

IGBO FOLKTALES: CORRECTIVE TOOLS FOR CHILD DEVELOPMENT

**Okafor, Chisom Nneamaka
&
Akpamgbo, Eunice Uchenna**

Department of Linguistics/Igbo
Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu Univerisity
Igbariam campus
Email: nsomsom@yahoo.com

Abstract

In recent times, the youths behave as though the older generation was born after them. They believe that they are wiser than the older ones because they are fortunate to meet a modernized society. However, before the advent of modernization, the older ones had a very effective way of correcting and training the younger ones, folktales. This study, Igbo folktales as corrective tools was motivated by the need to clearly explain the effectiveness of folktales in the ancient days, as told by the older generation. Few folktales were collected and the lessons in them portrayed. It is discovered that all folktales are wisely made up stories yet packed with wisdom. This study looks into the fictitious nature of Igbo folktales and how they are still used to impart the right attitude in children and because of its moral undertone, utilitarianism, which is a branch of the moral theory, is adopted as the framework for the study.

Keywords: Igbo folktales, magic wand, orality, modernization, corrective tool

Introduction

Folktales are part of the oral tradition of the Igbo nation. The Igbos hold folktales as they hold their proverbs. Even in the face of modernization, they still find a way to keep their folktales alive. Some are written down while some are put in cartoons for the modern child to know his/her roots. This paper focuses on the beauty of the Igbo man using a 'cooked up story' in the sense that folktales can only be imagined and cannot be a possibility in reality. When one asks the origin of any folktale told, one would end up with no definite answer as the only answer there is that 'my father said his father told him the story' it is then assumed that some other 'father' told the 'father' and so on. Here lies the orality of folktales. Dawkins (1951:41) says 'a folktale may be described as a story handed down by oral tradition from mouth to ear among people, generally, in fact illiterate, though not necessarily so...'. This implies that a folktale teller or narrator does not necessarily need to be educated, same as the listener. This goes to explain why children in the ancient days do not need to attend a university before they learn positive manners and become better individuals and useful to the society.

Furthermore, Emery (2012:10) holds that folktale is a traditional narrative, usually 'anonymous' handed down orally, example, fables, fairy tales legends etc. This gives more credit to the 'father' telling a 'father' narration earlier mentioned. No folktale has a known originator, it is basically and totally anonymous. Folktales' 'anonymous nature', does not mean that when it is being told, the listener does not know the narrator or the teller, rather it

means that no one knows the first person or narrator who told the story first. In as much as it is not known how it originated, it is still packed with wisdom, something no one can neglect. It is one tool all parents used to keep their children in check in the ancient days. In the Igbo setting, every elderly person serves as parents, thus the reason their word of advice during folktales telling helps to mould the younger ones. Folktale time is always in the evening. This is because at this time everyone must have finished doing his or her domestic chores.

Amos (2013:24) adds thus, one will be reminded that the story time is always in the evening; when the sun is set and all activities has come to a halt. This is necessary because naturally, any information rendered orally needs apt attention. This is for the listener to get all the information needed and learnt all that needs to be learnt. Martin (2000:34) adds that often such stories were told by the light of the moon around a village fire after the completion of a long day of work. It is believed that at such times, the younger ones would have a good listening ear for advice and guidance needed to become better adults. It is also important to note that folktales are not always told by parents alone rather responsible adult or elderly in the community whose words are held in high esteem. This is also clear evidence that the Igbos believe and uphold the culture of communal efforts in raising a child. Most folktales however end with the phrase, ...and they lived happily after' to show that the character in that particular folktale enjoyed the benefits of doing the right thing, while some end in the opposite to show that any evil deed will not go unpunished. These all gear towards explaining to the child that there are always options, either to do the right thing and be happy ever after or do the wrong thing and regret it forever. Uba-Mgbemena (1982:55) adds 'Ifo tales were among the chief means of mounding the character of the Igbo child'. Greater emphasis is laid on 'chief means' and 'mounding'. This means that the elders depended more on its effectiveness than any other means. For easy clarification, the expository method of analysis was adopted. This method will help to clearly explain the main objective of the Igbo folktales. In other to capture the need for parents to still use Igbo folktales to instill moral in their children, it is important to understand the essence of the moral theory. This theory generally examines human behaviours to determine which are wrong or right. In it are more branches which utilitarianism is one of them. Utilitarianism upholds that the greatest good is the good done for the greatest number of people. This assertion therefore cancels the help one renders to ones friend instead of helping a greater number of people who are in the same need as one's friend. This theory is therefore best for this study because when Igbo folktales are told to a generation, it carries it on to the next generation and the process continues, thereby educating a larger number of audience.

