AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE EDUCATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE OF ORAL LITERATURE IN TRADITIONAL TUMBUKA SOCIETY

BY THOMSON JOHN BOTA

A dissertation submitted to the University of Zambia in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of Master of Education of the University.

School of Education
The University of Zambia
LUSAKA
1983
I, Thomson John Bota, do hereby solemnly declare that this dissertation represents my own work and that it has not previously been submitted for a degree at this or other university.

Signed: ........................
Date: 25-8-83 ........................
This dissertation of T.J. Bota is approved as fulfilling part of the requirements for the award of the degree of Master of Education by the University of Zambia.

Signed: ................................... Supervisor
Date: 25/8/83

Signed: ................................... Co-supervisor
Date: 25/8/83
ABSTRACT

Oral literature plays a significant role in the socialization of young people in any society. Among the Tumbuka, the dominant form is the vidokoni, one of the four main genres. The others are midauku, ntarika and nyimbo. Vidokoni, comprising narratives both with and without song, is extensively used in inculcating societal values and beliefs, indeed the entire Tumbuka cosmovision. The relationship between oral literature, on the one hand, and the process of training and bringing up the young - education - on the other, is extremely intimate. Thus, to determine the i.e., content, the values and beliefs, fundamental to Tumbuka educational system, the formal process of oral literature narration necessarily calls for examining the structures and themes of vidokoni themselves. To this end, this study has adopted a generalized structural-functionalist approach in its examination of vidokoni and also of the relationship between oral literature and education in Tumbuka society.

The methodology used is descriptive emphasizing the functional aspect of narratives in education. Its materials have been drawn, in addition to oral literature itself, from interviews, printed materials, observation and the author's own experience.

This study is divided into four main chapters, plus an introductory and a concluding chapter. A full bibliography of relevant materials is also provided.
The introduction provides the historical and cultural background of the Tumbuka people which influences their oral literature which is the concern of chapter one. Also in this chapter is a discussion of the four genres of Tumbuka oral literature, with particular emphasis on the fact that a good deal of educational work is carried out through vidokoni narratives.

Chapter two deals with Tumbuka traditional educational system and its syllabuses and curricula. Generally, while a great deal of formal training is conducted through narratives, this activity is complemented by learning through imitation (child imitates his adults and/or his peers) and participation in various play and real life activities including initiation ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, etc. Apprenticeship, especially where learning of craftsmanship is concerned, plays an important role in the experience of Tumbuka children. In this chapter there is also an evaluation of the content of education. For instance, it focuses on what was taught to children at various stages of their development. The role of parents, siblings and public is also examined here.

Chapter three examines the themes and motifs in the various narratives in the representative corpus given here. It is noted, thereby confirming our argument, that the themes of narratives encapsulate important values and beliefs, that the motifs contribute to the logic as they provide the data
for substantiating the argument and that all in all the central teachings are to be found in these themes, the narratives' central and controlling ideas. To this end, therefore, narratives are both process and content of Tumbuka traditional education.

Chapter four looks at the various functions of narratives. It also examines the interests of narrators. The functions are divided into two: the latent and the manifest. The latent functions are those that are not clearly meant to teach (hidden functions). The manifest functions refer to functions which are clearly meant to teach. A narrator's interest is an important tool (1) for determining the seriousness of purpose in the teaching process and (2) for evaluating who teaches what to whom and at what stage. For this reason chapter four is concerned with this aspect of the interface between oral literature and education - the medium between the learner and the content - and its form. From our examination of the narrator and his or her place in the education process, it is observed that age and sex groupings predominate. The reason for this is that men feel most competent and are much at home when they narrate stories that describe male roles in society. Similarly, women concentrate on narratives in which women's roles are dominant. As for children (boys and girls), they are more interested in adventures and fantastic stories as those help them to enhance their imaginative faculties as well as to explore their social and physical environments.
The last chapter of this study, the conclusion, sums up the relationship between oral literature and education. It draws together the various strands and avenues pursued in the exploration of the educational system and the oral literature of the Tumbuka. More concretely the conclusion reveals that there is a dire need for (a) further research into the relationship between oral literature and education, (b) comparative studies between Tumbuka and other societies in which oral literature is still used for educational purposes, and (c) a closer examination of the possibility of utilizing oral literature in modern education.
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0.0. INTRODUCTION

0.1 Scope and Rationale.

Before the introduction of writing in Africa south of the Sahara, most societies depended on oral literature to gain and transmit knowledge. Song, dance and story were used singly or in combination to impart skills and wisdom to the young. The use of oral literature in educational process in traditional Africa is a fact widely acknowledged not only by colonial administrators, missionaries and adventurers, but also by modern students of African culture and indigenous African education. A typical example can be furnished from Smith (1922:108) who says,

'In teaching the African we cannot do better than follow the path they have marked out for themselves and make great use of stories'.

Similar is the view of Wandira (1961:165) who has pointed out,

'the past was presented to the child through myths, legends, tales, proverbs, riddles and songs which justify the existing social order and reinforce customs'.

Other scholars have made specific observations about the educational value of oral literature of the people they studied. For instance, Chatelain (1894:21) described the function of the *makka* (a class of stories) among the N'ubundu by saying,

'... though entertaining, too, these stories are intended to be instructive and useful as a preparative for future emergencies. They do not teach how to make a thing but how to act, how to live'.

Speaking about the Akan and Hausa societies, Rattray (1933:470) said, 'a large part of the child's training is derived from listening to *anansesem* (spider stories). He collected hundreds of such stories and proverbs from these societies. Many more scholars have shown the educational value of oral literature for the societies they have studied. Among them are Read 1959 (*Ngoni*), Mwondela 1972 (*Lovale*), Doke 1927 (*Lamba*) and Kenyatta 1961 (*Kikuyu*), to name only a few.

The subject of African oral literature has attracted many social scientists: historians, anthropologists, sociologists, etc. In each case the treatment of oral literature has been carried out in line with the
dictates of the individual disciplines. Thus, historians have used it to reconstruct the past, linguists to establish genetic and putative relationships between groups of people, and ethnologists to demonstrate cultural affinities and map out cultural areas and civilizations. As far as I am aware, hardly any educationists have seriously studied oral literature to show its value in education. Those who have attempted to relate oral literature to education have done so only in passing. It is this paucity, if not neglect, of educational studies of oral literature in Africa that has prompted this study.

Oral literature was an important tool in traditional African education. Today, however, this traditional method of educating children is gradually declining due largely to the introduction of foreign, mainly Western values and methods. Some of our children look down upon traditional stories in preference to foreign written literature. In addition urbanization does not afford many parents any chance of narrating stories to their children. This is so because some parents work even at night when stories are largely told. Sometimes children themselves go out in the evenings for disco, cinema, etc. Hence they have no time to listen to stories. However, one cannot deny that this may still be the way of
imparting knowledge in some remote areas where Western influences have not seriously disrupted the Tumbuka traditional way of life.

Education in traditional Tumbuka society was both formal and informal, conscious and unconscious. Children were formally instructed to do certain things, such as, cooking and making axes and hoe handles. But most of their learning took place informally through imitation, play and participation in productive work. The learning processes in traditional education are far too many to be studied comprehensively, even if such a study was confined to a single society. A more useful approach is to select one of the media of learning and study it in depth. This is what the present study attempts to do within the context of Tumbuka society. This research was conducted to investigate the educational significance of oral literature in traditional Tumbuka society.

The focus on the oral literature of the Tumbuka is additionally justified on the grounds that researches so far conducted in this field are inadequate. So far only a few collections have been made. For example, Young (1931:182), a missionary of the Livingstonia
mission, collected some aspects of Tumbuka oral literature: tales, proverbs and riddles. Fraser (1922:169), also a missionary of the same mission, recorded some tales, proverbs and riddles. Similarly, there is a small collection of folktales, entitled vidokoni brought out by the Livingstonia mission in 1933. A by-product of this research is the collection by the present author of some narratives from Tumbuka society. It is my belief that the whole body of Tumbuka oral literature may soon be lost to us if no urgent attempts are made to collect and record it.

2. Purpose of the Study

As noted earlier, the educational significance of oral literature has not received the attention it deserves. There has been virtually no detailed educational analysis of the materials so far collected from different societies. Such a state of affairs leaves much to be desired. Since oral literature was largely used as the material of African traditional education, it is important to know how it was used. The present study investigates the educational role of Tumbuka narratives as perceived by the Tumbuka people themselves. It also tries to underscore their latent significance to the upbringing of Tumbuka children, a contribution of which the Tumbuka themselves may not be
aware. More specifically, this study attempts to answer the following questions:

(a) What part, if any, do the Tumbuka speaking people think narratives play in traditional education?

