

Resuscitating the African Oral Artistic Tradition: Towards a Re-enactment of Storytelling for Moral Rebirth among the Nigerian Youth

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Abstract

The study was conducted to examine the role of storytelling in the moral upbringing of the Nigerian youth. Storytelling is one of the important subgenres of the prose form of oral literature. Being a verbal art used in traditional African society for entertainment and didacticism, its usefulness in inculcating in children values, mores and cosmological beliefs of traditional African society cannot be downplayed. In recent times, however, the art seems to have suffered atrophy since it is rarely told by parents to their children. One factor responsible for this is the creeping pace of the poor economic climate currently ravaging many African countries. Suffice it to state that, a poor economy has continually forced many parents to scout for the fleeting means of survival which prevents them from spending quality time with their children. As it appears presently, storytelling seems to be threatened in Nigeria, and by extension the entire Africa, by the overbearing influence of the cyber age. Undoubtedly, the cyber culture heralds the age of technological revolution which manifests in the overwhelming use of the Internet and social media. However, the age has witnessed the evolution of several devices that ostensibly render the art of storytelling preposterous. Nevertheless, while social media is fast spreading a subversion of African traditions, it becomes increasingly important to counterbalance this trend with the art of storytelling. Consequently, this study was conducted with a view to reiterating the significance of storytelling as a veritable conduit for moral regeneration of youth and children in the quest for national development. Iwo and Evbologun, two traditionally oriented Yoruba and Bini communities acclaimed for their folkloristic enterprises, were chosen for the study. Given their cultural inclinations, the choice of these communities



was informed by the need to re-evaluate the practice or otherwise of the storytelling art there. The study is anchored in structuralism to explain that cultural elements operate in an interrelated manner. Interestingly, it found that oral narrative (storytelling) is ostensibly declining among most Nigerians, though some people understand its usefulness and want it to be resuscitated.

Keywords: oral tradition in Africa; re-enactment of storytelling for a moral rebirth of the Nigerian youth; the significance of orature among the Yoruba and Edo nationalities

Introduction

Oral literature is a unique discipline in view of the enormity of cultural tropes that shape it and the non-verbal mode of its conception, delivery or realisation. Similarly, the amount of attention it has received among scholars within and outside Africa over time also attests to its importance as a vehicle for the preservation of a people's cultural patrimony and traditions. Defined as "the imaginative compositions distinguished by their beauty of forms of expressions and local ideas developed over the years by a people and handed down from one generation to another by word of mouth" (Akpobaro 2005, 29), the literature is essentially oral (Akpobaro 2005; Okoh 2012), and uses *performance* as its lifeblood as a means of "actualization or verbalization [...] [since it is] fleeting, ephemeral and evanescent, with no independent or *tangible* existence" (Okoh 2012, 19). Oral literature is of the utmost importance to African societies in view of the fact that the literacy level in many African societies is still regrettably low. The implication of a low literacy level among Africans is that many of their traditions, mores, histories, and arts are yet to be documented, but are preserved in various verbal arts. This explains why Akpobaro (2005, 29) writes that the literature is the property of "pre-literate societies." According to him, oral literature is "the heritage of imaginative verbal creations, stories, folk-beliefs and songs of pre-literate societies which have evolved and passed on through the spoken word from one generation to another" (Akpobaro 2005, 29). Some of the verbal arts that predominate the literature are, however, going extinct, despite their didactic and aesthetic functions. One of these timeless oral traditional arts is oral narrative. This creative phenomenon is also a folk art used in expressing the universe of the African mind and world. Unfortunately, the advent of writing technology, continuous technological discovery and advancement, the deliberate inferiorisation or denigration of indigenous African cultural practices by the West, and the condemnable attitude of many Africans in mimicking Western civilisation have greatly eroded its socio-moral and intellectual imports. Recognising a dilemma that forms part of the postcolonial African reality, Niyi Akingbe has argued that ethnic groupings and nationalities in present-day Nigeria have robust traditions of literature that stretch back to before "the historic Arabic and European cultural disruption of these literary traditions" (Akingbe 2014, 50). The incursions of these alien cultures and civilisations into Nigeria and the west African sub-region in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, "destructively undermined the literary productions by subordinating indigenous religious thoughts and traditional philosophies" (Darah 1988

quoted in Akingbe 2014, 50). Reiterating a direct relationship between a decline in oral traditions in Nigeria and the British colonial administration's striking contribution toward its degeneration, G. G. Darah has stridently lamented that "today, most of these traditions, like the human communities that created them, have declined. This state of cultural depression is a consequence of the conquest of Nigeria by British colonialism in collaboration with Christian and Islamic religions" (Darah 1988, 1).

