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Affirmation of *Unhu* as Reflected in Selected Manyika Proverbs

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Abstract

Unhu/ubuntu is one of the important mainstays of black communities in Southern Africa. It emphasizes the connectedness of people and the need for them to work together and sustains families thus ensuring their continued existence. This paper thus argues that the *vanhu/abantu* (people) of the sub-region have employed proverbs among other ways to ensure that *unhu* people going even when faced with daunting challenges. It asserts that through the use of some of these aspects of living heritage in the form of expressions like proverbs, *unhu* has been, and continues to be affirmed. Through an analysis of some proverbs of the Manyika, especially those of the Tangwena people on the border with Mozambique, by employing the speech act theory, this paper discusses how through proverbial lore the Manyika have buttressed and affirmed *unhu* in their communities, primarily among their children. The paper concludes by emphasizing that such gems of intangible cultural heritage need to be vigorously preserved, promoted and safeguarded through various means that include radio and online interactive platforms.

Keywords: *Manyika, Unhu, Speech act theory, Proverbs, Living heritage*

Introduction

A proverb is difficult to define. According to Mieder, a proverb is a short, well-known sentence of the folk which contains wisdom, truth, morals, and customary views in a figurative, set and memorable form, which is handed down from generation to generation (Mieder, 1985, p: 119; also, in Mieder, 1993, p: 24). To Finnegan (2012 p: 383) it is a saying that is in more or less fixed form, marked by 'shortness, sense, and salt'; distinguished by the popular reception of the truth succinctly articulated in it. Mapara and Thebe (2015 p: 204-205) characterize it as a succinct well thought-out, figurative expression that shows the ability of humanity to express its inner most thoughts, feelings and sensations through a keen and sharp sense of imagination. Proverbs are also a distillation of community thoughts, beliefs and practices (Andersson, 2013, p: 28).

The above definitions show that proverbs do more than spice language in either song and speech or written literature. Despite being figurative in character, they are memory chambers that are wisdom laden; these axioms also function as repositories of the people's collective social, political, and cultural astuteness, intelligence and as diagnostic tools of thought (Orwenjo, 2009 p: 123). They are some of the oral and traditional expressions that are used to give advice, or admonish those who would have gone astray. Proverbs effectively express some truth or useful thought that often has a meaning different from the simple meanings of the words it contains (Fayemi, 2009: np). They are the firmament on which communities evolve and develop. Because of their anchoring role, proverbs have remained part and parcel of each African indigenous community and feature prominently in both their oral and written lore which includes both printed and verbalized literature among other platforms through which they are disseminated and sustained. They are thus part and parcel of Africa's and specifically Zimbabwe's living heritage also known as intangible cultural heritage. In this paper, the focus is on the Manyika, a Shona group that is located in both Zimbabwe and Mozambique.

The spotlight on the Manyika, especially the Tangwena people is premeditated. Not much in parametrical terms has been undertaken as regards Manyika maxims and other related sayings. For this reason, the author has found it obligatory to confer on a few Manyika proverbs as highlights of how these like those of other Shona groups such as the Karanga and Zezuru are pillars of *unbu/ubuntu*. In addition to the above motivation, a study of a few selected Manyika proverbs will add on to a

dialogue on the distinctiveness of this particular sub-group that is a component of a much bigger family that makes up the overall Manyika cluster and in even an expanded version the different manifestations of how the proverb contributes to the construction of *unhu* among the Shona in general. It is thus in the spirit of intra- and interculturality and promotion of the dialogue between diverse cultures so as to endorse and spawn shared cultural expressions and mutual respect that this study is also carried out (Forbes 2011, p: 10). In a treatise of Manyika distinctiveness, it is essential to note that identity studies are by and large divided into essentialist and existentialist points of reference. The essentialist identity focal point is on the collective core of individuals whereas existentialist identity dwells on the constructed character of the individuals (Dwivedi, 2015 p: 9). A study of proverbs thus focuses on a constructed identity that is fashioned out of a community's shared experiences and linguistic essentials (Dwivedi, 2015 p: 9). The document consequently discusses how Manyika proverbs as a communicative tool that is subtle and suave in some way, are by and large informed and shaped by a reflective community whose interest lies in bringing up youngsters who fit into the mould of *wanhu wane unhu* (people who are imbued with humanness) as dictated by societal demands.

