

CULTURAL ASPECTS OF AFRICAN FOLKTALES: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE  
YORÚBÁ AND MAASAI FOLKTALES

by

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(Under the Direction of Dainess Maganda)

ABSTRACT

Scholars agree that oral literature is used prominently in various areas around the world. In African societies, oral literature was used as the primary means of education; however, such education was done using various ways such as folktales. African folktales reflect the culture of its people, likewise, Yorùbá and Maasai folktales also display their peoples' rich culture. Most folktales are stories that have a specified beginning and are usually passed on by word-of-mouth. Folktales represent the cultural attitude of any community and are specific to a specified location and period. This thesis examines similarities and differences between the Yorùbá and Maasai folktales by focusing on three themes: occupation, moral lessons, and religious beliefs. More specifically, this study analyzes selected folktales written by two authors, M.I. Ogumefu of Western Africa and Koi Mbugua of East Africa, by showing their style of presentation, setting of the tales, characters, and narrative style.

INDEX WORDS: Culture, Oral literature, African Folktales, Maasai and Yorùbá

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## DEDICATION

I dedicate this thesis to the almighty God. To my phenomenal husband, Olatunde Sanu, my three musketeers, Oluwakamikun, Anjolaoluwa, and Inioluwa Sanu, my Father Oyebamiji Ojo and in loving memory of my mother Clementine Faderera and my sister, Oyebimpe Aweni.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

#### **General Discussion on Culture and Folktales**

Many scholars continue to proffer definitions for culture, highlighting their respective views. Zimmermann (2017) states that “culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, defined by everything from language, religion, cuisine, social habits, music, and arts.” Falola (2008), on the other hand, believes that the “meaning of culture is broad: values, beliefs, text about beliefs and ideas, multiple daily practices, aesthetic forms, systems of communications (e.g., Languages)” (p. 1). The broadness of culture shows that there are different aspects of culture that make up a community. Edo (2005), quoting E.B. Tylor, points out that “culture is not only broad but a complex whole, which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, customs, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society” (p. 2). Thus, culture is inseparable from human existence. The importance of culture makes Hermes (2005) expound in her study of the Ojibwa of Wisconsin and Minnesota, that “culture is all-encompassing and often invisible. Every society has a unique culture, and each culture has its norms and values that are different from other cultures.” That is why Makinde (2004) says that “different aspects of different groups’ culture could determine the response to their environment. Culture is reflected through language, song, and works of art. In other words, people’s culture affects their actions or reactions to situations” (p. 165). Otite and Ogionwo (2016) also describe culture as the “complex whole of man’s acquisition of knowledge, morals, beliefs, arts, customs, and technology, which are shared and transmitted from generation to generation” (p. 86). Sibani

(2014) explains further, “culture is the entity that incorporates the totality and is synonymous with the people’s way of life, transmitted from age to age, generation to generation” (p. 107).

The scholars mentioned above share an identical voice on the generational transfer of culture. Culture is transmitted with the conservation of oral literature, such as African folktales, through which African cultures have been passed on from one generation to another. Adaptations of folktales from diverse cultures, ethnicities, and languages have exposed us to the widening cultural, and global landscape providing a bridge to the past, a link with cultures, generations and with the future (Blake & Kruger, 1994; Heckler & Birch, 1997). Folktales orature is a vast field of knowledge in which cultural information and messages are transmitted verbally from one generation to the next. Scholars (Achebe, 1987; Insaído, 2011; Obiechina, 1965; Owomoyela, 2002) have recorded the essentiality of folktale or storytelling as an art form in African societies, which serves as an essential tool for entertainment, documentation, and education. Kizza (2010) asserts that urbanization and technology, coupled with the long-term effects of colonization, are threatening folklore and oral traditions. As a result, there is deep concern about “the speed at which stories that anchor this oral tradition and the languages that sustain them are disappearing with the passing of each generation of Africans” (p. 9).

Although the speed at which folktales are transmitted to generations are disappearing as pointed out by Kizza (2010), it does not mean the component of culture has disappeared. Thus, any literature that contributes to the theme of culture must focus firmly on the authenticity of cultural facts and traditions through the content, motif, and setting, in historical events, work ethics, religious beliefs, attestation of the existence of events, and different lifestyles within the culture. Like every culture in Africa, the Yorùbá and Maasai people transmit their culture through oral traditions such as storytelling (folktales). Since this thesis focuses on analyzing

similarities and differences between the Yorùbá and Maasai folktales, a brief descriptive discussion on Yorùbá and Maasai culture and how it connects with their folktales is necessary.

### **Yorùbá and Maasai Cultures and Folktales**

As stated above, culture includes people's language, attire, music, work, arts, religion, dancing, and so on. It also includes "people's social norms, taboos, and values" (Idang, 2015). The above-listed traits are reflected among the Yorùbá and Maasai historical culture.

### **Yorùbá Culture and Folktales**

The Yorùbá people are one of the three largest ethnic groups in Nigeria—about 20 million concentrated in the Southwestern part of the country. Yorùbá people reside primarily in the six southwestern states of Oyo, Ogun, Ondo, Osun, Ekiti, and Lagos (see Figure 1). Other Yorùbá sub-groups reside in the north-central state of Kogi and the southern states of Edo and Delta. There are also Yorùbá ethnic sub-groups in the West African sub-region, including Benin, Togo, and Sierra Leone. They speak an African language of the Benue-Congo branch of the Niger-Congo language family. Their cultural influences spread to countries like Cuba, the United Kingdom, Brazil, and the United States of America.

Idowu (1996) states that oral tradition gives two explanations on the source of the Yorùbá people. He records that the "first holds that their founding fathers were immigrants from a northern source, namely: Egypt, Meroe, Yemen, or Arabia. Secondly, one of the stories of Yorùbá origin claims that Ile-Ife in Osun state, Nigeria was the first habitable place created on earth, from which all earthly creation began. For this reason, Ile-Ife is referred to as the cradle of the Yorùbá race" (p. 4). Coker and Coker (2008) declares that for the Yorùbá people, "culture is the unwritten constitution of society. It is a guide to morality, a determiner of ethics, and a paradigm of inter-personal relationships. The Yorùbá tradition is essentially oral-driven. Folklore

bellies the knowledge production process of the people. Indigenous epistemology is a by-product of its oral tradition. Knowledge is as such; a communal heritage passed through word of mouth across generations” (p. 4).

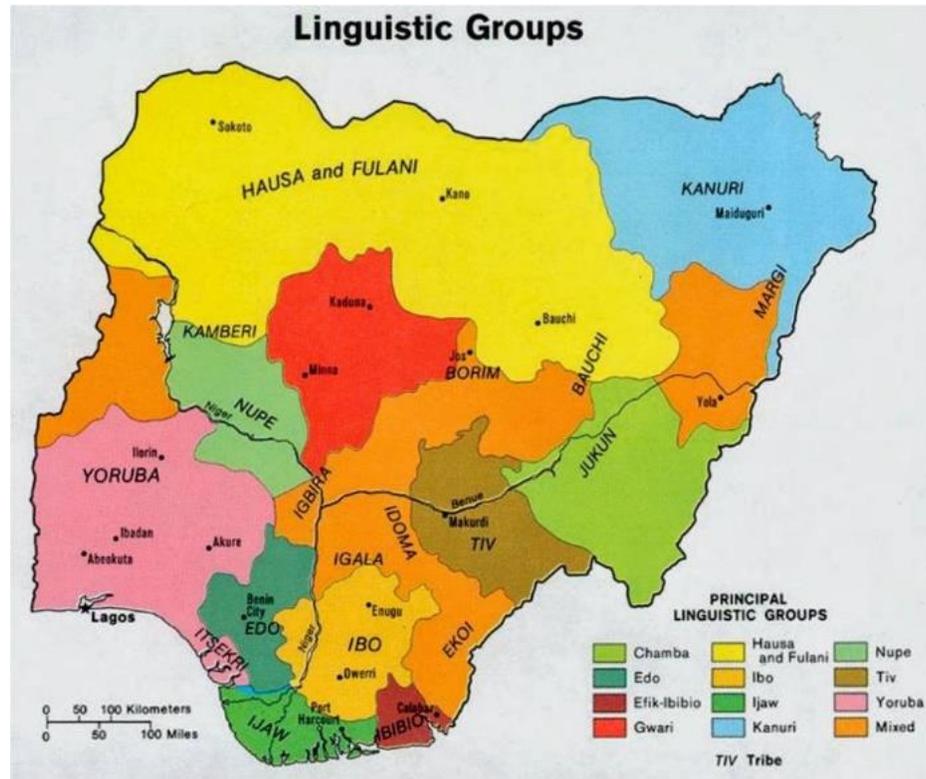


Figure 1. Map showing Yorùbá ethnic groups ([https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoruba\\_Sprache](https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Yoruba_Sprache))

Akinyemi (2003) states that “Yorùbá use oral literature to instill culture and values that guide daily life. To Yorùbá people, personality is very vital to determine the social worth of a person. Omoluwabi a Yorùbá concept which explains that there is a demarcation and perhaps a distinction between the human being in a generic sense, and the human person in a specific sense” (p. 166). Akinyemi (2003) further explains that “the Yorùbá traditional education seeks to shape people to become an *omoluabi*, meaning, one with good character. To the Yorùbá people, good character includes respect for old age, loyalty to one’s parents and local traditions, honesty in public and private dealings, devotion to duty, readiness to assist the needy and the infirm,

sympathy, sociability, courage and desire for work, and many other desirable qualities. In essence, the main idea of Yorùbá traditional education has always been to foster good character in the individual and make the child a useful member of the community” (pp. 162-163). Since the Yorùbá society emphasizes values and moral lessons such as respect, integrity, and hard work, this idea is reflected in their folktales, which is represented in this thesis. Apart from the emphasis on moral lessons, this study presents additional functions of the Yorùbá folktales, which will later be demonstrated through specific tales presented by Ogumefu (1985).

### **Maasai Culture and Folktales**

The Maasai people have their settlement in the Eastern part of Africa, mostly in Kenya and Tanzania (see Figure 2). They are a Nilotic group, and the language they speak is *Maa*. The Maasai oral tradition, like most African cultures, is meant to display and instill valuable cultural norms through the use of folktales. Every aspect of the tradition and culture of the Maasai is embedded in their oral traditions. The Maasai folktales reflect their communal living, as described in research done by Chege, Kimiywe, and Ndungo. Chege et al. (2015) explain that the “Maasai live together in clusters called Manyattas and adopt a socialism way of living. This promotes food security as well as food insecurity. During migration, families who move are housed by others in their destination for the time they will be in the area. Similarly, if a household has food, they have the responsibility to share with other households that don’t have enough. The belief in socialism ensures food sharing and availability” (p. 5). This communal culture aids peaceful coexistence among the Maasai people. It teaches the moral values of responsibility towards one another.



*Figure 2.* Map showing Maasai as a Nilotic ethnic group inhabiting northern, central, and southern Kenya and northern Tanzania. *Source:* <https://www.ogiek.org/faq/maasai.htm>

Apart from the idea of communal culture in Maasai folktales, another widely celebrated aspect is their popular occupation, pastoralism. The Maasai nomadic lifestyle is well reflected in Maasai folktales; thus, this thesis examines folktales that deal with the theme of occupation. Chege et al. (2015) point out that the “Maasai believe that land is only for grazing and not for cultivation. They believe that using the land for crop farming is a crime against nature. Once cultivations occur on the land, it is no longer suitable for grazing. On the other hand, grazing contributes to low crop production, which is believed it consequently leads to low consumption of food crops and has led to a slow progression of efforts to promote agro-pastoralism... The land in the Maasai community is communally owned; therefore, any activity to be done on the land must be agreeable by the community” (p. 5). Traditionally, the Maasai culture includes their distinct type of food. Chege et al. (2015) show that “culturally, the Maasai believes that they should not consume milk and meat during the same meal. According to the respondents, the

perception is that such an act is destroying the whole animal and disrespecting the highly treasured animals” (p. 5).

The discussion about the culture of the Yorùbá and Maasai is essential because it lays a foundation in examining the different aspects that constitute their folktales. Their location also inspires aspects of their folktales.

### **Road Map of the Thesis**

This thesis is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 provided an introduction and overview of culture and folktales. It also provided a discussion of how the types of folktales amongst the Yorùbá and Maasai peoples reflect their respective cultures. Chapter 2 presents a review of the literature on the theoretical developments and the basics of folktales in general and African folktales in particular. Chapter 3 identifies and discusses the functions and roles of African folktales in the context of African oral literature. Chapter 4 provides an analysis of selected Yorùbá and Maasai folktales through the observable similarities and differences in their pedagogical content and significance.

