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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60018/Hemi.CUPZ8891>

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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.60018/Hemi.CUPZ8891>

2449-8645

HEMISPHERES

No. 39, 2024

The Probable Extinction of Storytelling and Moonlight Games: Effects on Culture and Wellness among the Igbo of Nigeria

Abstract

In African culture, storytelling and moonlight games are all vital parts of people's way of life, especially the Igbo people. Storytelling and moonlight games go a long way in upholding ethical communal behaviour and passing down social education at various crucial moments, serving as mediums for transmitting values, history, and communal bonding. However, such practices are increasingly at risk of disappearing with modern technology and urbanisation. This research seeks to explore the probable extinction of the act of storytelling and moonlight games among the Igbo people. Through qualitative research methods, including interviews and participant observations, this paper investigates the current state of these cultural practices and their significance in contemporary Igbo society. The findings reveal a marked decline in the prevalence of storytelling and moonlight games, particularly among younger generations. The paper concludes that for these cultural practices to be preserved there is a need for initiatives and policy interventions to ensure their survival and the continued relevance of storytelling in Igbo society.

Keywords: storytelling, moonlight games, culture, wellness, oral tradition and extinction.

Introduction

In all African societies, orality (oral tradition), which includes storytelling, has been one of the ways traditions and cultural identities have been preserved from one generation to another. Storytelling has been part and parcel of every individual in any given society and can be seen as the fundamental human right of everyone in the community wherein both the griot (teller) and audience (listeners) are communally bonded. The basic feature of nearly all literary works is that they were initially expressed and transmitted orally

before arriving at the state of written literature or written heritage. Orality, such as moonlight stories, prevailed where the spoken conveyance of ideas, beliefs, and values was dominant. Storytelling plays a vital role in preserving cultural identity by transmitting knowledge, values, and traditions from one generation to the next. These traditions are crucial for comprehending the lives of a people, regardless of whether they belong to literate, oral culture models or mixed model societies.

Wherever human beings exist they have a language, and in every instance a language that exists basically as spoken and heard, in the world of sound (Siertsema, 1955). Indeed, language is so overwhelmingly oral that of all the many thousands of languages – possibly tens of thousands – spoken in human history only around 106 have ever been committed to writing to a degree sufficient to have produced literature, and most have never been written (Org, 1982). Yet, not every aspect of a people's history can be recorded. It may also be true that some of the most interesting aspects of oral history may be overlooked by history writers, even in literate societies (Segun, 2014). In such situations, community chroniclers are relied upon. In the case of predominantly oral cultures, oral tradition is an indispensable source of history, an indicator of deep thought, and a transmitter of cultural and religious values (Okwechime, 2004). An oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing; writing is never without orality (Org, 1982).

Despite the oral roots of all verbalisation, the scientific and literary study of language and literature has for centuries, until quite recent years, shied away from orality. Texts have clamored for attention so preemptorily that oral creations have tended to be regarded generally as variants of written productions or, if not, then as beneath serious scholarly attention (Org, 1982). Only relatively recently have we become impatient with our obtuseness here (Finnegan, 1977). Yet, it is through the vast ocean of the oral tradition of an oral culture that one can discover their historical being and their contribution to the metaphysical world (Segun, 2014), as in the case of the Igbo in Nigeria. In that case, one might argue that the term 'literature', though devised primarily for works in writing, has simply been extended to include related phenomena such as traditional oral narrative in cultures untouched by writing (Finnegan, 1977).

The Igbo people, the major focus of this research, are among the subgroups of sub-Saharan African society. It is pertinent to note that this group is one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria. The Igbo people occupy mainly the eastern part of the country and are predominantly found in the five eastern states of Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi and Imo states. There are also large Igbo populations in the Delta and River states. Through migration, the Igbo

people are found in different parts of Nigeria and the world at large. They have interesting traditions and customs, among which is the act of storytelling and captivating moonlight games.

Storytelling, which refers to the practice of sharing stories, folklore, myths, legends, fairy tales, and fables among other things, through spoken word rather than written text, can be seen as the means through which we come to know ourselves and others, and the non-human elements of the universe (Davies, 2011). It is a vital source of orality because it is being communicated through the indigenous languages, which brings deep meaning, standards and morals in the societies and deeply helps in preserving the cultural identity of a given society. The embodiment of storytelling is one aspect of the integration of mind, body, and emotion. The psycho-biological connection is readily apparent. Not only is the body used to transmit words, for example through the mouth and ears but, oral storytelling generally involves a face-to-face encounter, meaning that both teller and hearer can see each other's expressions as emotions and body language change (Abram, 2005). The storyteller transmits the story using mouth, facial expressions and body language and the hearer listens and interprets the teller's verbal and non-verbal cues. The moral instructions embedded in all the stories make young minds smart, intelligent, wise and psychologically mature to better navigate the affairs of life. Storytelling is also a means through which indigenous languages are learned, cultures are preserved and the traditions of the land are transmitted from one generation to another (Ogbu, 2018).

