



Exploring The Role Of Indigenous African Religion In African Folktales: An Analysis Of Ancestral Beliefs And Cultural Preservation

Ramohlale MI^{1*}, Chauke OR², Molotja TW³

^{1*}^{2,3}Department of Languages, University of Limpopo, Republic of South Africa. ²Email: Osborn.chauke@ul.ac.za

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ABSTRACT

Quite often we have witnessed the visibility of Indigenous African Religion (IAR) in many if not all African oral literature, mostly in folklore. Most characters in African folktales are mostly rescued by ancestors who appear to be characters in the form of animals. Children as recipients of oral literature grow up with the strong belief that ancestors are capable of rescuing members of their lineage every time they are in trouble. Ancestral belief is a religion categorized under the Indigenous African Religion (IAR). For many years, even before the invasion of Western missionaries, all African people across the entire African continent had only the IAR as their only religion that guided their lives and answered the most intricate supernatural questions. This religion was able to provide answers to the difficult questions of life after death and the powers that the ancestors have on our prosperity and well-being. This article reports on the study that focused on the visibility and part played by African Indigenous Religion in African oral literature. The study followed a qualitative research approach where a case study design, was adopted. Data were generated through focus group interviews and cultural analysis. The study found that: many African folktales have AIR used mainly to rescue characters. Two, the role played by the AIR brings forth the strong message that ancestors as agents of IAR have absolute control and protection over the lives of African people. These findings have at least two implications. Firstly, the Indigenous African Religion is innate to all African people; most African Christians have IAR first before converting to Christianity. All these findings imply that African people have dual religions; they wake up early in the morning and appease their ancestors and in the afternoon, they wear the Western rope of honour and go to church.

KEYWORDS: Indigenous African Religion, Folktales, African people, Ancestors, and Beliefs.

INTRODUCTION

In many African stories passed down through generations, the presence of Indigenous African Religion (IAR) is unmistakable, especially in folktales. The common presence is mostly in animals or beings representing ancestors; these animals and ancestral beings guide and make it possible for the protagonists to escape brutal death and finally expose the antagonist's evil which later justifies appropriate punishment. Without beating about the bush, religion then, according to Cole (1982:363), ... is a brief system involving myths that explain natural and supernatural phenomena and rituals by which beliefs and myths are acted out. It provides a rationale for human existence and makes intelligible and acceptable the world in which men and women live. Indigenous African Religion is as old as the first Mother Africa; it has been the main reason why African people are still in existence because it succeeded in providing Africans a reason for living and dispensed assurance of life with ancestors after death. IAR has been planted into the blood and veins of African people by the indigenous oral traditional literature. Therefore, all African people had their IAR as their first religion before they could convert to the modern Western Christian religion. Amongst the Africans two types of religions come to the fore: African religion, as defined by Mbiti and others, and Christianity. Both religions are portrayed in many of the poems written by the Northern Sotho poets, that is the African poets. As mentioned at the beginning, Matsepe wrote about the Christian religion although he was a traditionalist. He was exposed to

Christianity. According to Serudu (1990:41), Matsepe belonged to two worlds - the traditional African and the Christian worlds. Having come across Christianity at missionary schools, he then learned to accommodate the two and that combination seemed to have shaped his beliefs, attitudes, and views toward the living God and the ancestral spirits.

In the folktale Mašilo le Mašilwane, the Ancestors who appear in the form of a big snake rescue Mašilwane who was thrown into the dangerous deep river to kill him so he could inherit his cows. The big snake coiled around Mašilwane took him out of the deep river and took him home. When he arrived home, he said:

Hlware yešo, ntharolle ke fihlile.
Ntharolle!
Mašilo a ntokela Sedibeng,
Ntharolle!
O gapile kgomo tša ka ka dipedi
Ntharolle!

My ancestors snake, uncoil me I've arrived home.
 Uncoil me!
 Mašilo pushed me into the deep fountain.

On the other hand, 'magic' may be protective or productive, and therefore socially approved. This trustful attitude of the Africans towards their amulets and talismans takes on a religious flavour. And they have the full backing of their gods. That is why you often hear a traditional medicine man or diviner saying:

Hlare tšešo le Badimo Alafa Molwetši. "Our medicines and the gods cure the patient."