### **Conclusion**

The overall aim of this study is to analyze the similarities and differences in African folktales. There is a general perception among Africans of shared commonalities, but it seems that most of the proclamations are superficial. As a matter of fact, Africans from different regions do not know a lot about Africans from other regions. East Africans know little about the cultures of West African communities. The knowledge derived from this analysis of Yorùbá and Maasai folktales aims to contribute to increased understanding for Africans and the readers about the commonalities and variations in African cultures. Through folktales, comparing who they

are, the value of what they do, and how they have achieved the values and so on, the analysis herein shows that folktale is one of the essential tools of oral tradition for cultural representation.

## CHAPTER 2

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Background of Oral Tradition and Folktales Scholarship**

This chapter is devoted to the literature review of the theoretical developments and the basis of folktales in general and African folktales in particular. This chapter consists of a review of related literature concerning oral literature and its components, including riddles, praise poetry, and proverbs. Most notably, the concept of African folktales and its forms, as well as the broad explanation of the three sub-genres—legends, myth, trickster and fables—are presented. To do justice to the literature review, this chapter will be referring to both old and new scholarship.

#### **Oral Literature and Written Literature**

The concept of literature is familiar to everyone from diverse occupations. It can merely mean a compilation of any work of art. Over time, literature has been described by various scholars in different ways, but for this thesis, the description by Todorov and Adebayo is going to be used. Todorov (2007) says that “literature provides possibilities for interaction with others, thus being able to enter a reciprocal exchange of enriching each other’s lives. It provides irreplaceable sensations that give meaning to the world in which we live, thus bringing out beauty. Further than being a simple attraction or a distraction reserved for the educated, literature allows everyone to respond to his vocation to be human” (p. 26.). Adebayo (2010) describes “literature as a universal phenomenon that wears specific cloaks of language, culture, attitudes, and expectations in different parts of the world” (p. 3).

Combining the description of literature by the scholars above, it can be summed up that literature is interactive and prevalent. Apart from the various literature descriptions, generally, literature texts are mostly written forms and consist of three significant genres: prose, play, and poetry. Every continent of the world has its literature from Asia, Europe, America, Antarctica, and Africa. African literature possesses both written and unwritten traditions.

Finnegan (2012) states, “relatively well known—at any rate, the recent writings in European languages (much work remains to be publicized on earlier Arabic and locally written literature in Africa). Most African authors’ work shows an excellent relationship between the written literature and oral literature.” Schipper (1989) records in his work *Beyond and Boundaries: African Literature and Literary Theory* that... “in 1983, tradition as a source of inspiration for contemporary writers was the theme of an important colloquium in Dakar. Bernard Dadie (Ivory coast), Akinwumi Ishola (Nigeria), Leopold Sedar Senghor (Senegal), Jean Pliya (Benin), and other writers personally confirmed and explained the impact of the oral tradition on their writings” (p. 68). Before Schipper (1989), Scheub (1970) observes that “African literature has from the beginning been involved in a complex dialogue with the oral tradition, thematically and formally” (p. 34). Scheub further emphasizes “the robust interaction between the profoundly rooted oral tradition and the burgeoning literary tradition” (p. 34) in African literature.

The testimony of these reputable scholars validates what Saad (2003) points out that “oral literature is in a sense, like crude oil in that, there are so many derivatives one can extract from it, but only if one has good refineries....” (p. 134). According to the observation of Schipper and Scheub, it is evident that there is a persistent relationship between written literature and oral literature. It means that oral literature serves as a foundation for written literature. In this

perspective, most African authors work in union with both oral and written literature. Further examining African authors, it is not possible to separate their works from their indigenous culture. For example, Chinua Achebe's (1996) work *Things Fall Apart* is an excellent example of the relationship between the author and his culture. Achebe frames his narrative in the manner and style of the (Igbo) oral tradition. In addition to the explanations from Schipper and Scheub, there is a slight dichotomy between oral and written discourse in African literature. Oral literature differs from the written literature, especially in terms of style, structure, and transmission to the audience.

Furthermore, the reference to unwritten literature in scholarly research includes different terms such as oral tradition, oral literature, folkloric literature, and orature. These different appellations brought about Andre Kabore's description of Orature and Oral literature. Kabore (2014) says "the term 'Orature' has been coined to palliate the alleged contradiction in the phrase 'oral literature' or 'spoken literature' because 'literature' was understood from its etymology only as something written down and also to encounter the tendency to belittle the art communicated orally and received aurally, which was considered as inferior art in literature. However, in-depth studies reveal that before writing, there was a literature that was oral or spoken drums" (p. 13). Kabore's profound revelation matches Duncan's (1998) finding that "every culture in the world, from the stone age to the space age, has stories, music, humor, and spiritual ceremonies. Stories like the Gilgamesh epic from ancient Persia have existed in written or oral tradition, we know for about five thousand years. The bible has long been part of written or oral Judeo-Christian tradition—six thousand years for part of the Old Testament and two thousand for the New Testament" (p. 3). Thus, we can confidently say that there is a relationship between oral and written literature, and neither is inferior.

## **Concept of African Oral Literature**

At one period or the other, oral literature in Africa emerges as the center of scholarship and remains the epicenter of many ongoing researches. Akporobaro (2001) states that the “forms and techniques of African oral literature are not borrowings from external cultural traditions and are largely uncontaminated by western influences. For this reason, they constitute the most authentic expression of the creative intelligence and worldview of African people” (p. 18). Lorentzon (2007) affirms that the “latter part of the twentieth century has seen a growing interest in Africa’s oral literature, particularly in the narrative form” (p. 4). Despite numerous scholars’ submissions, this thesis accepts Okpewho’s (1992) succinct definition of oral literature as “literature delivered by word of mouth” (p. 3). To intensify this definition, Okpewho, in his work, quotes Nandwa and Bukenya (1983) who defines oral literature as “those utterances, whether spoken, recited, or sung, whose composition and performance exhibit to an appreciable degree the artistic characteristics of accurate observation, vivid imagination, and indigenous expression” (pp. 4-5).

Combining the description of literature by the scholars above, it can also be summed up that oral literature is interactive and prevalent. Oral communication is the raw stuff that literature takes off, and the two interact. Finnegan (2012) expounds that the “concept of oral literature is unfamiliar to most people brought up in cultures, which, like those of contemporary Europe, lay stress on the idea of literacy and written tradition” (p. 2).

Going back to the definition of “oral literature” that describes the oral nature of literature, some schools of thought argue that during the transmission process, some aspects of oral literature could be left out or modified. Okpewho (1992) and Asimeng-Boahene (2018) echo the idea of a Darwinist theory of natural selection or the preservation of favored races in the struggle

of life. Because traditional African literature is handed down by word-of-mouth, most European scholars in the tradition of Darwinism believed that anything emanating from those they term as primitive people might have lost some of its original qualities and therefore could not be considered authentic literature to qualify as a pedagogic tool in the mainstream academia (Asimeng-Boahene, 2018; Okpewho, 1992).

Obiechina (1965) does not agree with this school of thought. He claims that in the case of folktales, “it belongs to the community’s bare outline until the individual picks it up and makes it his own during the narration process. There is, therefore, no single authentic text. The skeletal text which embodies the well-known motif is there and sometimes the underlying exemplum. The individual narrator using the former builds it up by the use of methods. There could, therefore, be as many texts for one story as there are narrators, some of them good, some different, and others downright poor, depending on the competence or otherwise of the individual” (p. 65). The beauty of folktales is the simplicity of nature. Every culture has its originality, so does every folktale originate from such a culture. Since various scholars have confirmed that culture and folktales go hand-in-hand, the culture’s peculiarity makes the folktales original.

The celebration of oral literature may be less in some recognizable parts of the world. Nonetheless, the characteristics and features of the oral literature are still being celebrated in many parts of the world for its ability to instill moral values in younger generations. Akinyemi (2003), in his work, *Yorùbá Oral Literature: A Source of Indigenous Education for Children*, concludes that traditional oral literature of the people is an effective instrument for imparting knowledge to children and making them responsible and useful adults in the society (p. 177). Some other scholars who agree with the relevance of oral literature also agree that it is more than

just a form of entertainment. In Africa, the function and significance of oral literature are not quantifiable. For example, Zewde (2000) explains that “the value of African oral tradition for historical reconstruction attests to orality’s contemporary relevance” (p. 34). Some African societies also use oral traditions to invent as well as maintain royal genealogy. Kottak (2001) affirms the use of myths and legends in West Africa to legitimize royal genealogy and gain the submission or loyalty of the subject group.

Yorùbá people believe that “*Ọmọ tí a kò kọ, ni yóò gbé ilé tí a kọ tà,*” meaning the child that is not well trained, will eventually squander the hard-earned money of the parents.” This Yorùbá saying expounds on the significance of passing on culture to the younger generations. Oral literature remains a critical vehicle of history. The diverse sources of oral literature serve as the embodiment of cultural architecture. Virtually every aspect of culture is distinctly represented in different oral literature. Among the Yorùbá people, for instance, Akinyemi (2004) points out that “the growing recognition of oral art among the Yorùbá people is due to its functions and appeal to the various sectors of the society” (p. 1). The Yorùbá oral literature is designed to display and instill the Yorùbá culture that guides their daily activities.

In African communities, aspects of oral literature such as narratives, drums and drumming, poetry, proverbs, drama, riddles or wordplay, song play, epics, lyrics, poetry, are evident (Finnegan, 2012; Okpewho, 1992). The richness of every cultural group in Africa differs from one to another. Each culture decorates this genre of oral literature differently. For example, Barber’s (1999) study examines similarities and differences between Yorùbá *oriki* from Western Africa and Sotho *lithoko* from Southern Africa. She expounds that “Yorùbá *oriki* and Sotho *lithoko* share certain fundamental features and, with most genres of sub-Saharan praise poetry. Both the text or performance is constituted out of diverse utterance coalescing around a focal

subject—the person and the other entity, its statutes, memorializes or publicizes” (p. 30). The two-praise poetry, though, possesses diverse cultural backgrounds; they share primary hallmarks. However, despite their similarities, their distinctive feature also exhibits their differences. Barber (1999) also meticulously records that in *Oriki*, “the effect of profusion and variety can be very strong for almost any aspect of human hood and can be encompassed by the incorporative model of *Oriki*; however, *Lihoko*, by contrast, tends to be much more homogeneous and narrowly focused” (p. 32)

Overlooking proverbs in African oral literature is like missing an essential ingredient. Tiamiyu and Olaleye (2009) state that “proverb is a short sentence usually known by many people, stating something commonly experienced or giving advice” (p. 116). However, Schipper (1989) describes the use of proverb as a verbal expression technique that clarifies a situation through metaphor (p. 68). Animals are the subject of a great many African proverbs and praise. The Tabwa people of Congo-Kinshasa have many sayings about lions; for instance, ‘to see a lion is to escape from it’ (Robert, 1995). This proverb seems so simple but is loaded when the contextual usage of the proverbs refers to humans, and it may imply many meanings. In Amali’s (1984) work on *Form and Meaning of Idoma Otukpo Proverbs*, he discusses the relationship between Idoma proverbs and folktales. He points out that the relationship between proverbs and folktales is exciting. The two forms of oral tradition complement and intensify the quality of the other. Proverbs are employed in children’s training by imparting lessons or correcting them on errors they may have committed (Amali, 1984). Finnegan (2012) notes that “proverbs are sometimes locally thought to be as serious as literary work and as more lengthy forms—and in some cases are even expanded into long proverb-poems, as with the ‘drum proverbs’ of the Akan...Instances such as the metaphorical names, elaborate greeting forms, the serious art of

conversation, and, in some cases, proverbs or rhetoric” (p. 25). However, in the past, some scholars believe that proverbs originate from folktales. For example, Vlach (1973) states that “the origin and meaning of most Yorùbá proverbs and proverbial sayings are derived from folktale incidents.” According to Rowlands (1967), “the association of proverbs and moral tales is, in fact, very close in the Yorùbá tradition, a proverb being normally used to round off and drive home the point made in a tale. Thus, proverbs may account for the content and intent of some folktales and vice versa” (p. 377).

Riddles are another form of oral tradition, though some scholars question its inclusion in oral literature. Finnegan (2012) expresses her view in *Oral Literature in Africa*, declaring that “it may be surprising to find riddles included in a survey of oral literature. However, riddles in Africa have regularly been a type of art form, albeit often of minor and childish interest, and have long been included in studies of oral literature” (p. 413). To Finnegan, riddles seem insignificant and immature, but in the Yorùbá cultural setting, there are two types of Yorùbá folktales. One prepares the way for the other. It serves as a warm-up exercise for the other. Adebayo, 2010 explains further that the storyteller’s repertoire features two main genres of Yorùbá oral literature. The principal genre concerned are: (a) Riddles (Alo Apamo), which are traditionally scheduled within the program of moonlight pastimes to immediately precede, (b) prose narratives (Alo Apagbe) within which many proverbs (Owe) occur (p.159).

