Folktales for Development (F4D): A case study and exploration of Malawi Tonga folktales

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Abstract

This paper argues that despite the recent rise in the use of radio, television, and social media in advancing sustainable social development in Malawi, folk media, such as riddles, fables, folktales, and dance, can be harnessed to enhance radio, TV and social media production to promote development, communicate hard-to-deliver messages, and catalyze social and political change. Through a structural and characterization analysis of published and orally performed Malawi Tonga folktales, the paper notes that Malawi Tonga folktales have a unique narrative structure, and subtle characterization that can be adopted and adapted for effective social moralization without naming and shaming anyone.

Keywords: Folk media, Folktale, Dramatic intensity, Development, Narrative sequence, Nthanu, Oramedia

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, folktales, riddles, proverbs, parables, dances, songs, and music characterised pre-modernist society when they acted as mediums of instruction and education; as curators and archivists of tribal peoples' histories; as subtle, euphemistic and witty ways of criticising and accepting human fallibility, of praising success and warning against bad human practices and behaviour; and as forms of entertainment. As Kudadjie (2001), Lugira (2007) and Jepessen (2012) have severally noted, in Africa folk media, mostly folktales and proverbs, were and are still used to explain the origins of some recurring events and evolution of the human race, to educate and socialise children in communalism or *umunthu*, to entertain families in the evenings, and to pass on tribal history from one generation to the next.

Lugira (2007, p.33) sums up the role of folk media thus:

> *Stories and fables usually illustrate some truth about human nature and end with a stated or unstated moral. Such stories are partly for entertainment, but they are more than just amusing tales (emphasis added). They are the African way of teaching and passing down ethics, or right behaviour, to the next generation.*

Unlike the modern media, folktales as mediums of communicating tribal or social reality and morality, are as democratic, interactive and unrestrictive, in terms of usage, as modern social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter since anybody can tell a tale without fear of being accused of copyright infringement.

Some organisations in Malawi have taken advantage of the presence of the folk media to communicate otherwise difficult-to-understand issues. Malawian primary school teachers use song, dances and recitation to inculcate mathematical concepts. During under-five clinics or *Sikelo,* nurses in Malawi integrate display media, such as posters and cartoons, music, song and dance to deliver nutrition and health messages. Integrating media platforms has been extolled by scholars, such as Moemeka (1991), Tarawalie (2008) and Manda (2012), as one effective way of using communication to deliver development messages to poor societies. Other scholars, also acknowledging the value of folk media in communicating social change, have even posited that African folk media can stand alone and satisfactorily facilitate social and developmental issues (see Wilson, 2008).

In Malawi, Mphande (1996; 2006; 2015) has been in the forefront of promoting the use and integration of folk media, particularly proverbs in the preaching the Gospel of Christ and enculturation of Malawian youth. Elsewhere, Wheeler (2014) recommends storytelling as a means of personal, social and political transformation while Parkin (2004) has argued and demonstrated through a compilation and a thematic analysis of folk stories that storytelling can help individuals or societies become creative, deal with stressful situations and change, develop emotional intelligence and subtly teach leadership skills. She advises, "storytelling, though ancient, is by no means a dead art and those who think of it as just the province of children are missing a huge resource" (Parkin, 2004, p.1). Concurring with Parkin (2004), Jepessen (2012, p.7) adds that "in terms of social function, [folktales] are traditionally told in the relatively private context of the household where it is perceived widely among Malawians as a vehicle for bringing up children and

delivering life-guiding principles in an engaging and entertaining manner. [Folktales] are thus not merely to be perceived as children's stories".

