

# Yorùbá Proverbs, Names and National Consciousness

by

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## Introduction

Among Africans, names reflect the worldview of a people, hence some names are used to accentuate and situate the significance of an experience, an event or a phenomenon. In this respect, especially in Yorùbá language, some proverbs underscore the importance of names and others specific names that correlate with proverbs.

This paper is an attempt to situate Yorùbá proverbs, names, role-expectations, aspirations and consciousness towards building and contributing to the development of a national consciousness. The paper proceeds with a critical exposition of the general nature of Yorùbá proverbs, an exploration of the dialectical relationship between Yorùbá proverbs and names, and argues that this relationship instantiates a descriptivist theory of reference of names in the philosophy of language, with concluding particulars that critically espouses the values and virtues embedded in selected Yorùbá proverbs and names.

## The General Nature of Proverbs

Proverbs is one of the phenomena that human beings are mostly familiar with yet lacks a universally accepted definition<sup>i</sup>. As Wolfgang Mieder<sup>ii</sup> has shown in his discussion of various attempts at defining proverbs, it is difficult to arrive at universally acceptable and unambiguous proverb markers that would enable us to identify positively a sentence as proverbial. As a result, in talking about proverbs, the puzzlement one often finds oneself in is that it is easy to detect a flaw in the definitions others have proffered, but it is difficult to propose one own's which is infallible. In fact, R.C. Trench noted that most attempts at defining proverbs merely identify what are considered as the ornaments of good proverbs, but (not) the essential marks of all (proverbs)<sup>iii</sup>. Defining a phenomenon requires identifying necessary and essential qualities, which define a proverb.

*The Journal of Pan African Studies*, vol. 1, no.4, June 2006

However, it must be noted that though it may be difficult to arrive at a universally accepted definition of proverbs, we know what it is, because proverbs are a universal phenomenon.<sup>iv</sup> What differs from one culture to the other is the meaning that is attached to proverbs. Hence, ‘proverb must be analysed in each of its unique social contexts’<sup>v</sup>. In other words, ‘the proverbs of a community or nation is in a real sense an ethnography of the people which if systematized can give a penetrating picture of the people’s way of life, their philosophy, their criticism of life, moral truths and social values’<sup>vi</sup>. And in Africa, proverbs ‘have a different function and level of theoretical meaning that make them key components, as well as expressions of a culture’s viewpoints on a variety of important topics and problems.’<sup>vii</sup>

The Yorùbá, the subject of this paper, constitute the majority of people in South Western part of Nigeria, and are also found scattered in diverse countries all over the world. One distinct feature of the Yorùbás is their language, and how proverbs give it an aesthetic quality. Hence, the proverb, for the Yorùbá, ‘constitutes a powerful rhetorical device for the shaping of moral consciousness, opinions, and beliefs’<sup>viii</sup>. Among the Yorùbá, proverbs has become so interwoven with living speech that can be heard at anytime and occasion. Proverbs, among the Yorùbá also serve as means of achieving clarity and conciseness in discourse. For example, when a Yorùbá proverb says that ‘Òwe l’ẹsin ọrò, bí ọrò bá sọ̀nù, ọ̀we ni a fì ñwa a’, (‘A proverb is the horse which carries a subject under discussion along; if a subject under discussion goes astray, we use a proverb to track it’)<sup>ix</sup>, this shows that in every statement made to reflect decisions taken by Yorùbá people, proverbs are vehicles used in driving home their points.

It must be noted that though as Hallen hints, ‘proverbs do not introduce themselves to us as universal truths, as generalizations that always apply. Their pith, their point, their punch is situational or context-dependent to an essential degree’<sup>x</sup>. Hence, proverbs are products of peculiar and particular experiences of a people. In this respect, some proverbs, like ‘A kì í dúbúlẹ̀ ní ilẹ̀ ká yí şubú,<sup>xi</sup> (one cannot fall down when already on the ground), ‘A kì í mò í wẹ̀ kì a káyé já’<sup>xii</sup> (No matter one’s expertise in swimming, no one can swim through the universe) and ‘A kì í mòọ̀ rìn kí orí ó máa jì’ (no one walks without his head shaking) sound like common truisms which are derived from everyday experiences. Again, some proverbs are historical in origin, and bring to remembrance the events that led to their establishment. For instance, proverbs like ‘A fàdàmọ̀ dá’ mọ̀ lẹ̀kun àwówó’<sup>xiii</sup> (using the gun to stop an uprising), ‘A kị’ni í jẹ a kị’ni, a fi ‘ni hàn í jẹ a fi’ni hàn; ẹ̀wo ni ‘o kú ò, ará Ìbàdàn,’ l’ọ̀júdẹ̀ Sọ̀dẹ̀ké?’ (Salutation is known as salutation, betrayal is known to be betrayal; how does one classify ‘How are you, you native of Ibadan?’ in front of Sọ̀dẹ̀ké’s house?)<sup>xiv</sup>, ‘A rí şe l’a rí kà, a rí kà baba ìrẹ̀gún’<sup>xv</sup> (our deeds are what we can mention; what we can mention are the major credits we can gloat about) to mention a few, came into being during Yorùbá’s intra group hostilities, some of which resulted to wars.

