ORAL LITERATURE IN AFRICAN LIBRARIES:

IMPLICATIONS FOR GHANA

by

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DEDICATION

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CHAPTER 7: IMPLICATIONS FOR GHANA

7.1 Education 38
7.2 Organisation 38
7.3 Staffing 39
7.4 Storage and Preservation 40
7.5 Library Training 40
7.6 Concluding Remarks 40

BIBLIOGRAPHY 42
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

African oral tradition has come into UNESCO's programme in a number of ways. First of all, oral tradition is one of the main sources of African history used for the "General History of Africa" project. Secondly, oral tradition is of the greatest importance as a depository of the cultural past of Africa. Lastly, material drawn from the oral tradition is used in the study of African cultures and African languages (UNESCO 1974?: 15).

As far back as 1966 an international committee of experts met in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire to propose regions and periods to be covered and the themes to be dealt with and, secondly, decide what types of research should be undertaken in view of the sources and periods involved and the importance, abundance or scarcity of documentation. Since then, there have been other meetings on the coordination and planning of the collection of oral tradition in Ouagadougou, Niamey and Porto Novo.

Resolution 16 c/3.312(e) adopted by the General Conference at its sixteenth session (1970) included the following:

Invites the Director-General, within the limits of the existing budget, and in the context of the decentralisation policy being pursued:

a) to strengthen the Regional Documentation Centre for African Oral Traditions in Niamey;

b) to help to establish similar centres for Central Africa, East Africa and Southern Africa;

c) to continue to aid in the operation (equipment and administrative staff) of these centres, for fellowships for research conducted therein, for the organisation of training courses and seminars for their personnel, and for the dissemination of documents during the execution of the ten-year plan;

d) to encourage these centres to cooperate not only with UNESCO but also among themselves;

e) to assist the regional character of these centres by inviting them to conferences, meetings and symposia convened by UNESCO on topics falling within their terms of reference (UNESCO 1974?: 12).

UNESCO's action has, therefore, been extremely varied, ranging from the definition of the general problems of oral tradition to the drawing up of projects for its dissemination, and including the setting up of centres for its collection and conservation. One of these centres is the Regional Centre for Research and Documentation on Oral Traditions (CRDT), which was established at Niamey in 1968. It is responsible for the implementation of the plan for regional research on oral tradition and for the coordination of cooperative projects among institutes and universities in the region, especially in the following countries: Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Togo and Burkina Faso (UNESCO 1974?: 13). (A more detailed description of this centre has been provided in Chapter four.)

On the individual level, many of Africa's independent nations are beginning to express pride in the "ethnic pluralism" of their people and an understanding of it. Sometimes the results have been constructive, such as the Africanisation of school curricula and the demand for the provision of relevant information about Africa's past. Libraries have been expected to respond to this changing African point of view. To do this, the library has had to examine the practical as well as ideological implications of its own Africanisation. Many questions have been raised.
Is the library an institution of the printed word, or of all recorded information? To meet African needs, what materials are available in the form a library can now use, or could arrange to use? Should the library take an active role in the development of relevant material?

One answer to these questions is provided in the following definition of libraries:

Libraries are collections of books and other forms of records housed, organised, and interpreted to meet broad and varying needs of people for information, knowledge, recreation, and aesthetic enjoyment (Winger 1962: 353).

Going by this definition, a library is seen as being uniquely valuable for its ability to store recorded information and then produce it on call for the needs of its users.

Louis Shores has helped the library’s role to expand with his stress on "the generic book," which emphasises the "other forms" of information storage. A book, according to Shores, is "the sum total of man’s communication possibilities" (Shores 1969: 1553). Accepting this more flexible definition, a "book" as not only the printed word, but also such things as a radio programme, a teaching machine’s programmed material, a tape or transparency, or an interview with a resource person. At this point, one sees the library as a receptacle and transmitter of the collective information possessed and needed by the people it serves.

Today, libraries all over the world are trying bold new techniques of disseminating information. They are beginning to address themselves to the "broad and varying needs of the people" rather than to the collection of books per se. For a society that has based its heritage on a written culture thousands of years in the making, these new dimensions of library service still rely heavily on the printed word. But what of a society for which the printed book is a recent development—a society whose cultural heritage has been transmitted orally for hundreds or thousands of years?

In many parts of Africa the library is an imported European institution which has traditionally seen itself as the conservator of the book—a precious commodity in this part of the world. The library has served the elite few who were educated in the western way by providing them with books. Libraries in Africa have not addressed themselves to the fact that the majority of the citizens continue to transmit and receive information and ideas in the traditional—oral—ways.

What is envisaged here is the emergence in our libraries of the librarian—fieldworker, or what Amadi (1981) in a different context calls the "barefoot librarian." He is a conventionally trained professional, with adequate formal instruction in oral tradition and well able to manipulate photographic/recording equipment, who will go out to targeted locations in rural areas to take oral evidence from these repositories of traditional information. In this way, librarians will be generating much needed research material of interest to scholars, and also assisting greatly in the reconstruction of our history and literature from the earliest times ascertainable, rather than being mere passive acquirers of packaged information. The saying that "in a country suffering from economic problems culture becomes the cinderella" (Ramsten 1986: 11) does not need re-emphasizing here.

Oral tradition and oral history share a common oral nature. While it is deceptively easy to propose distinctions between them, it is more difficult to sustain the differences in practice. There is often much similarity in the ways they are collected, processed, stored, and made available to researchers and in the equipment to record and preserve these materials. In common practice, both those who concentrate on oral history and those who work with oral tradition belong to a common class of oral historians and share many of the same interests, concerns, objectives, methods and procedures (Moss 1986: 2-3).

Oral traditions are those recollections of the past, orally transmitted and recounted, that arise naturally within and from the dynamics of a culture. They are shared widely throughout
the culture by word of mouth even though they may be entrusted to particular people for safekeeping, transmittal, recitation and narration. They are organic expressions of the identity, purpose, functions, customs and generational continuity of the culture in which they occur. They happen spontaneously as phenomena of cultural expression. They would exist, and indeed they have existed in the absence of written notes or other more sophisticated recording devices. They are not direct experiences of the narrators, and they must be transmitted by word of mouth to qualify as oral tradition.

Oral history, on the other hand, is usually identified as an activity—a detached and academic process of inquiry into the memories of people who have experienced the recent past directly. This inquiry and the responses it generates are recorded to supplement written records that have been found wanting in some measure for historical analysis. It is a studied, abstract, and analytic practice of historians and other social scientists, and it relies heavily on a recording device, whether manual, mechanical, or electronic.

Although oral traditions may be collected as an academic exercise and subsumed under the general umbrella of oral history, in their very nature they have an inherent additional social value in contributing to the social cohesion, dynamic evolution, and durability of the culture they represent.

For the librarian, the distinctions between oral tradition and oral history are important primarily in understanding the provenance of each, and perhaps in developing appraisal criteria for deciding the durability of the value of each evidential, research or general information need. The forms in which the librarian encounters them are often remarkably similar, and the distinctions between them are often unimportant in their acquisition and management in libraries.

In more recent times there has been a tendency to view the people of Africa, particularly the majority who live in the rural areas, as the ignorant, passive and stubbornly uncooperative recipients of "modern" information that has somehow been legitimised by the printed word. The actual position, though, is that the people probably have more ideas than most, for within Africa's oral medium, there exists a treasure-trove of knowledge which could contribute to the solution of many of the continent's persistent problems (Sturges 1990: 11).

As Ndiaye suggests,
...the librarian's job is to try to gain in-depth knowledge of orality in order to mark out the areas where there is conflict and those where orality and libraries are really compatible. The needs of both must be brought into harmony. The effectiveness of libraries is at stake in all the regions where books are today being introduced, and where the population is acutely aware of their value and necessity (Ndiaye 1988: 40).

It is the view of this writer that unless librarians in Africa act now, we may be blamed by a future generation of librarians and scholars for failing in our duty. With the increasing tendency towards urbanisation and the influence of western civilisation on our culture, some of our traditions may disappear in a few decades unless they are recorded and preserved for future analysis and study.

1.2 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study seeks to describe the establishment, purposes, management policies and activities of selected oral literature programmes in Sub-Saharan Africa. Problems faced by these programmes and how these are dealt with also will be investigated.

The research for this report is a descriptive study which uses case studies as a methodological approach for gathering information. A survey methodology involving questionnaires was used to collect written responses. The results are quantified and recommendations based on the findings are made for the Ghanaian situation.
Chapter two deals with oral literature in Africa. Chapter three provides a review of oral literature in libraries. Chapter four gives a profile of some of the programmes selected for this study. Chapter five is the presentation of data and analysis and chapter six provides conclusions and recommendations. The final chapter presents implications of the study for Ghana.
CHAPTER TWO

ORAL LITERATURE IN AFRICA

A study of the need to collect, organise and disseminate oral literature demands a review of the importance of oral literature in Africa and the work of major thinkers in the field of oral tradition, oral history, and oral literature in Africa. The selected review which follows shows not only the role played by oral literature in African societies, but also establishes the relationship between oral tradition, oral history, and oral literature. As stated in the previous chapter, for African societies, oral tradition, oral history and oral literature constitute a unified mode of cultural consciousness. These three terms will, therefore, be used interchangeably in this study.

2.1 ORAL TRADITION IN AFRICA

Vansina (1985:27) defines oral traditions as "verbal messages which are reported statements from the past beyond the present generation." The definition specifies that the message must be an oral statement spoken, sung, or called out on musical instruments only. This distinguishes such sources not only from written messages, but also from all other sources except oral history. The definition also makes clear that all oral sources are not oral traditions. There must be transmission by word of mouth over at least a generation. Vansina is also of the view that although oral traditions are documents of the present because they are told in the present, they also embody a message from the past, so they are expressions of the past at the same time. They are the representation of the past in the present. One cannot deny either the past or the present in them.

Vansina, of course, also recognises the existence of a large variety of forms in which oral traditions may appear in different communities. He formulated five main types each with subtypes: 1) formulae including titles, slogans, didactic formulae, ritual formulae, 2) poetry comprising historical, panegyric, religious and personal subtypes, 3) lists in the form of place-names and personal names, 4) tales including myths, and 5) commentaries consisting of legal precedents, explanatory commentaries, and occasional comments (Vansina 1985: 27). On the basis of these criteria, Vansina excludes eyewitness accounts of events from the category of oral traditions.

