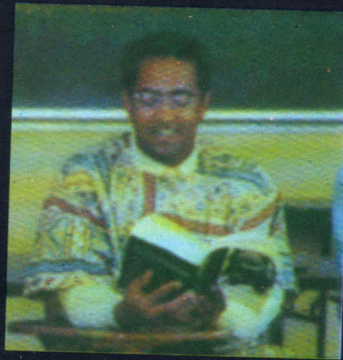


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Psychotherapeutic Allegories and Some Metaphors of Harmony Restoration Theory and Therapy in an African Indigenous Folktale

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Folktales, narratives, metaphors or stories are psychotherapeutic in nature especially when consciously applied in a therapeutic setting. They assist clients in achieving wholeness in the area of therapy focus. They also educate, entertain and perform other functions depending on the context they are used. While reading, listening to, or even writing their own stories, people tend to understand, feel, relate with and even see a part of themselves in stories. In Africa, when people are bereaved, they are told stories to assist them grieve positively (Nwoye, 2005). This paper elucidates the psychotherapeutic components of folktales or metaphors with focus on "Alabingo" (The land of Bingo), an indigenous (Igbo) folktale translated to English by Pritchett (2004). The story shows cycles of harmony-disharmony within the endocosmos (relationship within oneself), mesocosmos (relationship between oneself and others) and exocosmos (relationship between oneself and higher order beings (God or gods) or other revered things) that the Chief of Bingo went through before he was able to marry a wife and select a heir to his throne. The harmony-disharmony cycle experienced by the Chief were teased out and were juxtaposed with the steps he took to facilitate the achievement of harmony his life. The importance of metaphors in psychotherapy and therapeutic characteristics of metaphors in Alabingo were highlighted and implications for psychotherapy practice in Africa were also elucidated.

Keywords: Psychotherapeutic, Folk-tale, Metaphors, Igbo, Harmony Restoration

Folk-Tales or Storytelling in Traditional Igbo Societies

To trace the history of storytelling is akin to tracing the history of human existence because people started using forms of stories and metaphors with the existence of language. For instance, forms of mythologies have been in place among the Australian aborigines before the appearance of the term "dreamtime" in literature in 1896 (Dean, 1996). The aborigines have stories, "dated to thousands of years ago" (Pring, 2001, p. 3; Burns, 2005). According to Torres (2003, p.11), "Greek fables appeared approximately two centuries before the birth of Aesop" and "the first printed versions of fables appeared in 1814." Furthermore, philosophers like Zeno of Elea who lived before Jesus Christ used paradoxes and fables to present their arguments and teach people. However, as a point of departure in this discourse, it should be noted that storytelling has always been seen as metaphors and metaphors started with language. The Bible for instance started in

a story form, "in the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth" (Genesis 1:1 Holy Bible: King James Version (KJV)). Interestingly, most of the events of the bible have always been and are presently seen as folktales by the Jews because they experienced them (Exodus 13:26 KJV) and they have been passing the stories from one generation to another even before the bible was written. These points to the fact that stories have been in existence for thousands of years.

Folk-tales are a part of oral tradition (Torres, 2003; Dorji, 2009). Torres (2003:1) noted that: "folktales developed from the necessity of people to try to explain and understand the natural and spiritual phenomenon that occurred in their lives." Folktales which is also called folklores both reflect traditional stories originating from a particular place and passed down to younger generations by older ones. According to Ebigbo (2001, p. 21), folklore represents a penetrating picture of a given way of life; it reveals much about aspirations, values and goals of different

peoples." Storytelling has been in practice in traditional Igbo societies before attempts were made to document such tales. Emenanjo (2004, p. ix) noted this by pointing out that, "story-telling was one of the principal avenues for informal education and entertainment for children in the traditional Igbo society." Award winning books written by authors of Igbo extraction like: "Things fall apart" by Chinua Achebe is replete with folk-tales told by adults to children by the fireplace at night under the moonlight. Such tales always ended with morals. Emenanjo (2004) citing Bamgbose (1969) noted that there are similarities between Yoruba and Igbo folk-tales in terms of "plot, characterization, narrative technique, language and themes." Owomoyela (2004) is in concurrence with the similarities between Yoruba and Igbo folktales noted by Emenanjo.

