

**Tackling National Challenges in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century: The  
Role of Oral Literature**

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**Abstract**

In all parts of the world, the 21<sup>st</sup> century portends the escalation of many life-threatening challenges. These challenges include excruciating poverty, outbreaks of diseases, plastic pollution and contamination of land and sea, extreme challenges in the biosphere, uncontrollable climatic changes and so on. In addition, each nation has her peculiar challenges as can be seen in the rampaging actions of terrorists and regional militants, inflation and embezzlement of public funds, epileptic power supply to mention but a few as can be seen in Nigeria. Many are the challenges and there is the need to tackle them all. A cursory look at them seems to suggest that only the expertise of social and physical scientists are needed. Oral in all its genres, one may say, may not be useful since what is needed is the technical expertise of other professionals. This view is wrong because oral literature apart from being capable of solving some of the problems, can impact its usefulness on those who

are to do the work by helping to orchestrate the needs of the people, entertaining, consoling, satirizing and exhorting them. Folklore's second mentioned method of solving social problems is in line with the stand of the United Nations Organization which after enumerating its seventeen goals that can transform the world, asks whoever wants to be involved to start by telling these goals to others. This is how the work of a folklorist can help in propping up the efforts of these scientists who are directly doing the job. It is in this capacity that the different genres of oral literature can be used in combating the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century in this nation. As one Igbo proverb puts it: "*Nkwadebe ogu ka onunu ya mma* – Preparation for war is better than fighting the war itself".

## **Introduction**

The 21<sup>st</sup> century is so far the only century which has been assessed to have just 50% chance of survival for humanity (Rees qtd in Martin n.p.). The reason behind this bizarre projection is the plethora of challenges which is besieging all nations of the world. These challenges can be seen in all aspects of life and they are geographical, economic, social, and so on. It seems that man's incursion into the realm of the sciences has muddled the water of life, and without all putting heads together, half of humanity may be annihilated before the century wobbles to an end.

One of the most glaring challenges so far seen is climate change. Experts have it that atmospheric carbon dioxide is in the increase. This, which we in the tropic have noticed as an extreme heat has other negative effects some of which are: "... changing rainfall, retreating glaciers, sea level rise, changing animal migration. [Others are] unpredictable weather patterns, increased risk of heat wave and drought, increased risk of flood, increased risk of severe weather" (Royal Geographical society n.p.).

Due to this extreme heat, James Martin calls for the modeling of the planet's system. According to him: "Because we need to be sure [that] we do not go beyond the point at which global warming cannot be reversed, earth system science must be meticulously modeled and monitoring must be precise" (n.p.). This in itself is encouraging, for science though a very helpful and good field of study is not there only to muddle the water but to purify it as well. Without it, man would never have been in this state. So, it can as well help to find solutions to the problems it creates.

As it is now, Nigeria is one of the nations suffering from deforestation. What can be done? Can laws from the government debar people from felling down trees for the purpose of bio-fuel, timber trade, urbanization, et cetera. Whether we realize it or not, the major works of the rainforest which we are depleting include: "... absorbing carbon dioxide from the atmosphere, producing oxygen, recycling essential nutrients such as nitrogen and phosphorus [thereby] regulating temperature and precipitation and protecting watersheds from soil erosion" (Royal Geographical Society n.p.)

Sequel to this is the oozing into the atmosphere of other air pollutants. This can be as a result of burning of such substances like wood, coal and petroleum products. The situation has gone to the extent that the effect is easily discernable. Collect rain water with a white container and notice that the water is almost black in colour. This contaminated water in some places is used for domestic purposes. In view of this, the report of the World Health Organization (WHO) that in 2012, the world recorded 3.7 million premature deaths worldwide to outdoor air pollution must not be doubted (qtd by the Royal Geographical Society n.p.).

Stemming from the foregoing is the challenge of how far the fossil fuels will last without finishing especially for countries like Nigeria with mono-economy. These two challenges are calling humanity to find an alternative, most preferably one that is renewable with less havoc to humanity.