This is particularly important if it is remembered that any society's history is made up of individual experiences and it is the constellation of these experiences that translates into social wisdom and community survival philosophy. People have success stories to tell, which others may wish to emulate, and not-so-fond memories and mishaps about which to warn others through personal and social narratives and histories. The colonial education system in Malawi and Zimbabwe acknowledged the role of folk media in the education and socialisation of African children. Mphande (1996, p.10) quotes Young (1931) as noting in the 1930s that several folk narratives "were heard in a village school at different dates, being told by an old African teacher during the weekly period set apart for moral lessons". Those who attended formal education in the colonial period recall and testify that in addition to reading, writing, arithmetic (3Rs), the colonial primary school curriculum included folktales in the local languages to teach reading, writing and even health education and social studies (Chirwa, 2014). The use of local languages as media of instruction in Malawi's primary school education was curtailed when the 1968 Language Policy, which favoured the language and culture of the Chewa (Chilora, 2000)[1], was implemented but currently debate is raging on the need to revert to the precolonial education policy on languages of instruction in the early years of schooling. However, research shows that this policy has had a politically positive effect because at least Malawians now have a *lingua franca*, but educationally, the effect on learner performance, especially in the first four years of public education has been dismal (Chilora, 2000; Ando-Kumi, 2000). Due to observed underperformance of English medium instructed secondary school students in that country, the government of Tanzania recently declared Kiswahili as the medium of instruction in primary, secondary and university education (Lugongo, 2015).

Some African creative artists have used folk media to inform the structure and enhanced the linguistic beauty of their writing. For instance, the strength of Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* lies in the fact that it breaks away from the traditional English novel, uses traditional Igbo proverbs while borrowing from the English novel such techniques as the stream of consciousness and flashback to communicate a story of European colonisation of Africa, early heroic resistance, betrayal, and the passing of an entire way of African life. Ngugi's *Petals of Blood* completely departs from his earlier novels such as *A Grain of Wheat*, where he was preoccupied with developing round characters and display of style. While *Petals of Blood* uses flashbacks here and there, the story is chronologically told with the author intruding now and again, like do folktale tellers/singers, to ensure the story is understood because in folk media performance the message overrides style.

Nyaungwa (2008) has observed that folktales have influenced the plot, characterisation, and endings of Shona language novels in Zimbabwe while Larson (1978) makes similar comments about West African fiction. This could be the result of the mental and ideological homecoming of African writers who embrace narrative styles that are easier understood by their people. The central argument of this paper is that the folktale provides a good model of writing effective and impactful stories (fictional and journalistic) for entertainment, education and information.

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[1] Readers like *Nthanu za Chitonga* and *Chiswamsangu* were replaced by books like *Kukula ndi Mwambo* and *Maliro ndi Miyambo ya Achewa* whose aim was the symbolic annihilation of non-chewa cultures rather than the teaching of Chichewa as national language.

1.1. Common characteristics of a folktale

Collins (1992, p. 260) describes a tale as a "short narrative in prose or in verse. It may be the product of a communal oral culture, rather than a short literary story written by an individual. If it is written by an individual, it will probably reflect a folk tradition".

Thus, a folktale may be understood as a fictional story, a fable, a legend, or myth that has been passed on and refined from generation to generation. Unlike novels and short stories, the folktale is dynamic as it evolves with changes in society. Anonymous authorship is a common characteristic of a folktale (Finnegan, 2012; Haring, 2013). That is why folktale compilers, like Filemon Chirwa (2007; Mphande 2015), acknowledge that they simply compiled rather than authored the tales.

Madigan (n.d.) writes that folktales are fictitious oral traditions of adults or ancestors, which were passed down through generations to explain the patterns and wonders of the world. She further classifies folktales into a) trickster tales, b) fables, c) pourquoi (why) and 4) fairytales. This typology needs modification because a folktale can be all these in one. For example, most Malawian folktales feature the hare as the trickster, but the tales qualify as fables if the latter are understood to be stories that feature animals with human characteristics (such as speech) and deliver a moral lesson or explain certain regular phenomena. Madigan (n.d) goes on to describe a fairytale as a story that features good and bad characters, involves magic, usually begins with "once upon a time' and one in which conflicts are solved through kindness. However, even this description is wanting since 'once upon a time' is a generic locator of imprecise time in the past rather than a characteristic of a folktale and not all fairly tales involve magic.