(b) What aspect of Tumbuka narratives could be adapted or adopted by modern school education in the teaching of languages and other subjects as well as in character training?

It is additionally hoped that the present study will:

(i) make a modest contribution to the preservation of Tumbuka oral literature;
and (ii) initiate further studies in Tumbuka traditional education.

The present trend in many African states is to try to change from the colonial education system to one which is more relevant to the local society. Several educationists have argued that some aspects of traditional African education can play a significant role in modern education. For example, Wandira (1973:V) has argued that studies of African indigenous forms of education could contribute
to educational change and innovation. If we are to achieve African identity, steps should be taken to sort out what was good and bad in our traditional system of education, so that we do not continue, as hitherto, to throw the baby with bath water. By means of this study I should like to examine the extent to which Tumbuka oral literature could be utilized to give modern education its much needed African roots.

0.3. Methodology

0.3.1 Data Collection (the Sample)

The target population of the study were the Tumbuka speaking people. It was not possible to include in the investigation all sections of the Tumbuka people because of transport problems and the time constraint. The focus of this study was thus limited to the Tumbuka of Lundazi and Chama. Three categories of the Tumbuka of Lundazi and Chama served as the main source of data of the study. These are, first, some thirty or so story-tellers living in Lundazi and Chama. The second category comprises a sample of Tumbuka-speaking persons who live in Lundazi, Chama and Lusaka town. The third sample comes from school going boys and girls living in three areas, Lundazi, Chama and Lusaka.
0.3.2. **Data Analysis**

Social scientists have developed certain approaches which they use to observe, analyse, interpret and understand different social phenomena. Among them those which have been widely used in the analysis of oral literature are:

1. **Evolutionism** which seeks to trace if narratives have a common origin;

2. **Diffusionism** which examines how traits spread from one narrative to another and from one culture area to another;

3. **Structural-functionalism** which tries to show the contribution a story makes to the society in which it is in vogue by describing the role and relationship a narrative has to the society's culture.

In this study we have adopted the structural functional approach mainly because we seek to understand the educational function of Tumbuka oral narratives. By looking at the function of oral
narratives we have tried to determine the contribution of oral literature to the socialization of children in particular and the continuity of the society's culture in general.

0.3.3. **Limitation of the Study**

Three factors directly affected the field study. The first was the scarcity of good narrators. Men and women who were renowned narrators were difficult to find in the areas of survey. Many confessed that they had forgotten not only the art of narrating but many stories they used to narrate. A second constraint was the time factor. The investigation was conducted during the marketing season. At this time many of the potential informants were busy and could not spare their time to tell stories. In addition, replaying pre-recorded stories to informants and interviewing them proved to be a time-consuming exercise. Third, the stock of batteries dwindled and if we continued with the method of re-playing the stories and interviewing people, we would have failed to interview even twenty people. These reasons forced me to alter the method of interviews and to apply Crowley's method (1971:10) of recording stories from any ordinary narrator without looking for the best story-tellers.
Applying this method, I tried to record a large number of stories without particular consideration of quality, recording stories in traditional setting as they were told by ordinary narrators. I had thus to leave out, as Crowley did for different reasons, the aesthetic element of creative narrators and concentrated on the content of stories told by ordinary narrators. In addition, I found it necessary and less expensive to interview the ordinary narrator on his story for the educational value of the story he had just told. This had an advantage in that the story-tellers knew the story and would answer any question on it without having the recorded story replayed. In this case some of the questions on the interview schedule were slightly changed. For example, question 2.1.1 instead of reading: 'Have you heard this story before?' was to read, 'From whom did you hear this story'? By following this approach, I was able to collect a wide range of views about stories told to Tumbuka children.

The Tumbuka People

Location and Physical Background

The Tumbuka are distributed between 11°S and 14°S and between longitude 32°E and 34°E. This covers the area from Dwangwa river in the south to Rukuru river in the north and between lake Malawi in the east and Luangwa river in the west. Tumbukaland extends to over 32000 Km².
As indicated on Map 1, the Tumbuka of northern Malawi are found in Chitipa, Karonga, Rumphi, Mzimba, Nkata Bay and Kasungu districts, while those in Zambia are in Lundazi and Chama in Eastern Province and in Isoka district in Northern Province. The Tumbuka speaking people of Isoka include the Fungwe, Tambo and Lambya and they are in close contact with the Nyika and Namwanga. Those of Karonga and Chitipa are in close contact with the Ngonde, Nyika, Sukwa and Lambya. The Tumbuka of Chama are in close contact with the Senga, Bisa and Bemba. Those of Rumphi are in close contact with the Phoka and Ngoni. The Tumbuka of Nkata Bay are in close contact with the Tonga, while those of Mzimba, Lundazi and Kasungu are in close contact with the Ngoni, and Chewa. It is because of the close contact with other tribes that the Tumbuka way of life has been subjected to different external influences that have affected their dialects and culture. Their oral literature has also been influenced by the culture of the tribes with whom they are in close contact.

The greater part of Tumbukaland consists of flat undulating plateau, drained by slow moving streams which dry up in the dry season causing hardship to animals as well as to people. There are highlands of Vigya, Nyika and the dissected escarpment of the lakeside and Luangwa. There are low valleys of the Kasitu, Rukuru and Hewe rivers and the deep valleys of the Luangwa and lakeshore.
Tumbukaland lies within the savanna type of climate with hot wet summers and cool dry winters. Luxuriant growth of grass and trees occurs during the wet season and they dry during the dry season. Wildlife is abundant in sparsely peopled areas especially in the Luangwa valley. Numerous species of game roam about the plains.

Most of Tumbukaland has red soils and the river valleys have alluvial soils. These give rise to the cultivation of various crops.

0.4.2. **Historical Background**

Today there are many groups of people who call themselves Tumbuka, but if asked about their origins one hears different stories. They each give their clan history as the history of the Tumbuka society as a whole. Considering such differences I fully agree with Vail (1972:150) who states:

'\textit{the history of the pre-Ngoni Tumbuka speaking peoples is not the history of a unified people but rather a complex story of different groups and clans}'.

According to him the Tumbuka were the first Bantu speaking peoples to occupy the areas between Dwangwa and Songwe rivers in Malawi. This view suggests that on arrival the Tumbuka found the Khoisan people and drove them away. The Tumbuka call these people by various names, bakafula, (from the verb kafula, 'to make things out of metals', hence 'blacksmith'), bantu bafupifupi ('very short people') or ba mwaniboneranku? ('From what distance did you see me?') However, up to the eighteenth century, the Tumbuka groups, as their clan genealogies show, continued to move in their clan communities and did not create a single united political system. The unity of Tumbuka society emerges as a result of three major events: (1) the coming of the Lowoka traders, (2) the Arab slave traders and (3) the Ngoni intrusion.

2.1 The Tumbuka and the Lowoka Traders

The Lowoka were a Swahili speaking people that came into Tumbukaland attracted by rumours of an abundant supply of ivory (Young 1970:167, Vail 1972:154, Nyirenda 1931:70). The main group under Mlowoka established a dynasty in Nkamanga and traded in ivory. The Tumbuka were introduced to external trade and obtained new trade goods. In addition the Tumbuka adopted the Lowoka political organization of having chiefs and other practices. The Lowoka too were highly influenced by Tumbuka culture which they adopted so much that at present it is difficult to distinguish a
4.2.2 The Tumbuka and the Arab Slave Traders

The Arabs and Swahili slave traders came to the Tumbuka country during the first half of the nineteenth century. This encounter had a very unsettling effect on Tumbuka society. The slave trade, according to Vail (1972:161),

'aggravated further the already highly decentralized Tumbuka society by weakening the position of the major chiefs vis-a-vis local leaders and by encouraging rivalries among local leaders as to who should deal with slave trade and ivory trade'.

4.2.3 The Tumbuka and the Ngoni Intrusion

The Ngoni, an offshoot of the Nguni of South Africa, settled among the Tumbuka in the 1870s. The Ngoni raided the Tumbuka for food and cattle and they incorporated many Tumbuka groups into their society. The Ngoni rule as stated by Mwale (1956:88) 'was regarded by their subjects as brutal and almost wholly destructive'. The Ngoni greatly disturbed the Tumbuka and weakened them. As a result the Tumbuka called them by harsh names such as bazoba or bamazitu meaning 'the hardhearted'. The cruelty of the Ngoni led to the
rebellions of various subjects including the Tumbuka who rebelled in 1880 at Hora mountain in Malawi.

The Missionaries Arrive in Tumbukaland

The missionaries mostly of the Free Church of Scotland built mission stations in various places in Tumbukaland. Their early missions were Bandawe (1881), Ekwendeni (1889), Khondowe (1894), Loudon (1902) and Chasefu (1922). From these missions other small stations were opened. There were large numbers of Tumbuka students and servants in these missions, a sign of Tumbuka adaptability to different situations. The Tumbuka were greatly influenced by missionaries and mission education.