In the words of Alagoa, "in spite of their being technically disqualified from the category of oral traditions, rumours and eyewitness accounts cannot be ignored by the oral historian since they obviously contain information concerning past times and situations" (1978: 8). He goes further to argue that "few African communities, if any, subdivide their oral expressions under such (Vansina's) categories. Because of this fact, it has been suggested that instead of attempting to categorise forms of historical traditions the blanket term of legends be used for all traditional stories of the past" (Alagoa 1978: 9).

Every society has had to rely on oral methods to preserve knowledge of its past before the establishment of writing as a normal way of recording events, thoughts and activities. Even after writing becomes established, a large amount of information continues to be carried in the memories of participants in many important events (Agovi 1989a: 53).

The greatest interest in oral tradition has, however, been exhibited in countries of the developing world. Not only was literacy a relative new-comer in these countries, but by and large these countries had been under colonial domination for varying periods of time. When the colonial yoke was cast aside and independence attained, there was a realisation that such documentation as existed was largely a chronicle of the deeds of the colonisers. Indeed, the
colonisers had in many instances deliberately suppressed any indications that the indigenous ruled populations had a history or culture of their own (Moss 1986: 19).

2.2 ORAL TRADITION AS HISTORY

Unconventional sources, particularly oral narratives, were the methodological anchors around which the nascent discipline of African history swung during the 1960s (Miller 1980: 51). Archaeology, botany, linguistics, ethnology, artistic creations, among other fields of study formed a disciplinary gauntlet to which professors put ardent historians. No specialty seemed too esoteric or too technical for mastery by enthusiastic researchers who, forewarned and forearmed, spread out across the African savannas and woodlands in search of hidden records from the past that would reveal a depth and continuity of history in Africa worthy of the respect of an initially doubting world.

However, oral tradition as a source for African history has been subject to some controversy in recent decades. On the one hand, we are told that oral sources are a body of data which will open vast areas of African history that were previously obscure, while other authorities have taken the opposite view. G. P. Murdock is of the view that "indigenous oral traditions are completely undependable much beyond the personal recollections of living informants" (1959: 43). He is so suspicious that he specifically declares that he would set aside all evidence based on such traditions. Neither of these extreme positions can be taken seriously.

If oral traditions were simply models, their value for historical reconstruction of anything but the present would be extremely limited. The important point is that they are part of an overall cultural system, a system of meanings which emerges out of a people's historical experience (Spear 1991: 170-171). Myths are not the products of sheer invention. The values expressed in traditions, the structures delineated, and the idioms and models used are all cultural products of history. Oral traditions exist within an oral mode of thought which, regardless of how irrational it may appear, is rational and coherent when understood on its own terms.

It is generally agreed that the publication of Jan Vansina's *Oral Tradition* (1965) was a watershed in the historiography of Africa. It made the study of oral traditions a legitimate historical exercise and thereby allowed historians to expand greatly the scope and depth of their research into the African past despite the handicap of an absence of written records. By the early 1970s, however, the work of scholars such as Levi-Strauss (1966) on the structural analysis of myth, was suggesting to a number of historians that oral traditions often reflect a society's present cultural values and ideas rather than aspects of the past. Historical reconstructions based on a literal reading of such traditions, therefore, had to be reassessed.

The written document, which in literate cultures bridges the divide between the historian's present and the past that he or she studies, did not exist in most African cultures before the present century. No direct expressions of the remote African past survive in the way that documents do in literate cultures. Yet, other sorts of evidence from the past do survive in oral form in African societies, though often indirect, muffled, and mixed in complex ways with information from the present.

According to Buchanan (1974: 51), African oral narrators are creative artists who consciously attempt to preserve an accurate record of the past as they perceive it. Such professional historians may not be present in all oral cultures, but they may be typical in many parts of Africa. Their techniques and professionalism go far toward enabling present writers to reconstruct western-style history from the stories they have heard.

In the light of the above, Alagoa points out that "we can no longer doubt the primacy of oral tradition in the study of the history of the so-called precolonial period of the African past. However we must realise that colonialism is not necessarily the best landmark for determining
the time periods over which oral traditions are valid or most significant in African history" (Alagoa 1978: 12).

The important point to note in relation to the role of oral tradition in African history relates to the comparatively brief and recent period over which written material of a sufficient quantity and quality is to be found for most of Africa. Thus, for the overwhelming majority of African communities, the greatest portion of their past is recorded in oral tradition, and written sources are available only for the comparatively few years of the most recent past. "We cannot then, discuss African history without placing oral tradition in the centre of it. And our acceptance of oral tradition as a valid and viable historical resource cannot be conditional or partial" (Alagoa 1978: 12).

The relationship of folklore and history is more complex. In some cases, history is used to verify folktales or legends. In other cases, history forms the context for the discussion of folk life and forms. Yet in other cases, history often becomes another form of myth or folktale. While to the folklorist culture may have no gap, to the historian individual historical constructions do and history as an artifact of culture does (Grele 1991: 266).

2.3 THE ORAL/WRITTEN DICHOTOMY

Since the 1950s when historians first began using oral traditions in writing the history of Africa, they have been searching for better methods to deal with the basic fact that oral traditions, as documents which are stored in the human mind and transmitted anew to each generation, change over time. Although some historians continue to treat them as more or less straightforward accounts of past events, many others have turned to newer approaches which take the dynamic element into account (Harms 1980: 178).

These approaches are predicated on the assumption that oral traditions are retained and passed down, not out of an idle curiosity about the past, but because they make significant statements about the present. Thus, some oral traditions serve as cultural charters which use the medium of the past to express symbolically and to legitimate the ideals of the present social order (Henige 1974: 17). Sometimes, of course, elements of both may be found in a single tradition.

Jan Vansina in "Memory and Oral Tradition" maintains that the historian’s data are products of memory which in turn are all myth. He defines memory as "a representation of interiorised action of an event or situation ("remembrance-image"). Such a remembrance is usually expressed in a narrative form, as connected sequence, however inchoate.... the perceptual data are either selected or rejected, structuring takes place, and ‘gaps’ are filled by supplying logical sequences of the type ‘it must have been’ (Vansina 1980: 262).

One of the interesting analogies made by Vansina (1980: 270), is that between the human memory and the library coding system, for which the information received may not have been coded, but at the same time not lost, probably forgotten. In effect, every piece of data is stored in the memory, not lost, but forgotten because it made no special impression. Several factors could affect personal reminiscences, Vansina says, but some of them are the age of the witness and the emotions. Those could cause some specific scenes to be either remembered or forgotten.

Indeed, Vansina (1980: 271) states that some sets of personal reminiscences could become oral tradition, especially in cases of family oral tradition. "The reminiscences are edited, the general goal being to preserve family identity and cohesion and explain one’s individuality to the family." This statement is particularly applicable to a society whose main intent would be to preserve the society’s identity and cohesion and to explain a family’s individuality in the society.
Walter J. Ong is another leading writer in the study of the oral/written dichotomy. In *Orality and Literacy*, he states that oral societies must pass on information in patterned speech. Your thought must come into being in heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetitions or antithesis, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings (the assembly, the meal, the duel, the hero's helper, and so on), in proverbs which are constantly heard by everyone so that they come to mind readily and which themselves are patterned for retention and ready recall, or in other mnemonic form (1982: 34).

These kinds of patterns determine the kind of thinking that can be done by people in oral societies. Ong delineates eight ways in which expression in oral societies is conditioned. In his view oral expression is additive rather than subordinate, aggregative rather than analytic, redundant or copious, conservative or traditional, close to the human lifeworld, agonistically toned, emphatic and participatory rather than objectively distanced and homeostatic (Ong 1982: 46). He adds that oral thought is neither prelogical nor illogical. Rather it has its own logic.

Another writer whose work directly impinges on the topic under consideration is the late Marshall McLuhan. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan (1962: 72) notes that the great dichotomy was not between oral and literate societies but between print and non-print societies. Nonliterate societies are cultures "of the ear." According to him, the invention of the phonetic alphabet did much to alienate man from his society but manuscript cultures were relatively ineffectual in this respect. It was not until the invention of moveable type and the "portable book" that man fundamentally changed.

The contributions of Jack Goody are considerable. Goody edited *Literacy in Traditional Societies* in which he and Ian Watt discuss a fundamental distinction between oral cultures and literate cultures. They are of the view that:

In oral societies the cultural tradition is transmitted almost entirely by face-to-face communication; and changes in its content are accompanied by the homeostatic process of forgetting or transforming those parts of the tradition that cease to be either necessary or relevant. Literate societies on the other hand, cannot discard, absorb or transmute the past in the same way. Instead, their members are faced with permanently recorded versions of the past and its beliefs; and because the past is thus set apart from the present, historical enquiry becomes possible. This in turn encourages scepticism, not only about the legendary past, but about received ideas about the universe as a whole (1968: 67-68).

The logical, cumulative intellectual tradition arises out of this. The use of the syllogism and the development of systematic logic are dependent on the development of writing.

Goody has much to say, for example, about the role of creativity in an oral society. This is significant for it becomes clear that the idea of an intellectual in a non-literate society is very different from that found in a literate society.

In oral societies a man's achievement, be it ballad or shrine, tends to get incorporated (or rejected) in an anonymous fashion. It is not that the creative element is absent, though its character is different. And it is not that a mysterious collective authorship, closely in touch with the collective consciousness, does what individuals do in literate cultures. It is rather that the individual signature is always getting rubbed out in the process of generative transmission. And this process affects, though in a different degree, not merely in its written form what we would call "literature," but more generally the categories of the understanding and systems of classification themselves, for a dialectical relationship always exists between the individual as a creator and the culture as a given (1977: 29).
Most scholars agree that the break between orality and literacy is a fundamental one that affects society as a totality. The oral performer stands in a different relationship to his material, his audience, his society than does the literate composer. It is clear that the oral performer is not, however, a mere reproducer of the narrative tradition. He is instead a creative interpreter of the tradition. Though dependent on his tradition for the themes and formulas with which he creates a new and necessarily unique performance, the oral performer is an artist whose art requires the development of personal skills that are unknown to the written composer.

A crucial part of the dynamics of any oral tradition that distinguishes it from a written tradition is the interplay between the narrative tradition and individual interpretation. Scholars like Harold Scheub (1975: 72) consider the quality of voice, gesture, body movement and facial expression to be an essential part of the tradition which cannot be separated from the performance itself without loss of comprehension. Creativity thus involves much more than it does in a literary tradition and only by including all elements can oral traditions be adequately assessed.

2.4 ORAL LITERATURE

According to Gerhard Kubik (1977: 16), the term "oral literature" is a foreign concept. Even in the west some scientists do not like it, because they say literature is something written and, therefore, not oral. He goes further to argue that there is also no equivalent category for "oral literature" in any African language he knows.