Mbiti (1971:132) cites expressions that are often used by African people when they speak of dying, namely: *O iketše badimong* 'going to one's Fathers', 'going home', 'be taken away or be received', and 'departed'. 'Going away' in an African worldview implies going to the spiritual world because the spiritual world is as real as the physical one. Amongst other things, ibid (1971:132) claims that 'there are mountains, rivers, and trees; those who have died as babies continue to grow; God is the Originator and Sustainer of all things', and this includes the living dead and the spirits. At the point of death, a person becomes part of the 'living dead' and joins other members of his or her household who have preceded him or her in the spirit world.

CULTURAL PRESERVATION THEORY

The study was guided by the Cultural Preservation Theory as espoused by an African scholar, Mazrui (1996). his work undoubtedly contributed to discussions surrounding cultural preservation, identity, and heritage in Africa and beyond. Cultural Preservation Theory underscores the importance of maintaining and safeguarding traditional cultural practices in the face of external influences and modernization. Within this framework, folktales serve as repositories of cultural knowledge and values, including those about Indigenous African Religion. Through the retelling of folktales, cultural traditions are preserved and passed down, reinforcing the significance of ancestral beliefs and spiritual practices within African communities.

In his book "The Africans: A Triple Heritage" (1986), both a documentary series and a written work, Mazrui explores the cultural, historical, and political complexities of Africa's interaction with the Islamic world and the West. It delves into the challenges of maintaining cultural heritage while navigating the influences of Islam and Western colonialism. "Cultural Forces in World Politics" (1990) – is another book advocating for Cultural Identity Theory. In this book, Mazrui examines the role of culture in shaping global politics and international relations. He discusses how cultural factors, including religion, language, and tradition, influence diplomatic interactions and conflicts among nations. "The Power of Babel: Language and Governance in the African Experience" (1998) - explores the linguistic diversity of Africa and its implications for governance, identity, and cultural preservation. He discusses the challenges and opportunities presented by multilingualism in the context of nation-building and development. He wrote an article called "Cultural Engineering and Nation-Building in East Africa" (1972) - This article examines the role of cultural policies in nation-building efforts in East Africa. Mazrui discusses the challenges of reconciling diverse ethnic and cultural identities within the framework of a unified national identity. Finally, concerning Cultural Identity Theory, Mazrui wrote an essay, "Africa's Triple Heritage Revisited" (1996) - In this essay, Mazrui reflects on the legacy of his seminal work "The Africans: A Triple Heritage" and its implications for understanding Africa's cultural dynamics in the post-Cold War era.

Mazrui's perspectives on cultural preservation can be gleaned from his writings and lectures, where he discusses the importance of safeguarding and promoting cultural heritage. The following are some values associated with cultural preservation as identified or implied by Mazrui: i) Cultural Diversity: Mazrui emphasizes the richness of cultural diversity as a fundamental aspect of human civilization. He recognizes the value of preserving diverse cultural traditions, languages, and customs as a means of promoting understanding, tolerance, and mutual respect among different peoples. ii) Cultural Continuity: Mazrui acknowledges maintaining continuity with the past by preserving cultural heritage for future generations. He sees cultural preservation as a way of honoring the achievements and contributions of previous generations and ensuring

that their legacy endures. iii) Cultural Identity: Mazrui underscores the significance of cultural identity in shaping individual and collective identities. He argues that cultural preservation helps communities maintain a sense of belonging and connection to their heritage, fostering a stronger sense of identity and self-esteem. iv) Cultural Autonomy: Mazrui advocates for the autonomy of cultures in determining their development paths and safeguarding their unique characteristics. He opposes cultural imperialism and the imposition of external values and norms that undermine the integrity of indigenous cultures. v) Cultural Resilience: Mazrui recognizes the resilience of cultures in the face of external pressures and challenges. He highlights the adaptive capacity of cultures to evolve and respond to changing circumstances while retaining core values and traditions. vi) Cultural Empowerment: Mazrui sees cultural preservation as empowering marginalized communities and giving voice to their experiences and perspectives. He believes that cultural heritage can serve as a source of pride, resilience, and resistance against oppression and injustice and, vii) Cultural Exchange: Mazrui promotes cultural exchange as a means of fostering dialogue, mutual understanding, and cooperation among diverse cultures. He views cultural preservation not as an isolationist endeavour but an opportunity for cross-cultural learning and enrichment. This theory and its values were used to collect and analyse data. From this perspective, only three themes were used to collect and analyse data: Cultural Identity and Autonomy, ii) Cultural continuity, and iii) cultural resilience and empowerment.