The thrust of this paper is to explore storytelling as an alternate and relational form of pedagogy. The paper sets out to investigate the probable extinction of storytelling and moonlight games, and the effects of this on culture and wellness among the Igbo. It seeks to understand how storytelling can reveal character traits of the young mind in Igboland and connect the impact of storytelling and moonlight games to character development.

What is Storytelling/Oral Tradition?

Storytelling, which is found in orality, or orature – the combination of orality and literature (Finnegan, 1977; 1990) – is a unique action that is ubiquitous and is well-liked, especially among children in many African societies, including Igbo society. When a people's history/identity is (re)constructed through storytelling, oral testimonies, and cultural data provided by individuals or groups, either in the absence of, or to complement, writing it lays the foundation for future reconstructions based on oral transmission. This method is known in historical scholarship as orality. Besides the ancient existence of orality

in literature, writing has an important place in preserving the oral tradition. Orality refers to the transmission of facts, values, and fiction through oral means or storytelling (Finnegan, 2015; Segun, 2014). Storytelling qualifies as a “tradition” not because it is a fleeting, temporary approach to historical knowledge, but because it is a method that persists, endures, and remains stable over time. The term means the transmission of facts, values and fiction through oral means/storytelling. It is therefore one used by the observer – the scholar – to refer to the source of his/her knowledge of a people’s history and culture (Ezeigbo, 2013).

The chronicles of events told by griots (either local historians, storytellers, praise singers, poets, or musicians) – the myths; legends; cosmological ideas; and proverbs of sages, the folktales of storytellers, and the riddles and tongue twisters of verbal artists – constitute a people’s cultural data. When utilised properly, this data provides largely reliable knowledge, founded on a tradition of understanding that has been trusted by generations.

Not all elements of oral tradition originate from the desire to document history. Folktales, proverbs, songs, and chants may primarily serve to entertain and express ideas of ultimate reality and meaning for the people. Nonetheless, these forms can also aid scholars in understanding their history. The most crucial characteristics of oral tradition are its oral nature/ and its role as a medium for cultural continuity (Segun, 2014, p. 32).

In the Igbo cultural settings, storytelling has been the medium through which the people have preserved their cultural continuity, communal lifestyle, beliefs, social values, wise sayings, and cultural experiences (Verbina, 2013). It has provided an avenue for elders in Igbo society to impart essential moral norms and values to the younger generation, who, in turn, pass them on to their children, and the circle continues from one generation to another. Storytelling can be dated as far back as Igbo society has existed. It was a common practice in pre-literate Nigerian societies, serving to educate, preserve oral history, and transmit cultural norms to the indigenous population. Nigerian communities used storytelling as oral discourse, since writing was unknown to most of the populace (Achebe, 1959).

Scholars like Esther Oduolowu and Akintemi, Eileen Oluwakemi (2014) argued that in the traditional African environment, specifically Nigeria, young children are told stories by parents, grandparents, uncles and aunts. Ikechukwu Asika (2020) illustrated how storytelling works in Igbo traditional society, the stories often involving human beings, spirits, and animals in the struggle to survive in a mystifying world. These stories are believed to have taken place

in the past and the vital focus was to instill moral values in the heart of the listeners, fostering enduring good behavior, and promoting a harmonious way of life within the community.

During storytelling sessions, typically held during moonlight evenings, everyone learns from each other's mistakes, misdemeanors, and misconceptions. This communal learning through storytelling is a cherished aspect of Igbo society, contributing to its endurance and vitality. Through storytelling, children practice listening skills, learn how to follow elders' instructions and gain insight into their heritage. For adults, these stories highlight the wisdom, knowledge, and authority of the elders. Folktales are usually shared in the evenings after daily chores are completed. Children gather around the fireside in their father's *obi* or their mother's hut to listen. These tales often include proverbs, short, memorable sayings embedded with lessons.

