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Once Upon A Time: Storytelling in Anglophone West Africa
A Psychological Coping Method in Colonial Resistance

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Abstract

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This thesis aims to examine the role of storytelling during British colonization in West Africa. West African traditional storytelling tends to be dismissed by dominant scholarship as not meticulous enough to be utilized as a form of methodology. However, storytelling has been one of the main methods of knowledge production for African societies, keeping alive traditions and beliefs for communities to come. Prior to colonization, various West African ethnic groups existed in societies holding their own cultural heritage, traditions, language and systems of governing. British colonization sought to eliminate these identities, labeling them as one entity under the British with English as the unifying language. Through the use of existing stories from Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, I explore the cultural concepts of each story and its relations to colonial rule, emphasizing the power storytelling cultivates for each society. By positioning this project within the framework of African psychology, I argue that storytelling has served as a method of living resistance against colonization and operated as a psychological coping method for the people. Storytelling within these three nations functioned as a means to disrupt the Eurocentric colonial norms, ideals and rules embedded within the roots of racism and oppression. By critically engaging with the traditional oral stories of each nation, storytelling appears to be the strongest form of resistance that existed against colonial oppression.

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Table of Contents

Introduction.....	1
Literature Review.....	7
Case Study 1: Ghana.....	24
Case Study 2: Nigeria.....	38
Case Study 3: Sierra Leone.....	56
Future Directions of Storytelling and Conclusion.....	67
References.....	71

“The story refutes what is still an image of Africa lodged in the Western imagination: an image characterized by irrationality, exoticism, ethnicity, and naive causality”

– Michael Chapman¹

Introduction

Storytelling is a form of recording, communicating and displaying feelings, emotions, attitudes, and responses of an individual’s lived reality, experience and surroundings in their environment.² It has been utilized as a methodology of mediating and transferring information, knowledge and history across generations. Specifically, storytelling has been used to reach younger generations and provide insight and knowledge on their cultural expectations, morals, and values.³ The methodology of storytelling is unique because it is a retold tale or narrative to a group of people through varying voices and gestures. The format of storytelling allows for stories to be told through means of songs, music, dances, plays, poetry and drama.⁴ Ultimately, the tradition of storytelling differs across the world but there are characteristics that bind all varying forms together: oral narration, moral teachings, utilization of gestures and repetition throughout the story.

Uniquely, many African traditions are rooted within oral narratives, traditions, and cultures thereby giving Africans the reputation of strong storytellers. African storytelling has been a form of passing down codes, tradition, communal morals and methods to sustain social order. Historically, storytelling has functioned as conserving African history and tradition. Specifically in West Africa, the art of storytelling serves as the main transmittal of knowledge,

¹ Chapman, Michael. "The problem of identity: South Africa, storytelling, and literary history." *New Literary History* 29, no. 1 (1998): 97

² Gbadegesin, Olusegun. "Destiny, personality and the ultimate reality of human existence: A Yoruba perspective." *Ultimate Reality and Meaning* 7, no. 3 (1984): 173-188.

³ Ngũgĩ. *Devil on the Cross* (London: Heinemann, 1982), 30.

⁴ Thiong'o Ngũgĩ wa. *Decolonising the Mind: the Politics of Language in African Literature*. (Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers, 1994), 27.

history and experience throughout the region.⁵ The content of the story often instills a sense of purpose for children to be guided by the societal and cultural morals of their ancestors. The concept and tradition of West-African storytelling is one of the oldest across the continent, varying in narration but banded by cultural principles.

There has been a plethora of research on storytelling from the perspective of Eastern and Southern African countries as a recording living tradition of resistance from an ethnographic standpoint. However, the historical analysis of West African storytelling tends to be neglected amongst scholars even though for centuries, the history, beliefs and traditions of West African communities have been kept alive through oral storytelling. From the West African perspective, storytelling includes words, gestures, singing, facial expressions, a variety of body movements and acting to ensure that the story's content is tangible and unforgettable. West African storytelling can be performed for hours or days long to explain the significance of the people's history, genealogy, wars and political rebellions. West African people center storytelling as a community event in which people sit, listen and participate together. West African oral fables and folktales usually convey lessons rooted in courage, resourcefulness and the concept of independence.⁶

Characteristics of West African oral traditions usually include a communal participatory phenomenon where people gather together and listen to stories that give accounts of past beliefs, wisdom, taboos and/or myths. The audience and storyteller must interact with one another and both sides are given rights and obligations during this experience. Storytelling functions as a

⁵ Tuwe, Kudakwashe. "The African oral tradition paradigm of storytelling as a methodological framework: Employment experiences for African communities in New Zealand." *African Studies Association of Australasia and the Pacific (AFSAAP) Proceedings of the 38th AFSAAP Conference: 21st century Tensions and Transformation in Africa*. (2016): 3-5.

⁶ Tuwe, 5-7.

significant part of traditional West African life and even becomes ingrained into the basic training for children as a form of traditional indigenous education. From the West African perspective, participating in storytelling is an essential part of society to initiate children into the idea of “full humanness.”⁷ Elements included within West African storytelling are proverbs, epic narrations, genealogies and songs. Proverbs can describe or explain wisdom, findings of new ideas and life lessons. Epic narrations center its lessons around real lived heroes in the communities who have been significant to the group of people’s history; West African storytellers tend to exaggerate these epic narrations so the audience conceptualizes the prominent impact of the hero.⁸ Genealogies are detailed records of a dynasty or a group of people in which West Africans tend to sing with musical instruments; there are also detailed forms of storytelling that provide the audience with precise numbers, dates and significant names that must be remembered. Lastly, songs are a major element to West African oral traditions because they are present in all facets of life.⁹ Ultimately, an expert West African storyteller within a society is an individual who is a respected community member who has excelled at using proverbs, parables, epic narrations, songs and their strong memory after multiple years of community and tradition instruction and training.

The function of storytelling as a psychological coping method in colonial resistance could be understood in terms of a psychological framework, rather than a methodological or philosophical one. It is useful to understand psychological discourse because it defines coping methods and situational factors in which coping methods are applied. However, the

⁷ Tuwe, 4.

⁸ “The Oral Traditions of Africa.” Teach Africa, n.d.

⁹ Okpewho, Isidore. *African oral literature: Backgrounds, character, and continuity*. Vol. 710. (Indiana University Press, 1992), 3-9.

psychological framework for this paper is based in African psychology. African psychology is the psychology of the people of African descent that frames itself on theoretical models that analyze the understanding of psychosocial behavior of the African people rooted in the dimensions of the African perspective.¹⁰ The framework of African psychology recognizes storytelling's function in a holism rooted within the lived experiences of Africans rather than privacy-oriented Westerners. Scholars examining African storytelling through an European or American psychoanalyst lenses view the African psyche from the context of deficiency, an effect of colonialist thinking due to oppression.¹¹ African psychology, however focuses on the psychological *response* to oppression, internalized racism and self-concept in which I contend that storytelling serves as one of the psychological responses.

It is evident that storytelling plays a huge role in West African communities and the sustainability of the history and lived experiences of ancestors and current members of the society. Colonization attempted to implement Eurocentric norms within African societies that already had preexisting traditions and norms of their own. The cultural expectations of West African societies inherently clashed with the expectations and culture of western driven societies and colonization, thus creating a violent and oppressed environment where Africans physically, emotionally and psychologically dealt with and resisted imperialist aggression, diplomatic pressures, and military invasions. In psychological research, these types of environments produce stress and trauma in which coping mechanisms need to be created. Psychosocial coping research

¹⁰ Adelowo, A. (2012). *The adjustment of African women living in New Zealand: A narrative study* (Doctoral dissertation, Auckland University of Technology), 7-8.

¹¹ Pieterse, Alex L., Dennis Howitt, and Anthony V. Naidoo. "Racial oppression, colonization, and identity: Toward an empowerment model for people of African heritage." *Counseling people of African ancestry* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 2011), 93-108.

refers to coping strategies as strategic efforts that can be both behavioral and psychological, that people utilize to comprehend, tolerate, or lessen stressful events.

Moreover, there are two forms of coping methods that have been examined within psychological research: problem-solving strategies and emotion-focused coping. Problem-solving strategies are attempts to mitigate the stressful circumstance in which the individual or group of people are in. Emotion focused coping centers its efforts to regulate the emotional consequence of the stressful or traumatic event or potential outcome of the stressful event.¹² West African storytelling in the perspective of African psychology has been both forms of coping methods. Since West African storytelling is a communal experience in which people were brought together even during colonization, the storytelling aspect supported West Africans to step up and reduce the impact of colonizers' pursuit to erase the people's history and culture; in essence, moral codes and traditions were still able to be passed on during European colonization and stories of independence played a huge role in decolonization efforts. Markedly, storytelling sought to control the emotional consequence of colonization by telling stories of positivity and happiness of their ancestors, thereby giving the society a reason to push forward and continue their fight against their oppressors. The psychological lived experiences of Africans have been shaped and influenced by the long-lasting historical residue of European colonization. However, West African storytelling during colonization has operated as a communal strategy of resurgence and insurgence, a form of West African knowledge production and a coping method due to the psychological conflicts with the West African identity.

¹² "Psychosocial Notebook." MacArthur SES & Health Network | Research. MacArthur. Accessed February 27, 2020. <https://macses.ucsf.edu/research/psychosocial/coping.php>.

The focus of this paper is to highlight storytelling in Anglophone West Africa as a methodological form of community and the ways in which it unites groups of people together. By linking community and unity to a psychological coping method, I am able to apply that relationship to a specific time period, which is Anglophone colonization in West Africa. Specifically centering my research on Anglophone West African nations allowed me to examine trends in the same colonial power for three nations, Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone which provides insight on the content of the stories being told during colonialism; I chose Ghana, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone as the most suitable case studies to represent Anglophone West Africa because out of the five countries in Anglophone West Africa, their strong history in oral traditions was also evident in the resistance and uprising during British colonization. Furthermore, these three nations were the first three out of five in Anglophone West Africa to gain independence from British colonialism. I argue that storytelling functioned as a means of colonial resistance in response to colonizers' attempt to dissolve the West African identity. I will examine the cultural concepts that shape each nation's storytelling, its relation as a psychological coping method and colonial resistance. While there has been a lack of historical analysis of African storytelling for a region and during a specific time period such as colonization, I examine three Anglophone West African countries in depth - Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone - as case studies of storytelling utilized as an act of living resistance to survive and disrupt Eurocentric colonial norms of knowledge.

“Phumani bantu baseBhotwe anibonanga nto

Kub’ aniyibonang’ inamb’ icombuluka.”

“Come out, people of the palace, you have seen nothing

Because you have not seen the python uncoil.”

*– Magagamela Koko*¹³

Literature Review

Storytelling in Biblical and Christian Studies

Scholars have examined oral storytelling broadly and its role within varying disciplines such as theology. Specifically, African scholar, Dora Rudo Mbuwayesango has explored the relationship between oral storytelling and feminist biblical studies which was an interesting and unique perspective of scholarship through a historical outlook.¹⁴ In essence, the bible has been viewed as a source of empowerment for African women to overcome predicaments and difficulties they face within their society especially as some have seen it as a direct relationship to God and his word. Through African feminist theology, Mbuwayesango examines the role of African cultural resources like storytelling as crucial instruments in biblical interpretation. The Eurocentric based Christian interpretation of the Bible has been a daunting tool that is oppressive to African women because of its biblical interpretation and Christian theological roots that have been used to marginalize the African woman’s experience in religion. Therefore, Mbuwayesango finds that oral storytelling in African feminist theology changes the position of women “from being observers and victims into participants and actors in history,”¹⁵ thereby demonstrating

¹³ Scheub, Harold. *The uncoiling python: South African storytellers and resistance*. (Ohio University Press, 2010) 2.

¹⁴ Mbuwayesango, Dora Rudo. "Feminist Biblical Studies in Africa." *Bible and Women: The Contemporary Period* 9 (2014): 71.

¹⁵ Mbuwayesango, Dora Rudo. "Feminist Biblical Studies in Africa." *Bible and Women: The Contemporary Period* 9 (2014): 82.

that oral storytelling allows one to reconstruct and reaffirm their identity and resist the oppressive identity that may be impeded upon them.

Her work in African feminist theology emphasizes the essential role of storytelling in African women theology because the role of oral stories is to “educate, guide, warn, teach and lend meaning to events in the listeners’ lives.”¹⁶ Thus, African women theologians included storytelling as a vital factor of their theology. Their oral stories do not only include cultural-religious collections, but she found that there were personal stories about these women’s experiences in which the majority of them were physically and mentally agonizing. For instance, Mbuwayesango discusses an African theologian woman, Rose Teteki Abbey, who utilizes oral storytelling to retell a story of three significantly biblical women in her work, “I am the Woman.”¹⁷ Abbey draws on her own personal experience and the biographies of women in the bible who resided in patriarchal societies. She includes the story of the Samaritan woman, the woman caught in adultery and Mary’s decision to study as the logic for sitting at Jesus’s feet instead of aiding Martha in the kitchen. Mbuwayesango applies Abbey’s work to demonstrate the oppression of women in patriarchal societies especially within the biblical realm, but oral storytelling provides African women with a new world of liberation to express themselves while inherently emancipating themselves from their patriarchal cultural environments.

Similarly, Mbuwaysango analyzes Musa Dube, a Botswanan feminist theologian scholar in postcolonial biblical scholarship who utilized storytelling to depict how African women have resisted and suffered, yet survived all points of African history: precolonial, colonial, post, independence, globalization, and the contemporary era of HIV/AIDS.¹⁸ A compelling finding is

¹⁶ Mbuwayesango, 82.

¹⁷ Abbey, Rose T. "I am the Woman." *Other ways of reading: African Women and the Bible* (2001): 23-26.