The riddles go hand-in-hand with the storytelling. The design of a Yorùbá riddle (Alo Apamo) is in question and answer pattern. Apart from teaching, the listener learns the different aspects of Yorùbá culture, tests the listener’s depth of Yorùbá vocabulary, and prompts analytical thinking. Folktales encourage the communal culture of the Yorùbá apart from being a source of night entertainment. It introduces the child to nature study at an early age and prepares

him or her for future challenges. Hence, Yorùbá folktales awaken the children or the listeners psychologically and create interactivity in the community. The riddles help the younger ones sharpen their critical thinking. Olatunji (1984) makes the following claim, “Alo Apamo (riddles) can have a psychological function as an escape mechanism for repressed emotions. When riddles refer to taboo items, like sex organs and practice, participants chuckle and are thus psychologically helped” (p.xx).

Sociocultural riddles are instrumental in the development of children because of their interactive nature. Dang and Marginson (2013) refer to the popular Vygotsky sociocultural theory that suggests that development depends on interaction with people and tools that the culture provides to help form their view of the world. There are three ways an educational tool passes from one individual to another; the first way is initiative learning, where one person tries to imitate another. The second way is by instructed learning, which involves remembering the teacher’s instruction and then using it to self-regulate. The final way that cultural education tools are passed on to others is through collaborations. For example,

Narrator: *Aalo o*

Listeners: *Aaaalo*

Narrator: *Mo fi oko ti kii se oko pa eye ti kii se eye lori igi ti kii se igi*

Narrator: *Kin ni oko ti kii se oko?*

*Ki nii eye ti kii se eye,*

*Kin ni igi ti kii se igi?*

*Meta laa paa meta laa mo – on, omo aba lailo*

*Ta lo mo – on o*

Kike: *Emi mo – oo o*

Narrator: *Kike so o fun wa o*

Kike: *Oko ti kii se oko ni oguluntu*  
*Eye ti kii se Eye ni Adan*  
*Igi ti kii se Igi ni Afomo.*

Narrator: *O gbaa oo! E patewo fun!*

### **Translation**

Narrator: I used a stone that is not a stone  
 to kill a bird that is not a bird on a tree that is not a tree  
 We ask in three, we answer in three, the princess of Lailo.

Narrator: Who knows it?

Kike: I know it

Narrator: Kike tell us

Kike: The stone that is not a stone is a moldy stone  
 The bird that is not a bird is a Bat  
 Tree that is not a tree is a mistletoe

Narrator: Correct Clap for her

The examples of this set of riddles exemplify and represent the three ways riddles are instrumental in the development of children. The above riddle entails initiative learning; instructed learning and collaboration between the narrator and the children.

### **African Folktales and Folktales in General**

Peek and Yankah (2004) affirm that the discipline of folklore (folktale) has been shadowed for too many years by debates over terminology and the scope of the field. Before

delving into the scholarship of African folktales, this section will briefly review the universality of folktales. Funk and Wagnalls *New World Encyclopedia* (Legend, 2018) records that in the “early 19th century, great interest in folktales was created by the publication of *Household Tales* (2 vol., 1812–15; trans. 1884) by the German philologists Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Their work stimulated writers of many other nations, including the Scottish classicist and folklorist Andrew Lang and the Danish author Hans Christian Andersen, to publish and re-tell similar materials of their peoples. The Grimm brothers noted a great similarity in themes and characters among German and other European folktales; later, folklorists discovered resemblances between European folktales and those of other continents. Much 19th-century scholarship concentrated on attempts to account for these similarities. Generally, the 19th-century scholars were unaware of the vast store of African, American Indian, and Oceanic lore that existed independently of the Indo-European tradition. They sought their explanations in those parts of the world that seemed important to them” (Funk & Walls, 2018)

From the historical record of the universality of oral literature by the Grimm brothers, it is evident that folktales existed longer in oral form before their publications. Where the publication and printing were not popular, people easily accessed the folktales through the oral transmission of these tales. Zipes (2012) and earlier scholars (e.g., Dégh, 1969; Perrie, 1989) attest that “the peasants were the ‘prime carriers’ of folktales historically, particularly in Europe, and these tales became far more than just an innocent pastime. They are symbolic acts in which [peasants] enunciated their aspirations and projected the magic possibility in an assortment of imaginative ways so that anyone could become a knight in shining armor or a lovely princess” (p. 8). As pointed out by the Grimm brothers, before the eighteenth and nineteenth-century, it has been noted that the ability to tell tales offered storytellers momentary command over spaces,

which was probably an incredible sensation for those who were powerless in most settings of their periods. However, as this oral tradition began to be collected and usurped for a more written one in European society in the sixteenth and seventeenth-centuries, the bourgeoisie amended grittier folktales into moderated fairy tales by toning down the features that were more reminiscent of harsher social realities and by poaching these tales for the intent of civilizing children and adults to contemporary social codes (Manz 2007; Zipes, 2012). Going by these accounts noted above, studies show the popularity of folktales among the Europeans and the establishment of different forms of folktales that took place.

“This branch (folktales) of oral literature has received a great deal of attention from different African schools of thought. There has been documentation of much work written by professionals and amateurs” (Okpewho, 1992, p.164). To African scholars like Ebine (2017), oral narrative dates back to the griots, who are found in Western Sudan and West Africa. They are guardians of the history of the community and the re-creator of the tradition of oral performance. They are called different names in various communities. For instance, the Yorùbá people of West Africa call them *Akewi Oba* (the king’s praise man) or *Olohun iyó* (golden voice) as the case may be and by roles. Generally, griots are found mostly in the Senegambia region, among the Manding, the Wolof, the Bambara, and other ethnic groups in the upper Niger region of West Africa from Mali to Niger. According to historians, the Manding (also called Mandingo or Mandinka) migrated and settled around the Futa Jallon region of West Africa from the western side of the Niger River, where they founded the empire of Kaabu, comprising of small kingdoms (Ebine, 2017; Edris, 2003).

Similar to the Grimm brothers’ dealing with oral literature in Europe, Okpewho (1992) identifies different forms of oral literature, namely “songs and chants, oral narrative (folktales),

witticism (proverbs, riddles, pun, and tongue twisters)” (pp.127-272). African folktales are deep-seated in African culture and are used to explicate the cultural facets of the community they evolve. African folktale’s distinctive composition involves day-to-day life activities, whereby creating a sort of code of conduct for Africans. Okpewho (1992) further points out that folktales are peculiar to every culture, and there are four primary forms. “In African folktales specifically, there are myths, legends fables, and the trickster’s stories” (pp. 183-225). It is imperative to remember that though most of these forms of folktales are now published, they were primarily in verbal form. As Okpewho indicates, folktales have received much attention from different scholars in the past, and there is still ongoing research on folktales.

In the 2000s, Jenkins (2002) expounds that “folktales in children’s literature are valued for sharing indigenous and local cultures, which can vanish amid urbanization and globalization. He further adds that traditionally a primary reason for publishing folktales stemmed from ethnographic, multicultural, and nation-building studies” (pp. 269-278). He further notes that “folktales need to be preserved as historical artifacts for their importance in enduring and employing ethical, moral, and social-cultural values and cultural tolerance and accepting the Other” (Jenkins, 2002, pp. 269-278). Hanlon (2000) recommends folktales as a tool for teachers. She points out how much “children love stories and suggests that storytelling is one method of teaching values, ethics, and citizenship. Teachers can employ narration in any lesson presentation to enhance knowledge construction and knowledge processing” (Hanlon, 2000).

Akinyemi (2003) buttresses Halon and Jenkins’s views on Yorùbá oral literature. He says that “apart from entertainment and values, Yorùbá children’s literature educates youth in the traditional society in order for them to be responsible adults later in life. Currently, the myth that the school system is the sole custodian of the intellectual, physical, social, emotional, aesthetic,

moral, and spiritual development of the Yorùbá children under its care has been broken. The implication is now apparent to the elite in Yorùbá 's society that theoretical knowledge without any foundation in the people's culture is useless. In other words, we would acquire theoretical knowledge in vain if we ignored the conditions of our existence and the real world we live in. By implication, we cannot properly educate the child outside her/his cultural environment" (p.162).

The view of African scholars like Coker and Coker (2008) on folktales underscore the function of educating children. They believe that folklore should be folk law among the Yorùbá people. Coker and Coker (2008) point out the key elements of Yorùbá folklore: culture (*asa*); tradition (*ise*); religion (*esin*); character (*iwa*); language (*ede*); faith/belief (*igbagbo*) when interrelated, folklore can generate the laws governing intra and interpersonal relationships, communal cohesion, ethical regime and justice system among the Yorùbá people. They propose "folk law" as the product of the mastery of the folklore of the Yorùbá people. Coker and Coker (2008) explain further that, in essence, to understand law among the Yorùbá is to have a deep understanding of its folklore.

In most African settings, folktales are familiar, where elders in the families tell stories to the whole family, usually after dinner. Often, the importance of the performer or storytellers is of less significance. Oral literature depends on a performer who may be a composer. The relationship between composer and transmission is inseparable in oral literature more than in any other form of literature. Without the performance, the performer, storyteller, or singer, oral literature cannot exist. Canonnici (1990) puts it this way, "the grandmother is the performer par excellence, forever ready to entertain her young charges and to impart to them the wisdom and philosophy of life she has learned from her own, lived experiences" (p. 19). Finnegan (2007) states that "the aspect of individual originality and authorship could be played down because of

the factor of a grandmother performing par excellence” (p. 78). She also affirms that “without the oral realization and direct rendition by singer or speaker, an unwritten literary piece cannot easily have any continued or independent existence at all” (Finnegan 2012, p. 310). Let us turn our attention to the way folktales are categorized.

### **Categories of Folktales**

The invention of Western scholars’ classification of the numerous forms of folktales is different from the categorization of African folktales. African cultures depend on the content, context, and mode of performance to identify the form produced in their oral literature. Okpewho (1992) points out that the classification of oral narrative (folktales) is an old problem. He explains that there are two problems with the western style of classification. The first problem is the animals behaving like humans. The second problem is that it ignores the instances of tales where animals, fairies, and humans interact. He expounds that the word “myth” has also been frequently used to describe tales with divinities and gods, not only spirits. He notes that the problems are inevitable in numerous cases and that scholars have tried to resolve them but frequently run into troubles (pp. 181-182)

#### **a. Legend and Myth**

The difference between legend and myth tales in African folktales are tricky and not easy to differentiate. Sometimes in mythical folktales, there may be spirits, unusual creatures, and gods as the principal character, and legendary folktales may also involve human beings like the dead deity as heroes or heroines. Some authors interchange the features of the two and claim that the major difference between them is that the legendary tales entail events recent or past. However, Okpewho (1992) defines the two in detail: “The historic legend occurs mostly within a memorable time—the visible present or the recent past. The essential quality of legend tales is

that the narrator sticks to the details of real-life, perhaps because many people know the personalities concerned and can recall the events rather vividly. Even with written records, the narrator is careful not to engage in careless flights of imagination, especially if he or she fears being contradicted by listeners. The romantic or mythic legend is, on the contrary, not subject to any restrictions. Because the events are so far back in the past, storytellers indulge their imaginations in the most fantastic details and, when questioned, frequently hide behind the excuse that ‘things are no longer what they used to be’” (p. 183).

Due to the nature of the main characters and the events of this type of legendary storytelling, they are always extensive. Sometimes, a legend could be dead or living, which means the story is not limited to the past. Okpewho (1992) says “the event may be as recent as this morning, perhaps just an hour ago, or they may be so far back in the past that their memory is now vague, and the details are subject to all kinds of manipulation. Legends can be historical or romantic or mythical (p. 183).

Examples of legendary folktales of Yorùbá and Maasai folktales are Auerbach’s (2013), *The Sacrifice of Mórimi and The Origin of Death*. “Móremi is considered one of the progenitors of the Yorùbá nation. Móremi was a member of the royal family of Odudúwa through her marriage with Obálufon. As such, Móremi is considered more significant than life, with each of her emotions powerful... The story is also indicative of the relationship between mortals and the gods in Yorùbá tradition” (pp. 85-86). In the Maasai folktales, as recorded in Okafor’s (1986) *Origin of Death*, we learn that “death entered the world as a result of man’s failure to use the right funeral incantation at the right time, in the beginning, death as we know it today did not exist” (pp. 301-304).

