

Storytelling and the Preservation of Indigenous Culture in Nigeria

Naziru Ahmad Atiku

**Languages Department, School of General Studies,
Federal Polytechnic, Oko.**

Anambra state, nigeria.

e-mail: naziruahmadatiku@gmail.com

08067693760

Abstract

This work aims at elaborating widely on the concept of storytelling and how it plays a vital role in the preservation of Nigerian indigenous culture. As we are living in a space and time where some cultures establish themselves as predators and make others pray. Gradually, due to the influence of western cultures, many indigenous cultures are slipping into the oblivion as the younger generations of Nigerians develop prejudice and unfriendliness towards their own culture, giving an unnecessary preference to the western culture. Considering the evil effect of globalization in subjugation, segregation and victimization of the Nigerian culture, strong and stoic effort is to be made before it is too late to cry and end up campaigning after the election or planting crops on air, harvesting nothing at the end of the year. This storytelling is paramount in the Nigerian educational curriculum, documentation and movie so as to influence the general attitudes of the youths and save the indigenous culture from being lost.

Keywords: Storytelling, indigenous cultures, globalization, preservation

Introduction

Storytelling is as old as human endeavours since the creation of Adam and eve people began to narrate their story which can be found even in their scriptures. In relation to this assertion (Sheppard) said “storytelling

is an intimate and universal art form that is over 50,000 years old". Culture is preserved by the way of narration from generation to generation that transcendent their way of life socially, educationally, morally, religiously etc. people in the olden days tell stories for many purposes such as entertainment, information, education, etc. These generations dwell in different parts of the world and formed their identities or ethnic groups.

According to American Historical Association, "in Nigeria there are about 250 – 300 ethnic groups as measured by self-identification or the presence of different languages". Unfortunately, globalisation vandalizes and twists the Nigerian culture covertly or overtly. Nigeria is blessed with grandeur culture before the globalization dntrod and scattered it into unbearable or unwelcomed development away from its pulsating outstanding look. (Akande) "cautions that globalization for the extinction of 22,000 indigenou cultures in the last decade and projects that approximately 90% of the world's languages will disappear in the next century as a result of globalization".

Globalisation today endangers our indigenou culture and way of life as colonialism did some decades ago. In corroboration with this view:

Every element of the current crises of collapses of industries, collapses of educational and health facilities, collapses of infrastructure (power, transportation, water supply and communication), degradation of the environment, inflation, escalating debt bill, weakening of the currency, ethnic and religious violence and collapses of public security is traceable to the re-noued attempt to consolidate the re-colonisation process.(Aluko et al 119- 130).

Contemporarily this could be seen as a plain truth and undeniable, as it occurs in our daily life where Nigerians rush to the borrowed culture helter-skelter neglecting their indigenou culture in vain. In this era of technological innovations where the western technologies drive away

and re-shape our thinking to either blend of the two cultures i.e. indigenou culture and western culture or even embrace the latter, therefore it is paramount to trigger Nigerians harbinger of an action through storytelling of their founding fathers' way of life that tied them in piece not in pieces.

Concept of Storytelling

The concept of storytelling hybridized two different words "story" and "telling", according to Longman advance Learners' Dictionary, the word story could be seen as "a description of how something happened that is intended to entertain people and may be true or imaginary". Although this definition views the word "story" through the grammatical spectacle, but the literature point of view fill the gaps and inadequate of the meaning in portraying purpose of story not only for entertainment but also information, education, etc. "A story is understood to be a primary means of communicating oral tradition because it generally encapsulates principles, standard and various other expressions in oral societies" (Achebe 50).

Telling on the other hand encompasses the act of showing the true character or nature of someone or something, often without being intended. Telling is also a word of mouth, uttered or written ones with the aim of expressing the true picture or character of someone or something to the listening ears or viewing eyes.