¹⁸ Mbuwaysango, 83.

that oral storytelling for African women was considered narrative therapy and allowed them to take steps toward healing. In essence, Mbuwayesango's research exhibits that by placing the lived realities of African women at the heart of African history through oral storytelling, the cultivation of sharing stories, witnessing those oral stories being shared, and encouraging others to share stories, empowers African women to reconstruct the oppressive society of their existence.

Comparatively, other research has analyzed broadly, African storytelling as a form of transformational learning and a safe communal space for the unknown, especially within Christian Education in Africa. Researchers Russel Haitch and Donald Miller also focused on exploring the role of storytelling in Christian education for peace with the African continent. Their research was based upon one case study, the *Watu Wa Amani* (People of Peace) conference held in Nairobi in 2004. Most of the stories utilized in their case study were taken from the eastern region of Africa, specifically Kenya and Rwanda. Through listening and recording the stories at the conference, Haitch and Miller found five factors of why African storytelling is significant to create peacemaking within a society, especially within a time of hardship such as colonialism and even post-independence: oral storytelling create a familiar learning space, a safe space, a communal space, an empowering space and an imaginative space.¹⁹ Familiar learning spaces are significant because children generally listen to stories from their elders but even more than sixty years later, adults can still remember the same story told to them in childhood. Through the application of oral stories of Kenya, they found that storytelling is a "time-honored"

¹⁹ Haitch, Russell, and Donald Miller. "Storytelling as a means of peacemaking: A case study of Christian education in Africa." *Religious Education* 101, no. 3 (2006): 396-398.

mechanism of learning that fosters imagination and develops a sense of morality which seems to be a common thread within African nations and their forms of storytelling.²⁰

In relation to my research, Miller and Haitch found that storytelling creates a safe space in which it can be psychologically defined as a coping method. The “safe space” that African oral storytelling provides can be literal, metaphorical or psychological in which Africans are able to settle personal issues in a therapeutic environment. More common factors is that storytelling provides a common space in which people who have distinctive faiths or doctrines that they may believe in, can come together; storytelling brings peace and is a way in which everyone returns to a common ground and narrative. In a community, individuals exercise care and nurture to inherently support other individuals within the community. Thus, storytelling stimulates a communal experience in which people care to listen and hear the person speak as well as feel empowered to do the same. In the same fashion as Dora Mbuwayesango’s work found that oral storytelling empowers African women to discover their own liberation in the realm of theology, Haitch and Miller discovered that storytelling provides an empowered space which can be attributed to the dynamics of our human development. Through a psychological lens, Jean Piaget, a famous psychologist, believes the free and liberating flow of grammatical speech results in greater or newly discovered confidence in humans, specifically children. It is also known as the “omnipotence of intelligence” in which the capability to compose and organize the world around you linguistically empower [you] people to institute change.²¹ Lastly, African oral storytelling is significant because it fosters an imaginative space. As Africans experience

²⁰ Haitch and Miller, 396.

²¹ Haitch and Miller, 397.

arduous historical upheavals, storytelling gives Africans the agency to experience or hear alternative literal, metaphorical or imaginative endings to their lived experiences.

Storytelling Amongst the Oromo Speaking People

Furthermore, as mentioned prior, much research has focused on storytelling and its characteristics and function within African nations mostly in the southern and eastern region of Africa. Scholars have used ethnographic field research to critically analyze the role of children in storytelling within the Oromo-speaking Guji people who reside in southern Ethiopia.²²

Conventionally, the role of African oral traditions have lied in the hands of seniors and elders of the society who eventually pass these traditions down to the children and younger people.

Tadesse J. Jirata and Jan K. Simonsen, African literature researchers, conducted field research in three Guji villages in Ethiopia to examine the methods in which children engage in storytelling and its purpose when a society is experiencing changing conditions such as agro-pastoralism and schooling which produced hardships within their society.²³ Agro-pastoralism and schooling created labor divisions between women, men and children which caused a reorganization of the temporal order within the society; due to this lifestyle shift, there were less opportunities for children to interact with adults specifically for storytelling. Jirata and Simonsen conducted ethnographic studies on storytelling in the past and present by observing adults to children and children to children interactivities. Through their methodology, children between the ages of seven and fourteen (twenty-five girls and thirty-five boys) and twenty adults (six mothers, five fathers, four grandmothers, and five grandfathers) were interviewed; audio-visual recordings of all performances were produced. The overall goal of their field research was to examine the

²² Jirata, Tadesse Jaleta, and Jan Ketil Simonsen. "The Roles of Oromo-Speaking Children in the Storytelling Tradition in Ethiopia." *Research in African Literatures* 45, no. 2 (2014): 135-49.

²³ Jirata and Simonsen, 139.

methods in which specifically children cultivate their everyday expectations and realities through oral stories under challenging circumstances.

Their research found that through the changing and challenging conditions in their society, there were common categories and threads of oral literature among the people: *gerarsa* which are songs about brave men; *quexala* which are songs of rituals, prayers and blessings; and *oduu durii* which are historical stories that discuss the current and on-going political state of the society, neighboring groups and clans.²⁴ Additionally, they found that children were strong and engaging listeners and narrators of oral storytelling. To illustrate their opinions and emotions, children would utilize gestures and words while also asking questions to ensure clarity within the stories. Although the challenging cultural conditions of their society cannot be compared to the effects of colonialism, oral storytelling prevailed in their Ethiopian society as a means to deal with the societal adjustments. It is also important to note that children were still expected to engage in oral folktales, even as the societal disruptions were occurring. The article differs from most scholarship regarding oral storytelling as it acknowledges the agency of children as “intergenerational transfers” of cultural morals and beliefs.²⁵ The most compelling evidence which seems to tie African storytelling cross-culturally and cross-nationally is the powerful cultural ideal of the people: oral storytelling consists of the voices of their ancestors passing down wisdom and knowledge to the younger generation to uphold and learn from.²⁶

Storytelling in Northern Zambia

²⁴ Jirata and Simonsen, 139-142

²⁵ Jirata and Simonsen, 135.

²⁶ Jirata and Simonsen, 145.

Moreover, there has been ethnographic studies and fieldwork conducted in Northern Zambia to demonstrate that storytelling functions as a means of cultural autonomy. Pre-existing field research conducted in five Tabwa villages in northern Zambia by Robert Cancel recorded stories of village residents through the help of local schoolboys.²⁷ Cancel's book reviews the collection, representation and fieldwork ethics that showcase the agency of Northern Zambians in storytelling. His work includes performances and specific stories told by various villages in northern Zambia and the complicated relationship of storytelling within challenging economic conditions, governments, policies and the post-independence eras.

Through his research, Cancel found that oppressive realities and consequences of colonialism still dominate in Zambia. For instance, one story that was transcribed in the book explained how Catholicism became a piece of Zambia's culture and history which was inherently due to the wider consequences and influences of the colonial era: "one man performed a fascinating tale that he explained as being about the Catholic Church, with one of the wiser characters representing the Pope."²⁸ This specific incident emphasizes the significance of the societal circumstances influencing the concept and topics of stories being told. Specifically, when the tale regarding the Catholic Church was performed for the group, there were actually catholic missionaries that resided near or with the Bemba people of northern Zambia during that time; ultimately, it is evident that there were colonial structures in place impacting the society. However, common themes of the storytelling told by young Zambians include issues of struggle especially following the post-independence era of the nation. Storytelling and the oral narrative performances that followed independence after colonialism operated as a form of "ethnic

²⁷ Cancel, Robert. *Storytelling in Northern Zambia: Theory, Method, Practice and Other Necessary Fictions* (mobi). (Open Book Publishers, 2013) 3-6.

²⁸ Cancel, 22-27.

assertion” for specific ethnic groups in Northern Zambia.²⁹ Although the research implies that the storytelling in Northern Zambia helped explain the effects and conditions of colonialism, I contend it also depicts storytelling as a method to recontextualize narratives for Africans, especially the Northern Zambians in this context to “write back” to Eurocentric history and create an image for their own people. In essence, through Cancel’s research, African storytelling allows Africans to reclaim an authoritative voice as a means of self-representation in their own history that often tends to be written by people who are not them.

Storytelling in Rwanda as Self-Empowerment

Rwanda has been also been another nation in eastern Africa that has been researched in connection with storytelling due to the aftermath of the 1994 Rwandan genocide. Storytelling has been assessed as a form of self-empowerment in the setting and conditions of post-genocide Rwanda. A psychological and archival study conducted by David Wallace, Patricia Pasick, Zoe Berman and Ella Weber, examined healing and cultural continuity by utilizing intergenerational dialogue mechanisms such as oral storytelling between youth and elders in post-genocide Rwanda. Genocide aims to eliminate a group’s cultural stories because of its linkage to the group’s history. The researchers had Rwandan elders share and perform personal oral stories from their experience that was related to the genocide to a youth that they were paired with; the youth asked elders questions about the past during the oral stories. Furthermore, community workers and therapists within the society also acknowledged that collective oral narration

²⁹ Cancel, 24-29.

practices such as storytelling and *story making* were extremely practical for the individuals who lived after the genocide.³⁰

Their study found that the youth were very keen to learn about the genocide through oral storytelling as it was a great method of transmitting information and heavy and emotional history. Moreover, through storytelling, they found multiple broad themes that emerged, specifically one being foundational changes. There were strong positive emotional transitions from feeling alone to feeling like people care about them. In essence, there were reduced feelings of loneliness from the elders: “[Sharing] helped me because before the storytelling we would think about so many things, but we would isolate ourselves because we wanted to be alone, but it made us so that we no longer wanted to isolate ourselves from others.”³¹ Furthermore, elders also started to believe in a better and stronger vision for the future regarding themselves and their society: “The storytelling changed my mindset. At first, I could not have a clear picture of the future. I thought that the future would be very terrible and bad. But after the storytelling, I got hope, I got encourage[ment], and I now have hope [for the future].”³² The changes in feelings created a bridge that linked one’s individual self and their experiences of the genocide with others because they orally shared their stories. In regard to my research, this study illustrates how storytelling functions as a psychological coping method. Storytelling sustained the elders in this study and aided them to overcome the difficult aftermath of the genocide. The act of expressing these oral stories after the genocide from individuals who are survivors of the genocide is a form of resistance and sustenance that nourishes the community and its cultural heritage, keeping alive

³⁰ Wallace, David A., Patricia Pasick, Zoe Berman, and Ella Weber. "Stories for Hope—Rwanda: a psychological—archival collaboration to promote healing and cultural continuity through intergenerational dialogue." *Archival science* 14, no. 3-4 (2014): 278.

³¹ Wallace, Pasick, Berman and Weber, 294.

³² Wallace, Pasick, Berman and Weber, 278.

the customs and traditions after attempts to eradicate them. In essence, Africans are essentially forced to break the silence after a devastating human atrocity but storytelling cultivates an environment to break that silence which decreases the feeling of shame while promoting empowerment, social linkage to one's society and the reaffirmation of one's cultural identity and sense of self that underlines violence, colonization and oppression.

Moreover, a case study conducted in 2015 to focus on the significance of storytelling for female survivors within AVEGA Agahozo, a Rwandan organization that specifically provides resources and varying mental health services to widows from the genocide.³³ The research was centered on how contemporary Rwandan women attempt to counter the oppression they face through oral stories shared with others and ultimately reclaiming their power over their life in the aftermath of one of the most devastating forms of oppression: genocide. Lauren Garretson, the key researcher on this case study, utilized a qualitative case study in which she interviewed eight women who were AVEGA Agahozo beneficiaries along with two staff members who worked with these women in regard to psychosocial mental health. One-on-one interviews were conducted with the beneficiaries and a joint interview was done for the staff members.

Her research found that storytelling functioned as an essential factor of the healing process specifically for the traumas that the widows experienced. It is interesting to note that even as the beneficiaries of the organization told their stories, the stories were valuable to the staff members who were now much more able to assess the needs and problems of each beneficiary of the organization. Moreover, a majority of the beneficiaries that were interviewed mentioned a sudden feeling and awareness of freedom after oral storytelling sessions in front of

³³ Garretson, Lauren. "Storytelling as Self-Empowerment: A Case Study of AVEGA Beneficiaries in Post-Genocide Rwanda." (2015): 7

others for the first time when explaining how they survived the genocide. Markedly, in relation to past literature and scholarship, storytelling provided a communal experience for the beneficiaries. Majority of the women interviewed mentioned that the new feelings of freedom were followed by “feelings of no longer being alone” as they realized now that someone or multiple people in the group have also suffered from the same situation or experienced the same burdens of the genocide.³⁴ However, it is important to note that individuals interviewed believe that storytelling was vital component to the healing process, but could not solely or completely solve the issues impeding on their lives due to the consequences of the genocide.

Furthermore, her research also concluded that storytelling fostered the concept of transformation and self-empowerment for the women interviewed; thus, relating to past scholarship. In regards to transformation, storytelling functioned as a “cathartic” process in which orally telling their stories to each other expressively helped the women cope with their trauma.³⁵ One of the beneficiaries interviewed mentioned that by listening to the stories of the other widows in the organization, they were more comfortable with themselves and essentially the circumstances of their situation. They also felt more comfortable with others in the organization and began to feel the “human spirit” of the other widows in the organization; thus, illustrating how oral storytelling brings about a transformative process that can allow everyone to see the humanity within one another regardless of the situation.³⁶ Other beneficiaries mentioned that they experienced a strong positive transformation in which they were able to transition to transform their mindsets:

“Another beneficiary, Sydnee, added to the evidence that storytelling is a highly transformative process for these survivors. In detail, she described how she moved from a

³⁴ Garretson, 20-21.

³⁵ Garretson, 21.

