

Kahindo Katavo Jean-Pasteur -
PHILOSOPHY OF AFRICAN FOLKTALES

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NAIROBI EVANGELICAL GRADUATE SCHOOL OF THEOLOGY

**PHILOSOPHY OF AFRICAN FOLKTALES: A CASE
STUDY OF AKAMBA STORIES**

BY

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A Thesis submitted to the Graduate School in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for the degree
of Master of Arts in Christian Education

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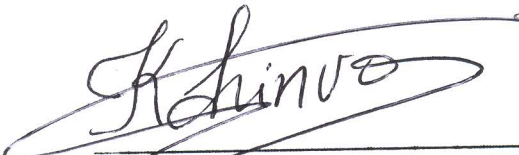
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Student's Declaration

PHILOSOPHY OF AFRICAN FOLKTALES: A CASE
STUDY OF AKAMBA STORIES

I declare that this is my original work and has not been submitted to any other College or University for academic credit.


Kahindo Katavo Jean-Pasteur

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ABSTRACT

This study involved 100 Akamba tales as recorded in Mbiti's Akamba stories, and Kieti and Coughlin's Barking, you'll be eaten! It had a fourfold purpose: establishing the morphological framework of the corpus, setting down their message, testing their coherence and gauging the degree of their analogy to the biblical worldview. Thus, three research questions, from which five hypotheses were drawn, led the study to five main areas of investigation.

Designed as a literary research, this structural analysis rested upon Bremond's morphological model, and Paulme and Cauvin's typological patterns. Both paracompositional and compositional structures were analyzed. It became clear that the narrative economy tended to reproduce all the structural types thus far known.

From its dual perspective, the tale genre seemed to express a two-emphasis theme, nine various frequencies of the life-view and three ideals. Despite a few inconsistencies, the commonsensical worldview of tales showed a significant extent of analogy with the biblical worldview. Three corrective ways were suggested and practical recommendations proposed in view of cultural revitalization.

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DEDICATION

To Mzee Kahindo Katabu Petro, my grandfather,
hidden behind the boiler but along with
me, in my studies and ministry.

To Daphrose, Miriam, Finney, Evangéline, Rachel,
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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Statement of the Problem

In the course of the ongoing African journey toward cultural integrity, one of the cultural tasks in the hand of writers, literary critics, educationists, theologians, pastoral workers, evangelists, and other communicators is to thoroughly understand folktales, "the most popular and most important form of oral literature" (Taiwo 1967, 14). During the colonial period, this didactic mythological genre which is regarded as the cornerstone of oral compositions was, like many other aspects of African culture, charged with ideological inadequacies, due to imperialist arrogance and missionary bias. From the low status of "good petty toys to entertain children" and that of "collections to prove how primitive the African was", the folktales thence on viewed in the dialectic of white-godly and black-devil (Amateshe 1984, 2), are now gaining a new status as they are solicited to contribute to the current process of "coming back home".

To illustrate this point, two instances will suffice. In the process of decolonization of African literature, oral

compositions, in general, and folktales, in particular, are regarded as indispensable literary antecedents into which modern African writing should seek to insert itself (Chinweizu et al. 1980, 5). Oral literature has always provided a point of departure to world literature, indeed. Likewise, oral compositions, including folktales, are being regarded as a guide in the process of rooting the gospel in local African cultures and societies (Healey and Sybertz 1996, 13).

Significantly, such African writers as Birago Diop, Bernard Dadié, Laurent Mama Abehikin, Amos Tutuola, Chinua Achebe and Wole Soyinka, have given palpable indications on how traditional tales can creatively be used in modern poetic creation within a new context. The debt these African writers owe to oral narratives is great. Their writings draw from oral compositions a sustenance of two natures: methodological and anthropological ones.

To preserve contact with the cultural roots and sensibility of their audience, some preachers of the gospel successfully exploit tales, among other compositions. This phenomenon is not the sole privilege of the African Independent Churches. It is common to listen to tale-telling in other churches. Popular

evangelists like Reinhard Bonnke¹ can successfully appeal to oral narratives as sermon illustrations. Some of Bonnke's listeners can still recall, for instance, the story of the elephant and the mosquito or that of the chicken and the young eagle. Culturally-oriented theological researchers, however, go beyond this level of appealing to tales for the purpose of sermon illustration.

In this line appear John Mbiti, Joseph Healey, Donald Sybertz, and many others who consider oral compositions, including tales, to be a source of African narrative theology of inculturation. These researchers have actually sustained a serious effort to integrate mythological compositions in their theological reflection. Published in 1996 by Paulines Publications Africa in Nairobi, Healey and Sybertz's book, Towards an African narrative theology is a very recent attempt of that nature.

It is fortunate that the habit of story-telling still survives and in some regions at least, the traditional stories are still very much alive (Diop 1967, 11). Through the school, radio and television, the folktale has

¹Reinhard Bonnke is a German evangelist well known in the African continent where his agency, Christ for All Nations, has been busy organizing great Gospel crusades.

shown that it can easily move from the traditional setting and be translated to a very new context as well. Indeed, folktales are an important part of oral literature in our African schools. Tale-telling sessions are also present on radio and television to furnish off-peak periods of programs. Folktales owe their great import partly to their social functions.

Coded by tradition, folktales as sources and vehicles of African cultural values, are not mere relics of the past. On the contrary, they constitute natural forms of handing on central messages of culture (Healey and Sybertz 1996, 31) and conveying African native wisdom as well. Thus, they are a "living archive". However, this is not their primary function. Folktales are primarily didactic (Diop 1967, 15). Moreover, in them there is a clear intention to instruct by entertaining, I may add.

Insofar as they evaluate behaviors, fix the norm to follow, stigmatize negative manners, and may be appealed to in courts, they then appear to exercise judicial as well as normative functions. In its discursive and poetic function, a folktale may serve as an illustration to a proverb or any other wise saying. The cognitive function of folktales shows up when this form is viewed as a

collection of knowledge on the physical environment, the animal world, the human society, and the supernatural realm.

It is also known that a tale-telling session allows those whom the 8 to 5 working day has dispersed to meet in a communal setting, to scream their joys together and to worry together about problems. Thus, the folktale allows catharsis to take place. Moreover, it is a testimony to the religious sense which permeates, livens up and drives its users. It happens, therefore, to be a factor of social cohesion. As a matter of fact, the folktale describes, conveys and prescribes values, aspirations, and preoccupations of the prevailing social order as well as particular angles from which it views and appreciates world realities, human behaviors and images of what the society expects from its various components.

To summarize, the folktale is education, entertainment, cultural archive, constitutional ideal, textbook, socializing factor, religious code and worldview mirror; in a word, the folktale represents a kind of humanism.

For sure, the folktale, among many other oral traditional compositions, is well designed to sustain creative efforts which aim at the development of, for instance, a local