Research Methodology Research Design

The study set out to explore the role of indigenous African religion in African folktales: an analysis of ancestral beliefs and cultural preservation. To succeed in exploring this theme with expertise, we found a qualitative research approach suitable because it allowed us to scan over the international and Northern Sotho folklore books, published articles, journals, and any available secondary published scripts for the availability and role of indigenous African religion in African folklore, and thereby gain an insider perspective of the problem under study. Within this approach, we adopted the cultural analysis and a case-study design, which allowed us to gain a deeper understanding of the issues at play. More specifically, as many other qualitative researchers do, adopted the notion of a case study as advanced by Stake (1995:99) who sees case study research as underpinned by a viewpoint that “knowledge is constructed rather than discovered”. Yin (2003:19) on the other hand maintains that the case study researcher is supposed to “maximize four conditions related to design quality: construct validity, internal validity, external validity, and reliability. How investigators deal with these aspects of quality control” is seen as the ‘yardstick’ for a case study. This allowed us to become what he calls qualitative researchers interpreters and gatherers of interpretations.

Data Collection and Sampling

The study followed the content or desktop type of data collection using secondary data. The biggest advantage of using secondary data is economics. Someone else has already collected the data, so the researcher does not have to devote money, time, energy, and other resources to this phase of research. Secondary data may include data that has been previously gathered and is under consideration to be reused for new questions, for which the data gathered was not originally intended (Vartanian, 2010). Secondary data such as published printed sources, books, and journals. Secondary data is often readily available. After the expense of electronic media and the internet, the availability of secondary data has become much easier. Published Printed Sources: There are varieties of published printed sources. Their credibility depends on many factors. For example, on the writer, publishing company, and time and date when published. New sources are preferred, and old sources should be avoided as new technology and research bring new facts into light. Books: Books are available today on any topic that you want to research. Books are secondary sources but the most authentic ones in secondary sources. Journals and periodicals are becoming more important as far as data collection is concerned. The reason is that journals provide up-to-date information which at times books cannot and secondly, journals can give information on the very specific topic on which you are researching rather than talking about more general topics (Kabir, 2016). This study selected Northern Sotho folklore books and relevant folktales which will assist in serving as proof that indeed Indigenous African Religion and Culture are embedded in oral literature, particularly folktales. supplementary data about the title was collected from all available international African journals and published printed sources.

The secondary data collection schedule included the six values of the Cultural Preservation Theory (CPT): Challenging patriarchy, advocacy of African states and leaders to empower Women's Voices, deconstructing gender stereotypes, and promoting gender equality and intersectionality. We wanted to establish from different published sources, how patriarchy can be challenged, how the African continent envisages empowering women's voices, how gender stereotypes could be deconstructed, and if African scholars advocate for gender equity and intersectionality.

Document Analysis

Document analysis was adopted as the main method of data collection and analysis. We browsed over the secondary data in the form of Northern Sotho folklore books, local and international African articles, journals,

and published printed sources for traces and confirmability of Indigenous African Religion in folktales. We wanted to confirm that religion served as the cornerstone for the development of the plots of African oral literature. The magic in most African folktales represented the Indigenous African Religion (IAR), animals that rescued most protagonists in many African folktales represented the IAR. Some supernatural characters like the fat old woman with one long tooth represented ancestors who finally gave Mašilwane a cow and a calf from ancestors, who indirectly represented the IAR. We further wanted to establish if all the IAR representations were commissioned in the African folktales unconsciously or consciously because African people wanted to inculcate, instill, and implant the IAR in the lives of young recipients (children). All these questions could only be answered by the opinions of scholars in their publications rather than the contemporary participants who have abandoned and disposed of their African culture for the Western missionaries' cultures. Local opinions would be compared to international African suggestions and postulations to arrive at cogent conclusions.