Storytelling is being discussed by many scholars in the realm of literature. "Story telling describes the social and cultural activity of sharing stories, sometimes with improvisation, theatrics or embellishment, it connotes some crucial elements which are: plot, character and narrative point of view" (Wikipedia.org). (Rossieter 27-34) states that storytelling is a form of communication that predates written human history as a means of teaching lessons and passing history down from one generation to another. Similarly, (Serrat 150-168) asserts that storytelling is the use of stories or narrative as a communication tool

to value, share and capitalize on the knowledge of individuals. He added that storytelling is the vivid description of ideas, beliefs, personal experiences, and life-lessons through stories or narratives that evoke emotions and insight. According to Thiango, storytelling is retelling a tale or narrative to one or more listeners through voice and gesture. Moreover, “storytelling is a method of recording and expressing feeling, attitudes, and responses of one's life experiences and environment” (Gbadegesin 173-188).

Thus, the human culture in the world seems to create stories as way of making sense of the world (Achebe and Vanbe). For all the supra scholars' definitions of storytelling one may easily detect that the Nigerian culture that etymologically accompany their life and plays a vital role in moving them forward.

Theoretical Framework

This paper deems it appropriate to use a theoretical framework that will suit its subject matter. Therefore it is the narrative paradigm theory which was propounded by Fischer. His theory posits that all human beings are recipients and originators of stories which are narratives in themselves (Fisher 74). He asserts that narratives that resonate with people are usually stories shaped by a series of events, historical or cultural markers. Storytelling is without doubt a veritable tool which oral societies used in conveying meaning and the narrative paradigm corroborates that a story may be used to convey meanings that will resonate better with an audience and this in turn can open a channel that can allow history and traditions to be passed from generation to generation for preservation purposes.

Structure of the Nigerian Storytelling

Nigeria like all other African countries values storytelling. For that the structure of the storytelling categorized into triangular segments that is to say three segments namely; the preamble, central idea and conclusion. In the African setting stories are divided into three parts as

follows: the introduction, the body and the conclusion (Matateyuo and Vambe).

Taking the major ethnic groups culture into account, Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba, the storytelling normally takes place in their homes' compound under the moon light. The story teller is mostly an elderly person like grannies. The mat will be spread and the children encircle the storyteller with the great alacrity. In Hausa community usually the stories begin by “gatanan-gatananku” that is “here it goes” said by the storyteller while the audience respond by saying “tazo mujita” meaning “we are listening”. Similarly in Igbo culture “umuaka, umuaka” that is “children, children” said by the storyteller while audience respond by saying “eeh” meaning “yees.” Also storyteller proceeded by saying “onwere akuko m ga-akoro unu” that is “there is a story I want to tell you”, the audience also responded by “koro ayi na ayi na-ege nti” meaning “tell us your story, we are listening.” In Yoruba tradition the storyteller starts with a call and the audience respond which is repeated for a few times in form of chant as to get the full attention of the listeners. The storyteller would say “Alo o” literally means “story” while contextually means “I have a tale to tell.” The audience would respond “Alo” literally means “story” while contextually means “say it.” Some stories put the children in a dilemma and deep melancholy which may cause sleepless night or terrible nightmare while other stories are hilarious and absurd but whatever phase the story takes lessons are grasped from it.

The recurrent stories among the three ethnic groups are about “Spider and Grasshopper”, “Cat and Mouse,” “Ant and Bird,” “Tortoise and hare,” “Elephant and hyena,” and other characters. To make the above point clearer, examples of some of these stories are cited below:

Cat and Mouse (Hausa Storytelling)

A notorious mouse annoyed a spider with stealing. Whatever the spider keeps, the notorious mouse would steal and eat it. As the spider became

fed up with the frequent stealing of the mouse, he went to a cat's house and reported it. The cat said, "no problem, let's go to your house. You know mouse is a smart thief. Bring daddawa (food spice) and place it at the center of this room. I will be hiding. Once he perceives it and comes out, I will pounce on him". Few minutes after the spider brought daddawa (food spice) and placed it, the notorious mouse perceived it and came out. As the cat was hiding beside a bed, she sighted the mouse coming out, she immediately pounced and grabbed him. The mouse screamed and cried. The spider looked at him and said, "Today is your day, heartless thief. We will see whether you can steal again".