More importantly, proverbs serve as charters of social and ethical norms in human interactions, extol what the society considers to be virtues, and condemn anti-social patterns of behaviour. Taylor Acher, a foremost scholar on proverbs, asserts that ‘proverbs are the simple truths of life and contain the ethical or moral values of a society’.<sup>xvi</sup> Thus, proverbs such as ‘Abanijé n ba ara rè jé’<sup>xvii</sup> (He who destroys others destroys himself), ‘A kì í láhun k’á ní iyì’<sup>xviii</sup> (We cannot be stingy and be honourable), ‘A kì í ní òtító ní inú k’á gbàwìn ikà s’òrùn’<sup>xix</sup> (We don’t know the truth and take delight in wrong doings), and ‘Apeèpo l’èhìn àgbà, àgbà ún bò wá kàn ó, k’ áwọn ọmọdé r’òhun pa’<sup>xx</sup> (he who strips the bark from the back of an elder (i.e. insults him), will become old, so that the youngsters will find something to strip him of (i.e. insult him in turn), {‘Apeèpo’ is one who strips the bark off a tree for medicinal purposes} etc, and inculcate some ethical virtues and injunctions.

In general, ‘proverbs evolved with the growth and development of the society, it reflects diverse aspects of a people’s culture, beliefs, traditional, social and political institutions, ethics, commerce, health, etc.’<sup>xxi</sup> Indeed, proverbs encapsulate the worldview of a people, and serve as means of arousing, defining, manifesting and establishing the expectations, aspirations and consciousness of a people. Kwame Gkekye<sup>xxii</sup> acknowledges this aspect and says ‘these sayings (proverbs)...contain some thoughts, which...expressed in words, (and which) all who are of that people, recognize at once as something which they knew full well already, which all the instinct of their lives and thoughts and traditions tells them to be true to their own nature’<sup>xxiii</sup>. Consequently, proverbs serve as linguistic confirmation of the totality of a people’s worldview and the epistemic cognition of this worldview, linked to other aspects of the Yorùbá worldview, such as name.

### **Proverbs, Names and Description**

A name, according to most cultural heritages, depicts the nature and life of a corporate personality, body or organisation; the focus and outlook of a personality, body or organisation, to a great extent, are influenced by the name he or she who carries it. For the Yorùbá, names are more than identification tags; they constitute an integral part of human existence. Some names are used to accentuate and situate the significance of an experience, event or phenomenon, and like proverbs, are instruments of arousing, defining, manifesting and establishing the expectations, aspirations and consciousness of the bearers.

It must be noted that among the Yorùbá, there are diverse sorts of names. For instance, there are names that are believed to be bestowed on the bearer by nature in virtue of some special or extra-ordinary features and circumstances about the birth of the child. Names such as these are called ‘orúkọ amùtòrunwá’ (names brought from heaven).

Examples are Táiwò, Kéhìndé, Ìdòwú, Ìdògbé, Àlàbá, Abòsèdè, Abíónà, Abíódún, Babátúndé, Babárìndé, Òkè, Dàda, Olúgbódi, Òjò, etc. Other kinds of names are appellations (inagije), like Olówóòfóyèkù, Olówóyeyè, Mārìndòtí, Jéjé, etc., and some are erroneously taken to be a name given to a child by a parent, however the discussion herein is primarily concerned with names deliberately or freely given to a child by her parents called ‘orúkò àbísò’ (as opposed to those bestowed on a child from heaven ‘orúkò amùtòrunwá’ and appellations.)<sup>xxiv</sup>.