Findings

Africans believe in the power of their ancestors, and some can describe incidents that show this power at work. Ancestors are intimate members of a family: they are part of the family and are considered and consulted on all important occasions. The ancestors can influence the fortunes only of their descendants. A man who is sure that sickness cannot befall him propitiates his ancestors, for they have power to ward off all misfortunes and evils. They are propitiated through offerings of food, beer, and prayers (Mulambuzi, 1997). There is a general belief in Bapedi society that the main desire of ancestors is to be remembered by their offspring. This observation is endorsed by Matshetla Sarah Mmotla,⁸ a traditional healer (pers. comm., 16 June 2006), who states that Bapedi observe the practice of venerating their ancestors. According to Matshetla, the motivation behind the veneration is to invoke and share communion with ancestors. Attesting to the opinion above, Mönnig (1967:54) writes, 'if this is done faithfully, they reward the living through good health for themselves and their livestock, plentiful rains, and good harvests'.

In many African societies, an important aspect of traditional education is concerned with teaching oral literature using folktales, riddles, and proverbs which aim at moulding character and providing children with moral values like honesty, integrity, courage, and solidarity. Many African folktales belong to a particular region, meaning that stories closely reflect the storyteller's culture. People portray not only their way of life but their experiences and knowledge of the plants and animals around them (Demuyakor, 2021).

From the analysis of both content data collection and document analysis, we came up with three main findings, which we classified under three themes: i) Cultural Identity and Autonomy, ii) Cultural continuity, and iii) cultural resilience and empowerment. These are further exposed in the sections that follow. African folktales with IAR will be aligned with one of the following themes of Cultural Preservation Theory below.

Cultural Identity and Autonomy

The study of cultural identity has been approached from diverse lenses depending on researchers' scholarly orientation and underlying assumptions about the nature of cultural identity. One thing that inter/cultural communication scholars do agree on is that the term cultural identity has been employed as an umbrella construct to encompass, or subsume, related group identities such as nationality, race, ethnicity, age, sex and gender, sexuality, socioeconomic status, regional identity, ethnolinguistic identity, political affiliation, and (dis)ability. Mazrui advocates for the autonomy of cultures in determining their development paths and safeguarding their unique characteristics. He opposes cultural imperialism and the imposition of external values and norms that undermine the integrity of indigenous cultures.

In the folktale, *Mošemane wa dišo* (The boy with sores) (Makgamatha 1994: 76-80), a boy and his sister were left alone. All the people who lived there died and the two remained. They had herds and herds of cattle. The boy had big sores. Other people very far from their village heard about the story of that village and wanted to seize the two and their herds of cattle. They did that and when they came back, they forced the boy to have intercourse with his sister. The seizers slaughtered and ate one beast, but the meat came out of their stomachs, and it became a complete beast. The other day the boy and his sister drove their herds of cattle to another village while seizers were still asleep. They arrived in that village and were welcomed by the chief. There was a severe drought at that chief's land, but the boy brought a new lease of life to his nation. The boy performed rainmaking rituals and sang traditional songs which made a lot of rainfall. This rainmaking issue is also supported by Rafapa (2009: 80) who said that: ... hymns had to be an integral part of communicating with the ancestors and Supreme Being during rainmaking rituals, for rain to fall. The chief became so happy and took the boy and his sister to his place. He instructed his few servants to grind the red ochre and smear him all over his body.