It is not all the challenges that have to do with man's mishandling of the environment. Man has been so ravenous that he has so disorganized the world that it has turned into a tottering pillar of stones. One of such disorganized areas is in the field of fishing where 87% of the world's fish species have been depleted. What is the alternative to those who earn their living from the water? What is the alternative source of protein to over fifteen million Nigerians who depend on fish for their protein? With increasing population, there ought to be increasing number of fish but not so is the case. The situation is so bad that the "UN Food and Agricultural Organization (UNFAO) predicts that by 2020, there ought to be an additional 37 million tons of farmed fish per year to maintain levels of seafood consumption" (Royal Geographical Society n.p.).

The situation is so bad that many animals and plants are in danger list because many of the animals have been cornered and decimated. The trees have been cut down and in the process, the carbon dioxide which they catch and use for their photosynthesis is now let loose thereby allowing more heat to descend on humanity. This challenge can be tackled with environmental protection laws.

Many are the challenges which the global community faces. Nigeria shares in these challenges and then, due to her peculiar environment, the nation also experiences some of them in a more heightened form. Some of these are: grappling with population growth, threats from insurgents, terrorists and kidnappers who are equipped with sophisticated weapons of

mass destruction, sudden outbreak of such natural hazards like flooding.

In addition but not peculiar to Nigeria alone is the outbreak of diseases. We have survived Ebola virus, Bird flu and Lassa fever. Who knows which one will come next? Also, let us alert ourselves that with more interaction with the outside world and with more depreciation in the standard of living, it is a sure guess that sooner or later, another disease may come up. We need to change our life style because some of our problems are as a result of the way we live.

It is a normal occurrence in all Nigerian urban areas for people to empty their rubbish into the gutters as soon as it starts raining. Dumped into these gutters are plastics, putrefying left-over food, fecal matter et cetera. The result is that these are used to block the gutters and make them veritable maternity homes for mosquitoes. But some find their way into the rivers, streams and ocean. In fact, “46,000 pieces of plastic are floating on every square mile of the ocean” (Royal Geographical Society n.p.). Some of them find themselves into people’s farmlands and sources of water supply. The threat here is that since they cannot decompose, they threaten aquatic life and food chains. But can we Nigerians grapple effectively with such threats that affect our farms, roads, and water resources? In addition, some of these non-decomposable plastics are carcinogenic with its health implications. In fact, the 21st century is froth with hydra-headed challenges and dangers that call for international cooperation.

Luckily enough, the UNO has come up with seventeen goals: “On September 25th, 2015, countries adopted a set of goals to end poverty, protect the planet and ensure prosperity for all as part of a new sustainable development agenda (n.p.). When these are carefully implemented, they will help to end poverty and hunger and by so doing, helping in tackling some

of these challenges. They will usher in an era of good health, quality education, gender equality, clean water, affordable and clean energy, economic growth, industry and reduced inequalities (UNO n.p.). Other benefits can be felt in responsible consumption and production, tackling climatic destabilization and living a more meaningful life on earth. These are some of the challenges in the 21st century and how to tackle them. But in all, none remembers that the Arts can proffer solutions.

Since what has been enumerated require high profile engineering, economics, management, even military and diplomatic alliance, to which extent can the different genres of oral literature which is an arm of the neglected art be helpful? What technical expertise has a folklorist that can enable him to face the challenges above in view of the fact that even at this age; some people take folklore as a remnant of what used to be obtainable among illiterate and poor folk? But then, the stand of this paper is that oral literature which is an aspect of folklore is needed in handling these problems which have been assessed to be capable of reducing 50% of the world population before the century comes to an end.

### **The Role of Oral Literature**

In spite of the enormity of the challenges and the technical adroitness required from different professionals, oral literature can still be useful both in direct participation and from an ancillary position. This is because it can work very well on those professionals who will be in the forefront in this struggle. To alert all and sundry, the United Nations Organization sent out a distress call inviting all hands to be on deck. Therefore, it is not just the contributions of geographers, economists, medical doctors, engineers and computer scientists are needed in implementing the seventeen goals that can help in transforming the world. For those who have no scientific

training, the UNO wrote: “Do you want to get involved? You can start by telling everyone about them [the seventeen goals]” (n.p.). This is where a folklorist who in his creative output can entertain, educate and help to build the people’s culture can come in and make his contribution.