The view of Kofi Anyidoho is that the term verbal art, now rapidly gaining widespread use, is significant in the way it draws attention to the aesthetic dimensions of oral literature. The significance lies in the fact that too many early studies all but neglected the art in these forms of cultural expression. On the other hand, he notes, the term oral art and orature may be seen as focusing attention on the orality of this art form (Anyidoho 1983a: 20).

The second of these terms, orature, has recently been advocated by Chinweizu, Jemie and Mudubuike, who credit the Kenyan novelist Ngugi wa Thiong'o and his colleague Pio Zirimu with coining the term to denote poems, stories, etc. in oral form and reserving the term literature for the same things in their written form (Anyidoho 1983a: 20).

The terminological debate has covered a wide range of terms which are beyond the scope of this paper. The important issue at stake is whether scholarly investigations take into account all the various significant features with a greater or lesser success by one term or another.

In the view of Ruth Finnegan, "the concept of an oral literature is an unfamiliar one to most people brought up in cultures which, like those of contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition. In the popular view it seems to convey on the one hand the idea of mystery, on the other that of crude and artistically undeveloped formulations" (1970: 46). She goes on to stress that none of these assumptions is generally valid. Her position is that despite difficulties of exact delimitation and presentation, it is misleading as well as unfruitful to attempt to draw a strict line between the verbal art of literate and non-literate cultural traditions.

According to J. H. K. Nketia (1964: 6) the study of oral literature can be approached from many angles: from a purely linguistic point of view as language text, or as a body of creative expressions in respect of style, setting, range of subject matter, predominant themes and their distribution and problems of historical origin, or as anthropologists and philosophers are doing, for the light it can shed on traditional modes of thought, ways of life, and value systems.

In recent times there have been growing signs of a fuller appreciation of the extent and nature of African oral literature. There have been attempts to establish oral literature as a systematic and serious field of study which could coordinate the efforts of all those working in relative isolation. These include students of culture, ideology, society, art, religion, and history.
As librarianship cuts across all these subject areas, it becomes even more relevant for librarians to have knowledge of the nature of oral traditions, various mechanisms available for testing their validity, authenticity, and reliability, and of the uses to which they may be put by researchers.

The increasing popularity of oral literature both as a technique and a product, is partly because it has been found to be an excellent tool, adaptable to practically every discipline and subject area. Apart from areas like anthropology, sociology and linguistics, oral literature has been used extensively in such fields as agriculture, medicine, and social work. The drastic change in modes of communication these days suggests the possibility that oral literature is capable of providing even more research opportunities. Unfortunately for oral literature practitioners, research has not kept pace with the growing importance of oral literature as a source of information. Without oral traditions, we would know very little about the past of large parts of the world, and we would not know them from inside. Oral traditions, therefore, have a part to play in the reconstruction of the past.

Oral literature is a conscious art form which demands from the performer the ability to be innovative. As Stith Thompson points out, "even where the reciting of tales is to be expected of everyone, there is every effort to make a story interesting and pleasing to the audience" (1946: 449). Creativity in oral literature resides not only in language use but also involves the whole range of voice, gesture, facial expressiveness as well as narrative art. It is this individual talent to work up a story that endows a particular performer with the title of a good artist and also helps to draw many listeners to his performance.

Oral literature may be sung, intoned or chanted as in the recitations commonly employed in solo sections of some musical types found in Africa. Or it may be spoken. Its identifying characteristics include both the formal features of the texts and the context of occurrence. Recitals may take place on social occasions or in personal situations, in seclusion or more commonly in public. They may be done by individuals or by groups and may form part of a number of activities going on simultaneously (Nketia 1964: 6).

As Africa continues to modernise, it seems that the barriers between the old and the new are being torn down. The isolated village, which preserves the traditional ways, is searching out new methods of communication such as the radio and the printed word. The city dweller, too, often isolated for several generations from the traditional ways of life, is searching out new ways to reforge his links with the past. It is the blending of the two ways of life which challenges the modern African who can recognise the values of both life styles.
CHAPTER THREE

ORAL LITERATURE IN LIBRARIES

3.1 INDIGENOUS SCRIPTS IN AFRICA

Although oral tradition has long had a privileged position in Africa, it would be wrong to think that some form of writing did not exist in Sub-Saharan Africa. Writing such as the Vai graphic system which arrived at the phonetic syllabic stage around 800 AD (Ndiaye 1988: 41) did indeed exist alongside those arising from contact with foreigners and from local adaptations.

Besides the Vai script, there are other native Sub-Saharan African writing systems including the aroko system of the Yoruba (Nigeria, symbolic writing), the gicandi system of the Kikuyu (Kenya, pictographic and then ideographic writing), the nsibidi system of the Efik (Nigeria, Calabar, pictographic and then ideographic writing), the mende system of the Mende (Sierra Leone, syllabic script), the toma or loma system of the Toma or Loma (Liberia, syllabic script), and the mum system of the Mum of Bamum (Cameroon, pictographic then ideographic, syllabic then alphabetic) (Ndiaye 1988: 41).

This brief outline of Sub-Saharan African systems of writing is both worrying and reassuring. We can see that despite their existence oral culture prevailed to the extent the scripts were relatively unknown and their development blocked. Agblemagnon (Ndiaye 1988: 42) calls this block the non-use of writing in societies based on oral traditions, and tries to explain this by four hypotheses: 1) the absence of pressure from development, which makes it necessary to find a more convenient system of signs, 2) the shifting of writing systems by incompatible factors or social structures, 3) the level of sophistication reached by the system of oral communication, and the lack of need to develop another system which would hardly be favourable to the secrecy so valued in African cultures, and 4) failure to overthrow magic signs, for whereas a system of writing evolves from the symbol of the thing to that of the word which designates the thing, then to signs representing the sounds of the word, the magic sign proceeds in the opposite way with the sacred or ritual word which becomes a symbol of the thing.

The existence of the writing systems described also shows the reality of traditions of African script which are much more widely based when one takes into account the systems of writing that adapt Arabic script to the phonology of the languages of African peoples long since converted to Islam (Ndiaye 1988: 42).

From the above considerations it is clear that the gulf between oral culture and writing in Africa or more broadly between oral culture and libraries can, indeed must, be narrowed. Libraries have an even stronger justification for anchoring themselves firmly in African oral cultures.

3.2 ORAL PEDAGOGY

The change from oral pedagogy to literary or "bookish" education is perhaps one of the most dramatic impacts of colonial conversion in Africa. In the view of Amadi (1981: 133), this change was revolutionary in its attempt to refashion an oral and "ear" culture into a print and "visual" culture. Colonialism dealt a big blow to the unity of Africans through the extended family system together with the common and popular storytelling sessions. As the existence of the extended family system was threatened by factors such as urbanisation and colonial education, grandparents and other relatives were separated from their grandchildren and other young relations who are now living in towns with their families.

This has changed the traditional way of rearing children where it was common to find grandparents and other interested people sitting down during the evenings around a fire, telling
stories to children of different age groups. An examination of some of these stories shows that
the narratives were aimed at providing fun as well as various forms of education such as moral,
physical, emotional and practical knowledge. Although there was no printed word and therefore,
no books during the precolonial era, "our forefathers did a splendid job of educating the future
generations through folktales, other forms of oral literature and practical demonstrations" (Patte
1985: 225).

3.3 ORAL LITERATURE AS AN INFORMATION SOURCE

Oral literature as an information source has gained increasing recognition throughout the
world, especially in the United States, Western Europe and Canada, where there are a growing
number of oral history programmes that have been established in universities and research
institutes, from a modest number of five programmes in America in 1956 to more than 300
programmes in 1975, for example (Starr 1977: 440). These programmes are devoted to the
collection, preservation and dissemination of oral history information. A considerable number
of these programmes are attached to academic libraries.

In addition, there are a growing number of scholars interested in oral literature the world
over, a growing body of literature which discusses oral literature techniques, and new professional
societies which deal with oral literature as an information gathering technique. Oral literature
is being used extensively in classrooms and in such fields as agriculture and medicine.

Three major factors have contributed to the growth of oral literature documentation in
recent years. These are: 1) technological advances and improvements which aided production
of portable, economically priced, tape recorders, 2) an increasing acknowledgement of
interviewing as a legitimate method of obtaining information, and 3) an increasing popular and
scholarly interest in subject areas for which there traditionally has been little written
documentation (Starr 1977: 440).

As a result of the awareness of the importance of oral literature in developing countries,
there are now thousands of oral history interviews placed in the collections of libraries and
archives especially in America. Librarians, archivists and other information professionals are
increasingly called upon to organise and service these collections. But to adequately perform
these services professionals need an understanding of oral literature as an information product.
There should be an understanding of the product's ingredients, how those ingredients are
processed, who makes the products possible, and why. As A. F. Lancaster has observed:

... the librarian must study and be familiar with all aspects of the communication cycle,
from the creation of recorded knowledge (including, of course, the characteristics and
motivation of authors), through its distribution, its processing by various types of agencies,
and its eventual assimilation and application (1983: 752).

In African countries oral traditions have become national treasures. According to K. E.
Agovi (1989a: 53), oral tradition is, and has always been, a solid bedrock for a life that
invigorates and is in turn invigorated. With just about 30 per cent of its people literate in the
western sense, Ghana is a country where oral transmission of knowledge is the most effective
medium of communication. In Mali, Guinea, Senegal and Gambia, the griot has become a
national institution, a historical museum and a verbal tradition that sings of the mastery of
mankind. Therefore, although "new perceptions, new ways of expressing sensibility, and new
priorities will continue to emerge as they must in a community of change and transition, they will
always be absorbed and merged in permanence of oral tradition" (Agovi 1989a: 53).

Unfortunately for librarians in Africa and particularly in Ghana, this oral material has
been largely neglected in our libraries. Hitherto conventional librarianship has been content with
the final "dead end" of the scholar's effort, that is, information that has passed from oral to aural
stages, and finally to the printed book. In the matter of interviews, audition and recording of real evidence, the African librarian has not shown commensurate interest (Iwuji 1989: 205).

It is not libraries alone that are to be blamed for their lack of interest in oral documentation. As Anyidoho has noted (1983b: 3), until recently, under the able misdirection of colonial education programmes, few African scholars would consider the oral traditions of their people worth the attention of scholarly research. Ironically, many of them were at the same time very loud in condemnation of almost every foreign work on African culture. Until about a decade or two ago, few African scholars would dream of going into anthropology or folklore. Today, however, an African scholar can stand up in the senior common room of an African university and announce that he or she is an anthropologist or a folklorist without losing respect among colleagues (Anyidoho 1983b: 3).