The nature of Igbo Folktales

Folktales in Igbo land are as old as the Igbo man. Ogbalu (2011:56) says that the folktale is as old as the society it belongs to. It is an oral form of literature, fictitious and full of moral lessons – folktale is the traditional beliefs, customs or stories of a particular people handed down from one generation to the other orally. In it, lies everything that makes up the people. Folktale includes tales, sayings or dances preserved among a people. These are called folk materials.

Nobody, village or group of persons can lay claim to folktale. This is because it is passed down from one generation to the other. No one knows the original storyteller. Even though folktale is handed down through generations and rendered orally, it does not loose its lesson (s) rather it may loose some parts of its story. This is mainly because, once it is told, the hearer carries it in his/her memory pending, when he/her sees an opportunity to render same

folktale. If not among friends, then it's to his/her children. It is only normal for the first hearer to forget part of the original story. So, in its stead, he/she replaces with another suiting word, or phrase, making sure that the tale does not lose its original meaning or lesson.

The Igbo folktale is entirely unreal, fictitious, and fable-like. It is considered as painting a situation, scene or story that cannot and can never happen, yet, it carries deep meanings and teachings. The narrator can hold his audience, be it children or adults, for long hours, without them showing any sign of fatigue, yet folktale is considered unreal. The setting may be anywhere the narrator feels is suitable and convenient for him or her and the audience. The folktale itself could happen on a tree, in the river, in heaven, on land, in the air, in the land of the spirits or even in the animal kingdom. The characters may include God, the spirits, animals or humans who are considered extremely strong. When people get dissatisfied with promises or feel that a person, especially politicians, are trying to convince them to believe they would do a nearly impossible task once elected, they often dismiss such promises as *akuko ifo* (folktale); which means that it is very difficult for such persons to do such things for the people.

No Igbo child grows up without coming in contact with one or two folktales. If not told by the parents, such child hears it in school or reads it on the social media. The Igbo hold folktales in high esteem that they have a special setting for it. It is normally told to children in the night sitting round in a 'u' form around the narrator while the moon shines bright on them. In the absence of the moon, the help of a handmade lantern "mpanaka" is sought. In the absence of that too, a neatly dry wrapped palm kernel shaft is used as torch or lamp, by lighting one end of it. Once the narrator says "Oti ... and the children chorus (oyoo ...). The narrator can also say "o ruru otu ubochi", the children chorus 'otu ubochi wee ruo'. Another angle to it is the narrator saying "chakpii!!!" and the children chorus 'woo' (all meaning once upon a time), then the story begins in earnest. This is a strong attention drawer as every child's attention at this point; is on the narrator, paying attention to every detail so as to draw the lesson the folktale is trying to teach. This means that the Igbo folktales as much as they are fictitious, and unreal also have lessons, or themes which they intend to teach. To this Onyekaonwu (2000:49) says, "... folktales are invariably didactic in purpose; it teaches one moral lesson or the other which is reflected in the tale'. No folktale exists without a lesson attached to it. These lessons range from "consequences of stealing", "consequences of disobedience", "why maltreating a child is not good". It may be a folktale teaching the origin of man, the reason behind some activities of man, the reason why man has some body marks and lessons like that.

When folktales are told, the audience either clap, sing, move head in a particular direction in appreciation of tale being told. The audience has no option but to suspend every manner of doubt he or she may have in order to appreciate folktale well. In folktales, "God may come down from heaven to feed a particular man", "Lion and man may live in same room", "man can travel from earth to heaven just by climbing a rope", "birds may travel down to the depth of an ocean to retrieve a bracelet" as seen in D.N. Achara's *Elelia na ihe o mere*. Behind these exaggerated stories, lies fascinating lessons and until the hearer suspends his or her doubt, he or she may not fully appreciate these tales and the lessons they convey. These scary exaggerated fictitious scenes are the captivating aspects of folktales, as in rendering the tales, the tale teller is careful, observes his audience, taking note of their facial expression for this will determine how the tales, rendered have imparted knowledge. The captivating nature of folktale is the reason Igbo writers insert folktales in their works to draw and capture the

readers' attention. Achebe did justice to this fact when he inserted five Igbo folktales about 'How the tortoise got his bumpy shell', "the mosquito and the ear", "the vulture and the sky, "leaves and the snake-lizard", and "mother kite and daughters kite". As unreal and fictitious these stories may be, they are used to impart knowledge or lesson in the audience. To buttress the captivating nature of folktales, Ogbalu (2011:55) has this to say;