Essentially, storytelling is the art of transmitting societal norms, values, ethics and etiquettes through the use of words, sounds, kinesics and mimesis that create images and imagery in the mind of the audience. It is a tradition passed down from generation to generation through the spoken word. In other words, it is communicated through word of mouth. As an oral product, the fluid, evanescent and temporal nature of storytelling explains its flexibility. Also, the basis of its articulation is performance, and this elicits the multimedia mode of the senses. Because of its transient nature, the storyteller needs an active memory to operate. S/he thus enhances his/her memory through the use of mnemonic devices like symbols, rhythms, codes and so on. Hence, the raconteur deliberately encrypts, summarises, formulates, and repeats the thematic thrust of a tale so as to reiterate the rhythm of the inherent didacticism in his/her narrative.

Invariably, the storyteller performs before a live audience, unlike in written literature where the audience is atomised. Ostensibly, during a storytelling session, there can be a homogenous or heterogeneous audience. The homogeneity or heterogeneity of the audience may be determined by demographics of age and sex. In many African societies, elderly people often serve as raconteurs who narrate traditional tales to children and youths. The gender of these elders is irrelevant, but elderly men practise this art more than women. The reason is that most women may be busy with home chores or prefer doing other duties deemed more feminine than narrating stories. This, however, does not indicate that women do not narrate stories or partake in storytelling performance. Finnegan (2012), for instance, comments on the gender and age of storytellers or raconteurs, noting that in some African societies men often serve as raconteurs, while in others it is women who gather people together to feed them traditional tales. She also notes that children¹ have their own stories that are separate from those of adults:

The limitations on [the] [...] mastery of the art of storytelling arise from local conventions about the age and sex of the narrators. In some societies, it appears, these are quite free; in others there is a definite emphasis on one or another category as being the most suitable one for a story-teller. In some areas it is the women, often the old women, who tend to be the most gifted, even when the stories themselves are universally known. Elsewhere it is men who tend to be the more expert (e.g. Limba, Hausa, Fang, Pygmies), and this applies particularly to the more serious types of narration (myths and legends). In other cases again, certain stories (perhaps particularly animal stories) are

¹ Children sometimes gather themselves together and regurgitate some of the stories heard from their parents.

felt to be the preserve of children and to be most suitably told by and to them even though adults know them and sometimes join in (e.g. Ibo, Dogon, Galla). Tales told by and for children can scarcely be judged on a par with those by adults, and the particular preoccupations of certain narrations might well be elucidated if we knew whether, say, they were typically narrated by women. (Finnegan 2012, 364)

Though not much research has been done on whether the nature of stories told by men or women reflects their gender, it has been observed that most stories narrated by women tend to impart *feminine softness* to their audience. Like traditional stories narrated by men that aim at moulding character and imparting morals, stories told by women often emphasise and explore human weaknesses, softness of character, moral living, while most stories narrated by men are more adventurous and daring. This dimension points attention to how sexuality can potentially shape the tone or nature of stories narrated by either of the genders.

From the perspective of the African mind, there can be a visible and an invisible audience. The invisible audience is the ancestors and preternatural forces that inhabit the metaphysical realm. They can be summoned through invocation to witness the storytelling performance. The art of storytelling can be hereditary; this is evident in the *griots* of ancient Mali, Guinea, Senegal and Gambia. Storytelling skills can also be acquired through apprenticeship, either formally or informally. Improvisation occurs in storytelling as a result of its spontaneity. However, improvisation is more concerned with the aesthetic values than the semantic implication of storytelling. Since a synergy is expected to exist between the performer and the audience, performers are often preoccupied with those stylistic devices they deploy that can make them win the heart of the audience.² Storytelling takes different forms. It can find expression in myths, legends, fables, fairy tales, trickster stories, ghost tales, hero stories and epic adventures.