According to the Yorùbá, no one bears a name without a reason, and no name exists without an explanation or a justification. According to Adéwoyè, the son of an Ifá priest could be called ‘Fágbèmi’, while a Sàngó worshipper could be called ‘Sàngóbùnmi’, because ‘ilé l’á á wò kí a tó sọ ọmọ l’órúkọ’<sup>xxv</sup> (i.e. ‘A child is named according to the circumstances of the home’). Hence, every name has its own peculiarity bestowed on it by virtue of certain circumstances, environment, the nature and the situation of the family or parent of the person being named. All these peculiarities serve as the explanation or justification for the name, and in some cases, the explanation or justification for a name is summed up into the name’s ‘oríkì’ (praise-name or cognomen), which reiterates the importance or significance of the name. This is why Yorùbá says ‘A kí í l’órúkọ kí á má ni oríkì’<sup>xxvi</sup> (we do not have names without a praise-name or cognomen).

Explaining the relationship between names and ‘oríkì’ (praise-name or cognomen) is another task, which is beyond the scope of this paper, however its important to note that proverbs are important in order to unravel the importance or significance of names which eventually explain the expectations, aspirations and consciousness embedded in a name.

The relationship between Yorùbá proverbs and names is an instantiation of the descriptivist theories of reference of names in the philosophy of language that attempts to solve the problem of how the reference of a name is fixed based on thesis that ‘...each meaningful (proper) name has associated with it a sort of descriptions, hence the unique thing that satisfies the description or in the case of the cluster theorists, enough of the descriptions, is the referent of the name, and when one uses a name the intended referent is determined by the descriptions that are associated with the name being used’<sup>xxvii</sup>. In other words, for the descriptivist theories, the reference of a name to its bearer is mediated by a description. That is, there is neither direct reference nor fixed relation between a reference term, such as a name, and the referent, and what determines the references of names are the descriptions, explanations, etc, associated with the names.

Among the adherents of the descriptivist theories of reference are John Locke, C. I. Lewis, G. Frege, John Searle, Bertrand Russell, and Ludwig Wittgenstein. The cardinal point they defend is the thesis of the descriptivist theories of reference that fix the reference of a name descriptions attached to it, i.e., the description attached to terms is subject to what human beings know about the referent.

For example, according to Russell, the reference of a proper name is determined by a definite description which, when analysed, picks out a referent of the name. The reference of names and descriptions to an object is neither fixed nor direct. When we say “Wólé Sóyínká”, we mean “The writer of *The Man Died*.” Whatever fits this description is the referent of the name “Wole Soyinka”<sup>xxviii</sup>. Thus, reference is mediated by the definite description associated with the name, although the discussion of the viability or otherwise of the descriptivist theories of reference is beyond the scope of this discourse<sup>xxix</sup>. What is germane here is that the relationship between Yorùbá proverbs and names stretches the thesis of the descriptivist theories beyond fixing reference of names.

Understandingly, proverbs are means of unravelling the descriptions and explanations attached with a name, not for the purpose of fixing reference but rather to define and establish role-expectations, aspirations and consciousness of the bearer of the name. In other words, role-expectations, aspirations and consciousness attached to Yorùbá names are unravelled through proverbs. And as the Yorùbá proverb ‘Òwe l’ẹ̀şin ọ̀rò, bí ọ̀rò bá sọ̀nù, ọ̀we ni a fì níwa a’, (‘A proverb is the horse which carries a subject under discussion along; if a subject under discussion goes astray, we use a proverb to track it’) suggests, every word or statement (names inclusive) in Yorùbá has an anchor (ẹ̀şin) found in proverbs, and if this anchor is lost or forgotten (and it is to be sought), it is a proverb that suggests the way to it<sup>xxx</sup>.

### Proverbs, Names and Consciousness: Analysis of Some Examples

There are two ways proverbs and names are related in order to define and establish the role-expectations, aspirations and consciousness of the Yorùbá. First there are proverbs that underscore the importance of names, thus I will examine five specific names that correlate with proverbs, and analyse six others. We shall begin with the first sense of the dialectical relations.