Dundes and Bronners (2007), in the *Meaning of Folklore*, takes the discussion on myth and legend from a critical angle. Dundes and Bronners (2007), in the postscript, writes that “myth as a form of folk narrative has fascinated scholars from a variety of academic disciplines including anthropology, classics, literature, philosophy, religion, and others. Yet, the study of myth by folklorists tends to be virtually ignored by these would-be mythologists. Consequently, from a folkloristic perspective, most of these academic discussions of ‘myth’ have little or nothing to do with myth in the strict and technical sense of the term. Even in volumes purportedly treating “myth and method,” one will find essays treating folktales and legends, rather than myths. Dundes and Bronners (2007) further expound that “there is nothing inherently wrong with analyzing folktales and legends, or short stories or poems for that matter. However, it is genuinely dismaying to folklorists to see such analyses wantonly labeled as discussions of “myth.” The generic distinctions between myth, folktale, and legend have been standard among folklorists for at least two centuries. They go back to the publications of the Grimm brothers, who published separate works on each of these genres. For the folklorist, a myth is a sacred narrative explaining how the world and mankind came to be in their present form. Myths and legends (narratives told as true and set in the post-creation era) are different from folktales, which are narratives understood to be fictional, often introduced as such by an opening formula such as “Once upon a time.” These generic distinctions are independent of dramatic personae. Thus, it is possible to have a myth of the creation of Adam and Eve, but once these individuals are created, one can tell the legends of these same individuals. Moreover, it is also possible to have folktales involving Adam and Eve” (p. 343).

### **b. Trickster Tales/Fables**

The trickster and fable are both tales that deal with animals. Armstrong and Botzler (2003) have given a laudable sketch of how animal ethics developed and its current status. It is believed that it originated among hunter-gatherers (pp. 1-11). The trickster folktale is present in several cultures all over the world and mostly incorporate animals. In most parts of Africa, when one mentions a trickster tale, the mind shifts towards animals. The animals always act like humans. “Invariably, folktale tricksters have so impressed their human observers by some exceptional qualities that they have become invested with uncommon mental agility and extraordinary capabilities. The spider inspires awe because of its seemingly miraculous ability to secrete the thread by the way it fashions its web; The tortoise impresses with its ageless look, its deliberate gait.....” Owomoyela (1997, p. ix). In further effort to describe the trickster folktales, Hynes and Doty(1997) conscientiously lists the traits of a trickster as follows: (1) Fundamentally ambiguous anomalous, (2) Deceiver/trick player, (3) Shapeshifter, (4) Situation inventor, (5) Messenger and imitator of the gods, and (6) Sacred lewd bricoleur. Hynes (1997) further explains that not every trickster necessarily has “these characteristics. Still more times than not, a specific trickster will exhibit many of these similarities” (p. 34).

Most of the African trickster folktales often deviate from the expected or normal story trend. The characters/heroes possess most of the characteristics mentioned by Hynes. In the Yorùbá trickster folktale, the tortoise and the hare in the Maasai trickster folktales are both deceivers in trickster folktales, and they invent issues.

## CHAPTER 3

### FUNCTIONS AND ROLES OF AFRICAN FOLKTALES

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on the functions and roles that folktales play in society. Folktales, as a form of oral tradition, have attracted academic attention from various types of researchers. One of the most substantial features of a folktale is oral transmission, as noted previously. This oral transmission gives it leverage over written literature. Receiving or listening to folktales do not require literacy of any form. The raw form of transmission of folktales serves as a vehicle to convey knowledge on every aspect of the human race. Folktales have granted a significant share to our understanding of culture and the functions within societies. However, firstly in this chapter, a general discussion of different scholars on the functions and roles of folktales will be scrutinized briefly before exploring in detail the functions and roles of folktales.

#### **Scholarly Views on Functions and Roles of African Folktales**

The functions and the role of folktales cannot, in any community, be over-emphasized. The importance of this form of oral literature plays a significant role in impacting every aspect of any society. Folktales most general function as a form of entertainment and, at the same time, serve as a fount of knowledge and create insight into various aspects of any group of people in a society. In the olden days, folktales and their diverse forms were told by elders in a community and mostly to teach morals and good character to children. Having a personal experience with folktales as a little girl from Africa, there was no mass social media craze; folktale was

influential among families. Adults gather children to tell stories to teach moral ideas, encourage imaginative construction, and entertain their youth after a day of hard work.

Folktales have always been productive and are still productive to date in not just passing on morals to children but in all these aspects. Okpewho (1992) points out that “the significant use of any form of literature is that it offers delight and so relieves us in various pressures and tensions both physically and mentally” (p. 106). For example, Ogbalu (2011) records that in the “traditional Igbo society, life is full of cultural activities... Children normally sit round the fireside in their father’s *obi* or in their mother’s hut to listen to folktales. Usually, the elders, the fathers, or mothers tell the story. These storytelling sessions typically take place in the evening after the evening chores and in a relaxed atmosphere, unlike today’s education, which is characterized by strictness and rigidity. Traditional Igbo child listens to the folktale from infancy to adult life” (p. 57). Jovchlovitch and Priego (2017) affirm the importance of children listening to folktales from infancy by stating that the “child’s cultural development offers an empirical opportunity to examine the role of imagination in the practices where human children enter the culture” (p. 111).

Several scholars validate that there are possible social, cultural, and political benefits in sharing folktales with young generations. For example, several scholars note that sharing folk and fairy tales provides an array of aesthetic experiences (Alembi, 1999; Finnegan, 1976; Hearne, 1989; Scheub, 2002;). Hearne (1989) observes that the appeal of folktales contributes to their enduring nature whether rendered in the style of the language from which they are adapted, or through illustrations, folktales offer occasions for entertainment and appreciation of the beauty and rhythm of language. As the folktales entertain us, they also carry the messages embodied in them to several generations, impacting us in various ways.

## **Functions and Roles of African Folktales**

It is not an easy task to specifically list the roles of African folktales in African societies. African folktales do not have limited functions and roles. Scholars like Ngugi wa Thiong’O (1986) and Utley (2008) explain that the uniqueness of African storytelling is enshrined in its distinctive ability to provide entertainment, to satisfy the curiosities of the African people, and to teach and impart critical moral lessons about everyday life. However, the uniqueness does not mean it has not faced criticism. Chinyowa (2001, 2004) points out that modern scholarship and academic researchers have tended to treat Africans as people with no sound tradition of storytelling. At times, African oral performances are regarded as simply quasi-dramatic phenomena.

Both Chinyowa (2001, 2004) and Vambe (2004) challenged western criticism that has sought to vilify and demonize African oral storytelling. They argue that the African oral storytelling tradition has survived within the Black Zimbabwean novels in English. Vambe (2004) critically analyzes the works of eight leading Zimbabwean creative writers, revealing how they have used oral storytelling traditions in their literature. He further argues that throughout the colonization, liberation, and post-independence periods, African orature (for literature) was a mode of expressing resistance to authoritarian ideas, cultural dominance, and a social vision. The criticisms do not nullify the benefits and roles of African folktales. The next section identifies and discusses a select few of the numerous functions and roles of African folktales.

## **Education and Training**

Chinyowa (2001) argues that a “pedagogical African storytelling tradition has its distinct significance and importance within the African theatre and performance industry. African

storytelling (and theatre performance) is closely linked to the African people's humanistic philosophy, and hence its functions are the central medium of social, cultural, mental, and emotional edification" (pp. 18-30). This means that it shapes the behavior, trains intellect, and regulates emotions.

African folktales educate and train in order to form a peaceful and sane society. The need for a community that consists of people with a good sense of moral conduct cannot be underestimated. African folktales contribute significantly to shaping the behaviors of its people by educating and training the children (listeners) using tales with moral lessons. The shaping of behavior entails moral and ethical training and work ethics. Youth that receive these mentioned training lessons is ready to face any kind of challenges in society.

- a. **Morals and Ethical Training.** Folktales that imbibe morals and values showcase the importance of good character and consequence of bad behavior—these folktales seek to mold, shape, and correct the foundation of children. Adeyemi (1997) states that “folktales can be used in inculcating virtues in preschool-age children. Virtues such as humility, gratitude, respect for elders and constituted authority, perseverance, conformity to societal norms, cooperation, hospitality, truthfulness, honesty, willingness to take advice, patriotism, courage, and love, loyalty to one's fatherland, hard work and the fear of God are valued and thus taught using folktales” (p. 115). Most of the time, Yorùbá folktales, for example, teach morals. The culture serves as the unwritten constitution of society. Coker and Coker (2008) state that “it is a guide to morality, a determiner of ethics, and a paradigm of inter-personal relationships” (p. 4).

Yorùbá people appreciate the need for tranquility hence the reason for folktales that have morals for their children. They believe it is important to train their children at

an early age. *Kekere ni a ti n pa ekan iroko Bo ba dagba tan, apa ki i ka*, which means “If the branches of the Iroko tree is not trimmed early, it goes out of hand when it grows tall.” Any of African trickster folktales will always do the trick and have a high chance of teaching morals and values because it would present characters that bring out the good and the ones that corrupt morals. Such lessons are presented not only during the story itself but also occur after the story has been told. Ratner and Olver (1998) point out the importance of follow-up discussions after telling trickster tales. They state that such tales “help young children to develop an understanding of representation. The follow-up discussions about the actions of the tricksters help children to explore their feelings, causality, and the exploration of the effects of beliefs on behavior” (p. 235). Henderson and May (2005) explain the importance of discussions of tales from counseling and development points of view. They expound that moral stories are a means of communicating lessons regarding the consequences of certain behaviors and emphasizing virtuous conduct. Sometimes, the trickster can be the hero and the exemplary character, while other tales caution children and adults to be careful of swindlers. Sometimes, when a trickster hero is bad, they still face the consequences of their actions.

Apart from trickster folktales, another form of African folktales is fairytales. They teach morals like generosity, intelligence, teamwork, respectful and hard work. Adeyemi (1997) states that “tales in this category have their central theme, the exhibition of some vice or wickedness such as treachery, theft, greed, cruelty, ingratitude, envy, lust, and drunkenness. In each case, the purpose of the tale is to show a character guilty of this vice” (p. 114). Below is an example of a popular East African

tale followed by a brief explanation of how it is used to instill moral lessons to story listeners.

### **The Hare and the Elephant**

*One day, a wandering Hare meets some elephants who were minding their business., “Father, please help me to cross the river” the Hare asks one of the elephants. The Elephant agrees to her request, so she jumps on his back. As the Hare sits on the Elephant's back, she quickly notices two bags full of honey that the Elephant is carrying. She begins to eat the honey from the first bag. The Hare eats all the honey in the bag. Then she calls out to the Elephant to give her stones to play with. She cleverly stuffs the bag with stones. The Hare finishes all the honey in the two bags and fills the bags with stones. When the Hare realizes that the elephants are about to arrive at their destination, she asks Elephants to drop her off. Soon afterward, the Elephant looked at his bags, only to realize that they were full of stones! He begins to chase the Hare, but unfortunately, he could not catch with him. The Hare plays many tricks on him (Tyman,1993).*

The above story teaches morals through the two main animal characters. The story illustrates the two sides of morality: bad and good. Let us begin with the conversation between the Hare and the Elephant. The Hare calls the Elephant father; this part of the tale teaches respect. This gesture shows an essential aspect of African belief that it is morally upright to address any elder that is old enough as father or mother. By stealing the honey and deceiving the Elephant, the Hare faced the consequences of running and trying to escape death; he never had rest. On the other hand, the Elephant was kind enough to help the Hare but repaid him for evil. A

substantial moral lesson to be learned from the Elephant is that no one should be under-estimated due to size, position, or class.

**b. Work ethics and observatory instruction/Experiences—learning social cues.**

African folktales educate the listener by teaching values of hard work and the consequence of laziness. In most traditional African settings, there are various professions, such as farming, animal husbandry, hunting, and traditional healing. Each profession has its responsibility to society. The building or shaping of a character includes shaping the work ethic as well. There are varied skills associated with the different professions or work in a traditional African setting. According to Ogundokun (2015), “in traditional African society, education is rooted in functionalism. Immediate induction into society and readiness for adulthood remains an important principle. Social responsibility, job orientation, political participation, spiritual and moral values are taken seriously. Physical training includes farming, fishing, hunting, weaving, cooking, and carving, knitting while intellectual training presents itself in terms of the study of local history, legends, the environment, poetry, reasoning, riddles, proverbs, and storytelling. Wrestling, dancing, drumming, acrobatic display, racing, and other recreational subjects are also not neglected” (pp. 179-185). Traditional African education and training include the development of any child’s untapped physical and intellectual skills. An excellent example of the West African folktale that discusses work ethics is *The farmer and his two wives*.

