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Challenges of Ethnopoetic Research in African Oral Literature in the 21st Century

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Abstract

The point of departure for this paper is a view that the significance of effective human communication to sustainability of development is in no doubt and that this effectiveness has been enhanced by creativity of expression (literature) throughout generations. In the last few decades African literatures have constituted the new literatures of the world and African oral tradition, in which oral poetry is integral, forms critical roots that nourish form and content pervading these literatures in complete disapproval of the unfortunate notion that African oral literatures are the old and the obsolete art forms. The correct view of scholars is that African oral literature is a dynamic literary continuum informed by and impacting people's everyday experience as they navigate into their future. As the family of scholarship continues to employ multi-disciplinary approaches seeking to facilitate an understanding of our worlds, that effort will be significantly limited if it excludes studies on our rich repertoire of literary cultures. This paper observes that critical literary study, no doubt, needs to be anchored on appropriate theoretical ground and the Ethnopoetics theory has been successfully applied to such effort. The paper sets out to demonstrate that in the process of applying tenets of Ethnopoetics to the study of African literatures in the 21st century, there are precedents of different types of unique challenges which ethnographers need to understand and address. The paper samples some of them, explores their possible implications to research, and recommends proactive and reactive strategies of addressing them in order to realise valid findings and credible conclusions. Empirical data for this study is drawn from an ethnopoetic research conducted between 2014 and 2017 on the cultural aesthetics of the oral poetry of Makindi ritual of the Mbeere community of Kenya. The research in reference and the discourse of this paper are anchored on theoretical tenets drawn from the strands of Ethnopoetics by Dennis Tedlock and Dell Hymes. The paper argues that sustainable development of a community is significantly predicated upon the validity of findings and conclusions from studies about such people because it is through results of such research that social and economic policies are designed and their implementation is significant to sustainable development.

Keywords: Sustainable development, Ethnopoetics, oral literature, challenges, mitigation

1. Introduction

Sustainable development is a complex concept with a deep history in academia and scholars continue to grapple with it from conceptual/theoretical as well as practical approaches owing to its significance for the well-being of humans. Colin Hunter (1997: 852) outlines some of the critical aspects of sustainable development around which scholarly discourse has been revolving. These include the role of economic growth in promoting human well-being, the impact and importance of human population growth as well as the effective existence of environmental limits to growth. In addition, the discourse has involved the substitutability of natural resources (capital) with human-made capital created through economic growth and technological innovation, and it has also focused on the differential interpretation of the criticality of various components of the natural resource base and, therefore, the potential for substitution. The ability of technologies to decouple economic growth and unwanted environmental side-effects, the meaning of the value attributed to the natural world and the rights of non-human species, sentient or otherwise have also formed part of the discourse and so has been focus on the degree to which a systems (ecosystems) perspective should be adopted and the importance of maintaining the functional integrity of ecosystems.

That list indicates the broadness of the points of departure as well as variety of trajectories of the discourse which leads Hunter to the conclusion that the concept of sustainable development is malleable and can be shaped to fit a spectrum of world views which, according to him, encompass different ethical stances and management strategies. Since the academic discourse is a reflection of the matters of significance to the society, effective communication at both the academic and the cultural levels is paramount for realization of human desires. As such, communities produce literature to enhance communication of such important matters as sustainable development. Therefore, research involving critical analyses of oral literature at the level of the producing cultures can unearth not only the aesthetics involved but also the cultural interpretation and collective perspectives related to sustainable development.

This paper acknowledges the challenges of development and low quality of life in the East African region. While not purporting to give a comprehensive guide for sustainable development, it sets out to demonstrate how appreciating and

addressing challenges of ethno poetic research can contribute to an understanding of the uniqueness of individual cultural communities as well as their perspectives on the concept of sustainable development. The paper argues that such an understanding would help in designing workable national and regional development strategies balancing various intergenerational human interests with concern for the environment. Ethno poetic approach to the study of culture acknowledges that literary discourses reveal information relevant to an understanding of geopolitical dynamics because development not only informs the quality of life of a people but also the power relations between and among individuals and groups across the strata of human society ranging from individual members, intra-community groups, cultural and ethnic nations, national communities, regional governments, to international and global units.