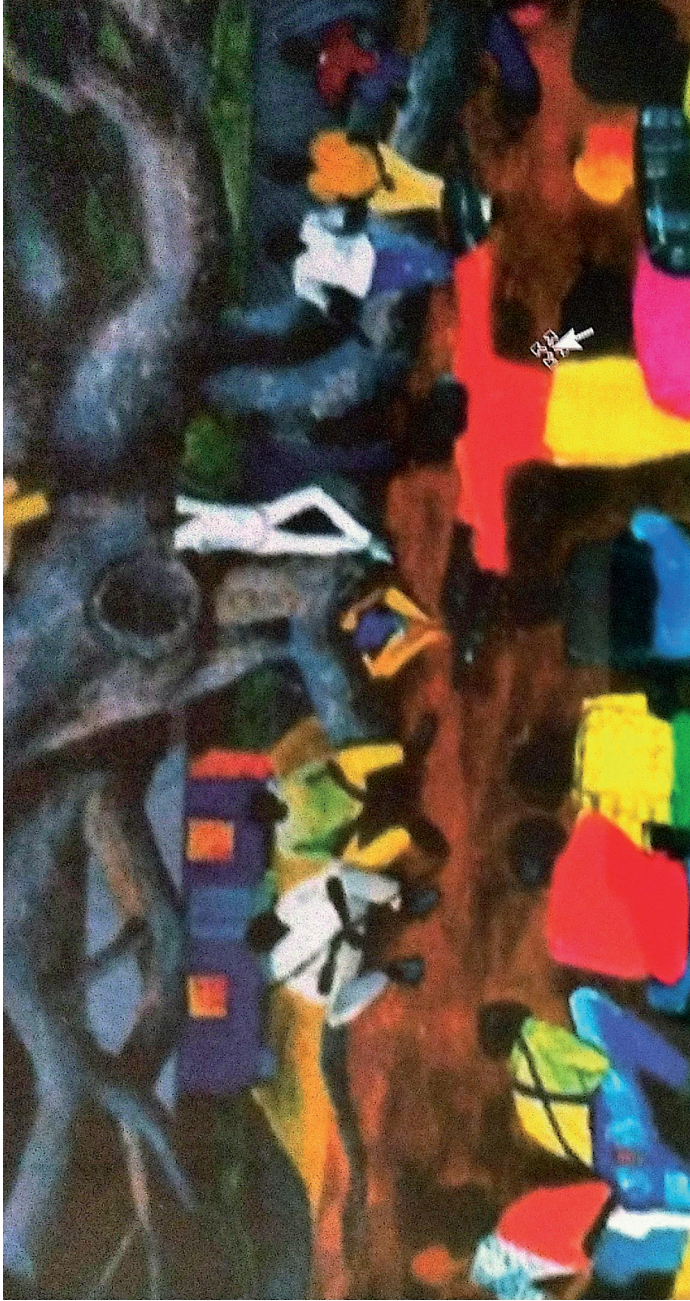
The storytelling of Igbo society, therefore, embraces both oral traditions in terms of reported accounts from the recent or remote past as well as oral history, the testimonies of contemporaries of such events. The Homeric epics, the Biblical accounts, the hadith of the Islamic tradition, the ballads, saga, and epics of many national literary traditions, which once took the form of storytelling, belong to the category of oral tradition written down and transformed from that tradition to the point where it started to give over to written tradition. In this sense, it may be claimed that storytelling in Igboland has been a universal tradition. The oral tradition is universal also in the form of oral history since this form of oral tradition co-exists with the written tradition and complements it in every culture, including Igbo culture (Aharanwa, Ubaku, and Ugwuja, 2014).

Storytelling in Igbo culture embraces forms of information preserved in the lives of people outside the literary system. Data of this type may be subsumed under terms such as folklore or ethnographic record. In the oral societies of Africa, much information of a historical character was embedded in ritual incantations, festivals, dances and masking, drumming and declamatory utterances and various economic, social and political institutions and activities.

The Igbo Culture and its Wellness

According to Adrienne Chan, culture is viewed as a crucial resource for indigenous communities (Chan, 2021). Retaining and strengthening cultural roots and practices is viewed as a means to maintain community coherence and strength. More specifically, Chandler and Lalonde (2008) connect the preservation of traditions, beliefs and language with societal wellbeing, for example the minimalization of alienation or anomie and collective

Fig 1: A sketch Picture of Storytelling



Source: Igbo Culture: Oke Iregbu's Musing, <https://images.app.goo.gl/kHe6EBWg3t4fxwr06>

self-damaging tendencies. In addition, Carlson (2010) posits that maintaining cultural connections and continuity is crucial in preventing self-harm among indigenous youth; other studies such as Sesan (2014), call attention to the vitality of self-reliance, self-control and the use of traditional/indigenous language, in re-discovering everyday customs that may have been lost due to cultural annihilation and genocide. According to some researchers, it is pertinent to re-learn customs and culture and for indigenous communities to make concerted efforts to preserve cultural practices and invest in elders and cultural facilitators to promote knowledge and shared history, which, in turn, develop individual and collective identities (Baladasaro, Maldonado and Baltes, 2014).