It is acknowledged that some authors especially those of qualitative orientation prefer the term narratives in their work (Goncalves & Paulo, 1999; Lysaker, Lancaster, & Lysaker, 2003; Riessman & Speedy, 2007), however, in this discourse, folktales, allegories, metaphors, stories and narratives shall be used interchangeably because of the thin line of distinction between them. Nevertheless, in other discourses and contexts, a distinction might be appropriate though most therapists would rather use terms such as metaphors or narratives because they sound technically and professionally appealing. However, in practice, they simply mean storytelling.

Metaphors and Psychotherapy

Psychotherapists who are versed in the art of storytelling have less challenge driving home points to their clients. Rosen (1982, p. 39) agrees to this fact by noting that, "simply having a repertoire of stories can give the therapist a feeling of mastery, control and competence." There is presently, to the knowledge of the present author, no empirical evidence supporting Rosen's assertion. It has however been observed in the present authors clinical experience right from the time he was introduced to psychotherapy in 2001 at the International Federation of Psychotherapy (IFP) Psychotherapy Center, Enugu under

the tutelage of the eminent Professor of Psychological Medicine (Clinical Psychology), Professor P. O. Ebigbo up until now, which is more than one decade after, that clients respond positively to stories, metaphors, allegories and case studies which reflect to them the fact that some other people have gone through the same challenge they are presently going through and have survived it. Professor Ebigbo as a clinician and one of the foremost Nigerian psychotherapists uses metaphors in his clinical practice and this is one of the reasons he has had a successful practice as a Clinical Psychologist and a Psychotherapist for more than three decades. His metaphors which largely come from real life personal experiences and case studies are intriguing to the extent that they facilitate insight even outside therapy settings. For instance, the story of John Muo Nso (Ebigbo, 2011) the story of his father's advice for him to avoid the "company of the poor" (Ebigbo, 2001), the story of his father's nighttime (bedtime) discipline method and so forth have thrilled scholars and students alike and would assist in creating and establishing rapport even with the most aloof client.

This method, akin to Milton Erickson's method of teaching tales (Rosen, 1982) has rubbed off on most of his protégés in their practice. For instance, at one time, the author had to work with a client who incidentally was also a colleague of his in another department in his present place of work. This client felt that people were not being receptive to her, especially her contemporaries, and did not like her. The author told her one of Aesop's fables: The Fox and the Grape; and it resolved her issue. According to Aesop, in his tale translated by Townsend (2004):

One day, a hungry fox saw some ripe grapes and wanted to eat some but could not reach them no matter how he tried. Out of frustration, the fox left the grape declaring them to be sour grapes and not ripe. The moral of this tale is that things beyond our reach are often despised.

This particular fable changed her outlook and made her view herself more positively not as a person not accepted by her

contemporaries but as one whom people wanted to emulate and desire to be close to but could not and as a result resort to treating her negatively. Although the metaphor might at first instance appear to rationalize the situation, it enabled her view her situation differently, adapt positively to her environment and assisted her in her journey towards the "search for meaning" (Frankl, 1984) in her career and relationships. Interestingly, she did not again complain of her colleagues to the author nor see them as threatening and undermining her. She became "psychologically well adjusted" according to existentialists (Comer, 2010, p. 69).

One of the modern proponents of stories as an effective tool in therapy especially among children is Burns (2005). Apart from telling one hundred and one stories addressing various areas of children's lives and how to develop certain skills, Burns explained the therapeutic nature of stories and why stories seem to positively affect the listener. According to him, (Burns, 2005, p. 3) stories are:

"... like hypnotic induction, an invitation to participate in a unique relationship with both the teller and the story's characters. They are words that invite the listener on a journey into a world of imagination where reality must be suspended, and learning can be potent. They are an invitation into a special realm of experience where listeners are entranced, attention is focused, and one can share the emotions of the fictional hero. They invite participation in a relationship which the teller and listener share in an interactive bond."