³⁶ Garretson, 21.

state of hopelessness to a hopeful state where she felt capable of providing for herself and her family, how giving her story of surviving the genocide helped empower her to believe in herself as someone who is capable of being self-sufficient and strong.”³⁷

These emotional shifts from loneliness to feeling like one is in a group is similar to the psychological-archival study conducted between elders and youth pairs mentioned prior. In essence, it is evident that through both research studies conducted in Rwanda, storytelling can provide individuals with a lasting sense of positive self-transition that reaffirms their personal growth and redefines their sense of self and identity in their life, specifically as the genocide meant to eradicate that identity. The formation of narration to help one resist, deal or experience a traumatic or difficult event has sustained through African communities; it allows Africans to psychologically acknowledge that the issues they are undergoing, experiencing or have experienced are or were eminently arduous. However, oral storytelling nourishes the development of a narrative that addresses the individual or the society conquering the traumatic hardships which is vital to lead their own stories.

Storytelling in Southern Africa

Oral storytelling as a means of resistance has also been heavily focused on in the southern region (specifically during colonialism for some nations in the region) and South Africa during the time period of apartheid. Through ethnographic research, Pabalelo G. Mmila who is also from Botswana but a different ethnic group than the one studied, explored how the Setswana society of Botswana used storytelling as a tradition. Mmila investigated how the executors of storytelling, illiterate women in rural areas, fill subordinate positions in Western knowledge institutions such as patriarchy and colonialism.³⁸ Mmila analyzes the “voicelessness” of what

³⁷ Garretson, 21.

³⁸ Mmila, Pabalelo G. "A 'subordinate' genre in the voice of the 'subordinate' gender: the storytelling tradition in post-colonial Botswana." *South African Theatre Journal* 26, no. 3 (2012): 236.

tends to be from rural Botswana women who are highly marginalized, but do not yield to their marginalization. Instead, as their rural society excluded them from positions of power and expelled them as voiceless, their expressions of oral storytelling in their private spaces illustrated resistance to the prevalent patriarchal discourse that their societies are predicated upon.

Distinctively, her research found that Setswana oral storytelling tradition differs from many African storytelling traditions because for the Setswana people, it is a predominantly female genre. Mmila found that the stories known as *mainane* were usually orally performed by older women to a younger audience constituting mostly of children; *mainane* mostly served as channels to transfer moral values, ancestral knowledge and guidance.³⁹ The content of *mainane* draws upon the circumstances of the society, precisely a changing environment in which a need must be filled in for; the needs for the Setswana women were exclusion from their society and being voiceless within the society. These women's lived realities were oppressive circumstances but Mmila finds that the key objective is not whether or not they conquer and survive these oppressive realities. Rather, the essential matter is that we understand these women choose to act upon this oppression and their action was oral storytelling which sets the agency for change for themselves as well as others to come. The framework of African psychology focuses on the psychological response to oppression and as we see here, the Setswana women utilize storytelling as their response to the oppressive society. It is interesting to note that Mmila discusses that storytelling can be perceived as primitive and childish, but it is more than that – storytelling is a “space for social transformation” in which these women were able to create and transmit knowledge.⁴⁰ Notably, these women make use of oral storytelling to rejuvenate

³⁹ Pabalelo, 239.

⁴⁰ Pabalelo, 243.

themselves by utilizing storytelling, privately as a space of development, nourishment and power in a society that dismisses them as mute.

South Africa has also been an African nation widely studied due to its history with apartheid. Scholars have considered storytelling in South Africa as a vehicle to “capture, reorder and reinvent” a sense of identity and humanity of the self into society especially when understanding whose story is being told and what is the definition of a South African story.⁴¹ One scholarly work that aligns closely with this project but utilizes a different nation in a different region is that of Harold Scheub who is a leading scholar in African oral traditions and folklore. His book, “The Uncoiling Python: South African Storytellers and Resistance” is a collection of stories of the Xhosa, Zulu, Swati and Bdebele people that presents an in-depth study of oral storytelling as a form of survival.⁴² Scheub’s collection of stories provide context on how the African people survived 350 years of apartheid through stories. Specifically, for the South African people, all the oral traditions functioned as competent shields against colonial powers.

Prior to colonization, the oral traditions of South Africans provided an understanding of their past and the ways in which the past influences the present. However, when colonial forces entered the region, oral traditions were the defense and fortress against the racist policies of apartheid in which the people found solace in.⁴³ The stories acknowledge that Africans were not submissive to the idea of colonial rule from the start as there were rebellious actions that occurred and destructive methods that Africans used to resist the colonial powers. Scheub argues

⁴¹ Chapman, Michael. "The problem of identity: South Africa, storytelling, and literary history." *New Literary History* 29, no. 1 (1998): 86.

⁴² Scheub, Harold. *The uncoiling python: South African storytellers and resistance*. (Ohio University Press, 2010): 4.

⁴³ Scheub, 7.

the most effective and at times, the least apparent method that was never fully understood was oral storytelling. For instance, the infamous story told about the python depicts a dynamic image of “rebirth”, “power” “togetherness” and “undivided oneness” during colonialism:

“The thought-pattern of togetherness is the underlying idea in the use of a python's skin in the *inkatha yesizwe*, the emblem of national unity and loyalty. It is only when the *inkatha* has been enveloped with the skin of a python that it is really and truly the national emblem, even though it could lack other ingredients. But under no condition may the skin of the python be omitted. How else could we say, ‘We are the children of Mageba and Zulu’ if this thing was not there, binding us together.”⁴⁴

Thus, it is evident that the python functions as a symbolic figure for unity. Without the python and its stories, the South African people believe that they would not connect together. I also contend that the stories of the python allow South Africans to cope by emotionally transferring their emotions during apartheid into stories that represent their power.

Furthermore, the story continues by explaining how a python can be very difficult to kill because of its composure, even when death is near. However, even though people may think it is dead, the python removes its skin and continues to live which instills fear within others and its enemies. In essence, the python relates to the people of South Africa during colonialism who believe that as the skin of the python cannot be neglected nor removed, their spirit and traditions cannot be omitted as well. The python’s skin is the binding ingredient that keeps the people together specifically during the arduous time of apartheid and colonialism. The belief of togetherness is the underlying notion that the python’s skin is the South African people’s unity and loyalty to themselves prior to colonization. Scheub’s collection of stories provides connections in South, a nation heavily studied due to its apartheid. Nonetheless, through his research, it is evident that storytelling provides connections to the past, present and future and

⁴⁴ Scheub, 2

binds groups of people together in times of adversity, while serving as resistance to sustain the presence of history, emotion and the substance of one's culture.

Ultimately, my research differs from some of these approaches specifically as I did not conduct field research or an ethnographic study. Although the existing literature and research heavily focuses on the use of ethnographic studies in which the researcher immerses themselves as part of the community or the event occurring, I will be historically analyzing existing recorded and collected oral stories and poetry of storytelling within the chosen Anglophone West African nations. Additionally, it is important to note that there are restrictions within conducting ethnographic studies of storytelling. For instance, the researchers in the Northern Zambian study mentioned that the Zambian people were mostly comfortable with the overall presence and attendance of the researchers, but there were still feelings and notions of distrust due to the European identities of the researchers. These feelings must be acknowledged because the study was conducted closely after the nation gained independence. Thereby implying that the emotions of distrust were a result of the historical legacy of colonialism and the post-independence visits from foreigners, aid workers and various representatives. Limitations existed and in some ethnic groups and villages, the researchers were forced to maintain a distance because the distrust was too complex for them to bridge the gap with the locals.⁴⁵ Although utilizing an insider methodology to study storytelling can provide great insight, challenges can occur. My project aims to historically examine three nations (rather than one) who were colonized by the same Anglophone country and storytelling's purpose during colonization.

⁴⁵ Cancel, 247-60.

The purpose of this literature review was to provide context on existing scholarship in the nations, regions, and forms of methodology that have been heavily focused on to examine African storytelling; thus, recognizing where my research will contribute new insight. Although I will not be examining the eastern and southern region of Africa or utilizing African theology as case studies, they present information on how African storytelling has been critically studied in other capacities and nations. More specifically, current scholarship does not specifically focus on multiple nations that shared the same metropole to further understand storytelling as a psychological coping method and means of resistance against that shared colonial power.

*“Son of the spider, and son of Africa, follow our black brothers and friends.
Bring them relief when the chains are galling; bring comfort, by telling my stories.
If you want to be sure that you will succeed, bring comfort to **all** Who are being oppressed”*

– Anansi ⁴⁶

Case Study 1: Ghana

African oral storytelling and history tend to be dismissed by Western historians because Eurocentrism largely determines the framework of legitimate forms of knowledge production and the transmittal of knowledge. However, knowledge is contextual; so, when analyzing Ghana’s history prior and up until colonization, oral storytelling must be recognized as a complex, yet valid resource to understanding how history transpires itself through the Ghanaian people. Thus, specifically for Ghanaians, oral storytelling and history signify the totality of truths within the nation and its people, including the lived experiences of the people while dispelling colonial clichés.

According to oral storytelling, the ancestors of the Akan people (currently the largest ethnic group in Ghana today) entered Ghana between CE 1200 and 1600. Storytellers believed that by the 1400s, the Akan had organized and settled their kingdoms along the central region area of the nation.⁴⁷ By the end of the 16th century, the majority of the ethnic groups residing in what is known as modern-day Ghana had occupied their present locations. Additionally, oral history and traditions also imply that the ancestors of specific ethnic groups, such as the Dagomba people, arrived in the region in at least the tenth century and migrations followed thereafter. These migrations produced large states in various regions where the Ghanaian rulers

⁴⁶ Meder, Theo, and Flora Illes. "Anansi comes to Holland; the trickster spider as a dynamic icon of ethnic identity." *Quotidian. Journal for the Study of Everyday Life* 2 (2010): 37

⁴⁷ Site designed and built by Hydrant (<http://www.hydrant.co.uk>). "Ghana : History." Ghana : History | The Commonwealth. Accessed March 4, 2020. <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/ghana/history>.

were known for their abundance in gold and strong warrior-hunting skills.⁴⁸ As skilled traders of gold with strong military powers, the region was prone to attacks by neighboring groups during the eleventh century, but the region's great reputable state never ceased.

The development of trade fostered the growth of early groups such as the Akan-speaking people such as the Asante people, who inhabited most of the southern half of Ghana and the Dagomba states who were heavily influenced by the presence of Islamic scribes and medicine men.⁴⁹ The varying ethnic groups lived in a segment society, only bonded together by kinship ties and inherently governed by the leader of their clans, with trade ensuing between kingdoms. One of the most successful empires, the Ashanti, also known as the Asante Empire, developed its strength through victorious military battles against neighboring Akan states; thereby, giving the Ashanti empire more territory. The Asante people are characterized as members of the Akan people who speak the language, Twi. Their militant sovereignty established them as a highly centralized and organized society in which newly conquered areas were required to join and assimilate to the empire's existing customs and traditions while following and adhering to the society's existing leaders and clan members.⁵⁰ When analyzing the historical depth of Ghana and specifically the Asante people, it is evident that oral storytelling accounts for the first people of Ghana, their historical timing is different than some scholarship indicates. Henceforth, to understand Ghanaian history prior to colonization, oral storytelling is the form of validation that I utilized to analyze the first people of Ghana - the Asante empire - and the oral traditions in place prior to colonization.

⁴⁸ "Pre-Colonial Period." Pre-colonial history of Ghana. Accessed March 1, 2020. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/history/pre-colonial.php>.

⁴⁹ "Pre-Colonial Period." Pre-colonial history of Ghana. Accessed March 1, 2020. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/history/pre-colonial.php>.

⁵⁰ Salm, Steven J., and Toyin Falola. *Culture and customs of Ghana*. (Greenwood Publishing Group, 2002): 102.

In the late 15th century, the first Europeans arrived on the Gold Coast (the former name of Ghana prior to colonization) because of the large supplies and market of gold located in the region. The Portuguese were the first to arrive as their concern and attraction to the Gold Coast's gold, ivory and pepper led the Portuguese to build a permanent trading post in Ghana. For over a century, the Portuguese stayed in Ghana, trading with other European traders such as the English, Danes and Swedes. As a result, the Gold Coast became the location with the highest concentration of European militant buildings and construction outside of Europe.⁵¹

In the late 17th century, the politics of the Gold Coast began to change which led to modifications in warfare; henceforth, rather than gold being exported from the Gold Coast and slaves being imported into the Gold Coast, the Gold Coast was now a large-scale slave exporting economy. Oral storytelling recounts that everyone participated in the market trade; kings, chiefs, royalty and the local people engaged in the trade. However, storytelling also explains that the conquerors, kings and chiefs held the advantage and leverage over the market.⁵² All nations that had some form of interest in West African nations participated in the slave trade as relations between Europeans and Africans were tense due to constant clashes. Approximately ten million enslaved people were transported into the transatlantic slave trade.⁵³ Nonetheless, the demographic aftermath of the transatlantic slave trade was considerably more prominent than the actual number of people enslaved because a great number of West Africans lost their lives during slave attacks and raids or while being captured and waiting to be transported. In relation to the transatlantic slave trade, storytelling has been a strong defense for Ghanaians in the midst of

⁵¹ "Pre-Colonial Period." Pre-colonial history of Ghana. Accessed March 1, 2020. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/history/pre-colonial.php>.

⁵² Perbi, Akosua. "The relationship between the domestic slave trade and the external slave trade in pre-colonial Ghana." *Research Review* 8, no. 1–2 (1992): 66.

⁵³ History Slave Trade. Accessed March 4, 2020. <https://www.ghanaweb.com/GhanaHomePage/history/slave-trade.php>.

European attempts to “erase or rewrite the past” specifically when it comes to the perspective of the slave trade.⁵⁴ However, oral narratives have emphasized the misery of the slave trade and have served a purpose as a coping method to reconcile with the atrocities and tragedy of the slave trade.