The onus of this work is for the Igbo member to know the indigenous language and practice the culture because this is connected to wellness and is the basis of cultural continuity, unity and preservation of cultural identity both at home and abroad. The wellness of an individual is connected to the deep connections they know, exhibit and practice. This can only be possible when an individual knows his/her roots by communicating with the indigenous language and embracing in the totality of cultural heritage. Where an individual is not conversant with his/her language and does not know his roots, how can the individual know what is expected of him/her in his community?

Significance of Storytelling and Moonlight Games in Igbo Culture

The historical significance of storytelling in the Igbo culture can never be over-emphasised as it has always been a vital means of communication, acquiring the indigenous language and cultural preservation. Through oral narratives passed down from one generation to another, the Igbo people have maintained a rich tapestry of myths, legends, histories and moral teachings. As stated by Chinua Achebe:

It is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the story that outlives the sound of war drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story...that saves our progeny (off-spring) from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort; without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No, neither do we, the story; rather it is the story that owns us and directs us (Achebe 1987, p. 12).

The moonlight games, traditional nighttime activities often associated with cultural and social gatherings, involve storytelling, singing, dancing, and sometimes drama performances, which are often performed after a day's work, such as *Egwuonwa* or *Apèèrè Eré Ìdàràyá Òṣùpá*, and provided a space for

social interaction, recreation, and community bonding. These games were not only fun activities but also served as a way to reinforce social norms, foster cooperation, and instill a sense of belonging among participants. Moonlight games, according to Asika (2020), are activities carried in Igbo land at the appearance of the full moon, when the light emanating from the moon is visible enough to bring a good and clear sight in the compound or village square. The moonlight games provided a magical backdrop for these communal gatherings, enhancing the experience and creating lasting memories.

The origin of moonlight dates back to the days of the Igbo forefathers (Ijioma, 2024), part of the tradition of playful interactions. These games typically occur within the family courtyard or compound, especially for the younger children, and occasionally at the village square. The games usually take place during the dry season, to ensure the rain does not interrupt them. Children between the ages of five and seventeen are mainly the participants. The play is a recreational activity which commences especially after dinner and runs into the night (Ijioma, 2024). It is a rich source of entertainment, education, and recreation.

Moonlight games include various activities, such as songs, précis and responses, wrestling, dance, mimes, riddles, puzzles, storytelling, group dynamics, and more. Women engage in a type of dance, (*ikpo oga*), singing and gossip about lovers and affairs. The younger men delight in engaging in stunts, wrestling, acrobatics and other games. Adults also take part in the games, but on a different level. The elderly men sit around the fire to make jokes *njakiri* and reminisce on heroic feats they achieved in various endeavors. Lastly, the mothers engaged the little ones in folklore, where moral values are impacted (Chima, 2024).

This study adapted some of the collection of Asika (2020) on moonlight games in a particular part of the Igbo land. The study did so because these games are similar in all Igbo lands but different in the oral rendition in different indigenous languages. Examining these games rendered in the Igbo language helps to show the significance of the moonlight games and storytelling. It also goes a long way to revitalise the nostalgic socio-cultural and moral values of the Igbo people. Asika (2020) compiled a few of the raw moonlight songs and games collected in Nise, a town in Awka South Local Government Area of Anambra State. One of the collected games is called *Dodo nido, Doni*. In this game, participants are split into two teams. Each team grips one side of a bamboo stem and, as soon as the contest begins, they start singing:

Dodo nido, doni. (2x) – (suggesting let us pull, let us pull)

Ngodo wete ogugu ka anyi nafo do- do ni – Ngodo (bring the bamboo stem so that we contest)

Fig 2: Youths Reaffirm Identity during Moonlight Game



Source: <https://images.app.goo.gl/Tbc3UQHbP674woW8A>

Arah weta ogugu ka anyi nafa do- do ni – (Arah bring the bamboo stem so that we contest)

Umuazu weta ogugu ka anyi nafa do- do ni – (Umuazu bring the bamboo stem so that we contest)

Isiakpu weta ogugu ka anyi nafa do- do ni – (Isiakpu bring the bamboo stem so that we contest).

The next game is titled *Nwa m Nwa m*, and involves two groups with an equal number of team members. In each round, one member from each team is sent out to hop on one leg while the group sings:

Nwa m, Nwa m, nwa m o- kpangene – (My child, my child – group chorus)

Nwa m jelu oku na agbaja- kpangene – (My child that went to answer a call in faraway land)

Okpa luo gi ani gi nodu oo, – kpangene – (If your two legs touch the ground, then stay back) *Okpa elughi gi ani gi nata ba – kpangene* – (you can return if your legs do not touch the ground then return).