2. Multi-Disciplinary Research

Education the world over involves processes through which humans seek to interpret life and generate knowledge with which to address life experiences and respond to the variegated aspects of their environment. Such human endeavour involves such complex concepts as sustainable development whose implications and impacts involve all human beings as well as their environment in an equally complex way. In dealing with such concepts, it is imperative that a multi-pronged approach involving natural, biological, physical, social sciences, humanities (where literature belongs) is adopted. If such a discourse is narrow and isolationist, i.e., if left to one or only a few academic disciplines, the resultant conclusions risk being grossly limited and limiting, if not seriously flawed. Hunter (1997: 849) asserts that a narrow isolationist approach leads to oversimplification of the concept leading to paradigm inflexibility which, according to him, needs to be redefined to respond to the incorporation paradigm in which one aspect of development is mutually intertwined with others. In his example, sustainable development of tourism can only be realised through such other aspects as development of environmental conservation (see World Commission on Environment and Development Report, 1987), peace, technology, and innovation. In the same way that sustainable development of a society is multi-sectorial; all sectors of the society must grow together for there to be equity. Educational approaches to that development need to be not only multi-disciplinary but also inter-disciplinary. Through multi-disciplinary education a variety of knowledge on sustainable development is generated and shared through cross-disciplinary platforms. Furthermore, even within the same academic discipline study should be multi-departmental and shared cross-departmental. Synthesis of ideas from various disciplines enables designing of policies that embrace equity in intergenerational human development and environmental health.

Individual scholars have advanced positions and views on sustainable development that have informed designing of different policies and action plans with significant and varied spatial-temporal implications on humanity and environment. Some of these positions are extreme while others are moderate as illustrated in Table 1 below. The question that begs the use of ethno poetics particularly in studying African ethnic oral literatures is: Why not interrogate the collective paradigm of a community in an effort to understand and contribute to sustainable development? It is the view of this paper that a properly conducted ethno poetic research would yield credible information on sustainable development based on deep and broad cultural philosophy that overrides individual interests while at the same time being considerate of such. Indeed, Oyekan Owomoyela correctly observes that "a study of oral poetry will give insight into how this art explains the interrelationships of all things that exist and provides for the group and its members a necessary sense of their place in relation to their environment and the forces that order events on earth" (1979, 2). Findings of such a research would help compare, contrast and locate the collective perspectives of the community in question correctly on the following spectrum of viewpoints on baseline development sustainability positions, comparative perspectives and their defining characteristics.

Baseline Sustainability Position	Baseline Perspectives and Defining Characteristics
Very Weak	Anthropocentric and utilitarian perspective; growth-oriented and resource exploitative; natural resources utilized at economically optimal rates through unfettered free markets operating to satisfy individual consumer choice; infinite substitution possible between natural and human-made capital; continued well-being assured through economic growth and technical innovation
Weak	Anthropocentric and utilitarian perspective; resource conservationist; growth is managed and modified; concern for distribution of development costs and benefits through intra- and inter-generational equity; rejection of infinite substitution between natural and human-made capital with recognition of some aspects of natural world as critical capital (e.g., ozone layer, some natural ecosystems); human-made plus natural capital constant or rising through time; decoupling of negative environmental impacts from economic growth
Strong	(Eco)systems approach; resource preservationist perspective; recognizes primary value of maintaining the functional integrity of ecosystems over and above secondary value through human resource utilization; interests of the collective given more weight than those of the individual consumer; adherence to intra- and inter-generational equity; decoupling important but alongside a belief in a steady-state economy as a consequence of following the constant natural assets rule; zero economic and human population growth
Very Strong	Bioethical and ecocentric perspective; resource preservationist to the point where utilization of natural resources is minimized; nature's rights or intrinsic value in nature encompassing non-human organisms and abiotic elements under a literal interpretation of Gaianism; anti-economic growth and reduced human population

*Table 1: A Simplified Description of the Comparative Sustainable Development Spectrum
Source: Adapted from Kerry Turner, David Pearce and Ian Bateman (1994)*

3. Research Methodology: Uniqueness and Significance of Ethnopoetics

In this section I focus on the centrality of research methods in facilitating the researcher's quest to unearth information, make interpretation and unearth meanings that constitute credible information and knowledge. It is important to restate a confirmed fact that unique strategies are required in accessing, collecting, and analysing credible data on collective cultural wisdom of ethnic communities regarding their development and its sustainability as encapsulated in their creative expression through oral poetry. In this kind of critical inquiry, Ethnopoetics is regarded as an appropriate theory because it provides research strategies that facilitate a fresh look to the cultural aesthetics of oral poetry of the Makindi ritual as a subgenre of the oral literature of the Mbeere community of Kenya with a view of identifying and explaining how development and its sustainability are aesthetically (re)interpreted, (re)negotiated, and (re)constructed collectively. By so doing, the research will have helped bring out new knowledge from the cultural prong. Abiola Irele correctly observes that through such achievement, the researchers involved join a new generation of literary scholars and writers who are "giving a wholly new direction to the literary expression on the continent" (1990, xi). This view that engenders a new and unique look at African ethnic literatures is shared by Ngugi wa Thiong'o in *Moving the Centre: The Struggle for Cultural Freedoms* (1993), in his argument that this kind of transformational study becomes part of the process of recognizing all cultures and giving space to their expression, and that "the call for the Western-based new world order should be countered by a continued call for a new, more equitable [...] cultural order [...] a world order that reflects the diversity of world peoples and cultures ... [in a process he refers to as] the struggle for cultural freedoms" (xvi). Cultural freedom of aesthetic expression, in other words the right and liberty of ethnic communities to express themselves through oral literature, is enshrined in Ethnopoetics' central tenets upon which unique research strategies emanate to ensure that cultural freedoms and liberties are upheld. Therefore, an effective ethnographer who employs the theory needs to be deliberately keen to ensure the research strategies in use guarantee and indeed facilitate the community under study in expressing itself aesthetically. Any research strategy that undermines this freedom constitute part of the challenges that we are expected to address, including what may amount to a form of cultural alienation which Peter Wasamba (2010) calls "devoicing" the community.