The narrative of the above folktale provides clear proof that African folktales have Indigenous African Religion which helps to develop the plot of the folktale and instill the African religion into the blood and hearts of young recipients. The rainmaking rituals that the boy performed, were inspired by the powers of ancestors directly aligned to indigenous African religion. The traditional songs that the boy sang were songs to call ancestors and to awaken them to descend their supernatural powers to cause the rain to fall. In the post-colonial period, African people had no other religion to identify with except the Indigenous African Religion. African

understanding of identity leaves very little room for personal autonomy, as one is only a person in so far as the person follows the moral dictates of the society (Okolo 1998: 213). In other words, an individual is only said to find himself within a society. In isolation, he is said not to exist. As opposed to individual essence, there is an emphasis on collective significance in the African comprehension of identity. The African expression that says: *Motho ke motho ka batho* (a human being is a human being because of other human beings). This is beautifully expressed by Mbiti (1969) when he wrote: "I am because we are. And since we are, therefore, I am." This is dialectically opposed to the Western rugged individualism, which has unfortunately threatened the very root of African communalism through colonial contact. It is proof enough that an African cannot survive alone but can only survive among other fellow Africans. Therefore, African people have oral literature in the form of folktales which advocates for Indigenous African Religion which all African people identify with.

Cultural Continuity

Cultural continuity is the ability to preserve the historical traditions of a culture and carry them forward with that culture into the future, and it is closely linked to the concept of cultural identity. Cultural identity has a major influence on our confidence and self-esteem. However, because of years of colonization and assimilation, there is a disconnect from the cultural values and traditions espoused in Indigenous communities (Morris 2007). On the issue of culture, Ngugi believes strongly in the preservation and promotion of African cultural values. The novelist does not, however, believe that culture is static and must be maintained at all costs even when it is evident that certain aspects of it are outmoded. He is much aware of the dynamic nature of culture and this partly explains why in *Towards a National Culture*, (1972:4) he maintains that: Culture, in its broadest sense, is a way of life fashioned by a people in their collective endeavour to live and come to terms with their total environment...but we must bear in mind that they are derived from a people's way of life and will change as the way of life is altered.

It is doubtless that colonialism stimulated positive and negative changes in Africa. More importantly, colonial rule was an imposition that unleashed a deadly blow on African culture with the immediate consequence of the introduction of such values as rugged individualism, corruption, capitalism, and oppression. According to Okoduwa (2008: 18), colonial rulers promoted their economic and religious values. This is evident in economic exploitation and socio-religious vitrification that characterised the colonial period.

In the folktale, *Nonyana hlapahlapa go senya meetse ke ga yona* 'Hasty decisions cause negative outcomes.' which is an indication that young people at some point will face very serious problems if they do not behave appropriately. The ones in the folktale had no self-discipline and had not developed independent cultural habits. The old men then went to call a doctor. They addressed him with respect. Traditional doctors are greatly respected. A lack of respect towards them implies a lack of respect for their ancestors. The doctor responded positively, asked his ancestors to give him the power to heal the chief, and went with them. When they arrived at the chief's kraal, the doctor just licked him, and the chief became completely healed. The old men brought him back and the nation became excited. The old men never acted like boys. In the African culture, anyone who does not respect their ancestors during their lifetime will never respect them even after death. Such a person is not fit to join them after his/her death (Mphasha, 2015).

In the above folktale, just because of mere respect the traditional doctor was able to cure the sick man. Respect is one of the important values in the African culture and Indigenous African Religion. The narrative of this folktale would prompt young recipients to make respect and other culturally good practices their second culture and make it a reality the cultural continuity.

Cultural Resilience and Empowerment

Shelton (1969) in his paper titled 'The 'Palm-oil' of language: Proverbs in Chinua Achebe's Novels' writes that proper understanding of African and other literatures will be achieved by relating the literary works to cultural context. He goes ahead to bring out Achebe's method of blending traditional African and European literary forms in the development of a new and Africanized Literature. According to him, Achebe uses folklore to combine traditional Africa and modern Africa and to support both plot and characterization.

One of the folktales in *Arrow of God* is centered on a man who had two wives. The senior wife has many children while the second wife has only a son. This only son proves to be obedient and truthful by obeying the spirit of the yam field and receiving a pot filled with 'every good thing'. His half-brother who disobeys the spirits is given a pot containing horrible diseases and abominations. (214-218) John Povey commends Achebe's use of folklore in his novels. He writes in the *Introduction to Nigerian Literature* edited by King (1968:98) that: Achebe manages to convey the essential elements of belief in the importance of the yam festival in *Arrow of God* for example without there being a sense that one is reading a series of notes in parenthesis. He makes them an integral part of the structure of his story, so that we are informed, almost as it were without recognizing it and our attention is not directed away from the essential elements which give novels their power of concentration.