These characteristics of stories reflect the reason why stories have healing effect whether they are told a client or the client is encouraged to read or write them. Living or experiencing a scene in story as a result of being part of a narrative has a positive healing effect on people including those who represent such narratives in visual forms such as drawings (Stone & Evert, 2006).

Prominent psychotherapists like Victor Frankl, the proponent of Logotherapy used stories with the theme of suffering to assist clients in gaining insights to their own sufferings (Frankl, 1984). He used case studies, allegories and real life experiences in his remarkably successful practice of Logotherapy. Before Frankl, metaphors and symbols have always been part of core psychotherapy and Psychology theories like Psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud and Analytical Psychology by Carl Jung (Boeree, 2006).

Apart from formal psychotherapy settings, storytelling and metaphors are also used in grief work. For instance, according to Nwoye (2005), stories are used in traditional African cultures to assist the bereaved deal with their bereavement in a positive way. Nwoye (2005, p. 150) in describing the major phases and processes of grief in Africa, particularly, among the Igbo's of Nigeria and the Bukusu's of Kenya, pointed out that during the third phase of grief which is the phase of: "promotion of logical thinking, double description and positive cognitive adaptation," mourners made speeches to the bereaved in an attempt to describe the meaning of the loss. Nwoye (2005, p. 151) further explained that, "speeches included stories and parables intended to teach the bereaved a new way of looking at the loss." These stories had themes relating to the loss and ended with the client being made to understand that providence will not let things get out of hand.

However, documentation of such stories and parables were not formally done except through the reliance on the mental capability of some elders who by reason of years of repeatedly telling such stories and repeatedly hearing similar stories have developed the ability of memorizing and recalling plethora of stories. These they are able to pass to younger generations through the art of storytelling. This lack of formal documentation, until the advent of the missionaries who taught the people how to read and write in western manner, made it impossible for some of the stories to be safeguarded in book forms in the original format they were told. In spite of this, during grieving, the bereaved is mainly told related instances of such occurrences and

how the affected persons were able to live through it.

Such stories used in grief work and other stories told under normal circumstances are embedded in allegories which is a literary term. According to Iwuchukwu (1998, p. 18) an allegory is "a story, painting or description in which ideas such as patience, purity and truth are symbolized by persons who are characters in the story. Example, "pilgrim's Progress" by John Bunyan." Allegories most times are used to address people who are experiencing the same situation which the protagonist of the allegory is experiencing and the climax creates a feeling of assurance in the listener or reader that the situation the reader is going through is not an isolated situation but one which could be overcome by following the example of the character(s) in the allegory. The Bible is full of allegories. For instance, Daniel's story teaches resilience and faith in God while Joseph's story teaches patience and forgiveness. One story which is not often referred to is the story of the man Jephthah, who vowed to give God the first thing that came out of his house if God gave him victory over the Ammonites and as a result, had to sacrifice his only daughter is representative of a high level of integrity and also the need to avoid hasty vows and promises (Judges 11: 27 - 40. Cp: Psalms 15:4; Ecclesiastes 5: 1-2 KJV).

Bible stories are also filled with metaphors which is a figure of speech. Figures of speech are used in speaking and writing to "spice up" what is being said or written. To use a word figuratively means to use it in an indirect way. Iwuchukwu (1998, p. 1) identified the following classes of figures of speech: those based on resemblance, those based on point of contrast or difference and, those based on association. Metaphor is a figure of speech based on resemblance. In metaphor, according to Iwuchukwu (1998, p. 2), "we replace one thing with another thing..., we say that it is exactly that thing." Although this may sound tautological but what Iwuchukwu is implying is that when we use simile, we use contrasting words for instance "like," "as" and so forth but in metaphors, instead of contrasting, we use statements implying that whatever we may

have contrasted in simile instead of being like or as, we say it is the exact thing. For instance, instead of saying "she is as wicked as Jezebel," in simile, we can say metaphorically, "she is Jezebel."