The centrality of research strategies in ensuring credible results is further emphasized by Clough and Nutbrown in *Research Methods for Students* (2002). In this work, they give a three word summary of the debate which links methodology to research while equating the two (methodology and research). To them, "Research is methodology" (31). This implies that the quality of research is determined by the quality of its methodology, a view that is also observed by Peter Wasamba who clarifies that "methodology is about style and substance of fieldwork that include processes, principles and procedures by which the researcher approaches problems and seeks answers" (2010:100). This paper affirms the views of these scholars because it holds that whereas Ethnopoetics as a theory provides appropriate strategies, successful application is dependent upon clarity of the tenets to the researcher and preparedness to surmount related challenges in the entire research process.

Other scholars have advanced various important views on methodology in research. These views aptly inform the determination and deployment of certain Ethnopoetic strategies to enhance effectiveness, validity and credibility of the various strata of this research. For example, The SAGE Dictionary of Social Research Methods defines methodology as: the philosophical stance or worldview that underlies and informs a style of research...it encompasses, first, an epistemology – the 'rules of truth' for warranting the validity of conclusions – and secondly, an ontology – establishing the 'objects' about which questions may validly be asked and conclusions may be drawn. (175)

The tenets of Ethnopoetics constitute the philosophy which guides the strategies designed in researching oral poetry and those tenets or principles form the basis for designing activities such as interviews, participation and observation, recording of performances, analysis and interpretation of data. Fidelity to the theoretical philosophy guarantees the desired effectiveness, validity and credibility of research processes and results.

In order to realize a successful contemporary research in ethnic oral poetry, the foregoing arguments advise that it is important for the researcher of Ethnopoetics to operate within close fidelity to the key tenets in appreciation of the fact that the theory is in many ways founded upon protest and advocacy. Ethnopoetics mounts a protest campaign against certain tenets of other theories in its effort to advocate for recognition and appreciation of the centrality of the producers of literature in the process of interpretation of its meanings. The temptation to resort to other theories when faced with challenges of interpretation is common, and if not carefully addressed it can ruin the ethnopoetic effectiveness of the study processes as well as the validity and credibility of the results. Sue Greener makes an important observation in this argument. According to her, different textbooks define methods and methodology "differently but research 'methods' usually refers to specific activities designed to generate data [...] and research 'methodology' is more about your attitude to and your understanding of research and the strategy you choose to answer research questions" (2008:10). According to Greener, the challenges faced by researchers can reduce significantly and methods of addressing them adequately can be realised if the researcher makes efforts to understand the relationship between objectives, methodology, and theory very clearly and by developing an attitude that resonates with the objectives, the methodology, and the theoretical philosophies which unite the various aspect of the research process. As will be seen in the succeeding sections, contemporary Ethnopoetic research on oral poetry is both labour and capital intensive in many cases. Its demands build pressure on the researcher to a point where fidelity to theoretical philosophy is put to serious test and, with it, the validity of the results is subjected to risks. As such, an appropriate attitude is necessary if we are to guarantee realisation of an effective research process and the desired outcomes.

Kothari presents an additional dimension to the understanding of methods and methodology. His views help us to understand Ethnopoetics, with its application challenges, as the theory of choice that provides credible methods for studying ethnic oral poetry. In *Research Methodology: Methods and Techniques* (2nd Ed, 2009) he states that: [On the one hand] Research methods may be understood as all those methods/techniques that are used for conduction of research. Research methods or techniques, thus, refer to the methods the researchers use in performing research operations. In other words, all those methods which are used by the researcher during the course of studying his research problem are termed as research methods. [On the other hand] Research methodology is a way to systematically solve the research problem. It may be understood as a science of studying how research is done scientifically. In it we study the various steps that are generally adopted by a researcher in studying his research problem along with the logic behind them. (7- 8)

Heeding Kothari's observation, an ethnographer studying oral poetry needs to be very clear about specific research problem and its key elements of focus. According to Kothari, the process of determining and delimiting the research goals, objectives, and questions is part of the research methods. Using Kothari's observation, methodology in ethnopoetic research encompasses the research activities carried out by the researcher and the theoretical logic that explains their significance to theoretical fidelity and the validity and credibility of results. Kothari points to the challenging demand that ethnopoetic research portends mainly because of the kind of planning required and the systematic logical implementation practice that follows. Indeed, the right attitude is necessary in this kind of research, probably more than many other types, such as those based largely on library reading and desktop analyses.