While Collins (1992) and Madigan (n.d.)'s definition and descriptions could be right about folktales in some cultures, the African, and *ipso facto* Malawian, folktale is a complex entity. As Finnegan (2012), Haring (2007), Chimombo (1988), Banda (2006) and Jepessen (2012) have correctly noted, the African folktale is mostly a performance that involves change in voice (tone), dramatisation, song and even instrumentation. As Banda (2006) has demonstrated, the folktale is performed by a leader and his or her audience (known herein referred to as co-performers). Thus, folktale performance can hardly be ascribed to one person. African and Malawian folktales can be told (*kukamba nthanu*) or sung (*kumba nthanu*) depending on the occasion (Nkhoma, 2014). The other element of *nthanu* is that their performance encourages or allows for interactivity or audience participation, where all the participants as authors or co-performers. When the *nthanu* leader (*wakusala*) changes the sequence and contents of the *nthanu*, seasoned members of the *nthanu* performance sometimes protest "*nthanu yo njaboza*" (that is a fake/false tale) as if the other tales are true. The *wakusala nthanu* often admits that he or she added content, but the structure and moral are the same.

2. Research design

This study adopted a qualitative case study design to describe the narrative technique, structure, and characterisation of the Tonga folktale and to explore how these work to subtly deliver transformative lessons. This qualitative approach was adopted because it was best suited to the study since it fell within the domain

of studies whose goal is to explore and explain a phenomenon by gathering emic information that provides in-depth understanding rather to make etic or universalisable conclusions (Kvale, 1996; Yin, 2005; Baxter and Jack, 2008). Basey (1981, p.85) is more emphatic about the goals of qualitative case studies when he writes:

> *An important criterion for judging the merit of a [qualitative] case study is the extent to which the details are sufficient and appropriate for [a different professional] in a similar situation to relate his decision-making to that described in the case study. The relatability of a case study is more important than its generalisability.*

Thus, the information and the model of the folktale structure presented in this paper relate to Tonga folktales and may only be hesitantly generalisable to folktales from other cultures and areas. The analysis was based on Chirwa's (2007) thirty-three folktales, one of which, *Mbunu yaku Pundu* (Hyena's Greed), was performed at Msambandopa, Chinthechi, in Malawi by women and children in 1997. The tale was audiotape recorded and later analysed to locate moments of tone change, emotional and dramatic intensity and to describe characterisation and narrative technique or scene sequencing.

3. Discussion

3.1. Background to the Malawi Tonga folktale

Although people who culturally and linguistically qualify as Malawi Tonga are mostly found in Nkhata Bay, Nkhota Kota and Mangochi (Monkey Bay), their total population is not known as they are scattered all over the world. There are probably more Malawi Tonga people outside the named areas and in the diaspora than it is often acknowledged. Due to the discriminatory politics associated with the Malawi Congress Party (1964-1994) regime, many people changed their names and stopped speaking Chitonga so as to be accepted in those communities and workplaces, and get selected to secondary school and university, become chiefs, marry and settle. Some Tonga people migrated to other areas and dissolved themselves into cultural groups they found. For instance, Mkandawire (2003, p.38) notes that "Ngwata, a leader of the Manda clan, came by way of Luvuwu to Nkuwazi (sic) after Kanyenda and Kabunduli had settled, and left some of his relatives at Mkuwazi while he himself went further south to Mlanje (sic) and settled there". Recently, Harry Ngalu of Chikwawa, Malawi, revealed that he is a Tonga chief whose ancestors left Nkhata Bay and settled in Chikwawa following the 19th century Ngoni wars with the Tonga (Kabango, 2014)[2].