3.4 ORAL LITERATURE LIBRARIANSHIP

Oral literature librarianship is relatively new not only in Africa, but in many parts of the world. Even the reputed Columbia University Oral History Project came into existence under the leadership of Professor Alan Nevis only in 1948. Columbia University's project influenced the establishment of others such as those at the University of California at Los Angeles and Indiana University at Bloomington.

As Fry and Baum (1969: 320) point out, "before the formation of the Oral History Association in 1966, each person had been operating in a state of insularity, unilaterally learning the new trade by his own trials and tapes." Yet it has been found that oral literature is an excellent tool, adaptable to practically every discipline and subject area.

Baum also has dealt with the responsibilities of librarians in creating, curating, and consuming oral history. She explores the special problems libraries face in caring for and publicising oral history materials, then points out how the library, through setting standards of acceptance, can play a part in encouraging well researched oral history (Baum 1984: 397-398).

Mary Jo Pugh (1979: 13) has argued that libraries may get involved in oral history at one or more levels of commitment: developing collections of published materials, acting as a repository for primary resource materials, and/or maintaining a programme which records oral history. Acquisition of published materials tends to fall within commonly accepted library practice and procedures but, as Pugh rightly points out, involvement at the repository or programme level may lead librarians into new areas requiring unfamiliar methods of technical processing, storage, and information retrieval (Pugh 1979: 13).

Writing on "Oral History, Law and Libraries," Joseph B. Romney (1979: 39) touches briefly on such problems as the right of privacy, libel and copyright. In order to avoid these problems, as well as to solve them when they arise, librarians, according to Romney, are advised to consult their attorneys.

A number of African writers have also joined in the appeal for the collection and organisation of oral materials. Alegbeleye (1985: 421) contends that there is a considerable literature in Africa on the collection from the field and analysis of oral tradition and oral history, but curiously little discussion on making them available to scholars--Africans and non-Africans alike. He goes on to suggest various strategies for improving accessibility to oral materials in Africa.

Another African advocate of oral documentation in libraries and archives is B. O. Aboyade. In her view "people who are engaged in communication activities among ordinary and unsophisticated people, especially in rural areas, cannot afford to ignore the media which are indigenous and familiar. Oral tradition is an indigenous medium which has not yet been fully exploited in its wide variety" (1984: 75). If we consider the fact that librarians are agents of
communication which, in Africa, deal more with unsophisticated people, then new approaches
have to be made in information provision. This, of course, includes the provision of materials
on oral literature.

In the words of Raphael Ndiaye, "the library, the memory of the written word today, has
the capability to be the memory of the spoken word, and to aid in the creation of organisations
whose role will be to collect and preserve oral tradition" (1988: 45). Oral literature presents an
important and challenging new ground which librarians cannot afford to leave to professional
scholars only. The least librarians in Africa can do is to act as catalysts by developing strategies
with interested scholars.

Amadi laments that "the grief arising from the devastation of a library by fire or similar
causes in the western world is only comparable in intensity to the loss, through death, of an old
man in Africa. The latter, like the former, is the veritable embodiment of an archive or a proto-
library--a library without shelves" (1981: 140).

The situation in Africa is probably much more devastating than is suggested by these
writers. For whereas a published book has an independent existence and generates secondary
materials such as reviews, synopses, and commentaries, all of which could be replaced from
multiple copies elsewhere, the destruction of an oral library through death occasions a total
"vanish into oblivion."

As long ago as 1973, in a contribution to a conference on publishing in Africa, K. K.
Oyeoku suggested that "the initial emphasis of African libraries need not be on the printed word.
It is quite feasible and more meaningful to start a library in a rural community with miles of
tapes of the people's folklore, music and culture" (1975: 280). He proposed experimentation with
a new institution in a rural village, which would collect oral materials from the villagers into a
community library of tapes. The institution would gradually transcribe the materials for use in
connection with literacy teaching, so that new readers would deal with familiar and well-loved
materials. It is doubtful that many African countries have explored such possibilities of providing
library materials.

3.5 THE RESOURCES DEBATE

Critics of library involvement in the recording of oral literature argue that it is unwise or
even criminal to divert resources to the acquisition of recording equipment and materials and the
employment of staff to record, transcribe and index oral literature when there are not even
sufficient funds to cope with the more traditional and conventional library functions, and when
libraries continue to deteriorate and disintegrate for lack of adequate resources. This is what
Mazikana (1987: 14) rightly refers to as "the resources debate." The involvement of librarians
in the recording of oral literature is further decried in view of the librarian's lack of expertise in
the area. It is asserted that it is ill-advised to dabble in a profession of which one has only a
superficial grasp and understanding.

The proponents of the library's involvement in recording oral literature point to several
factors that make such involvement mandatory. While they accept that it would be regrettable
to disadvantage other library programmes because of oral literature, they argue that in a
situation in which the documentary sources are clearly inadequate, it is negligent to ignore or fail
to tap the oral sources that can assist in supplementing the documentary sources and redressing
the imbalance inherent in the collections.

Proponents accept that the librarian has professional limitations in the handling of oral
sources, but argue that, even so, the recording of oral literature is a skill that can be acquired,
and the librarian with knowledge of the strengths and weaknesses of existing collections and the
requirements of researchers for source materials, is in a singularly advantageous position to learn the skills and exploit the oral literature sources meaningfully.

The supporters of the library’s involvement in recording oral literature also accept the budgetary constraints that affect many libraries and realise fully the ever-increasing range of responsibilities that have to be shouldered. In spite of these constraints, however, it is felt that in an environment in which the oral sources, and, in particular, oral traditions, are known to be rapidly disappearing, or at any rate are being transformed beyond all recognition, and when no other agency is prepared to accept the responsibility for gathering the material, then the libraries have a duty to intervene, however inadequately, to ensure that at least some oral literature can be recorded and preserved.

There is no doubt that the task of collection and preservation of oral literature involves the dissipation of resources. In some African countries where attempts have been made to record oral literature, various problems have to be tackled. As Mazikana has observed, "it is not unusual to find that after they have purchased the recording equipment and materials and having hired the staff required to record, transcribe and index, these institutions sooner or later come to the realisation that oral tradition is a vast subject whose exhaustive exploitation requires means and resources well beyond their capability" (1987: 14).

Another obstacle facing librarians in their attempts to organise oral literature is the attitude of sponsoring authorities towards such ventures. In a number of countries in Africa, librarianship, and for that matter information, is not considered to be a high priority. Therefore, any attempt to organise oral tradition in libraries is bound to be regarded as a case of biting off more than can be chewed, as it is often assumed that librarians are not performing their "traditional" duties very well. To add another function may increase problems.

A very important question for the librarian is who should go into the field to gather oral materials? This is worth deciding before any attempts are made on a project. Ideally, experts should be employed in all cases, but there are few experts in most African countries. It might be necessary to employ knowledgeable amateurs where possible. Materials collected by amateurs could be checked by an expert for authenticity and exhaustiveness.

The transcribing of tape recorded information may also pose a problem. In recent years investigators have made tape recordings and then paid people to transcribe and translate them. Unless this procedure is subjected to close linguistic control, most transcribers will give quite loose paraphrases of the originals, and they may suppress local dialects and replace them with more fashionable standard forms. If care is not taken, the result may be a literal translation of the original form.

Yet another obstacle for librarians in Africa is the problem of bibliographic control and storage. This problem arises when consideration is given to the vast array of languages that need to be utilized depending on the size of the country and the geographical area that must be traversed.

3.6 PROPOSALS

The starting point for the organisation of oral literature in Africa is to identify an institution, agency or group that has an interest in and the capability of organising oral source material. Although libraries in the modern sense are still in their infancy in most countries in Africa, academic libraries seem to be in the lead in terms of accommodation, financing, stock, equipment and staffing. Hence they become the logical candidates for initiating such programmes in Africa.

The above suggestion is without prejudice to those made by writers such as H. O. M. Iwuji (1989), J. C. Anyim (1972), and Raphael Ndiaye (1988) who attempt to link public libraries
and oral tradition. Although this writer is totally in agreement with those cited above on the need to document oral tradition in African libraries, it is my opinion that a beginning must be made with academic libraries for those who have not already done so. These libraries are staffed with professionals of wide ranging subject backgrounds such as literature, history, sociology, and anthropology. They also have specialists in these areas on their faculties. Furthermore, they are often better funded than public libraries. Therefore, they have the necessary environment for locating and documenting oral literature.

As has already been mentioned, the organisation of oral literature is a very expensive venture, involving motor vehicles, tape recorders and other equipment. On the other hand, it is common knowledge that libraries in Africa are facing very serious financial constraints. Librarians will, therefore, have to provide convincing arguments for extra funding from sponsoring authorities. This is not an easy task, but it has to be done anyway.

There is also the need to organise training programmes for people who will do field interviews and recording on behalf of the libraries. The training programmes must be both theoretical and practical. Participants must realise that the recordings and transcripts that they produce will be treated by researchers with the same regard as they treat other material in the library. It will be assumed that oral recordings have the same integrity and authenticity as other library materials. For this reason, it is necessary to ensure that those asked to record on behalf of the library do not portray narrow sectional interests, but are guided by the need of the library to achieve comprehensive historical documentation.

It may also be necessary for the librarian, the academic or specialist to analyse all oral recordings in order to make a distinction between propaganda, political materials and historical records. There is thus the need to keep full records about the informants, and about the tapes, individual testimonies, and the subjects on which information is recorded.

It is envisaged that some day African librarians interested in oral literature librarianship will come together and form an association with a view not only to exchanging ideas, but also staging concerted efforts to collect raw data in the form of recorded interviews and performances and preserve them for future generations. Indeed, Africa’s great potential in this field needs to be tapped and preserved as part of the continent’s heritage.
CHAPTER FOUR

PROFILES OF SELECTED ORAL LITERATURE PROGRAMMES IN AFRICA

4.1 CENTRE REGIONAL DE DOCUMENTATION (CRDT)

This Centre was established by UNESCO in 1968 at Niamey, Niger. It is responsible for the implementation of the plan for regional research on oral tradition and for the coordination of cooperative projects among institutes and universities in the region, especially in Benin, Cameroon, Chad, Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone and Togo (UNESCO 1974?: 13).

Under the terms of its provisional status, it is to draw up and implement programmes in consultation with member states and in collaboration with their national research institutes. For this purpose, it is expected to publish a liaison bulletin, grant research fellowships to national institutions in member states, assist individual research workers, organise technical training courses, and publish works that are widely distributed in Africa and throughout the rest of the world. Unfortunately, very little has been heard of its activities and services in all these years.