Economy

Most traditions agree that the Tumbuka lived by hunting and farming. Farming was for subsistence. Although they were skilled hunters, their hunting implements were antiquated: spears, bow and arrows, nets of bark twigs (ukonde) and game pits. Later the gun was introduced by the Arabs, and the Tumbuka learnt to use it. The chief hunters were famous men and were respected by their communities. Their exploits are still remembered through stories and songs.

In addition to being excellent hunters, the Tumbuka are
also splendid agriculturalists. Their year is divided into dry and rainy season. Rain in Tumbukaland starts in November and lasts until April. This seasonal rhythm greatly controls peoples' activities in the area.

The staple food crop was millet, but now it is mainly used for brewing beer. The Tumbuka cultivate maize as their main food crop nowadays. They also grow beans, groundnuts, peas, sweet potatoes, sugar cane and a variety of bananas. In the past they grew maize, beans and groundnuts, mixed up together on mounds, but colonial administration introduced the use of ridges, (mizengo) and contours bands (mabanda). Today in addition to food crops, cash crops or industrial crops such as cotton, tobacco, sunflower and coffee have been introduced.

There is evidence that the Tumbuka kept cattle in tsetse-fly-free areas even before the arrival of the Ngoni. Fraser (1922:186) points out that 'the Tumbuka kept a few cattle and goats but not sheep. These animals were confiscated by their conquerors'. Tew (1950:56) is in agreement with Fraser when she writes that 'Tumbuka country had been full of cattle before Ngoni invasion'. According to one of our informants, the Tumbuka abandoned their cattle because the animals were an attraction to the Ngoni raiders.
Headman Chiwarankwende of Jitwe in Chuma district reports the presence of cattle in that area up to the beginning of this century, but he says they were killed by lions which became numerous. The Tumbuka of nowadays have again taken up stock breeding in addition to farming especially in those areas which are not infested by tsetse-fly.

The Tumbuka were famous iron workers and today one can see signs of smelting in Tumbukaland. They made hoes, axes, spears, knives and arrow-heads which they exchanged for cloth and arrow-poison with the Bisa and other tribes.

In the past the Tumbuka were often afflicted by periods of famine. In such circumstances their meagre food supplies were supplemented with wild roots, fruits and berries. Economic activities of the kind discussed above had tremendous impact on the socio-political organization of Tumbuka society.

Political Organization

Today the Tumbuka are hierarchically organized under a chief, below him a village headman, and finally under a family head, usually a male. The family is the smallest socio-economic and political unit. Every family member
is expected to conform to the family code of conduct.

The Tumbuka village is based on kinship and each village has its own system of government and administration. The headman takes decisions after consultation with residents and decisions by majority are binding on all in the village. The headman is expected to safeguard the village from snakes, lions, and witchcraft. He leads his people to work on community projects and on ritual matters. The headman is supposed to be generous, calm, tolerant, approachable and good-tempered.

Centralized chieftainship is a new concept in Tumbuka society; therefore the ruling chiefs are of foreign origin. The only chief who is of Tumbuka extraction is chief Mphamba of Lundazi. His installation as chief of a large section of the Tumbuka may have been due to attempts made by colonial officials to recognize and confer upon important headmen the status of chief, in order to establish indirect rule. Colson (1961:102) notes that they did this in Tenganalnd where they did not find chiefs. She says:

'at one time the administration recognized 116 small chieftaincies ... and later consolidated them into a few larger chiefs'.
Most Tumbuka leaders now held the status of headman. In this category are Zorokere in Katumbi's area, Munyanjagha in Chinda's area, Chama in Kambombo's area, Gumba and Kholopete (Longwe) in Magodi's area, Lusuntha in Phikamalaza's area, etc. In matters of ritual the chiefs consult these headmen as owners of the land.

Many Tumbuka people have migrated to urban areas in Malawi, Zambia, Zimbabwe, South Africa and other neighbouring countries. There they participate in the social and economic life of the host community, a sign of their adaptability. However, the greater number of Tumbuka people still live in Tumbukaland.

In the village, children's rights and duties are defined according to age group. Small boys herd goats and big boys herd cattle. In the fields, boys practise a lot of manly skills such as games, carving articles and they even indulge in fighting each other. The strongest boy (chigwe) is chosen as the overseer of the herders. The western form of school has upset the whole life of herders. Children are away at school leaving herding to adults.

4.5. Kinship

Kinship plays an important role in Tumbuka social organisation. Tumbuka kinship is organised on either
matrilineal or matrilineal system. It is not uncommon to find some Tumbuka people following both systems. For the Tumbuka people kinship refers to all immediate and distant blood relations: parents, brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, cousins, etc. Kinmen help each other in times of need and care for those in trouble. Marriage between blood relations is not allowed in most Tumbuka groups.

0.4.6. Tumbuka Religion

The Tumbuka practised their own system of worship before they were introduced to Christianity and other foreign religions. Their beliefs were based on the existence of a Supreme God, lesser gods and spirits.

0.4.6.1 The Supreme God

Among Tumbuka names for the Supreme God are Chiuta (a big bow), Mulengi (creator), and Leza (lightning). The Tumbuka believe that the Supreme God lives in the sky with and does not interfere/or bother about the affairs of man. The Tumbuka approach the Supreme God through the ancestral spirits though in cases of severe calamity, disease, or drought, they can approach/ directly.
Local Gods and Spirits

The Tumbuka worshipped local gods in addition to the High God. For example, Chikhang'ombe was worshipped in the Henga valley and on Khamanga plateau (Fraser 1922:121; and Young 1931:130). Mangazi was worshipped by some Tumbuka people who had Chews influence. Tew (1950:63) and Fraser (1922:121) have noted that the Tumbuka of Luangwa plain worshipped Zambwe. The Tumbuka worshipped the local gods for rain because they thought the gods controlled natural forces. There were many sacred places where the Tumbuka groups worshipped their local gods.

The Tumbuka also believed that there were both benevolent and malevolent spirits. Rev. Nkowane pointed out to me the activities of a malevolent spirit called Nakapumpu or Mulenga. According to Nkowane this spirit throws stones at and beats up people whenever he is displeased. ¹ Nakapumpu is not an ancestral spirit. Other malevolent spirits cause vimbuza (a spiritual ailment). This ailment is caused by bad spirits of the Bemba and Bisa chiefs. The patient is cured by dancing. The belief that the Bemba or Bisa spirits cause this ailment is based on the fact that the possessed patient is able to speak Bemba or Bisa languages perfectly even when he has never known it before.

0.4.6.3. **Worship of Ancestral Spirits**

An important aspect of Turbuka religion is the ancestral cult. The ancestral spirits (vibanda) are believed to be shadows that appear and disappear in human form any time and anywhere. They live the same way they lived on earth before death. These ancestral spirits live on food offered to them by the lineage. If sacrifices do not please the ancestors, they take revenge on the living members of the lineage by bringing sickness, bad luck and drought and by driving away game from the area. It is said, for example, that the spirits of Zorokere drove away elephants from Hewe when Katumbi angered the local headmen. If the spirits are pleased by the sacrifices, they help members of the lineage in various ways. Thus, spirits are regarded as the most effective agents for influencing the affairs of their descendants.

Each individual head of the family builds a number of small shrines which they call tukavuba. The number of such shrines depends on the number of spirits which are to be honoured. Offerings of food,
meat, beer, cloth, etc. are given for various purposes. For example, when a member of the family is sick, the sickness may be attributed to the spirits and a diviner may be employed to discover the spirit for appeasement. This does not of course mean that the Tumbuka worshipped spirits as some Christians would have us believe. The Tumbuka prayed the High God through their ancestral spirits. All the lineage members have common shrines for the spirits of their ancestors. The lineage head leads other members of the lineage to worship the spirits and all members contribute to the preparation of the sacrifices. Every year they clean the surroundings of the ancestral graves and build new shelters over the graves. After offering sacrifices they all sit to drink the beer they have prepared.

The Tumbuka believe that when a family member dies, his spirit brings bad luck to those who are far away and have not heard of the death. They appease the spirit while naming all the family members not around so that they do not meet bad luck. The Tumbuka also believe that when a family member dies far away and is buried there, his spirit will take revenge on the living if they do not do something.

So one or two members of the family go to bring home his spirit. They do this by taking a branch of the sacred msoro tree and beat the grave while saying, 'we have come to collect you so that you sleep among your people'. They carry the branch
and the leaves wrapped in a new cloth or put them in a toy coffin. When they get home a fresh funeral is arranged until they bury the toy coffin containing msoro leaves. If this is not done, they believe the spirit will constantly take revenge on the family for neglecting it.