Storytelling is often seen as a mode of entertainment, despite the present writing and digital cultures. Nevertheless, it does more than this. Storytelling is not unidirectional; it is multidimensional. The oral narrative mode of moonlight storytelling, which takes place in the evening after a long day's work, also performs other functions, though it entertains as well. One of its aims is to foster collaboration among families, clans, society and community. Here is where the communal spirit of the African mind is invoked. It is also an avenue through which values are transmitted. At such a gathering as moonlight storytelling, knowledge is shared among the audience. This is why when a story is related, a member of the audience may relate their experience similar to the story narrated for the benefit of all. Through storytelling, people are inspired into action. A story can end with the undertone of "go and do likewise." Aside from all these, the

² Various artistic and literary features are employed by a storyteller in the course of their performance. Such devices, according to Bauman (1975, 295), include "special codes, such as archaic or esoteric language, special formulae that signal performance, such as conventional openings and closings [...] figurative language, such as metaphor, metonymy, formal stylistic devices, such as rhyme, vowel harmony, other forms of parallelism, special prosodic patterns of tempo, stress, pitch, special paralinguistic patterns of voice quality and vocalization, appeal to tradition."

storytelling arena is a centre for language acquisition, especially for the younger generation. This is where the semantic, pragmatic, stylistic, syntactic, morphological and phonological dimensions of language are brought to the fore. For instance, many idiomatic expressions and proverbs have stories behind their formations; it is in the arena of storytelling that these stories are recounted. Thus, the usage of witty expressions is enhanced as a result of the knowledge of the stories behind them.

One of the key elements in storytelling is the style; the story must be simple and not complicated. It should be presented as something valuable and this can only be realised with simplicity of style. Inexorably, simplicity of style makes a story direct. It also helps to avoid alternative points of view that can lead to unnecessary complexity. The truthfulness of the story account is another key element. The storyteller presents the simplistic truth of a story. His/her role is to present and not to argue or force his/her view on the audience. Preparation is also an essential element in storytelling. Though storytelling is an oral account and spontaneous in nature, there is the need for the storyteller to rehearse his/her story before presentation. The last key element is delivery. The mode of delivery is known to be oral, but it must be delivered in an interactive and conversational manner. Akingbe (2013a) has argued that in the art of oral narrative/performance, there should be a dialogue between the storyteller and the audience. This synergy becomes imperative since “it is taken for granted that most oral performances in Africa usually derive their successes from the harmonious cooperation between the performer and the audience” (2013a, 327). The storyteller presents himself/herself as equal to the audience, to facilitate interaction and create active participation of everyone in the storytelling performance.

Aside from the use of verbal communication skills, nonverbal communication skills are needed for effective delivery of storytelling. This mostly makes the art of storytelling lively in Africa. Apart from mode of delivery, Mota (2009) submits that songs and percussions sometimes accompany storytelling in Africa. Drawing on examples from the Limba in Sierra Leone, she notes that “[i]n storytelling, for example, songs often form part of the narration, and in practice it may often be the experts in musical skills who also tend to be the best storytellers. Music and dance illustrate dramatic activity in which both narrator and audience share the emotions conveyed by storytelling” (2009, 19–20).

Despite the various researches on storytelling and general acknowledgement of the erosion this traditional art is facing, there seems to be no action or move made towards reinventing it or preventing it from going extinct, hence the thrust of this study—to examine factors that may be responsible for the atrophy of the art and ultimately initiate an intellectual mechanism that can trigger scholarly interest and draw the attention of policy formulators to the dwindling fortune of oral storytelling in Africa and specifically in Nigeria. This was done by first locating communities where this art is still practised in the southern part of Nigeria in order to carry out an ethnographic research that can help in objective data collection for the study.

Oral Storytelling in the Digital Age

Different approaches have been applied to the study of oral storytelling. While some scholars have attempted to trace its origin (Spaulding 2011; Tingoy et al. 2007) and its new forms in the digital age, others have tried to identify the functions it performs in society. The general view is that with the advent of writing and the new media, there has been a change in the form and structure of this art with an attendant adverse effect on its continued existence. The research problem, therefore, focused on the inadequate scholarly works on the atrophy of this oral art in Nigeria. Little attention has been given to this traditional art that is nearing its extinction in the country, though it can still be revived and preserved in this digital dispensation. With the current improvement in information technology facilitated by globalisation or the Internet of Things (IoT),³ the age-long traditional moonlight storytelling is fast disappearing, while the moral values that go with such a cultural exercise are also diminishing.

In the 1980s, 1990s and up till early 2000s, attempts at digitalising the art of storytelling were made by the Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) through its network programme tagged “Tales by Moonlight.” It was an attempt at reinventing the moonlight storytelling art, as practised in the rural communities. The moonlight storytelling platform has been a major tool in developing the total child in the African cultural setting. In such stories are embedded values, ethical conduct and wisdom that are central to the overall wellbeing of Nigerians, especially children and youths. However, that programme has long been rested; hence this study becomes timely and handy.