People think, communicate and build their world in metaphors. This is because people are not exposed to all experiences and metaphors assist by providing an avenue for them to situate themselves within the context of other's experiences and empathize with them. Victor Frankl as have been noted earlier used metaphorical statements in his therapies. For instance, he stated metaphorically concerning making the most of the third tragic triad which is death, "live as if you were living for the second time and had acted wrongly the first time as you are about to act now" (Frankl, 1984, p. 175). Another interesting instance of his use of metaphorical statement was in explaining the meaning of suffering while introducing Logotherapy; Frankl told the story of a doctor who consulted him because he could not overcome severe depression as a result of the death of his dear wife. The following conversation ensued between Frankl and the doctor:

"What would have happened, Doctor, if you had died first, and your wife would have had to survive you?"
"Oh," he said, "for her this would have been terrible; how she would have suffered!" Whereupon I replied, *"You see, Doctor, such a suffering has been spared her, and it was you who have spared her this suffering - to be sure, at the price that now you have to survive and mourn her."* He said no word but shook my hand and calmly left my office. In some way, suffering ceases to be suffering at the moment it finds a meaning (p. 135).

This simple interaction produced the attitudinal change needed for the doctor to deal positively with his suffering by seeing the meaning inherent in his suffering (Frankl, 1984). Such metaphors are used to awaken client's emotions and also to enable them think objectively by being empathic as in the case of the doctor mentioned above. Rosen (1982, p. 35) noted that "stories are

not only therapeutic but also diagnostic.” This is interesting because Milton Erickson, the father of Ericksonian hypnosis, used stories most times to diagnose his client’s problem. At times he just told them stories and let them go knowing they have got the point and they have had their presenting complaint addressed through his tale. One question that arises from this is: What made Erickson’s teaching tales so therapeutic that patient would at times get relief from the issue for which they came to therapy through them? Rosen captured the answer to this by outlining the characteristics of Erickson’s stories. He noted that each tale had: “... a structure and a plot, often with a surprise ending. ...a climax, followed by a feeling of relief or success” (Rosen, 1982, p. 35).

With a dynamic representation of stories metaphorically and allegorically, it is often possible for an interested therapist to effectively achieve a good deal of success in psychotherapy. One of the Erickson’s teaching tales that the present author identified with is titled: “The boy will be dead by morning” (Rosen, 1982, p. 52) and it goes thus:

“I graduated from high school in June 1919. In August, I heard three doctors, in the other room, tell my mother, “the boy will be dead by morning.” [Erickson had his first poliomyelitis infection at age seventeen.] Being a normal kid, I resented that. Our country doctor had called in two Chicago men, as consultants, and they told my mother, “The boy will be dead by morning.” I was infuriated. The idea of telling a mother that her son will be dead by morning! It’s outrageous! Afterwards, my mother came into my room, bland of face. She thought I was delirious, because I insisted that she move the large chest in my room, in order for it to be at a different angle beside the bed. She put it beside the bed one way and I kept telling her to move it back and forth, until I was satisfied. That chest was blocking my view through the window – and I was damned if I would die without seeing the sunset!

I only saw half of it. I was unconscious for three days. I didn’t tell my mother. She didn’t tell me.”

The first time the present author read this story; he entered into a self-induced hypnotic trance because he identified with the story. He relived his battle as a young boy with poliomyelitis. How he could not be helped by conventional medicine or scientific intervention. His mother was distraught with the idea that her third son would live the rest of his life not walking while his father, Dr. Igbokwe, then a denominational pastor was unwavering in his faith that God will heal him just as he had promised in His Word. Of course God did it and that is why he walks today without any form of complication or after effect. One of the highlights of Erickson’s teaching tales and most metaphors is that whenever it is read or told the reader or hearer identifies with a part or all of it.

Hence, one major importance of narratives, metaphors or stories in psychotherapy is to assist the patient identify with the subject of the story, empathize, switch roles and understand that his/her presenting problem is solvable. The moral of Erickson’s tale above is that we should be grateful for life and look forward to accomplishing things. For instance, he looked forward to seeing the sunset. Another tale along this line is a tale also told by Erickson but to Sidney Rosen when the latter wanted assistance to improve his memory for names and in recovering childhood memories. Erickson told him a story of the comment his father made during his mother’s funeral. Instead of over grieving during the funeral, Erickson’s father said (Rosen, 1982, p. 53):

“It was nice to have seventy-four wedding anniversaries with one person. It would have been nicer to have seventy-five, but you can’t have everything.”