By the 19th century, the British had conquered most of the forts along the Gold Coast. During the 19th century, the Ashanti, which then was the most powerful group within the Akan, desired to expand their territory and protect their trade. However, military confrontations between the Asante and other ethnic groups contributed to the rise of British influence within the nation. In 1831, the first Anglo-Ashanti war occurred and endured until 1831 in which most of the British military died along with the Ashanti forces.⁵⁵ The second Anglo-Ashanti War occurred in 1863 and continued through the following year which increased British presence in the Gold Coast as they continued to purchase more forts and castles in the region. The third Anglo-Ashanti war happened in 1874 which was planned by the British, resulting in the British conquering the Ashanti capitol, Kumasi and burning Kumasi down. Thereafter, the Ashanti empire’s power slowly decreased. Following their victory over the Ashanti people, the British claimed the former coastal protectorate, a crown colony; thus, the Gold Coast Colony was created on July 28, 1874. In 1896, the British launched another crusade against the Ashanti which forced the group to become a protectorate of the British crown. The *asantehene* who was the leader/ruler of the Ashanti people and his advisory council had been expatriated; therefore, the British placed a resident British commissioner to the Asante people. After a final attempt of

⁵⁴ Akyeampong, Emmanuel. "History, memory, slave-trade and slavery in Anlo (Ghana)." *Slavery and Abolition* 22, no. 3 (2001): 2

⁵⁵ "History of Ghana." History World. Accessed March 31, 2020.
<http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/plaintexthistories.asp?historyid=ad43>.

rebellion against the British wherein they were defeated by the British, the Asante group and region eventually became a British colony under the jurisdiction of the appointed governor of the Gold Coast in 1901.⁵⁶ With the largest and the most significant kingdom defeated, conquered and expropriated, British colonization was now a reality for the Gold Coast.

As British colonization in the Gold Coast became a reality, many references to the everyday realities of colonialism secured a place in oral stories, reforming storytelling in Ghana with a socio-political touch. The Akan people of Ghana utilized oral stories to preserve their traditions and history as colonization progressed, thus allowing us to understand how they viewed their relationships with the British at times. Oral stories revealed that the Akan knew that the British did not come to Africa and the Gold Coast, specifically because they generally cared for them [Ghanaians]. Rather, the Akan acknowledged that trade, the slave trade and eventual colonization were for altruistic motives, only to increase the fortune, wealth and power of the British: “*Se ohia nni Abrokyrie a anka oburoni ammeketa ne ntoma wo Abihirem*” which translates to “had there been no poverty in Europe the white man would not have come to spread his clothes in Africa.”⁵⁷ Excerpts of oral stories similar to this exemplify that as colonization aimed to dissolve the West African identity, Ghanaians wrote and spoke back to history by explaining the logic of colonization from their perspective through a sarcastic and snarky tone in oral storytelling. In essence, they mocked Europeans and the lack of “wealth” on the European continent as a reason for Anglophone colonization. In a sense, the excerpt depicts some boasting and confidence because the Ghanaians considered their nation and continent a treasure due to its wealth that Europe does not have. Therefore, as the Ghanaians understood it, the reason why

⁵⁶ Publications, Usa International Business. *Ghana Country Study Guide*. Intl Business Pubns Usa (2009): 50.

⁵⁷ Daaku, Kwame Y. "History in the Oral Traditions of the Akan." *Journal of the Folklore Institute* 8, no. 2/3 (1971): 125.

Europeans had to come to Africa was to gain some fortune. In the same fashion, the story provides a perspective of history that the average person would not find in a textbook or through a simple google search. The position in the story characterizes Europeans as poverty-stricken and deficient of a factor that Africa has, a perspective that history tends to be showcased the other way around. By retelling history orally through their own perspectives and transmitting it to future generations, Ghanaians resisted and disrupted the Eurocentric colonial norms of knowledge that tend to be widely-accepted.

Moreover, the Akan people's tones to explain colonizers disseminates knowledge of a nation to the future people of the society from their perspective. The quote from the oral story also conveys how oral storytelling was a strong method of colonial resistance; the Akan people utilized their story and mocking tone to resist and dismiss the Eurocentric widely accepted notions of colonization. Ultimately, the Ghanaian identity is not only reinforced but continues to live because history tends to draw upon colonial clichés of the Gold Coast, but the Akan people generated a different capacity in which they have the ability to cultivate historical experiences different from the ones they experienced through oral storytelling.

Some aspects of oral storytelling during colonialism also tended to strengthen cultural values such as hospitality or self-confidence as colonization sought to disrupt them. Among the Asante, hospitality and benevolence are elements of human life that every individual in the society should attain or strive to attain as they grow. A Ghanaian philosopher and researcher in Pan African Studies, Nana Adu-Pipim, translated the end of an oral story, to English from Twi derived from the Asante people that can be orally dated back to the time period of colonization:

“keep doing good, the ancestors want it that way. Food that is not shared with others will finish anyway. You will be satisfied to a point where you cannot eat any more. If you had

not shared your food with others, how can you, in fairness, share your problems or even joy with them.”⁵⁸

It is important to note the significance of the translation because Ghanaian oral stories tend to be extremely sacred and transferred familial as it is a tradition that, at times, the original format of the story in Twi is not written down in scholarship. Thus, when the story arrives to a Ghanaian child, some words/meanings may have been modified and in modern day today, it may be said in English. However, the philosophy of this story is really significant to understand Ghana because as colonization is actively occurring, there is still a highly developed form of art to transmit knowledge and Ghanaian cultural customs and beliefs during a time that is actively distorting their society.

Likewise, during the colonial time period, Anglophone colonization sought to disrupt existing values of living for the Ghanaians. So, in a time where the value of hospitality may have been a value that not many individuals wanted to express due to the growing concerns for their society, the fact that there were oral stories being told to reinforce the virtue of benevolence and hospitality during colonization, exemplifies living resistance. The cultural values that manifested within Ghana’s oral storytelling sustained during colonization as colonial powers may have controlled the worldly story, but within the Ghanaian people, they controlled their nation’s story. Therefore, through oral storytelling, Ghanaians remapped their history and values from their own perspective to exist today.

Moreover, for children, oral stories expressed through songs accompanied by a dance specifically for younger children were concentrated on self-confidence through hardship:

“Ebow Kakraba kotow ewia mu / Little Ebow squats in the sun

⁵⁸ Boaduo, Nana Adu-Pipim. “Philosophical Discourse by the Asante of Ghana: Mythological Symbolic Analysis.” *Journal of Pan African Studies* 4, no. 3 (March 2011): 81.

Daa daa na orusu / Daily, daily, he's weeping
 Ebow soer, Ebor soer / Ebow rise, Ebow rise
 Ebow popo w'atar mu / Ebow shake your dress
 Ebow twa woho, twa woho, twa woho / Ebow turn, turn, turn
 Ebor ko kefa wo dof o e. / Ebow go fetch your love."⁵⁹

In this specific story, the storyteller would group the children into circles or semi circles as they would all rhythmically clap and dance to exaggerate the scene in the chosen song. Each child would perform a dance once they were invited into the circle and then once they returned to their spot, another child would come to the circle performing the same or another dance. The communal experience provides Ghanaian children with an engaging experience that teaches them the morals of self-confidence. In essence, the child may be weeping at the atrocities of colonialism, but the child must rise up and shake off the melancholic feelings they are experiencing in order to exude self-confidence. Through this, the Ghanaian child is taught to resist the emotions of sadness associated with colonization and rather than cry, they should embody and follow the values of their people and ancestors: confidence.

Ultimately, reinforcing the moral values of the Akan people during a time of adversity is a problem-solving strategy because it helps mitigate the stressor [colonialism] in which the society is in. Oral storytelling gave the Akan people a voice to their stories during colonization. Although they do not explicitly describe their resistance in the oral story to this negative experience, the Akan people mobilized themselves to share their own stories to dismiss the colonizer's values or beliefs, by reinforcing their own cultural heritage. Through the perspective of African psychology, by sharing oral stories in a community through songs and proverbs as a

⁵⁹ Abarry, Nana. "Teaching Akan Oral Literature in Ghanaian Schools." *Journal of Black Studies* 24, no. 3 (1994): 322.

psychological response to oppression, there is an inherent development of strength finding which intrinsically increased the resistance to the negative effect [colonialism].

Specifically, the well-known spider stories of Anansi (in which Anansi means spider in Twi), an animal tale character in the narrative culture of the Ashanti people in Ghana, connected with the religious perspectives of the Ashanti people and divine qualities that were imputed upon him. Anansi can serve as the creator of humans or the being who provides knowledge to the people and diseases to mankind. In some stories, Anansi operates as a mediator between God and humans. Older stories believe that the spider occasionally ascends into heaven by using his cobweb to communicate messages, questions or desires of the people on Earth to God. However, in present-day Ghana, Anansi still remains in direct communication with God but most oral stories begin with Anansi's name even if the spider is not present in the story.⁶⁰ The Ashanti people believe that because Anansi executes the most impossible missions and tasks, God decided that all stories told must begin with Anansi. Anansi's position between the two worlds allowed him to be a cheater and a benefactor at the same time; thus, he was able to function as a human, a divine creation/creator and/or bring good or evil acts into the world.

The Ghanaian oral stories of Anansi adjusted and adapted to the realities of colonialism, functioning as identity reinforcement during colonialism. Anansi stories are carriers of the cultural heritage of Ghanaians so as Anglophone colonization began, Anansi served the role in the "integration with retention of own identity."⁶¹ The oral stories of Anansi during colonization were a method to embody and signify the people's identity and roots. For instance, one oral story

⁶⁰ Meder, Theo, and Flora Illes. "Anansi comes to Holland; the trickster spider as a dynamic icon of ethnic identity." *Quotidian. Journal for the Study of Everyday Life* 2 (2010): 31.

⁶¹ Meder and Flora, 33.

of Anansi told by a storyteller illustrates Anansi as a freedom fighter and resistance hero for cultural identity. The older Anansi talks to his younger son, Anansi and says: “

Son of the spider, and son of Africa,
 Follow our black brothers and friends.
 Bring them relief when the chains are galling,
 Bring comfort by telling my stories.
 If you want to be sure
 that you will succeed,
 Bring comfort to all
 who are being oppressed.”⁶²

The excerpt from the oral story places Anansi as a comforter and confidant whose stories provide security and refuge for the oppressed. Anansi’s immense vitality is ascribed to his function as a cultural hero who holds the significant values of freedom and independence for the community.

Although the people are oppressed, there is also this perspective that Anansi is perceived as the one who can overpower the oppressors, by comforting the people through his stories. It is evident through the excerpt that Anansi stories brought relief to Ghanaians, operating as a mechanism of emotion-focused coping. As the Ghanaian people are oppressed by the British colonial system, the psychological response to the oppression lies in Anansi – Anansi’s stories provide solace to the people. The excerpt essentially conveys storytelling as a coping method to deal with the traumatic circumstances of colonization. Thus, Anansi’s stories give Ghanaians the agency to develop and cultivate their own emotional framework to how they respond to British rule.

As colonization progressed, Anansi continuously adapted to the needs of the people that told his tales, the Ghanaian people. Oral folktales of Anansi begin to serve as a method to cope

⁶² Meder, Theo, and Flora Illes. "Anansi comes to Holland; the trickster spider as a dynamic icon of ethnic identity." *Quotidian. Journal for the Study of Everyday Life* 2 (2010): 37

with the impertinent ideals of the British. Slowly, Anansi became less of a spider and evolved more into a greater representation of the Ghanaians being oppressed by colonialism. The Akan people of Ghana (which also includes the Ashanti), explained an oral story told during the colonial period of British colonization about a tyrant who would not stand to be or believed he could be argued with: he would put to death every individual who went against him or would not satisfy his insane requests and desires. Contradiction in the sense of this story takes the definition of being in disagreement and disputing rather than countering. In the story, Anansi was able to exercise intelligence and his trickster ways against the tyrant and teach him a lesson. The folktale goes by many titles such as, “How Dispute Came Among the Tribe” or “Hate To-Be-Contradicted” in which Anansi adapts to the socio-cultural structure of colonialism; the tyrant being the colonial powers who are the British and Anansi representing his people. The tyrant starts by telling a lie about palm nuts that are grown by his home to Anansi:

“When they are ripe, three bunches ripen at once; when they are ripe I cut them down, and when I boil them to extract the oil, they make three water pots full of oil, and I take the oil to Akase, to buy an Akase old woman; the Akase old woman comes and gives birth to my grandmother, who bears my mother, that she in turn may bear me. When mother bears me, I am already standing there.”⁶³

Anansi replies by lying to the tyrant because he knows that he would put to death if he contradicts the tyrant: “you do not lie, what you say is true; as for me I have some okras standing near my farm, and when they are ripe, I join seventy-seven hooked poles (to reach them to pull them down), but even then they do not reach, so I lie on my back, and am able to pluck them.”⁶⁴ Ultimately, the tyrant visits Anansi at his home, but Anansi is not home so his family continuously lies about Anansi’s whereabouts until the tyrant could no longer stand the lies and

⁶³ Marshall, Emily Zobel. "Liminal Anansi: Symbol of Order and Chaos An Exploration of Anansi's Roots Amongst the Asante of Ghana." *Caribbean Quarterly* 53, no. 3 (2007): 34-35.

⁶⁴ Marshall, 35.

disputes with them. However, because he argued with Anansi's family, Anansi comes out to tell him he should be put to death: "you hate it when people dispute what you say, but you still dispute what others say. That's why I say you should be beaten to death."⁶⁵ Thus, the tyrant was beaten to death.

The oral story was translated from its original language -Twi - to reflect and match the English language structure and rhythm. The story displays the duality in the oral storytelling character, Anansi, as he is able to serve as a violent character and a trickster to disrupt the boundaries of social acceptability of the British. It is interesting to note that the socio-cultural structure in which Anansi is placed allows him to possess a nevertheless divine in which he can hold the position of a cultural hero while being humorous and uplifting and also resisting oppression.