An exposition of these proverbs is as well a commemoration of the diversity that is part of the Shona cluster. It, as a result argues that proverbs as applied and deployed by the Manyika, as among other Shona groups are a living heritage and an indigenous way of grooming youngsters that serves to entrench in addition to upholding and affirming what among the Manyika it means to be a *munhu* (a human being). They are also worth unravelling for the reason that proverbs are consequently highly valued in and among Africans such that Achebe has described them as the Igbo art of conversation where they are regarded very highly. It is also for the reason of the reverence and value placed on them, that Achebe again states that they are the palm-oil with which words are eaten (1958 p: 5). It is as well for that rationale that it becomes necessary that an on-going engagement with this wisdom be given room to flourish particularly in this day and age when there are threats to such forms of intangible cultural heritage that are the anchors of indigenous knowledge. The importance that Achebe places on proverbs is not only peculiar to the Igbo but is a practice that permeates at least all of sub-Saharan Africa as reflected by the Oromo of Ethiopia who thus speak, "A speech without a proverb is like soup without salt" (Orwenjo, 2009 p: 123). All, or most speeches in Africa are given to teach, admonish and praise

community members, and thus as the Oromo point out, the language used needs to be embellished so that the teachings that are given get home and are retained in memory forever. This embellished language makes the creators of these axioms come out strongly through word-play in entrenching their gate-keeping role (University of Twente, 2019, p: 133) and through the process keep alive a tradition that is significant to their communities. These embellishments are made more vivid through the fact that some proverbs are expressives, while others are directives, pivotal issues that Austin's (1962) Speech Act Theory speaks to. It is to this theory that the next part turns to.

Theoretical Framework

The Speech Act Theory (SAT) underpins this paper. The Speech Act Theory was first propounded by Austin (1962). It was in addition elaborated on by Searle (1969, 1975). The SAT proposes that there are three kinds of acts that are instantaneously accomplished by an utterance that are:

- Locutionary act: an utterance with a definitive sense and reference. (E.g., I will eat later.)
- Illocutionary act: this refers to the making of a proclamation, proposal, promise etc. in uttering a statement, by virtue of the orthodox force linked to it. (E.g., a promise or a threat.)
- Perlocutionary act: bringing about effects on the addressees by means of an exclamation with outcomes being special to the circumstances of utterances. (E.g., making hearer happy, angry, or scared etc.) (Austin, 1962, pp: 99-106, 108).

The ideas of Austin were further elaborated on by Searle (1975, 1976) who argues that meaning cannot be explained where there is a dearth of the context of a speech act. Searle thus posits that sentences are bereft of articulating a proposition unless they are analysed in context. Hence by deploying Austin's framework, he brings forth the idea that there are several ways of describing the same speech act. Searle (1976) thus classified Austin's SAT:

- Representatives: commit the speaker to the truth of the expressed propositions (e.g., asserting, concluding).
- Directives: the speaker attempts to get the hearer to do something (e.g., request, question).

- Commissives: commit the speaker to some future course of action (e.g., promise, threat).
- Expressives: convey a psychological state (e.g., thanks, apologies, congratulation).
- Declarations/Declaratives: effect changes in the institutional state of affairs (e.g., declaring war, christening) (Searle, 1976, p: 10-14).

When viewed from a SAT standpoint, it is consequently clear that:

- All utterances serve to express propositions and to perform actions
- The (illocutionary) speech act is associated by convention with the form of the utterance
- The illocutionary force is specified by a set of felicity conditions which may be classified according to Searle as:
 - preparatory conditions: real-world prerequisites
 - propositional content conditions
 - sincerity conditions: restriction on beliefs, feelings and intentions of Speaker

Felicity (appropriate) conditions have significance because they specify how the context has to be in order for an utterance to perform the type of act it is conventionally associated with (Searle, 1969, pp: 66-67).

An analysis of the above reveals that SAT is pertinent to the study of Manyika proverbs with regards the affirmation of *unhu*. This is so because even though they may not fit in all categories, they are directives and expressives. They give direction and express communities' expectations on what constitutes *unhu hwakanaka* (behaviour that is reflective of human virtue).

The *unhu* and living heritage connection

Living heritage is part of indigenous knowledge and it refers to the values, beliefs, as well as ways of living that today's people have inherited from past generations that they still depend on and bring into play in their effort to fully comprehend their present in addition to making decisions and choices that have a bearing on their future. The importance of living heritage is that it shapes our sense of identity and uniqueness as individuals and communities as well as our relationships with others, including the environment; as a consequence, shaping our communities and our quality of life. It is best summed up in the UNESCO 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage

(ICH) as manifested in among other fields and domains, (a) oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; (b) performing arts; (c) social practices, rituals and festive events; (d) knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe and (e) traditional craftsmanship.

What is vital and significant to commentate is that proverbs fall under oral traditions and expressions as noted in the 2003 UNESCO Convention on ICH. What is however, worth noting is that they are also found in other domains that are social practices as well as knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe. These three are best captured in some Manyika proverbs and are made lucid through their illumination on what constitutes *unbu*.