The foregoing arguments together imply that for Ethnopoetic research to be effective appropriate strategies that factor in the logic of contemporary dynamism and technological development as well as digital fluency need to be adopted and related challenges anticipated in order to remain within contemporary best practices in focusing on the concept of sustainable development in its complex contemporary reality. Dawson (2002) observes that "different methodologies become popular at different social, political, historical and cultural times in our development" and in his opinion, "all methodologies have their specific strengths and weaknesses" and, therefore, "these should be acknowledged and addressed by the researcher" (26). Dawson is, by implication, pointing to the necessary preparedness as a key requirement for ethnopoetic researchers to interrogate their strategies in the context of modern world of research and update their suitability for addressing specific study needs and (un)anticipated challenges in order to realise research objectives.

4. Sample Challenges in Ethnopoetic Research

Illustrations to elucidate arguments in this section are largely drawn from an Ethnopoetic research conducted on the oral poetry of Makindi rituals of the Mbeere community of Kenya between 2015 and 2017. This is the period that was under official permit after the research proposal was approved by Kenyatta University – Nairobi, Kenya. As a cultural native of Mbeere and a long resident of the study region, deliberate focus on the aesthetics of the subgenre had been going on for a long period prior to the formal research process. This advance cultural presence contributed significantly not only to the development of the proposal but also to the entire research process. In this discussion, I present each challenge and

its impacts; the related theoretical tenet, and I propose strategies of addressing the said challenge in the context of the 21st century world. As will be noted from the discussion, the challenges arise partly because researchers must strive to address the critical scientific burden of observing ethnopoetic theoretical fidelity and adhering to the other research requirements including the ethical considerations.

5. Qualifying as an Ethnographer in Oral Poetry of Cultural Rituals

There are two major types of ethnopoetic researchers and each type is faced with unique challenges. On the one side is the native ethnographer; one who is born and brought up in the language, customs, and life experiences of the community of study, or has lived and interacted with the community, learning and using its idiom like a native. On the other side is the non-native; anyone without adequate grounding in the language, culture, and life experience of the resident native, or the one who moves into the community for the first time with the sole purpose of carrying out research. The kind of the grounding mentioned here in relation to the researcher is in reference to the amount of direct or close cultural interaction and experience that the researcher has. It is also referred to as insider informedness.

Adequate insider informedness in the culture of the community of study is a necessary qualification for a researcher using Ethnopoetics and both the native and the non-native must spend as much time as may be necessary to acquire it. Dell Hymes (1996) underscores the relevance of this insider-informedness to the validity of ethnopoetic inquiry and observes that: [...] validity is commonly dependent upon accurate knowledge of the meanings of behaviour and institutions to those who participate in them [...] accurate knowledge of meaning is sine qua non. The problem [of accuracy] is obvious enough in the case of a language and culture we do not know. It is less obvious in the case of communities around us [much less in those that we belong to]. (8)

The said adequate knowledge which reduces problems in the study includes adequate acquisition or learning of the language as a basic material for the rituals and the oral poetry under scrutiny. Okpewho, in *The Heritage of African Poetry* (1985), supports these arguments for the need to have sufficient feeling and sensitivity for the language during studies in oral poetry and culture because a foreign understanding is inadequate. He argues that a foreign understanding of an African language in oral poetry "cannot be compared to that of a native speaker for whom the words have meanings and implications that go far beyond the ordinary pattern of sounds" (4). As such, acquisition of this competence especially for non-natives is a challenge, and limit of expenditure in terms of time and other resources in learning the language and culture extend to the subjective point when the said researcher will be qualified in insider informedness. This point is not specified and neither is the amount of related acquisition of knowledge quantifiable, which compounds the challenge of becoming a competent ethnopoetic researcher. The cost implications of beginning life in a new environment and learning enough of a new culture are, without doubt, a challenge. This is one reason why scholarships and other forms of facilitation are needed to avail resources and logistical support for such ethnographic commitments which are meant to benefit the discourses on sustainable development with credible findings, conclusions, and recommendations drawn from people's own collective wisdom.

The native ethnographer starts from a point of advantage in relation to resource requirements but faces the challenge of determining preparedness and competence in a different way. As a member of the community of study, the ethnographer has certain statuses and subjectivities which can compromise preparedness for effectiveness in conducting credible and valid research processes. Decoupling the several selves of a researcher is necessary so that there is a safe balance, for example, between a relative participating in a ritual ceremony and a researcher with scientific detachment that enables scholarly interrogation into the cultural aesthetics involved. The native and non-native researchers must also address the challenge of decoupling the ritual ceremonies from themselves from their ordinary cultural status to research specimens. In addition, the researchers have to facilitate the process of decoupling members of their research teams from their various statuses especially if they are natives to the culture. One strategy that can be used to address this challenge is by involving members of this team in the development of appropriate tools for ethnopoetic participation and observation including interview guides and observation checklists. It also involves induction of these members into the research ethics to ensure that research validity is guaranteed. The resource implication for this process is significant and facilitation by institutions and individual entities can be sought to mitigate upon the deficits which pervade many ethnographic studies in Africa, particularly those undertaken within academic institutions with inadequate budget.