Colonization sought to disrupt the West African identity, but the people of Ghana under colonial rule took advantage of Anansi's stories to address the emotions associated with colonization. Anansi's contradiction story illustrates that he played a multifunctional role for Ghanaians as he was able to utilize strategies to resist the powerful oppressors through cunning and trickery. I contend that the contradiction story cultivated a sense of continuity for Ghanaians under British rule and provided them with a mechanism to evolve and reinforce their identity within the boundaries of colonization. The structure and message of the contradiction Anansi story were dedicated to the obligations of the present circumstance of colonization. Anansi is a symbolic figure of the historical upheavals of enslavement, colonization yet resistance of the Ghanaian people. In essence, Anansi's oral storytelling allowed Ghanaians to create an

⁶⁵ Van Duin, Lieke. "Anansi as Classical Hero." *Journal of Caribbean Literatures* 5, no. 1 (2007): 38.

imaginative space in which they have the free will to modify, create or cultivate endings and experiences that resist colonialism different from the destructive one that they are forced to experience due to colonialism.

Lastly, an oral story that symbolized a real instance of the final Ashanti uprising against British imperialists regarding a golden stool emphasized the significance of resisting oppressive situations to develop solidarity:

“During colonialism, the Queen of England wanted to sit a white man on the golden stool, which would symbolize that she held the soul of the Ashanti people. The men of Ashanti were tired, didn’t want to fight anymore. They said, “They want the stool? Give them the stool.” And the warrior Queen Mother said, “Ught ughn. They can have our bodies, we cannot allow them to have our soul.” And she bared her breast, and she and the women smelted rifles out of gold and went to war for the Ashanti people. And the Europeans never got the golden stool, nor the soul of the Ashanti people”⁶⁶

In essence, the Golden Stool has symbolized the power and strength of the Ashanti people for multiple years. It has also long represented the souls and identities of the Ashanti people. The story rejects the notions regarding the Western perception of the outcome of British colonization. The British may have believed that their imperialist and racist goals to “civilize” the Ghanaian people were successful. However, by telling these oral stories like the Golden stool, there is an indication of a psychological attitude of perseverance, conveying the true and pure reality of history told from the perspective of Ghanaians. For the Ashanti people, no matter how physically and mentally destructive colonialism was for them, their Golden Stool was not taken; thus, meaning that the British did not succeed in capturing the Ashanti people's cultural heritage, spirit and most importantly, their traditions.

⁶⁶ Banks-Wallace, JoAnne. "Emancipatory potential of storytelling in a group." *Image: The Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 30, no. 1 (1998): 17.

The connectivity of Ghanaian storytelling that explains colonization from the Ghanaian perspective or strengthens cultural values in the midst of a governing power that attempts to disrupt the societal virtues of Ghana, allows us to see that we must not draw upon idealistic or naive perspectives of Ghanaian oral storytelling. The adversity that the oral stories emanate from and sustain itself through demonstrates that Ghanaian oral storytelling has been a mobile and diverse mechanism built within tradition to operate against Anglophone colonization. Colonial oppression aimed to silence the Ghanaian voice, but the oral stories reinforced the Ghanaian identity and responded to colonial oppression at all levels. Through the framework of African psychology, it is compelling to acknowledge that oral storytelling was an open-ended psychological response to the oppression colonialism imputed upon the individual. The stories of the trickster and powerful spider, Anansi, were a creative force, embedded in the rootedness and relationship of the Ghanaian people's history that sought to undo and reimagine colonialism from the African [Ghanaian] perspective.

"Oh my home, when shall I see my home?

When shall I see my native land?

I will never forget my home! ⁶⁷

Case Study 2: Nigeria

Before examining Nigerian history prior to colonization, it is important to acknowledge the problem of the pre-colonial identity. The pre-colonial identity of Nigeria recognizes that "Nigeria" or "Nigerian" were not the identities of the first settlers and most of the people up until colonization. Much scholarship regarding Nigeria's history focuses on what is known of Nigeria, thus beginning Nigeria's history in 1914 when the British grouped the northern and southern regions of Nigeria as one colony. However, individuals within those regions did not identify as "Nigerian" or had a governing system that unified them as a group. It is important to make that distinction when we examine the early history of Nigeria as it accounts for various groups of multiple dominant empires and kingdoms; oral storytelling helps establish the foundation of the region prior to it becoming "Nigeria." Through the framework of oral storytelling, each individual ethnic group within modern-day Nigeria dated its origin to its first people, uniquely.

The intrinsic and complex, yet diverse, oral history of multiple African civilizations that settled within the region known as modern day Nigeria provides insight on the various kingdoms and empires such as the Oyo Empire, Benin Empire, Hausa Kingdoms and the Kingdom of Nri. The Oyo Empire was considered the foundation of the Yoruba people, one of the most dominant groups in Nigeria and the Kingdom of Nri tends to be associated with the foundation of the Igbo culture and one of the oldest kingdoms in Nigeria. Many of the stories utilized in this project for

⁶⁷ Simpson, Alaba. "Oral Tradition in Nigeria, Ghana, and Benin." *African Diaspora Archaeology Newsletter* 10, no. 1 (2007): 14.

this case study derive from the Yoruba, Benin and Igbo people. Oral storytelling has been a historical resource of understanding Nigeria and its indigenous people during pre-literate times.⁶⁸ Moreover, by the 14th century, the region was heavily influenced by Islamic culture and the Arabic language. By the 17th century, some of the stories by the Hausa people who are the largest ethnic group in Africa and in Nigeria were being translated into Arabic.⁶⁹

European contact with the region began in the late 15th century to the 16th century, beginning with the catholic missions of the Portuguese. By the later 17th century, the Portuguese influence gradually decreased as the rise of the English and Dutch traders increased within Nigeria. In 1650, the European slave trade began in West Africa with an average of 3,000 – 20,000 human beings being taken each year. Approximately 1,000 – 2,000 slaves per year were being taken from the former capital of Nigeria, Lagos, alone.⁷⁰ Following multiple inter-kingdom wars between various ethnic groups, the British expanded its presence in the region through trade. In 1885, a British businessman created the Royal Niger Company which managed trade on the Niger river. Thereafter, two protectorates were established: The Southern Nigeria Protectorate and The Northern Nigeria Protectorate. As the British continued to force themselves into Nigeria, they were met with varying methods of resistance specifically from differing Yoruba groups and Igboland societies, resulting in many wars. However, in 1914, the British united the two protectorates as one: The Colony and Protectorate of Nigeria. Despite their unification as one, they were still divided administratively.⁷¹

⁶⁸ Edosomwan and Peterson: 93.

⁶⁹ Edosomwan and Peterson: 93.

⁷⁰ “Nigeria’s History of Politics and Global Relations -The Pre-Colonial Period.” Exploring Africa. Accessed March 28, 2020. <http://exploringafrica.matrix.msu.edu/module-twenty-five-activity-two/>.

⁷¹ Kirk-Greene, Anthony Hamilton Millard, and Reuben Kenrick Udo. “The Arrival of the British.” Encyclopædia Britannica. Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., March 21, 2020. <https://www.britannica.com/place/Nigeria/The-arrival-of-the-British>.

As the British presence increased heavily during colonization, British explorers continuously visited the region and wrote their own stories depicting the existing civilizations and kingdoms as societies that lacked civilization and culture. Ultimately, the British colonizer's perspective, "painted Nigeria [and Africa] black" in which this Eurocentric perspective regarding the continent and its nation still persists till today.⁷² However, oral narrations accompanied with musical instruments debunked the Eurocentric narratives and upheld the power and pride of the people: "we are a musical race, and though it may seem a bold assertion, it is a fact that this beneficial gift of the creator has been acknowledged to fall more largely to our share than any other nation of the world."⁷³ As the colonizers perceived the Nigerian people as "black," lacking civilization and cultures, Nigerians were inherently employing their own forms of resistance to negate that discourse. Oral storytelling produced an empowering space where values of the traditional Nigerian society were reinforced to combat the existing negative and false narratives that were being held against the colonial society.

Oral storytelling was operating as a method to counter the Eurocentric perspective of what Nigerians or Africans appeared to be. Within the quote of an oral narration mentioned prior, it is evident that the people have a sense of pride in who they are and as a musical race that tells stories, they consider the music and oral narrations of their traditions, the biggest blessing in the world. It is compelling to note that even though Nigeria may have been created due to the altruistic and selfish initiatives of the British, the people of the region of current day Nigeria still considered themselves one against the colonizers. Through African psychology, the power in the words and oral narration of "we are a musical race" makes the community and the race being

⁷² Edosomwan and Peterson, 93.

⁷³ Simpson, 13.

referred to psychologically feel better about their identity. The excerpt from the oral narrative illustrates that as a musical race, Africa as a continent, and Nigeria as a nation within, were not devoid of civilization and culture. Instead, the quote fosters the concept that Nigeria was the home of culture.

A common thread that is apparent within Nigerian oral storytelling specifically during British colonization is the trust within and the relationship with God(s). The quote regarding Nigerians being the “musical race” mentions that the creator placed such a significant blessing of being a musical race to them which should be held in high esteem because most of the responsibilities fall on them. Another oral story translated by Nigerian educators and researchers, Hannah Okediji and Olatunde Olatunji, reminds Nigerians of the power of God and God’s desire even through failure and hardship:

There was nothing they didn’t cry,
So that they might have all money
But all their efforts failed
As it pleases God so he works. ⁷⁴

Thus, the excerpt reminds people that the creator, God, handles everything and God’s desire is the reason why particular adversities or life events may be occurring. This form of narrative reasoning attributed to God operates as a coping method to deal with the intense negative emotions produced by colonialism. Additionally, within the African psychology framework, emotional storytelling that deals with the response to an event such as colonialism, helped Nigerians resist the colonial powers and strategically work with their emotions associated with colonialism. Oral storytelling distances them from colonialism and places them in a communal

⁷⁴ Okediji, Hannah Adebola Aderonke. "Effect of Oral Traditions, Folklores and History on the Development of Education in Nigeria, 1977 Till Date." *History* 7, no. 2 (2017): 71.

imaginative state that brings Nigerians together as one, hence the “musical race.” The moral virtue of putting one’s trust in God (or a creator) dispels the European narrative that the Nigerians [Africans] were a group of people with no prior civilization or religion; it exhibits that there were religious foundations and frameworks in which the people created and aligned with. Nonetheless, the religious background helped them cope with the tragedy of colonialism. Thus, the teaching of this oral story re-orientates Nigerian socially, morally and politically because it cites a reasoning for what is occurring especially during colonization when all facets of life are disrupted and constantly changing, leaving people with the unknown of their society.

The Benin people of Nigeria also utilized oral storytelling to audibly sing and tell a story of a “metal sound” in which the story mimics a metal sound:

“Ye no su a su le, soi Yoruba
 Ngono ja si do soi Azi yeh,
 O yenfi ren za me len homeh
 Ye da si no wai do mie”⁷⁵

This is an excerpt of a particular Benin oral story which is told in the same tone of a song in its original form and language as the original version is much longer. Although this is an excerpt, the most compelling aspect of this oral story told in the form of a song is the concept of the metal sound representing the immense grief associated with the presence of Europeans disrupting the everyday lives of the Nigerian people. Throughout the story, there are metal sounds that signify the coming of Europeans to eradicate the West African identity. A great deal of scholarship regarding African storytelling delineates oral storytelling as a jovial experience in which it usually is. However, within Nigerian storytelling and this story from Benin, there is a distinctive perspective associated with negative feelings to a negative circumstance that also utilizes

⁷⁵ Simpson, 14.

storytelling. In the story, the storyteller discusses the sorrow and tears associated with the actions of Europeans in Africa. He cites how colonialism aimed to erode the identity of many Nigerians by forcibly taking control of the social bonding, indigenous beliefs, group identities and values of the people. Furthermore, the storyteller also discusses how Nigerians were forced to participate in the world wars that occurred which broke family chains and lineage by forcefully taking away men from their families.⁷⁶ The dichotomous relationship of the reality where colonization is actively occurring and the performative state of oral storytelling to express the Nigerian people's feelings with colonialism nourish a psychological form of Nigerian indigenous human life that liberates the Nigerian individual to cope systematically with colonialism.

Like Ghana who also shares the same colonial power as Nigeria, oral stories connected emotions among a society. Although the British labeled various Nigerian groups as a people with no culture, while aiming to “civilize” them, oral storytelling is still working as a living resistance story because it exhibits that Africans, specifically Nigerians, were not complacent in colonialism. In fact, the story evokes grief, sorrow and anger while it is performed to display and explain to the audience the emotions regarding the tragedy of Europeans in Africa. By addressing these feelings within a group and performing the story, the history and voices of those who lived through colonization are still heard – and that for me, is living resistance. The full song illustrates the emotional pain associated with the presence of Europeans in general by conveying how uneasy it is to remember the unforgettable atrocities Europeans created within Africa all in the name of “western dominance.”

⁷⁶ Simpson, 16.

Moreover, there are other alternative oral stories told in the form of a song. A specific story that originated during the Trans-Atlantic slave trade among the Nigerian people also reappeared as a popular oral story during Anglophone colonization in Nigeria:

*“Oh my home, when shall I see my home?
When shall I see my native land?
I will never forget my home!
When shall I see my native land?
I will never forget my home!”*⁷⁷

It is powerful to see that the oral story emerged after the Trans-Atlantic slave trade. The oral story inherently alludes to multiple ideas of the circumstances and emotions associated with colonialism. I contend that the people of Nigeria did not feel as though their land was theirs especially during colonization, but they will continue to remember their culture. As colonization aimed to disrupt the Nigerian identity, these oral stories reinforced tradition and the cultural orientation of people. Because the story returned during colonialism, it is evident that Nigerians did not see British colonization as their home; the presence of Europeans in Nigeria was neither native nor innate to them. Their home was their native land prior to Europeans entering Nigerian.