The word *unbu* or *bunbu* is a Shona phrase whose equivalent is the Nguni (Ndebele/Swati, Xhosa and Zulu) *ubuntu*. In Shona, a group to which the Manyika belong, a depiction of one who has *unbu* traits is rendered as *Munbu vanbu* with Manyika giving it as *Munbu wanbu* (A person is because of [other] people) or *Munbu munbu n(g)ewanbu* (One is a person/human being because of other people). This is given in Zulu/Ndebele as *Umntu ngumuntu ngabantu*. It is a term whose meaning is the same across Bantu Africa such that in Swahili it is given as *Mtu ni watu*. From a SAT view, the community is expressing what it means to be human and in the same vein giving direction on how one has to behave so as to be accepted as a human being. They are part of active verbal communication and are not confined to textbooks and dictionaries (Klégr, 2013, p: 7).

Unbu like *utu* and *ubuntu* is in Swahili and Nguni languages a class 14 noun and as some of the other nouns in that class, it refers to the abstract concept that includes what it means to be human and humane (Demuth, 2000; Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020). Therefore, as a concept and major pillar of society, *unbu* emanates from the human-centric African viewpoint, which places community at the core of society where it is accepted and promoted as the sole cog that drives communities and makes them thrive in a spirit of oneness in a cooperative spirit captured in this African proverb whose origins cannot be ascertained, “If you want to go fast, go alone, if you want to go far, go together.” This proverb affirms the idea of community as one of the principal building blocks of humanity. *Unbu* is therefore by and large a moral signpost to the principles and ethics that it symbolizes and our humanness and the value of community over the individual (Mugumbate & Chereni, 2020 p: vi; Nussbaum, 2003 p: 2). As a value system, (Bolden, 2014), it also

entrenches the importance of caring and sharing as reflected in some proverbs like this Manyika one, “*Mweni haapedzi duraba*” (A visitor/passers-by does not deplete the granary). It is as Nussbaum (2003 p: 2) puts it, “the capacity in African culture to express compassion, reciprocity, dignity, harmony and humanity in the interests of building and maintaining community with justice and mutual caring.” *Unhu* can therefore be said to be in short; the main pillar on which the guidelines for correct moral behaviour relating to human relations as well as indigenous knowledge on caring and husbandry over the bio-physical environment are anchored and sustained. And this realization is what has sustained them among the Manyika as well as among the entire Bantu group. The paper proceeds by way of discussing eight Manyika proverbs that are spoken largely among the Tangwena people.

Acts that avow *unhu*

Proverbs can be used for good or bad (Mangena & Ndlovu, 2014). Meider (1982, p: 438) observes that proverbs under National Socialist (NAZI) Germany were used as an effective anti-Semitic tool. In this paper however, the focus is on the good that proverbs broadcast. Being a human being is affirmed through certain activities and/or behaviours that defer to the common good and not the individual over society (Nussbaum, 2003); and the common good does not only relate to human beings but also how they interact with the environment. Among these are the following: hospitality and generosity, empathy or taking trouble for others, humility, advice/warning and the ability to work together as a team, and one’s being a team player (the cooperative principle) as well as compassion (Nzimakwe, 2014; Mandova & Chingombe, 2013; Sefa-Dei, 2013).

Human beings are expected to share in both joy and sorrow as is reflected in the words, “*Makorokoto*” (Congratulations) and “*Nemadendere*” (My condolences). It is in light of these two words that it can be realized that the sanctity of humanity is key among the Manyika. Its import is not solitarily anchored in the actuality that human beings have a right to life, but also that they are perceived and acknowledged as the custodians and not destroyers of the natural environment. More crucially however, is the veracity that the Tangwena, a Manyika people value human life such that they assert its paramountcy even for those with different and debilitating ailments as well as those who are also differently able, who for instance, may have walking, hearing in addition to sight challenges. That humanity

is superior no matter in what form it comes is plainly captured in one proverb that exhorts the centrality of humanity: *Munbu munbu, baatsikwi ngebweba* (A person is a human being that cannot be crushed/buried under a stone/by a stone). The idea carried in this proverb is that despite one's physical and other life challenges like poverty and orphanhood, one has to be accorded the respect due to him/her as a fellow human being (Sefa-Dei, 1994). The proverb thus underscores the need for respect and the taking care of and support for those who have fallen on bad times or have been visited by misfortune. It is thus a gentle urge that requires that those who find themselves in a better position do all they can to assist the less fortunate.