- (1) ‘Orúkọ ọmọ ni ijánu ọmọ’ – ‘A child’s name is his/her brake’
- (2) ‘Orúkọ ní ro ọmọ’ – ‘A child is influenced by his/her name’
- (3) ‘Orúkọ isọ ọmọ ní mó ọmọ lára’ – ‘A child gets used to behaving like his/her name’
- (4) ‘Orúkọ ní kọ saájú kí oyè ó tó tẹ̀le e’<sup>xxxi</sup> – ‘The name precedes the title’
- (5) ‘Orúkọ méjì ní èniyàn maá n ní, ọ̀tò l’orúkọ ojú, ọ̀tò sì ni orúkọ èhìn. Nítorí orúkọ èhìn ni kálukú fì n sọ iwà rẹ̀ hù’ - ‘Each person has two names; there is presence name; and there is the future name. It is because of the future name that everyone behaves with caution.’

The first proverb can literally be understood to mean that the name of a child is the only means of catching the attention of the child when in the midst of multitude. This is, however, not important, because virtually all names, even appellations, can also do this. Again, treating names as mere identification tags, as the literal interpretation of this proverb suggests, does not capture the pragmatic and ethical values attached to the name of a person. Yet, a more germane understanding of the proverb, ‘Orúkọ ọmọ ni ìjánu ọmọ’ (a child’s name is his/her brake), reveals that if a child has ‘a good name’<sup>xxxii</sup>, and he/she is aware of this, he/she will be conscious of what he/she does. Such a child would want to guard against any bad influence or conduct that could spoil the name or bring it to disrepute. In fact, the bearer of such a good name will also be mindful and attempt to emulate people who had bore this name before him/her<sup>xxxiii</sup>.

In this context, the name becomes a force that drives him/her, and acts as a catalyst, which propels the bearer to work and brake with cautions to regulate behaviour. Therefore, it is within the purview of this name that the bearer of the name defines, or is expected to define, his/her worldview and philosophy of life; virtues that would eventually have effects in the nation-state. For examples, the names: ‘Adéyemí’, ‘Adéníran’, ‘Fadéřera’, or names that show the work of the bearer’s family, e.g., ‘Ọdẹwálé’ (Ọde: hunter), ‘Ọlágún (Alágbẹde: Blacksmith), ‘Àyandélé’ (Onílù: Drummer) show that the bearer is from a royal family, and that anyone who bears any of these names would want to live according to the expectations of people concerning the name.

As a result, it would be frowned upon if a person called ‘Àyandélé’, who is from the family of drummers, cannot show his/her expertise on the drums, because a greater responsibility is bestowed on the bearer of the name to demonstrate this expertise. Therefore, it should be the aspiration of the bearer of the name to meet this challenge which encourages him/her to strive hard not to bear the name in vain, and as this is done, his/her work would improve, eventually contributing positively to the development of the nation.

In the same manner, the second and the third proverbs suggest that names play significant roles in accentuating the destiny and consciousness of the bearer. The second proverb suggests that once a child is conscious of the meaning of his/her name he/she would want to act accordingly, and whatever the child does, either consciously or otherwise is explained through his/her name. A child’s name, therefore, provides a ready explanation for why a child is involved in whatever he/she is doing. Hence, the Yorùbá often says ‘ọmọ aségítà tí n ta èpọ igi, orúkọ ló’ nrò’ (the child of wood dealer who sells wood’s bark is influenced by his/her name).

The third proverb shows that the name given to a child could suggest the kind of person the child would be, or what may happen to the child (thus, when the child behaves according to the dictate of the name, no one is surprised), and echo a proverb that says ‘A sọ ọmọ ní Sódé, ó lọ Èbì, ó dé, a sọ ọmọ ní Sóbò, ó lọ àjò, ó bọ; a wá sọ ọmọ ní Sórìnጔ, ó lọ s’ájò kò dé mó, a n̄sọ; tani kò mò pé ilé l’ọmọ ti mú orúkọ anù lọ<sup>xxxiv</sup> (we name a child Sódé, he went to Èbì and returned, we name a child Sóbò, he went on a journey and returned; we now name a child Sórìnጔ, he went on a journey and never returned, we are expecting him, who does not know that the child takes the name of never return from home), demonstrating that the name of a person can, in a sense be a platform for the destiny of the bearer thus providing an explanation for the bearer’s behaviour<sup>xxxv</sup>.