The rule about two legs touching the ground means if you are comfortable, do not return; if you are not, return to us. The two contestants continue to dance and challenge each other on one leg. The first to put their second leg down is recruited by the other team. The game continues in this manner until one team runs out of members.

Another game collected by Asika (2020) is called *Asigene*. In this game, children sit in a circle with three major characters: *Amagu*, *Ichele*, and the lead singer, *Asigene*. A pebble serves as the bone of contention. *Ichele* is tasked with keenly observing the pebble's movement within the circle. Whoever fails to pass the pebble correctly is caught and must replace the person in the middle of the circle. The game then restarts. During the game, the leader sings and passes the pebble around:

Asigene kpanga ofe, oho oo, oho – (Asigene passes on the pebble)

Onye na onye ka nchiche nata? – (Who is being plagued by leprosy?)

Ima na nchiche anaro atanu m oo – (I am not plagued by leprosy)

onona ogbo ka nchiche n'ata – (It is the one standing in the middle that is plagued by leprosy).

In the context of the song, whoever is in the middle is assumed to be afflicted with leprosy. This derogatory remark and the associated shame motivate the individual to find a replacement at all costs to escape the humiliation. Once this

occurs, the game restarts with a new individual, now considered the victim of the leprosy menace, occupying the middle.

Another game is called *Ayolo*. Before the game begins, the groups are divided into two equal teams. Each group has a mother figure overseeing and caring for her children (group members). Each group dispatches a member on a mission to lure and snatch a child from the other group to add to their own. The person sent addresses the mother of the opposing group as *Ayolo*. She chants:

Ayolo na abia m be gi – (Ayolo I have come to your house)

Ibakwa be m noo (2 times) – (If you have come to my house, you are welcome)

Isi nke a di ka isi nwa m oo – (This head of this one is like the head of my child)

The team echoes: *oburokwa nwa gi!* – (She is not your child!)

Anyanke a di ka anyanwa m oo – (The eyes of this one are like the eyes of my child)

Oburokwa nwa gi oo! – (She is not your child!)

Imi nke a di ka anyanwa m oo – (This nose is like the nose of my child.)

Oburokwa nwa gi oo! – (She is not your child!).

(She will continue naming other parts of the body until she begins negotiating with the opponents).

Mu welu nke a? – (Should I go with this one?)

Eee ooo na ona echu iyi eee ooo – (No, No, No, she fetches water! No, no, no!)

Mu welu nke a? – (Should I go with this one?)

Eee ooo na ona awa nku eee ooo – (No, No, No, she cuts firewood! No, no, no!)

Mu welu nke a? – (Should I go with this one?)

Eee ooo na ona esi nri eee ooo – (No, No, No, she cooks food! No, no, no!).

After much questioning, when the mother is not vigilant, the visitor seizes one of the children and attempts to flee. If successful, she takes the child to join her group. If unsuccessful, she returns. Then it will be the other group's turn to attempt the same act and gain a member. The game concludes when a mother in one group loses all her children to the mother of the other group.

The last game we shall consider here is *Onye enena Anya n'azu*:

Onye ene na anya na azu – (No one should look behind)

Mmonwu anyi na aga n'ilo – (Our masquerade is passing in the village square)