From an *unbu* perspective, the demand is that one exhibits an altruistic spirit and not laugh at or even despise the less fortunate. Malunga and Banda sum the expectations that are placed on the fortunate ones by stating that *unbu* requires of the more fortunate "a selfless spirit of living for the betterment of a person's environment using all talents at his or her disposal and not resting easy knowing that another is in need" (2004, p: 11). The mooring of such a teaching is informed as well by the realization that in life fortunes do change, and the fortunate of today may be tomorrow's needy and desperate. More importantly however, is the realization that each human being (*munbu*) is a reflection of the other and as such one's misfortune or fortune is also communal. This realization becomes clearer when two scenarios are looked at, one good, and another one a tragedy. When among the Manyika, as among the other Shona and Bantu in general a child is born, these words or some to that effect are said to the parents and close relatives, "*Makorokoto*" (Congratulations) to which the parents respond, "*Ngeedu tese*" (We share in the joy together). Implicit in the words "*Ngeedu tese*" is the age-old tradition that while as parents and relatives they share in the joy of the child's birth with the community, they will also partake with the same community in the act of raising the same child, and if the child misbehaves any member of the community who finds her/him in the wrong has the right and authority to chastise him/her.

The inverse is also true in the event of death. The expression "*Nemadendere*" (My condolences) of which one responds "*Aonekwa*" (True, the misfortune has befallen us) illustrates an exchange involving a bereaved part and one who has come to console him/her. This interchange as well demonstrates that challenges are collective and are not left to an individual to solve or respond to alone. One who is bereaved is as good as any other person who is crippled, blind or is hard

of hearing. All need assistance and support. Because of this, the community is expected to as well come in numbers to share in the angst as well as to participate in all activities relating to the feeding of mourners in addition to the interment of the deceased. Failure to participate or even to send word and later visit the bereaved to pay condolences is an exposition that is a reflection of lack of *unbu*. In fact, it is morally repugnant that a kin or community member faces a calamity and people do not come to that person's assistance despite his or her moral culpability; for example, even in cases of infidelity, people are expected to restrain the wronged part so that s/he does not inflict harm and injury on the guilty (Munyaka & Motlhabi 2009, p: 72). To therefore stand and watch is a mark of lack of moral depth. What motivates communities is that both the culprit(s) and victim are human beings and one major mark of a real *munbu* is restraint. So even when members of the community may let the culprit be punished a little, they have to ultimately restrain the wronged one so that mortal harm cannot befall him or her. Another reason is that people acknowledge that all human beings are capable of falling short in everyday interactions and may short change society. As such while transgressions get their just spoils, the fallibility of humanity has to be acknowledged so that one cannot be buried under stones and rock boulders beneath the steam of vengeance, hence the Manyika's proverb, *Munbu munbu haatsikwi ngebweba*.

Zimbabwe in the early 1980's witnessed a deluge of baby dumping incidences. These really were a cause for concern especially to some families whose children were caught on the wrong side of the law. The families, felt collectively exposed as having failed in parenting. There was also a spike in the number of illegitimate children during this same period. In an effort to comfort one another some people in the Tangwena area also used the same proverb *Munbu munbu, haatsikwi ngebweba* to cheer up and console one another in their troubled times. The proverb functioned at two levels, comforting those whose daughters would have dumped babies to accept them since they were still human beings and as such deserved to be accepted back into the family notwithstanding their misadventures. They furthermore reckoned that these had already been punished by borstal terms. More importantly nonetheless was the proverb's role in encouraging those parents and extended families of children born out of matrimony to accept them because they were not just children but were human beings with the inviolability of humanity invested in them. To therefore reject them was analogous to baby dumping and was a sign of lack of *unbu* as their

mothers had become as well. To also fail to forgive and accept back the daughters who were perceived to have defiled the family name was also condemned as being without *unbu* (Horta, p: 2017). The proverb substantiates not merely the worth of *unbu* but that words are as a rule a potent weapon that humanity can manipulate. It is through this weapon that above and beyond exhorting others to take arms of all nature and size, it can be deployed constructively to encourage the affected along life's journey or to destroy communities.

Proverbs by their nature additionally have an authority and weight that is vested in the ancients as Chimhundu (1980) situates it. He posits that the proverb has the rationale to encapsulate the “accumulated ethical and philosophical experience of generations for the benefit of posterity” (1980, p: 40; Nhlekisana, 2016, p: 150). This anthology of moral and philosophical experiences has the upshot of turning these gems of wisdom into ideological tools that steer and give direction to members of the community. Through these intangible sites of memory, communities are acquainted with what is ethically worth doing and what is morally repulsive. Proverbs thus communicate values and they ensure that the general truth that is deposited in community memory is sustained and entrenched. This becomes clear in an additional proverb, *Utsaratseba shiri mubapwa ngekuombera* (Do not throw away what is in your armpits because of the desire to clap hands/ to receive). Indigenous epistemology values community and the community instructs on the importance of building and sustaining relationships (Boyer in Moyo & Lantern 2016, p: 103). In addition, individuals are taught and encouraged to keep what they have acquired over the journey of life, whether these be relationships or material goods. It thus is important for example, that when a person gets married, he should keep his relationships with friends and the same relationships good and ensure that they remain tabbed. Maintaining these strips on is in no doubt a means of keeping alive a safety net that will give one a soft landing in the event that things do go wrong between two parties. This proverb as a result functions as a warning to the newly married to build on the existing relationships that they already have instead of throwing away old acquaintances and hope that their world begins and ends with their spouses or new relatives that they will acquire along the way.