In contemporary democracies where freedom of association is provided for and protected constitutionally, the challenge of living within new communities especially by the non-native category of researchers can be initiated through informal relationships with residents before the costly official research permit is sought. There is a logistical challenge of lack of permit for activities leading to development of a research proposal because of the common practice in many African universities to approve ready proposals as one of the minimum requirements to allow a researcher to seek research permit for substantive fieldwork. Even where a university has approved a research proposal, commonly after a substantial amount of money has been paid as institution fees, a government permit has also to be sought. These permits are limited in time and are relatively expensive even in their varying rates for citizens and non-citizens. In Kenya, for example, the National Commission for Science, Technology and Innovation (NACOSTI) research permit for PhD in 2015 cost Ksh 2000 for citizens with proposals approved by academic institutions. Nacosti offers grants for such studies and researchers are advised to follow due procedure, however challenging, to qualify for the competitive grants which can help address the cost challenges attached to this kind of study. Lack of awareness of this facility is a challenge that has to be addressed early enough through adequate consultation in order to comply and to qualify. Researchers should make endeavour to identify such organizations locally and internationally for help in facilitating research. I propose that researchers consult local levels of government to register their intention to be a resident of the study regions and seek any assistance. Such

consultation would create early rapport and address several unseen challenges that the national permit, which comes much later, may not be able to address. Indeed, the unusual character of a researcher – especially a non-native – bears the potential to create security tension in the contemporary geopolitics characterized with espionage, spying, human trafficking, money laundering and global terrorism. Deliberate effort to seek formal and informal initiation and acceptance into the community of study is a demonstration of respect for culture and institutions in line with general ethnographic principles. This leads to a composed and confident researcher and it lays a suitable foundation for application of other tenets of Ethnopoetics in the field going forward.

6. Dynamics of Sampling in Oral Poetry of Rituals

The diverse uniqueness of individual subgenres of oral poetry poses several challenges especially to the dynamics of ethnopoetic research sampling. This necessitates greater creativity in applying existing ethnographic guidelines to the research as demonstrated in the research conducted on the Makindi subgenre of Mbeere oral poetry. One cause of this challenge that appeared at the proposal stage in this study was the scarcity of literature to review specific to the Makindi rituals and its presiding oral poetry. Although Miles and Huberman offer guidance in addressing the challenges of determining possible appropriate sampling procedure in our fieldwork, only further creativity enabled us to realize credible sampling. According to these scholars "Research that is field oriented in nature and not concerned with statistical generalizability often uses non-probabilistic samples. The most commonly used samples particularly in applied research are purposive" (1994: 27). Even with the decision to employ purposive sampling, the uniqueness of the subgenre brought a functionality challenge to this procedure because whereas all Makindi ritual ceremonies are based on the same cultural philosophy, performance formula and ritual procedure, the oral poetry which presides over all major activities bears the standard characteristics of performed oral literature. As such, there are not any two rituals performed in the ceremonies that are identical in all aspects of realization. This scenario means that each ritual in each ceremony and each song performed had its unique characteristics and aesthetic significance which cannot be fully represented by another. An ideal study would be forced to sample all ritual and all poems in all ceremonies. This was a huge challenge to contend with. Faced with this challenge, we had to be creative to design and successfully pilot a hybrid procedure which relied on strategic combinations of elements from purposive, convenience, and snowballing in order to come up with a set of activities that would be ethnopoetically workable and which would guarantee effectiveness of the research processes as well as the realization of validity and credibility well aware that a lot more data and information still remains unearthed as a result of the limited nature of such a research. That challenge of lack of adequate literature to help navigate such challenges of ethnopoetic sampling has been highlighted by Greg, Arwen, and Laura for which they caution researchers of oral poetry that "guidelines for determining non-probabilistic sample sizes are virtually non-existent. Purposive samples are the most commonly used form of non-probabilistic sampling" and that "their size typically relies on the concept of "saturation" or the point at which no new information or themes are observed in the data (2006: 59).

Application of purposive procedures to performers or artists in ethnopoetic research involving performances of cultural ritual oral poetry was another challenge. Makindi ritual ceremonies are cultural events in which each of the members present is assigned a cultural role in the dramatic spectacles presided over by oral poetry. All participants exhibit almost similar cultural aesthetic competence and each has aesthetic uniqueness that cannot be ascribed to any other participant. Therefore, the challenge of sampling experienced with regard to texts, ritual and ceremonies persisted in the sampling of participants for interview and analyses. I propose that researchers take advantage of ethnopoetic principle of participation and observation and use it to pilot the functionality of hybrid sampling procedures based on the unique characteristics of subgenre including the performers ahead of the substantive data collection process. In addition, the researcher should maintain close observance of the provisions of Ethnopoetics and focus on the objectives of the study as well as the research questions whose answer must emerge from the dynamics of sampling. It is not possible to collect all data and explain all about the oral poetry in a single research.