The sustainability of the native land song to transpire past the slave trade and live through colonialism is colonial resistance. The song mentions that people will never forget their home regardless of the situation and circumstance. Furthermore, native land constitutes traditions, cultural virtues and heritage that shape the people and their societies because of their ancestors and thus, the repetition of “I will never forget my home” demonstrates that they will not forget who they are and their native land even as colonization attempts to “civilize” or erase it. It is

⁷⁷ Simpson, 14.

inherently compelling to explore oral stories like this that remerge in a different time period in which the similarities revolve around Europeans and oppression.

The African psychological framework allows us to see that when Nigerians arrange these experiences into stories, the narrative that is produced may be a perfect or ideal method that distinguishes the stride of overcoming these negative experiences or developing methods to rewrite history about the “savage people devoid of culture.”⁷⁸ It is said that once an individual or group of people lose their ability to develop their own narratives, they lose themselves. Throughout colonialism, Nigerians did not lose their ability to construct their own narratives and history and thus, they did not lose themselves. In essence, by singing their oral stories, they never forget who their native people and land were which subverts and recreates Western dominant knowledge that oral storytelling may not be a “rigorous” resource or a form of “identity politics.”⁷⁹

In Badagry, a coastal town in Lagos State in modern day Nigeria, many oral stories and folklore were re-produced. One compelling story titled, “Hunto Konu” in which the title name alludes to many variations of a ‘European that smiles’ or ‘ship owner that smiles’ as the Europeans utilized ships to reach Nigeria:

“Huntokonu, You hound us like a demon!
 How can we forget you so easily? Is it for the naked ruins
 That we stare at left and right every day? Or for tearing us apart as a race
 Is it for the seed of fear, Planted in our hearts
 Or the gene of suspicion, Ingrained to plague our oneness?
 Is it for the blood stains, That trail your trampling footsteps
 Or the unending wailing of the million souls
 Destroyed for sin they carried
 Because of the colour of their skin?”⁸⁰

⁷⁸ Edosomwan, 91, 96.

⁷⁹ Sium, Aman, and Eric Ritskes. "Speaking truth to power: Indigenous storytelling as an act of living resistance." *Decolonization: indigeneity, education & Society* 2, no. 1 (2013): 3.

⁸⁰ Simpson, 20.

The excerpt of the story about Hunto Konu incorporates the ideas regarding the emotions associated with European imperialism in Nigeria. These emotions are inherently born out of the oral storytelling accounts of colonization and European presence in Nigerian societies prior to colonization. As time progressed, this story was inherited by younger and older generations and transformed into a dance form so now it is performed along with a dance. Knowing the significant location of Badagry allows us to conceptualize this oral story and the history. Badagry was one of the coastal locations in Nigeria that experienced European contact prior to other societies and the location in which Europeans were concentrated during the slave trade. The story displays anger towards Huntokonu because of his actions. When the storytelling mentions [us] and [our], it can be implied that the storyteller is discussing the Badagry people specifically, or the Nigerian people as a whole. The anger displayed within the story is compelling because the storyteller is saying that the people will never forget the acts of brutality and selfishness against Africans caused by the Europeans. The powerful story of indigenous traditions producing knowledge and history in their own ways to transmit through future generations.

The storyteller in Hunto Kunto story accounts and reminds Hunto Kunto that these “savagery” acts committed against Africans were to “tear apart a race” and all because of the “color of their skin” which must be acknowledged because it shows that Nigerians were transferring knowledge to future generations about the heinous crimes committed against them. Here, we are seeing a different side of the humorous accounts, and at times, cheerful trickster stories that Ghanaians used to display their feelings of colonialism to children. The story also cites the already existing murder crimes for “millions of souls” at the hands of Europeans which reinforces the concept of white supremacy being utilized in all facets of European contact with

Africans.⁸¹ These counter-narratives disrupt the legitimacy of presentations of Africans by the Europeans during colonization. Europeans described the people as “savagery” but in the Huntokonu oral story, the roles are reversed, providing a valid history perspective allowing Nigerian history to exist in its own right. Ultimately, this single narrative hounds European oppression and speaks back to history, representing the totality of truths of colonialism. Focusing on the psychological to oppression and internalized racism, this oral story displays that Nigerians utilized oral stories to explain the discourse surrounding colonialism. Nigerian oral storytelling is a double-edged sword in which the storyteller here utilized it to reawaken a dormant conflict in the eyes of the colonizers.⁸²

Comparatively like Ghana, in Nigeria, some oral stories during colonization reinforced the societal values such as the importance of pregnancy and the importance of the child. Children were taught these songs to recognize their self-beauty and to stand proud. Particularly, the Yoruba group made it a conscious responsibility to ensure that the child understands his worth as an individual within a society or government institution that try to dismiss them on the color of their skin:

“Omo nigbeyin ola / The child is the end product of wealth.
 Omo niyi, omo lewa / The child is a thing of fashion; a thing of beauty.
 Bi a bu ni leyin, ba o si nile, / If one is insulted in one’s absence,
 Omo eni nii so funni / It is one’s child that informs
 Ki la ba fowo ra bi ko se omo? / What do we spend money to buy that is greater than the child?
 Bina ba ku, a fi eeru boju / When the fire is extinguished, it is the ashes that survive it.
 Bi odege ba ku a foo re ropo / When the banana tree dies, it is the offshoot that survives it.
 Omo ni yoo jogun ewa awa / It is the child that will inherit our beauty.”⁸³

⁸¹ Simpson, 20.

⁸² Folami, Olakunle Michael, and Taiwo Akanbi Olaiya. "Gender, storytelling and peace construction in a divided society: A case study of the Ife/Modakeke conflict." *Cogent Social Sciences* 2, no. 1 (2016): 3.

⁸³ Akinyemi, A. (2003). Yorùbá oral literature: A source of indigenous education for children. *Journal of African Cultural Studies*, 16(2), 163.

The oral story allows us to see the importance of the child within society no matter the circumstance. Similar to Ghana's oral stories during colonialism, particularly the story of "Little Ebow" displays a communal appreciation of validation of children and their lived experiences. The Nigerian child is also taught to resist the emotions associated with colonialism and the outside and exude self-confidence, immensely sustaining the beliefs of Nigeria. In the story told of "Hunto Konu", there is anger directed towards Europeans because Nigerians were "destroyed for the *sin they* carried, because of the color of their skin."⁸⁴ By teaching this oral story, it reinforces the moral values of Nigerians and resists what Europeans may label the children as because of the color of their skin. Children are the "end product of wealth" so colonization can continue to occur, but the child's beauty still prevails, and that fact alone is the most significant. It is captivating to see how education within Yoruba society continues and even if the children are not aware of what is occurring within their society, they still perform these oral stories and listen to the message while society embraces their character-building and striving for the ultimate confidence that their ancestors believed in. Psychologically, the children are *implicitly* coping with colonialism by developing strength and confidence that validates their color and their worth in a system that attempted to reduce it.

Anglophone colonization did not stop the tradition of the pre-colonial Yoruba society and the Yoruba traditions ultimately resisted so that children acknowledged their worth within society. Anglophone colonization was a form of European imperialism in which they aimed to produce a process of "homogenization" culturally, socially and politically within societies in the Nigerian region.⁸⁵ The autoethnography of traditional oral storytelling provides us with a

⁸⁴ Simpson, 20.

⁸⁵ Sium and Ritskes, 4.

glimpse of groups like the Yoruba who were both a dynamic and flexible society in which cultural practices and knowledge productions resisted colonial values that were meant to “civilize” them. Their own cultural values sustained during colonization, recreating revolutionary spaces in which children not only had an imaginative space to embrace their confidence but for societal leaders to affirm their people’s political and societal identities.

Moreover, another Nigerian folklore that re-emerged during colonialism with modifications to its character, is titled, *How the Leopard Got His Claws*. The oral folklore takes the listeners back to the first humans and the beginning of time in which there was only one farming society of animals. Their original story included a King Leopard who was originally a well-liked, powerful yet gentle leader. Originally, the story displayed a society in which animals could live a “communal life of peace, harmony and cooperation.”⁸⁶ However, as time progressed, the story became focused on the dangers of bloodthirstiness and selfish leadership; and the animals turned into altruistic and antagonistic individuals:

“In spite of Leopard’s self-righteousness in blaming the citizen for cowardice and fickleness, it is obvious that the actual cause of the tragedy that befalls the animal kingdom is the selfish individualism of the greedy power elites -Dog who originally possessed sharp teeth and Leopard who later acquired sharp teeth and dreadful claws. The Leopard’s outburst shows he is as individualistic and selfish as Dog and that he actually cares more for the preservation of power than for good governance.”⁸⁷

I assert that as this story was told during colonization, it analogizes colonial violence while resisting it at the same time. There is a personified reciprocity that lives through the Nigerians and their stories. Originally, the oral story symbolized a lesson to demonstrate the communal life of peace, harmony and cooperation but as history progressed, European contact within the nation

⁸⁶ Balogun, F. Odun. "Nigerian Folktales and Children's Stories By Chinua Achebe." *Journal of Black Studies* 20, no. 4 (1990): 427

⁸⁷ Balogun, 428.

became stronger. As the story transforms to show the antagonistic individuals residing in horrible leadership, there is a direct representation of what is actually occurring within the society. The stories then become these measures of “creative rebellion.”⁸⁸

As colonization progressed, the ancestral oral stories were also emphasized. The Yoruba specifically used oral stories centered on the concept of praise to remind children and the younger generation of the strength of their virtuous ancestors. Coupled with this, the younger generation was supposed to feel empowered and motivated with these ideals. One of the Yoruba stories emphasize the lineage of the child and its significant to protect that regardless of the circumstance:

“Omo osan pon kanrinkanrin / The offspring of the sun that is high in the sky
 Keni ma gbode baba re lo / Let no one pass in front of your ancestors’ house
 Omo aajin jin dundun / In the thick dead of the night
 Keni ma gbode baba re lo Let no one pass in front of your ancestors’ house”⁸⁹

The line that mentions not to let anyone pass in front of the individual’s ancestor’s house is continuously repeated throughout the story. This specific oral story is accompanied with musical instruments and a dance while carrying the Yoruba people’s indigenous philosophies and epistemologies of the significance of their ancestors. Children are reminded of their significant, worthy and noble ancestry that colonization aims to erase and motivates the children and older members of the society to strive and uphold these high morals. In view of this oral story being performed to younger children and other members of the group, the story is personified as a living thing for Nigerians in which it resists colonial erasure violence and promoting and encouraging the morals of ancestors.

⁸⁸ Sium and Ritskes, 5.

⁸⁹ Akinyemi, 164.

The modifications of the story evidently exhibit that storytellers have never been silent in the face of colonial violence that destabilized and neutralized other mechanisms of resistance. Storytellers were never idle and especially not through colonization; they operated through different mediums, modifying stories such as *How the Leopard Got Its Claws* to sustain the societal morals and cultures of being. Stories also appeared to be related to the politics of pre-colonization and modified to fit and cope with the current political state of the society. Thus, exemplifying that storytelling was if not almost, always political with a personal narrative touch. However, in the midst of colonization, the delivery of Nigerian stories and cultural groundings were inherently resistant and threatening to colonialism. Storytellers were the key to continue the Nigerian [African] agency and sustain the agency during and after colonization. Ultimately, the survival of these stories through any colonial circumstance should be recognized as an intrinsic combination of refusal, creation and knowledge production, assertion and resistance.

Lastly, the novel by well-known contemporary writer, Chinua Achebe, *Things Fall Apart* is about violent transitions caused by British colonization. It was published in 1958, right before Nigeria gained its independence from Britain in 1960. The novel narrates the story of Okonkwo, an Igbo village hero, as European missions arrived in Nigeria during the late 1800s, strongly impacting the lives of the traditional Igbo group. *Things Fall Apart* interposes Western linguistics mechanisms and traditions with his own Igbo words, phrases, folklore and traditional oral communal stories.⁹⁰ The utilization of Nigerian oral traditions in the novel subverts the colonizer's power to control the Igbo people. It is crucial to recognize that Okonkwo never submits to the British or their Christianity lesson which leaves his mind and heart candidly Igbo as Achebe never translates Okonkwo's thoughts or oral stories and leaves them in the Igbo

⁹⁰ Achebe, Chinua, and C. W. Bacon. 1958. *Things fall apart*.

language. One of Okonkwo's oral stories, which becomes the only oral story in which he sings as the society is clearly being influenced by British missionaries, is very significant to acknowledge. Although Achebe did not translate the oral story, I found a translation through consulting multiple Igbo natives:

“Eze elina, elina! /King, do not eat, do not eat!
 Sala
 Eze iilikwa ya / King if you eat it
 Ikwaba akwa ogholi / You will weep for abomination
 Ebe Danda nechi eze / Where White Ant installs king
 Ebe Uzuzu nete egwu / Where Dust dances to the drums
 Sala”⁹¹

The placement of this oral story for Okonkwo is compelling as it seems as though he sings this oral story in hopes that his people do not become subdued by the British influence or they will “weep for abomination.” This oral story song traces the tragedy of the dehumanizing effects of cultural arrogance and the desire to control one's people as it is evident that this song is inherently telling the King not to eat this item which can possibly symbolize not to engage with the Europeans. From the story, the consequences of engaging the Europeans are apparent as the King (which could also signify) the people would be grieving. Achebe demonstrates, through his fictional book, the importance of the Nigerian oral tradition of storytelling as that was a story Okonkwo remembered from his childhood.