The research basically examined the significance of oral storytelling in regenerating the dying fibres of morality in Nigeria. The association between moral decline and the absence of oral narrative is exemplified most obviously by a predisposition to unbridled disorder and anti-social behaviour often associated with the Nigerian youth. Akingbe makes a pertinent observation while establishing a direct relationship between moral ambivalence and a decline in oral narrative performance when he declaims that the continued absence of storytelling in contemporary Nigeria has further compromised an already weakened disposition to African cultural philosophy which has in turn exacerbated a decline in social and cultural norms as it “ostensibly reflects how contemporary Nigerian society has been weakened by its ambivalent positioning between poorly-digested western values and half-forgotten indigenous norms” (Akingbe 2013b, 150). Consequently, the study is poised to settle the following challenges. It acknowledged the significance of orature in the art of storytelling. In achieving this aim, the study identified communities where this art is still well

³ The “Internet of Things (IoT) is a concept and a paradigm that considers the pervasive presence in the environment [of] a variety of things/objects that, through wireless and wired connections and unique addressing schemes, are able to interact with each other and cooperate with other things/objects to create new applications/services and reach common goals” (Patel and Patel 2016, 6122). It is a concept that defines the growth and general application of “mobile devices, embedded and ubiquitous communication, cloud computing and data analytics” (Patel and Patel 2016, 6122).

entrenched and practised. Furthermore, doing an ethnographic study in these communities helped the researchers to observe and gather information first-hand through the “three main styles of research: experimentation, observation and survey” (Lashley and Best 2001, 93). Since every culture is born out of orality (Makgopa 2012, 1325), this study advocates the revival of oral storytelling in a strategic way so as to boost the national policy on education. Storytelling as an oral art form has a distinct essence and should not be brought to a halt simply because of the evolving dynamics of the writing culture. The study found that the advent of the Western-oriented writing system has not rendered useless the potency of orality in Africa (Ong 2002), but has made both complementary. Consequently, the study examined how the art can survive the challenges of the modern digital age and not exist on the periphery of the age; after all, writing technology began as a support base for the oral transmission of histories and cultural practices (Gitay 1980).

Literature Review

Oral storytelling has been identified as a major vehicle of cultural expression in Africa. Unarguably, it is used as an avenue to transmit values, share knowledge and foster collaboration. It can also be used to manipulate an audience’s emotions (Sekoni 1990). This, perhaps, is why Favat (1997) examines how children react to folk stories and how students connect their personal life experiences to the plots and events in a text. To this end, Gallas (1994) posits that traditional literature like storytelling can be a veritable tool in advancing imagination. It is, therefore, believed that storytelling in format and presentation modes are vital intellectual tools for teaching and learning (Egan 1997). Correspondingly, Akingbe (2015), validating the relevance of the oral tradition to literary production, affirms that “despite many years of neglect, the Yoruba oral tradition has not gone into extinction, but has been re-structured linguistically as a platform of literary communication by the younger generation of Nigerian poets” (2015, 41). Also, due to its importance as a traditional means of education and entertainment, efforts have been made to conduct research into the traditional art of storytelling. While some scholars have identified the nature, context and structure of the art, others have x-rayed its functions and strategic relevance. However, what appears not to have been given much attention is its threatened existence and survival in the contemporary period of writing and globalisation. Also central to this study is the reinvention of the moral corpus of the dying traditional art in the lives of Nigerian children in the communities where the study took place. Scholars have attempted to identify the goals of oral storytelling in various African communities. They also examine the methods of oral storytelling that have continuously been used within various African communities. While Abdul-Malik (2012) posits that Africans value the building of relationships through oral storytelling for cultural sustainability, Stone (1997) and Sobol (1999) are of the opinion that the synergy of the story, the storyteller and the audience often creates participation equality. Abdul-Malik specifically believes that African oral storytelling traditions, when utilised with their original goals and methods, can address the culturally diverse needs of people in society, since the art assists “participants [to] co-create and

manifest their identities in relation to one another and also enables them to imagine and appreciate each other's perspectives" (Black 2008 quoted in Abdul-Malik 2012, 35).

One of the major studies on the art of storytelling was carried out by Spaulding (2011). The research, divided into four parts, starts by looking into the teaching of storytelling and how it can be taught through storytelling. Entertainment is identified as "a requirement for successful storytelling" without which a story "becomes a lecture" (Spaulding 2011, 4). Spaulding opines that some people are born storytellers and some not; yet, they can learn. Various types of stories were identified such as folklore, folk tales, wonder tales, *pourquoi* tales, myths, legends, fables, parables, ballads, hero tales, epics, modern fantasy, droll stories, and many more. Distinctions between storytelling and story crafting are made. The former is said to be traditional, while the latter is a recent invention that builds on oral narratives. It was observed that "the kind of traditional folk tale that was honed by many tellers over many generations largely has been replaced by the novel" (Spaulding 2011, 91). Story crafting is seen as an individual's stories, while there is communal authorship over oral narratives.