The young are taught, as they grow, about how powerful the spirits of their ancestors are and the work of the spirits of the dead, their friendliness and their rage.

**Magic and Witchcraft**

The Tumbuka believe in magic and witchcraft. They think that all death is caused by witchcraft. Further, they believe that some people have unusual powers of sending snakes, lions, crocodiles and even lightning to kill other people. They also hold that witches and wizards have powers to travel naked unnoticed by common people and their means of transport is the hyena. They trust in the power of the sorcerer to take a dead man's body out of the grave and eat his meat or to bring the dead people to life in an invisible form in order to work for him in the fields. A widespread superstition is that people who cultivate large fields and produce a lot of crops actually use the labour of the ghosts of people they killed.
In the past, the suspected witch who denied being responsible for killing a person was given a mwavi ordeal to prove his innocence. He either drank a liquid concoction called mwavi or picked a mwavi root from boiling water. If he vomited mwavi or if the hot water caused no blisters on his hands, he was considered innocent. Sometimes mwavi in its liquid form was administered to two pigeons one of which represented the suspect. The suspect was considered a wizard (fwiti), if the pigeon standing for him died in the process or failed to vomit the concoction it had drunk.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have presented the overriding questions of the study and its need. We have also described the Tumbuka people: their land, history, economy, religion and the political and kinship organization. It is against this background that we will examine in the following chapters the oral literature of the Tumbuka and its educational significance.
CHAPTER 1

TUMBUKA ORAL LITERATURE

1.1 The Problem

This chapter deals with two major concerns. First, it attempts to answer the question, 'What is Tumbuka oral literature'? Second, it initiates an assessment of the relationship between the literature and the traditional education in Tumbuka society. Specifically, the chapter is the beginning of our answer to the study's overriding question, what is the educational value of Tumbuka oral literature?

1.2 Definition

Tumbuka oral literature, if it can be defined at all, refers to all the various stylized forms of verbal expressions which the Tumbuka speaking people recognize and accept as aesthetic. Besides this recognition, however, the Tumbuka do not have, as far as our research has been able to establish, a single term which covers all the different forms of their oral expressions. They nevertheless view and distinguish different categories as distinctive styles which they themselves employ to project various literary products. More importantly, the Tumbuka distinguish such oral expressions from that of general everyday discourse. These expressions are characteristically aesthetic, stylized and often marked
by explicit formulae. All those expressions are, to borrow Bascom's (1955) terminology, 'verbal arts'. The term 'verbal arts' does not suggest the mode of performance but it does suggest, without restriction, the use of language. Thus 'verbal arts', as far as we are concerned, can refer to the spoken expressions. The term 'verbal arts' will be employed to include all the forms of Tumbuka literary products that are transmitted by word of mouth.

A further characteristic of these oral arts is that they all deal with the same universe: Tumbuka people and their environment. They all employ the Tumbuka language and symbolism to depict a whole range of Tumbuka people's activities and experiences. For example, various forms of verbal arts are concerned with political, social, cultural and historical experiences of Tumbuka people. In this way it can be said that Tumbuka oral arts are very much a part of the real life situations in Tumbuka society. Yet, these arts are also different from the real life situations. Although they are diverse and reflect a variety of specific concerns, they are nevertheless one in that they are recognized to constitute a body of works. This body of works is different from all other manifestations of Tumbuka culture and heritage. It comprises only the products of the imagination so that the real life facts are reworked and rendered to meet the requisite social functions and to establish aesthetic traditions. Thus, we can define Tumbuka
oral literature as all the various imaginative, stylized and orally transmitted forms.

To distinguish and classify these forms of verbal arts it is no easy task. But it is important to attempt if the educational value of such literature is to be studied. The Tumbuka themselves consciously or unconsciously identify and distinguish several broad categories of their oral literature, although this does not amount to a strict scientific type of classification.

1.3 **The genres of Tumbuka oral Literature.**

A careful study of the performances of Tumbuka literature reveals that it comprises at least four major genres. These are:-

1. Vidokoni
2. Midauko
3. Ntarika
4. Nyimbo

These four genres are distinguished on formal criteria of content and theme, structure and function, occasion of performance as well as the performers and the type of audience.

The above terminology (1-4) was found to be the most widely recognized as well as the most commonly used in Tumbukaland. Hence, its adoption in this study. These
terms are not mutually exclusive in meaning as their elements may sometimes overlap. For example,vidokoni and nyimbo, midauko and nyimbo, vidokoni and ntarika may possess similar elements. All the same, it may be useful to think of two broad classes into which Tumbuka oral literature may be divided. Although the Tumbuka themselves do not have the terms for prose and poetry, one of the two classes deals with prose and the other with poetry. Partly, vidokoni, midauko and ntarika can be considered as prose, while nyimbo and some vithokozo, a type of midauko, are devoted to poetry. All forms that are sung or chanted fall into poetry and those that are just narrated are regarded as prose.

1.3.1 Vidokoni

Vidokoni, whose singular is chidokoni, are Tumbuka traditional fictitious stories. Turner (1952:23) defines chidokoni as 'a fable, folksong and nursery rhyme sung together in the evenings'. Our informants were agreed that vidokoni are stories which are about events that did not happen. The characters in a chidokoni can be humans, animals, spirits and supernatural beings. From the informant's statements and Turner's definition of vidokoni, we can describe this genre of Tumbuka oral literature as prose be both narrative that can/ sung and narrated. In this category can be included what in the western societies are
known as myths, fables, \textit{aetiological} tales, fairy tales and folk tales. Most of the stories in our collection belong to this category. For example, all stories in appendix I are typical \textit{vidokoni}. Some of \textit{vidokoni} have songs like story No. 1 in the appendix and others are stories without songs as tale No. 4 in the appendix. These stories may sometimes have a proverb or a moral lesson and such stories are told for the purpose of entertaining and teaching the young people. Most \textit{vidokoni} deal with fantasy and they are often introduced with a formula and may conclude with a moral.

\textit{Vidokoni} are told only at night around a fire. They can also be told in a hut of a renowned woman story-teller. Girls may tell stories to one another in their dormitory (ntanganeni). Boys may do the same in their dormitory (Mphara). \textit{Vidokoni} are mostly narrated by adult women and occasionally by adult men, although it is not unusual to find proficient young performers engaging audiences comprising their peers.

1.3.1.1 \textit{Vidokoni vyakuyoboya} (\textit{vidokoni} which are only narrated)

We have pointed out above that some \textit{vidokoni} have songs and others are without songs. Our own collection includes both types. In the narration of tales without
songs, singing does not form part of the performance. These are tales that are only narrated. When a narrator wishes to tell a story without a song, he prefaces his performance with a set phrase: Chidokoni chane nchakuyoboya. ('My story is only narrated'). The Tumbuka speaking people of Chama do not have separate terms for stories with and stories without songs. They use the terms visimi or visuzu for both categories. However, the narrator characterizes the performance by saying chane nchakwimba (i.e. 'My story is sung or has a song') or chane nchakuyoboya (i.e. 'Mine is narrated or told; hence, singing is not involved'). Some Tumbuka of Lundazi, on the other hand, have special terms for stories with and stories without songs. Ntanti, vintanguni and ntano are used in different areas of Lundazi to refer to stories without songs.

Ntanti (pl. zintanti) are a kind of vidokoni that frequently contain proverbs and parables. Turner (1952:90) defines ntanti as a story or fable. An ntanti is only narrated. Story No. 4 is a typical example of ntanti. When such stories have proverbs or parables, they seek to emphasize some morals.

Ntanti narratives are generally performed at night, though sometimes they are also told during the daytime by adults when they want to explain the proverb that forms part of such stories.
According to most of our informants ntanti stories are narrated by both adults and children. When narrated by children aged between six and thirteen, their peers form the audience and they tell the stories mostly for the purpose of recreation. When narrated by the adults, children form the audience and in addition to providing entertainment, adults aim at imparting certain values to the young people.

For example, story No. 4 contains the message to the children that it is important to obey the instruction of the parents and the disobedient are warned against the dangers of insubordination. Story No. 21 warns children against greed. In this story greed made Kalulu meet his death. The audience take part in the performance of an ntanti in a variety of ways: listening to the story, laughing on appropriate occasions and answering questions that the narrator poses.

Chintanguni (pl. vintanguni) is similar to ntanti. It is a tale without song which is only narrated. Turner (1952:90) says that this form refers to proverbs, parables and fables, a view supported by some of our informants.