That this is the genesis of confronting the plethora of challenges of this century can be seen from the stand of David Scott Clegg who has it that the skills needed are: “... communication, collaboration, critical thinking, problem solving, creativity, adaptability. There are more, but these are generally agreed upon as the skills required to navigate the waters of the 21st century” (n.p.). In other words, no matter the number of professionals collected to tackle each of the challenges, something beyond expert knowledge is required. After all, what is the essence of vast knowledge of the experts if there is no rapport between them? If they do not agree on what they will do, their efforts will reduce to nothing. The result of such efforts will be similar to the biblical story of the building of the tower of Babel. The builders of the tower at a time could no longer understand each other because each was speaking a different language. The result is that the children of men had to abandon the building of the gigantic edifice with which to make a name for themselves, show off their unity and congratulate themselves for a job well done (Gen. 11:4).

Concerning the need for enthronement of communication channel, one should note that it must start from the home since the attitude one fails to learn when one is young may be difficult to be learnt later in life. These experts should have a favourable home environment for them to have relaxed minds. When relaxed, they can bring out their best. It is only then that they can cooperate with their fellow experts in order that they can team up together to achieve something tangible and desirable.

That oral literature is best suited as the ancillary ship in navigating the deep and crocodile-infested waters of the 21st century is seen in what it has been doing all over the ages. It has been transforming itself to face new challenges. While some keep on collecting and saving whatever they can lay hands on so as to preserve the genre, oral literature keeps on adjusting itself to be facing new challenges no matter where and when it encounters them.

This stand accords well with Liz Gunner's praise of the genre. According to her: "We can see it as a mode of communication that has in the past been finely honed to fit a myriad of different social, ideological and aesthetic needs in many different societies on the continent [of Africa]" (69). If it has been helping in the different needs of other centuries, why cannot it be beneficial in the 21st century? This is more so when the scholar goes on to state that in "... the era of globalization, orality has not disappeared but has often adapted itself in its many different forms to become a vehicle for the expression of the fears and hopes of new generations of Africans" (70).

In all, oral literature through its different genres can accomplish much in society. Depending on the genre, it expresses societal expectations and aspirations, satirizes those whose actions fall short of the required standard thereby being a veritable tool in social control, helps to orchestrate the needs of the people, praises those who live up to expectations, entertains the people who bear the burden of society directly, stipulates the relationship between the people and the unseen, consoles those who are suffering or are directly bearing the burdens or the challenges on their heads.

### **The Role of Poetry**

Many are the ways through which oral literature can be used in tackling the challenges of this century through its



different genres. Like written literature, oral literature is made up of poetry but mainly in the form of songs examples of which are war songs, songs associated with peace, funeral, birth and so on. Other aspects of oral poetry can be seen in religious and spiritual observances example of which are invocation and incantation.

In areas where there are monarchies examples of which are Idah of Igala land, Bomo village of Zaria in Kaduna State and Oyo, there are court poets whose duty is not only to eulogize the King but also to satirize negative actions of the antagonists of the land. In that case, the actions of all and sundry are put on check.

In spite of the topsy-turvy nature of society, there is the more need for checks and balances, for mortals when left unchecked may turn brutish, arrogant and domineering. The experts who will be directly involved in tackling the challenges will have an enabling environment for them to work. They themselves will know that their importance will not enter into their heads and in the process making them to misbehave. In that case, oral literature can be helpful to the nation.

Apart from this type of poetry, there are numerous others which serve many special purposes. As Okey Umeh records:

Between the early days of childhood and the age of maturity or adolescence, there is poetry that aims at inculcating into the child, the accepted norms, beliefs and values of the community. Ideals of motherhood are inculcated into the female child while those of industry, courage and honesty are instilled into the male child through poetry. Other societal ideals like hospitality, obedience to parents

and elders, wit and caution are also embodied in these poems (29).