Scheub (2005), in his collection of different African stories, contends that storytelling "is a performance that one seeks to capture in words, not simply the words" (2005, xiii). This is because most of the stories collected in the oral tradition are captured as scripts, and not as performances. Nevertheless, he was able to capture some parts of the performances in his collections on film. It is worthy of note that out of the 46 tales recorded in this work, only three are from Nigeria. Most of the tales recorded are South African stories. Therefore, there is the need for more in-depth researches into oral traditional storytelling in Nigeria.

Theoretical Framework

Structuralism is critical to this research because of its strategic role in exploring the full significance of oral storytelling to the society that owns the verbal art. Its significance is underscored by the fact that it helps to foster an understanding of the social relevance of oral narratives in the society by portraying oral art as an integral part of the society that produces it. Structuralism is a critical theory that seeks to "understand [...] in a systematic way [...] the fundamental structures that underlie all human experience and, therefore, all human behavior and production" (Tyson 1999, 198). Being a "method of systematizing human experience" (1999, 198), rather than a field of study with specific propositions, structuralist criticism is used in many fields of study, including the humanities, social sciences and natural sciences. It started as an intellectual movement in France in the 1950s with its popularisation by Claude Levi-Strauss and Roland Barthes (Barry 1995). According to Barry (1995), structuralism should rather be conceived as a knowledge-based theory that holds that "things cannot be understood in isolation—they are to be seen in the context of the larger structures they are part of" (1995, 39) in order to "provide an account of all social and cultural practices, in a range that includes mythical narratives, literary texts, advertisements, fashions in clothing, and patterns of social decorum" (Abrams and Harpham 2012, 382).

To Blackburn (2008), structuralism is “the belief that phenomena of human life are not intelligible except through their interrelations. These relations constitute a structure, and behind local variations in the surface phenomena there are constant laws of abstract culture” (2008, 353). Blackburn’s “surface phenomena” and “abstract laws” are what Tyson (1999) calls two fundamental levels of the world that humans inhabit: the visible and the invisible. The visible world, according to him, “consists of [...] all the countless objects, activities, and behaviors we observe, participate in, and interact with every day” (1999, 198). The invisible world, on the other hand, “consists of the structures that underlie and organize all of these phenomena so that we can make sense out of them” (1998). Structuralists believe that the configuration of a structure (society) is altered when an aspect of it is tampered with. Since the thrust of structuralism is on the interrelatedness of different aspects of a structure (society), if a part is affected it can have adverse effects on the whole structure. Using the theory helped to identify those “invisible” or “abstract” factors underlying the continued practice of oral art in the two locales where the research was carried out, though its existence is also threatened there. This identification is critical to the sustainability of the verbal art in the present context. Thus, the study explored how oral art has co-existed with writing and virtual technologies, despite the danger they pose to its existence. This study has implications, not only for the scholarly fields of oral literature, but also for the related disciplines of education management, philosophy, psychology and sociology.

Research Methodology

The research was quantitative, since it studied the atrophy of the dynamics of storytelling in Nigeria. Two communities (Iwo) in Iwo Local Government Area of Osun State and (Evbologun) in Ikpoba Okha Local Government Area of Edo State were selected for the study, and the population comprised adults, some of whom are custodians of Yoruba and Bini (Edo) cultures, as well as the youth. Iwo is cosmopolitan, while Evbologun is rural. The choice of these communities was largely informed by the desire to establish the prominence or otherwise of the verbal art in both the rural and urban settings. Questionnaires were administered to some respondents in the communities to ascertain whether they considered storytelling an important art or not, and also to find out if the art is still in practice or not. Among the custodians of Yoruba and Bini cultures who took part in the research were professional storytellers. They have practised the art of storytelling for more than five years. The questionnaires were administered to 100 respondents, 50 from each of the two communities where the study took place. These respondents were within the age brackets of 15–25 and 25–60 years. They were chosen from the council of the youth and elders. This was done in order to correctly approximate them as representatives of the larger population of the town and villages. The questionnaire was the major instrument used for the collection of data for this study, apart from the professional storytellers employed. The questionnaire contained 20 yes/no questions, all based on the set research questions for this study. The introductory section contained the biodata of the respondent, followed by questions

drafted to elicit information on their familiarity with or lack of interest in the oral narratives.