... the reason why real people on their appreciation react to them as if they are real life stories beside a careful observation of the folktale performing sessions show that neither the performer nor his audience is ready to move out of the sign. None show sign of getting tired of either telling the story or listening to the story

This can also be achieved by the ability of the performer to render the folktale. The performer may apply the use of mimick, that is, mimicking the animal or character in the story being rendered. This means that everybody may not be able to render folktale well. First of all; the performer is conversant with the community, dines with the people if not a member of the community. Ogbalu (2011:56) stresses thus; 'it is interesting to note that folktale narrator lives in the community with the others. It takes materials for his tales from his experiences in the community ...' This goes to confirm that as folktales pass from one generation to the other it loses some of its parts and is replaced with another suitable word or phrase, as the narrator pleases. This suitable part (phrase or word) may be from personal experiences of the narrator. It is important to note here that, while some parts are lost, the theme never changes.

The most common character in Igbo Folktale

The most common character in Igbo folktale is 'the tortoise' (mbe). This animal has been used in so many folk stories to teach lessons of either dangers of being a trickster or the advantage of being a trickster. 'Mbe nwa aniga' as it is fondly referred to, exhibits the highest level of mischief. He uses this tool to either save himself from a difficult situation or put another animal in a difficult situation. In real life, people who possess such quality are called tricksters. They are often called 'mbe' because of their mischievous nature yet they use this feature to solve a nearly impossible problem. To this, Ogbalu (2011:263) says:

Tricksters may be condemned for moral depravity, selfishness or lack of a sense of reciprocity, but on the other hand, they may inspire a mild sense of administration for their wit, ... and ability to achieve the seemingly impossible.

The tortoise always brings its mischievous nature out in every situation he finds himself in. For examples, in the story of the elephant and the tortoise, a certain King held a party and said that whoever rides on the elephant to his house, will marry his daughter. No animal dared to try because the elephant is the hugest animal on earth. The tortoise, yet went to the elephant and told the elephant that the King would want to make him the chairman of the occasion at his party, as the hugest animal, only if he carries him (the tortoise) to the King's palace. The elephant readily asked the tortoise to climb on him and off they went. As they approached the King's palace, the tortoise started signing thus;

Tortoise: Nna m eze akwota m enyi – bọbọmbo (my King, I have brought the elephant (twice)

Elephant: Mbe, ị sị na ị kwota onye? (Tortoise, who did you say you have brought) bọbọmbo

Tortoise: Mba: Asị m ala ya dube enyi, chebe enyi, ọ dika m si na akwota m enyi. Na asị m ala ya dube enyi, chebe enyi ... ọ dika ka m si na akwota m enyi, okwa enyi ga-abu isi oche? Okwa enyi ga-abu isi oche? Enyi na-aga na m so gi n'azu - bobombo. (No I said may the land lead and keep you. It sounded like I said I have brought the elephant (twice) Is the elephant not going to be the Chairman? I am right behind you, elephant.

This continued, until they finally arrived the King's palace and the tortoise was given the King's daughter to marry. And that was how the tortoise tricked the elephant irrespective of his size. This goes to say that tricksters are not afraid of the size of the problem, they get it done by any means necessary. In the story of the tortoise and the dog, there was a debate among the animals and humans regarding the possibility of making man immortal. The dog was chosen to run to God and tell him to allow man to be immortal because it is one of the fastest animals. The tortoise was chosen to go to God and tell him to make man less immortal because it is believed that the tortoise walks slowly, therefore, the dog will deliver the message before him thus making man immortal. On their way, the dog saw a human faeces and decided to feed on it. He was still on that when the tortoise walked pass him and got to God first. That was how humans started dying. This is to teach the concept of being focused. Clearly, the above story is not a real scene but created to illustrate the importance of being focused. As vague and senseless the story may have been, yet, it served a purpose, to teach. That is the full essence of folktale. There is also 'the Lion' perceived as the strongest animal God created. Though as scary as the Lion is, the tortoise, yet, manipulated him when the latter visited the former during famine, but, seeing that the footprints of the animals that visited before him only showed them going in and never coming out, he quickly left. Folktale in its totality is fictitious (Uwa nro) thereby making it a complexity in simplicity kind of literature.