Like ntanti, vintanguni are also performed both at night and during the day. Adults mostly perform vintanguni to explain the moral of a proverb or parable. Story No. 3 illustrates the form of chintanguni and ntanti.
Ntano is a tale without a song. Our informants indicated that this is a Cewa word which some Tumbuka use to mean stories. Turner (1952:90) says, 'ntano is a fable told or acted'. These stories are mostly performed at night, though nowadays they can be told even during the day. Adults usually narrate these stories to children between five and thirteen years. They are also told for both entertainment and transmission of values.

1.3.2 Vidokoni vyakwimba (vidokoni which are sung)

Vidokoni with songs are more numerous and popular than those without songs. 75 percent of the stories we collected have songs. Our survey shows that women favour narrating tales with songs. Most of the children we interviewed indicated that they had heard most of the stories from their mothers or their grandmothers and rarely from their fathers and grandfathers.

The Tumbuka of Lundazi refer to tales with songs as virapi or visiriri. This form is both narrated and sung and in its performance the audience participates actively. While the performer recites his story the audience joins in the refrains of the songs which form part of the tale. The songs are a device for keeping the audience interested and act as a mnemonic device for remembering the story. The audience additionally shows its appreciation of the story by laughing at
the jokes and the pranks of the performer. According to Turner (1952:114, 127) *chirapi* is a tale narrated through songs, mainly chorus. Similarly, he defines *chisiriri* as a fable and tale with chorus. Our informants in Lundazi were agreed that both terms refer to tales with songs. Story and 5 Nos. 1, 2/ are all illustrations of stories with songs.

This form is generally narrated at night after the evening meal. Most of our informants said that it was taboo to narrate *virapi*/*visuzu* during the daytime. To quote a respondent, "If someone narrates *virapi* during the day, his mother will turn into an anti-hill, i.e. a grave." The significance of this taboo is twofold. First, stories are better told at night when people are not engaged in any type of routine duties. If stories were told during the daytime, performance of routine jobs would be disrupted. The second probable reason seems to be that the effects of narration may be greater at night than during the daytime, because during the day both the performer and the audience may see many things, which would draw their attention and hence, disrupt the performance.

The chief characters in *virapi* or *visuzu* consist of humans, animals, birds, spirits and gods. The tales depict the social relations of the characters. Such relations, as distinguished by Kilson (1972:34), may be based on three levels: domestic, community and supernatural. The domestic relations and 9 are exemplified in tales Nos. 1, 7/ in the appendix and
those of community are shown in stories Nos. 16 and 25. The relations at supernatural level are depicted in the story of the chameleon and the gecko lizard recorded in chapter three of this study.

An examination of a Tumbuka tale reveals that tales follow a certain sequential action pattern. The initial episode describes the situation and the characters involved. This is a phase of harmony. For example, in story No. 1 by Meki Hara, the family is in harmony and the parents seek and prepare food for all. Phase two introduces a conflict in the family or community. In the story cited, Mbabo repeatedly steals relish and creates a conflict with other members of the family by starving them. Phase three deals with the resolution of the conflict. In story No. 1, the father arranges the trial of the three children by an ordeal and Mbabo fails to prove his innocence. Mbabo is punished by drowning into the river. Phase four deals with the re-establishment of harmony. In story No. 1, the family returns to normal life after the conflict has been resolved. The same sequence may be illustrated with reference to other Tumbuka tales.

Tumbuka tales begin in various ways. Some tales begin with a statement of the morals like story No. 1, others begin by introducing the main characters of the story as in story No. 4. Several other tales start off by highlighting what the story is about, while still others are prefaced with a
proverb. Most stories we recorded in Chama have a general formula for beginning a story; one begins by saying 'the the!' Literally the expression means, 'I have taken'. Probably it refers to the taking the position as the next performer. The audience would reply: 'Nkaruskaba kamumasinda kakuska basungwana banyama bakanukatonda', that is, 'It is a groundnut which girls are able to shell while boys fail'. We tried to elicit the meaning of this from the narrators and their audience, but nobody was able to give us the meaning. Perhaps it highlights the fact that traditionally Tumbuka women are competent narrators. The 'the' may also refer to the sound produced when groundnuts are shelled or broken. In Lusaka, we came across a slightly different version of this formula. One wishing to perform says:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tumbuka</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Performer: Thethel</td>
<td>I have taken the position!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience: Nkaruskabal</td>
<td>It is the groundnut!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performer: Gampu!</td>
<td>Dig out!</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Audience: Yowa!</td>
<td>It has come out!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Gampu refers to the digging out of groundnuts and Yowa to the coming out of the ground of the nuts. Our Lusaka informants also failed to give us the meaning of the formula. Probably the groundnut symbolises the people's accumulated wisdom hidden in tales just as groundnuts which are very useful are hidden in nutshells underground. The performer
has to skillfully reveal the wisdom out of the tales in the same way one who wants to use the nut has to dig it out and to shell it.

Tales in Tumbuka end in various ways. Some end with a statement of the moral of the story, for example, story No. 4. Some stories conclude with a statement like, 'The story is finished', or 'This is all', or 'It has ended'. Others, end with no particular comment as is the case with story No. 17.

The performance of vidokoni differs from all other genres in many respects. Like in Xhosa ntsomi performance, the vidokoni performer does not memorise any part of the tale. He only recalls the main episodes into which he can fit details that he creates through his imagination. The performer can be ranked good or bad because of the way he handles the details of the story to make it thrilling or dull. This is why the same audience can continue listening to the same tale without getting bored when different performers narrate the same story.

The vidokoni performance is characterised by repetition of words, phrases or themes. Repetition in tales helps to focus the listener's attention on the message that is being communicated. According to Scheub (1975:362),

Repetition in oral narratives organizes images and thereby controls the aesthetic experience of the members of the audience, regulating their responses to repeated sequences.

Due to the repetition of words and phrases and the use of animals as characters, [vidokoni] are not straightforward narratives, while the message in [Midauko] is simple and direct.

1.3.2 Midauko

Midauko, (sing. mudauko) form another category of Tumbuka oral literature. This category deals with historical accounts. Midauko are narrated and not sung, although at times praise names which are part of midauko are chanted. According to chief Mphamba, a Tumbuka chief in Lundazi, [mudauko] is a Ngoni term which refers to/separation of a section of people from the main group. Moyo (1978:293) concurs with this view and explains that, 'The word imidauko, singular umudauko, is derived from the verb uku-dauka... which connotes the idea of breaking off of a part from a whole.' Midauko can be divided into the following sub-categories; mikoka, makani-ghakare and vithokozo.

1.3.2.1 Mikoka

This category includes clan and tribal genealogies and legends. Mikoka are narrated by elder members of the family.

1. Interview: Chief Mphamba, 29-8-81, Mphamba Village, Lundazi.
or clan, mostly men. These tell children about the origin of their family or clan, their leaders, their heroes and the good and bad neighbours. For example, here is Mlowoka Chikulamayembe's **mukoka** reported by Isaac Gondwe (1933:64):

"Nyaluhanga the wife of Mlowoka had three children: a girl whose name is not known and two sons named Chavula and Gonapamuhanya or Khalapamuhanya. Chavula was made chief but he refused and removed the turban (i.e. a headdress of black or red cloth worn by chiefs or headmen). From then he was nicknamed Chavula and up to now his family is known by this name. Gonapamuhanya was made the first chief Chikulamayembe. Gonapamuhanya had many children..... But not many of these children and grandchildren became chiefs. Those that reigned were: Chiwozga the third child, Pitamukusa the fourth child, Chakanda the eighth child, Bwati the seventh, etc."

The function of such **mikoka** is to teach children and to explain to them the family history from the past to the present. **Mikoka** are recounted by family members only. Some tribal legends may be included in this category. The audience of **mikoka** are mostly children, but adults can also listen to **mikoka** being told.

1.3.2.2 **Makani ghabare.** (History)

This form of **midauko** deals with some general historical events such as the origin of the family, clan, tribe, the migration and wars the ancestors fought and other important happenings in the history of the community. The difference between this category and **mikoka** discussed above is that **mikoka** deal mainly with family and clan histories while **makani**
ghakare are broader in scope and may mention significant landmarks in the history of the region, e.g., the coming of the missions and missionaries, the slave trade, etc. Children form the audience of such story-telling sessions, while the adults tell the stories. A renowned narrator in the community would tell the stories to the younger generation at the men's community centre (mphara). Any elder is free to describe any historical episode he is familiar with or recite any event he experienced or witnessed. He would narrate how the ancestors fought against other tribes or how those ancestors worshipped gods and spirits.

When chieftainship had been established in the Tumbuka area during and after the Lowoka period, special narrators presented official accounts of the history of the royal family. This form of midauko is performed at any time of the year and day when men and male children assemble at the community centre.