The fourth proverb shows that a name proceeds whatever position one achieves in society, and underscores that the bearer of a name, in whatever he or she is doing, is conscious of the fact that he or she has a name to protect, and essentially a person’s name is a harbinger of whatever the person will eventually become in life. The proverb can also be understood as a way to highlight the identity of the bearer, or an attempt to separate the name and the identity marker of a person, from other means of identifying him/her that may reflect traditional titles, social, religious, political and academic honours, or the roles (negative or positive) of the person. In a proverbial way, we can say: ‘nítórí ojò tí ọmọ bá maa dáràn ni ó se ní orúkọ tirè’ (it is because of the day a child will commit an offence that he/she has his own name), each person has a name, which will be used to identify him/her whenever there is a problem. Or that ‘òun tí a bá ẹ lóní, ọ̀rọ̀ itàn ni b’ódòla’ (whatever we do today is history tomorrow) based on the belief of the Yorùbá that whatever we do today becomes history tomorrow, hence people are conscious of their name and would be mindful of what they do, because whatever they do could make or mar the name. In this respect, ‘bí o láyà o ẹ̀kà, bí o rí ikú Gáà o s’òótó’ (if you are brave be wicked, if you witness Gáà’s death, you would be truthful) is a proverb that apart from warning people not to emulate Gáà’s way of life, it identifies the treacherous and tyrannical rule of the Oyo chief, Bashòrun Gáà who lived between 1750 and 1775<sup>xxxvi</sup> (thus today nobody bears that name again, as nobody who knows the story of Gáà would want to give the name to his/her son).

In the same vein, the last of the proverbs listed above strengthens the importance of a person’s name even after the bearer is no more. Among the Yorùbá, it is believed that names live longer than the bearer, which explains another proverb: ‘e jẹ a pàjùbà sílẹ̀ de ọ̀sù ọ̀lọ̀, e jẹ́ kí á jẹ́ orúkọ tó dùn sílẹ̀ d’ọmọ’ (let us prepare the barn for the new yam, let us bear and leave a good name behind for our descendants), that enjoins people to strive harder to live a worthy life so that their names would be a significant legacy for their descendants.

Special within our discussion is the importance of names in the human bid to achieve set goals in life which link name and roles with expectations, aspirations and social consciousness, notwithstanding that many Yorùbá names are shortened forms of a statement that convey a message or confers a responsibility, nevertheless, the consciousness attached to a name which the proverbs above underscore are socially created. Yet in a pure dialectical relation between name and proverb there is no necessary causal connection between a name and the message it conveys, the name does not ‘determine’ the consciousness of its bearer, and it is possible for a person not to be mindful of whatever message or responsibility is imposed by the name he/she bears. And if a person bears a name and is not conscious of the responsibility the name places then the name becomes a mere identification tag used solely to refer to the person. Hence, in general, the Yorùbá that there is no necessary entailment between a name and the significant values and virtues associated with it which explains a proverb that charges a person to be conscious of the significance of his or her name, e.g., ‘A kì í rí omọ Qba kí má rì àmì dàńsákì lára rẹ’ (we never see a prince or princess without the sign of royalty on him or her), and a proverb that asserts the disapproval of a person who does not take cognizance of the responsibilities imposed by a name says ‘a kì í fi ni joyè àwòdì kí á mà le gb’ádìè<sup>xxxvii</sup> (you don’t bear a name the expectations of which you cannot meet).

Juxtaposing the dialectical relationship of name and proverb, there are specific names that correlate some proverbs that in some cases have an origin in specific events and experiences in history, and thus serve as a way of reliving significant lessons, expectations, aspirations and roles, and experiences/events from where the proverb was originally enacted. Anyone who bears names contained in any of these proverbs would have the peculiar event or experience behind the name as watchword, while the significant lessons, expectations, aspirations and roles attached to the experience are automatically conferred upon whoever happens to bear the name.

For illustration, consider the following names and their corresponding proverbs:

Name	Corresponding Proverb
1. Kúmólú special	‘Bí kò bá n’ídí obìrin kì í jé ‘Kúmólú’ (Without a reason, a woman is never named to mark the death of a family pillar)
2. Qláníyọnu	‘Eni tí kò rí ọlá rí, tí ó sọ omọ rẹ ní Qláníyọnu’ (Those who have never experienced wealth or honour, say there is problem in wealth or honour and name their children so)



