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Original Research

Moral Values as Depicted in Selected Oromo Folktales

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Oromo folktales in upholding traditional moral values within the larger societal framework. It employs a qualitative research methodology to investigate the moral values embedded in the folktales. Like all nations, the Oromo possess core values essential for cultural preservation, which have been passed down through storytelling. They have been preserving social values that denounce wrongdoings and support virtues through folktales. It has been found out that the Oromo used to use folktales (storytelling) to promote virtues such as honesty, integrity, faithfulness, kindness, respect for elders, and courage while condemning behaviors like infidelity, cruelty, laziness, falsehood, and cowardice. However, this tradition is now facing challenges due to the rise of modern media, including radio, TV, social media, and changing lifestyles. These factors have disrupted the practice of storytelling. To adapt to modern times, it is recommended that folktales be made accessible to children through contemporary media, similar to how shows like Tom and Jerry are broadcasted. Additionally, incorporating these folktales into primary school curricula and shifting storytelling settings from firesides or under trees to classrooms and media outlets can help continue teaching these valuable moral lessons and ensure their preservation for future generations.

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INTRODUCTION

Many literary scholars assert that a given society's norms and their established social, cultural or moral values are explicitly or implicitly reflected in literature. Examining and studying the literature of a society in detail is one way to gain insight into their way of thinking about life. A vast array of views and concerns about individuals, societies, events, culture, and other topics can be shown through literature.

Thus, one of the means to understand a given society and its philosophy of life is to closely scrutinize and explore its literature. In short, literature can reveal a huge range of ideas and concerns about people, societies, events, culture, and so forth.

With regard to this, [Odinye \(2015\)](#) asserts that as literature serves a didactic purpose, it is impossible to dispute the importance of literary works in fostering the development

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and advancement of moral and social ideals. He further noted that literature is the storehouse of human experiences and hence cannot be separated from the moral principles and social values of the society in which it emerges.

Before the emergence of written literature, people used to convey their messages and impart their knowledge, skills, and attitudes through the use of folklore. Folklore is a society's traditions, customs, manners, superstitions, songs, proverbs, stories, and other oral traditions that are passed down orally rather than in writing between generations (Okpewho, 1992). It is claimed that regardless of a society's degree of development, all societies share this fundamental human legacy. Regarding its domain, Dorson (1972) stated that folklore encompasses people's oral and material arts, conventions, and other forms of culture. "Verbal art (oral literature), material culture, performing folk arts, and social folk customs" are the four main categories into which he divides folklore (ibid).

Throughout history, oral literature has fulfilled many of the same functions as written literature, such as providing entertainment, moral guidance, memorial service, and overall shaping the society to the required goal. Regarding this Andrzejewski (1985) stated that oral literature has educational benefits, as listening to it improves verbal abilities, expands vocabulary, and deepens understanding of one's society and its history.

Numerous research works in the area have also shown that oral literature in its many forms can impart knowledge of a society's history, social and cultural norms, diligence, respect, endurance, and other values. Regarding this Andrzejewski (1985) explains,

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"... oral literature contributes to the upholding of the social norms of the society in which it functions." In general, according to folklorists, oral literature serves a variety of purposes, such as educational, entertaining, cosmological, justifying, protest, and so on.

Folktales are one of the constituents of oral literature. According to Abrams (1991), a folktale is "a short narrative in prose, of unknown authorship, which has been transmitted orally.... They include myths, fables, tales of heroes, and fairy tales." Broadly speaking, folktales are narratives that originate in people's lives and imaginations and are told orally before being passed down verbally, rather than in writing, from one generation to the next. Folktales can represent or reflect human experiences and daily activities because they are human creations. They might also be a reflection of how people view the world and their dreams. Folktales frequently feature themes of love, hate, cruelty, deception, faithfulness, and other human thoughts and feelings because of their ability to portray a broad spectrum of human emotions. In this regard, Oring (1949) observes that folk narratives, as reflections of the societies and individuals who create and share them, often explore themes such as violence, hatred, cruelty, racism, prejudice, sexuality, obscenity, and scatology, alongside the victories of good over evil, the struggles for justice, and the sacrifices and martyrdoms made in the pursuit of righteousness.