This proverb *Utsaratseba shiri mubapwa ngekuombera* also warns against discarding of old goods because one has purchased new ones. Despite the fact that the proverb does not for example encourage hoarding, it is also against rushed decisions which see some people disposing of for

instance an old car for a new one. They caution that it is more important for one to give room for assessment before taking a plunge. The value that is laden in this proverb is best captured by Barajas (2010, p: 50) who observes that proverbs play an added and critical role than seasoned language. They serve to give direction through the provision of a comparative platform between two objects that in the least appear related, but whose relationship becomes more evident on closer scrutiny and analysis. He notes that the initial congruence that comes up serves to direct listeners to make a mental effort so as to glean a message from the utterance. In the same vein, Dundes observes that a proverb is based in tradition and thus sums up a situation and in the same process passes judgment on a past matter, or recommends a course of action for the future (cited in Mieder, 2007, p: 11). Experience has taught people not to dispose of what they already have in the certainty that they have acquired something more worthwhile. What can thus be noted is that listeners are compelled to engage their higher order thinking skills and reflect on the message in the axiom. The higher order thinking skills are necessary since they empower listeners to dig deeper into the recesses of their thoughts so that they will retrieve the entrenched meaning and have a deeper understanding of the message(s) embedded in the proverb. The use of such a form of indigenous ways of teaching is effective and diplomatic in that it is a sure way of communicating an idea without engaging the target person or persons using barbed, crude, spiteful and naked words that are not only direct and painful as well as frightening, but have the potential to cause conflict among the concerned parties.

Also implied in the same proverb is the idea that one has to give thanks and show gratefulness for that which one already has and not what is promised and anticipated. Based on the authority of this axiom as handed down by Manyika elders, it is a clear sign of a lack of *unhu* for one to sever relationships or cause grief to those close to him or her who have been helpful just because of a promise that has been made, either for a job or even for example, for school fees assistance. Some Manyika speakers would prefix such an adage by saying, “*Takura ngekuona*” (Literally, “We have grown up by seeing/observing,” which really means “We have seen a lot in life’s journey”). Such words when uttered especially by the elderly should not be taken lightly. They are loaded with experiences of both the good and the bad, and it is that familiarity and know-how that informs and packages wisdom and acumen. In this piece of living heritage, what is clear is that above and beyond being short sentences with long experience, as Don Quixote

(Alexander, 2004: np; Can-Daşkina & Hatipoğlu, 2019) would put it, proverbs go a long way, not only in strengthening the collective and ethical foundation of community members, but also in the creation of a fertile ground for the growth and development of critical thinking, a skill that is key for one to survive in the world, but which apparently is lacking in most people today. In this case, before one discards of anything, s/he is compelled to reflect and seriously question whether the resolution s/he is embarking on is worth pursuing.

As part and parcel of the Manyika's communicative arsenal, proverbs also converse and emphasize the importance of working together and in addition undertaking consultations before making decisions that affect other members of the group. In light of the importance of this, the Tangwena people would say *Kubya pfunze hupfunzana* (To eat a porcupine requires that there be consultation). This proverb underscores their poetic nature and how the use of images underscores and lures the hearer to get deeper into unearthing the meaning and emphasis that is carried in each aphorism. In the above maxim, the image of a porcupine with its quills and the challenges in hunting it, which usually requires that people dig it out of its burrow clearly show that the desire to eat it requires that one consults and also deliberates together with others on endeavours such as this. What it boils down to is that a porcupine uses its quills as a protective shield, so to get it requires cooperation from other members, hence the need for consultation and cooperation. Failure to do that can lead to injury, as well as potential failure to catch it because attempts to dig it out furthermore call for skilled hunters.

This same proverb *Kubya pfunze hupfunzana* is as well implicit and analogical. It implies that it is common cause that anyone who is worth being called a *munbu* has to consult with others before making a big decision that has ramifications on the community, the family at large and even the individual. *Unbu* thus dictates that one puts together resolutions that are all-inclusive so as to guarantee a happy and qualitative human societal life in a family environment and spirit (Nzimakwe 2014, p: 32). One through an error of commission may cause the family or community to face a calamity in a situation that could have been avoided, or that could have been handled in a different way. For example, when burning some dry leaves after preparing one's field, it is important that the surrounding community be involved. From an analogical perspective, the fire which can be controlled by a larger group of people can get out of hand if only one person or a very small group attends to it. In the image that the proverb gives, the fire's potential for harm and destruction is

equated to the probable injury that one can get if he embarks single-handedly on a hunting expedition for *pfunze* (porcupine).