Achebe's use of folklore in his novels is deliberate to show the Whites (Europeans) that Africans had a culture before colonization. He successfully exploited his cultural heritage as he consequently uses folklore, especially songs, proverbs, tales, and myths consistently and thoroughly in his novels. Achebe's folktale, *Arrow of God* exposed the vital role played by ancestors as representing Indigenous African Religion. The only son who was

obedient and truthful by obeying the spirit received a pot filled with 'every good thing'. His half-brother who disobeys the spirits was given a pot containing horrible diseases and abominations. The narrative of this folktale to young recipients would probably influence them to want to be like the son who was obedient to the ancestors and received 'every good thing' and they will despise the second son. This will in fact cause the young recipients to adopt the Indigenous African Religion unconditionally and develop a resilient cultural advocacy and empowerment.

Sacred animals represent ancestors and clan's prosperity.

There is a strong connection between animals and people. This relationship has existed since time immemorial as both are products of nature. One may argue that at some stage animals and people were relatives: brothers, sisters, and cousins. Rafapa (2007: 8) concurs with this view when he says that 'African oral poetry is also witness to these forces, to this interconnectedness of human, animal, plant, inanimate, environments and the cosmos'. It is believed this relationship was at some stage lost due to the interaction between people and animals based on power and authority. The relationship was lost because people were believed to be more cultured and civilised. In the Indigenous African Religion, the sacred animal or totemic animal is the representation of ancestors. Africans were obliged to inform the sacred cow about all clan activities and allow the cow to drink the African beer prepared for the occasion. Agreeing to drink the African beer signifies that ancestors have blessed the occasion and therefore, the occasion can continue without fear. In the African culture, the sacred cow is highly respected and even given the name of humans; he is swatted with a lot of respect while being ushered with praises and in return, Matome (the sacred cow) will boldly walk to the ancestral shrine to drink a small portion of the African beer.

Mašita, kgomo ya badimo

Makgamatha (1994) narrated a folktale about the young girl Mmakoma. Mmakoma was 'ngwanangwako' (the child whose birth was assisted and made possible by the medicine man and ancestors). Her parents gave her the sacred cow, '*Mošita kgomo ya badimo*' (sacred cow) to guide and protect her life. The parents did not want Mmakoma to get married, but when the time came one man could pass the tests and marry Mmakoma. She could not enter her inlaws home with the cow instead she put the cow in the nearby bush and went to feed it with water regularly. Her husband spotted her singing and feeding the cow and killed the cow; realising that Mmakoma raised the cow and went back home, and her husband never saw her again.

Evidence of IAR and Cultural Education

In African culture, the woman who cannot conceive is taken to the traditional doctor and medicine man. Treated with African muti, the woman will conceive and later give birth to a child. Just because the child was conceived because of the African muti, then the child is called *Ngwanangwako*. Introduction of such Northern Sotho terminologies to young beneficiaries not only will advocate the importance of Indigenous African Religion but as well will also educate the young one's cultural awareness. Mmakoma's parents gave her '*Mošita kgomo ya badimo*' (Mošita, the ancestral cow) to guide and protect her. Once more the young folktale beneficiaries are obliged to learn a lot from the folktale; Mošita the sacred cow is directly connected to the ancestors, which indicates that Mmakoma is directly connected to the cow. Before taking any action, Mmakoma must consult with the cow for advice and a way forward. Many African clans and families have inaugurated sacred bulls directly connected to their ancestors; such clans are obliged to consult with the sacred cow for suggestions, safe steps to take, when to have family rituals, what to do when one family member is ill or has died and they even go to an extent of observing the behavior of the sacred cow to predict the overall future of the entire family. This folktale has indeed a lot to teach the young ones about their African culture. The Collins COBUILD Advanced Learner's English Dictionary (2006: 1534) defines a totem as follows: In some societies, a family's totem is the animal, plant, or a natural object which they regard as a special symbol and which they believe has spiritual significance. Something that is a totem of another thing is a symbol of it. A totem is thus an entity that watches over or assists a group of people, such as a family, clan, or tribe. Totems support a larger group than a person. A totem spiritually represents a group of related people, such as a clan or tribe.