3. Aríléyan ‘Bàbá olórùlé kan tí ó sọ ọmọ rẹ ní Aríléyan, ní’bo ni ó yan sí?’ (An owner of one house who names his child ‘takes pride in ownership of many houses’, where is his pride?)
4. Àṣàmú sámú’ ‘Ọmọ tí yíò jẹ Àṣàmú, kékeré ni yíò ti ẹ ẹnu sámú’  
(A child that will be sharp, shows it early in his speech)
5. Apálará ‘Apá l’ará, ìgbònwọ ni iyèkan; bí a ò rí ẹni fẹhìntì bí ọlẹ li à n rí; bí a kò rí ẹni gbójúlẹ, a tẹra mó iṣẹ ẹni’  
(A man’s arms are his relatives, his elbows are his brothers and sisters; if we find no one to lean on, we are like a lazy man; if we find no one to rely on, we apply ourselves to our work)<sup>xxxviii</sup>.
6. Ańjùwọn ‘Ańjùwọn kò seé wí lẹjọ, ìjà ilara kò tán bọrò’  
(‘We are superior to them’ cannot be quoted as an argument or complaint in court; a quarrel due to envy is not settled by the passage of time)<sup>xxxix</sup>

(It must be noted that the corresponding proverb to each of these names is not the meaning, the proverb, as earlier explained, is the ‘ẹṣin’ that arouses, defines, manifests and establishes the expectations, aspirations and consciousness embedded in the name).

A person who bears any of the above names could be cautioned or spurred, as the case may be, into action when he/she remembers the corresponding proverb to the name. For instance, the name ‘Kúmólú’ literally means death has killed an important person in a family or the head of a family<sup>xl</sup>; and the corresponding proverb can literally be understood to make a point that there is problem in a family where a female, considered as a weaker being, signifies the passage of a great person in the family. More than this, the proverb, ‘Bí kò bá n’ídí obìrin kì í jẹ ‘Kúmólú’ shows that a family has lost a powerful person. The bearer of the name ‘Kúmólú’ is then used as a means of remembering that incidence. Therefore, the proverb ‘Bí kò bá n’ídí obìrin kì í jẹ ‘Kúmólú’ could also be understood to mean that when a strange thing happens, there is the need to find or explain the cause. In any of these interpretations, attached to the name ‘Kúmólú’, as the descriptivist theorist would argue, is a ‘description’ (of a history, an event), the cognizance of which would help in shaping the expectations, aspirations and consciousness of the bearer.

For example, a person named ‘Kúmólú’ if told the feat achieved by the person considered as an icon in the family, who had died before he was born and which explains why he was given the name, may be challenged to aspire to surpass that feat. Again, if the event that the name reminds the family of is unpalatable, the person named ‘Kúmólú’ may be challenged to change the fortune of the family or try to prevent the occurrence of the unfortunate incidence.

Second, the name, ‘Qláníyonu (or Q̀rànlọ́lá)’, literally means there are problems or troubles in wealth<sup>xli</sup>. However, as the corresponding proverb suggests, attached to the name is a specific message fundamental to the role-expectation, aspiration and consciousness of the bearer as the literal meaning of this name ‘Qláníyonu (or Q̀rànlọ́lá)’ sends a warning signal to the bearer that not all that glitters is gold and that life is not always rosy for a wealthy person. Yet, the proverb that corresponds to the name shows that it has an ethical underpinning attached to the name that becomes manifest in the proverb. For instance, it could be argued that it is by virtue of the proverb that the name suggests a disapproval of pride and incautious display of wealth, however the proverb provides a reason why a wealthy person should not flaunt his/her wealth unnecessarily. For the bearer of the name, ‘Qláníyonu (or Q̀rànlọ́lá)’, if he/she takes cognizance of the proverb, then there is a sense that the proverb influences his/her thoughts, decisions, and actions; otherwise, the Yorùbá will say that his/her name has no impart on his/her life, considering ‘Orúkọ ní ro ọmọ’

In the same vein, the name ‘Ariléyan’ literally suggests a person who has access to many houses. The corresponding proverb, however, warns against living in falsehood or forbids building castles in the air, and implies for the bearer of the name ‘Ariléyan’ a challenge to not engage in self-deceit, exaggeration and the misrepresentation of facts. Hence, these cautions, if taken seriously by the bearer of the name tend to influence his/her thoughts, decisions and actions on important issues.