The teaching and warning that are carried in this proverb are in addition echoed in another Manyika wisdom saying that advises, *Dhaka ivhu, njekwere haibatwi ngemaoko* (Mapara, n.d) (Mud is soil, a porcupine cannot be caught with one's exposed and bear hands). What this proverb does is to reinforce the advice that each situation deserves careful scrutiny and approach, and one of the best ways of approaching a challenge is realised when people come together and map the way forward. The warning is very clear that while soil is not mud, mud which comes from soil can cause grievous harm since soil becomes mud in different areas that include quicksand. The same is true of the porcupine image. While it is a rodent like a rat, it can cause greater harm than that of a rat. *Kubya pfunze bupfunzana* thus serves to warn people to refrain from comparing situations and as well refrain from taking lightly some circumstances that they may consider to be harmless without consulting others, especially those who are more experienced. The teaching and warning that it carries are further buttressed in the rhyme that comes out in the words, *pfunze* and *bupfunzana*. Therefore, as minuscule poems proverbs can consequently be taken as oral texts laden with wit and didacticism among other forms of knowledge that they transmit and this knowledge in most cases emphasizes *unhu* as the principal goal.

It is significant to point out that proverbs are oral texts that are also an indigenous form of media that communicates issues to the populace. They exist and flourish in a socio-cultural environment in Africa and the world at large, and moreover they are deployed by word smiths not only in churches where parables are embellished with folktales but also through public performances of poetry now classified as spoken word. Because orality is living, proverbs become a medium that articulates issues that have a bearing on the community. This reality is captured in another proverb that also buttresses *unhu* within the Manyika society. The proverb *Huru ingokudzwa ngewayo* (The elderly earn respect from their own) accentuates the importance of mutual respect among peers (Sefa-Dei, 2013). This proverb may have been coined by one in a community where someone complained or raised issue with a particular person on matters relating to respect. The point it affirms is that it requires two people for mutual reverence to exist or die. It therefore does not make sense for one to expect respect without him/her also investing in the act of respecting others.

The significance of this proverb also lies in the fact that it applies across different age groups. There are some adults who are given to expecting respect and deferment from their juniors, whereas they (the same adults) however do not show any respect for those same juniors and other subordinates. This is principally so among politicians who presuppose that because of their high political horses, they have to be respected without themselves doing the same to the people in the communities. Such a proverb is therefore significant because it is an aide memoire that what matters in life is *unbu*. The politician is what he is not just because of his political party or ideology but also because of the very community members that he may look down upon. It is thus a caution that s/he does not have to raise issue if they (community) appear not to show reverence. The same is true of an elder who demands respect without behaving in a manner in which respect is cultivated and earned. This proverb in affirming *unbu* as reflected in the Manyika proverb confirms that though the epigram is largely a linguistic aspect that has also been used in literature, both oral and written, it is an important mechanism in the moulding of communities into cohesive and united entities that have largely weathered the onslaught of western influences up to this day. It is thus part of constituents that make up a momentous ingredient of oral verbal communication (Hatipoğlu & Can-Daşkın, 2020; Malik, 2017). In addition, reminiscent of other varieties of oral language forms for instance folktales, riddles and parables; they are deemed the genus of the spoken tongue which is found in all human languages. This is for no other reason other than the potency that they pack in their terseness which enables them to effectively point out pitfalls that have to be avoided by anyone who wants to be accepted and acknowledged as a *munbu ane unbu* (a human being who is humane).

Unbu as a philosophy revolves around the importance of the community, not the individual. From an *unbu* standpoint, it is communities that make chieftainships and kingdoms. Since a king/chief cannot preside over himself, the Manyika caution against dictatorial modes in some of their proverbs. One such proverb that advises the chief to take counsel from the people is through consulting with his councillors who are called *makota* or *makotsi* in Manyika is, *Mambo makota/makotsi* (Kingship is [through] councillors). This proverb means that kingship is accomplished only if the incumbent steers clear of making his own decisions without conference. This proverb serves as a reminder to him that his power derives from the people and not from within him or his family. In fact, a king or chief who ignores his *dare*

(council) is not a person according to the Manyika. When discussing him, they can even state, “*Munbu ere uya? Akadzombwa ndimusawara.*” (Is that one a person? His brains were picked by a crow). This is a serious indictment because the Manyika, like the other Shona groups do not take kindly to people whose behaviour is characterized by *umbimbindoga* (lone ranger mentality).