4.2 EAST AFRICAN CENTRE FOR RESEARCH ON ORAL TRADITIONS AND AFRICAN NATIONAL LANGUAGES (EACROTANAL)

This Centre located in Zanzibar was founded in 1977 by five countries, Tanzania, Madagascar, Sudan, Ethiopia, and Burundi, with Somalia, Mozambique and the Comoros joining later (African Research and Documentation 1988: 55). EACROTANAL's most prominent objectives are to promote and coordinate research of a regional nature pertaining to oral traditions and African languages; help people conduct research in these fields and help train appropriate personnel for various national centres; develop means of collection, analysis, preservation, and dissemination of African oral traditions and languages; and organise seminars or conferences and edit or publish work in the chosen field.

In practice the Centre has organised a number of training sessions on such topics as methodology and techniques for collecting oral tradition, preservation and use of that tradition, lexicography and dictionary construction, and the training of terminologists. Another activity has been the preparation of albums of traditional music, as well as illustrated books on handicrafts in East Africa.

A project has been designed to produce small, simple but attractive books for children and new literates to enable them to maintain their new skills while still helping to preserve traditional culture. At the same time this project will include translations from one African language to another as well as into French and English, in order to widen appreciation of African traditional tales and legends. Two films, both on apiculture (bee-keeping), have been produced, one in Tanzania, the other in Burundi. About a hundred old manuscripts on various subjects have been collected.

Various papers in mimeographed or photocopied format are available at the Zanzibar centre. Topics include "Taarab Music from Zanzibar," "Oral Traditions, Archaeology and History," "Sound in Films," "Some Notes About Audio-Visual Materials and How to Preserve Them," "Oral Traditions and Translations," and "Oral Traditions for Development." Most of these papers are produced by either Tanzanian or Malagasy scholars.

4.3 THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF MALAWI

The National Archives of Malawi started its collection of oral traditions in 1980 (Lwesya 1989: 10). The interviews were initially written down on paper by the interviewers. This proved
very tiresome and time-consuming. In 1984 funding was provided by UNESCO for the purchase of two Uher 4,000 Report Monitor Tape Recorders which use single dry cell batteries, and a special rechargable lead storage battery. The equipment can have main power supply inserted as required, and can also be powered by a 12.V or 24.V car battery by using an appropriate connecting lead. Additionally, a Canon camera, tapes, microphones, microphone heads, headphones, nickel cadmium batteries and chargers, and a portable Sanyo cassette recorder were purchased.

The involvement of the National Archives of Malawi in the collection of oral traditions is threefold: 1) To bridge the information gap uncovered in both government and non-government archives through planned interviews with individuals in rural areas in the form of sound records. These recorded interviews are intended for preservation and research. 2) To enrich the National Archives with oral information depicting the views of the people who were underprivileged, dispossessed and disgruntled in the colonial period, and of those who by virtue of being historically inarticulate have been overlooked in various studies of the past. 3) The collection of oral traditions is conceived of as a panacea to the biased information contained in government and non-government records of the colonisers about the culture and history of the indigenous people. It can be contended, however, that the collection of oral traditions is geared towards decolonising history and relieving it from the cruelty of official documentation by allowing the scholarly community to use oral traditions to study all facets of the past with balanced perception.

4.4 THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF SENEGAL

At the time of independence in 1960 the National Archives of Senegal was preoccupied, above all, with the protection of the French West Africa archives preserved at Dakar, and with the establishment of an archives for independent Senegal. It was not until the 1980s that oral records were considered and even then, only in a very small way. Article 6 of Senegal's Archival Law of February 2, 1981 states that "non-written documents and especially those produced while collecting oral traditions can serve (perhaps even support) national history, whatever their medium, and must be deposited in public archives" (Mbaye 1990: 570). This led to the establishment of a department of oral records.

Researchers began depositing copies of their recordings in the National Archives after this law was passed. These tapes in the local languages included transcriptions. The collection's catalog entries include the name of the collector, the subject discussed, the language of the recording, the date, the original classification code of the recording, the transcription, and the library's classification. For recordings, the archives adopted a classification code using letters that denote the media (Ba for tapes, Ca for cassettes), followed by numbers. Transcriptions are treated according to the description standards of the International Standard Bibliographic Description for Monographic Publications--ISBD(M). There are encouraging signs that more advanced techniques will soon be applied.

The National Archives, for the moment, subsidises the production of collections of oral traditions. "Oral tradition" is understood as "past remembrances orally transmitted which are the product of the activities of a dynamic culture" (Mbaye 1990: 571), for these oral testimonies concern the past of one or many people that are made the object of a recording across a temporal chain. These include oral history, ethnographic texts, oral literary texts, and oral traditions.

At the National Archives no oral archival collections have been accessioned, either under a special arrangement of deposit or in the usual way through a gift agreement. Uniform methods are now being found for treating oral records. The Archives maintains an original and two
copies of each tape. The original, appropriately marked, is preserved in a place other than where the copies are stored. This practice maintains security for the document. The first copy, which is marked "first copy" serves the reference needs of the staff and the second copy, also marked with a descriptive label, is used by patrons.

4.5 THE NATIONAL ARCHIVES OF ZIMBABWE

The National Archives of Zimbabwe has an Oral History Programme which was set up in 1976 (African Research and Documentation 1986: 60). The Programme is divided into three language sections, Shona, English and Ndebele, the three major languages of Zimbabwe. Those who have contributed to, or are able to throw light on the nation's development and historical background, are interviewed by oral historians on the staff. The interviews are recorded on tape and subsequently transcribed, thus becoming a research asset of considerable value.

Workshops are held in the Archives to give elementary training in methodology and techniques for local teachers and cultural officers who conduct the interviews. Interviews on cassettes are transferred to reel for archival retention.

The National Archives of Zimbabwe Oral History Programme works in close collaboration with the Oral Traditions Association of Zimbabwe (OTAZI). Together, they try to promote the documentation of Zimbabwe's oral history and also to improve and standardise the practice and methodology of those involved in oral history. They also provide a national forum for practitioners so that Zimbabwe's unrecorded history that has survived for generations through oral narration will appear in documented form.

4.6 THE SWAZILAND ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

In 1985 an oral history project was established in Swaziland, based at the National Archives at Lobamba (Hamilton 1987: 383). The project set itself three tasks: the establishment of an oral archive on Swazi history, the publication of a selection of transcripts from the oral archive concerning the precolonial history of Swaziland, and the popularisation of precolonial history.

The precolonial history of Swaziland is the history of a largely non-literate people. The colonial period is well documented, but mostly from the perspective of the colonial administration. Oral traditions are thus a primary source for both the precolonial and the later history of Swaziland. The project is aimed at preserving oral testimonies about all periods of Swazi history, including the immediate past. Special attention has been paid to the collection and preservation of the oral record pertaining to the precolonial history of Swaziland, a period for which documentary sources are largely absent.

At the present moment, Swazi oral traditions are dying out. Literacy is on the increase and Swazi history, literature, and law are being written down. Oral traditions are, therefore, rapidly losing their reasons for existing and are being supplanted by the authority of the written word. The existing repositories of oral traditions are also gradually disappearing. The 1970s and the 1980s have seen the demise of many Swazi elders who have been raised in "traditional" circumstances. These factors have made the creation of an oral archive a task of some urgency.

Until the project's inception, oral data recorded in the past were both inaccessible and in danger of being lost. A secure and centralised repository for original tape recordings (or copies and/or transcripts of them) has now been established in the National Archives at Lobamba. The facilities include the provision of suitable cases to protect iron oxide tapes from the earth's magnetic field, which uncountered, can over a period of some years cause the complete obliteration of the recordings.
The core of the oral archives at Lobamba comprises interviews from four major sources: 1) the mid-1960s to the early 1980s, relating to historical topics, 2) the same period covering a wider range of topics, including traditions, nursery tales, praise poems, and stories of past heroes, 3) those conducted by Philip Bonner in 1970 as the basis of the early chapters of his book *King, Commoners and Concessionaries* (1983) on the rise and dissolution of the Swazi state, and 4) those conducted in 1983 by Carolyn Hamilton on the precolonial history of southern Swaziland. In many instances testimonies of the same informants appear in all four collections. These interviews conducted at different times in the past twenty-five years, and under varying circumstances, provide a unique opportunity for the assessment of the effects of various factors on oral testimony.

To facilitate access to the oral archive and provide a sense of the range, quality and research potential of the Swazi oral traditions, the project has undertaken the transcription, translation into English, and annotation of a selection of the interviews, although the tapes themselves will be available to researchers. Every written text produced by the project is accompanied by the name of the transcriber, translator, and annotator.

In producing written texts of oral testimonies, the project strives to reproduce the original text as fully as possible in transcription. Where necessary in translation, elegance of style is eschewed in favour of accuracy of interpretation. The translations remain closely bound to the original testimony. Where SiSwati words or phrases have no satisfactory English equivalents, the original SiSwati word is retained in the text and its meaning is discussed at length in a note. Ultimately a detailed historical map will be produced to accompany each collection.

An index to the transcripts is being compiled to make the data more accessible. The final collection of transcripts will be fully microfilmed as an insurance against loss or damage. A selection of the transcripts produced by the project will be published in edited form, to make the data accessible to the widest possible audience, both those with an interest in Swazi history and those whose concern is oral studies.

4.7 UNIVERSITY OF ZAMBIA

The Oral History Project of the University of Zambia began in 1979 as a special collection in the university library. It was not only the first library project to have the blessing of the University of Zambia’s Senate Research Grants Committee, but also the first one to receive financial support from an outside body—the Swedish Agency for Research Cooperation with Developing Countries (SAREC) (Msiska 1987: 42).

The project was allotted the sum of K10,850 from SAREC, which was used to purchase a wide range of equipment—tapes, tape recorders, projector, microphones and headphones. The purchase of the equipment was only one part of the project. The other was the compilation of bibliographies of completed oral history projects in the country that would, among other things, avoid duplication of research. A two volume bibliography of taped and transcribed projects and materials derived from oral traditions was published (Rooke and Msiska 1981).

The project team was concerned that bona fide researchers, especially foreigners who conducted oral interviews, did not deposit their work or duplicates as tapes or transcripts with the National Archives of Zambia, the only institution enjoying a legal depository privilege in the country, or the University of Zambia Library, the designated National Reference Library for Zambia. Thus, the oral history project was implemented to arrest this loss of cultural documentation.