These children trained in this way are the future professionals on whose shoulders will lie the hope of the nation. Definitely, when they are well trained and steeped deep into societal aspirations, needs, expected and acceptable behaviour, then they can be relied on to tackle the plethora of challenges facing the nation. In this way, oral literature will serve the nation as it has been doing all over the years.

Another type of oral poetry is lamentation poetry which helps to release tension due to the death of somebody. Such a poem also helps to evaluate how well the dead lived while he was on earth. The implication is that those who live bad lives by being of antithetical behaviour to the requirements of the culture of the people are satirized or their actions are criticized. Nobody wants to be treated like that. Since many people must die in this century and since the expectation is that there will be more deaths judging from the 50% evaluation seen above, those surviving must in one way or the other release the sorrow they will encounter. Also, everybody will be forced to consider his life style so as not to attract the criticism of the lamentation poets. In that case, oral literature will create a favourable environment for the experts who are involved in tackling the challenges and at the same time curtail their excesses since it is possible that some of them may be tempted to be puffed up.

With intensification of the challenges, the expectation is that religious poetry will be in the increase. The reason is that when man is faced by unmanageable challenges, he becomes religious and looks beyond his immediate surroundings for solution. Religious poems are such poems like religious songs, invocational and incantatory eruptions which are used to commune with or manipulate unseen forces or beings that one

cannot easily handle. And by many people inclining towards increased number of such poems, one is reminded of what Umeh says: “The Igbo [and indeed other tribes of Nigeria] believe that it is only when there is justice and fair play between human beings on one hand, and between human beings and the spirits on the other hand, that the continuity, the stability and the happiness of the community are answered” (38).

The result is that the spirits will either respond to the increased calls of the century or they will not. If they do, that is oral literature helping out. If they do not, the euphoria, hope and the momentary joy of the people while they are communing with the unseen forces is still oral literature helping in tackling the numerous challenges of the century.

The situations already seen above must have occurred to Ikyer Aondofa when he states that oral poetry:

... has steadily strengthened itself due to its relevance to the Tiv society and has strong influence across the board of class, sex and ideology. Not just that the melodies of the poets are mellifluous, the poems serve as a conscious-raising tool for social change and continuity (136).

This is more so when oral poetry in molding the minds of the people including those who are directly tackling the challenges, transforms their behaviour for the better. In its multifarious functions, it influences attitudes thereby “... re-establishing values and generally [ensuring] social order and change” (Aondofa 136). This scholar goes on to point out that oral poetry is imperative in “... economic partnership and development, religious and spiritual coherence, political stability, collective consciousness and value and reason re-orientation and projection” (136).

The result is that oral literature changes people into re-thinking of their attitudes. Since there are many facets of the genre, it affects a lot of people starting from the babies who are mollified with children's rhymes to adults who it satirizes, consoles or eulogizes. This is how it will work when it gets to the people including the experts who will be battling with some of the challenges.

But due to urbanization with its atomizing effect on society, oral poetry has been transforming itself. Therefore, it no longer gets to everybody directly. In its indirect dissemination, there are some minstrels who record their songs and sell to the public. Under this category are such musicians like Mike Ejeagha, Sunny Ade, Asa, Lagbaja and many others. However, the power of transformation shown by the direct one is highly reduced here. But no matter the extent of its power, it is better than having nothing. Even if it only entertains the professionals at the forefront of those tackling some of the challenges, it is better than having nothing.