This proverb is significant and has become even more pertinent in this day and age especially in Africa in general and Zimbabwe in particular where democracy appears to be on the back burner with dictatorships backed by sham elections taking centre stage. Although people may not say it openly, but some styles of leadership that have been exhibited; especially in Zimbabwe and Africa at large show that the sense of community has long lost traction and appreciation among the political elite. They now focus on being the only visible ones who have to live comfortable lives. From an *unbu* viewpoint, such a type of leadership style is the forte of those without *unbu* and who are thus not *vanbu* (not human beings) because of the way they behave and run the political show. It reflects a disregard for consideration, decorum, respect as well as a humanistic concern for relations especially in the communities (Muchiri, 2011).

Linked to the above proverb is *Kurwa mbairi* (It takes two to tango). This proverb is a call on those who preside over cases where there are trades in accusations. This proverb advises not only those in power but even parents and friends who are presented with cases from feuding parties to weigh both sides of the story before haphazardly plunging into making judgements. Uninformed decisions have the potential of creating an impression that those who have made a decision are interested parties that want their colleague to benefit from biased decisions. The same would apply to parents who may make a hurried decision especially when one of the parties involved is a child, they have always considered mischievous and a misfit who is without respect. They risk being despised by the community and also by the affected part if s/he is later proven innocent and s/he will always perceive them as biased against him/her. Consequently, for one to be considered and accepted as a *munbu* who is worth his or her salt, it is imperative that an analysis of the case focuses on both sides. In addition, hurried decisions also risk escalating tensions and conflicts between the concerned parties. It is therefore essential that whoever has been tasked with solving the conflict make an effort to reconcile the two sides and this is only possible through impartiality.

Unbu demands that people be humble at all times, but especially when they are not in their realms or forts. As required of a real *munbu*, the focus on humility entails that one be unassuming, respectful and even courteously acquiescent. To be humble, meek or unpretentious as an essential manifestation of *unbu* is reflected in at least two Manyika proverbs *Kusiri kwaro jongwe rinodya nenbiyo* (At a place that is not his, the cock will feed with chicks) and *Kusiri kwaro jongwe barikukuridzi* (At a place that is not his, the cock will not crow). These proverbs all focusing on the cock are important, because it is common knowledge to most farmers that no two bulls or cocks can put up in the same pen or coup. Any attempts will lead to mortal fights especially among the avian cousins. Even though as human beings people may not necessarily end up fighting; it is advisable that when a person visits another, s/he should realise that they are not in a position where they can throw their weight around. Because of the absence that removes one from a situation where they can exercise the authority and prominence that they are blessed with on their own turf, it is important that one be humble. That is part of the indigenous knowledge that relates to practices that are promoted among the Manyika. It is the opposite of aggression, arrogance, pride, and vanity (Ncube, 2010 p: 75). Such a practice reveals that even as humility as demanded by *unbu* on the surface, appears to empty its holder of all power, it actually empowers one who opts to be unassuming and those who are graced by one's meekness.

Humility is also at the core of some of the world's major religions, Christianity and Islam. In the Christian bible's Old Testament, which is also a part of the Jewish scriptures, it is advised, "Do not exalt yourself in the king's presence, and do not claim a place among his great men; it is better for him to say to you, 'Come up here,' than for him to humiliate you before his nobles." (*Proverbs*, 25:6-7). The bible makes it clear that humility for their God is also paramount because *Proverbs* 22:4 says, "By humility and the fear of the LORD are riches, and honour, and life." The Quran, the holy book of Islam, another religion which shares the same origins with Christianity also has Allah (God) being given prominence by one who is considered humble. In effect their God demands humility by stating, "And I (God) created not the *jinn* and humans except they should worship Me Alone." (*Quran* 51:56). What is coming out of this verse is that a humble person is one who totally submits to the will of God and this submission is made manifest in worship to God. Worship is thus viewed and accepted as an essential ingredient that is part of one's submission and humility. It has to be noted that despite the fact that in

Christianity and Islam humility is to be practiced as a sign of respect for the deity, and thus avoid conflict or being in a conflictual relationship, it is basically the same with the Manyika where it is as well deployed to avoid conflict with one another especially in situations where accusations may be traded between for example host, and host's wife with the host accusing his wife of possibly having an affair with the guest because he may claim that their guest is too relaxed in his home instead of behaving like a guest, not the host or that the wife is appearing more excited than is normally expected.

As reflected in these proverbs, one is reminded that humility is not a permanent feature of one's life since one can also have people humbling themselves before him/her. What the Manyika emphasize is that different situations demand different responses, and where one is not necessarily in control, then s/he has to defer to those who have the power and authority. These proverbs therefore serve as a warning especially to the youngsters and also mostly some urbanized youths who may think that they know everything about life especially when they are with their rural based relatives and would have visited the same rural areas.