1.3.2.3 Vithokozo

This form of midauko consists of praise names and praise chanting. In Tumbukaland every family or clan has a common praise name. For example, the Zimba clan are referred to as bamagaba (those who divide or share) and the Gondwe clan are called basabila (those who splash any liquid). These family and clan praise names are recited with reference to an individual whom the reciter wishes to compliment. Both men and women can recite praise names of an individual family or clan. Often,
too, we find self praises performed by individuals. But official vithokoza, i.e. chanting in praise of a chief are always recited by a male elder who carries the tradition throughout his lifetime. Such an official praise chanter ought to be familiar with all the panegyrics of the chief or leader. These high praises are principally applied to chiefs of Lowoka and Ngoni origin rather than to Tumbuka chiefs, as we have noted elsewhere that the Tumbuka had no chiefs before the Lowoka period.

In sum, all midauko are simple and straightforward in narration. They differ from vidokoni with respect to their content and structure. Vidokoni deal with the general norms of society while midauko give historical accounts, customs and practices of the society.

1.3.3 Ntarika

This is a broad category of Tumbuka oral literature. In this genre are included what the English speaking peoples call riddles, proverbs, parables, puzzles and what Bascom (1972:143) calls dilemma tales. In our field work we found that the Tumbuka use the term ntarika to refer to all these forms. We also found some Tumbuka speaking people using the term vintanguni and ntanti synonymously with the term ntarika. Turner (1952:91) has the view that ntarika refers to proverbs and parables. In the section that follows, we try to describe the various forms of ntarika as used by the Tumbuka people.
1.3.3.1 Ntarika (Riddles)

Our informants are agreed that the term ntarika sometimes refers to what the English speaking people call riddles, that is, short puzzles to which one is required to provide the answer. For example:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tumbuka</th>
<th>English</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Puzzle:</td>
<td>Puzzle:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Nyumba ya mama yirije mulyango'</td>
<td>'My mother's house has no door'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer:</td>
<td>Answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Lisumbi'</td>
<td>'An egg'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puzzle:</td>
<td>Puzzle:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Ba munyaengu bakumwa ciziba cimoza'</td>
<td>'The blackbirds drink from one pool'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer:</td>
<td>Answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Mapaso'</td>
<td>'Rafter of a round hut meet at the apex'.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Puzzle:</td>
<td>Puzzle:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Nchichi icho chikwenda na malundi ghanayi namachero chero pa ghabiri na muhanya ndipo pa ghatatu namise'</td>
<td>'What is it that goes on four legs in the morning, on two at midday and on three in the evening'?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Answer:</td>
<td>Answer:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>'Muntu: wakukhwaba pa waniehe wakwenda para wakura ndipo wakwendera ndodo para wacekura'</td>
<td>'A man: He crawls on hands and knees when young, he walks erect when grown and he walks with a stick in old age'.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In structure some riddles have a statement part which requires an answer like the first two in the table above. Some riddles have a question part which seeks an answer. For example, number three in the table above. The answer consists of a single word or a short phrase.

The ntarika used in this sense are mostly engaged in by children between the ages of five and fourteen years as a kind of entertainment. Tumbuka children love playing riddles. Our informants say that there are two ways through which riddles are performed. First, children would play riddles in a group. An individual in the group would pose a riddle and wait for an answer from any one in the group. When the right answer has been given, then any other participant would pose his. Secondly, riddles are played in teams. Members of one team challenge those of another with riddles. If members of the competing team are able to give the correct answer to a riddle, they get the right of posing a riddle to the contending team. If members of any team fail to answer a riddle and would like to know the right answer to that riddle, the challenging team would demand in a mock exchange to be given a village (muzi), a country (charo) or cattle (Ng'ombe), for supplying the right answer. In a mock exchange, each team only mentions the village, chief's area or a number of cattle to be offered and the challenging team would provide the answer. This team would continue to pose riddles until their opponents can give the right answer to a riddle, and thereby acquire the right of posing their own riddles. Every member is
free to participate in asking and answering riddles. It is rare for adults and children to participate in the same game of riddles.

Some writers have underlined the educational value of riddles. Cole-Beauchat (1957:133) has noted that 'riddles combine recreational and educational features to an unusual degree'. Other students of Bantu riddles, such as Schapera (1932:215), and Doke (1947:7) argue that riddles foster intellectual skills. One such skill is the ability to establish logical connections between two phenomena. Once a riddle has been posed, the audience try to identify the interrelationship between the puzzle and various phenomena.

In Tumbukaland riddles are mostly performed at night. But children of five to eight years who are less occupied with domestic chores at daytime may engage in playing riddles even during the day. However, sooner or later, they may be reminded of the taboo of performing riddles and stories during the day. In the area covered by this research we found teachers at Mwase, Nkanga, Mphamba and Chama schools engaging children into story-telling and riddling during the day. This means that nowadays there is relaxation in the enforcement of the taboo of telling stories during the day.

1.3.3.2 Ntarika (Proverbs)

Most of our informants are agreed that the term ntarika an also refers to proverbs. When used in this sense, ntarika
pithy wise saying. In this form ntarika is used to emphasize a point or to cut short an argument. The speech of Tumbuka elders is often interspersed with proverbs and parables and children are supposed to deduce appropriate lessons from such sayings. Proverbs, says Blacking (1961:7), 'add spice to a discussion'. Generally, proverbs are cited by adults in their everyday speech to show their accumulated experience and wisdom, to advise, to warn and to transmit values to the younger generation. In Tumbuka, proverbs are used on various occasions. They are used at family or neighbourhood deliberations, settlement of disputes and court proceedings - as a warning, advice, complaint and in self-justification and for purposes of argument and instruction. Tumbuka children are believed to attain a higher level of intellectual and linguistic development when they begin to use proverbs after the age of twelve years.

In structure the Tumbuka proverbs consist of a wise statement whose meaning is implicit. To decipher the hidden intricacies of the language and especially its idiomatic uses and to establish a meaningful relationship between the symbols used in the proverb and the real objects they represent. A few examples of this type of ntarika will illustrate these points.

Example I

Mwandizora kamayi kakuyunira
The literal meaning of this ntarika is: 'You have turned me into a little reaping knife'. A person would use this proverb in
everyday speech if he felt that people looked down upon him as worthless. He would refer to the proverb to convey his feelings that he is still worth some value.

Example 2

Wabira pacande mubongo ukuboneka.

Literally: 'You have dived into a saucer, the back is seen'. This proverb blames those who try to use lame excuses to cover up their mistakes or faults.

Example 3

Nyinda yakwendendeke yikukumana nachinontoro.

Literally: 'The wandering louse meets a thumb'. This one may advise people against wandering aimlessly, the wanderer may be in danger of meeting problems.

Used in this sense ntarika becomes a very effective way of communicating one's feelings and educating others. For example, in proverb 1 above, one complains, in No. 2 one is taught to be truthful, and in No. 3 one is advised against wandering. Our informants are of the opinion that a person who recites plenty of proverbs in his speech is considered wise and knowledgeable.

1.3.3.3. Ntarika (Parables.)

The Tumbuka also use the term ntarika to mean parables. When used in this sense it means a narrative with a religious or moral lesson. Such a story contains certain messages which can only be understood when one decodes the symbols and implicit meanings of the story. Tumbuka people like to speak in parables,
but unfortunately we were not able to come across and record any story to serve as an example. As parables are mostly used by Christians for Christian worship, this kind of ntarika is a recent development for it is mostly told by preachers and priests at Christian ceremonies. Parables may be told to both children and adults.

1.3.3.4 Anecdotes, Puzzles, Conundrums and Dilemma Tales.

In the Tumbuka language the term ntarika may also refer to anecdotes, puzzles, conundrums and what Bascom calls dilemma stories. In the ntarika that refers to dilemma stories, one has to describe a problem situation. The one to provide a solution to the problem posed, has to think hard in order to solve it. Here is an example:

A young man found his mother very sick, almost at the point of death. The mother told him of a medicine and said, 'I shall get well again if you bring me a mango fruit from the tree that is on an island in the middle of the nearby lake'. The lake was full of dangerous animals, snakes, hippos and crocodiles. On the mango tree lived a monkey. How could the young man fetch a mango fruit to save his dear mother without getting killed himself?

Solution:

The young man should not go into the lake. All he has to do is to pick stones to hit the monkey up the tree. Feeling pain, the weaponless monkey would pluck mango fruits to hit him back. In this way one of the mangoes would be thrown to the bank and the young man would take it to save his mother.

Here is another example of dilemma story.

A man had to carry a leopard, a goat and some malt across a river. He could take only one thing across the river.

18.10.1980,

Told by Mr. Chavula,/ Ng'ombe township, Lusaka.
Bearing in mind the dangers each of these would face if left with its enemy, how would the man take all of them across safely?