Results

Table 1: Respondents in Iwo Town

No.	Age Brackets	Total
1	15–20 years	10
2	40–60 years	10
3	40–60 years	10
4	60 and above	20
	Total	50

Table 2: Respondents in Evbologun Village

No.	Age Brackets	Total
1	15–20 years	10
2	40–60 years	10
3	40–60 years	10
4	60 and above	20
	Total	50

Table 3: The questionnaire

No.	Question	Yes	%	No	%
1	Do your parents tell stories to you in the evenings?	40	80	10	20
2	Do you tell stories to your children?	45	90	5	10

3	Storytelling was common some years ago, but is unpopular now.	48	96	2	4
4	We all gathered to tell and listen to stories in those days.	50	100	0	0
5	Do you still gather to tell stories in the evenings?	45	90	5	10
6	The last time we told stories to our children was a long time ago.	48	96	2	4
7	Our children are not aware of storytelling and its cultural values.	48	96	2	4
8	We often gather in the evening to tell stories.	2	4	48	96
9	We have only told traditional stories not more than three times this year.	50	10	0	0
10	Listening to stories can contribute to morals in the village/town.	49	90	5	10
11	Listening to traditional stories at home enhances the attention span of children in school.	48	96	2	4
12	There are always life lessons to learn from traditional stories.	48	96	2	4

13	Storytelling provides a good source of entertainment at home.	48	96	2	4
14	Lack of storytelling breaks down family unity.	50	100	0	0
15	Storytelling promotes cultural unity.	50	100	0	0
16	Storytelling is negatively affected by mass/social media.	45	90	5	10
17	Mass/social media promote the art of storytelling.	2	4	48	96
18	Do you prefer oral storytelling to written literature?	48	96	2	4
19	The story is fresher when told orally.	48	96	2	4
20	The new (mass) media draw attention from oral narratives.	50	100	0	0
21	Do you wish storytelling is revived again?	50	100	0	0

Discussion

The study found that the art of storytelling is dying off among the rural people, while it has almost become extinct among the urban dwellers. However, most adults interviewed and those who responded to the questionnaires administered still identified with the art. Most unfortunately, the youth and children who should have imbibed the morals of storytelling have apparently taken to mobile phones and several computer applications as means of seeking immediate entertainment. This finding is drawn from an analysis of the responses of the majority of respondents to the questionnaire. While 91.5% of the respondents claimed to view storytelling as an important vehicle of cultural communication and education, 8.5% claimed not to have knowledge of the value of

storytelling. This may not be unconnected to the fact that the craft of storytelling declined over the last 20 or 30 years. Experience with the practice of storytelling was also attested to by both the young and old in the society, as all the respondents who were 60 years and above noted that the practice of storytelling was not new to them.

Of the population, 94.5% believe that the current state of the oral tradition in the country is not good at all. Almost all the respondents admitted the fact that though they were told stories in their time, their children have not enjoyed such a traditional tool of education and entertainment. Where it was found to exist, its prevalence was far from salutary. About 96% of the respondents noted that they have not been told stories for a long time. About 96% of the respondents agreed that they have been beneficiaries of storytelling in their time, yet they have not told their children or anyone any story for some time. Storytelling, according to the respondents, has become a rarity. Nearly all the respondents (99%) agree that storytelling is a good source of entertainment, while all the respondents, representing 100%, agreed that storytelling will promote culture. All the respondents also agree that a lack of storytelling contributes to the breakdown of family unity in the country, while 96% of them believe that there are always important lessons to learn from storytelling art. About 90% of the respondents affirm that the mass media negatively affect the art of storytelling. On whether the mass media promote storytelling, 96% of the respondents believe that the mass media do not promote storytelling in the country. Interestingly, 96% responded that verbal stories are fresher; hence they are better enjoyed when presented orally than when written as a storybook to be read. All the respondents affirm that the mass media often divert attention from storytelling. Correspondingly, all the respondents want the art of storytelling to be revived once again.