Folktales as corrective tools

The elders used folktale in the ancient times to perform wonders in the lives of the younger ones the way a witch uses her wand to perform wonders. Folktale is told for so many reasons. It may be told for entertainment purposes. In this setting, the elderly or story teller sits on a more elevated platform, whereas his audience, mostly children, sit round him in more of a U-form. That way, he captures the faces of all his audience. They may either, laugh, clap or sing along a chorus in appreciation of the folktale being total. It can also be rendered to educate, instruct or impart morals. This paper, however shall focus on using folktale as a corrective tool to guide and correct ill behaviours in the younger ones. Uzochukwu (2001: 14) appreciates this function, thus,

... the folktale invariably contains some lessons which serve as a tool for currently antisocial behaviours. As often as is the case, wickedness does not go unpunished in the moral world of the folktale. ... retribution is always a recurring theme. The implication is always a warning for people to adhere to the norms of the society or else, they meet the fate of the guilty.

This is not to say that, humans do not know that wickedness is evil and has its own punishment, rather, when it is in hidden as a story in folktale, it creates a stronger impact and sinks well. In this case, the performer may decide to paint a picture of a very scary spirit 'who' 'pays' wicked doers. If this is rendered to children, one may observe their scared faces, the quiet scene and the attentiveness. This is because the 'Spirit' characters in the folktale

rendered captured their sub-consciousness. They imagine what would happen to the person if that 'spirit' catches up with him/her. Same goes to disobedience, arrogance and other vices that are prevalent among youths. The biblical injunction, 'train up a child in the way that he should go, and when his is old, he will not depart from it' (proverbs 22:6) plays a huge role here for it is believed that folktale told to children, serves as a tool to guide them as they grow into adulthood. Children tend to react to visuals more than any other teaching tool and this is why the performer tries to demonstrate the 'evil Spirit' that punishes children who disobeys, steals, disrespects or engages in bad behaviours.

Furthermore, because the Igbo child listens to folktale till he is older, he makes sure he never does anything that will make the 'Spirit' to punish him. Ogbalu (2011:58) says:

Traditional Igbo child listens to the folktale from infancy to adult life. By the time he gets to adult life. The events of the folktale had entered into the marrow of his bones. This means that he is firmly rooted in his society's way of life. This will continue to direct his life, throughout on earth.

This simply means that folktale is a guide to good behaviour. An instrument of moral. A tool with which the Igbo man instills morals and corrects bad behavior. Folktale is in the Igboman's blood.

Some Igbo Folktales and the Lessons behind Them

In addition to the few Igbo folktales narrated above, below are few Igbo proverbs and the lessons they teach.

a. The Tortoise and His Pot of Wisdom

Once upon a time, the tortoise collected all the wisdom in the world (so he thought) and put them in a pot and tied it around his neck with a strong rope, that the pot hung in front of him. He was afraid that someone will find the pot and steal it. He thought of how to hide it and then decided to hide the pot on top of the longest tree in the forest. The tree he found in the forest as the longest was a thorny silk cotton tree. He looked at the tree and was worried that it would be a bit difficult for him to climb the tree with its thorns and the pot hanging in front of him. As he stood at the foot of the tree trying to figure out how to climb the tree, a palm wine tapper who had been watching him from the top of the palm wine tree came down and asked him, 'Mr. tortoise what are you doing?'. He answered 'I have all the wisdom in the world in this pot, I want to hang it on top of this tree where no one can touch it, so I will become the wisest person in the world, but I am still thinking of how to climb the tree because I am afraid the thorns on the tree may destroy the pot'. Then the palm wine tapper replied, 'why not hang the pot behind you then you will be able to climb the tree'. The tortoise did as he said and surprisingly he was able to climb the tree. Then he said, 'I thought I had all the wisdom, but an ordinary palm wine tapper has wisdom that is not in my pot', so he smashed the pot and all the wisdom scattered all over the world and he made the statement popularly used today; thus, 'no one has all the wisdom in the world'.