**The Farmer and His Two Wives**

*One time ago, there lived a man with his two wives. The first wife was a hardworking person. She was a principled individual and was never used to look at anybody’s face*

*before she did her work. However, the young wife was a lazy person. She was an indolent person. She was capable of working hard, but she will not work. Their husband was a big farmer. The co-wives had been blessed with children. This husband had a massive farm where he planted yams. Eventually, the yams were to be harvested. The plan was to carry the harvested yams home in batches, but the lay second wife did not do more than one round while the first wife went thrice with her children. The behavior of the younger wife did not deter the first wife from stopping her from doing her work. She worked until it was dark. Later in the evening, the husband called the two wives and announced to them that the number of yams each of them had carried for the day belonged to them. On hearing this, the junior wife busted into tears and wept her heart out. But the deed had been done.*

The above story teaches work ethics by showing how the first wife was rewarded. Despite the indolence of the second wife, she maintained her work ethics and showed an excellent example to her children. She stands as an observatory example to her children. Probably, the first wife's children in the story may have felt cheated by continuing to work with their mother, but in the end, they enjoyed the reward with their mother. The behavioral trait cannot be handed down from parents to children like a legacy by the story alone; it is reinforced by what happens in daily life. However, the story helps children to learn why they should work hard, thus, creating a foundation for their work ethics.

## **Entertainment**

Okpewho (1992) states that “a primary use of any form of literature is to delight and offer relief from different physical and mental pressures and tensions” (p. 106). Entertainment is a

popular function of African folktales. Folksongs are included in some of the Yorùbá folktales for entertainment. In Yorùbá folktales, a tale with songs is called *Alo Apagbe*. The exciting part of this performance is that during the narration of the story, the audience joins in singing the chorus. Sometimes, drums and dancing may be added to the story. Audience participation during storytelling is well documented. Okpewho (1992) explains what takes place between the narrator and the audience. He states that “as the narrator narrates the story, he accompanies it with various paralinguistic devices such as gesticulation and facial movement. The audience, for its part, identifies with the plight of the characters or at least adopt a critical attitude towards his behaviors. Audience members also frequently laugh, exclaim, make comments, and do various other things to participate fully in the narrative experience” (p. 108). Okpewho’s explanation on the participation of the narrator and audience throws light on how simultaneously the narrator and the audience enjoy the entertainment. For example, the story of *the dog and the tortoise*. The tortoise goes stealing with his friend, dog. As usual, the tortoise exhibits greed and steals more than he could carry. In the process of calling on his partner for help, he begins to sing. Unfortunately for him, the song attracts the owner of the farm, and he gets caught. The folksong goes thus in the Yorùbá language:

*Narrator: Aja duro ran mi l'eru*

*Audience: Ferenkunfen*

*Narrator: Aja duro ran mi l'eru*

*Audience: Ferenkunfen*

*Narrator: To ba duro ran mi l'eru*

*Audience: Ferenkunfen*

*Narrator: Ma kigbe oloko a gbo*

*Audience: Ferenkunfen*

*Narrator: Agbo o a gbe wa de*

*Audience: Ferenkunfen*

*Narrator: Agbe wa de a gba wa nisu*

*Audience: Ferenkunfen*

*Narrator: Aja duro ran mi l' eru*

*Audience: Ferenkunfen*

*Narrator: Aja duro ran mi l' eru*

Translation in English

*Dog, stop and help me,*

*Dog, stop and help me.*

*If you don't stop and help me,*

*I will shout, and the farmer will hear us.*

*He will hear us and come and get us.*

*He will come and get us and then detain us.*

*So dog, you better stop and help me.*

*So dog, you better stop and help me.*

### **Cultural and Historical Records**

African folktales serve as historical records of past and present events. Beer and colleagues (2006) say that “oral literature is often called oral history” (p. 66). Every society has a unique culture, and each culture has its norms and values that are different from culture to culture. Generally, children are the significant listeners of folktales, proving that they enter the

sociocultural system as newcomers and as imitators. They rely on the achievements of cultural traditions established by their predecessors. Human children “stand on the shoulder of the giant” scaffolded by accumulated history know-how and interactive practices (Jovchlovitch and Priego , 2017, p.111). Children, referred to as imitators, show that culture is not tangible enough to be handed over to them, so they must imitate it. Vansina (1985), in his book *Oral Tradition as History*, affirms that anyone writing oral tradition should embrace the process of collectivity and become immersed in the flow of traditions of historiography and scholarship in general. Extensively, Vansina explains the importance of cultural and historical records by giving examples of the Burundi kingdom not having an official historical account. He notes that the most official data were a short song and two more songs that were sung during the installation of the king, and even here, the interpretation was free.

Curtin et al. (1995) state that “the role of oral tradition in constructing African history is enormous as Africans transferred their natural and cultural heritage orally” (p.xx). Ihueze (2015) cites the example of Igbo folklore to buttress Curtin et al.’s view on the transfer of cultural heritage. Ihueze (2015) states that “passive folklore writers document folklore to preserve Igbo language and culture because they felt that it would disappear if not documented. To avert this, these writers quickly documented any folklore they came across, even if it meant repeating them. Functional or active writers incorporate folklore in plays and novels (narratives) to enhance understanding, entertain their readers, and preserve the culture for the future generation” (pp. 57-61).

In every region of Africa, there are examples of diverse forms of folktales that serve as cultural and historical references. Practically, all southern African people have experienced war

and systematic cultural displacement, but they have different stories to tell. Examples of southern African folktales that serve as historical documentation are as follows.

**The legendary hero.** Beer et al. (2006) tells the story of Sorenzo Murenga of Shona in the southern region of Africa. Murenga of the Shona people of Zimbabwe is renowned for his fighting powers. He is associated with the first Shona uprising against the British rule at the end of the 19th century. Murenga is supposed to have been a big man, with the head size of an elephant, and was inspired by the spirit medium Mbuya Nehanda to take up arms against the British. Mbuya Nehanda gave him to the Shona for the uprising, Chimurenga, which means ‘fight in the style of Murenga’ (Beer et al., 2006, p. 66). Owomoyela (2002) narrates the background story of the Chimurenga, “The existing provocations prompted the Ndebele, in concert with the Shona, to rise in 1896 in what is known as the first war of liberation (chimurenga) against Rhodes and his company. The Shona aspect of the insurrection effectively ended in 1897 with the capture and hanging of its leaders, the mhondoro (mediums) Nehanda Charwe Nyakasikana, a woman, and Sekuru Kaguvi. Nehanda’s dying words were, “My bones will rise again,” a cry celebrated much later in Chenjerai Hove’s novel *Bones*” (p. 16). This tale talks about the history of the Shona people, and it is transmitted from generation to generation.

Similarly, many animal legends of southern Africa have recounted the San of the Kalahari Desert. They are renowned for their intimate knowledge of landscapes and animals and how they use it to survive. One of the leading figures in the Kalahari people’s mythology is the predator insect, the praying mantis, which the San regard as a wily trickster who can shift its shape at will. San herdsmen are reputed to use the pointing posture of the insect to discover the whereabouts of a lost sheep or goat (Beer et al., 2006, p. 66). This cultural belief of the San people can be connected to the story. Beer and colleagues (2006) also illustrate that the creation

myth told by the Zulu centers on a figure known as *unkulunkulu* (ancient one or the ancestor). He is said to have grown from a reed in the mythical swamp of Uthlanga and proceeded to create everything that exists mountains, streams, snakes, cattle, and people. Taking the form of a human, he taught the Zulu how to hunt, light fires, and grow crops. The transmission of this tale continues from one generation to another. For the Zulu people, this is a story told to clear the mysterious formation of humankind.

**Attestation of the existence of events.** Some of the African folktales serve as evidence or proof of historical events. Every African society has myths that explain the origin of the universe, or cosmos and the coming into being of social order, long before they were exposed to the Judeo-Christian views of creation (Esler, 1996; Kayode, 1998). African folktales deal with the myths of creation by explaining how creatures differed in essence from each other and the Creator's role in establishing the differences between creatures.

**Observation and documentation of the environment.** African folktales serve as documentation of a practical guideline and assist in answering existential questions about the environment. Environmental history is many things to many people. McNeil (2003) points out that the preferred description of this genre is in the history of the mutual relations between humankind and the environment and the rest of nature. The environment can be cultural, physical, biological; it depends on what it means at a particular period. African folktales document the environment in diverse ways. It documents the interactions between humans with animal environments, humans with plants, animals and plants, and humans with nature. There are African folktales that consist of moon, animals, and trees talking like humans. Such interactions in folktales create awareness and documentation of the environment to the audience. Numerous folktales document the environment, such as the Maasai tales of *The Sacred*

*Mountain*, where the Maasai people feel the impact of the sacred mountain's emotions. When the mountain is happy or sad, it behaves differently and affects people accordingly (Mbugua, 1994). Another example is the *Two Friends*, where the Baobab tree talks to the Vulture. The Vulture visits the Baobab tree from season to season to discuss issues about humans.

**Acquiring conflict resolution skills.** Folktales that involve conflicts between individuals or between villages are usually deliberate. The conflict may be caused by many reasons such as drought, encroachment on lands, political position, and economic hardship. In some folktales, the conflict may grow between individuals, such as co-wives' jealousy and greed between siblings. Gbade (2003) described the conflict as a disagreement within an individual, a negative interaction between two or more people, community, or nation. Mostly, folktales train the audience on how to acquire conflict resolution skills. In Yorùbá folktales, the King always represents wisdom and power, so in most Yorùbá tales, the conflicts go to the King's palace to be resolved. Much of the conflicts listed here are present in various African folktales—for example, the story of Isoken and the baby. The identified problem or issue is childlessness. Isoken, the Queen to King Dokun, waited for so long to have a child. There was no heir to the throne. Out of desperation, Isoken disappears in search of a solution to her problem. After some time, while away from her home, Isoken steals a baby boy and presents him to the King. Eventually, the birth mother finds the baby in the palace, and the king instructs Isoken to give the baby back to her (Ogumefu, 1985).

According to most African cultures, kings are next to gods. King Dokun could have exercised his power and not return the baby to the birth mother. As Fadipe (1991) notes, “a king especially in the precolonial times, was not only revered but was seen as next to the deities (*Oba alase ekeji orisa*)” (p. 205).

**Confirming group membership or identity—we all know/share our folktales.** Barber (1999) explains that “origin is the foundation of identity” (p. 136). African folktales have helped many African people to discover their identity. These stories help the African people to appreciate their African heritage. Cultural identity quest in African folktales is the relationship between individual identity and community. Barber (1999) claims that *Oriki* (praise poetry) and *itan* (folktales or myth), both of which are oral in form, are inextricably linked to the construction of identity not only to the gods but also various clans and personage (p. 36). In African communities, the family is vital in guiding a child to know his identity. Barber explains that praise poetry is linked to the construction of identity, allowing families to trace their roots. Barber illustrates the town of Okuku, where many families migrated from different Yorùbá towns such as Ofa, Otan, Oyo, Oshogbo, or Ara orin, but each family can easily trace its roots from *Oriki Orile* (p.136; pp. 145-149). The idea of confirmation of membership and identity through African folktales is usually connected to processes such as language, religions, ethnicity, to name a few. For example, Maasai’s legendary tales and folktales tell the stories of the origin and beliefs of the Maasai people. The stories include the rise of Maasai people from a crater, and through them, the Maasai learn the story of their origin.

In conclusion, studying African folktales offers an abundance of information on moral, cultural, and historical perspectives about life in general. These have been established through the discussion of the roles of African folktales in this chapter. Jaffe (2014) attests that folktales provide ways “for people to see, feel, and understand life from many different perspectives—both personal and cultural”. The idea of learning from and about one’s own culture is unique. People need exposure to folktales to help them value their culture.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### COMPARISON BETWEEN THE YORUBA AND MAASAI FOLKTALES

#### **Introduction**

This chapter focuses on identifying observable similarities and differences between Yorùbá and Maasai folktales. In order to achieve this task, an analysis of *Inkishu: Myths and Legends of the Maasai* by Kioi wa Mbugua (1994), and *The Yorùbá Legends* by M.I Ogumefu (1985) will be explored. The focus is to compare and contrast the style and purpose of each tale by examining tales that explore the following themes: occupation, moral lessons, and religious beliefs.

#### **A Comparison of the Yorùbá and Maasai Cultures**

The Yorùbá and Maasai people are from the opposite direction of the cardinal regions of the African continent. The Yorùbá people are from the western part of Africa, while the Maasai are from the eastern part of Africa. Although the two cultures are from Africa, they have notable differences due to various factors, including geographical location, language, and many more. Falola (2008), in *The Power of African Culture*, explains that “.... Culture is a dynamic process....” (p. 2). He mentions how people get divided by languages. The Luo and Maasai of East Africa’s languages are believed to be Nilotic, and they have common practices such as pastoralism as the principal occupation and perform initiations for young people.