Conclusion

The article has examined the significance of storytelling in the quest for the moral upbringing of the Nigerian youth. While a drive for moral regeneration certainly qualifies a revival of the art of storytelling, the article acknowledged the capability of the cyber culture, manifested through the outlets of mass media, computer games, mobile phones, the Internet and various computer applications, to have negatively impacted on the art of storytelling in the communities where the research was carried out. Because the African oral artistic tradition is grounded almost solely on the participation of a communal gathering, the article has further reiterated that the privileged position the art of storytelling used to enjoy in the past has been ostensibly hijacked by various mobile devices and apps. Sadly, despite the importance of the oral artistic tradition and its utilitarian functions, it was discovered that both adults and the youth have turned away from such storytelling performances and embraced other means of entertainment and instruction, although this behaviour is more prevalent among youths than adults. Unarguably, it was also discovered that the moral laxity and permissiveness that characterises today's Nigeria could be traced to the inability of parents to instil moral education in their children and wards. One of the major vehicles

through which this education could be taught to children or the younger ones is oral narratives. The study submits that the pervasiveness of moral laxity among youths in the country may not be unconnected with the loss of this traditional tool of moral education, hence the need for its revitalisation. As a matter of fact, it goes without saying that its atrophy automatically results in the breakdown of moral education. To address this anomaly, it is recommended that oral arts, especially storytelling, should be revived and given adequate attention to counterbalance the growing influence of the cyber culture. It is exhilarating to note that the majority of the respondents desire that it should be regenerated for the sake of re-enacting dialectics of moral consciousness among the youth towards building a healthy society devoid of moral bankruptcy. In resuscitating the African oral artistic tradition in contemporary Nigeria, it is strongly advised that the traditional rulers/titular heads in their capacities as custodians of tradition should as a matter of urgency encourage the revival of oral narratives in different forms in their respective domains and communities. Also, the government at both the state and the local levels should see to the revitalisation of the art of storytelling by incorporating oral delivery of traditional tales and stories into the school curricula. Again, professional storytellers can also be commissioned to go round the schools, especially at the primary level, to narrate important tales to pupils in these schools.

Acknowledgement

Our profound gratitude goes to the Nigerian Tertiary Education Trust Fund (TETFUND), who awarded us a research grant to conduct a project entitled “Re-inventing Oral Narrative for Moral Regeneration in the Contemporary Nigeria.” This paper is a product of the aforementioned research project.

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Appendix A

Interview with Chief Adetoyese Adeniji Apata, the *Erinmi Onpitan* of Iwo Town

You are a professional storyteller and Yoruba culture enthusiast. Where would you situate storytelling? Would it be right to describe it as a corpus or a subgenre of oral literature?

Oral literature is a unique literature that makes use of word of mouth as a medium of expression. Its uniqueness derives largely from its media of conception and transmission. This makes it different from written literature. The literature is often associated with literature of the communities where writing and printing technologies are absent. Storytelling is an oral art that mostly takes place in the evening time, especially at the leisure hours of most people. In those days, people used to gather themselves under the trees during their leisure hours to listen to tales and traditional stories in order to entertain themselves after retiring home from farming. Storytelling as a genre of orality has always been an indispensable appendage of oral artistic tradition. It is an important component of the African world view, because it catalogues the tales of a people, their cosmological beliefs, past events, fauna and flora, and important occurrences that shape the identity of a people. Due to its importance, many scholars, including late Professor Robert G. Armstrong of the University of Ibadan, gathered these art forms into short stories (Yoruba folklores). Some of them have even succeeded in publishing these traditional stories. In fact, foreign students from Philadelphia in the United States of America often come to me to listen to collections of moonlight tales which they then use for their personal research. That underscores its importance, considering its appeal to foreign students who brave all odds to come listen and learn our moonlight tales. The importance of traditional tales to literature is the reason why some schools abroad include moonlight stories in their curricula.

How did you acquire expertise in storytelling that foreigners even come to listen to you in your narration of traditional stories?

My interest in traditional stories started right from childhood. I used to listen to my father narrate these stories, because he, too, was a gifted storyteller. He would narrate these stories infusing into them Yoruba proverbs, metaphors and imageries that would make it difficult for us to forget them. He was good at it. At a time I used to travel with him to different communities and listen to his tales which he told to the admiration of people who gathered to listen to him. When I grew up, I developed myself in the art of storytelling, learning the nuances, the tricks and peculiar techniques with which a professional storyteller holds his audience spellbound. Though storytelling skills may be inborn, they can be honed as well. That was exactly what I did. I took time off to develop myself in the art.

How would you describe the current state of storytelling in Nigeria?