Recommendations

Our overall findings gave rise to two main recommendations, which we envisaged would assist in coming up with tangible strategies to improve cultural awareness, which include the collection of more African folktales and the preservation of oral tradition.

Collection of more African folktales

After considering the importance of folktales in African culture we recommend that African folktales from all African cultural backgrounds and all different folktale versions be collected. Folktales can enforce social discipline and moral values in the lives of young children who are the primary recipients. There is a rich fertile legacy of oral tradition in Africa and its Diasporas. African oral traditions and other elements of collective traditional wisdom thrived for generations due to the absence of printed material, when secular texts that attempted to translate oral into written traditional began to appear, it became clear that written text could not

replace the role and appeal of the traditional storytellers (Gadzekpo, & Ribeiro, 2010). Religion in African societies seems to be the fulcrum around which every activity revolves. Hence religious values are not toyed with. African traditional religion, wherever it is practiced, has some defining characteristics. For instance, it possesses the concept of a Supreme Being which is invisible and indigenous. It holds a belief in the existence of the human soul and the soul does not die with the body. African traditional religion also has the belief that good and bad spirits do exist and that these spirits are what make communication with the Supreme Being possible. Above all, it holds a moral sense of justice and truth and the knowledge of the existence of good and evil (Umoh 2005: 68). Collection of all versions and African folktales, from all corners of different cultures would assist in promoting African culture, and religion and moral discipline.

Oral Traditional Heritage

Oral tradition is defined as testimony transmitted verbally from one generation to another. "Verbality" and transmission characterize oral tradition, as these are different from the written word. However, quite often, oral tradition is considered only for its historical dimension. This is a result of circumstances. Historians are among the leading researchers in the realm of the social sciences to express an interest in oral tradition and its scientific roots. Works that employ research from the perspective of oral tradition are mostly those of historians. Oral tradition encompasses not only historical, literary, and religious traditions, but also all aspects of traditional wisdom (Diakjte, 2001). To succeed in preserving the African oral tradition, we recommend that parents take their noble position participate actively and take the lead in indigenous oral traditional narratives. Studies have established that children exposed to indigenous African oral traditions are better raised with morally acceptable behaviors than the ones never exposed to oral traditional narratives.

Stories like folktales, myths, and legends are the cultural traditions of the society. These traditions have been a source of value for education as well as entertainment in rural societies, and they hold the essence of the unique culture and traditions. The stories guide the children to develop moral and sympathetic attitudes toward others. The stories have no immediate purpose other than to amuse, but they leave a substantial by-product that has a moral significance. In every reaction that the child must distress or humor in the story, he deposits another layer of sensational experience which sets his character more firmly in the mould of the right or wrong attitude. Cultural identity is observable through language, culture, and all kinds of oral traditional narratives capable of transmitting moral values and Indigenous African Religion from one generation to the next. Therefore, our final submission is absolute advocacy for the preservation and heritage of oral African tradition.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study sheds light on the enduring presence and significant role of Indigenous African Religion (IAR) within African oral literature, particularly in folktales. Through the depiction of ancestral intervention and protection, these narratives instill in children a profound belief in the power and influence of their ancestors, positioning IAR as a foundational aspect of African spirituality and cultural identity. The findings underscore the dual religious practices often observed among African communities, wherein IAR coexists alongside Christianity, reflecting a complex interplay between tradition and modernity. Ultimately, this research highlights the intrinsic connection between storytelling, cultural heritage, and spiritual beliefs, emphasizing the enduring relevance of Indigenous African Religion in shaping the worldview and practices of African people. Children's stories provide children with the opportunity to respond and develop their own opinions. They can learn to evaluate and analyze, as well as summarize and hypothesize about the stories. Children's stories also provide a possibility to learn about their cultural heritage and the cultures of other people. Children must learn these values because developing positive attitudes toward their own culture and the cultures of others is necessary for both social and personal development. From the stories, which contain obvious stereotypes about certain cultural groups, children can realize the cultural values of that group.

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