The next we have ‘Àsàmú’, and a corresponding proverb on admonition for ambitious people; a person who craves to be successful in any endeavour who is asked to be diligent in his/her work from childhood reiterating the antidote for failure and conditions for success via hard work. Continuing, the fifth and the sixth names are derived from the proverbs corresponding to them; ‘Apálará’ enjoins the bearer to apply him/herself to his/her work instead of hoping for help from others, and ‘Ańjùwọ̀n’ cautions the bearer who is successful in life with envious contemporaries to be careful to avoid misunderstandings, both describing encapsulated role-expectations, aspirations and expected consciousnesses.

In this analysis of the dialectical relationship between Yorùbá proverbs and names we now understand that the relationship serves as an influence in arousing, manifesting and establishing the expectations, aspirations and consciousness of Yorùbá people in building and developing their nation-state, and thus it could be asserted that most Yorùbá sons and daughters who misbehave in leadership positions are either not aware of proverbs that correlate to their names or they are simply not cognizant of the virtues and values upon which their role-expectations, aspirations and consciousness are built upon. Hence, the resultant implication for this set of Yorùbá people is that caution is thrown to the wind, and their actions and conducts in their nation-state do not meet the expectation, aspiration and consciousness of the Yorùbá. In some cases, the virtues and values in a particular name embedded in proverbs are lost to such persons of low awareness. Moreover, proverbs, which emphasise these virtues and values, are gradually being thrown away in the name of globalisation. This may serve as explanations for the array of bad leadership displayed by some Yorùbá sons and daughters, in all facets of life.

The solution is to re-launch the importance of the proverb that ‘Òwe l’ẹ̀şin òrò, bí òrò bá sọ̀nù, òwe ni a fí ńwa a’, (A proverb is the horse which carries a subject under discussion along; if a subject under discussion goes astray, we use a proverb to track it)<sup>xliii</sup>. The task is to dig to the virtues and values attached to Yorùbá names, some of which are embedded in Yorùbá proverbs, and once the bearer is conscious of these, they would serve as means of calling the Yorùbás to order.

## **Conclusion**

In conclusion, I have argued that like the thesis of the descriptivist theories of reference in the philosophy of language, that for every name, there is a description that correlates with it, there is also a description that correlates Yorùbá proverbs and names. And just as the description attached to a name helps in fixing the reference of the name, the proverb also helps in unveiling the catalysts that arouse, define and manifest role expectations, aspirations and consciousness of the bearer of the name. This awareness can indeed end some of the root causes of social vices in contemporary Yorùbá society, the severed link between names and proverbs that retard the recognition of the veritable name-proverb relation denies concerning the cultural elements that define and work towards meeting certain socially approved expectations and aspirations in life. Therefore I recommend that the seemingly severed link between proverbs and names should be restored to deliberate cultural re-orientation as a way to recoup the erstwhile vibrant virtues and values that would help build and develop a peculiar and virile Yorùbá society, especially in these days of rapid globalisation.