The cat went house with him, killed him and ate. Theft is not good, we should avoid it. (Sani).

This Hausa tale originated since from time immemorial generation after generation.

The tale aimed at portraying the evil of theft and bad turn of the thieves' fate. The storyteller warns the audience about the danger of theft, as a moral lesson of this story. Thus in the Hausa culture people normally use this food spice (daddawa) to add taste aroma in their native soup and also as a trap of catching mouse.

The Cunning Tortoise (Igbo Folktale)

Once upon a time in the animal kingdom, Tortoise who was a cunning animal wanted to get married. He could not afford the traditional wedding items required by his soon-to-be in-laws, so he borrowed them from his neighbors. He called his kinsmen to accompany him to his in-laws for the wedding ceremony. Before Tortoise and his kinsmen set out, he told them that they should all take on special names to answer to when they arrived at the ceremony. Everyone chose their names and Tortoise chose to be called "All of you."

When they arrived at the wedding, the in-laws had prepared different kinds of foods and drinks. The ceremony began first with the serving of kola nuts and palm wine. When the kola nuts were served, Tortoise stood up and asked his in-laws ["who are the kola nuts for?"] and the in-laws replied, [they're for "all of you"]. Then Tortoise turned to his kinsmen and said ["my people, the kola nuts are for me"]. So Tortoise put the kola nuts away in his bag. After some time, the in-laws came back with other foods and drinks and Tortoise would ask again ["who are these for?"] and the in-laws would reply ["for all of you"]. Tortoise took all the foods and drinks that were served for him and put them away in his bag.

When the in-laws came back and saw that the kinsmen were not eating and drinking, they asked Tortoise why? Tortoise replied that it was because the in-laws said that the food was for "All of you" and that was his name.

After the serving of food and drinks, they began the traditional wedding ceremony. Tortoise and his kinsmen presented the bride price and wedding gifts to the bride's family. Some of the gifts were yams, rice, and palm oil. The in-laws accepted these gifts and stored them in their house. At the end of the ceremony, Tortoise and his new bride went home. Tortoise, being a greedy and crafty animal, arranged with some thieves to steal the wedding gifts he had just presented to his in-laws. When Tortoise and the thieves arrived at night to steal the gifts, the in-laws heard the noise and raised an alarm. Neighbours came running and caught Tortoise and the thieves. The neighbors tied Tortoise and the thieves to a tree in the public square as punishment. Later, members of the community pleaded to have Tortoise and the thieves released. The in-laws released them and Tortoise went home in shame. When Tortoise got home, he realized that his bride had gone back to her father's house, (i.e. Thelma).

This tale portrays some of Igbo cultures during their traditional wedding where cola nuts are brought to the in-laws as a sign of respect. The in-

laws on the other hand present the bride price and wedding gift like: yams, rice and palm oil. These items are very crucial in Igbo culture during wedding. The bride family might be stigmatized if these items are not being brought by the in-laws.

The lesson grasped from this tale geared directly towards greedy people. Their greediness drives them to venture into the fate of regret as shown in the tale (The Cunning Tortoise). The Tortoise lost his integrity and even his wife as a result of greediness.