Lesson: This cliché has been widely used and in most cases teaches people, irrespective of their class and affluence, to learn from even the lowest person. people should not look down on others when it concerns providing positive ideas and solution because no one knows it all.

b. Obaledo

This Igbo folktale tells of a young pretty girl who meets a great misfortune due to her stubbornness and disobedience to her parents. Once upon a time, there lived a couple who had only a child, a daughter, named Obaledo. That period, demons and spirits roamed around villages. The girl was instructed by her parent before going to the farm, to remain in their home and eat just yam and snail when hungry. The parents told her to roast the yam first before the snail, because the snail would quench the fire with its saliva if roasted first and this would make her to go outside and look for fire to roast the yam which will eventually put her at risk of being caught by the demons and spirits. Unfortunately, the girl, having a strong lust for meat, roasted the snail first and the fire went off. Still hungry, she went out of her home, in disobedience to her parents, in search of fire from neighbors. On her way, she encountered the demon and it stole her beauty and left her with his own ugliness.

Lesson: Children should not disobey their parents for every act of disobedience has great consequences. Stubbornness and headiness do not always lead to success rather it destroys. So, children should always be levelheaded, that way, they learn and finally, greed and gluttony will always lead to the wrong way. If not for Obaledo's gluttony and greed for snail, she would have been patient enough to

c. The Disobedient Daughter Who Married A Skull

This tale narrates the story of a maiden who was so pretty she had suitors from around the world. Unfortunately, she was very picky and was never satisfied with any of the suitors. A demon from the spirit world in the form of a skull, fell in love with her and was determined to marry her. He went round villages collecting body parts and became extraordinarily handsome. As expected, the maiden fell in love with him once she set her eyes on him and agreed to marry him. After the marriage, the demon took the maiden to the spirit world (home). On their way, he started giving back the body parts he borrowed to their owners and by the time they got home, he was only a skull. That was when the maiden realized she was heading for doom. She was however very nice and helpful to the demon's mother and in appreciation of her acts of kindness, the demon's mother helped her escape and sent her back to her parents. On getting home, her father asked her to marry a friend of his, and she willingly consented, and lived with him for many years, and had many children.

Lesson: This folktale is told to teach young maidens the dangers of rejecting suitors for this will eventually make the maiden end up with the wrong husband who in turn would waste her youthful years. So, it is very good for a young maiden not to be very picky when it concerns suitors but look well and marry on time.

d. The Tortoise And The Drum Of Ants

Once upon a time, there was famine in the animal kingdom. The animals began to search for food even outside their kingdom. Soon, there was neither grass nor food from god to eat. Some of them who could feed on their fellow animals became very deadly predators. At a point, the animals that are fed on, fled the animal kingdom entirely to the land of the spirits. When the other animals realized that there was no longer any weaker animal to feed on, they decided to journey to the land of the spirits. But before they embarked on the journey, the animals felt it was better to send two animals first, to go and survey the land of the spirits and probably beg for some food. They chose the snail because they felt the spirits would pity him

and the tortoise because he would know how to talk to the spirits to get food from them. The tortoise told the snail to wait for him by the gate of the land of the spirits. When the snail questioned why he should wait outside, the tortoise told him that it is because if they went together, the spirits would feel they are greedy and would not want to give them enough food, but if he went alone, the spirits would understand their modesty and give them food. The snail saw sense in what he said and waited outside. After much persuasion by the tortoise, the spirits gave him two drums; one was beautifully decorated while the other was just an ugly drum. They told him that once he gets to their kingdom, he should choose one of the drums, then gather all the animals and beat the chosen drum. He thanked them and left. When he met the snail, he told him that the spirits told him to keep the beautiful drum for himself and share the other drum with the animals. When they got to their kingdom, he dropped the beautiful drum at his house and proceeded to the village square where other animals had gathered waiting for him. He beat the ugly drum and all kinds of food came out of the drum. The animals ate to their fill and thanked the tortoise for a job well done. Thereafter, he hurriedly left because he taught to himself, since the ugly drum can bring such good food, the beautiful drum will produce even better food. Immediately he got home, he gathered his household and beat the drum even harder than the animals beat the ugly drum, and immediately, all manner of deadly animals jumped out and started attacking them. He kept beating it because he felt he did not beat it well the first time and the more he beat it, the more they are attacked. They all left the drum and ran away from their home.