## Notes and References

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- <sup>i</sup> Among other concepts which lack a universal definition are ‘time’, ‘consciousness’ and ‘love’.
- <sup>ii</sup> Wolfgang Mieder, *American Proverbs: A Study of Texts and Contexts*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), pp. 13-27
- <sup>iii</sup> Trench, R.C. *Proverbs and Their Lessons*, in Wolfgang Mieder (ed) *Supplement Series of Proverbium*, Vol. 13, Vermont: The University of Vermont, 2003, p.9
- <sup>iv</sup> Adewoye Omoniyi. “Proverbs as Vehicle of Juristic Thought.” *Obafemi Awolowo University Law Journal* 3 & 4 (1987): 1
- <sup>v</sup> Wolfgang Mieder, *American Proverbs: A Study of Texts and Contexts*, (New York: Peter Lang, 1989), p. 21
- <sup>vi</sup> Akporobaro F.B.O. and Emovon J.A., *Nigerian Proverbs: Meanings and Relevance Today*, (Lagos: Department of Culture, Federal Ministry of Information and Culture, 1994), p.1
- <sup>vii</sup> Hallen Barry. *The Good, The Bad, and the Beautiful: Discourse About Values in Yorùbá Culture*. (United States of America: Indiana University Press, 2000), p. 140
- <sup>viii</sup> Akporobaro F.B.O. and Emovon J.A., *Nigerian Proverbs: Meanings and Relevance Today*, p. 169
- <sup>ix</sup> Delano Issac, *Owe L’essin Oro: Yorùbá Proverbs , their Meaning and Usage*. (Ibadan: Oxford University Press, 1972), p. 109
- <sup>x</sup> Hallen Barry. p. 141
- <sup>xi</sup> Akinlade Kola, *Owe Pelu Itumo (A-GB)*. (Nigeria: Longman Nigeria Limited, 1987), p.57
- <sup>xii</sup> Bada S.O. *Owe Yoruba ati Isedale Won*. (Ibadan: University Press, 1979), p. 5
- <sup>xiii</sup> Bada S.O. p. 1
- <sup>xiv</sup> Delano Issac, *Owe L’essin Oro: Yorùbá Proverbs , their Meaning and Usage*. p.114
- <sup>xv</sup> Delano Issac, p.49
- <sup>xvi</sup> Taylor Acher, *The Proverbs* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1931), pp. 70-71
- <sup>xvii</sup> Akinlade Kola, *Owe Pelu Itumo (A-GB)*. (Nigeria: Longman Nigeria Limited, 1987), p.22
- <sup>xviii</sup> Akinlade Kola, p.65
- <sup>xix</sup> Akinlade Kola, p.60
- <sup>xx</sup> Delano Issac, *Owe L’essin Oro: Yorùbá Proverbs , their Meaning and Usage*, p.126
- <sup>xxi</sup> Adewoye O. “Proverbs as Vehicle of Juristic Thought”, p. 1
- <sup>xxii</sup> Kwame Gyekye. “Philosophical Relevance of Akan Proverbs”. *Second Order, An African Journal of Philosophy*, Volume IV, Number 2, (1975): 45
- <sup>xxiii</sup> Rattray R.S., *Ashanti Proverbs* (Oxford: Oxford University Press: 1916), p 12
- <sup>xxiv</sup> See Adeoye C.L. *Oruko Yorùbá* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press Limited: 1982), pp. 6-25 for details account of these kinds of names.
- <sup>xxv</sup> Adeoye C.L. *Oruko Yorùbá*, p 2
- <sup>xxvi</sup> Akinlade Kola, *Owe Pelu Itumo (A-GB)*. p.65
- <sup>xxvii</sup> Stephen P. Schwartz, ed. *Naming Necessity, and Natural Kinds*, (London : Cornell University Press, 1977), p. 18
- <sup>xxviii</sup> Russell Bertrand, “Descriptions”, *Readings in the Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice hall Inc. 1971), p. 172
- <sup>xxix</sup> Objections to the descriptivist theories were raised by Donnellan K.S “Reference and Definite Descriptions”, in Rosenberg J. F and Charles Travis, (eds.) *Readings in the Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliff, New Jersey: Prentice hall Inc. 1971), pp. 195-211; Saul Kripke, *Naming and Necessity* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1980); Hilary Putnam, *Language, Mind and Knowledge* ( London: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp.215-271;

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- <sup>xxx</sup> Adeoye C.L. *Oruko Yorùbá* (Ibadan: Ibadan University Press Limited: 1982), p 1
- <sup>xxx</sup><sub>i</sub> Adeoye C.L. pp.1-3
- <sup>xxx</sup><sub>ii</sub> By a 'good name' is meant a name that is associated with good things, achievement, persons, etc.
- <sup>xxx</sup><sub>iii</sub> Adeoye C.L. *Oruko Yorùbá*, p.1
- <sup>xxx</sup><sub>iv</sub> Adeoye C.L, p.1
- <sup>xxx</sup><sub>v</sub> Note that by the relationship between a name and the bearer's way of life is not anyway rigid. In other words, the relationship does not presuppose the fact that a name determines the fate of its bearer. That the Yorùbá people acknowledged this fact is explained further in this paper.
- <sup>xxx</sup><sub>vi</sub> Bada S.O. *Owe Yoruba ati Isedale Won.*, p. 20
- <sup>xxx</sup><sub>vii</sub> Akinlade Kola, *Owe Pelu Itumo (A-GB)*. p.59
- <sup>xxx</sup><sub>viii</sub> Delano Issac, *Owe L'esin Oro: Yorùbá Proverbs , their Meaning and Usage.*, p.6
- <sup>xxx</sup><sub>ix</sub> Delano Issac, p.3
- <sup>xl</sup> Adeoye C.L. *Oruko Yorùbá* p.26
- <sup>xli</sup> Adeoye C.L. p.27
- <sup>xlii</sup> Delano Issac, *Owe L'esin Oro: Yorùbá Proverbs* p. 109

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