Sigidi the Idol of Ayede Town (Yoruba Folktale)

Sigidi, the clay idol was regarded a very important part of the town of Ayede, he was a god in his own right. However, unlike other clay gods he could talk, everybody deferred to him and no one dared question him, not even the king. He was carried to wherever he wanted to go and saw whatever he wanted to see, people adored him and he enjoyed the best offerings of all the idols in the town. Whatever he asked for became his. One day, while he was being carried along the bank of a river, he saw people swimming and wanted to join in, but his request was turned down. That was Sigidi's first ever request to be refused, and he was not happy at all. He moped, he complained and he threatened until his request was granted. When he was finally put in the water, he discovered to his dismay that he was much heavier than water and he soon sank to the bottom of the river. Before his carrier could get to him, he had already soaked too much water and had begun to melt. The young carrier could only watch with dismay as the once honoured and respected clay idol of Ayede turned into mud and was washed away by the river

Moral: Learn that no matter how popular, loved and honoured you are, there are still limits to what you can do. Know how much you are worth, because going beyond your limits is an invitation to disgrace, because as the bible says: “pride goeth before a fall” (Sigidi n sere ete, o ni ki won gbe lo si odo loo we) (Deebayuu).

Ant and Bird

Ant went to drink. He fell into the river, “Help! Help! Will you help me, please?” He shouted. Bird heard Ant and she ran to the river. “Shall I help you? She asked. “:Yes, please!” said Ant. So, Bird pulled Ant out of the water. “Thank you, Bird! Said Ant. “Not at all Ant, It is good to help others,” said Bird. “Will you help me one day?” “Yes, I will!” said Ant. Many years later, Bird was in the forest. A hunter saw her. He wanted to shoot Bird. Ant was in the forest, too. He saw the hunter and Bird. “Now I can help Bird!” thought Ant. Ant ran up the hunter's leg and bit him. The hunter jumped and shouted. Bird flew away. The hunter did not kill Bird. Ant was very happy.

The tale “Ant and Bird” is one of the stories put in the educational curriculum to educate students some important aspects of their culture. We can deduce the act and value of assistance which may turn back to the performer later in life. As Bird helped Ant from being drown in the river latter the Ant rescued Bird from the shoot of a hunter. (Coates and Styring 21-22).

Therefore, the nature of Nigerian storytelling depicts the culture of their ethnic groups ranging from the food, dress, customs, religions, beliefs, traditions, magical practices, interactions, etc. as their way of life or identity.

The Role of Storytelling in Preserving Nigerian Culture

It is destined for man once to live and eventually demise. For a culture to be recognized or imitated, it must be preserved and told to younger generations so that it will not go into extinction. Stories play a vital role to the human cognitive domain and interaction. Human beings are curious to hear stories of their replica so that they can imitate them. Religious scriptures like Qur'an and Bible are filled up with stories of the past as a mirror of present and future. Elders also engage in telling stories of their ancestors. Why stories are highly regarded here? They are the instruments for preserving and transmitting culture. The maintenance

and preservation of culture are needed for the culture not be perished.

Knowles outlines six important factors that make stories essential to human existence. The factors are globally applicable to every society, namely:

1. Stories are universal,
2. Stories help us understand our place in the world,
3. Stories help us learn how to act wisely,
4. Stories help us shape our perspectives of the world,
5. Stories help us understand other people and their perspectives, and
6. Stories pass down knowledge and morals.

Stories help us understand our place in the world, taking this statement into cognizance, we can easily draw an idea that culture explains where and who we are. In Nigeria each ethnic group is designated with norms and values entitled to it. Identity could easily be identified by the way people behave though one might find himself in heterogeneous societies, where different identities interact, but each individual behaving according to his culture and showcasing his identity through the practice of his beliefs, norms and values. For instance, in the Nigerian culture all the major ethnic groups have their own way of traditional leadership and the hierarchical arrangement of the leadership. The Nigerian culture of traditional leadership is really outstanding because each leadership epitomizes the culture of its society. Moreover, traditional leaders are the custodian of culture, law and order. Due to this system of leadership by the Nigerian ethnic groups like Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba, etc. people live happily and fond of one another.

As a way of nurturing younger generations to adopt this culture, stories are being told in such a way that even if they (younger generations) are not capable in the participation of leadership as a result of their age limit, at least they passed through the knowledge and if they are asked to describe their system of traditional leadership they can elaborate it as

they learn through storytelling. Thus the story will tell them their culture and where they belong to even within one ethnic group. Therefore, the storytelling immensely preserves the culture of leadership and many more in a given society. Neglecting storytelling for younger generation is like downgrading and even eliminating our culture which may likely forced them to embrace different culture and tarnish the image of their native culture.