The ability of oral poetry to collect and channel the collective strength of every member of society to a useful end can be seen in one popular chant of the people of Aba in Abia state. This chant has so permeated into all the nooks and crannies of Igbo land that almost everybody knows it. The song goes like this:

***Nzogbu nzogbu!***

***Enyi mba, enyi!***

While the chorus leader sings the first line which when translated means "Trample to death, trample to death," the members of the audience reply: "Elephantine town, elephant!" This song normally comes up when there is a challenge that requires harnessing the strength of all and sundry. It is then not

surprising that this city can easily rise up at the spur of a moment to fight even armed soldiers, face any challenge and at the same time be victorious. It is on record that the weird and formidable vigilante group Bakassi Boys that made Anambra State the safest state in Nigeria during the governorship of Dr. Chinwoke Mbadinuju, originated in this town. Also in 1929, the women of the town gathered together to fight the British colonialists who imposed high taxes on their husbands' palm products (*Encarta* n.p.). Although fifty of them were killed in the process, the point has been made that these women were capable of uniting themselves to face challenges. In fact, the old war song that originated from the Ngwa people of Aba did its job very well.

This is how oral literature harnesses the power of the individuals of society in order for them to face challenges. Therefore, if there is such a challenge as the intrusion of militants, insurgents or anything that calls for collective strength, what is required is for somebody even in the middle of a market place to call the attention of others, explain to them what has gone wrong, bolster their morale and chant the old war song. The next is the reply and a move into action.

In this way, any Nigerian can call the attention of the experts and ginger them into action after explaining the enormity of problems to them. As it has been observed:

Many countries have fallen and still fall back on their oral literature as sources of inspiration and courage in their attempt to liberate their countries from colonialists, tyrannical and corrupt rulers. The Mau Mau struggle in Kenya succeeded not because of their military strength but because they identified and developed those aspects of their oral literature that strengthened their resistance; songs of struggle, songs

of praise, songs of faith and songs of hope were common features of their lives (Mbunda 55).

Many are the ways in which oral poetry can serve as a tool that can be used in tackling the challenges envisaged in this turbulent century. Due to the multifaceted genres of oral poetry some of which are the lyric, lamentation, panegyric, birth songs, many are the ways in which it can be used to help the people to live their normal lives. But then, there are other genres of oral literature as can be seen shortly.

### **The Folktale as a Veritable Tool**

Oral literature has prose narratives and these are the folktale, myth, legend and many others. There are some sub-genres which combine the characteristics of poetry and prose together. Examples are the proverb and the tongue-twister but the prose component dominates over the poetry content. Then, the question is, how will these help the experts to tackle the challenges as enumerated above? “Folktales are stories and like...other stories do more than entertain. They instruct us by showing us things about our lives we had not known before reading them. Some stories make instruction or teaching their primary purpose” (DiYanni 2). In this regard, folktales are didactic stories with animal, human, plant and even spirit characters the purpose of which is to entertain and teach morals. That explains why in a typical African folktale, there is always an etiological summary.

In using such tales generally known as Märchen in sustaining the experts facing the challenges, one should note that the moral import of tales is better grasped than the moralistic preaching of men of God because the wonder tales encapsulate their teachings in stories full of amazement and wonder. That is why it can be remembered more easily than the dry and moralistic words of the preachers. Since such tales can

be turned into satire or to whichever end one wants, a relapsing or deviant expert can be made to change his ways.

But most importantly is the way folktales work on children who are the main recipients of the tales. A society whose younger ones are not initiated into what is held sacred or profane is a society that is about to disintegrate because it is a society that allows wanton destruction of values. Some of these children belong to those at the forefront battling with the challenges. A professional whose family is in disarray because of rascally behaving children cannot concentrate enough to perform well. But if these children are introduced early to the culture of storytelling, they should learn early enough that "... they are expected to derive knowledge and wisdom from [these] ... stories and through these stories to become acquainted with the customs, traditions and religion of the people" (Taiwo 15). Use the stories for the children, they will grow up to become responsible citizens who in due time will join to redeem the tottering society.

The importance of the folktale has been emphasized by different scholars. With its communication ability especially when children are involved, the future of society is taken proper care of. These children are the future economists, social and physical scientists, geographers, soldiers, military personnel and so on. As one scholar who sees the importance of the folktale on these children puts it: "The functions of folktales range from educating children, acting as a vehicle for satire and social protest, cultural propagation, promoting group solidarity and providing an enjoyable escape from reality" (Mbunda 129).