Lesson: All that glitters is not gold. That something looks beautiful does not mean that it would be beautiful inside, so children should learn not to take something because the thing looks beautiful but they should learn to look deeper before making their choice. Secondly, greed always kills. If the tortoise had taken all the drums to the animal or had thrown away the beautiful drum and chosen only the ugly one for the animals, he would not have been attacked. Children should learn to be satisfied with the little given to them.

e. How the tortoise got its broken shell

Once upon a time, when the animals were able to communicate with god and even have meetings with him in heaven, god invited them to heaven for a feast. The animals gathered and got ready to journey to heaven. The tortoise told the animals it would be wise for each animal to choose a special name for himself for the special occasion. They all agreed and chose a name each for themselves. The tortoise said that his chosen name was 'all of you'. When they got to heaven, god was happy to see them and made them all comfortable. Soon, the feast started and god's servant started serving them food. Once a serve brought food, he would say, 'this food is for all of you'. The tortoise would then tell them that the food was for him because he name was 'all of you'. This continued until the last food was served and he it was still delivered to 'all of you'. The animals ended up not tasting anything at feast and this made them very angry. The tortoise ate and was too heavy to carry himself. The other animals all left in anger to their kingdom. The tortoise taught of how to get down from heaven with no bird or any other animal to help him come down, he realized he was in trouble so he started calling the animals. They answered and asked him why he was calling them. Then he told them to please gather all the grass around and set on the ground for him, so that when he falls from heaven, he would fall on the grass and not harm himself. The animals agreed and instead of gathering grass, they gathered every harmful object around and set on the ground for him. They told him that the ground was set for him to fall. He fell, landed on the dangerous objects and shattered his shell. The animals laughed and left him but

the snail was kind enough to glue his broken shell back. This is why the tortoise has broken shell.

Lesson: Greed is bad. It was the tortoise's greed that put him in trouble. Children should try, at all times, to resist greed because it can lead to death.

f. Why The Hawk Kills The Chicken

Once upon a time, there was a very fine young hen that lived with her parents in the bush. One day a hawk was hovering round, late in the morning, as was his custom, making large circles in the air and scarcely moving his wings. His keen eyes were wide open, observing everything that his eyes could see because there is nothing that moves which can ever escape the eyes of a hawk, no matter how small it may be or how high up in the air the hawk may be circling. This hawk saw the pretty hen picking up some corn near her father's house. He therefore closed his wings slightly, and in a second of time was close to the ground; then spreading his wings out to check his flight, he alighted close to the hen and perched himself on the fence, as a hawk does not like to walk on the ground if he can help it.

He then greeted the young hen with his most enticing whistle, and offered to marry her. She agreed, so the hawk spoke to the parents, and paid the agreed amount of dowry, which consisted mostly of corn, and the next day took the young hen off to his home. Shortly after this a young cock who lived near the hen's former home found out where she was living, and having been in love with her for some months—in fact, ever since his spurs had grown—determined to try and make her return to her own land. He therefore went at dawn, and, having flapped his wings once or twice, crowed in his best voice to the young hen. When she heard the sweet voice of the cock she could not resist his invitation, so she went out to him, and they walked off together to her parent's house, the young cock strutting in front crowing at intervals.

The hawk, who was hovering high up in the sky, quite out of sight of any ordinary eye, saw what had happened, and was very angry. He made up his mind at once that he would obtain justice from the king, and flew off to the king's palace, where he told the whole story, and asked for immediate redress. So the king sent for the parents of the hen, and told them they must repay to the hawk the amount of dowry they had received from him on the marriage of their daughter, according to the native custom; but the hen's parents said that they were so poor that they could not possibly afford to pay. So the king told the hawk that he could kill and eat any of the cock's children whenever and wherever he found them as payment of his dowry, and, if the cock made any complaint, the king would not listen to him.

From that time till now, whenever a hawk sees a chicken he swoops down and carries it off in part-payment of the dowry he paid on the hen.