With SAREC’s provision of funds, more equipment including sound/slide projectors was purchased locally and abroad. Special regulations were formulated regarding the lending of the equipment, especially the tape recorders, to bona fide researchers. Researchers in need of tape
recorders would be allowed to borrow them from the library and return them at the end of their research, thereby placing the library in a better position for acquiring tapes and transcripts made by researchers.

Most of the oral history research is confined to the University of Zambia, Lusaka campus library and the Institute of African Studies, since inadequate funds and lack of time do not allow the staff to either go out and conduct their own interviews or locate completed projects. However, other institutions in the country including libraries, museums, the National Archives and private individuals are contacted for assistance.

4.8 UNIVERSITY OF IBADAN

The University of Ibadan in general and its Institute of African Studies in particular are actively engaged in collecting various kinds of oral tradition (Armstrong 1969: 12). The University has voluminous materials in Yoruba on Ifa divination and many other kinds of traditional materials, as well as oral collections relating to the traditions of the deserted towns of the old Oyo Empire in the valley of the Upper Ogun.

Other cultural areas that also have been covered include the Benue valley, with considerable material in Igala, Idoma, Tiv and on the Jukun. There is also a large collection of tape recorded interviews containing the historical traditions of the Aro Ibo made before the Nigerian Civil War broke out. From the Niger Delta there are large collections of oral traditions relating to the history of the Ijo peoples.

Most of these collections were made using both student and non-student transcribers. It became important to collect as many different kinds of materials as possible, not just the formal story of origin, but as many versions of a particular tradition as possible. Many kinds of cross-checking become possible when one can compare materials from several different categories of traditional literature, such as funeral songs, praise songs, and hunting-horn calls.

4.9 ORAL TRADITIONS ASSOCIATION OF BOTSWANA (OTABO)

The Oral Traditions Association of Botswana (OTABO) is affiliated with the Botswana National Archives which was established in 1982. The headquarters of the Association is in Gaborone. The objectives and functions include: 1) to organise, monitor and coordinate activities in the field of oral traditions in the country, 2) to promote measures for the preservation, protection and defence against all manner of impediments towards the practice of oral traditions in the country, and to further the progress of all aspects of the administration and preservation of oral traditions in the country, 3) to establish, maintain and strengthen relations between all those concerned with the study, practice, preservation, dissemination and promotion of oral traditions in the country, 4) to facilitate meaningful use of oral traditions in the country, by making them more widely known, and by encouraging greater ease of access to research findings, and 5) to give advice and guidance to researchers by assisting in identifying areas of research and relevant information (Oral Traditions Association of Botswana n.d.)

Membership of the Association is open to individuals as well as institutions. The Association is governed by an Executive Committee which comprises members elected by the General Meeting. The Executive Committee has the power to determine the affairs of the Association, but must report its decisions at each General Meeting. The General Meeting of the Association is held tri-annually in March, July and November each year, with the Annual General Meeting at the end of each financial year. The meetings are held to brief members on the activities of the Association and bring to their attention other matters of interest.
CHAPTER FIVE
DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

5.1 INTRODUCTION
The data for this study were obtained through a questionnaire that was sent to ten Sub-Saharan African countries which were known to be involved in oral literature activities. This list was compiled from articles in journals such as the International Library Review, African Research and Documentation, Journal of Documentation, and the African Studies Review. Institutions in seven countries responded to the questionnaire, representing a 70% response rate: the National Archives of Botswana, National Archives of Malawi, National Archives of Swaziland, National Archives of Zimbabwe, University of Natal, South Africa, University of Zambia, Lusaka, and University of Ibadan, Nigeria.

Since the study is exploratory in nature, characteristics of programmes under investigation are expressed as frequencies. There are some discrepancies in the analysis because some of the programmes did not respond to some of the questions. Also, in cases where the items overlap, the total adds up to more than seven. The analysis is divided into four major categories of oral literature activities: management, collection, processing, and dissemination.

5.2 MANAGEMENT
1. STATUS OF THE PROGRAMMES
Four of the programmes are connected to a national archive, while three are established in universities. This is unlike the situation in developed countries, such as the U.S.A., where most of the oral literature programmes are associated with universities and research institutes.

2. ACTIVITIES OF THE PROGRAMMES
All the programmes under investigation indicated their involvement in the collection of oral history and oral tradition. This is also different from the situation in North America where most of the programmes, such as those at Columbia University and University of California-Berkeley, are involved only in oral history collection. This might be attributed to the fact that whereas oral history is usually identified as an academic process that supplements written records, oral traditions are to a large extent identified with societies lacking a written tradition, even though they also exist in highly literate societies.

It must be pointed out, however, that the term oral history has assumed an all-embracing connotation, and much oral tradition work is carried on under the guise of oral history. Therefore, the distinctions that have been drawn between the two, may not even apply in most of the places.

3. PROGRAMME DIRECTORS AND STAFF
In order to explore and determine its effects on their practices, the programme directors were asked to indicate their educational background. As Table 1 indicates, three of the directors are reported to have a background in history, two in Library and Information Science, two in Social Studies, one has a background in History and Library and Information Studies, and two have backgrounds in other areas.

* The University of Natal programme was not described in Chapter four since their programme description had not been received by the time this manuscript was completed.
Table I  Educational Background of the Directors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Discipline</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library and Information Science</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Studies</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>History &amp; Library and Information Science</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of writers hold the view that the educational and professional background of the programme director does not matter, so far as he or she is knowledgeable in research needed. This is due to the fact that the main focus of oral literature is to get material for research. What has been overlooked by these writers, however, is the fact that the whole process does involve a library aspect. Considering the possibility of a director being involved in research and interviewing is justified, but the failure to acknowledge the importance of acquiring competency in such aspects as management, technical services, and dissemination is not justified.

Respondents also were asked to indicate the responsibilities of the programme directors. All the programmes indicated that the directors are involved in other activities in the library or archives, or in teaching in one case. This shows that only a minimal amount of time is usually devoted by the directors to oral literature activities.

Directors in four of these programmes are autonomous and report directly to government authorities. This is an encouraging development as the position of the director in the decision-making hierarchy has a considerable effect on the extent the programme’s demands and needs are met. A director who reports to the highest authority in the institution, for instance, is likely to have the programme’s needs met more effectively and efficiently. By the same token, a director who is the last in the chain of command and reports to lower management is likely to be neglected or forgotten.

The study also revealed that all the programmes are faced with shortage of human resources. The average number of staff devoted primarily to oral literature activity is four. Even so, in most cases, they reported having additional duties unrelated to oral documentation. The visible reason for the acute shortage in staffing is the financial difficulties these institutions face. Inadequate budget allocations impact directly on manpower levels.

4. FUNDING

All the programmes reported that their budgets are inadequate. None of the programmes has an autonomous budget. The budgets are either part of the budgets of the library or archives. Four of the programmes receive funding from the government, while three programmes are funded as part of the university budget. One of the programmes (University of Zambia) reported having received a substantial amount of funding from foreign donor agencies.

Because all the programmes receive their funds from major institutional budgets, there is stiff competition for the allocation of resources. It is, therefore, not surprising to see oral programmes relegated to the background, with the bulk of funding being allocated to traditional library and archival activities. This may account for why many oral history and oral tradition activities in Africa have had to be shelved.
5.3 COLLECTION

1. SIZE

As shown in Table 2, three of the programmes reported having collections of less than 500 tapes and interviews, three reported having collections of more than 500 and less than 1500, and one reported more than 1500 collections.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Holdings</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Less than 500</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>500 to 1500</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1500 to 2500</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. INTERVIEWS

All the programmes reported using the staff of the programme to conduct interviews. Two of the programmes reported using volunteers for interviewing, two reported using faculty members, and two reported using students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewers</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff of the Programme</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteers</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question of students' role in the process of interviewing is one of the most controversial issues in the field of oral documentation. Some programmes do not rely on students because of their inadequate training, and because they do not stay long enough in a programme. Other institutions have involved students in a number of interviews, especially students who collect data in connection with their research.

There is no doubt that the use of permanent full-time staff tends to produce a more even quality of work and a guarantee for control and continuity. However, with the extreme shortage of staff among the programmes in Africa, it may be necessary for the programmes to solicit the help of faculty, students and volunteers in order to fulfill their missions. The alternative may be stagnation, if not the demise of the programmes.

3. EQUIPMENT

The equipment available to any institution depends on a number of factors, including the availability of funds for purchase and the brands of equipment that can be secured on the market. From the response to the questionnaire, a rather distressing picture emerged regarding the extent to which these institutions are equipped.

Whereas the use of the tape recorder was reported in all the programmes, only three programmes reported the use of electric typewriters, two programmes reported the use of word
processors, and none used a transcribing machine. It appears that technological advances that facilitate oral documentation seem to have largely by-passed these African countries.

5.4 PROCESSING

1. TRANSCRIBING

Although all the programmes agree that researchers prefer the use of transcripts to tapes, the statistical analysis of data has shown that none of the programmes has fully transcribed all the recordings. As shown in Table 4, four programmes have partially transcribed their transcripts, two provide only an abstract to their recordings, while one programme does not provide any transcribing services.

Table 4 Transcribing Activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Partially transcribed</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstracts provided</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No transcripts</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is clear that lack of sufficient funding and staff are among the factors that have inhibited transcribing in most of these programmes. Seeking student and volunteer help, even if it implies a certain degree of compromise, is one of the alternatives that should be considered by these programmes.

2. INDEXING

Only two of the programmes index their materials. As in transcribing, the paucity of indexing can be attributed to the lack of financial support and staff. This obstacle is faced by almost all types of programmes whether they are affiliated with libraries or with archives.

3. ACCESS POINTS TO MATERIALS

The decision to implement a particular access point is dependent on several factors such as the nature of the collection and the relationship of a particular collection to the general collection of the parent institution. This is in addition to the orientation and attitude of the staff of the programme. From Table 5 below, it can be seen that all the programmes classified their materials by the name of the project and also have some form of accession number. The name of the interviewee was considered an important access point in five of the programmes, while the subject of the interview was considered in three. On the other hand, the name of the interviewer was considered an access point in only one programme.
Table 5 Access Points to Materials of Programmes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Access Points</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Name of Project</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Interviewer</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Name of Interviewee</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accession Number</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subject</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.5 DISSEMINATION

1. USE OF MATERIAL

All the programmes reported that their materials are stored in closed stacks. However, they are accessible to the general public upon request. All the programmes insist that materials be used only in the library or archive. No lending facilities are available for users.

None of the programmes reported the need for authorization from the donors or interviewees before the materials are made available. This practice is probably related to the recording of oral traditions of predominantly illiterate societies which lack experience in the benefits and intricacies of copyright.