Solution:

The man should take the goat first to leave it on the other side of the river. On his second crossing he would carry the malt across and leave it there and bring back the goat. On the third crossing he would take the leopard across and leave him with the malt on the opposite bank. Lastly, he would come back for the goat.

This type of ntarika is often given by adults to children to solve. Children who are able to solve dilemma problems are considered intelligent and capable of dealing with problem situations which they would face in their daily life. Sometimes children are given difficult problems and are made to argue while the elders listen and judge the children's level of intelligence from the way they argue. Our informants said that children would sometimes argue at length, each giving reasons for his stand. All these are meant for the intellectual development of the children. An example of a puzzle on which children are often set to argue is: 'Which came first: the egg or the chicken?' One other question the adults often test their children with is: 'Who is more important: the mother or the father?'

1.3.3.5 Ntarika (Code Language)

The term ntarika is applied to another form of verbal interaction. Our informants distinguished as a special category of ntarika the conversations between girls and boys during courtship. Traditionally when a boy loves a girl, he would seek

\[\text{1. Told by B. Mfune, 19.9.1980, at the University of Zambia Campus in Lusaka.}\]
the help of other boys for/* wooing */ his beloved. The friends would accompany the lover to the girl's hut (ntanganeni) to help the suitor win over the girl he wishes to marry. In the girls' hut, the young men would engage the girls into a general conversation which is best carried on through a kind of ntarika. In the first place, the young men do not name the suitor and the girl he is in love with. Courting would ensue in a general way through ntarika as a battle of wit. One example of this type of ntarika was collected from Lundazi. The informants said the girls that were engaged in such conversation would wish to know the man who was in love and the name of the girl he was in love with. The girls would ask questions through ntarika, like this one:

Tibwerskeni phini tithorere minga ('Lend us a pin so that we remove a thorn from the flesh'). By this, the girls asked for the identification of the man who was in love and the girl he loved. The men would on their turn search for and recite an appropriate ntarika to make the girls accept or thank the girls for their decision to accept the proposal.

All these categories of ntarika are recognized and used by the Tumbuka of the areas covered by the present research.

1.3.4 Nyimbo

Lastly, mention should be made of the folksongs (nyimbo) as a genre of Tumbuka oral literature. According to most of our informants, this is a very broad category and includes various types. Included in the folksongs are tales with songs virapi, pounding songs (nyimbo za kumirira), dance songs (nyimbo zakuvinira), work songs (zanchito), beer drinking songs (zamoba), songs for
initiation ceremonies (zauzamba), songs for marriage (zantengwa), sorrowful songs (zavitima) and children's songs (zabana). Most Tumbuka folksongs contain an educational element since the people can be advised, warned, and even instructed through a song. Children and adults alike may be warned and advised through folksongs. For example, certain songs warn children against developing undesirable habits and personality traits. Others provide positive reinforcement of desirable behaviour and praise people for their wisdom, kindness, honesty and courage. Through folksongs adults may be warned about things that are happening in their community.

A few examples of folksongs and their messages are cited below to illustrate these points.

1. **Pounding song**

   **Tumbuka text**
   
   Kumphara uku kumphara!
   Kuri makani ee kumphara,
   Kumphara uku kumphara!
   Kuri makani ee kumphara,
   Banyake bokhariramo!
   Banyake bokhariramo!
   Banyake bokhariramo kumphara,
   Kuri makani ee kumphara.

   **English text**
   
   At the men's community centre, there at the centre!
   There is a gossip, eee, at the centre.
   At the men's community centre, there at the centre!
   There is a gossip, eee, at the centre.
   Others are unaware!
   Others are unaware!
   Others are unaware! At the men's centre.
   There is a gossip, eee, at the men's centre.
This pounding song is sung by women, especially wives, to warn their husbands about a gossip going round at the men's community centre, of which some men who should be concerned are unaware. On hearing the song the ignorant men would become anxious and inquisitive until they discover or learn the gossip about them.

Here is another example of a folksong.

2. **Tumbuka text**

Babori bamacona!
Pulikani,  
Babori bamacona!  
Pulikani,  
Baswena binu barunjira nchito yabuhure  
Tikaba nabò tikabanabo  
Tikaba nabò tikaba nabò muBulawayo  
Barunjira nchito yabuhure.

**English text**

The wives of migrant labourers!  
Listen!  
The wives of migrant labourers!  
Listen!

Your husbands are busy with prostitutes,  
We were with them; we were with them.  
We were with them; we were with them.  
In Bulawayo they are busy with prostitutes.

This song concerns migrant workers who go in search of well paid jobs in towns but leave their wives in villages. When some migrants get employed, they spend all their money on prostitutes. The wives of such migrants are told through this song about the activities of their husbands by the migrant workers that have returned home. The wives would learn the reasons why
their husbands did not send them money and failed to write to
them and why they failed to return home because they wasted money
on their mistresses.

Here is an example of a song that warns people, especially
young girls, against polygamy.

**Tumbuka text**

Kanarume kamitara ee!
Chitengo chake nimbavi,
Zina nintengwa dada,
Kanarume kamitara
Tumaso turikuzgemba ee!
Zina nintengwa dada,
Nkopa ine nkopa ine,
Kanarume kamitara!
Zina nintengwa dada,
Nkopa ine nkopa ine,
Chitengo chake nimbavi!
Zina nintengwa dada.

**English Text**

The polygamous husband, eee!
His seat is an axe, eee!
It is marriage only in name, father!
The polygamous husband, eel
His eyes are faint, eel
It is marriage only in name, father!
I am afraid, I am afraid of a polygamous man.
It is marriage only in name, father!
I am afraid, I am afraid!
His seat is an axe!
It is marriage only in name, father!

In this pounding song the unmarried girls are warned not
to accept marriage with a polygamous husband as it only becomes
marriage for convenience or in name, because the man does not
stay in the house as a husband.
Folksongs, like other forms of the Tumbuka oral literature, are organized and focus on the people's social life. They provide a channel for expressing feelings and thoughts of individuals and groups. Folksongs may additionally provide a medium of communication about current events to some villagers who may not keep abreast of the times.

1.3.5 General Considerations (Problems of Terminology)

In the foregoing discussion we have tried to classify Tumbuka oral literature into various categories. Since these are not mutually exclusive, our classification is for analytical purposes only. In Tumbukaland like in other societies, terms are not rigorously defined. Many writers on African oral literature have noted that tales do not fall into clearly distinguishable categories because there is considerable overlap between them. Doke (1947:102), writing about Bantu oral literature, commented on the vagueness of terminology used and noted:

'Bantu terminology is not so exact... there is dual significances of terms used for riddles, proverbs, fables, legends and myths. But despite the vagueness of terminology, there is difficulty in differentiating between folktales, proverbs and riddles in Bantu'.

In Doke's view, some of the terms are used interchangeably by the Bantu speaking peoples to mean different literary forms. Our research about the Tumbuka terminology has found Doke's viewpoint to be true. For example, ntarika may mean a variety of genres and forms including proverbs and riddles. Fortunately, the people themselves distinguish the forms in relation to the specific context, although the same terms continue to be applied
to different categories as these are identified in western literary traditions. Writing about the Zuni literary categories in America, Ruth Benedict (1935:30) stated, 'In Zuni, tales fall into no clearly distinguishable categories and the division used in this volume are for convenience of reference only'. Similarly Mary Frost (1977), with reference to Bemba narratives, remarked that there was little distinction between inshimi and imilumbe, both terms being used for narrative forms. Among the Tumbuka the problem of terminology is made even worse by the diversity of the dialects and also by the various external influences on the Tumbuka. Confusion is intensified when it is seen that some literary elements are found in more than one form as we have pointed out earlier.

1.4 Summary

In this chapter we have tried to classify Tumbuka oral literature into four broad categories. (1) vidokoni, (2) midauko, and (3) ntarika/(4) nyimbo. We have then subdivided each genre into those with songs and those without. Midauko have been classified into mikoka, makani ghakare and vithokozo. An attempt has been made to identify various types of ntarika and underscore the function of each. Lastly, the many different situations in which nyimbo may be performed have been noted with special reference to the taboos that surround their performance.

The present study is devoted to an examination of the educational value of vidokoni to the exclusion of other genres of oral literature.
CHAPTER 2

TUMBUKA TRADITIONAL EDUCATION

2.1 Scope

In this chapter we look at the education Tumbuka children received from birth until death. The chapter is in two parts. The first part examines various definitions of the term education with a view to discovering its meaning. The second part deals with what was learnt at each stage of a child's development. The chapter discusses various types of specialised education which were available to Tumbuka children.