In *Inkishu: Myths and Legends of the Maasai*, Mbugua (1994) briefly but meticulously explains that traditionally, as soon as a Maasai boy was about seven years old, he began going into the bush with his elder brothers and friends to learn how to look after the livestock. By

interacting with their elders, the children learned the family traditions as soon as they could understand them; their grandmothers told them stories, riddles, proverbs, which in turn were told to each other (Mbugua, 1994). The children grow up to tell their children the same stories and continue from one generation to another. The Yorùbá folktale culture is quite similar. Ojo and Ajao (2014) explain that elderly members of society do storytelling because, by age and experience, they have accumulated an extensive repertoire of stories and narration techniques. Gender plays a part in storytelling among Yorùbá people, as both men and women have their roles. While men may take the stage at communal events, women are the regular storytellers in their homes. The audience usually consists of eager children and younger members of society.

In order to attain the main aim of this chapter, three tales are selected from Mbugua's (1994) *Inkishu: Myths and Legends of Maasai*; (1) *Inkishu: The Enkai's Great Gift*, (2) *The Forest of the Lost Child*, and (3) *The Sacred Mountain: Oldoinyio Lenkai*. From Ogumefu's (1985) *The Yorùbá Legends*, three tales are chosen: (1) *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá*, (2) *The Leopard-Man*, and (3) *Orisa Oko*. The analysis of the above tales is done through three themes, namely: occupational values, moral lessons, and religious beliefs. To begin with, I examine the similarities and differences of occupational values through Mbugua's *Inkishu: The Enkai Great Gift* and Ogumefu's *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá* tales.

### **Narrations of Mbugua's *Inkishu: The Enkai Great Gift* and Ogumefu's *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá***

#### **Inkishu: The Enkai Great Gift (Maasai Folktale)**

The story starts with a very interesting and non-ignorable preamble. According to the oral tradition, 'In a distant past, all cattle in the whole world belong to the Maasai.' There lives a man called *Maasinta*, the father of all Maasai, whose occupation was rearing cattle in the ancient

settlement of Kerio in the northern rift valley. He goes to *Enkai* (God) to ask for animals that will not run into the wilderness, which he can call his own. He makes a burnt offering, and he eventually gets *Enkai's* attention. *Enkai*, in the form of a deep voice, instructs him to build a large *Ekang* and wait for him without showing astonishment at anything he sees or making any sound. *Maasinta* carries out the instruction, and *Ekang* keeps his part of the promise. Suddenly, *Maasainta* sees thousands of bulls, cows, and healthy calves rushing down from the sky. While the cattle were trooping down from the sky, *Maasinta* keeps quiet as instructed by *Ekang*, but unfortunately, his servant comes over to him to give him a piece of information. He sees cattle, and in surprise, he shouts *Ayie yie. nkumok oleng!!!* (there are so many!!!). Immediately, the sky closes up, and that is the last day *Enkai* had direct contact with humanity. This unintentional act gets *Maasinta* annoyed, he curses the servant and banishes him from him. *Maasinta* gives the red cattle to his first wife and the black cattle to the second wife. That is why the descendants of the first wife are called *odomong 'i'* the people of red cattle, and the second wife's descendants are called *Orok-kiteng* people of black cattle. From that day onward, the Maasai people trace their descent to his two wives. As for the servant, he begs for mercy from *Enkai* and *Maasinta* but to no avail. He gets a bow and the arrow to get wild animals in the forest. He begins to live among snakes and elephants, but out of anger one day, he kills the snake and later kills the mother elephant. The baby runs away from him and seeks refuge from *Maasinta*. Moreover, from that day, *Maasinta* and his people live peacefully with animals, and his servant continues to live alone in the forest with his bow and arrow (Mbugua, 1994, pp. 3-16).

### **The Kingdom of the Yorùbá” (Yorùbá Folktales)**

There lived *Oduduwa*, the ancient king of the Yorùbá and his many grandchildren. *Oduduwa* grows old, and on his death bed, calls for his grandchildren and divides his riches and

possessions. However, unfortunately, one of the grandsons, *Oranyan*, a great hunter, has gone hunting. When he returns, he realizes that his brothers and cousins have inherited the riches and crowns. Nothing much is left for him except twenty-one pieces of iron, a cock, and some soil tied up in a rag. *Oranyan* is disappointed; he takes his share and leaves without any contest.

After a couple of years, the whole earth is covered with water. The world needs help. *Oranyan* steps into the situation immediately. He lays seven iron bars over the water, spreads the rag of soil on top of them, and makes the cock to scatter the soil with its leg. As the cock scatters the soil far and wide, the water cover dries up bit by bit and forms an island. From that day onward, the iron bars became the hidden mineral wealth under the ground. When *Oranyan*'s brothers and cousins see this, they beg him to allow them to stay on the island. *Oranyan*, out of kindness, allows them to stay on the island, but they had to pay tribute. From that day onward, *Oranyan* becomes a rich, famous, and prosperous king of the Yorùbá.

### **Thematic Analysis of the Two Tales—Mbugua's *Inkishu: The Enkai Great Gift* and Ogumefu's *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá***

#### **Occupational Values**

Mbugua's *Inkishu: Ekai's Great Gift* can be linked to the popular truth about the Maasai people's occupation. They are known for animal husbandry as their source of living. Traditionally, the Maasai people lead a nomadic, pastoral way of life with cattle and sheep as the basis of their economy. They live solely off milk, blood, and meat of their animals (Århem, 1989; Stewart, 2015). The author's introduction to *Maasinta's* occupation indicates how much the Maasai people hold cattle in high esteem; they are precious to them. "In the distance land, according to oral tradition, all the cattle in the world belong to the Maasai....." (Mbugua, 1994). The Maasai believe that any cattle found on another person's farm still belongs to them. Mbugua

tells the story of how *Maasinta* asks for his cattle from *Enkai* (God), and how he receives it in abundance. *Maasinta* names the descendant of his wives after the color of cattle given to them, the red and black cattle descendants, *Odomong 'i'* and the *Orok-Kiteng*. *Maasinta's* gesture to name his descendants based on the color of cattle demonstrates that cattle rearing is a prestigious occupation.

One of the scholars of Maasai culture, Galaty (1982), expounds with great attention that the details of Maasai ethnoecology are built upon an interplay between nature and culture, for people are identified both with what they are (nature) and what they do (culture). We can conceptualize these two dimensions in terms of indigenous notions of descent (*enkaji nabo* [one house], *olsarge obo* (one blood), and occupation (*esiaai*) work. Even with modernization, Maasai people to date cherish the traditional story of their nomadic lifestyle.

Galaty (1982) further explains that there are other occupations among the Maasai people, namely: farming and hunting, but they refer to such occupations as (*Inkuaapi*) “foreigners.” The Maasai farmers and hunters are not considered to have authentic occupations; such jobs are to be done by non-Maasai people; true Maasai should be pastoralists. Similarly, Ogum’fu’s *The Kingdom of Yorùbá*, just like Mbugua’s *Inkishu: Enkai’s Great Gift*, is connected to the main occupation of the Yorùbá people. Ogumefu’s story talks about hunting. Yorùbá are known for hunting though they also farm and trade. Agwuele (2016) states that “it is worth noting and repeating that in the eighteenth and nineteenth-century Yorùbá nation subsisted on agriculture and ironworks, with supplements coming from fishing, hunting and pottery” (p. 51).

Ogumefu also begins the story by introducing *Oranyan* as a great hunter, which reflects Yorùbá’s perspective on hunting and their identity. It shows that hunting as an occupation is well respected among the Yorùbá just as *Maasinta's* pastoralism occupation is respected and

honored among the Maasai. Ogundipe (2018) notes that among the Yorùbá people, hunting was a respectable profession in traditional times because they were thoroughly knowledgeable in the forest. Hunters used their knowledge to serve as scouts or explorers against neighboring people as well as members of a reserve army (p. 18). For Yorùbá people, hunters are influential people, and they use their powers to favor their community. Though in Ogumefu's *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá* tale, *Oranyan* is not favored to receive grandfather's possessions, he makes use of the knowledge and powers of a hunter to produce something good.

Ajuwon (1980), in Yorùbá hunters' narratives, mentions a Yorùbá proverb to describe the experience of hunters. It is a common narrative that states, ' Tí ọdẹ bá ro ìṣẹ́, tí ọdẹ bá ro ìyà, t' ó bá p'ẹran, kò ní f'ẹnikankan' (If the hunter takes stock of all his adversities, he will not share his kill with no one) (p. 19). What Ajuwon means here is that if the hunter gives the account of his challenges and suffering in the forest, he will not be ready to share the animal he brings back. When Yorùbá hunters gather to do a hunter's narrative, they describe what it entails to be a hunter. They believe a hunter is fearless and ready to face any danger to achieve his goal. *Oranyan* is a perfect choice to be a king because his occupation requires him to be resourceful and knowledgeable in many aspects; no wonder his brothers and cousins begged to live with him in his kingdom despite all the riches they inherited from their grandfather.

In both Mbugua's *Inkishu: Enkai's Great Gift* and Ogumefu's *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá*, the main characters are deities, and their occupations are cherished. Generally, Africans believe in hard work, and both characters in the two tales display diligence in their occupations. Ogumefu displays *Oranyan's* diligence by mentioning only his occupation and never mentioned the brothers' and cousins' occupation. He is the only one who goes to work. The stories show how *Oranyan's* and *Maasinta's* occupations contribute positively to their communities'

livelihood. Yorùbá people believe hunters do more than hunt for animals; they deal with spirits. They communicate with spirits and fight them sometimes. Because of this, hunters are believed to be close to the supreme being as we saw in *Oranyan, the hunter*, so also, *Maasinta*, the cattle rarer who speaks directly to the supreme being *Enkai*.

The two stories show that both Maasai and Yorùbá people value their occupations and use folktales to instill a sense of pride in their occupations. Despite the similarities between the two stories, there are still some differences between them. One of the differences in the story is the choice of occupations. Mbugua talks about cattle farming while Ogumefu talks about hunting. The second difference is that though the two authors use the theme of occupation, and we see differences in the setting, other differences in the two tales are beyond what the story shows. The *Inkishu: Enkai's Great Gifts* setting is in an ancient settlement of Kerio in the northern rift valley, where Maasai people settle, and their principal occupation is pastoral. Animal husbandry among the Maasai is also part of the rite of passage for every Maasai boy. In the Yorùbá tale we saw, there is no rite of passage based on pastoralism. Owning hectares of farmland is what determines a man's readiness to enter manhood.

### **Notable Similarities Between the Two Tales**

**Narrative style.** The two stories have some similarities in style and are examples of the direct narration of people and their society. Both stories are simple in style because the stories are straight forward. The stories are presented chronologically; each event follows in the order in which they occur. There is no flashback in-between the narrations.

**Suspense.** These stories have elements of suspense. In *Inkishu: Enkai's Great Gift*, the suspense occurs when *Enkai* promises to give *Maasinta* his cattle. The main suspense to the audience is how *Enkai* will fulfill his promise to *Maasinta*. So also, in *The Kingdom of the*

*Yorùbá*, the main suspense is in not knowing what *Oranyan's* reaction will be; it makes the reader guess what *Oranyan* will do after he receives the inheritance. With the suspense, both stories keep the audience guessing.

**Characterization.** The choices of the main characters in Mbugua's *Inkishu: Enkai's Great Gift* and Ogumefu's *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá* are similar. The two stories present the characters as real humans and at the same time represent them as Yorùbá and Maasai culture deities, respectively. Their characters are strong. According to the history of the origin of Yorùbá people, *Odudwa* and *Oranyan* are prominent characters in the story. *Maasinta* also is well known in the story of the origin of the Maasai people.

**Language.** The choice of names for the characters in Ogumefu's *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá* are Yorùbá indigenous names such as *Oranyan* and *Oduduwa*, so also in Mbugua's *Inkishu: Enkai's Great Gift*, names such as *Maasinta* and *Oltorroni* are also indigenous to the Maasai. The choice of Yorùbá and Maasai names makes the two stories authentic and believable to the Yorùbá and Maasai cultures.

### **Notable Differences Between the Two Collections**

**Narrative style.** The style of narration in *Inkishu: Enkai's Great Gift* is different from that of *The Kingdom of Yorùbá*. In the former, *Inkishu: Enkai's Great Gift*, *Enkai's* deep voice takes up the narration from the narrator to instruct *Maasinta*. Some parts of the narration show the supremacy of the character involved; it allows dialogue between the characters. As one conversation between ... and ... continues, another dialogue between *Maasinta* and the servant also breaks in from time to time. This style helps to reduce the monotony of a sole narrator and makes it dramatic. In Mbugua's *Inkishu: Enkai's Great Gift*, the narrator makes use of flashbacks in the introduction of the story to create a background for the story. "In the distance past,

according to the oral tradition, all the cattle in the world belong to the Maasai. The ancient legend tells how the cattle were first given to the Maasai” (Mbuguwa, 1994, p. 2).