It is likely that the folktales told by the Malawi Tonga of current Tongaland may not be the same in content and structure as those told by the diasporan Tonga. Indeed, analysis of the case study Malawi Tonga *nthanu* performance shows that while the Tonga folktale shares a number of characteristics with, say, the Chewa and Tumbuka folktale, it has some unique features. The basic structure of the Chewa, Tumbuka and

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[2] For details about the Tonga migration and settlement in Malawi (see Mphande, 2006 and the Tonga in Tongaland, available at www.wawamalawi.com/cultures/tonga.php)(accessed 12 July 2014.

Tonga and other African folktales is predictable: *Intro*, *Body*, and *Ending* (and occasionally a lesson for the audience). All are told (not performed) by an intrusive omniscient narrator. However, the Tonga *nthanu* performance begins with a special disclaimer that is not available in other societies' and cultures' folktales. Even accomplished and meticulous folktale compilers and transcribers such as Banda (2006) and Mphande (2015) have not reported finding a similar disclaimer in Tumbuka and Chewa folktales. This is discussed in more detail in the proceeding section.

3.2. Structure and narrative technique

The structure or morphology of the Tonga folktale is generally chronological. As noted above, it starts with a tag or an announcement or a disclaimer, which is followed by an Intro, a Climax/Crescendo, and gradual drop in intensity or flattening out (denouement) into the conclusion and its application, often a moral to the wayward.

Although Chirwa's (2007) *nthanu* anthology does not include the disclaimer or tag, the disclaimer is as much part of the story as are other parts. Using *Mbunu yaku Pundu* performance as a case performance, the following structure was observed:

Wakusala/Leader: *Nthanu*, *nthanu* mukuti (Here is a tale)

Audience:	*Mukuti asala nyanda*	(From bark of brastegia tree nyanda wrap around is made)
Leader:	*Boza buli*	(Here comes a lie/fiction)
All:	*Nthanu* buli	(Here comes a folktale).

During the *nthanu* performance, this tag, disclaimer, preamble or announcement sets the tone of the story telling/performance event as entertainment-education. It draws the attention of the co-performers and warns the audience or co-performers that the forthcoming tale is mere fiction. It is important to note that this preamble differs from more serious preambles, such as those accompanying a funeral message (*odi, muodelu wangu – excuse me, my aim for asking you to listen*…). Note also the playful response from the audience (*Mukuti asala nyanda*). Thereafter, the leader announces that what he or she is going to narrate is not true (*boza buli*) and the audiences accepts that where there is a tale performance there is fiction[3] (*nthanu buli*).

After this tag or preamble, the *nthanu* locates the event in the remote past using the tag *Kali mwaka* or just *mwaka)* - Once upon a time). This, too, acts as a form of preparation for the audience to just listen without questioning the contents, plot and ending. However, if the folktale performance leader seems to digress too much from the known plot or folktale structure, or does not introduce the songs known to accompany the specific *nthanu* rendition, the audience or co-performers protest, '*nthanu yo njabozo'* (that tale is fake). During the *Mbunu yaku Pundu* performance at Msambandopa in 1997, some members interjected when the performance leader jumped the song Hyena sung. The songs are located in specific areas of the structure of the *nthanu* and the co-performers expect to hear or sing them.

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[3] Boza= lie, but in this context it means fiction.