Lesson: This story teaches children to be contempt with whatever they have. If the hen had been contempt with the life she shared with the hawk, no amount of nice voice from the cock would make her leave her home. However, this is the situation these, days. Young married ladies still give ears to their ex-lovers believing that what he would offer her would be better than what she already has and this has caused many broken homes and even death depending on the level of jealousy involved.

g. Why The Bat Is Ashamed To Be Seen In The Daytime

Once upon a time, There was once an old mother sheep who had seven lambs, and one day the bat, who was about to make a visit to his father-in-law who lived far away, went to the old sheep and asked her to lend him one of her young lambs to carry his load for him. At first the mother sheep refused, but as the young lamb was anxious to travel and see the world begged to be allowed to go, at last she reluctantly agreed. So in the morning, the bat and the lamb set off together, the lamb carrying the bat's drinking-horn. When they travelled half-way, the bat told the lamb to leave the horn underneath a bamboo tree. When they arrived at the house, he sent the lamb back to get the horn. When the lamb had gone the bat's father-in-law brought him food, and the bat ate it all, leaving nothing for the lamb. When the lamb returned, the bat said to him, "my friend! you have arrived at last, but you are too late for food; it is all finished." He then sent the lamb back to the tree with the horn, and when the lamb returned again it was late, and he went to bed hungry. The next day, just before it was time for food, the bat sent the lamb off again for the drinking-horn, the bat's father-in-law gave him breakfast, the greedy bat ate it all up a second time. This mean behaviour on the part of the bat went on for four days, until at last the lamb became quite thin and weak. The bat decided to return home the next day, and it was all the lamb could do to carry his load. When he got home to his mother the lamb complained bitterly of the treatment he had received from the bat, and the pains it brought him. The old mother sheep, who was very fond of her children, determined to take out her revenge on the bat for the cruel way he had starved her lamb; consulted the tortoise, who, although very poor, was considered by all animals to be the wisest of all animals. When the old sheep had told the whole story to the tortoise, he considered for some time, and then told the sheep that she might leave the matter entirely to him, and he would take ample revenge on the bat for his cruel treatment to her son.

After a while, the bat thought he would go and see his father-in-law again, so he went to the mother sheep again and asked her for one of her sons to carry his load as before. The tortoise, who happened to be present, told the bat that he was going in that direction, and would cheerfully carry his load for him. They set out on their journey the following day, and half way into their journey, the bat pursued the same tactics that he had on the previous occasion. He told the tortoise to hide his drinking-horn under the same tree as the lamb had hidden it before; this the tortoise did, but when the bat was not looking he picked up the drinking-horn again and hid it in his bag. When they arrived at the house the tortoise hung the horn up out of sight in the back yard, and then sat down in the house. Just before it was time for food the bat sent the tortoise to get the drinking-horn, and the tortoise went outside into the yard, and waited until he was sure food had been served, he then went into the house and gave the drinking-horn to the bat, who was so surprised and angry. His anger did not allow him eat any of the food served so the tortoise ate all the food. This went on for four days, until at last the bat became as thin as the poor little lamb had been on the previous journey with him. At last the bat could no longer stand the hunger he felt so, he secretly told his mother-in-law to bring him food when the tortoise was not looking. He said to her, "I am now going to sleep for a while, but you can wake me up when the food is ready." The tortoise, who had been listening all the time, hid in a corner out of sight, waited until the bat was fast asleep, and then carried him very gently into the next room and placed him on the bed; he then very softly and quietly took off the bat's cloth and wore, then, lay down where the bat had been; very soon the bat's mother-in-law brought the food and placed it next to where the bat was supposed to be sleeping, and pulled the cloth he used to cover himself to wake him up and then went away. The tortoise then got up and ate all the food; when he had finished he carried the bat back again, and took some of the palm-oil and foo-foo and placed it inside the bat's lips while he was asleep; then the tortoise went to sleep himself. In the morning when he

woke up the bat was more hungry than ever, and in a very bad temper, so he sought out his mother-in-law and started scolding her, and asked her why she had not brought his food as he had told her to do. She replied she had brought his food, and that he had eaten it; but this the bat denied, and accused the tortoise of having eaten the food. The woman then said she would call the people judge the matter; but the tortoise slipped out first and told the people that the best way to find out who had eaten the food was to make both the bat and himself rinse their mouths out with clean water into a basin. This they decided to do, so the tortoise got his tooth-stick which he always used, and having cleaned his teeth properly, washed his mouth out, and returned to the house.

When all the people had arrived the woman told them how the bat had abused her, and as he still maintained strongly that he had had no food for five days. The people said that both he and the tortoise should wash their mouths out with clean water into two clean calabashes. This was done, and at once it could clearly be seen that the bat had been eating, as there were distinct traces of the palm-oil and foo-foo which the tortoise had put inside his lips floating on the water. When the people saw this they decided against the bat, and he was so ashamed that he ran away immediately, and has ever since always hidden himself in the bush during the daytime, so that no one could see him, and only comes out at night to get his food. The next day the tortoise returned to the mother sheep and told her what he had done, and that the bat was for ever disgraced. The mother sheep praised him very much, and told all her friends, and this made the tortoise to be highly respected in the kingdom.