This stand is similar to that of F. B. O. Akporobaro but in his own, he sees some similarities between the functions of folktales and proverbs. As he puts it:

In traditional societies, elders tell stories about the major social values of life. Stories and proverbs are used to teach the lessons of honesty, kindness, hard work, helpfulness, good faith, obedience and endurance. Proverbs are used by elders to instruct other elders about specific codes of behaviour and to remind listeners of age-old wisdom and truth (60).

No matter the way these two (the folktale and the proverb) are looked at, they are very useful and can act in both ancillary and direct positions in tackling the challenges of the century.

Since children must be born and be trained in this country, there is need to help them with tales since these tales are as useful as they are said above. Even if the tales are used as bugaboo, they are still useful. When untrained and disobedient children are left on their own, their behaviour will become additional challenges that will disrupt the lives and families of those fighting against the major challenges. In this way, such tales are very important tools.

In addition, any good storyteller can use his talent to earn a living for such a person can do like Mike Ejeagha who records his tales in CD plates for public consumption. The person can also use the television and the radio to educate and entertain the public using these tales. In that case, more people will be working for a living thereby reducing poverty and the number of people who will join the group of insurgents, militants, terrorists, kidnappers and hoodlums who give others sleepless nights. This is another way of tackling the ailing economy of the country. That the folktale has the clout to generate employment can be seen in the observation that:

He who has the ability to tell good, amusing and memorable stories can achieve a status title. A story teller in the community is recognized for that. Through



his status and recognition, he gains favours from the chief or leader and also is able to attract a female for a wife in just the same way in which a good warrior, farmer by his status achieves a livelihood (Akporobaro 58).

But apart from the Märchen, there are other sub-genres like the myth and legend. But due to page limitation, it is not possible to look at them apart from showing that while myths are told to explain certain mysteries of existence and are used in some communities as a guide to action, legends "... may tell us about people who really lived and things which really happened. But as a rule, they are embellished to make them sound more romantic and fascinating" (Gunner 14). In this case, legends can be used to bolster the morale of those tackling the challenges by projecting the achievements and successes of these legendary figures that lived before them. In their bid to compete with these legendary heroes, social situations can be changed for the better. On the other hand, myths can be used in "... ordering of societies through the public recitation of genealogies and praises of rulers ..." (Gunner 69). In all, every sub-genre of the folktale can be used to tackle the national challenges of the 21st century.

### **Oral Drama and Social Engineering**

When it comes to drama, oral literature offers the masquerade drama, ritual drama and dance as sub-genres. These are also highly effective in confronting and controlling societal menace. The special forte of oral drama in confronting the challenges of this century and any other period is that it can be more radical and effective since all the sub-genres so far considered cannot be too confrontational. The highest that they can do is to teach, satirize and appeal to somebody's conscience. But in the traditional setting, apart from community theatre which can be staged at any place—village

squares, market places, inside people's compounds and in the fronts of town halls to mention but a few—so as to sensitize and get the information directly to the people, there are magical and pugnacious forms of drama. Such types of drama are more effective when compared with western-introduced drama which is so elitist that it has distanced itself from the target audience. In this way, its effectiveness has been greatly reduced.

As was done above, we cannot look at all the sub-genres in oral drama since space cannot allow such. That explains why this section can only talk about masquerade performance as an aspect of the confrontational power of oral drama.

What the Westerners call the masquerade is far different from what some parts of this nation call the masquerade. To the Westerners, any person that covers his face and parts of his body is a masquerade. That is not so in Nigeria because the Igbo *mmonwu*, Yoruba *Egungun*, Ijaw *Owu*, Idoma *Ekwu*, Hausa and Bambuka *Dodo* to mention the most prominent, are all ancestral spirits who come to sojourn temporarily with the descendants they left on earth. Therefore, hiding the face or covering some parts of the body by just any person cannot imbue the person with the aura, power and social regard which the masquerade enjoys. It is with the help of this aura which surrounds the entity that it can help in tackling the challenges of the century. But then what or who is the masquerade?