Rosen as a result accepted his limitations and lived with it happily. Another importance of metaphorical stories in therapy and daily life is that it offers us the relief needed at that particular time and instills hope for better days ahead.

However, metaphors in therapy are not one-way. It is not just the therapist that is expected to tell the stories but the clients as well in some cases. This implies that just as there are therapist-generated metaphors, there are also client-generated metaphors. A therapy like Interactive Drawing Therapy (IDT) is one of those that encourage client-generated metaphors. Stone and Everts (2006, p. 31) noted that,

"In IDT, therapeutically significant metaphors appear to be those that are generated spontaneously by the client and which encapsulate and help name their personal experiences rather than those that are chosen for the client and are introduced by the counselor."

This seems conceivable and achievable in therapies like IDT where stories are couched in drawing and clients are expected to generate visual forms which are concretized by drawing. However, majority of psychotherapies do not rely on forms but abstractions in working with clients. Hence they do not rely solely on client's representation of experiences but on metaphors which emanate from case studies and other sources and as a result, encourage therapist-generated metaphors. Whether client-generated or therapist-generated, from the foregoing, it is evident that it is important to use metaphors in therapy. Milton Erickson made extensive use of them in his sessions with great success (Rosen, 1982) and it is better to use them when the client is a child or is traumatized (Burns, 2005; Stone & Everts, 2006).

Apart from metaphors being important in psychotherapy, another issue that needs to be evaluated is: why do metaphors work in therapy? From Onnis et al's (n. d.) point of view, metaphors work in psychotherapy because they open therapeutic communication spaces, allow free communication of feelings and emotion, they enable clients empathize, find alternative ways of perceiving presenting challenges and evokes openness and breaks barriers of interaction between the client and the therapist. This assertion is in line with Schmit's (2005, p. 360) position that

metaphors "form a structure in which we live." These are probable reasons why metaphors work in therapy. One therapy which has metaphor as an integral part of it is the Harmony Restoration Theory of Health.

Harmony Restoration Theory: A Synopsis

The Harmony Restoration Theory is a theory of psychotherapy from an African perspective. It is hinged on the African cosmology and belief system. The African worldview has been mainly reflected in folktales, fables, myths, legends, proverbs, puns, riddles, and the African culture among other ways. According to the theory, people fall ill when they are in disharmony and the therapist's role is to assist the client in restoring harmony (Ebigbo, 2001).

The theory is better seen as a theory of maladaptive and adaptive behavior from an African perspective. While maladaptiveness means disharmony, adaptiveness means harmony. One of the major tenets of the theory is the Igbo proverb which says: "He that is at peace with his world does not fall sick." This is because the absence of disharmony creates good health while the presence of disharmony creates ill health. Whenever there is disharmony, the individual tries to ensure that the disharmony is restored and among other activities in ensuring this, presents for therapy. The therapist's task is to find where the individual's disharmony emanates from and assist him in restoring the harmony for wellness to be achieved.

According to Ebigbo (2001, p. 20), "a person is healthy if he or she is at peace with his/her world." Peace means the individual not having or manifesting any form of psychological or physiological disturbance that inhibits successful environmental adaptation. The individual's world or cosmos is made up of the relationships he/she maintains. This relationship is at three levels viz: the relationship he maintains with himself. This Ebigbo (2001) called the endocosmos. The relationship he maintains with others, this Ebigbo called mesocosmos and thirdly, the relationship he maintains with whatever he/she reverences such as God or gods and so forth. This third aspect Ebigbo called the exocosmos. Hence, an individual

is in disharmony when any component of his/her world is not in harmony. That is, if his relationship with himself is not the way it should be for instance if he is depressed, has low self-concept, is anxious or has any form of psychopathology. This is called endocosmos dysfunction. When the individual has an issue with his family members or with his colleagues in his place of work or is not satisfied with how things are working out in his environment and this causes him distress, this is called mesocosmos dysfunction. When the individual is not at peace with God or whatever he reverences, for some, it could be their jobs or anything they hold dear and it causes him distress, it is called exocosmos dysfunction. The theory establishes that there is always the presence of disharmony in people as a result; they always try to restore harmony by seeking treatment or therapy.

