to guarantee his

or her future. In fact, the Yorùbá place importance on guidance of children by adults by way of counselling, discipline and advice (UNICEF, 2004).

In the same vein, the Yorùbá do not tolerate abuse of children. In fact, there is no condition that permits a child to be maltreated, even when a child has committed an offence. In other words, the Yorùbá believe in the protection of children from practices that can endanger their lives, just as the CRC specifies children's protection from exploitation, drugs, sexual abuse, slavery etc.

Conclusion

It is then clear that the idea of the rights of the child is not strange to the Yorùbá. It is well established in their practices and attitudes as shown in their proverbs. It follows then that most of the dictates in the CRC are attainable among the Yorùbá. This offers great hope to children rights' advocates and development agents working among the Yorùbá that improving the rights of the child will not be difficult to achieve. It is true that so many things have changed against the background of civilization and modernity with its attendant infiltrations into the thinking of modern parents and parenting, coupled with the fact that adverse economic situations are tampering with people's ideologies, values, good healthy practices about handling children: the fact still remains that the possibility of improving and sustaining the rights of the child among the Yorùbá is high having been part of their belief systems and practices.

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