Simply stated, the masquerade in this nation especially in Igbo land is believed to be an ancestral spirit which comes from the bowel of the earth when palm wine is poured into an ant-hole after the performance of some rituals. Then, the initiates beat the ant-hole with a newly opened and yellowish palm frond. Once this is done, out comes the masquerade in its

ferocity, grandeur and awe-inspiring posture. This emergence of an ancestral spirit that is invited to be in the midst of people can explain Ola Rotimi's stand that the masquerade "... is a concrete evidence of Nigerian's world-view that asserts the union between man and the powers – the mortal and the immortal. It is a testimony of the continuity of the life force" (42).

Normally, there are different types of the masquerade and they serve different functions in society. Some come out at night and are called night masquerades. Apart from these, there are some that dance and entertain. Others are so fierce looking and ugly that pregnant women hide their faces lest the babies in their wombs would resemble them. On the whole, masquerades are meant for men except when elderly women are nominated and initiated into the cult. Such women who have for long passed the age of menopause are called mothers of the masquerade. They do not participate in most of the activities. Masquerades are so powerful and highly regarded that nobody points at them with the person's fingers for such can be seen as a sign of disrespect.

The masquerade due to its ancestral connection can be used in tackling some of the challenges – partly in ancillary position and partly directly because it has been known to be doing so. As an illustration, one of the researchers was on a national assignment in Umueri which is in Anambra East Local Government Area, Anambra State. Unknown to him and his group, nobody would come out at night because the burden of securing the town was laid on masquerades. Also, nobody would allow any type of light to be seen outside his compound. But the national visiting team was on the balcony of a story building with lights, working and chatting noisily. The group was told the following morning that they escaped being dragged down from the place and harmed by masquerades who were securing the town because the masquerades knew not only

their mission in the town but were in support of their not being molested.

In view of the above illustrations, one can rightly say that masquerades in Nigeria can tackle directly the problem of insurgency, kidnapping and militancy. They settle cases with utmost uprightness. Sometimes what they do is glaringly uncanny or how can one explain how the night masquerade would at night get to the top of two palm trees which are standing far apart and tie their fronds together? One needs to point out the Wonder Masquerades of Delta State. Are these spirits or humans? With which mechanism do the initiates make them to grow like trees at the beating of drums and collapse, to become like discarded clothes at the reversal of the drum beats? Some of the activities of the masquerade defy natural laws. An example can be cited with some of their drummers who at the heat of their performance would throw their drums upwards for the drums to hang on the air only to fall onto their hands later at their command.

With this unearthly power and knowledge, this oral drama instills fear into people and helps to keep order in society. Some of them using their mystical power can trace and destroy evil doers. Some also satirize but most use this supernatural power to carry out their will. Because of this unearthly connection, they do not overstep bounds when they carry out their activities. Therefore, they can be used to curtail the excesses of people especially the insurgents and militants and make them law abiding thereby bringing about peace. As these masquerades have been assessed in society, they "... constitute a machinery of government, for establishing order in the town. They possess power which stems from their religious symbolism and authority" (Chukwuma 45).

## **Conclusion**

It is not for the purpose of terrifying people that this century has been assessed to be a century where the world's population will be reduced by half. This reduction can be as a result of the numerous problems (some of which have started manifesting) which will face humanity. Some of them are economically, geographically, socially and biologically generated. What is required is for all hands to be on deck. Else, the globe will submerge.

Some of these problems require direct tackling from experts in each field. Others can be handled through intervention of the government. It is here that oral literature through its numerous sub-genres can be applied both on such challenges like insurgency and insecurity and on the experts who are tackling some of the problems. Some of the genres can help them in making their children docile. Some of the sub-genres can be applied on the experts themselves when they start misbehaving while others can be used to secure them and make their working environment conducive for them. In this case, different genres of oral literature can be used in tackling the challenges of the 21st century.

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