An analysis of the case study tale, *Mbunu yaku Pundu* (Hyena's Greed), reveals the following schematic narrative structure:
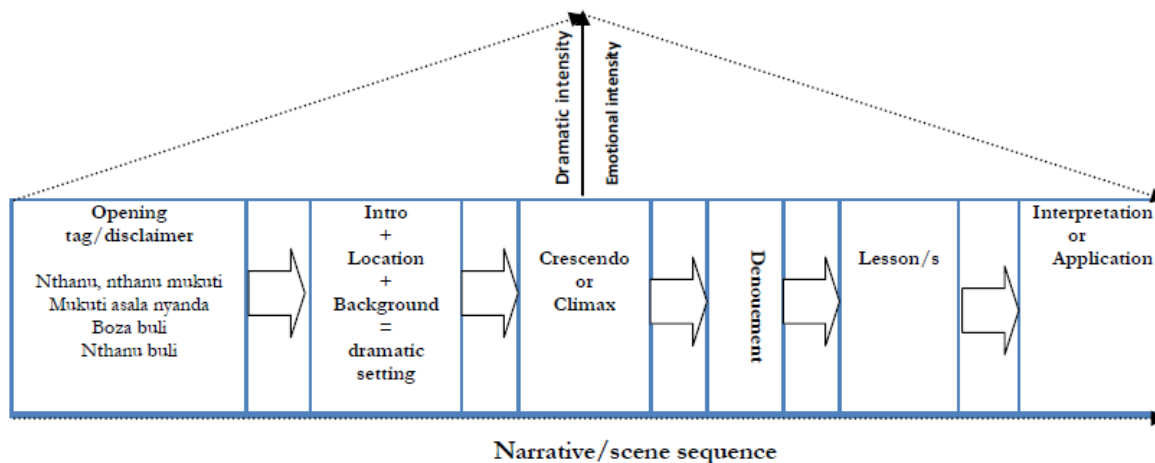

Figure 1. Structure of the Tonga folktale (Manda, 2015)

Tag/Disclaimer:	*Nthanu, nthanu* mukuti	(Here is a tale)
	Mukuti asala nyanda	(From bark of brastegia tree nyanda wrap- around is made)
	Boza buli	(Here comes a lie/fiction)
	Nthanu buli	(Here comes a folktale).

Intro-background: Once upon a time-Elephant cultivated *mawe* (finger millet) and hired Hare as a guard. One evening hare cooked *sima* and ate but still felt hungry. So he went into the millet field and picked out some ears of millet at random. Elephant was furious that his millet was being stolen while the guard was there. Hare denied knowledge of who was depleting the millet. Elephant hatched a plan to catch the thief. He pretended to go back home but instead hid in the millet field.

Crescendo/Climax: Elephant captured Hare stealing millet and resolved to burn him alive. Hare admitted his guilt but suggested his own way of being burnt alive. Elephant accepted to roll him in a bundle of dry grass and leave him at a road junction (*nthowa ndekanu*) so that his death by torching the following morning should serve as a warning to all. Elephant agreed.

Song: At road the junction Hare sung (while still in the grass bundle): *Chakuvundavunda (something rotten) x n⁴.*

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[4] In some oral performances the full song goes:
Chakuvundavunda x 3 (Rotten meal x 3)
Ndichu atanja abwana a pundu (That's what Mr Hyena likes)
Mphamufwilu wawu!   (It is his best meal!)

Denouement: Hyena heard the song and rushed to the road junction where he asked Hare what the matter was. Hare replied he had been rolled in the grass because Elephant promised to give him rotten meat but he was very worried because he did eat rotten meat. Hyena was surprised because rotten meat was his best meal and offered to untie Hare from the grass bundle and take his place. But Hare pretended not to want to be released now that Hyena had spoken positively about rotten meat. Hyena pleaded that he be given an opportunity, which Hare (pretending to do so reluctantly) accepted, and tied Hyena in the grass bundle. He advised hyena to keep signing: *Chakuvundavunda (something rotten) x n.* until Elephant came. Hyena agreed and sang.

Ending: At dawn Elephant came to the road junction armed with fire to burn Hare. However, Elephant was surprised to hear a thick voice coming from the bundle. He asked if that was Hare's voice. Hyena said it was him, *Pundu/hyena*, waiting to eat the rotten meat Elephant had promised to give to Hare. Elephant told Hyena he would burn him since he let Hare run away due to his greed. And indeed Elephant lit the grass bundle, burning hyena to death.

Lesson: Hyena died because of greed.

Interpretation/Application: Greed is bad. Young people should refrain from it because greed can lead them into problems.