By the same token, the locust myth, an oral story is told in Chapter Seven of the novel: “locusts came in a generation, reappeared every year for seven years and then disappeared for another lifetime. They went back to their caves in a distant land, where they were guarded by a race of stunted men.”⁹² The locust oral story is noteworthy to examine because normally, locusts

⁹¹ Achebe: 60.

⁹² Achebe, 42.

should be perceived as threatening; however, the Igbo society welcomes them jovially through celebrations. When locusts arrive, women, men and children chant and run to see the locusts descending. However, Achebe instils a deeper significance to the story as he describes the arrival of the locusts: “at first a fairly small swarm came. They were harbingers sent to survey the land. And then appeared on the horizon a slowly-moving mass like a boundless sheet of black cloud drifting towards Umuofia.”⁹³ Although the characters in the novel are not real, we still see symbolism associated with each myth especially as colonization was gradually beginning. The arrival of locusts alludes to the dark cloud of the arrival of European imperialism. Achebe utilizes allegorical elements to foretell the Europeans arriving who will eventually exploit the resources of the Igbo people.

When the Europeans arrive, some of the people refer to them as locusts: “they were locusts, it said, and that first man was their harbinger sent to explore the terrain.”⁹⁴ Ultimately, Achebe utilizes oral storytelling within his book regarding colonization to amazingly metaphorically associate in which “locusts” and the “white men” as similar. The locust invasion inherently represented European imperialism with the intention of devastating Africans and destructing the existing societies. Notably, even though it is a fiction novel, we see that oral folktales kept the cultural history of Nigeria alive during colonial times. Chinua Achebe utilizes oral storytelling to show that as colonialism attempts to exterminate the West African identity, oral folktale was a powerful defense in challenging and resisting that domination as their stories described how the Europeans arrived on their land. In the way that Europeans characterize land as a possession, an item that is owned, *Things Fall Apart* illustrate that through storytelling, land

⁹³ Achebe, 43.

⁹⁴ Achebe, 102.

is not just the scenery in which these stories are being told – they are the why and how we tell them and the promise to uphold the society’s virtues. Storytelling and Nigerian land go hand in hand as the locust myth and Okonkwo’s oral story undo the borders in which colonization binds them, restoring the indigenous history, relationships and linkage rooted within the land.

Markedly, Chinua’s Achebe contemporary stories are distinct from its predecessors as it symbolizes a new approach that depicts a collision rather than a coalescence of the old and new ways of life to a devastating event, colonialism. His work exemplifies a subtle rejection of the historical dominance perspective of the British as it tells the story of European perspective explicitly through use of characters from the society, while implementing existing traditions of the society and stories which allows the people to connect directly with all characters. The most important aspect of the entire narrative is that it is conducted through the African perspective, and that in and of itself, is colonial resistance.

Through the excerpts of Nigerian oral stories, we see how oral stories have spoken against claims of “premodernity” associated with the pre-colonial Nigerian societies. As the British sought to homogenize the societies through “civilizing” them, Nigerian oral stories continued to reclaim and strengthen the epistemic foundation that colonialism heavily sought to eradicate. Nigerian oral stories provide a framework and foundation for scholars to acknowledge oral stories as one of the most resistant forms against colonization. The foundation of African psychology provides a framework to prove that Nigerian oral storytelling was therapeutic in its measure to bring communities together spiritually, embedding and reinforcing the values of their ancestors during colonization. Through colonial violence, Nigerian storytellers have never remained idle. Their stories dismantled colonial structures and the negative experiences associated with it while providing a psychological cathartic release to express their anger, grief

and somewhat hope for the future during colonization. Ultimately, Nigerian storytellers have cultivated communities that deconstruct colonial knowledge, while constructing alternatives that signify the totality of truths in the colonial discourse heavily controlled by the British.

“... a garden does not require half as much cultivation as a human being, and is generally worth it, whereas people very often are not!”⁹⁵

Case Study 3: Sierra Leone

According to oral history and traditions, the first inhabitants of the Sierra Leone area were known to be the Bulom, along with the Krim and Gola people arriving by AD 1400. In the 15th century, the Mende and Temne groups settled in the central region as the Fulani people moved to settle in the northern region of Sierra Leone. Due to the dense tropical rainforests, Sierra Leone was mostly isolated location-wise from other pre-colonial African societies.⁹⁶ In 1462, a Portuguese explorer, Pedro de Sintra found the area and named it, “Serra Lyoa”, meaning Lioness Mountain.⁹⁷ During this time, oral traditions recorded that the country was occupied by various politically self-sufficient native groups and numerous languages, but there was still a sense of similar region between the disparate groups. During the 15th century, Portuguese explorers continuously visited the area, maintaining forts in the northern region.

When the Europeans first arrived in the 15th century, Sierra Leone’s oral history described that slavery among the existing societies were actually rare. However, foreign influence began to increase as trade occurred between the Sierra Leoneans and the Europeans. Nonetheless, the British had a growing interest in Sierra Leone which led to the establishment of more forts in the coastal locations of Sierra Leone in 1672. The emergence of the slave trade established human beings as commodities to be sold in the market.⁹⁸ Ultimately, Bunce Island in Sierra Leone became a centered location for the transportation of slaves from Europe to the

⁹⁵ Desai, Gaurav Gajanan. "Gendered Self-Fashioning: Adelaide Casely Hayford's Black Atlantic." *Research in African Literatures* 35, no. 3 (2004): 152.

⁹⁶ Kup, Alexander Peter. *A history of Sierra Leone, 1400-1787*. CUP Archive, 1961. 124

⁹⁷ “About Sierra Leone: History.” UNITED NATIONS INTEGRATED PEACEBUILDING OFFICE IN SIERRA LEONE, April 13, 2017. <https://unipsil.unmissions.org/about-sierra-leone-history>.

⁹⁸ Kup, 120.

Americas. Thus, the Atlantic slave trade unquestionably impacted Sierra Leone, socially, economically and politically.

By 1807, the British proclaimed the slave trade illegal and a British naval port was created at Freetown in Sierra Leone to rescue people from slave ships or intercept ships with slaves in them. In 1808, the British declared Sierra Leone, the British Crown Colony of Sierra Leone and Freetown served as the capital of British West Africa as a whole. Oral records explain how the new city exponentially increased with freed slaves.⁹⁹ Coupled with this, the British aimed to use “friendly persuasions” to secure their altruistic and imperialist interests in Sierra Leone as they attempted to completely control trade and eventually, the people.

Through the 17th century, the “Scramble for Africa” forced the British to obtain various treaties from different chiefs. These treaties were described as “cooperative agreements” between the people and the British. Unfortunately, in 1896, the British declared a protectorate, forcing the nation to become a single entity that followed a shared history, culture and language known as Krio, a mix of the different languages of the traders and other settlers within the region. The British also declared that the official language of the new protectorate would be English. However, oral storytelling shows that societal chiefs in Sierra Leone did not agree to these treaties voluntarily. For some groups, oral records explain that there were no treaties acquired by the British from the chiefs in those areas. Most chieftaincies responded to the concept of Sierra Leone being a protectorate with armed resistance. Henceforth, the British reduced the power of the chiefs through the replacement of titles in which chief positions could be overthrown or replaced by the British.¹⁰⁰ The arbitrary choice to forcefully group native groups together was a

⁹⁹ Kup, 38.

¹⁰⁰ Fyle, C. Magbaily. "Oral Tradition and Sierra Leone History." *History in Africa* 12 (1985): 67.

huge challenge that caused ethnic wars and traditional enemies between societies that still exist today because they had to solely identify as one: Sierra Leonean. For instance, the Mende, Temne and Creoles are still rival power groups.

As British colonization progressed and numerous violent uprisings occurred to resist the British oppression, the indigenous philosophical thought, morals and wisdom did not cease for the groups who had to take upon the sole identity of now being Sierra Leonean. Oral stories preserved the history of the people, the society's general perspective on the meaning of life and how the people should conduct themselves. In Sierra Leone, adults would gather the younger children discussing and performing myths, legends and stories that not only expressed the ancestral past of the society, but also transmit political and cultural heritage of the people so the children could relate their ancestral history to their current lives. The oral stories for Sierra Leoneans provided the ethical standards for how individuals should conduct themselves. Notably, the Mende people of Sierra Leone emphasized stories during colonization regarding the trickster spider, "kasiloi" who taught the children of Sierra Leone about the "unwanted consequences" of greed and egocentrism.¹⁰¹ In the story, the narrator would begin the oral story by asking the audience which tends to also include adults, "do you know why the spider has such a slender waist?" Thus, the oral story would be sung, accompanied with music and then fully performed:

"Spider was invited to two feasts in two villages at the same time. Not wanting to miss either feast, Spider tied a rope around his waist and gave each end of the rope to each village. He instructed each village to pull the rope precisely when the feast began. The harder Spider was pulled in each direction, the smaller his waist became. He screamed and screamed in pain till his neighbour heard his cries and came and untied the rope.

¹⁰¹ Kanu, Yatta. *Integrating Aboriginal perspectives into the school curriculum: Purposes, possibilities, and challenges*. University of Toronto Press, 2011.

*Through greed, therefore, Spider lost the feast in each village and never regained his waistline.”*¹⁰²

The story warns the audience of the dangers of greed and how greed as a characteristic can make one lose all its treasures. The narrations of the spider story reaffirm the role of oral tradition as a mechanism to strengthen the Sierra Leone people’s cultural assertion. Like Ghanaians, the Mende people utilized an animal such as a spider, ‘kasiloi’ to depict cultural values in which children and adults in the society should uphold.

For the Mende people, the spider story displays the dangers of greed and egoism which can allude to negative attributes associated with the British. Greed is not and should not be a desirable trait that one should have within the Sierra Leonean society, so stories like Kasiloi reinforce those morals especially when colonialism occurred as a consequence of Eurocentric greed. Within the kasiloi oral folklore, oral stories provided a way to display inappropriate behaviors of members of the society or outsiders like the British colonizers and appropriate behaviors of ancestors or past members of the story without directly criticizing or even mentioning the individual. Anansi’s stories provided Ghanaians with a vitality in which his heroic acts encouraged the people to seek ‘imaginative’ or psychological refuge within his stories. In the same fashion, Kasiloi provided the Mende people with the same attributes as Anansi because its stories deconstructed the characteristics associated with the colonizer like greed, while passing on their historic indigenous stories to reinforce moral virtues.

Psychologically, as colonization ensued, the animalistic based oral stories offer therapeutic mechanisms for the Mende people to express and perform their cultural norms safely in a community as a means to deal with the colonial conditions.¹⁰³ In the community, stories

¹⁰² Kanu.

¹⁰³ Kanu.

about Kasiloi the spider brought together the elders, adults and younger ones of the group as they reclaim their knowledge of their ancestors through oral storytelling education, which was seen as a strategic method of resistance. British colonial education sought to negate the powerful oral traditional teachings of the Sierra Leone people, but oral learning tools such as the spider story endured through the identity displacement; thus, each existing ethnic group was able to develop creative sustainability and recovery to ensure certain aspects of their tradition were being passed on through oral stories.¹⁰⁴ Through the teaching of Aboriginal traditional education to the children while colonization was actively occurring, oral traditions protected the cultural continuity and survival of the holistic well-being of the Mende people's cultural unit and its environment.¹⁰⁵

Another trickster animal who has entertained and bemused Sierra Leone's people in oral history is the "Royal Antelope." Although the Royal Antelope is a trickster, the Mendes' oral tales tend to associate the Royal Antelope with "socially positive behavior." Moreover, in the Temne people's oral tales, the spider was equated to both positive and negative attributes.¹⁰⁶ A popular tale that was also performed during colonization within the Mende and Temne people refer to the Royal Antelope saving the animal community through its trickster acts:

"the predatory Leopard was tricked into believing that a big storm was coming and that he should be tied up so that he would not be blown away. By successfully tying up Leopard, the trickster, Royal Antelope saves the animal community from Leopard's depredations - at least temporarily."¹⁰⁷

Similar to Ghana's Anansi's trickster ways and the oral story from Nigeria, *How the Leopard Got His Claws*, the Royal Antelope and the spider, Kasiloi are animal-based oral tales that serve

¹⁰⁴ Kanu, Y., 2007. Tradition and Educational Reconstruction in Africa in Postcolonial and Global Times: The Case for Sierra Leone. *African Studies Quarterly*, 9(3): 77.

¹⁰⁵ Kanu.

¹⁰⁶ Kilson, Marion. "Spider and Royal Antelope in Sierra Leone." *Anthropos* H. 1./3 (1984): 242.

¹⁰⁷ Kilson, 242.

as personifications of morality. The collective themes regarding these animal characters in oral stories derived from Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone are the behavioral attributes affiliated with the animals like Anansi, the Royal Antelope, Kasiloi and other animals. When the animal behaves antisocially or aims to use deception for his own selfish gain rather than in the best interests of the community's, the character does not attain his goal in the story and is ultimately physically or psychologically punished. However, when these animals employ positive characteristics to serve a social and communal purpose, the character reaches its goal and is inherently honored. In essence, the oral stories are reinforcing the characteristics of high esteem that society values in which every individual should strive to attain.

Moreover, colonization disrupted the social order of these varying ethnic groups and attempted to psychologically disconnect these societies from their cultural socialization. However, animal oral stories like the Royal Antelope and the spider were embodiments of cultural ethics and definers of order through a period of social disorder [colonization]. Contemporary African psychology embraces that oral stories exude a sense of psychological realism as the characters [animals] of story are manifestations of the people who tell these stories, the ones they make be criticizing or a significant life event. These oral stories challenged the Western European culture of knowledge production and reclaimed the Aboriginal knowledge of Sierra Leone in which the British attempted to devalue and delegitimize during colonization. Anansi, Kasiloi and the Royal Antelope are movers of an oppressed universe that create an imaginative space for stories of ironic transformation.