**Language.** Mbugua makes use of Maa words and sentences with their translation, which signifies the rich culture in Maasai folktales. For example, when *Maasinta* shares the cattle that *Enkai* gave him among his wives, he names each wife’s descendants according to the colors of their cattle. He calls the first wife and her descendant *Odomong’i*, meaning the people of the red cattle and the second wife *Orok-Kiteng*, meaning the people of the black cattle. On the other hand, Ogumefu’s *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá* did not make use of Yorùbá words other than the names of the characters. Ogumefu did not give *Oranyan’s* brothers and cousins names; they remain anonymous to the end of the story. There are no Yorùbá words or sentences in the story. Every part of the story is written in English.

**Illustrations.** Although not captured in the summary presented in this paper, in Mbugua’s *Inkishu: Enkai’s Great Gift*, there are pictures and images. The picture display helps the audience to understand the story. It helps a reader who is new to the Maasai culture to see a different aspect of the culture, such as the traditional attires and the environment. The audience’s imaginative ability is awakened from the beginning of the story to the end. *Maasinta* is dressed in Maasai traditional attire with beads round his neck while the servant dresses in a different way to show his social status. Such illustrations are not shown in Ogumefu’s tale.

In Ogumefu’s *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá*, the setting does not showcase Yorùbá people’s rich culture. Ogumefu’s *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá* is bland, unlike Mbugua’s *Inkishu: Enkai’s Great Gift*, where the setting is creative with the help of the pictures. For example, the description of *Maasinta* picking big and healthy cattle and offering a sacrifice is very reflective of what Maasai people actually do. Next, I use the following stories to discuss and analyze the

similarities and differences of the Maasai and Yorùbá folktales on the theme of moral lessons: Mbugua's *The Forest of the Lost Child* and Ogumefu's *The Leopard-Man*.

**Narrations of Mbugua's *The Forest of the Lost Child* and Ogumefu's *The Leopard-Man***  
**The Leopard-Man (Yorùbá Folktales)**

There was a very handsome stranger who seldomly came into a village. Whenever he came, he strolled mysteriously among the villagers. The maidens in the village always admired him. His charms are irresistible. They wished he would pick one of them to be his bride. Many times, he would hear their comments then walk away into the forest without any reply. A month later, the handsome stranger returns, and this time one of the maidens falls so much in love with him that she decides to follow him secretly. As the stranger looks back and sees her, he turns and begs the *Maiden* to go back in order not to regret her action. She refuses to go back and continues to follow him. The *Maiden* tells the stranger that she will never leave him, and wherever he goes, she will go. The stranger walks faster to discourage the *Maiden*, but as he speeds up, so does the *Maiden*.

The handsome stranger suddenly slows down and begs her in a sorrowful tone to go back. As they walk deep into the forest, there at the feet of one of the trees is a leopard skin; the handsome stranger waits under the tree. The handsome stranger begins to sing; in his song, he explains to the *Maiden* that once in a month, he is allowed to roam in the village in the form of a man, but in reality, he is a leopard. As he sings, he falls to the ground and immediately turns into a fierce leopard. After his transformation, he begins to pursue the *Maiden* and sings: "I will tear you into pieces." The *Maiden* runs for her dear life, and she also replies to the leopard with a song. Saying to him in her song, "you will never catch me." After running for a long distance, the *Maiden* comes to a deep but narrow river, unable to cross. She becomes so frightened

because the leopard is almost catching up to her. Luckily, a tree falls across the river to enable her to walk to the other side. Immediately, she crosses over the river and runs as quickly as she can and reaches the village safely. Disappointingly, the leopard lost her, went back into the forest, and never returned as a man.

### **The Forest of the Lost Child (Maasai Folktales)**

*Nasira* is a very respectful and hardworking little girl. She does her house chores without any complaints. Although she is a diligent girl, she desires to visit the forbidden and mysterious forest one day. When the brothers and men in the family take the cattle to graze during the dry season, she pleads to follow them, but her grandmother always refuses to allow her. *Nasira* sometimes volunteers to pick berries by the side of the forest in order to gain her grandmother's favor. Sometimes she is given permission to go, but she is warned not to wander into the mysterious forest, and she agrees. The grandmother tells her the story about *Morans*, who lived long ago. After so many years, *Nasira's* village experiences drought, and there is hardly food or water for both humans and animals. Because of this reason, the little girl decides to pick some juicy berries for her family members.

While picking the berries, she gets carried away and wanders into the deep forest. Her bag is filled to the brim. As she goes farther in the forest, she learns the secret of the forest and sees different animals. After walking for a while, she comes upon a stream and decides to rest. She sits to eat some of the berries. Then she decides to proceed; on her way, she meets older girls who are rude to her. They ask her why she went so deep in the forest, and she replies that she has come this far to pick some berries for her family. Immediately, the older girls grab the bag of berries and eat them. *Nasira* gets so sad and cries bitterly. After a while, she says to herself, "I will not go home, empty-handed." She gets up and goes further deep into the mysterious forest to

pick more berries for her family. When she realizes she has enough, it dawns on her that she has gone too deep into the forest and does not know her way back. As she tries to find her way, the night falls, and little *Nasira* becomes frightened and starts to remember her grandmother's warning.

Back home, *Nasira*'s family is devastated but continue to await her arrival. They searched in many of the neighboring villages and the surrounding bushes. Two days pass, and the girl is not found. None of the older girls say anything because they are afraid that people will think they have killed *Nasira*. The village elder decides to go to the *Morans* to ask them to help search for the girl. The *Morans* agree to search for the girl in the mysterious forest. They search for two days, but sadly they come back without *Nasira*. The family and the other villagers begin to wail because they know that the little girl is lost forever. That is how *Nasira* never comes back home to her family. Ever since the sad event, the Maasai call the forest *Enaiminie Enkiyo*, meaning *The Forest of the Lost Child* (Mbugua, 1994).

### **Thematic Analysis of the Two Tales— Mbugua's *The Forest of the Lost Child* and Ogumefu's *The Leopard-Man***

#### **Moral Lessons**

African folktales are mainly used to teach morals, and these two stories extensively teach moral lessons. The moral lesson in Ogumefu's *The Leopard-Man* story gives credence to self-control. It tells both the young and the old to be careful and practice self-control in making decisions. It teaches all that glitters are not gold. It also brings out the fact that we should not lust after things. We should always be prepared to look deep beyond the surface. Apart from this, the story also teaches us to adhere to cultural norms in various aspects of our lives. According to Yorùbá culture, the marriage process begins with investigating the person one wants to marry. In

the story, the *Maiden* does not get to know the handsome stranger because she was smitten by his outward appearance. Another moral lesson is the danger of ignoring warnings. The *Leopard-Man* warns the *Maiden* several times, but because of her lustful desire, she ignores the warnings and keeps following him until the man transforms into a leopard. The story teaches people to be careful in picking their marriage partners. It is not about beauty or money; marriage is more than what one sees on the outside. In the story, the falling tree teaches kindness and readiness to help. We should be ready to help whenever or wherever we find the opportunity to do so. The *Maiden* did not ask the tree for help, but the tree decides to help her and eventually saves her life.

Similarly, in Mbugua's *The Forest of the Lost Child*, the story teaches against disobedience and curiosity. "Curiosity bells the cat" as the famous fable goes; it is the curiosity of little girl *Nasira* that made her disobey the warnings of her grandmother. She gets lost forever and never sees her family again. In most situations and as it is in both stories, life lessons may come with punishment, whether permanent or temporary. In the first story, *Leopard-Man*, the *Maiden* almost dies; she suffers before escaping death, while *Nasira* is not lucky enough to escape death. *The Forest of the Lost Child* also teaches that any word of instruction, especially from elders, must be honored. Like the adage says, "what an old man or woman sees while sitting; a boy or a girl may not see it while standing." *Nasira's* grandmother allows her to pick berries but warns her not to go into the forest. Her grandmother may have thousands of mysterious reasons for warning her not to go into the forest. Obedience is better than sacrifice. The story also teaches that according to Maasai culture, girls' chores are different from boys' chores. *Nasira* was supposed to do chores at home, such as cook and milk cattle, unlike boys who were allowed to go work outside. The two stories show how folktales educate the youth (Finlayson, 2012).

### Notable Similarities Between the Two Collections

**Narrative Style.** The two stories are similar in style. The characters in the two stories engage in dialogue. In *The Leopard-Man*, there are two occasions when the *Maiden* begs the leopard man as she tries to escape from him and the conversation between the *Maiden* and the tree. Likewise, in *The Forest of the Lost Child*, there are several examples: (a) the older girls talking to *Nasira* in the mysterious forest, and (b) the dialogue between *Nasira* and her grandmother. The dialogues make the two stories exciting and dramatic. The dialogues reveal the thoughts and personality of each character and make the stories seem real. Both stories are not complicated; they are chronological; the events follow a precise sequence.

**Setting.** Both stories are set in the forest. This setting creates a scary and chilling effect on the story. The two female characters in the two stories, *Nasira* and the *Maiden*, encountered challenges in the forest, thus, making the forest a symbol of misfortune or danger.

**Suspense.** In *The Forest of the Lost Child*, there is suspense and a moment of mixed feelings when the women in *Nasira*'s village await the *Morans*' return from the mysterious forest. This suspense keeps the audience guessing and hoping for a good outcome. In *The Leopard-Man*, the suspense of the story is when the leopard pursues the *Maiden*. The audience remains in suspense until the sudden intervention of the tree and the *Maiden* escapes. The two stories help in stimulating the imagination of the audience with suspense.

**Characterization.** The choices of the main characters in Mbugua's *The Forest of the Lost Child* and Ogunjufu's *The Leopard-Man* are similar. They are both females and are strong characters.

### **Notable Differences Between the Two Tales**

**Characterization.** In *The Leopard-Man*, the *Maiden* and the *Leopard-Man* involve two main characters at the center of the conflict, while in *The Forest of the Lost Child*, there is only one main character, *Nasira*. The characterization in Ogumefu's *The Kingdom of the Yorùbá* involves the transformation of the handsome man into a leopard. Ogumefu gives a physical description of the *Leopard-Man* as handsome and irresistible to the village maidens while Mbugua describes *Nasira's* personality as a hardworking and respectful little girl.

**Narrative style.** In *The Forest of the Lost Child*, the narrative style is sophisticated. There is a story within the main story. The story begins with *Nasira's* grandmother narrating the story of the *Morans* in the mysterious forest to set a background for the main story. This type of introduction is deliberate because the narrator gets the readers' attention and whets the appetite of the audience from the beginning. Another significant difference in style between the two stories is that the author of *The Leopard-Man* makes use of songs. The conversations between the *Leopard-Man* and the *Maiden* were made in songs while *Nasira* talks to her grandmother. Finally, the last theme to be discussed and analyzed is a religious belief.

### **Narrations of Mbugua's *The Sacred Mountain Oldoinyio* and Lenkai Ogumefu's *Orisa Oko***

In this section, I will be analyzing *The Sacred Mountain* and *Orisa Oko* from the work of Mbugua's and Ogumefu's collection of stories.

#### **The Sacred Mountain *Oldoinyio Lenkai* (Maasai Folktale)**

In a vast sprawling land of the Maasai, lives a pillar of rock by the name of *Oldoinyio Lenkai*, the Mountain of God. This mountain is an active volcano that has always impacted Maasai people. It is believed that there is a spiritual relationship between the mountain and the people who live around it. The mountain throws a sheet of flames to the sky from time to time.

The Maasai people call him *Oldoinyio Osira Lenkai*, meaning “The stripped mountain of God,” referring to the stream of ashes which often flow down from the crater when the mountain is in a good mood. It is believed that when the mountain is in a good mood, the Maasai people’s spirits and moods are uplifted.

On the other hand, when all sorts of calamities befall the Maasai people, they consult the *Enkai*, the God of the mountain. Around the *Lenkai* lives a spirit called *Kirim*, who acts as a messenger between *Enkai* and the Maasai people. There came a time when the Maasai people had a drought. The drought killed many of their cattle because the grass was scarce, and people died of diseases. After a while, the elders gathered and decided to visit Mount *Lekani* to find out the cause of the disaster.