It is clear from the above schema that *nthanu* are short and are structured linearly or chronologically and events flow from low emotion through the climax down to conclusions and interpretation. The reason is simple. This is an oral/aural communication medium and complex plotting would denude the folktale of its didactic objective. There are no fancy techniques like irony and flashbacks (although during performance sometimes scenes are retold to ensure everybody around understands the sequence of events). Occasionally, streams of consciousness, when characters talk to themselves to reveal their inner thoughts, are used. It is worth noting that the Tonga folktale is structured in such a way as to reach a point of crescendo in two senses: dramatic and emotional intensity. Note in Figure 1 how the tale's structure matches with emotional and dramatic intensity.

The ending is purposefully didactic because the tale aims at inculcating lessons and socialisation. Actually, apart from experiential learning, folktale telling was probably the only means of bringing up the male Tonga youth as there were, and still are, no organised rites of passage for boys in Tongaland. Girls, of course, used to spend some days in *nkholi* or later *nthanganeni* (Pachai, 1973) at their first experience of puberty (*kukuwa umwali*), where they were taught by elderly women on how to handle and conduct themselves during menstruation, how to behave before male adults, and against having sex to avoid premarital pregnancies.

3.3. Characterisation

Once the disclaimer is announced, the characters are introduced. Unlike in short stories, epics and novels, in *nthanu* characters are not described in detail essentially because it is assumed that everybody around has an idea what *Kalulu* (hare), *Njovu* (elephant), *Nkhalamu* (lion), and *Pundu* (hyena) are.

Most Malawi Tonga folktales feature wild animals, which is surprising for a community that lives by fishing because one would have expected fish, turtles, hippos, crocodiles, fish eagles, and storks to feature highly as main characters[5]. Alternatively, this could be a confirmation of the migration thesis that holds that the Malawi Tonga migrated from different places where hunting was more commonplace than fishing. Some folktales feature only animal characters. Examples of tales which feature animal characters only include *Mbawa ndi Nyalubwi* (Bushbuck and Leopard). Others, such as *Msibweni ndi Mkosanu* (Father in Law and Son in Law) feature human characters only. Sometimes animal and human characters feature in one story such as in *Wajinangiye Wenecho (*Give them a chance to destroy themselves).

The characters are mostly male and where female characters (human and animal alike) are featured, female characters are often portrayed as docile, unquestioning and unreasoning partners. For instance in *Tambala ndi Zumbwe*, Zumbwe asks his wife to cut his head off and boil it. Mrs Zumbwe indeed does kill her husband. A deeper interpretation of this folktale reveals something beyond marginalisation and symbolic annihilation of women in the Malawi Tonga society. It could mean that women are merciless, even to their husbands, and are, therefore, not trustworthy[6]. As such, it would not be wrong to conclude that folktale characters may appear flat as Russel (2009) claims but they may not always be simple and straightforward. To understand them one needs to immerse oneself into the folktale's source culture because this provides the necessary ideological background and socio-political context.

3.4. Content

In terms of content, the Tonga folktale does not differ much from those from other parts of Malawi. As Schoffeleers and Roscoe (1985) and Mphande (1996; 2006; 2015) have noted, the contents of the Malawian folktales mostly relate to human society and centre around, *inter alia*, hunger, disasters, chieftaincies, greed, jealousy, foolishness, inheritance and succession, witchcraft and the importance of *umunthu* or one's identification with and submission to collective social thinking that defines most *Bantu* societies. These themes are also common folder for Nollywood films, which are quite popular amongst African rural audiences (Uwah, 2008).