In the present discourse, we shall be examining the indigenous folktale *Alabingo* by D. N. Achara (1963) vis-à-vis the Harmony Restoration Theory of Health. We shall be pointing out the areas of the folktale which has the concept of harmony-disharmony reflected and what the protagonist did to restore harmony. It is important to note that this folktale was first published in the 1940's with a new edition in 1963 (Pritchett, 2004). This book was published before the discipline psychology formally started in Nigeria as a department at the University of Nigeria Nsukka in 1960 (Ezeilo, 2005). This highlights the fact that forms of coping and adjustment which are psychological in nature have been in existence before the advent of formal treatment modalities by psychologist and psychotherapists and have been captured in folktales.

Alabingo: A Synopsis

An attempt shall be made here to provide a short summary of the story, *Alabingo*, which was translated into English by Miss Frances W. Pritchett in 2004. The full English translation is retrievable on line by visiting her webpage at Columbia University (hosted by her daughter Professor F. W. Pritchett) reflected in the references. It is important to note that the story was originally written in Igbo language by D. N.

Achara. According the information on the translator's webpage, *Alabingo* was published in the 1940's but the new edition translated into official Igbo orthography was published in 1963 also by Longman Nigeria Ltd, Ikeja. The book has 38 pages, 12 chapters and four illustrations. The book has been in use in secondary schools in the eastern part of Nigeria as part of the academic syllabus, the present author having read it as a student twenty one years ago. Note: Pritchett translated the *King of Bingo* as the "Chief of Bingo." *The Land of Bingo* was captured by Achara (1963) as a kingdom with a ruler, the king of bingo. Brief summary of *Alabingo*:

There was a certain man who lived in the land of Bingo; he owned two kingdoms, one in the sky and one in Bingo. He had power over everything. His title was, "one who goes to work in one year and returns the next year." Bingo was a very fruitful land. The Chief was the only one who knew the way to Bingo and he planted a tree, the leaf was called the bad leaf of the forest because once it touches one, one would not know what one was doing or where one was going or where one had come from. The Chief had a river in the land of Bingo where he usually takes his bath. He went there one day and saw fresh human footprints. It surprised him and he waited for a longtime but could not find the owner. He decided to spread seeds from his farm there so that when the person comes to eat, he will catch the person, but after several attempts, this did not work.

He became extremely worried, and while upset, returned to the sky, his second home, to tell his slaves his ordeal, promising to exalt the person who could find how to get to the owner of the footprints. The slaves went everywhere to seek this out but one couldn't go because he was sick and had been neglected. He dreamt one day of a man who gave him information, he also told him to send for the Chief to instruct him on what to do. The Chief was infuriated by

the summon and refused to go. After one year, when all the other slaves returned without success, the Chief dejectedly went to the slave who told him to go to earth and meet a certain Chief of the east who will give him further information. When the Chief of Bingo got to earth, he started boasting to the Chief of the east. As a result, the Chief of the east refused to tell him anything. He became apologetic and the Chief of the east decided to listen to his story. After listening, the Chief of the east told him the owner of the footprints was his daughter. She was betrothed but her fiancée stole and instead of being hanged or imprisoned for twenty three years in line with the law of the land, it was reduced to ten years. Upon being released, he decided to get back at the Chief of the east by making his daughter mad. As a result of the madness, the young girl ran into the Bingo River. The Chief of the east also related to the Chief of Bingo that she loved groundnuts (peanuts) when she was living in his palace.