Stories pass down knowledge and morals and help us understand other people and their perspectives, when we critically observe the life itself is like a mirror or replica of the past people and events. People learn through different ways e.g. trial and error, insight, learning from others etc. The essence of telling such stories is solely for imitation purpose. Bandura emphasizes the importance of learning from others or observational learning as “Helping individuals, especially children, acquire new responses by observing others' behavior”. Many stories are written or told not for entertainment only but also knowledge or moral lesson is expected to drawn. Being an important figure or influential personality who contributed in the development of society in one way or the other history is generous to document their gigantic task and save it away from falling into trash. Tracy, one of the motivational influential public speakers and self development author in his work titled “Eat that Frog, twenty one ways to stop procrastination and get more done in less time” says, “if you want to be successful ask for those that succeeded and the ways followed for that achievement”. For that reason many autobiographies and biographies of influential people are documented. In Nigeria we have people like Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, Obafemi Awolowo, Nnamdi Azikiwe and others.

In fact, stories really serve as reservoir of knowledge written and told for the purpose of preserving people's culture.

Recommendations

- Movie directors and producers have vital role in reviewing or revisiting our indigenous stories to convert them into their movies as the globalization is taking another shape in which the super power countries work tirelessly to over shadow African countries.
- This paper suggests that it is imperative to reintroduce the art of storytelling by codifying the myths and rich historical antecedents of Nigerian societies into oral instruments that can be transmitted to the younger generations using digitalized formats.
- It suggests that in this culturally predatory world, Nigeria will seek not just to preserve its indigenous cultures but also to export them to other parts of the world, by disseminating the implicit and explicit wisdom and moral lessons available in our folktales i.e. storytelling.
- Government should create some processes that can be used to encourage the younger generations to develop an interest in and an affinity for indigenous culture and tradition through storytelling.
- Families as agents of socialization should engage their members in storytelling with a view to acquaint them with their cultural background.
- It will be salient to integrate the participation of schools and learning institutions in this process as they embody one of the major agents of socialization as well as it will force the recognition of the promotion of indigenous cultures into the societal system.
- By adopting storytelling as part of our educational curriculum, modern media channels can also be used to launch a massive campaign and sensitization programmes on the relevance, transmission and participation in the acts of storytelling.
- Communities should strive to expose their young generations to all the elements, forms and practice of their traditions and also

instill in them appreciation of these traditions through storytelling with a view of preserving their indigenous cultures and acquainting them with their cultural identity.

Conclusion

In conclusion storytelling as a get way of preserving indigenous culture in Nigeria can never be under estimated, therefore to avoid the intrusion of foreign cultures, movie directors and producers have vital role in reviewing or revisiting our indigenous stories to convert them into their movies as the globalization is taking another shape in which the super power countries work tirelessly to over shadow African countries, Nigeria is not excluded, and other under developed countries by presenting what they called “world order.” Their decision and ideology is what matters but others are constrained in pursuing their potentialities. Thus, affinity to indigenous cultures is another crucial aspect to be strengthened. Mabera, a renowned Islamic public speaker said, “We are in the era that conquest of thought is more harmful than physical conflict, your child at home embraced bad culture that is not in conformity with his own culture at long last bad characters over shadow him and control him through the use of contemporary technological innovations.” Storytelling is at the crossroad of sinking under a deep ocean if remedial measures are not taken. Norms and values such as: honesty, sincerity, humility, integrity, fidelity, modesty, equity and hospitality as well are key aspects to every culture, expected of every member of the society to imbibe. Luckily, these are also key clues preserved in the storytelling. For these reasons storytelling contribute immensely in the preservation of indigenous culture in Nigeria.

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