

DIDACTISM IN THE ALO GENRE FOR CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AND BEHAVIOR MODIFICATION

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Abstract

Against the backdrop of contemporary changes in the Nigerian society of the 21st Century, and a consequent degeneration of societal values, this paper examines the unsettling development and explores ways of amelioration. To find a panacea to this unhealthy development there has to be a revisit to our roots culture. Specifically, the reformatory potency of the alo genre (i.e. Oral folklore) for character development and behaviour modification is closely examined. It is seen that African folktales and folklore have embedded in them didactic lessons for character development and behavior modification. The universality of archetypes, as reflected in African folktales is considered significant for moral consciousness and rejuvenation. Arising from this study, some suggestions are made towards the amelioration of moral decay and degeneration of societal values. Such recommendations inter alia, include the role of the home through parents, in instilling appropriate moral codes in their children from early childhood. Schools also have an important role to play, while the role of counselling psychologists cannot be overemphasized.

Keywords: Contemporary, Roots Culture, Folklore, Didactic, Archetype, Alo.

Introduction

In Nigeria, child education places considerable emphasis on the inculcation of moral values and character development. In times past the child was taught moral and religious education for the attainment of excellent character which is necessary for effective nation building. In this regard, the home and the school are expected to play key roles. But it would appear like the home has abdicated its responsibility in an age of career parents when both father and mother leave home for work in the mornings and do not get back till late evenings, tired and exhausted after a hard day's work.

The home is a very important agent of socialization which ought to play a useful role in ameliorating the problem of maladaptive behavior in our children and youths. Of the three major environmental factors, i.e. the home, the school and the society, Lawal¹ asserted that the home produces the earliest, deepest and most direct influence on the child's educational development. Vital role of the home environment has been recognized and acknowledged by educators, sociologists and psychologists for quite a long time. The consensus has always been that the home environment is unilaterally related to the educational system of the child.

The home lays the moral, spiritual and intellectual foundation on which the child is to build later. Unless the child's early experience at home is of the right type therefore he or she starts life at great disadvantage.

In contemporary times, parents hardly have quality time for their children any longer in their insatiable quest to make ends meet in these highly demanding and competitive times. The observation is corroborated by Adegoke² who pointed out that most parents in the typical African cities are prevented from getting involved in their growing adolescents life because of job and career demands. This trend is now exposing many young people to high risk behaviors that were otherwise strange to much of traditional African Society in the past. And the society is the worse for it, as respect for social values have been thrown to the wind. Armed banditry and kidnapping, usually involving teenagers have become commonplace. Drug abuse and rebellious tendencies are now the order of the day. Indeed, this is an age where children feel they know everything, as respect for grey hair is thrown overboard and the words of the elders are, sadly, no longer words of wisdom.

The good, the bad, and the ugly

The contemporary world is changing at a shocking and alarming momentum. Some of the developments such as advanced technology and Artificial Intelligence (A.I.) are inevitable sign posts of societal advancement and progress. Too many things seem to be happening at too fast a pace leaving one almost breathless in the effort to keep up the pace and bewildered in the attempt to understand some of the rather strange and unusual developments. For instance, there is a corresponding increase in restlessness, violence and social insecurity and the more answers are sought, the more questions there are even as the human society moves on, closer and closer, to a precipitous edge of self-annihilation. Let us bring the picture nearer home. The reign of terror unleashed on the Nigerian society in recent years in the area of armed banditry, kidnapping, rape and arson are mostly perpetrated by youths. The militants in the Niger Delta mostly comprise youths. In Abia state of Nigeria kidnapping has been turned into an art leaving the security machinery of the state completely helpless! Even though it could be argued that youth restiveness and recklessness are being aided by lack of employment which, admittedly has become a monstrosity, the fact remains that a child that is well brought up (which is another parlance for good home training) would not, readily, fall to the bait of atrocious and antisocial engagements.