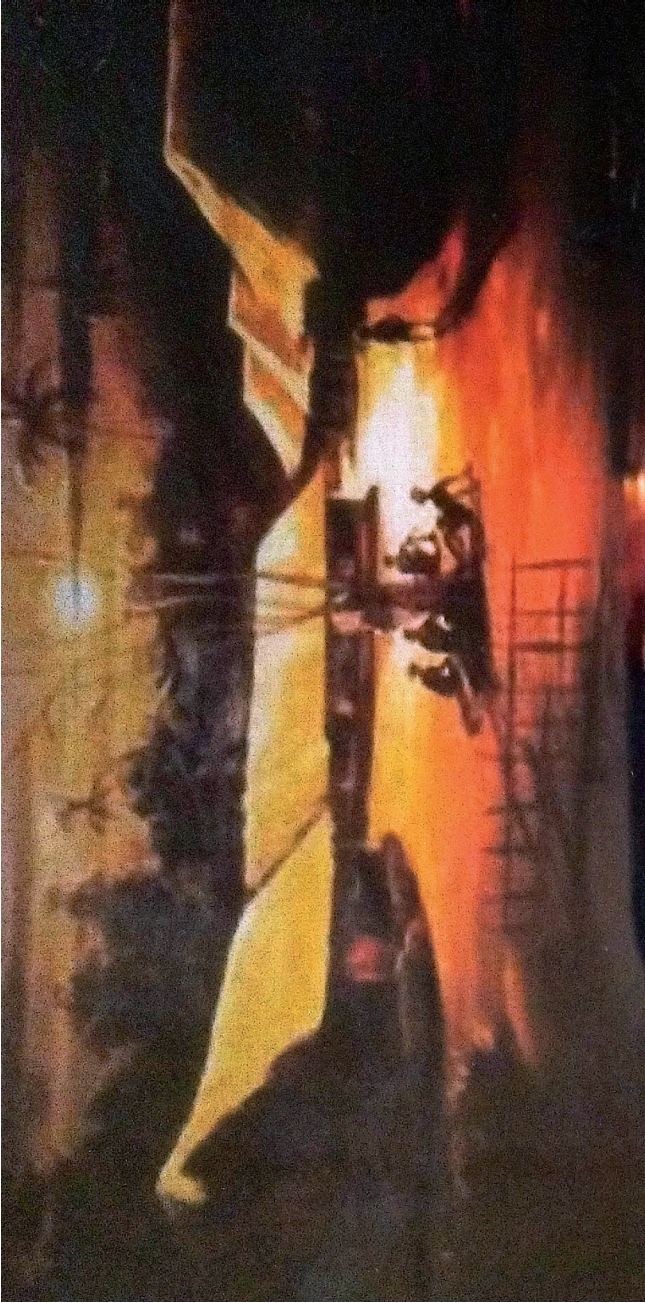
Onye nee anya n'azu – (Anyone who looks back)

Mmonwu anyi ga apia ya utali – (Our masquerade will flog him/her).

This game is very popular among the Igbo people and is typically played by children. The children sit in a circle while one child runs behind them with a stick, shouting intensely and warning everyone not to look back. The rest of the children respond affirmatively, acknowledging the consequences of being flogged if they do look back. At some point, the running child drops the stick behind someone. If the chosen child completes a circuit of the circle and sits down without the other noticing the stick, the inattentive child receives a flogging for their lack of vigilance. However, if the child catches up with the runner, they give the stick back before settling back into their original position, and the game continues. It is therefore pertinent to note that the various games promote obedience and diligence in a child, which in turn enhances the chances of a child abiding by the customs, laws, and ethical values that govern society. The communal closeness, co-existence, unity of purpose and harmony that moonlight brings, make Chinua Achebe recognise this great value of the novel *Things Fall Apart*: “When we gather together in the moonlight village ground, it is not because of the moon. Every man can see it in his compound. We come together because it is good for kinsmen to do so. Therefore, let us continue with the team spirit and enjoy the power of togetherness...” (Achebe, 1987, p. 45).

Storytelling and moonlight games are part of the culture of the Igbo people and culture is a total way of life of the people (Umeasiegbu, 2007). Culture is an essential part of human existence and to preserve it from generation to generation, indigenous languages are vital tools. In recent times, it is sad to mention that the delightful tradition of playing under the moonlight, *Egwuonwa* and storytelling in the indigenous language, is a neglected cultural practice among the Igbo people and that trend is also affecting the acquiring of indigenous dialects. One may say that these stories are preserved but that poses the question, in what language is it preserved? The decline of storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture despite their profound cultural significance is facing a steady decline.

Fig 3: Picture of Moonlight Gathering



Source: African Folktales: Tales by Moonlight, 1995. <http://www.booksbybooks.com/2012/10/throwback-tales-by-moonlight.html>

Statement of the Problem

The issue that prompted this research is the significant decline in the use of the indigenous Igbo language, which our forefathers once taught through storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo society. Additionally, there is a gap and a waning interest in sharing our stories in the indigenous language within modern Igbo homes. This decline may be attributed to technological advancements and sophisticated inventions, facilitated by Western education and acculturation, which have transformed our modern-day societies and eroded our once-cherished ideals and indigenous cultures. Therefore, this begs the question:

1. Is there a probable extinction of storytelling in indigenous languages among the Igbos?
2. How well do young people know about the Igbo culture?
3. Do inter-tribal relationships affect the act of storytelling and moonlight games?
4. Are the Igbo parents living in the diaspora tell stories in their dialects of the Igbo heritage to their kids more than those living in Nigeria?