However, while most folktales are very simplistic and therefore facile to understand, interpret and apply, others are complex and controversial. For example, *Mbawa ndi Nyalubwi* (Bushbuck and Leopard) features animals, but it tackles a very sticky issue about inheritance. To whom do Tonga children belong? The tale suggests that children belong to the mother because a man cannot give birth. It is also possible, based on this tale, that originally Tonga society was matrilineal or since the Tonga have more than one origin, this folktale could be about that section of Tonga society that was or still is matrineal. It is not clear how one would interpret this tale in relation to inheritance of property although Pachai (1973, p.17) cautiously claims that "in cases of inheritance or succession the mother's title" is generally adopted. However, for a long time the Tonga believed that *Mwana ndi mwanangwa* (a child is free to choose where to live and to treat both parents

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[5] Only one folktale, on how Mwela winds or storms on Lake Malawi start, mentions a fish with a human head which lives *pakati panyanja* (the lake deep). When this human fish gets angry, the lake produces heavy waves (Mwela).

[6] One Tonga proverb says *fwiti inthikazi kuti igowoka bweka cha* (a witch does not easily forgive).

equally) and therefore eligible to inherit his or her mother's and father's possessions and titles. To date, both lineage patterns exist amongst Malawi Tonga people.

Other tales teach, *inter alia*, respect for those who help others (*Wajinangiyi Wenechu*), not to claim what one is not your (*Charu Nchaku Yani?),* to listen carefully (*Kuvwa Mphuvya*), or explain why certain phenomena occur (*Tambala ndi Zumbwe*). Although Mphande (2015) claims that "in Tonga oral literature the names Mulungu (god) and Chiuta (god) are regularly used" (p.76), gods or shrines are virtually absent in the published and orally performed *nthanu* examined for this study. However, this absence does not necessarily mean that the Tonga of time immemorial did not believe in their gods. Apropos, earth cultures, [http://www.earth-cultures.com/cultures/people-of-malawi] writes,

> *"before Christianity, the traditional religion of [the Tonga] was a religion of the dead, centred on the worship of ancestral spirits. They believed in diviners and spirit- possession, and they sought out those who communicated with the dead. The Tonga of Lake Malawi say that by taking certain medicines, a person can ensure his changing after death into whichever animal he wishes".*

What this absence of god and worship in Tonga folktales implies is beyond the scope of this study. It could mean God was too important to be found fictitious narratives (*boza buli; nthanu buli*) or that precolonial Tonga society were animalists with no central god to worship (Mphande 2015)

4. Harnessing folktales to communicate development and inspire social change

As it has been noted in this paper, the folktale subtly delivers a lesson, admonishes and corrects without directly naming individuals. It was for this reasons that the folktales were extensively used in the early junior primary school classes during the British colonial period. The rationale behind the policy was to ensure that children did not experience total cultural and linguistic rupture when they started formal Western education. In introductory classes (Sub A and B), children were taught in their own languages, read local literature with local content in local languages. Actually, primary education Sub A and Sub B classes, in Tongaland at least, were aptly named Mchapu and Nthanu respectively. In Sub A children learned, *inter alia,* arithmetic, family relationships, reading, Chitonga, Christianity, missionary work, and writing. Needless to mention that at this level all these were done in Chitonga. In the Chitumbuka speaking areas, this was delivered in Chitumbuka and Chinyanja was used in the Chinyanja speaking areas. In Sub B, more advanced arithmetic, reading, writing, Chitonga, health education, social studies, and nthanu za Chitonga (Tonga Folktales) (Nkhoma, 2014; Chirwa, 2014). English, as a medium of instruction, was introduced gradually as the learners advanced and it gradually replaced Chitonga as the language of instruction. Because of the concentration on reading and writing, colonial education primary school graduates were very good at numeracy, literacy and grammar (both in English and local language). Although the 1968 Malawi Language policy effectively banned the use of local languages (except for Chichewa) as media of instruction, the need for reversion is high and the early childhood education movement is campaigning for it.