2. LOCATION OF THE MATERIALS

All the programmes reported that their materials are integrated either into the library's special collections or into the archival collections. They all also integrate oral literature materials into the general library or archive catalogue.

3. BIBLIOGRAPHIC ACCESSIBILITY

Accessibility involves making the collections known through adequate and easy-to-use finding aids, as well as publicizing the existence of the materials by such means as contributing to union lists and cooperation with other groups with similar interests.

Table 6 Bibliographic Accessibility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bibliographic Utilities</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Annual Reports</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Catalogues of Holdings</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brochures, guides, etc.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bibliographies</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As shown in Table 6 above, all the programmes provide annual reports of their activities. Three provide catalogues of their holdings, four compile bibliographies, and only one provides a brochure or a guide to the collections.

4. PRESERVATION

All the programmes under investigation reported having facilities for temperature and humidity control. Air-conditioners were commonly mentioned. This is an encouraging
development since tropical temperatures and humidity do not favour the use of most of the equipment dealing with oral documentation.

All the programmes preserve their material in audio recording form, although a few transcripts have also been produced. All of them also produce a master tape of each recording and one or two other tapes. However, none of the respondents indicated having any maintenance programmes for their collections.

5. COOPERATION WITH OTHER AGENCIES

Five of the programmes reported some cooperation with other libraries, archives, museums and research institutes with similar interests, while two did not have any such activity. The form of cooperation varied among programmes and included consulting with other depositories and programmes, as well as sharing information about holdings. No programmes exchange or loan materials.

More cooperation is expected among the oral literature programmes, irrespective of whether they are affiliated with archives or research institutes. It is expected that there will be joint acquisition of equipment and cooperation in research among programmes located in the same area, which will reduce operational costs and avoid duplication of research.
6.1 CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings of this preliminary study on data from seven countries, the following conclusions are made with regard to the management, collection and dissemination of oral literature in Sub-Saharan Africa, which need to be investigated by future research in other African countries.

1. On a regional basis more has been achieved in oral documentation in eastern and southern Africa than in West Africa. Although it is rather difficult to ascribe any reasons for this disparity, one may hazard a guess that part of the reason for the seeming lack of interest by West African countries may be due to the greater impact of western education and urbanisation. Areas that are largely rural, with higher percentages of illiterate populations, are more influenced by oral tradition than areas with higher rates of urbanisation and literacy.

2. Since funds for all the programmes are obtained from already tight institutional budgets, most of the programmes have had little impact upon the scholarly communities in their areas. Funding of oral literature programmes often pose problems. Like libraries or archives, the programmes' purposes often imply not-for-profit activity which is staff intensive, geared towards amassing, processing, and promoting the use of oral data. This process must be continuous. If it is supported only in a sporadic manner, or if the support is curtailed, the result will be fragmented, unbalanced, and missed collections. The evaluation of larger societal benefits from oral data collections is difficult to make in the short range.

3. All the programmes produce their work in tapes and transcripts. Requests from users have been more for transcripts than for tapes. Except for areas like folklore and music, transcripts are favoured. Unfortunately, most of the programmes do not properly index their products. Finding what one wants from a taped product can thus be sometimes difficult.

4. Theoretically speaking the collections of the programmes under investigation seem to be easily accessible to all prospective users. The use of these materials is, however, hindered by sets of rules and regulations as well as by certain restrictions that were not necessarily stipulated by the interviewee or donor in some of the cases. Procedures vary from programme to programme, but it is doubtful whether any serious researcher is turned away. The observation of restrictions is, of course, rigid and to the letter.

5. A very small amount of oral data in Africa is found in film format. The costs and technical problems inherent in film production will probably continue to limit the use of this medium in oral data research.

6.2 RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made to serve as a guide to various countries in Africa which intend to initiate oral literature activities. Since the problems likely to be faced by these institutions are the same in most Third World countries irrespective of their location, these recommendations also may be applicable to other countries in the Third World.

1. Since the ultimate goal of the whole process is making oral literature materials accessible to potential users, a strong relation between the oral literature programme and the library or archive must be established, irrespective of the status and affiliation of the programme.

One of the alternatives for the programme is to be an autonomous unit within the institution where it functions as a production unit that plans for acquisition, solicits grants, searches for potential interviewees, and conducts, transcribes, and indexes interviews. With this
arrangement, technical services and dissemination of materials are to be carried out by the library's technical services department and other concerned departments.

Another alternative is to set up the programme as an autonomous unit within the library or archives where its director reports to the director of the library/archives in his or her capacity as director of the oral literature programme. In this scenario, a director should be free from other obligations and be wholly devoted to oral literature activities. As in the first alternative, technical services should be carried out by the staff of the technical services department, whereas dissemination should be delegated to the staff of the library or archives.

2. The programme should define its objectives taking into consideration its available resources as well as its limitations. This is particularly true for programmes that are affiliated with smaller institutions that have limited funding. Due to the financial crunch that faces all the countries in Africa, a logical strategy for the programmes is to concentrate on collecting materials on selected topics. Statements of purpose of oral literature programmes should include at least three elements--subject area to be documented by the programme, kinds of documentation sought, and the anticipated users of the collections.

3. A full-time director should be available to plan, coordinate and supervise the execution of the policies of the programme. Although no specific background would be suggested, the director should be familiar with the general principles of management, and a knowledge of any of the following: librarianship, sociology, folklore, history or anthropology. The director also should be familiar with the research needs of the parent institution in particular, and the community in general.

The director should be well-placed in the hierarchy of the institution in order to make the needs of the programme heeded and met, and be assisted by enough full-time staff members to perform the ongoing duties of oral literature programmes such as needs assessment, and coordinating interviewing, transcribing and editing.

4. The cost of funding the production of oral data can be staggering when compared to the costs of adding other information products to the library and archive collections. It is apparent that if any country is to establish an oral data programme, it would need to seek funding from philanthropic and other granting agencies as was done at the University of Zambia, Lusaka. Funding from more than one source is recommended.

5. Acquisition policies should be constantly reviewed and revised. This task should reflect the philosophy and objectives of the programmes, not just those of the director or some of the staff of the programme. The programme should define with care and precision what it is after, and this should be done in accordance to its written and clearly defined policies.

6. Space requirements for an oral literature programme depend upon how many people might be working simultaneously on various stages of oral literature processing, and how many projects the programme is running at the same time. The programme requires space for desks, files of correspondence and records, interview tapes and transcripts in their various stages of completion, as well as equipment.

7. Basic equipment should include tape recorders for interview and playback, typewriters, transcribing machines, video recorders, and microcomputers for word processing. The programme also needs some standard office supplies and furnishings (chairs, desks, tables, file cabinets, shelving, card catalogues) and access to a photocopy machine. The number of tape recorders needed will depend upon how many interviewers would be working at the same time. The equipment available and used by oral literature programmes can affect sound quality of interviews, interview processing, preservation of interviews, and the future uses of interviews.

8. When acquiring equipment there are several broad considerations to keep in mind. It is necessary to purchase equipment that can be repaired and serviced by local technicians or
equipment agents and distributors. This means, of course, that the brand of equipment must have local representation. Unfamiliar equipment simply may not be repairable. Sometimes even local agents of a manufacturer or distributor may not carry the full range of spare parts, and there may be delays of weeks or months while replacement parts are ordered and shipped.

9. When purchasing equipment from abroad, it is necessary to guard both against outdated technology and technology that is too advanced for effective use and repair. It is not uncommon for manufacturers to consider low-volume markets such as the Third World some form of dumping ground for obsolescent inventory. No sooner is such equipment delivered than the purchaser may be told that it is no longer being manufactured and that spare parts have become difficult to secure.

10. It is expected that a number of oral literature tapes may stay unused for a long time, and then suddenly become immensely valuable. Meanwhile the tapes that contain the living moment testimony are liable to loss from electrostatic build up or sound overprint, so they need some special servicing at regular intervals. Like all other preservation materials, audiotapes and videotapes must be kept in a cool, dark, dry environment. They should be shelved away from metal and other magnetic surfaces. Magnetic catches from cabinets are particularly suspect. Damage in the form of scrambled magnetic particles may ensue from a magnetised fireproof metal drawer. Tapes must be kept supple to ensure the stability of the backing materials and should be played at least once a year. Simply rewinding or fast-forwarding the tapes will not suffice, since these procedures wind the tape onto the reel unevenly and hinder long-term storage.

11. Since this study has revealed that the majority of patrons usually prefer transcripts over tapes, programmes in Africa should give serious consideration to transcribing when establishing their priorities. This is especially important, given that tapes are usually not indexed in most of the programmes under investigation. Transcription also has an advantage because the programmes will have fewer equipment problems.

12. Despite the concern expressed by several practitioners, some of which have merit, the programmes in Africa should solicit student and volunteer help in performing their recording and transcribing. Although the result may not be all that perfect, it would still be better than to leave these tasks undone because of inadequate staff.

13. Although the transcript was the most favoured format, it must be stressed that the written version is only a representation of the interview and that the tape remains the original document. No transcript can capture the timbre of a person's voice, its tone, inflections, and the intensity of expression which are as much a part of speech as the words uttered. By the same token, the tape recorder misses all of the nonverbal communication—the smile, the frown, the movements. Videotaping may, therefore, be the best means of producing oral literature.

14. The better the quality of the original recording, the better will be subsequent reproductions of the record. For this reason it is advisable to make two copies of the original tape so that the original may be preserved and used for further reproduction only in emergencies. Both duplicate copies should be made directly from the original, and should be stored in separate locations so that they will not be mistaken for each other or used interchangeably, and so that if one becomes damaged, the other may survive.

15. Since the catalogue of the library or archives is the first and sometimes only tool for patron inquiries, it is important that catalogues of oral literature materials, especially those which are open for public use, be fully integrated into the general catalogue of the parent institution's library. This will make the materials of the programme widely known and used.

16. Ultimately the success of any cultural research depends to a large extent on the fieldworker whose success may vary in accordance with personal character, training, methodology,
and cultural and national background. These factors should be considered in the selection of interviewers. It also is recommended that modest compensation be offered to interviewees deemed to be in need.

17. Legal release agreements are required in oral literature programmes in which the interviewee either signs over copyright to the institution of deposit or retains rights. Agreements governing restrictions on the use of the materials also may be made. It is recommended that programme directors seek the advice of legal counsel to develop a legal agreement for interviewees to sign.