This assertion is corroborated by the recent arraignment of minors in Nigeria for participating in protests like the End-Bird-Governance movement in August, 2024. In early November 2024, these minor were arraigned at a Federal High Court in Abuja. It was obvious that the minors had been shabbily treated, with reports of some of them fainting in court due to alleged malnourishment exhaustion. Expectedly, this led to a general outcry across the country as angry citizen insisted that the minors must be acquitted and discharged. Thankfully, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigerian, Asiwaju Bola Ahmed Tinubu ordered their release shortly after. The incident however, raises fundamental questions about youth engagement and plummeting societal values.

Let us now cast our minds back to the 25th of December, 2009 (Christmas day), when Nigerians received a rude jolt by the announcement that a young Nigerian by the name Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, popularly referred to as the ‘Underwear Bomber’ attempted to detonate plastic explosives hidden in his underwear while on board Northwest Airlines flight 253, en route from Amsterdam to Detroit, Michigan. He was subsequently charged on six criminal counts, including attempted use of weapon of mass destruction and attempted murder of 289 people. He is currently in the custody of United States of America, serving a life sentence.

Since then, terrorism has surreptitiously, found its way into our daily lexicon as the Nigerian society has now given birth to terrorists groups such as *Boko Haram* and lately, *Lakurawas*. As a counseling psychologist, one feels that these disturbing developments, some of which are hitherto alien to our cultural values and sensibilities, are a fall-out of fast disappearing societal values and strongly believes that part of the solution to the problem would be going back to the roots.

It is not as though there has been no attempt to combat some of these antisocial and maladaptive behaviors in the society. There are already in existence, a number of western behavioural packages that had been used for behaviour medication and maladaptive problems such as Freudian Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy, Rational Emotive Therapy (RET) of Albert Ellis, and Reality Therapy (RT) of William Glasser among others. However, all of these are alien to the African culture and peculiarities, which, invariably, throws up a challenge for a ‘homegrown’ alternative. I took this up and came up with the Indigenous Nigerian Folktale Therapy (INFT). The INFT is a treatment package containing carefully selected , goal-directed folktales which, when administrated through counselling sessions on identified delinquents and maladaptive children has been found to be helpful and effective in reducing considerably and sometimes erasing completely, delinquent traits and maladaptive behaviours in such children and youths. This is because what goes into a child’s mind and imagination is important in shaping his behaviour. Folktale therapy, as embedded in the aforementioned package, is one way to inculcate into the child’s imagination, and consciousness, a cultural antidote for the violent youth culture of this contemporary age.

Archetypal themes in African Folklore

At this point, a brief examination of archetypal theory is considered necessary for the purpose of a more insightful understanding of its place and significance in African folklore and, by implication therefore, its relevance to this paper. In the words of Davis³ an Archetype is a recurring pattern of character, symbol or situation found in the mythology, religion and stories of all cultures. Archetypes can be thought of as the precursor to conscious thought, existing in the unconscious mind as expressions of psychic happening, but without a basis in the physical world. To put it another way, there are very few basic archetypes or pattern which exist at the unconscious level, but there are an infinite variety of specific images which point back to those few patterns. Since these potentials for significances are not under conscious content, we may tend to fear them and deny their existence through repression. This has been a marked tendency in modern

man, the man who seeks to lead a life that is totally rational and under conscious content. Recurring archetypal themes in African folktales include the wicked step-parent, fierce animals being over-come by weaker but smarter animals, the 'why' stories, such as Why African origins, smaller, physically weak, and seemingly vulnerable creature like Tortoise, or Spider in Ananse stories, are often endowed with special intelligence and human characteristics, and are answerable only to God⁴. The tortoise, for instance, is a popular figure in African folktales, and a symbol of the trickster motif. He is known as Nnabe in Igbo culture, Fudugazi in Zulu culture and Ijapa in Yoruba Culture. Tortoise is physically slow but quick witted, lives a long time and has a long memory, and gains a type of wisdom by studying fellow creatures in society. But, like trickster figures in the folklore of many world cultures, tortoise misuses his knowledge.