Writing in July 1933 to explain why he had decided to break away from the Livingstonia Mission, the Rev. Yeseaya Zerenji Mwasi said:

> *I wish to naturalise and nationalise God, Christ, Faith- in short Christianity. There is no say that [the] Object and Goal of the missionary enterprise is to naturalise and nationalise Christianity-to grow out of its own soil, having its own customs and traditions purified by the Gospel of Christ (1998, p.17).*

What the Reverend Mwasi said in 1933 about the need to naturalise and nationalise Christianity also applies to the need to domesticate Malawian journalism and communication for development, which at present uses Eurocentric writing styles, such as the Inverted Pyramid, emphasises eurocentric news values, and positivistic scientism. Textbook hard news journalism forbids journalists from commenting or interpreting events they cover or projecting their emotions into the stories they write and let the text speak for itself. However, this paper argues, that like the *nthanu*, the Malawian journalistic story should have a mission to empower and develop Malawian society. Art for art's sake and journalism for journalism's are a futile project because there can be nothing called communication for communication's sake. For a country suffering the burden of HIV and AIDS, corruption, immorality, cultural discord and a dwindling sense of *umunthu* and nationhood, disinterested and non-interventionist journalism is tantamount to vainglory. Malawian journalism and communication for development must be investigative, interpretive, interventionist, culturally and linguistically relevant like the *nthanu*. This is a challenge experts in journalism, health and bahviour change, agricultural and natural resources, communication for development and social change ought to take up as matter of urgency.

It has also been noted that storytelling has been extolled as a transformative medium (Wheeler, 2014) because, as Schwerty (2015) has noted, it encourages participation as it excites those areas of the brain that are associated with colours and shapes, language comprehension, scents, sound and movement. Figueroa *et al. (*2002) have identified journalists – gatherers, tellers and chroniclers of modern life - as one of the agents of development and social change. This paper proposes that journalists, particularly citizen or community journalist and development communicators such as agricultural, forestry, environmental, health extension officers adopt a narrative technique that has worked and still works in African oral and aural societies. What this entails is that *Nthanu* could be transcribed, scripted and dramatised like Banda (2006) has done and adapted to talk about current issues. The characters may remain the same animals, but lessons can be updated and interpretation domesticated or localised.

Further, the Malawi Tonga folktale structure and its stages of emotional and dramatic intensity could be adapted to harness the three stages of social change communication: *Consciousness Raising*; *Discussion,* and *Issue Resolution* (see Moore and Gillis, 2005). As an illustration, take a community that suffers cholera outbreaks every rainy season. After the tag of the story (*nthanu, nthanu mukuti*....), cholera could be introduced and facts about how the disease is caused and spread (such as poor hygiene) could be discussed through animal characters during the first phase, *Consciousness Raising*. Once awareness and knowledge about the causative agency and the vector have been understood by the community, the animal characters

could engage into the second phase, *Discussion*, where they would discuss the issue in detail. The story would finally move to phase three, *Issue Resolution*, where the animal characters could show that the community has no more problems associated with cholera and give out lessons about how other diseases, such as AIDS, could also be avoided.

This type of journalism will serve and save society. Unlike mainstream Eurocentric traditional journalism, which allows very little audience interaction, the *nthanu* allows the audience or co-performers to question and challenge the sequence of the events and abrupt departure from what is already known. The interactivity or dialogicity of the *nthanu* performances makes the *nthanu* a more democratic and empowering entertainment-education platform.

James (1990) has proposed that Africa needs to come up with fresh journalistic and broadcast formats for its journalism to be effective. One such innovative format would be the folktale, which could be told on radio for a wide audience and in school for the children so that they grow into responsible adults and teachers. The stories could also be dramatised using puppetry and theatre for development approaches. Mphande (2006) and other scholars have led the way in adapting oral narrative forms to preaching about modern realities. Lent (1978), Wilson (1987; 2008), Ogbuajah (1985), Sewanyana (1997), Salawu (2004) and others have highlighted the usefulness of traditional communication systems in promoting sustainable development, conscientisation and empowerment of youth, women and the marginalised in Africa. To underscore the importance of the field of folk media or oramedia to development, the *African Communication Research* journal dedicated a full volume (see *African Communication Research,* Vol. 1, No, 1, 2008) to the subject.

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