It is apparent that the storyteller of West African societies must have a strong and powerful collective memory; the society's selection and recognition of the influence of a historical moment is not arbitrary particularly for the people of Sierra Leone. When the British

imposed a levy tax on huts during colonization, it immediately resulted in armed resistance. A notable and resilient military strategist in Sierra Leone's history, Bai Bureh encouraged and proposed guerilla warfare against the British government to resist the hut tax. His actions inspired others within the governments to aggressively rise up against the hut tax; however, British governmental forces won the battle after many lives were lost on both sides of the fight. Eventually, Bai Bureh was exiled to the Gold Coast until 1905. Sierra Leoneans utilized oral stories that were to be sung centered around Bai Bureh during colonization which has been continuously passed down through generations:

“Bai Bureh was a warrior
 He fought against the British,
 The British made him surrender,
 I ala Kortor Maimu / He hollered, ‘Master, I beg
 E Kortor ‘Maimu, E Korotor Gbokitong’ / oh, Master, I beg, oh, Master, It’s enough.’
 I ala Kortor Maimu” / He holler, ‘Master, I beg’”¹⁰⁸

Through oral storytelling, Sierra Leoneans are able to preserve Bai Bureh's historical legacy and innovative forms of resistance. Although the British wanted to exile him from society and history, Sierra Leoneans are remembering his defiance and warrior-like characteristics, restoring and re-creating their own history. African psychology recognizes the systems in place which Sierra Leoneans react to British oppression. Sierra Leoneans employed and produced new oral folklore to commemorate a leader that the British desired to erase from the society and its history. Thus, an oral story sought to remember a leader and record his plight against the British provides emotion focused coping as Sierra Leoneans are able to control and narrate their own collective emotional feelings of his success and failure yet brave heart and convey it through a story that provides a communal experience for everyone.

¹⁰⁸ Osagie, Iyunolu Folayan. "National Identity: The Dramatic Return of Memory in Sierra Leone." In *The Amistad Revolt: Memory, Slavery, and the Politics of Identity in the United States and Sierra Leone*, 98-118. University of Georgia Press, 2000: 101.

The way in which the story is written deviates from the British colonial perspective of how Bai Bureh was “defeated.” By stating that the “British made him surrender”, it depicts Bai Bureh as active rather than passive. If Bai Bureh is depicted as passive rather than active, the historical legacy of heroism would be automatically erased within the oral story which would sustain the British colonial perspective of his legacy. Therefore, the active method speaks from an African perspective and is able to be passed through generations during colonization.

Correspondingly, the last lines of the Bai Bureh oral story derive from the Temne in which there is a sense of a cultural value being reinforced. Through social commentary, the performers of the song are distancing themselves from the notable leader's predictable fall from glory by ridiculing and comedizing his personal failure. For context, the final lines of the story are normal as Sierra Leoneans have instilled cultural values that assert an “intolerance of failure.”¹⁰⁹ Therefore, by incorporating Bai Bureh’s failure and controlling the narrative of his defeat, the articulations of the story cultivate a forceful resistance to colonial power because Sierra Leoneans are in control of the narrative. Historical oral stories like the Bai Bureh created during colonialism are “resurgent moments” that give Sierra Leoneans the foundation to restore an epistemic ground. The Bai Bureh oral story reinforces indigenous traditions such as the intolerance of failure while reconstructing a resistant space for collective history to be sustained for generations to come. The Bai Bureh oral story utilizes the repeating structures of oral tradition, ensuring that both the “re-memory” of the present and the validation of the present is spoken from the Sierra Leonean perspective.

¹⁰⁹ Osagie, 101.

Similarly, like Chinua Achebe of Nigeria, Adelaide Casely-Hayford was a Sierra Leonean Creole activist for cultural nationalism, a storyteller and a feminist committed to the advancement of Black men and women in Sierra Leone. Hayford familiarized Sierra Leoneans with Pan-Africanist and feminist discourse while establishing women's education in Sierra Leone. Under British colonialism, she founded an all-girls school in Freetown, to promote and encourage Sierra Leonean cultural heritage and racial pride, in hopes of conserving and protecting the Sierra Leonean identity.¹¹⁰ Hayford's short stories were devoted to Pan-Africanist messages in which her stories emanated from the racialized oppressive environment. Her work sought to resist the oppression of colonialism by speaking out against colonial powers. For instance, her short story, "The Answer" displayed a Sierra Leonean village life in which an evil spirit originating from the sea forcefully took Africans into the slavery. The evil spirit represented Europeans as they utilized ships by sea to take Africans from their homeland. At the end of the first part of the story, a chief weeps and says, "Tell me, Oh tell me. When my people are carried into this fair land, Will they keep the faith and return again to me?"¹¹¹ The rest of the story shows the endured suffering that the slaves experienced in the Americas, but throughout the story, the people sustained their unwavering devotion to Africa.

One of Hayford's well known oral stories was, "Mista Courifer" in which Mista Courifer is a Sierra Leonean advocate for colonization. Mista Courifer is a Sierra Leone man who believes that everything and anything European is the right and only thing for Africans, thus depicting a caricature of a Black Englishman. In the story, Mista Courifer made coffins for a living, dressed in all black and constructed himself a house that was based in European elements of architecture.

¹¹⁰ Okonkwo, Rina. "Adelaide Casely Hayford Cultural Nationalist and Feminist." *Phylon* (1960-) 42, no. 1 (1981): 41-43.

¹¹¹ Okonkwo, 45.

The house is described as “uncomfortable, stuffy, and unsanitary” which is ironic because those negative qualities are used to describe a European house.¹¹² It conveys how Sierra Leoneans may have felt about Europeans and their customs.

Moreover, Mista Courifer puts his hopes and dreams into his son, Tomas, as he aimed to develop him into the perfect Englishman by ordering all his clothes from England. Tomas was a victim of racial oppression as he was employed as a government clerk and the English workers were inherently treated superior to him. Ultimately, Tomas eventually challenges his father’s perspective: “... I shall never look like an Englishman, and I don’t know that I want to.” From that moment forward, Tomas continued to dress in traditional Sierra Leone attire and Mista Courifer was left as a “slavish imitator” of the British.¹¹³ The short story instills racial pride in one’s identity and reinforces the Sierra Leonean identity as a strong nation one should be proud of. Sierra Leonean identity also appears to be a strong identity that is hard to remove because even within the story, Tomas nor his father cannot seem to fully assimilate to European culture; there are never quite 100% there. Thus, by developing cultural nationalism within her story, Hayford’s story is a living document of resistance and survival of the native habits and customs that strengthens Sierra Leoneans, African individuality.

Contemporary stories like Adelaide Casley-Hayford’s, “Mista Courifer” differ from the predecessors because contemporary stories draw on the oral traditions of storytelling to represent African agency while contextualizing misguided notions about African societies in new cultural forms. Hayford’s work utilizes feminist frameworks to reject colonial androcentric stories and leadership while addressing global white supremacy, elitist respectability politics and the

¹¹² Okonkwo, 48.

¹¹³ Okonkwo, 49.

destructive consequences of colonialism. In essence, Hayford's stories promote cultural nationalism and encourage racial and national *indigenous* pride through her stories.

Sierra Leone's oral stories resisted the colonial norms 'objectivity' by seizing control of their narratives. The British attempted to erase the differences in existing societies by grouping them as one sole entity of one culture. However, the complex articulations of Sierra Leone's oral stories convey empowerment and devotion to their indigenous cultural heritage as well as the ones produced during colonialism like the heroic stories of Bai Bureh. Their oral stories maintained a strong resistance to the British colonial powers by providing the "pure" and untainted perspective of the morals and societies of the precolonial reality and how the people's stories resurged to cope with the failures of colonization. It is crucial to understand that the only reason scholarship can recognize oral storytelling's role within colonization and its influence into contemporary modern storytelling is because the oral storytelling was one of the strongest forms of living resistance as it deconstructed and decolonized the tainted monolithic and homogenized Eurocentric norms of societies and civilization.

“Many stories matter. Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity”

– Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Future Directions of Oral Storytelling and Conclusions

Oral storytelling has served as a dynamic means of colonial resistance in response to colonization’s attempt to suppress the West African identity. The cultural concepts that mold and define the meaning of oral storytelling for Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone have sustained through colonialism and psychologically responded to colonial oppression at all degrees. Comparatively, there are similarities between the nations’ themes of storytelling. For all three nations, storytelling has substantially served as a method of transferring knowledge through generations, helping the people make sense of the world around them. Oral storytelling teaches adults and children the essential aspects of their culture in which the past and present connect to keep the community united.

During colonization, all three nations used storytelling as a mechanism to reinforce their cultural values in the midst of chaos and uncertainty, emphasizing the sense of pride within the existing people and their ancestors. Furthermore, many ethnic groups within each nation still told and performed these stories in their native languages despite the British attempt to enforce English as the original language and force the ethnic groups into one identity. For Ghana and Nigeria, there is a strong importance and emphasis placed on the self-worth of children. Ghanaian and Nigerian children are inherently seen as the prizes of their societies, thus building the children’s confidence at a young age under colonial rule that perceive them as otherwise due to the color of their skin. In all three nations, animals are also at times employed in the places of humans to tell the stories of people; there tends to be an animal in the story with non-desirable traits that are associated with the British colonizers, teaching the community not to embody these

traits. A distinguishing contrast between the nations' storytelling during colonization was their referral to the British. Ghanaian stories tended to use euphemisms like, "Queen of England,"¹¹⁴ whereas Nigerians tended to not explicitly state nor mention the British in their stories and instead, it was rather implied that Nigerians were referring to the British. On the contrary, stories from Sierra Leone explicitly specify the British like, "He fought against the British, The British made him surrender."¹¹⁵ Despite their commonalities and differences, storytelling for Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone operated as colonial resistance through efforts to erase their identity. The work of oral storytelling did not end at colonization as storytellers utilized their power and impact from native stories during decolonization efforts.

During the beginning of the 20th century, national pressure for governmental autonomy and self-determination forced the British to modify the legislative council makeup; the legislative council now required that Africans must be the majority. Thereafter, multiple civic disturbances across the region and the creation of the Convention People's Party by Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana to fight for independence contributed to Ghana achieving independence on March 6, 1957.¹¹⁶ In the same fashion, the majority representation of Nigerians in the House of Chiefs and legislative council led the fight against full sovereignty of the nation to Nigerians thus leading to the accomplishment of Nigerian independence on October 1, 1960.¹¹⁷ Subsequently, Sierra Leone also became independent on April 27, 1961.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Banks-Wallace, JoAnne. "Emancipatory potential of storytelling in a group." *Image: The Journal of Nursing Scholarship* 30, no. 1 (1998): 17.

¹¹⁵ Osagie, Iyunolu Folayan. "National Identity: The Dramatic Return of Memory in Sierra Leone." In *The Amistad Revolt: Memory, Slavery, and the Politics of Identity in the United States and Sierra Leone*, 98-118. University of Georgia Press, 2000: 101.

¹¹⁶ Ghana, Commonwealth.

¹¹⁷ Site designed and built by Hydrant (<http://www.hydrant.co.uk>). "Nigeria : History." Nigeria : History | The Commonwealth. <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/nigeria/history>.

¹¹⁸ Site designed and built by Hydrant (<http://www.hydrant.co.uk>). "Sierra Leone : History." Sierra Leone : History | The Commonwealth. Accessed March 29, 2020. <https://thecommonwealth.org/our-member-countries/sierra-leone/history>.

In order for West Africans to have repealed western dominance and dismantle colonialism, it was necessary to produce a knowledge based on African philosophy that included “community-centered [sic] ways of knowing, the storytelling framework, [and] language as a bank of knowledge.”¹¹⁹ Oral storytelling fulfills all three elements because it was a communal custom and a participatory experience that was centered within the society. The oral storytelling framework has been utilized in these West African nations as an oral tradition since the beginning of time which has continued into contemporary written short stories.¹²⁰ Lastly, language is a bank of knowledge within oral storytelling because oral traditions included the cultural heritage, morals and history. Despite the fact that Europeans renamed the various parts of the land, the West African identity was reclaimed through native storytelling and sustained throughout. Within decolonization efforts, oral stories from Ghana, Nigeria and Sierra Leone, were shared throughout the region which inherently performed trans rhetorical resistance by nourishing emotions across West Africa and cultivating relationships across the region to form movements in decolonization. Thus, the argument of oral storytelling serving as a means of living resistance and a psychological coping method is still applicable to the period of decolonization and ultimate independence.

The conversation of oral storytelling does not end with my analysis of oral storytelling in colonial West African nations. For multiple years, oral storytelling has been overlooked by scholarship and often rejected or mocked as not being “rigorous enough.” However, West African oral stories have proven to be culturally literate mechanisms that give us the privilege to analyze, read, and listen to these stories without limitations while placing us in the imaginative

¹¹⁹ Chilisa, Bagele, and Julia Preece. *Research methods for adult educators in Africa*. Pearson South Africa, 2005: 49.

¹²⁰ Edosomwan and Peterson, 96.

state of possibilities in the oral story. Scholarship should begin and continue to examine connections between oral stories conducted in the United States, the Caribbean and Europe as an essential defense of strength for the African diaspora and symbolic representation of the continuation of African history and perseverance against all odds.

As I conclude this project, I must recognize my own privilege in bearing witness and access to these oral stories. When engaging with and examining West African oral stories, I urge scholars to keenly acknowledge and engage with the potential meanings and possible actions the oral story presents, which includes the relationship and interactions between the past history and the present position between the people and their land, and discourse regarding “us and them.” Through this practice, the researcher or the one seeking the knowledge takes on the full responsibility of enduring witness to the oral stories of pain, resistance and transformation. Thus, I have had the privilege of using this practice to ask myself why these stories were being told and in what ways were they being told that nurtured a cycle of renewal and recreation for the West African identity.

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