It is part and parcel of human life that challenges do occur. What is important is that the affected find ways of negotiating them and not ignore or run away from them and seek comfort elsewhere (Nzimakwe, 2014). As far as the Manyika perceive it, one who has *unhu* should stand up to challenges and look them in the face. The importance of facing challenges is captured and memorialized in the proverb *Pakukutu hapaurayi* (A hard/tight sleeping place does not kill). The idea that is emphasized in this proverb is that difficult times are not permanent and it is therefore prudent for people not to give up. The proverb is not just encouraging people to bravely face the challenges but to also work on solving them. What also comes out of this proverb is that the survival as well as success of families and communities is anchored not on the ability to be fleet-footed but the aptitude and desire to stand firm and work for the common good. The proverb in a subtle way suggests that difficult times can be overcome if people work together as communities and as families. As in the proverbs, *Kusiri kwaro jongwe rinodya nenhiyo* and *Kusiri kwaro jongwe harikukuridzi* discussed above, this proverb also promotes humility.

The Manyika observe that *unhu* is not just premised on relations between and among people. Like the other Shona groups, they also encourage travelling. They emphasize that travelling enables one to see

the world, and assert that one place does not enrich a person. While they do not openly say that one who is not travelled lacks *unbu*, they emphasize in every day speech that one learns a lot from life by comparing experiences and by observing other traditions and practices in addition to different situations both challenging and enriching. It is for this reason that it pays to travel even if it may mean that travel may have been motivated by ugly incidents. The Manyika capture this in the proverb, *Mukudzvinga matiro ndimo/ ngemo mukuona ndimo* (It is in the act of chasing away baboons that one discovers areas for the possible extension of his/her fields). Travelling, not necessarily to faraway places has an inspirational effect on some people to do things differently or even to adopt new products like seeds and other goods of utilitarian value that they may not have had in their area. The Manyika also acknowledge that staying in one place can be boring. They therefore encourage people, especially the young ones to travel so as to break monotony. They realise that life is more than tending crops and livestock or getting married and looking for work, hence the words, “*Munhu ngevekumbobambawo*” (It is important that at times a person goes on a journey).

The proverb is also relevant today as much as it was in the past. It encourages travel so that people also break away from the demands of wage labour and even academic endeavours so that they learn and get exposure on life events and also learn about other cultures. This is even more important in this world that is becoming more and more globalized. The proverb of course does not encourage people to just travel to faraway places, but even to travel locally because at times it does not make much sense to know far way people and places without appreciating those in one’s country and sub-region.

The other point being emphasized in this proverb is that despite the misfortunes that one may suffer in life, what is of great significance is that one extracts lessons for existence. It as well reiterates that the good things in life usually accrue to those who are adventurous. It is thus essential to note that even though the Shona in general caution against harm as is reflected in some proverbs such as *Makunguo zvaakatya mapapata awo mangani?* (Ever since crows developed a general phobia, how many of their carcasses have been seen?), they also encourage travelling and getting to other places. This is clear in the proverb, *Chitsva chiri murutsoka* (New things/experiences accrue to those who venture out). What the Manyika call attention to through this proverb is that generally no one labours in vain. People are thus encouraged to show and reflect

their being human by having a twist and interest in travel and learning new things.

Conclusion

This paper has discussed the importance of proverbs as major pillars that affirm *unbu* among the Manyika, one of the major Shona groups that is found in both Mozambique and Zimbabwe. It has argued and asserted that they are a major part of indigenous living heritage and folk wisdom that plays a very significant role in ensuring that people work for the common good in their communities and also learn to respect one another despite the fact that they may feel differently. What this paper has also done is to expose the actuality that among the Manyika in particular, and other Shona as well as the Bantu in general, what is emphasized is the need to respect humanity in its entirety. A discussion of the selected proverbs has also highlighted the reality that the Manyika put a premium on weighing options and not to just making hurried decisions on what may potentially turn out to be mirages as is emphasized in the proverb *utsaratseba shiri muhapwa ngekuombera*. Since one who is a real *munbu* with *unbu* has to be part of a community, it has been noted in the proverb *kuhya pfunze hupfunzana* that it is not good for one to make decisions on his/her own. Other matters that show that proverbs occupy an important place in the matrix not only of the Manyika's culture but also that of the Bantu is that such axioms place mutual respect and the search for advice especially by those with authority at the core of *unbu*. As a major cog in the world of the Manyika, proverbs as key elements also promote and insist on humility, bravery as well as positive adventure among other important *unbu* elements. They thus confirm Mieder's assertion that proverbs are never out of season (1993).

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