The elders chose *Ole Sankale*, who is from the diviners’ family, to represent the people. *Ole Sankale*, joyfully with pride, accepts the task, but after thinking about it, he becomes afraid of the mission. He fears that if he fails, he will jeopardize the future of the people. However, he asks to be accompanied by some of the elders and *Morans*. *Ole Sankale* gathers the chosen people and instructs them to quietly leave their homes and come with their knobbed sticks, fly whisk, strongest donkey, and enough milk to sustain them. They set out as planned, leaving the village. The women hail them and send them off with words of encouragement, and women splash milk towards the sky to bless them as they go. They travel across the dry country, and they grow tired and hungry. It is not their culture to eat wild animals. Animals like antelope, lions, and zebra pass by the Maasai people, but they did not kill them. They walk day and night, and finally, they arrive at the foot of the mountain. *Ole Sankale* leads the group to the holy land called *Orkuroto*, and as a tradition, they carry a horn full of oil to sacrifice to *Enkai*. *Kirim* welcomes them and takes the horn one by one. During the rituals at the sacred mountain, *Ole*

*Sankale* takes a purple cloth to tie his head to signify himself as royalty and to show respect to the God of the Mountain.

Then they proceed to speak through the mediator (*Sanjo*) named *Kirim* to seek God on their behalf. Suddenly, a deep voice comes as a mist of the mountains by thunder. “The deep voice” *Enkai* acknowledges the Maasai people’s problems and promises to resolve it all. Nevertheless, before *Enkai* gives them a solution, he instructs *Ole Sankale* to tell the Maasai people to sort their differences. *Ole Sankale* bows, and they set out to return. When they return to their own *E Kang*, *Ole Sankale* relays the message. The people agree to the message he gives, then they sacrifice to their God. Soon after this, they receive rainfall, and things go back to normal. Till today the *Mao-narok*, *Laikipia*, *loliondo*, and *Ngorogoro* districts go to Mount *Lenkai* to appease the great deity.

### **Orisa Oko (Yorùbá Folktales)**

*Orisa Oko* is a poor hunter with a dog and a fife. As a hunter, when he gets lost in the forest, he plays tunes with his *Fife*, and then his dog leads him home. *Orisa Oko* is a reserved man who does not like quarrels, and for this reason, people believe he possesses power and knowledge, but he does not want to reveal it. As the years go by, *Orisa Oko* becomes too old to hunt. He decides to live inside a cave, which makes people believe that he is mysterious. People begin to visit him for advice and to ask him to look into their future. In no time, *Orisa Oko* becomes a soothsayer. People come from far and near to get his advice, and he becomes comfortable staying there.

In those days, if someone was suspected of being a witch, she or he is sentenced to die. The mysterious belief about *Orisa Oko* residing in the cave made people begin to take any witch to his cave for judgment. If the witch is found guilty, the head is cut off, and the body thrown to

Polo, the demon. If found innocent, he or she is released. However, there was a big and powerful man who was suspected of being a witch. People dragged him to *Orisa Oko*'s cave, but Polo, the demon, was not able to handle him. This outcome left the people disappointed. Ever since then, everyone stopped going to *Orisa Oko* for advice.

**Thematic Analysis of the Two Tales— Mbugua's *The Sacred Mountain Oldoinyo* and  
Lenkai Ogumefu's *Orisa Oko***

**Religious Beliefs**

African folktales teach the young generation various religious beliefs. Achufusi (1986) states that “folktales serve as a means of enforcing conformity with social norms, validating social institutions and religious beliefs, and they help to provide psychological freedom from some society-imposed restrictions” (pp. 1-2). The two stories chosen here are myths and, to a great deal, validate the religious belief of the cultures represented, respectively. Both stories demonstrate how people's religious beliefs have their origins. In *The Sacred Mountain*, when the Maasai people faced droughts, they believed the only solution to the problem was to consult God of *The Sacred Mountain*. Likewise, in *Orisa Oko*, the Yorùbá people took witches to *Orisa Oko*'s cave dwelling for judgment. Both stories show why the Maasai and the Yorùbá people have a particular religious belief. In *Orisa Oko*, the people believe that one must consult *Orisa Oko* to know their future. In *The Sacred Mountain*, there are two examples of offering sacrifices to the one they consider to be a deity. The first example is when *Ole Sankale* offers a sacrifice of horn filled with oil to the Gods to show respect before presenting their case.

The second one is the ritual of thanksgiving, where women splash milk towards the sky. Both stories present a supreme being and use humans as an intermediary. Despite all the similarities, there are some significant differences. Mbugua (1994) uses symbolism, such as the

horn's oil, the elders spitting on the ground to signify acceptance or agreement, and the women sprinkling milk as a way to display aspects of religious beliefs and the rituals that accompany them. All these details are not present in Ogumefu's *Orisa Oko*. Though the story talks about the religious belief of the Yorùbá people regarding their deities, the necessary details are missing. For example, the communication between *Orisa Oko* and his demon and the people are so ordinary; no rituals are performed before getting access to him. It is only at the end of the story that one of Yoruba's beliefs is acknowledged. The belief is that humans manage any *Oriṣa* (gods) in Yorùbá land and that without the participation of the devotees, the *Oriṣa* is reduced to nothing. The story of Yorùbá people is that the continuity of any divinities depends on the sacrifices of the devotee. Mbugua's *The Sacred Mountain* shows the Maasai belief as demonstrated through their true devotion to the mountain. The story demonstrates why the Maasai people believe in the sacred mountain.

### **Notable Similarities Between the Two Collections**

**Narrative style.** Mbugua's and Ogumefu's styles are similar. Both stories are simple enough for the audience to understand. Both storylines have a sequential mode of development.

**Characterization.** The characterization in Ogumefu's *Orisa Oko* and Mbugua's *The Sacred Mountain* display a complete picture of a traditional African setting. Both stories include villagers and chiefs of the villages.

**Suspense.** Both authors make use of suspense to captivate the audience through the end of the stories. The suspense in the stories follows the same pattern; there is a dilemma and solution at the end. In *The Sacred Mountain*, the suspense of waiting for the chosen men who went to the mountain to return back safely. While in *Orisa Oko*, the suspense of waiting to know if the man sent into *Orisa Oko*'s cave will come out alive.

## Notable Differences Between the Two Collections

**Characterization.** There are several characters in Mbugua's *The Sacred Mountain*, and they are strong compared to the characters in *Orisa Oko*. In *Orisa Oko*, the main character displays weakness.

**Narrative style.** The characters in *The Sacred Mountain* frequently engage in conversation at one point, which makes it dramatic and real. Characters like *Ole Sankale* takes part in different conversations, such as the speech to the chosen ones (*Lo Moruak*) and when he talks in a deep voice with the *Kirim*. The dialogue between the characters helps the audience understand the emotions of the characters. On the other hand, Mbugua's *Inkishu: Myth, and Legend in Maasai* begins with a preamble. He narrates the religious significance of mountains and hills to the Maasai people. He explains that the sacred mountain mentioned in the story *Oldoinyio Lenkai* is situated in Tanzania, not far from the Kenyan border. The preamble creates a solid foundation and a good mental picture for the readers.

**Language.** Apart from the name of *Orisa Oko* that sounds Yorùbá, there are no other Yorùbá names or words in the story. For *The Sacred Mountain*, there are Maasai names, words, and sentences with their translation. For example, when *Ole Sankale* ties the purple cloth, it is explained that it symbolizes royalty, and the name in the Maa language is *Enanka*. Mbugua freely makes use of words and sentences to create the originality of Maasai folktales.

In conclusion, this thesis explored similarities and differences between the Yorùbá and Maasai folktales by exploring stories that focus on three major themes—occupation, moral lessons, and religious beliefs. The analysis shows that the selected tales by Ogufemu (1985) and Mbugua (1994) were similar by using the presentation of the themes of occupation, moral lessons, and religious beliefs to communicate their similarities in culture and beliefs. Yorùbá and

Maasai folktales show the following similarities: (1) reverence of occupation: the Maasai value and honor pastoralism while the Yorùbá take great pride as being great hunters. (2) Respect of religious beliefs: the Maasai and the Yorùbá cherish and validate traditional religious beliefs and have a similar belief in the existence of a supreme God. (3) Importance of moral lessons: the Maasai and the Yorùbá treasure the importance of the use of moral lessons in shaping children's behaviors. However, the tales differed in terms of means of performing religious beliefs. The Maasai and the Yorùbá have different gods that are unique to their culture, and they practice their religious beliefs differently. (4) Difference in choice of occupations: Animal husbandry among the Maasai is part of the rite of passage for every young Maasai boy while there is no rite of passage based on pastoralism for the Yorùbá people. The stories also indicate the efficacy of folktales as an educational tool. The analysis of the selected folktales goes beyond entertainment; they include vital aspects of the Yorùbá and Maasai culture. Collectively, this thesis shows the fundamental value of African folktales in various aspects of life. It is my hope that folktales will continue to be used in Africa and other parts of the world.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

This study has examined the cultural aspects of African folktales' cultural through a comparative study of Yoruba and Maasai folktales. With a focus on the cultural aspects of African folktales, chapter one explores the meaning of culture as perceived by different scholars to show that culture incorporates the wholeness of any group of people. The chapter gives a brief description of the selected African cultures: Yoruba and Maasai culture, providing background knowledge of the two cultures. Chapter two is the literature review that showcases the views of different scholars on the theoretical developments and basis of folktales in general and particularly, African folktales. Chapter three identifies and discusses the functions and roles of African folktales in society. The chapter selects a few among the numerous functions of African folktales aimed at achieving specific objectives in society. It points out how folktales are used as tools in shaping children, educating and training, and preserving cultural and historical records. Other functions discussed in this chapter are the attestation of the existence of events, entertainment, observation and documentation of the environment, acquirement of conflict resolution skills, and confirmation of group membership or identity.

Chapter four focuses on identifying observable similarities and differences between Yoruba and Maasai folktales. The chapter stated the similarities in simple Yoruba and Maasai folktales, including narrative style, settings, plots, resolution, and language. The styles in the folktales of both cultures are set to achieve similar goals. The selected examples of Yoruba and Maasai folktales that have been discussed and analyzed show the reliable and active status of

African orality. The presented illustrations of Yoruba and Maasai folktales capture noteworthy similarities including the following:

- i. Reverence of occupation: The Maasai value and honor pastoralism while the Yoruba take great pride as being great hunters:
- ii. Validation of religious beliefs: The Maasai and the Yoruba validate the existence of a Supreme being.

A noteworthy difference observable from the folktales of the two cultures include the variation in the link between children's occupation and their rite of passage. In Maasai culture, male children's occupation is linked to their rite of passage while the Yoruba culture does not link any of the known occupations to rite of passage

#### Findings and Contributions to the Field

This study's significant finding is that African folktales are fundamental to most, if not all African oral dominated cultures. These fundamental cultural elements are based on numerous themes including moral beliefs, religious belief, and occupation. My finding is that each African culture has one or more peculiar traditions that are idiosyncratic. The analysis of the similarities and differences between the Yoruba and Maasai folktales through the selected tales raises the discussions about African culture versus African cultures. At the level of shared literary traditions dominated by orality, the notion of African culture holds steadily. The expression and transfer of culture in most societies on the African continent is dominated by orality. However, at the level of the characteristics of individual cultures – as accentuated in this study of folktales in two different African cultures of Maasai and Yoruba, the multiplicity marked notion of African cultures become germane.

The study confirms the fact that the proclamations and general perceptions about cultures on the African continent sharing absolute commonalities is somewhat superficial. African cultures have the oral tradition in common, most notably folktales. Through interacting with their elders, the children of both cultures learn their family traditions but the variations that the study finds amongst the two studied African cultures are significant. These discovered differences highlight the fact that although culture is universal, through practices and norms, individual cultures are different. This thesis emphasizes and shows that African oral tradition forms such as folktales operate within sets of specific cultural features and functions. The Maasai and Yoruba (African cultures) have folktales in common, but Maasai folktales, for example, contain peculiar traditions which makes it different from Yoruba folktales, and ultimately distinct among African folktales.

This thesis has contributed to the study of African oral literature most especially by expounding the understanding of African folktales. It has also contributed to the comparative study of African oral traditions through the assessment of elements of Maasai and Yoruba cultures, such as ideals, beliefs and worldview of through their folktales. The study confirms that the two focused African cultures have told stories in both similar and different ways. The findings and contributions of this study notwithstanding, the comparative study of different African oral traditions on the continent merit further efforts. There is need for additional study on African folktales, with special focus on specific cultures and even importantly, comparative studies of different oral traditions of other parts of Africa.

Finally, the engagement of culture on the African continent is not supposed to go beyond the business of tourism for foreigners, there should be a legitimate manner of upholding the

transmission of these cultures from one generation to another. Most African cultures proclaim the practice of transmission of culture through folktales, but not many Africans display or remember these functions discussed in this study. For example, the Ijapa and the Hare trickster tales with its moralistic and ethical lessons have become irrelevant to the younger generation, many of them now strangely push aside the values of their respective cultures. As previously noted, African culture is inherently diverse, and the disparate views and values are the sources of strength for each cultural group. There is therefore the need for active tracing of African paths back to their oral traditions. The suggestion, in this study and many other studies, of the vital use of folktales in building up (African) societies cannot be overstated.

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