Objective of Study

The objectives of the study were to work towards: resuscitating the act of storytelling using the Igbo indigenous languages; using technology to revive moonlight games among young minds using indigenous language; and educating young couples on the importance of training their young ones at home with indigenous languages. This research is also aimed at renewing interest in storytelling and moonlight activities in the Igbo language in a modern Igbo home. Just like the trending song “*gwo gwo ngwo*” story of *Nnambe na Enyi* (The Tortoise and the Elephant), *Mmere Mbe n’azu* (Why the Tortoise Has a Cracked Back), and many other enthralling folktales. Moonlight games activities include “hide and seek,” “action songs,” “tongue twisters,” “breath control games,” “riddles,” “puzzles” song display/dance choreographies and some dramatic performances. Even if they are not done under the moon again it should be encouraged among kids in the community, compound and environment. Through fieldwork, the research rediscovered the wealth of Igbo stories and moonlight games, and their educational, social, religious, and cultural impacts. Storytelling and games are imbued with underlying philosophical ideologies that can be harnessed to guide the Igbo people, and Africans at large, toward a more humane and desired destination. This study addresses some evident gaps in previous research on storytelling and moonlight

games and, most importantly, ignites the scholarly need for further refreshing, exciting, and thought-provoking discussions about storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo and African languages.

Research Method

This research adopted the qualitative method that used a historical approach and ethnographic survey. The historical method was based on oral, primary and secondary sources. The samples for the research were oral interviews conducted on a randomly selected twenty-one interviewees gleaned from different parts of the Igbo land in the southern part of Nigeria. Thirteen interviewees are residing in the Western world, one in Benin Republic, while seven interviewees reside in different states in Nigeria. The accounts from the interviewees, seven females and fourteen males, formed the nexus on which the study drew its inferences.

Results of the Interviews

The following questions were asked: is there a probable extinction of storytelling in indigenous languages among the Igbo? How well do married couples know the Igbo culture? Do they tell their kids about their culture or tell them stories in their indigenous language? How often do parents and their kids bond in indigenous games and storytelling? Do inter-tribal relationships affect the art of storytelling and moonlight games? Are the Igbo parents living in the diaspora telling stories in their dialects of the Igbo heritage to their kids more than those living in Nigeria?

Some parents born in the early 1980s to early 1990s attested to the fact that they enjoyed the moonlight games (Eke, 2023) and storytelling (Eze, 2024 and Onukaogu 2024) in a communal environment where unity, love and the speaking the Igbo language thrived. A few admitted not getting involved in storytelling in the Igbo language and moonlight games (Ajies 2024; Nwazue and Nwazue, 2024; Osagie and Osagie, 2024; Nwosu 2024) because they had elite parents who lived in the western part of Nigeria and they had to speak only the English language as their first language and the language of the environment. Some others admitted that they were conversant with the popular folktale television programme (*Tales by Moonlight*) that was aired on Nigeria Television Authority (NTA), but that they heard these enthralling stories in the English language and not the indigenous Igbo language (Kalu, 2024; Ugwuanyi 2024; Jaja, 2024; Ekuma, 2024).

Some adults born in the early 1990s said that they were not taught their indigenous Igbo language nor told stories in the language because their parents had white-collar jobs and had little or no time for the teaching and learning of the Igbo language through storytelling and games (Ipiankama, 2024 and Azubuike, 2024). Most of them lived in cities and never visited their hometowns, thereby not knowing the culture. Some of the interviewees who visited the village were not allowed to mingle for fear of evil people (Azubuike, 2024 and Chimaije, 2024). This unconscious act of relegating the Igbo language to the background in the late 1990s until the 2000s is being handed down to the generation known as Gen X. What these adults learned from their parents they are transferring to their children.

Furthermore, inter-tribal marriages have also impacted the learning of the Igbo indigenous language through storytelling and moonlight games. The Igbo men whose wives are not Igbos tend to speak just the English language at home. Some of them who did not even know that their language allowed their women folk to teach the children their (wives') dialects, thereby making the children more tilted to their mothers' culture (Jaja, 2024).

Surprisingly, it was observed that some of the interviewed Igbo parents living in the Western world like the United Kingdom, United States of America, Australia, Canada, among others, taught and ensured that their children speak the Igbo language more than the Nigerian parents that were interviewed. The diaspora parents told their children stories and made time out of their busy schedules to teach them the moonlight games, although it was not done at night. The reason is that they seem not to want their children to lose touch with home although they are not home. But this cannot be said to be the same for most Igbo parents in Nigeria, who prefer to westernise their children in Nigeria by banning them from speaking the Igbo language, let alone engaging the children in moonlight stories or moonlight games. As a result of this, the Igbo language is now threatened and may go into extinction in Nigeria.