According to Badejo's⁵ interpretation, the African tricksters like the Yoruba Ijapa or the Igbo Nnabe perceive, remember, and study others' weaknesses in order to use this knowledge for the trickster's own self-interest or amusement, or to escape social responsibilities. Tricksters exist on the peripheries of the social order. Their individualistic, non-conformist behaviour creates havoc and disharmony in society and can threaten the survival of the community. Ugorji⁶ pointed out that secular tricksters like Tortoise often project the kinds of evil forces and bad behaviours against which the human community must contend to survive and which must be kept in check. This goal is rehearsed and achieved in the communal performances of African proverbs and folktales, herein the trickster's bad anti-social behaviours are usually punished and the evil forces unleashed are controlled or defeated. Thus, recounting Tortoise stories in African communities can function to reaffirm the priority and wisdom of the community, reassure its members that balance and harmony can and should be restored and that the community will survive and prevail.

There is in Ghana a story-telling art called Anansesem by Akan-speaking people. The name, which literarily means Ananse stories is used both for the body of stories told and for the story-telling performance itself. Although this story-telling is usually a domestic activity, there are in existence some specialist groups who have given it a full theatrical expression with established conventions. Who is Ananse, and why should so many stories be told about him? According to Sutherland⁷ Ananse appears to represent a kind of every man, artistically exaggerated and distorted to serve society as a medium for self-examination. He has a penetrating awareness of the nature and psychology of human beings and animals. He is also made to mirror in his behaviour fundamental human passions, ambitions and follies as revealed in contemporary situations. Significantly, laughter is the main social response to Ananse as a character. In addition, it is in the verbal comments which often underscore the laughter that the society's attitude to him is clarified. Of these the most representative is 'Ananse's wealth' – a sarcastic expression for successes and triumphs which are not likely to last. Indeed most of Ananse's successes are doubtful and temporary. By constantly over-reaching himself he ruins his schemes and ends up impoverished. That Ananse is, artistically, a medium for society to

critize itself can be seen in the expression. ‘Exterminate Ananse, and society will be ruined.’

Yoruba Oral Traditional Literature

Ruth Finnegan⁸ in the revised edition of her work; Oral Literature in African Studies, reinforces her argument about the literary merit of African oral traditions, challenging previous dismissals of oral literature as primitive or inferior to written forms. She meticulously documented various poetry across different cultures, emphasizing their complexity and artistry. The book includes detailed analyses of the oral literary practices of over 150 ethnic groups, with notable attention to the Yoruba, examining their storytelling techniques, folklore, and use of proverbs. Her 2012 update reflects on the continuing evolution of oral literature in contemporary African societies, considering how new technologies like recording and digital archiving influence the transmission of oral traditions. This edition is highly regarded for making oral literature more accessible to a global audience, while also emphasizing its relevance in modern African life. The foregoing is insightful in appreciating the fact that African folktales in which profoundly significant archetypes are embedded, serves important social and ethical purposes. More importantly, the element of universality in archetypes as reflected in African folktales in particular, lends support to the applicability of the I.N.F.T package mentioned earlier in this discourse.

Form and Structure of The ‘Alo’ Genre, (Yoruba Folktale)

Yoruba folktales, being oral in form are told by an omniscient narrator, that is, an elderly person who is believed by children (audience) to possess great wisdom and experience. The style of narration is direct and intimate. To bring out the beauty in the totality of presentation and for aesthetic appeal, the narrator dramatizes, mimics and makes use of other verbal and non-verbal codes to the admiration of the children. The opening of a folktale involves the use of set phrases. This is an essential aspect of its technique. Below is an example of the opening of a tale:

Apalo: Alo o!

Awon Omode: Alo o!

Apalo: Ni ijo kan ...

Awon Omode: Ijo kan kii tan laye

Apalo: Ni igba kan

Awon Omode: Igba kan nlo igba kan nbo, Ojo n’gori ojo

Apalo: Iya kan wa ...

Awon Omode: O wa bi ewa

Apalo: O bi omo meji ...

Translation

Storyteller: story! story!!

Children: story!

Storyteller: One day ...

Children: One day shall never end

Storyteller: Once upon a time ...