18. Property rights to materials include literary property rights which may be retained by the interviewee until such time that he or she deems it appropriate to assign them to the programme or literary property rights which may be assigned immediately to the programme. When the literary property rights are assigned to the programme, the permission of the interviewee to quote from or publish is not required, and the policy of the programme is to permit publication of the entire interview.

19. The programme may receive recordings donated or purchased from individuals and organisations. The programme should not accept gifts indiscriminately since they also may bring new responsibilities for the programme. Gifts must be properly evaluated in terms of quality, authenticity, interpretation and biases. To determine whether the contents of a gift warrant transcribing and whether the tapes are defective, an early audit of the tapes should be done by a qualified person. With extremely large gift collections, some kind of sampling technique may be more appropriate. A decision should be made whether "bad" oral sources are better than none at all.

20. Access to collections implies providing the tools required for access. It is not only important that internal aids be in existence, for they serve only those who venture into the institution, but also that the existence of the collections should be made known to a larger cross-section of the population and to the wider world. Published guides are important whether they are in print, microfilm or available online by computer.

21. It is recommended that programmes in Africa establish some relations with selected foreign institutions with related interests so as to help in the coordination and development of the programmes. This type of relationship exists between the Word Archive of Mexico and some oral history programmes in America. It has helped in the training of staff and the provision of equipment for the Mexican archives.

22. It may be necessary to seek expert advice before starting oral literature programmes in Africa. This was done in Australia and Singapore where a consultant, David Lance, of the Sound Archives Department of the Imperial War Museum in London, was employed to undertake feasibility studies and to draw up proposals for the establishment of the oral documentation centres.

23. The UNESCO Centre at Niamey should be reorganised so it can perform the function of a regional depository for oral tradition materials. Adequate publicity should be given about its existence and functions so that scholars become interested in all its activities.

24. On an individual level, each African country should have a law requiring researchers, Masters and PhD students to deposit copies of their field tape recordings with translations in an academic library. A copy of field tape recordings should be retained in the department where the thesis or dissertation was completed, to be deposited later in the library. It should be mandatory for all institutions collecting oral sources to publish a descriptive list of their holdings.

25. Since oral tradition is central to African history, its teaching should form an integral part of courses in library schools in Africa. The methods of collection, organisation and dissemination of oral traditions also should be taught. Such a course which may be of interest
to students who intend to become research scholars in African history, folklore, sociology, or anthropology is already being taught at the library school of the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Other schools should follow this example.
CHAPTER SEVEN

IMPLICATIONS FOR GHANA

The findings of this study have implications for Africanists, librarians, archivists, educators, researchers and all others interested in the collection, management and dissemination of oral literature in Ghana. Since there is at present no properly organised oral literature collection in Ghana, it is hoped that this study will serve as a guide for initiating such a programme.

7.1 EDUCATION

The question of education in Ghana raises the crucial question of cultural identity. Adam Curle's studies (1969) have demonstrated that educational priorities which are most inextricably linked to existing social factors will have the greatest success. Even though these studies were conducted more than two decades ago, the results are still relevant at this time. It seems that schools—especially at the primary level—are not succeeding in Ghana as well as they could. Writers such as Dyk (1967) have shown that missionary education laid the seeds of failure by ignoring the existence of the effective customary education present with the traditional structure.

Traditional African schools were a primary target in the process of the destruction of African cultures by foreigners. The most effective way of destroying a culture is to destroy its educational system first. And the most effective way of destroying a people’s educational system is to deny it status in a national educational system.

An examination of some of the stories used in traditional education shows that the narratives were aimed at providing fun as well as moral, physical, emotional and practical knowledge. Although there were no books during this era, our forefathers did a splendid job of educating the future generations through folktales and other forms of oral literature. Not only is much of Africa’s oral literature, including stories, riddles, and proverbs, part of traditional educational systems, but African institutions for the formal education of children also usually contain treasuries of verbal cultures.

Educators and policy makers in Africa are becoming more and more aware that education cut off from the cultural environment because it has been imported by a foreign culture cannot play the role of a disseminator of culture. The schools in Ghana can provide the necessary cultural/traditional material by adapting many of the oral traditions to this purpose. The rich store of oral traditions can be effectively used in schools in their original oral ways to convey not only the traditional stories, but also the new themes which could be presented in traditional form.

In the area of adult literacy campaigns, oral traditions also could be used to great advantage. Functional literacy should not be taught with reading materials alone. Messages have to be dramatised for attitudinal change. And this is best done with visuals, and even better with folk media. Village events such as drama, folk songs and folk media can bring the transmission of new information to adults in basic as well as continuing education. The content of the oral traditions are familiar to the Ghanaian illiterate and could be seen as the foundation stone for the building of greater awareness on the part of the illiterate villager. With this increased awareness could come the desire for the benefits of increased knowledge. The library could be the focal point in this interaction.

The library has a central responsibility in addressing the question of continuing education. By providing recorded material in many forms and services on the part of people trained in the oral material, the flow of information will remain unbroken from initial experience throughout life. Information provided as continuing education can be recreational as well as purely informative, and the library has the whole gamut of rich oral traditions from which to draw.
The big question before today’s educationists in Ghana is: do these kinds of ideal materials, in various recorded forms, actually exist? If not, who is going to provide them? The answer is that oral material in its traditional forms has been demonstrated to exist today in lessening, but still available quantities. But much of this material has yet to be recorded in any preservable form. Ironically, as European and American Africanists learn more and publish more about Africa, this information is imported back into its home country through the channels of commercial book importation.

According to Ikoku (1971: 13-20) the challenge of the library today in Africa is to "de-colonise" its goods and face a cultural reappraisal which incorporates the already inevitable elements from foreign culture, as well as the indigenous, often previously suppressed, elements of the traditional culture. The library can do this in four ways: by becoming the depository of knowledge from all parts of the world and thought, providing in usable form the information stored in the library for all levels of user, existing as a centre for the documentation of traditional and contemporary social values of the people, and becoming an agency for the promotion of the new literature of an emancipated people.

The fact that these suggestions come from a Nigerian does not mean that they are not applicable to the Ghanaian situation. The underlying but unstated philosophy of Ikoku’s plan is that a nation which is truly developed takes the initiative rather than allowing itself to follow later the progress made elsewhere in a different context. Ikoku challenges the library to serve its society in truly unique and personalised ways. Knowing the society, its old ways and its new, and exploiting existing patterns and institutions will result in that service.

7.2 ORGANISATION

The organisation of any programme on oral literature will be complex, in fact much more complex than organising books in libraries. This should be clearly understood by researchers, administrators, librarians and all those interested in oral literature. A conscious effort should be made to investigate all the alternatives available and the necessary groundwork should be made before such a programme is set up.

An effort should be made to draw up a statement of purpose, the type of collections to be organised, project funding methods, processing methods, and the procedures for interviewing, etc. It is advisable that this information be expanded or gathered into a guide for anyone who is interested in contributing to or using the programme.

7.3 STAFFING

Libraries in Ghana will have to train personnel who traditionally service collections to enhance their understanding of oral literature as an alternative method of information provision in libraries. Training programmes will have to be organised for people who will do field interviews and recording on behalf of the libraries. The training programme should be both theoretical and practical. It should acquaint the participants with the functioning of the library and the context in which the oral literature operates. Participants must realise that the recordings and transcripts that they produce will be treated by researchers with the same regard as they treat other material in the library. It will be assumed that oral recordings have the same integrity and authenticity as other library materials. For this reason it is necessary to ensure that those who record on behalf of the library do not portray narrow sectional interests, but are guided by the need of the library to achieve comprehensive historical documentation.
7.4 STORAGE AND PRESERVATION

Assuming that university libraries in Ghana are moving into oral documentation, then concrete efforts should be made to guard against deterioration of materials. The building that will house oral data should be planned so that it will have flexible areas to allow reallocation of space and redevelopment. Adequate temperature and humidity controls should be provided, with sockets or outlets for television and video players, tape recorders, projectors and other equipment. Carrels for use and work space for technical activities, repairs and maintenance also should be provided.

It is the view of this writer that the principle of integrated arrangement of like materials in libraries should not apply to oral materials in the library. I believe that the integrity of the original collection is more important. Therefore, oral collections should be stored and arranged according to provenance, that is, where they come from. Thus, the indexing and cross-referencing of related collections of oral literature materials within the same overall collection becomes of great importance for the users of the materials.

7.5 LIBRARY TRAINING

Professional education for librarianship in Ghana should include making users aware of the place of oral literature in society, the forms that oral literature may take, and the methods of collection, organisation and dissemination (Alemna 1992: 427). There also should be joint efforts among the libraries through conferences and workshops to explore the use of oral documents.

A stronger bond of cooperation should be developed among librarians, researchers, educators, and other users of oral documents. This will enable them to perceive their common activities or interests and thereby find solutions to their problems.

7.6 CONCLUDING REMARKS

The concept of librarianship continues to expand. New areas continue to emerge, as the concept of information is being pushed to its outer boundaries, crossing disciplines to create a holistic, organic concept that is all inclusive. Librarians are now being called upon to service ever-expanding roles in various organisations from record managers to systems analysts.

The oral dimension pervades human history and predates recorded history. Libraries and oral tradition can intersect at a number of points. First, libraries can select and acquire materials on oral tradition as they do standard works in other formats. They can purchase or generate directories which facilitate access to this type of historical data. Second, libraries can organise and process oral literature in the same way that they organise and process other materials and make them fully and easily accessible. Thirdly, libraries can service and disseminate oral materials in a variety of ways, further integrating them into the culture in which they are located.

In addition, libraries can become involved either independently or in conjunction with other agencies in the creation and generation of oral data that will further their roles as purveyors of culture. A number of libraries are cited in this work that have been involved in gathering primary source material. The librarian does not need to be a full-time anthropologist, folklorist, historian or sociologist to embark on this endeavour.

Libraries have employed traditional skills in this enterprise from interviewing and communication techniques to the utilisation of audio and video technology. But most importantly, libraries have ploughed new ground for librarians. They have entered a new dimension of librarianship that transcends the traditional trinity of acquisition, selection and dissemination. They have moved into the creation and generation of information. It is in this area that I believe the future of the library profession in Ghana lies, perhaps our very existence.
It is not every vision that easily becomes a reality. However, it is certain that without goals and visions, achievement is impossible. Not every blueprint for a library becomes a library building, but every library building begins with a blueprint. The observations made in this research may, therefore, be later reviewed, modified or totally accepted. I hope the latter will be the case.
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Monographs are available free of charge to libraries and librarians in Africa. Requests for monographs should be sent to: Nancy J. Schmidt, African Studies Program, 221 Woodburn Hall, Indiana University, Bloomington IN 47405 U.S.A.

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