2.2 Definitions

The term education does not easily yield to definitions. Different writers have interpreted education in different ways. In this section an attempt has been made to examine some of them.

For example Dewey (1968:26) has defined education as:

'The reconstruction or reorganization of experience which adds to the meaning of experience, and which increases ability to direct the course of subsequent experience'.

In the above statement Dewey thinks of education as a process of personal development. He believes that through the process of education an individual will develop ability that will direct new experiences.

Russell (1967:33) has distinguished between the broader and the narrower meaning of education. Viewing education in a broader sense he writes:

'....education will include not only what we learn through instruction, but all that we learn through personal experience - the formation of character through the education of life'.

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Here Russell considers the process of education with reference to both formal and informal aspect. In a narrower sense, education to Russell, is:

...'the instruction, the imparting of definite information on various subjects because such information, in and for itself, is useful in daily life'.

Lastly, Russell defines education as:

...'the formation, by means of instruction, of certain mental habits and certain outlook on life and the world'.

In the last two definitions Russell lays emphasis on instruction in the development of personality and intellect.

Another educationalist Peters (1962:2) has noted that:

...'education implies that something worthwhile is or has been transmitted in a morally acceptable manner.... that education is the initiation of an individual into public tradition enshrined in the language concept, beliefs and rules of society'.

Writing on education Perry (1967: 33) says:

'education is a cultural process by which successive generations of men take their places in history'. He contends that, 'Nature has assigned an indispensable role to education through the prolongation of human infancy. By nature man is equipped for life, but with capacities that enable him to learn how to live. Since it is generally accepted that acquired characteristics are inherited, education assumes the full burden of bringing men "up to date",... through education men acquire the civilization of the past and the civilization of the present and make the civilization of the future'.

Indeed, what Perry means by education is that man is born with many capacities which require to be developed within the context
of the values of his society if he has to participate in and
contribute to the development of that society. The important
thing to note is that each society has its own values and tends
to bring up its young within its system of values.

Phenix (1961:17) also views education within the value
system of the society. He writes:

'The need for goals in individual social life sets
a clear and exacting task for education. It is through
education not only in school, but also in homes and
other institutions, and by a variety of agencies that
individual character is formed and social patterns are
propagated'.

Hence according to Phenix the society's duty is to transmit
the required values to the young ones through various
processes.

According to Halsey (1967:558) in Collier's
Encyclopedia:

'education has always been a social process by means of
which a community, society or nation has sought to
transmit to the emergent generation those traditional
aspects of its culture which it considers fundamental
and vital for its own stability and survival'.

In the African context, several writers have given their
views on education. Nyerere (1967:45) in his essay,
'Education for self-reliance', has written about education.

He says:

'The fact that pre-colonial Africa did not have schools
except for short periods of initiation in some tribes -
did not mean that the children were not educated.
They learnt by living and doing. In the home and on the
farm they were taught the skills of the society and the behaviour expected of its members. They learnt the tribal history and the tribe's relationship with other tribes and with spirits by listening to stories of the elders. Education was thus informal, every adult was a teacher to a greater or lesser degree.

Thus, according to Nyerere, education in the traditional African society aimed at transmitting values and skills pertinent to the needs of the society. Both formal and informal processes were used for the purpose.

Education, as it can be seen from the various definitions, is a process whereby we try to shape the behaviour of children in accordance with our goals and objectives. It involves training, instructing, guiding and directing children in order to achieve harmonious development of their capacities. Education is, therefore, concerned with building in a child an organization of knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and ideas which will help in shaping his behaviour for his adequate adjustment to the society.

By Tumbuka traditional education is meant the education the Tumbuka people received during the pre-colonial period which may still be imparted in remote areas. This is a non-school education which lasts a lifetime and is acquired through participation in activities of the family, clan and tribe. The aims and goals of Tumbuka traditional education were various. The main aim of Tumbuka traditional education was to train children to fit into their community. In other
words education for the Tumbuka people was the making of a child into an acceptable member of the community. This was partly achieved by the emphasis laid on the learning of correct speech and behaviour. A well behaved child was a pride of the family and the community as a whole.

Children were taught good manners, morals and the etiquette of the society. They learnt, for example, to be polite and to respect the elders in particular. A child who behaved contrary to accepted norms was referred to as a fool (chindere) and not well bred.

It was also the concern of Tumbuka parents to instil the right attitudes into their children. Children were taught to be friendly, honest, generous, courageous, obedient and cooperative.

In educating their children the Tumbuka strove to provide various kinds of knowledge to them. They taught children something about their environment, history, customs, and beliefs and the traditional way of life. This knowledge was necessary for the continuity of the culture and the society itself.

Another objective of Tumbuka education was related to personal hygiene and health. In this respect children were taught healthy habits such as cleanliness, proper feeding, proper rest, playing games and other kinds of exercises.
The acquisition of occupational skills was another focus of Tumbuka traditional education. In this regard, children had to acquire various skills such as farming, cooking, herding, hunting, building, disease curing, worshipping, etc. These skills are, as Fortes (1938:31) puts it, 'the end-results of education'. The skills acquired enable the children to play their economic and social roles in the community.

To sum up, the goals of Tumbuka traditional education were to make children play their role in society. Children were to be industrious, well behaved, physically fit and responsible.

It is against this background that we have considered the value of oral literature in Tumbuka traditional system of education in the chapters that follow.

2.3 Process and Agents of Tumbuka Traditional Education

There were many ways through which Tumbuka traditional education was practised. The main methods included learning through observation and imitation. Children imitated the activities of the adults they admired; they imitated the way those adults walked, spoke and behaved. They would at an earlier stage imitate the activities of adults of either sex. Later they would identify themselves with adults of their own sex. Boys would imitate the activities of men and girls would imitate women.
Children also learnt through participation. They participated in productive work, social and religious ceremonies, sports and other pastimes. At an earlier period they participated in simple chores like sweeping the house and the surroundings, / scaring birds from fields, building huts, herding, hunting for mice and birds, etc. Both boys and girls participated in these duties at this stage. But as they grew older, boys and girls acquired more skills from adults of their own sex. Boys learnt from men the skills and roles of men and girls likewise learnt skills and roles of their mothers. For example, girls participated in cooking, pot-making, caring of children and smearing the floors of houses with black soil. Boys likewise participated in masculine roles such as building huts, herding, wood carving and other activities involving the use of men's skills.

Furthermore, children learnt many skills through apprenticeship. Most specialised roles and crafts were acquired through apprenticeship as will be seen in a later section of this chapter.

Play also formed a process of Tumbuka traditional education. Tumbuka children learnt many aspects of their culture through play. Often boys and girls learnt through play the roles of husbands and wives, father and mother. Through play, boys learnt how to fight, hunt, dance, sing and farm. Girls, too, learnt to care for children, cook, and dance, sing through play. They learnt many different things
from various games and imitative play. In imitative play children imitated the roles played by adults in their daily undertakings.

Initiation ceremonies were a source of learning to those who participated in them. Girls, for example, learnt a lot of valuable lessons from the umwali ceremony. This ceremony was conducted when the girl became of age. What was learnt through initiation ceremony will be discussed in a later section of this chapter.

Sometimes elders narrated stories such as folktales (vidokoni), genealogical accounts and history (midauko.) Listening to such stories stimulated children and shaped their behaviour. Many times children were given riddles, puzzles and proverbs (ntarika) as mental exercises. All the above formed the process of Tumbuka traditional education.

Traditionally the Tumbuka did not have a separate category of teachers for general education. The parents were the first teachers of the child. But siblings and other relatives also helped to educate him. At a later stage even friends, neighbours and other members of the community at large assisted in the process of education. Children belonged to the community as a whole and it was the community's responsibility to make them good citizens.
2.4 Stages in Tumbuka Traditional Education

Tumbuka traditional education started at birth and lasted until death. Like school education in which children move from grade to grade, Tumbuka traditional education was also taught in stages according to age sets. Small children were taught simple things, with more complicated ideas and skills reserved for older children. In other words, children of a certain age were expected to learn certain things and not others. The chart below summarises the stages and what was learnt at each stage. What should be noted about the stages is that there is no rigid distinction between the stages. The divisions used here are for analytical convenience and consist of the following:

1. *Bonda* (infancy). This extends from birth to around 24 months. This stage can be sub-divided into *lutema* and *chivuza*

   (a) *Lutema* lasts from birth to about three months when the baby is weak and delicate. At this stage the child's skin colour is lighter than what will be his normal colour. Around three months the baby takes on his normal colour, he becomes black or chocolate-coloured.

   (b) The period characterized by the Tumbuka as *chivuza* or *chibuza* begins around the fourth month and lasts to over 20 months. This stage begins when the baby starts to crawl and ends when he begins to walk.