An elaborate presentation of theory-based procedure for sampling is necessary because it not only creates a good impression for the quality of research and thus contributes to validity of results but it also helps in enlightening other researchers on how to sample within such research activities. The notion that some things are obvious and need not be documented is a possible challenge because it leads to half explained procedures. This not only creates a negative impression of the quality of research to consumers of the text but it also hinders the researcher's preparations because of inadequate details. We emphasize that at almost every point of ethnopoetic research, resources are required to sustain a valid and credible process and, therefore, the researcher should have a properly -planned budgetary provision for it.

7. Recording Ethnopoetic Data

Recording ethnopoetic data is probably one of the most rigorous processes of fieldwork and it is one of the most important processes because it produces material that helps to answer research questions, address assumptions and the objectives. According to Ethnopoetics data should be collected by the researcher. In the singular form and based on the characteristics of the subgenre of study, implementation of this theoretical tenet becomes a major challenge. The tenet is a by-law of the cardinal ethnopoetic rule that emphasizes that researchers should work with actual sources and primary data drawn directly from the source. Such sources and data are commonly referred to as the "originals". It is the search for the originals that necessitates fieldwork in which the researcher is a qualified "original" with native competence or acquired insider informedness. Collection of data in this kind of research is not an independent process but part of a continuum of cultural interaction and expression involving the researcher at several planes; he is part of the original performance, trusted cultural mediator, as well as an agent of the collective expression.

Whereas data analyses in many kinds of research begin after collection, analysis in ethnopoetic research in oral poetry is part of the process of collection and recording. As Kiura (2017) observes, a researcher using Ethnopoetics engages in various levels of interpretation of data across the entire process of the participatory research. Information on material recorded, such as videos of performances of rituals and poetry, is not just on the devices, it is in the memory of the researcher in order for it to qualify as original. Later analyses of the data are done through transporting the replay of videos to the performance spaces from where it was recorded via the memory, re-imagination or rehearsal by the researcher. In the process the sensibilities and feeling for the words and actions as generated during the process of data collection inform the new level of analysis, giving it a higher level of credibility which would be lost if the data were to have been collected by someone else. Therefore, even where creativity is used to address the challenge of covering the entire ceremony in its general and specific aspects by using services of research assistants in data collection, it is important that adequate prior induction is conducted to enhance the assistants' capacity to carry out preliminary analyses in the field so that they too can contribute in the subsequent analyses with valid confidence of the ethnopoetic originals. Even with assistants, Ethnopoetics require uninterrupted presence during the performances and the researcher should prepare to deal with this challenging requirement.

In line with the ethnopoetic principle that meanings and interpretations of cultural material are with the producers and users of its language, the sampling of respondents will commonly pick respondents without requisite literacy and numeracy to fill questionnaires directly. Since participant observation is allowed, creativity of the researcher enables him to record on video a systematic interaction in which questionnaire items are presented creatively in an interactive and non-obstructive conversation. This method of recording picks non-digital material that helps in subsequent analyses. It also nourishes and aligns the thinking of the respondent leading to more fruitful information. As such, the answers to be extracted from the recorded interview are enriched making them more credible for the research. Challenges in recording range from the cost of the necessary types of field electronic and digital devices to the competence in deploying them. The cost is aggravated by the simultaneous need for several digital cameras depending on the number of areas of the ceremony that needs to be recorded. The uncertainty of occurrence of an important event at an unspecified spot requires that as much of the area of performance as possible is under continuous data capture. That way the risk of missing some important aspect is minimized at the equivalent preparation cost. I propose that the researcher should facilitate training of native assistants on the use of digital recording devices or get native experts and train them on theoretical provisions to avoid obstructive/intimidating recording. Researchers are advised to ensure testing and retesting of field equipment to be sure that as much data as is significant to the cultural ritual and the study is recorded because there can never be a repeat once a performance is realized.

I also propose that the researchers should be aware that they are recording for several purposes depending on the kind of research. These could include such purposes as availing video clips and still photos for the final thesis. Recording could also be informed by the need to ease subsequent analysis or to prepare to make family films for hosts as a cultural requirement concomitant to the ceremony. Remember the constant challenge of cost applies to all these purposes. Safety of devices is a challenge that must be addressed to prevent damage or loss. Piloting is suggested as an appropriate process for training and testing in order to familiarize with the digital functionality and application. The raw data collected during piloting and testing should be retained since it may present relevant material for the substantive study. Researchers should arrive early in line with their participation guide and observation schedule. In addition they should seek consent to record from the hosts as well as other authority as the circumstances may demand.