Factors Contributing to the Lacking of Storytelling and Moonlight Games

There is a serious decline in storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture despite their profound cultural significance. These factors mean the teaching and learning of the indigenous Igbo language faces a steady decline: firstly, the changing lifestyles in our modern society. Parents, teenagers, adolescents, and little children are increasingly preoccupied with work, school, and digital entertainment, leaving little time for the leisurely pursuits of storytelling and moonlight games. Urbanization, technology and globalisation have disrupted

the traditional rhythm of life that brought so much glamour and humour to the heart and mind (Chike, 2024).

Still battling with the changing lifestyle, the next profound factor is generational shift. As younger generations grow up in an increasingly digital world, their exposure to traditional cultural practices diminishes. The oral tradition of storytelling competes with flashy media forms, while moonlight games are often seen as outdated or uninteresting compared to video games and social media (Chima, 2024). Furthermore, there is the displacement of true elders and custodians of the Igbo oral traditions and cultural practices. Unfortunately, most elders who are revered as great storytellers or game organisers are losing their memories or some are passing away. With their deteriorated state or their departure, there is a risk that valuable knowledge and skills linked to moonlight games or storytelling will be lost.

Lastly, there is a lack of institutional support. It has been observed that schools, community centres and cultural institutions often prioritise academic subjects over cultural education (Ijoma 2024). As a result, opportunities for young people to learn and engage in storytelling and moonlight games are limited, leading to a serious disconnection between the younger and older generations.

The Effect of Lack of Storytelling and Moonlight Games on Culture and Wellness

One can deduce that the probable extinction of storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture has a profound effect on the people and their culture as it undermines the learning of the language in the community. Some of the effects are:

1. **Misplacement of Cultural Identity:** Storytelling and moonlight games are pillars of Igbo cultural identity, which embodies the beliefs, moral values and historical truths of the society. If these practices are not continued, future generations may likely struggle to connect with their cultural traditions and heritage.
2. **Oral Tradition Decline:** The act and art of storytelling is a fundamental aspect of the Igbo culture. Through a good storyteller, wisdom, sound knowledge, moral ethics and values are transmitted from one generation to the other. If the art of storytelling continues to fade away, a vital link to the past will be lost, there will be no memory to preserve in the present, leading to the loss of collective memories that will be severed for the future. This will have an impact on how the community understands its history and place in the world.

3. Erosion of Social Cohesion: Storytelling and moonlight games have long served as social glue, bringing people together, fostering empathy and understanding, and strengthening community bonds. Their decline could lead to a loss of shared experiences and a weakening of social ties within the Igbo communities. (Sanchez and Stewart 2006)

Recommendations

Efforts to preserve and revitalise storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture are essential to safeguarding the community's cultural heritage and promoting cultural continuity. Some strategies to consider include:

There should be an organisation of cultural events in the cities that brings together young people and elders to share stories, play traditional games and exchange wisdom and knowledgeable facts. This kind of intergenerational exchange will go a long way to help bridge the gap between generations and ensure the transmission of cultural practices. Also, there should be organised cultural festivals that can reignite interest in traditional practices and participation.

The Ministry of Education should integrate moonlight games and storytelling into the educational curricula and community centres. By so doing the children will learn about their cultural heritage and identity in a structured and meaningful method.

It is useful that the Igbo people digitalise their stories in the indigenous language and not in English. Embracing digital technologies to document and archive traditional stories, games and cultural practices is of paramount importance. Even creating games apps using the Igbo language to preserve the kind of games played under the moon will go a long way to ignite the interest of the younger generation towards participating in the richness of the Igbo culture. Creating digital repositories can ensure that these valuable cultural assets are preserved for future generations and made accessible to a wider audience.

Conclusion

In recent times, it is apparent that Igbo society has shifted from the golden era of storytelling, known as *Egwuonwa* to the challenging age of technology. While Igbo and African cultures are dynamic and ever-evolving, certain elements, such as storytelling and moonlight games, remain fundamental to the socio-cultural identity and essence of the Igbo people. As has been stated during the course of this research, storytelling is a powerful tool for preserving and promoting cultural identity because it connects the past with the present,

educates and inspires, and ensures that the rich tapestry of cultural heritage continues to thrive across generations. Therefore, losing these cultures and traditions could signify the gradual loss of identity of the society.

The probable extinction of storytelling and moonlight games in Igbo culture represents a significant loss that could have far-reaching consequences for the community. These cultural practices are not just forms of entertainment but essential components of Igbo heritage, identity, and social bonding. By recognising the important values of storytelling and moonlight games and implementing strategies to preserve them, the Igbo community can ensure that these cherished cultural practices continue to enrich the lives of the present and future generations.

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