So, the Chief of Bingo instructed all his slaves to get a bag of groundnut each. He scattered a little at the Bingo River, the young girl came out and ate everything. He kept scattering and she kept coming freely to eat them. One day, the Chief happened upon her and her beauty gave him 'gooseflesh.' She was indescribably beautiful. So beautiful that "her beauty drove the Chief mad and gave him a fever." The Chief became obsessed with the girl, couldn't eat and came to watch her daily. He decided to catch her. All attempts proved futile because "her body was as slippery okra." He even scattered groundnuts on top of himself in a buried position but still couldn't catch her.

The Chief of Bingo returned back to the sky, also, "his health was very bad on the account of thinking about what he could do to catch the price."

His household swore to help him catch her. They all went to the land of Bingo the next day. He buried himself again with groundnuts spread on top and instructed his slaves to hide. They did but when the girl came out, her beauty bedazzled them and they, while staring, forgot to help him catch her. He was very angry. The next day they tried again without luck, her body was just too slippery. The chief, lovesick, "was no longer himself, but his ghost."

One day, the Chief remembering his promise to exalt the person who told him how to see the owner of the footprints, cured and exalted the sick slave in an extravagant manner. He then announced that he would give seven times more to the person who could help catch the Chief of the east's daughter. All went in search. One day, a leprous slave whom the Chief had banished to the forest requested audience of the Chief in the forest, the Chief vehemently refused. The Chief still obsessed with the girl was emaciated and couldn't eat. His household went to the slave but he insisted the Chief must come. The Chief later went after much persuasion. The slave related that someone told him to tell the Chief to consult a shepherd living in the west.

The shepherd was a friend of the sorcerer responsible for making the woman run into the river. The Chief went to the shepherd humbly and told him his predicament. He then told the chief "that anyone who could make her fall to the ground would be the one to marry her." He advised the Chief to gather many slippery things to accomplish this task. This the Chief and his slaves did in no small measure and when the woman again came to eat groundnut, slippery things were spread on "the path she would follow to run back into the river". When they did, they started pursuing her and she fell. They were finally able to catch her

because of the neutralization of the slippery charm.

The Chief was indescribably happy. "Immediately, he regained all the body weight he had lost." He held a large wedding which lasted three weeks where people "ate to the full until they could hardly breathe."

The woman became pregnant and bore him a son whom he named "Fight." She bore a second son named "Wrestling." At old age, the Chief was worried about his successor; this made him call for one of his slaves, "Teach me and I Learn." This slave was named by his father after someone in his village who was given a task with another man named: "I Know Everything." Both were each given a fresh leg and thigh of a goat and were told to return it fresh and bleeding the same way in eight days. "Teach Me And I Learn" won because he asked a friend who advised him to buy the same size of goat, slaughter it, and present it in eight days. "I Know Everything" presented his own which he had dried over the fire and as a result was shamed for not having common sense.

The Chief learnt by this to always tell his slaves about things bothering him. Interestingly, Fight, a very strongman who ate what "more than 400 people could eat" was busy fighting everyone to the extent that he killed about forty lions with his bare hands. Wrestling was also accomplishing much feat that he was able to wrestle with a Chimpanzee and throw it to the ground despite wildly held beliefs that it was impossible.

Though they were both strong, the Chief needed the wiser one to succeed him so he gave them the following feats to accomplish:

1. Enter the river and drag out a hippopotamus alive

2. Answer the question: "why does the face of the sun look like a broom, and why is it that when the moon comes out on one side and when it goes in, it is the other side that people see?"
3. Answer the question "Why is it that if a man in his own home gossips about another person, it does not cause trouble for him?"

Fight, the firstborn, was able to accomplish two out (1 and 2) of the three feats. That is why "anyone who is the firstborn son is the one who takes his father's place after his father dies."