The environment anticipated to obtain in the field by the theoretical guidelines is only a generality of possibilities that is drawn from actual experience and assumed probabilities. This environment is used to guide reasoning which generates credible proposals on possible strategies of addressing related fieldwork by subsequent researchers. The proposals are not cast in stone and it is expected that each researcher will employ creativity to customize the theoretical proposals to respond to common instances of ground shifting that occur in each fieldwork experience. For example, some participants in performances of ritual get observably discouraged from normal performance by the presence of strangers with video cameras while others overly hype their performance way above the normal upon realizing that recording is taking place. The challenge involved here is that the researcher might record faked performances whose analyses will lead to flawed results.

Whereas this kind of recording presents some level of intrusion, it is upon the researcher to be creative in utilizing the zooming function and to ensure strategic angles of capture are constantly identified as the performances run so that what is recorded is as "natural" as possible. It would also help to be perceived to be part of the performance even as you record. This eases the tension or extra excitement among some performers leading to a normal, arguably genuine, performance whose analyses should more certainly yield the desired valid results. In the fieldwork of our reference, the soloist eased the tension among performers by singing in references to the useful role of the exercise of video recording to the ritual ceremony. In her soloist verses, she also identified and introduced the photographer (local lead research assistant) as a good chairman of the local church choir. The effect of this creative strategy was observable because even the participants who had earlier seemed reserved dropped caution and proceeded to perform almost oblivious of the cameras even where the recording was close-up. The photographer creatively took advantage of the soloist's intervention to close in for clearer recording while remaining faithful to the ethnopoetic demand for non-intrusive recording exercise.

Such other advice for improvement of video recording involves the use of a tripod stand for stability. However, since there are several instances where the stand may be obstructive, physical muscular exercise before and during the fieldwork should be deliberately used to help to steady hands for freehand recording. In addition the researcher should assign some cameras to record video and others to take still photos for temporal order and pairing of video time and photo time on

clips. This makes subsequent discussions using replays easier because it organizes the recreation of the original experience. The researcher should also ensure dates and times are registering on the digital impressions for accuracy of reference. The team recording the performances should keep constant eye contact with each other for communication signals and to enable each determine the view point or angle of recording where such may require adjustment for the best results. Heat cameras or infrared cameras can help at night but also solar or rechargeable lamps can be introduced by the researcher in ceremonies where it is acceptable and where darkness may seem to curtail the quality of recording. From our experience in the field, I propose that the research team leaves only after ascertaining the main rituals are concluded and they have arranged for interviews with help of the hosts. Before leaving the researcher should ensure that the recording devices are secured to avoid damage or erasure of material. It is advisable to upload into a computer immediately before embarking on any journey and preferably within the venue of the performances in order to ensure that the first raw backup is secured.

Conducting and recording interviews that follow is equally challenging due to the rigour involved in ensuring fidelity to the principles of Ethnopoetics. I advise the research team to develop appropriate questions, structuring them in a friendly order for application in a participant observation interview with sampled respondents. The research team should prepare with flexibility because the interview ground in Ethnopoetics keeps shifting. While conducting interviews, for example, uninvited and unsampled members of the community related to the sampled interviewees would innocently join the interview session and make comments in response to questions directed to our respondent. This was appropriate culturally although it was not specifically planned for in the sampling. In the spirit of enhanced participation, we creatively admitted the responses and regarded them valid with further engagement because they were from a credible custodian of the culture. In addition, the costly post-ceremony interviews could not escape being cultural visits and therefore the standard demands applied. We had to present gifts on each visit for interview. I propose this kind of preparedness because it was partly responsible of our ethnopoetic success in the field. I further advise that the researchers determine the most appropriate time and venue for interview for the best research results, not the researcher's comfort. Threat of cooking responses by putting words in fictitious respondents' mouths is a real challenge in an effort to meet other demands or to evade research responsibility. However, challenging the exercise is, supervisors of Ethnopoetic researches should not just emphasize credible interviews as a mere matter of academic exercise, they must enforce the ethnopoetic demand for recording full interviews because compromised exercises would lead to invalid results whose incorporation into the national agenda would result into poor policies on development.

Based on the clear rigour involved in the foregoing aspects of recording, the researcher is obligated to ensure the acquisition of and familiarization with the functionality and modes, servicing, maintenance, and safety of adequate field technology and devices. This is a challenge which must be addressed if fidelity to Ethnopoetics is to be observed. It is through this effort that a valid interaction on the cultural discourse on sustainable development will be realized and its place in the common national development agenda secured.