Children: Time changes as day succeeds day

Storyteller: There was a woman

Children: She was indeed

Storyteller: She had two children

With this arresting opening lines, the attention of the children is called. The storyteller, through this formula, succeeds in arresting the attention of the children through the bandying of words between the narrator and his audience (Bamgbose & Akinwale)⁹. For children to learn from a lesson, their interest should be aroused. Hence, there is the application of this formula. From the opening, the narrator tells his story and during the course of his narration, audience participation, according to Bamgbose¹⁰, comes in form of sympathetic comments, fixed responses and joining in the chorus of the song in the story.

At the end of each tale, there is an moral tag which will be announced by the storyteller . The set phrases employed for this is:

Itan yi ko wa pa ... (This story teaches us that) and he (storyteller) goes on to mention the moral lessons deduced from the story, a closing formula is also adapted immediately after announcing the lesson of the story:

Apalo: Idi alomi re e gbangbalaka

Idi alo mi ree gbangba laka

Bi n ba paro ki agogo enu mi ma ro lemeta, bi n ba paro ki agogo enu mi ro lemeta

Po! Po! Po!

Awon Omode: E o puro baba

Storyteller, this is the reason for my story. This is the reason for my story. If I am lying, may the bell in my mouth fail to sound. If I am not lying may it sound three times.

Po! Po! Po!

The Children: You are not lying, father

To demonstrate this the storyteller dips a finger into his mouth and tries as much as possible to make three clicking sounds of his inner cheeks with the finger. The children hearing these sound, believe the truthfulness of the story. Yet another type of storytelling is what is known as Aro. These are chain reaction folktales. They are highly entertaining and involve the ability to string together a series of pithy comments in a related manner. This is done as each member of the group adds to what has just been said by taking off from the last word of the last speaker. Here is an example:

Opo ti ko gboran
E je ka f'enu re gbungi
Igi ti ko gboran
E je ka mu kanna
Ina ti ko gboran
E je ka bomi paa
Omi ti ko gboran
E je ka fi ponti lile
Oti lile to ko gboran
E je ka fomo lile
Omo lile ti ko gboran

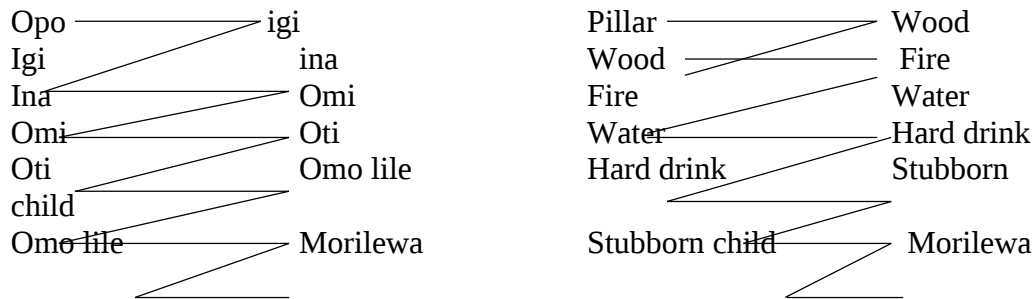
Translation

The pillar that doesn't listen
Let us match it with wood
The wood that doesn't listen
Let us destroy it with fire
The fire that doesn't listen
Let us quench it with water
The water that doesn't listen
Let us use it to brew hard drink
The hard drink that doesn't listen
Let us give it to stubborn child
The stubborn child that doesn't listen

E je ka koju re si Morilewa

Let him face Morilewa

DIAGRAMMATIC REPRESENTATION OF ALTERNATE BEGINNING AND END RHYMES



Contribution of Folklore and Folktale to Child Education

In Nigeria, child education places considerable emphasis on the inculcation of moral values and character development. In times past, the child was taught moral and religious education as foundation to the attainment of excellent character which is necessary for effective nation building. In this regard, the home and the school are expected to play key roles. According to Nelson¹¹, African traditional and oral literature is a synthesis of such literary resources as folktales, stories, proverbs, songs riddles and poetry which are often inseparable as narrative or oral art. In the Yoruba tradition and contemporary society for Instance, the desire to teach a good child habit stat early. Alamu¹² asserted that because of the moral, cultural and entertainment values inherit in them, children are exposed to tales to mould their character rights from youth, thereby laying solid foundation for their future. In Yoruba land, the principles of good characters in all its ramifications have their basis in Yoruba traditional education. Traditional education embraces Yoruba maxims that are needed for the building of children's moral and spiritual being.