Lesson: This folktale teaches children that selfishness and wickedness are very bad traits especially towards someone who rendered a helping hand. The bad exhibited these traits against an lamb who only rendered a helping hand. In other words, the bad paid good with evil and when he met his match, he paid suffered the consequences. It also teaches children that every evil deed will always have a negative result.

Mbah and Mbah (2007: 192) assert:

A stylistic feature of akuko ifo, which needs close examination is the style of presentation of ifo tales. The first unifying force in ifo is the use of songs with choric refrains to mark the points of intense emotion of the drama of the narrative. Quite often, the songs are prophetic in the sense that they foretell the future. They warn characters about what could befall them. They suggest approaches to the solution of some problems in the future. Songs of this type are usually realized in some prophetic animals especially birds.

This assertion supports the fact that not only do Igbo folktales help in shaping the younger generation, it also serves as a tool for prophesy. For instance, there is a known bird in Igbo land that is known as an agent of bad news. Once it cries, it is believed that somebody must die in the family it cried. This bird does not fly all the time yet when it does, it is not for good. Folktales capture these rare creatures in its effort to teach children that even if nobody sees them when they may be tempted to misbehave, even birds can see and report them.

Nnyigide and Okoye (2016:2) add;

Prior to western education, Africa, particularly in Igbo society, folktales played an indispensable role in traditional education. It was a veritable means through which morals, culture, beliefs, values, worldview and consciousness of the Igbo were handed

down to the younger generation. In the early Igbo traditional community, Igbo folktales were invaluable to the early Igbo people due to the communal attributes of the stories. The tales served as tools for conflict resolution in the communities, and is still thought to weld same capability for enhanced consciousness.

As earlier mentioned, in the ancient days, children did not need university education to learn the right moral values that will help them become responsible adults. Folktales were used to instill the right frame of mind in them and this helped them immensely.

All the folktales used for illustration have something to teach children. One peculiar factor all the folktales have is the fact that all of them appeared like something that can never happen in reality, very unreal and made up. For instance one would wonder how wisdom can be 'gathered' and put in a pot. Though it sounded funny and unrealistic, yet it served the purpose of teaching a child that he or she cannot stop learning, it is continuous process. This is the whole and full essence of folktale, to teach and correct the younger ones. One may ask how can mere telling children fictitious stories help to impart the right virtues in them? The fact remains that children are naturally programmed to take in whatever that they are told at a very tender age and act on them. This explains why their attention is easily drawn during folk telling. One may see them crying, laughing, smiling, holding their cheek in their hands or simply looking on with all seriousness. One may also notice some element of fear in them towards certain activities and times. This is because the folktale they heard had an impact on them, so when they find themselves in the same position as the character in the folktale, they tend to behave so as not to get the same result the character in the folktale got, that is, assuming the result was a negative one. This behavior they carry on till they are mature enough to know that the stories were just made up to teach them lessons. These children turned adults, knowing that the folktales they heard helped them become better people, would pass on the same folktale to their own offspring believing that it would to the same service to their children. This is the beauty of the Igbo folktale and the whole essence of this study.

Conclusion

This paper examined the way Igbo elders hold and use folktales to instill the right behavior in their children. This they do by drawing the children's attention to the lesson in a told folktale, that way, children are expected to act accordingly. They hold it as one of their effective ways of correcting and training a child. From the way the folktale telling starts, 'once upon a time...', To the way it ends, the elders hold the children together with the wisdom packed in the folktales being told. Most times children are seen crying, smiling and laughing, at the end of the story, this shows that the folktale told had effect on them and sometimes they refuse to go out in the night because of fear that the 'spirit' would carry them, as a result of the folktale they heard. However fictitious Igbo folktales are, they are very effective in guiding the younger minds. Even though there may be a decrease in the oral rendition of folktales these days, some folktales are converted into cartoons and children tend to watch and learn from them. This is to show the efficacy of its content. It is suggested that parents should adopt folk telling as another way of guiding their children aright for this will not only help in teaching their children morals but also help to keep the folktales alive in Igbo land. .

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