8. Data Organisation and Analysis

Ethnopoetic data involves more than the material collected using the various standard instruments. It includes the researchers' field experience in the form of impressions in memory which are essential in guiding interaction with the data in standard records during subsequent analyses. Experience reveals that analysis of ethnopoetic material cannot be confined to the interpretive exercises after fieldwork. Indeed, ethnopoetic fieldwork neither begins nor ends abruptly. Instead, it is a continuum of mutually infused strata of what Ezekiel Alembe (2002) calls infra-cultural experiences. Therefore, researchers contend with the challenge of trying to begin analysis long after their obvious encounter with data. Ethnopoetic data begins to appear at the conception of the research and this is the point where I propose analysis to commence; the kind of analysis that Kiura (2017) defines as: The systematic process of interrogation and interpretation of the poetics of performances ... [which] includes the preliminary assessment of the aesthetics during the process of data collection as well as the final interrogation of the data collected in order to find answers to research questions, prove research assumptions and realise the research objectives. (x) As a systematic process, data analysis requires not just a mass of data but a systematically calibrated set of reference materials and pieces of appropriate information related to the study. As such, there is the need to further arrange all the material collected in a way that interaction with it makes interrogation and interpretation objective and easy. A further challenge lies in the rigour involved in sorting, uploading, merging, coding, backing up, transcribing, translating, and authenticating the digital impressions, written texts, in consideration of memory of all researchers and respondents. Advice here is for the researchers to begin analysis from pre-research interpretations to on-research interpretations and after-field interpretations using tenets of theory for guidance and justification of the process and results.

Using the infra-cultural model in ethnopoetic organization and analysis of data is a challenge because it demands constant consultation with all participants from institutions to the field for authentication by cultural experts and producers of literature. The end of formal recording of ceremonies does not spell severing of cultural ties with the community under study. A permanent bond needs to have developed under ethnopoetic principles which should continue nurturing academic and cultural pursuit in the field. Therefore, material should be authenticated infra-culturally with all its costly resource implications, but for the sake of credible contribution to the discourse on sustainable development that sacrifice is worthwhile.

9. Presentation of Findings, Dissemination and Adoption

Challenges of ethnopoetic research do not end with the writing of the thesis or report document. Depending on the nature of the study, there commonly is the requirement to deliver the research to an audience constituted by the sponsoring institutions for purposes of further authentication and the initiation of the process of dissemination ahead of adoption for further use in the society. Presentation is the responsibility of the researcher(s) deemed to have the most comprehensive knowledge about that specific study. The audience of the presentation is meant to make constructive criticism of the research and offer proposals for improvement of the research where applicable. Ethnopoetic research can face further challenges where uninformed suggestions are given by senior scholars with little grounding in Ethnopoetics. The demand for junior scholars to obey their seniors means that the researcher must carefully consider and sometimes reject unhelpful suggestions politely but firmly. This challenge is compounded by the possibility of a penalty in kind for firmness in fidelity to Ethnopoetics. This is nonetheless a worthy price to pay for the delivery of valid results to subsequent discourses on sustainable development.

It would be wasteful to abandon the research after initial levels of presentation because findings are meant to inform efforts to address sustainable development among other human interests. As such, the researcher is obligated to pursue avenues for wide dissemination of the research at local, national, and international seminars, conferences, workshops, symposia in spite of the resource demand involved. At this point, such a researcher is advised to face another challenge of actively searching sponsored means of dissemination to address cost-based impediments to research. Whereas in many cases adoption and application of the research findings to development is partly outside the domain of the researcher, he however should face the challenge of ensuring the findings are available to as many interested users as possible. The presence of the research findings in the government and other offices is a step in the right direction because they can be available to inform discussions on related matters of sustainable development. Universities and other research platforms should increase public access to their research materials to facilitate informed planning and policy. Societies which have done this have realized positive transformation. Others should adopt that system for the desired results.

10. Conclusions

This paper set out to present some of the challenges that ethnopoetic research in the 21st century faces and to suggest strategies of addressing them. It departed from a point of restating the critical essence of oral literature in the development of the other literary forms as a way of affirming scholars' conviction that oral literature has been, is, and will always be (Muleka 2006). The paper is based on a research that employed Ethnopoetics in investigating the cultural aesthetics in the oral poetry of the Makindi rituals of the Mbeere community of Kenya. The paper wished to recommend Ethnopoetics as a preferred theoretical axis for credible results of cultural research because of its capacity to elicit more accurate and thus genuine people's collective perspectives on sustainable development. The paper has shown some key parameters of the scholarly discourse on sustainable development and highlighted the place of oral literature and its research in the broader national debate. In doing so, the paper has attempted to show some of the challenges, including research processes and use of technology, ethnopoetic researchers can face. We have made proposals on ways of addressing some of these challenges especially through fidelity to the foundational theoretical tenets as well as employment of creativity and innovation. The paper in the end shows that oral literature has a major contribution to sustainable development because its aesthetics constitute the cultural debate as communities engage in development activities. Research on this literature helps in unearthing this cultural wealth and presenting it at national and global platforms for inclusion in variegated development agendas. This, in my view, is proof that oral literature is directly and indirectly part of the major processes that are related to the sustainable development of all humanity.

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