Indeed, the didactic purpose of folklore is achieved during narration as the themes are carefully selected (mainly involving an exhibition of some vice) and the resultant punishment melted out for the perpetrator. The condemnation of vice and the reward of virtue as evidenced in the folktale are to teach children that there's a reward in doing good. Mapanje and White (1983)¹³ observed that African achievement in oral literature include changelessness and continuity in stories passed from generation to generation, in customs and community saying preserved by the elders, the whole making up a culture of the kind celebrated so vividly in Chinua Achebe's *Things fall Apart*. A few decades ago when folktales were still told to children at moon lit nights by parent and grandparents, such times always availed the parents the opportunity to extol virtue and denounce evil and such lessons and codes of conduct learnt were never lost on the listeners despite the informal setting and the entertainment value of the stories.

In this respect a favorite folktale from my childhood years would suffice as an example: *Tortoise and his wife Yannibo had been married for several years but without an issues i.e. a child. Tortoise eventually became worried and off to a*

famous medicine man he went. 'My wife and I have been married for several years but we don't have a child,' he complained, 'You are a man of great knowledge and a store house of unlimited charms and spells. Please do something to make my wife pregnant and I will never forget you,' he pleaded. The medicine man prepared a special concoction in a small black pot which he gave to tortoise to carry to his wife, but with stern warnings. 'Do not taste out of the concoction for whatever reason. If you do you would become pregnant like a woman.' Tortoise promptly replied, "How would I do such a thing! Thank you very much, wise one, may the gods bless you for me.' So saying he started on his return journey home. But after a while he started to sniff loudly as the delicious aroma oozing out of the pot pestered his nostrils. After ensuring that no one was in sight he stopped and took a peep into the pot. Behold, the pot indeed contains the most tasteful-looking soup anyone could imagine! There was assorted meat such as snail, shrimps, goat meat, dog meat, stock fish, catfish, cow leg, cow head, and cow tail e.t.c. Tortoise thought to himself that it would not do any harm to take just a bite. Neither Yannibo nor the medicine man would know anyway. So he took a bite and continued on his journey. But he soon stopped again to take yet another bite, and then another. And, before you could say 'YAN-NI-BO', he had finished the pot of soup together! But, no sooner he finished the concoction than his belly began to protrude at an amazing rate. Before long it could no longer be hidden and tortoise now look like an eight month old woman!

Embarrassed, afraid and confused, he made his way back to medicine man's abode singing a sorrowful song:

Babalawo mowa bebe	-	Alugberen
Babalawo mowa bebe	-	Alugberen
Ogun to se fun mi lerikan	-	Alugberen
To ni n ma ma mowo kenu	-	Alugberen
To ni nma ma mese kenu	-	Alugberen
Gbongbo lo yo mi gere	-	Alugberen
Mo fowo kan 'be mo mu kenu	-	Alugberen
Mo bojuwo kun o ri bentu	-	Alugberen
Babalawo mow a bebe	-	Alugberen

Translation

*Medicine man I have come to plead
Medicine man I have come to plead
The medicine you prepared for me a while ago
Which you said I must not taste
Which you said I must never, never touch
I tripped over a tree stump
My hand got soiled in the soup
Which then touched my mouth
Now I discover my tummy is protruded
Medicine man I have come to plead*

As may be expected, the medicine man showed no compassion whatsoever. 'I warned you, didn't I? He queried. Am sorry there is nothing I can do to remedy your situation'. Thus, tortoise's tummy continued to swell and swell until it burst

and the tortoise died. The story teaches that greed and disobedience are vices that children should abstain from in order not to suffer dire consequences.