Therapeutic Characteristics of Metaphors in Alabingo

Apart from giving a summary of the story *Alabingo*, attempt shall also be made to point out the therapeutic characteristics of the story. Therapeutic characteristics refer to the component of the story that has healing effect on the reader and the lessons learnt by reading or listening to the story. According to Burns (2005, p. 237), therapeutic characteristics of stories as metaphors are that they have the following: Problems Addressed, Resources developed and Outcomes offered. This he called the PRO Approach. We shall be adopting this PRO model in pointing out a summary of the therapeutic characteristics of *Alabingo*:

Problems Addressed

- a. Feelings of disharmony
- b. Pride
- c. Love
- d. Ostracizing people
- e. Wisdom

Resources Developed

- a. Working with people
- b. Learning from almost everyone
- c. Pursuing and achieving a goal
- d. Hope for a better tomorrow
- e. Solving problems

Outcomes Offered

- a. Restoration of harmony
- b. Being Humble
- c. Not undermining people as a result of their status
- d. Fulfilling promises

instance of disharmony all their lives. It depicts the continuous process of harmony-disharmony. People tend to have series of harmony and disharmony in life. However, after each disharmony, harmony is inevitable restored. The author weaved this cycle of harmony-disharmony within the story using narrative proverbs (Obiechina, 1992) to elucidate the harmony-disharmony situation which people have and to make the narrative richer. Most of these narrative proverbs within the story also had components of harmony-disharmony within them showing that harmony is not a destination but a journey.

Implications for Psychotherapy Practice in Africa

The aspect of storytelling as part of therapy is a formally uncharted area in African psychotherapy. The traditional schools of psychotherapy are still being widely practiced. However, it is important that therapists adopt stories or narratives as part of their psychotherapy treatment plan since stories as we have seen and in consonance with Burns' opinion (2005, p. 13), can "inform, educate, teach values, discipline, build experience, facilitate problem solving, change and heal." Practitioners can integrate stories in their therapy from the plethora of folk-tales available in Africa.

Storytelling has been seen to be an important aspect of grief work since people try to construct a "preferred story by which to live" when they are grieving (Nwoye, 2005, p. 148). It is important that aspects of narratives or metaphors be formally incorporated in grief or trauma therapy. This will enable clients construct their own metaphors while the therapist acts as a facilitator in enhancing the understanding of the client and his situation along the lines of the client's constructed metaphor. It is important to encourage metaphors especially when the bereaved is in denial as is mostly the case. However, the use of narratives seems to be more established in narrative therapy for instance, Pennebaker and Seagal (1999, p. 1244) noted that, "the area of narrative psychology has long held that it is important for people to make sense of events in their lives by putting them into story-like format." The method of

psychotherapy integration might be necessary in order to achieve this.

One might ask, "What is the success rate of metaphors in therapy?" This question would be effectively answered when large scale meta-analysis have been conducted to ascertain the particular effects of different forms of narratives. Then, one also would need to differentiate between client-generated metaphors or narratives and therapist-generated metaphors. However, according to, Pennebaker and Seagal (1999, p. 1244), "extensive research has revealed that when people put their emotional upheavals into words, their physical and mental health improves markedly." They also noted that, "forming a story about one's experiences in life is associated with improved physical and mental health across a variety of populations" [p. 1252]. With these benefits, it is important for therapist in Africa to explore further, this area of narratives whether client-generated, therapist-generated, from case studies or selected from a book of narratives.

Conclusion

Written allegories, stories and metaphors abound in native languages and clients know many of these including the client's own personal experiences. The therapist could tell the client: "tell me a story similar to what is happening to you and what you think the person should do." This at times assists in rapport building. Although some clients might present with nihilistic tendencies and only narrate negative stories, a way of countering this is for the therapist, once this is noticed, to tell the client a therapist-generated story which is positive.

It has been the author's experience in psychotherapy that clients come to therapy armed with answers and solutions to their problem(s) whether rational or irrational. The therapist can only act as an understanding companion in the client's journey towards wellness. This, the therapist can effectively do by couching the client's experiences in metaphors and allowing the client achieve insight on his own.

Parts of the African personality are couching in the African metaphor and once the African understands himself within a

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Parts of the African personality are couching in the African metaphor and once the African understands himself within a

particular framework of metaphor or folktale, insight is achieved and healing is facilitated. It is in these folktales, these narratives, these stories and these metaphors we find who we really are as Africans. In finding who we are, we go further to ensure that we are always in the state we are supposed to be and that is a state of harmony.

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