Storytelling in Nigeria, and by extension Africa, is under the attack of technology and globalisation. To further compound the precarious state of the art in Africa, the incursion of Western cultural practices into Africa has largely sounded its death knell. Nowadays, children are entertained through the conventional and social media; folktales have been jettisoned as a viable alternative for education and entertainment. Come to think of it, who will even narrate traditional tales to children and the young ones when they are busy playing with their phones taking *selfies*? Besides, is it the father who goes out very early in the morning and returns home late and tired? Is it the mother who cares less about the emotional wellness of her children, but spends most of her time at the market trying to see how the family can make both ends meet? The fact is that most parents leave their children in the care of their home helps and nannies. The inability of parents to inculcate morals and African values in their children is responsible for the breeding of dysfunctional children and sociopaths who grow up unleashing havoc on the society. There are kidnappers, ritual killers, thugs and scores of morally bankrupt people everywhere. Most of them grew up not learning or being inculcated with basic virtues that define an average African man. All these happen as a result of the decline in the art of storytelling. Nowadays, any child that sits where stories are being told, all you will hear from his/her parents is “Go and pick up your book and read.” Moreover, an elderly person who decides to gather children around for storytelling will be mocked and become a subject of ridicule in the society. What most storytellers do nowadays is to narrate their stories in books. However, the orality of stories transmitted through books is problematic, because it is no longer oral, it has been documented, and the “mouth-to-mouth” transmission mode is disrupted.

How can storytelling be used to teach morals and widen the intellectual capacity of Nigerian children and youths?

Without mincing words, storytelling is an important tool for teaching morals and developing the intellect of children. The substitute that the Western civilisation provides, in form of video games, animated cartoons, television reality shows, film and cinema, has created morons, wayward and corrupt characters out of these children. I said earlier that the prevalence of sociopaths in the country is as a result of the inability of parents to use the art of storytelling to introduce their children to the African cosmos and values. When you introduce your children to a civilisation that privileges materialism, individualism and promiscuity, you cannot but have corrupt and wayward children. When I tell children my story, they are always amazed. I used the story to teach them morals and wisdom, and often encourage them to re-enact what they have heard from me. To advance the moral and intellectual capacity of children and youths, I often use *aloapamo*—a subgenre of oral storytelling—to test their level of understanding of issues and philosophies. *Aloapamo* is like riddles and jokes or jigsaws and puzzles in English. Stories and tales are used to task the reasoning ability of young ones. In the process of asking them questions, explanations of events behind the stories

(*aloapamo*) are offered. The narration of experiences gathered becomes stories and tales; and all these are applied to wisdom. The fact is that this type of story can be used to give insight, teach morals, and impart wisdom. It can also serve as a means to give warning or offer pieces of advice on the behavioural pattern expected of an individual. There are a lot of moral values that go with cultural practices like storytelling. I believe these practices need to be reinvented among the youth and children.

What is the impact of the New Media on traditional storytelling?

There are many underground works going on to help bring the art of storytelling to the social media. We are in the digital age, the age of the Internet, and our plan is to move with the spirit of the time, to create a socially compliant mechanism that can help take traditional tales from their raw state to the virtual state. One of the endeavours is to have people listen to and read stories in Yoruba and other African languages online. I currently have about 120 Ifa stories that can be read or listened to online. Though it is not free—a token fee is to be paid for the download of these stories—I believe it will achieve the desired purpose in those who download these stories. The major purpose is to reinvent Yoruba traditional tales and use them as a means to moralise the youth. This will take them away from corrupt sites online where immoral practices are taught and learnt.

What other means do you think can be used to reinvent the dying state of the storytelling tradition in Nigeria?

One of the plans designed to reinvent the storytelling tradition is to have the stories written down in books for posterity. Another one is to teach courses on it in the university, just like it is done in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages at the University of Ibadan, Nigeria. Regular public lectures must also be organised to sensitise people to the importance of the art and save it from the precipice of extinction. As part of this measure, I gave a lecture at the Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile Ife, Nigeria on “The Story of the Human Part in Ifa Couplet.” More of these lectures should be organised. Besides, books should be written and published on how to save oral arts from going into extinction. I am aware that some books have been published in the Department of Linguistics and African Languages, University of Ibadan. I think the Ibadan Cultural Studies Group is also doing great work towards reinventing the oral tradition of storytelling. Professor Wande Abimbola and I have done a lot in this regard. Presently, there is an ongoing alliance between the Osun State Government and myself on the teaching of Yoruba stories in public schools. An arrangement is also being made with some media houses in the country to create storytelling-based radio or television programmes for the education and delectation of people at home. This will involve gathering school children and asking them to tell stories. The ones with good stories will be aired. Again, the Art and Culture Ministry in all the states of the federation should facilitate competitions among primary and secondary school pupils/students on our indigenous cultural practices.