Today, how much of our traditional folklore are our children and youths exposed to, any longer? The idea of moon light stories has disappeared from our lexicon due to the invention of electricity and is now replaced by the television and the computer android phones. The child returns home from school and there is no parent to welcome him back home. As a matter of fact in many instance he does not get to see his parents who have also gone in search of daily bread and may not return until nightfall. In despondent loneliness he turns to the companion readily available- the television and the computer. And now, even as a child he has mastered the computer to such amazing extent that what he does with the computer and mobile phone, what he watches on television, I should like to leave to our imagination! It is therefore with an understanding of this unfolding scenario that we must give kudos to the Nigerian Television Authority (N.T.A) for creating some children programmes which are overtly or covertly, directed at redirecting our children's attention and interest towards appreciating cultural and societal values. One of such programmes has become so popular over the years that most children (and adults alike) are already familiar with its signature tune, such that, anytime they hear it they know what programme is on. I am referring to no other than **Tales by Moonlight**.

The Indigenous Nigerian Folktale Therapy

The Indigenous Nigerian Folktale Therapy (I.N.F.T) as briefly mentioned earlier in this paper is a treatment package designed and developed by the presenter to help in combating delinquent trait such as excessive greed, cheating, stealing indolence disobedience/stubbornness bullying/aggressiveness, all of which together encapsulate maladaptive behaviour in later years. The package comprises four sections, the details and procedure of which cannot be discussed here for reason of time constraint and copyright. Section A of the package contains the directions, which are invaluable for the therapist. Section B contains the prologue and prelude. The prelude i.e theme song is scored by a musicologist for easy usability. Section B contains the prologue and prelude. The prelude i.e theme song is scored by a musicologist for easy usability. Section C contains the procedure for treatment, and section D contains the stories used. The package may be used in group counselling over a period of 8 to 10 counselling sessions spread over a time frame of 4 to 5 weeks. A longer time frame may be considered necessary at the discretion of the therapist depending on availability of time and post-test readiness of group, etc. the counseling technique must be what is known in counselling parlance as leader-structured and the counselor or therapist is to employ the use of psychodrama during the sessions. The package has been put to use and found to be very effective. However, for most effective results, the package is recommended for use by professional counselors/ therapists, and on African (particularly Nigerian) juveniles only.

Conclusion/Recommendations

There is no gainsaying the fact that civilization and modernity could be described as twin sisters that sign post societal growth and development. However, the same would seem to have paved the way for high-risk, immoral and alarming behaviours in the citizenry that were strange to the traditional African society in the past. Preserving Nigerians' rich cultural heritage can be achieved through the use of oral folklore in schools and in our homes. This way, Nigerian youths can be persuaded to respect and uphold societal values for the good of the nation.

Arising from this presentation, the following recommendations are made:

1. As the home remains a major and strategic base for socialization parents have a key role to play in combating the social vices of our society. After all, the Bible says, Train a child the way he should go, when he grows he will not depart from it. This theological truism is beautifully captured in the Yoruba proverb that says, "ile la ti nko eso rode" i.e. Charity begins at home Parents should therefore create more time and attention for their children and tell them didactic stories that would help to mould their character. Even though electricity has greatly erased the idea of moonlight stories particularly in the urban settlements, still in order to create the most ideal setting lights could be deliberately switched off and candles lit if there is no moonlight. Or alternatively, wait for the ever sure, ever regular black-out by the nation's Electricity Companies!
2. The school also has a prominent role to play and should therefore include **Folktales** hour on its curriculum during which time resource persons such as community when elders are invited to tell the pupils folktales.
3. The Nigeria mass media should promote oral folklore through a variety of programmes and features such as **Tales by Moonlight** by the N.T.A.
4. Since television and the home video have become part and parcel of our daily existence from which we can hardly keep the children away, producers of home videos should de-emphasize violence and romance on the screens and instead source for healthier materials from the very rich and morally didactic reservoir of indigenous oral folklore.
5. Guidance counselors and Counselling psychologists should utilize the I.N.F.T. package (designed and tested by the presenter, either preventively or curatively) in addressing delinquent traits in children, as well as other maladaptive behaviors. After all, a popular adage says, 'A' stitch in time saves nine.'
6. Lastly, the Federal Government should formulate policies to revive our moribund and fast disappearing cultural heritage, paying particular attention to the use of Folktales in redirecting the pleasures, interest and energies of our children and youths.

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