Folktales serve a variety of functions, despite being largely narrated for pleasure/entertainment. They have the potential to educate young people on moral principles through their underlying meanings. They are often thrilling, which makes them well-liked both for instruction and

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amusement. Concerning the educational value of folktales, [Lindfors \(1977\)](#) explains, “Even folktales that are regarded as fictitious are recognized by Africans as important in the education of children because so many of them have moral values.” Folktales, which are mainly imbued with moral precepts, can assist young people in distinguishing between appropriate and inappropriate behavior in a given society. In other words, one can say that folktales are loaded with moral lessons that can educate children and uphold social norms. They are also believed to fulfill people's dreams and fantasies, offering a therapeutic role by alleviating the tensions caused by restrictive social rules and taboos.

Since time immemorial, folktales have been used by people to instruct, counsel, caution, mock, encourage, amuse, protest, and, to put it another way, respond to the things they come across in their daily lives. Therefore, the underlying themes and meanings found in folktales can serve to instill moral values in young people. The current study also assumes that analyzing folktales can provide a deep understanding of the moral standards, social values, attitudes, imagination, living conditions, and other aspects of a given society.

Folktales have served as a means of passing down and safeguarding the common beliefs and life experiences of the Oromo people in particular, as well as those of other traditional societies. The practice of storytelling among the Oromo, nowadays, seems to have been dominated by other activities (mainly struggle for survival among the elderly and preoccupation with games, passing time with social and mass media, school-related affairs, and so on among the youth and children). Thus, storytelling

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practices, preserving one's lore and handing it over to the next generation, etc are being challenged among the Oromo, and a serious gap seems to have been created in this regard. While discussing the importance of preserving a given society's lore, [Ohia \(2024\)](#) states, ‘When they [children] lose the values [in Oral literature], there is every tendency that there will be rise in cases of juvenile delinquency, disruptive or anti-social behavior, disobedience, dishonesty, stealing and other deviant behaviors that are generally associated with anti-social vices among youths.’ Thus, it can be said that a society is doomed to fail if its history, wisdom, and values—all of which are maintained in folklore—are not continued.

The researcher thinks that neither the government nor the society has paid enough attention to the potential long-term effects of folktales—or storytelling—may have on listeners or the importance that society places on these genres in shaping the young generation to the required level. In other words, among the Macha Oromo, these days the relevance of folktales (storytelling) as a mirror of society and the importance associated with them with regard to inculcating the moral principles and social values in the mind of the children seems to have been overlooked.

The researcher also believes that a gap has been created in the practice of storytelling among the Macha Oromo, and other means of telling similar stories to children seem to have been overlooked by the concerned bodies. It is not common to see stories being told in different ways apart from the usual teller and listener scenario under the shade of a tree or near a fireside. The practice in the developed countries indicates that stories could be told in the form of dramas, movies, dances, pictures,

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and so forth on TV series, radio programs, in theatrical halls, at schools in the classroom by teachers and students, in the form of games on smartphones and computers, etc.

The review made to conduct this research so far indicates that one of the means to study the moral principles and social values of a given society is by closely examining the folktales that they use. To help the young generation access the moral values of their ancestors, it is essential to integrate them into education, storytelling, and community traditions. Elders and scholars can document and share moral lessons through books, digital media, and interactive platforms. Schools and cultural institutions should incorporate ancestral wisdom into curricula and mentorship programs. We can make sure that these values are applicable and available to future generations by combining conventional and contemporary approaches. To this end, this research is expected to address the gap in existing studies by exploring the moral principles and social values of the Oromo people, particularly the Macha Oromo, as reflected in the folktales they commonly use.

The term 'moral' bears various definitions and often difficult to put what it means in a nutshell. Some people define morality as what people use to guide their actions (Trusted, 2002). *Encarta Encyclopedia* (2009) defines the term moral as a concept "based on what somebody's conscience suggests is right or wrong, rather than on what rules or the law says should be done."

Many scholars indicated that morality is tied to the function of a human being, and it deals with humans and how they relate to others and the world around them (Dwyer, 2011; Timmons, 2017; Cahn, 2017; Haidt, 2011). Similarly, Trusted (2002) asserted that

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"Morality must be a social concept since it is concerned with our dealings with others." The explanation given on morality play by Cuddon (1998) could also help us to understand the essence of morality in relation to human beings. According to him "Morality Play is a dramatization of the battle between the forces of good and evil in the human soul; thus, an exteriorization of the inward spiritual struggle: man's need for salvation and the temptations which beset him on his pilgrimage through life to death."

As far as morality is concerned, Devin in Trusted (2002) also stated that:

But an established morality is as necessary as a good government for the welfare of society. Societies disintegrate from within more frequently than they are broken up by external pressures. There is disintegration when no common morality is observed and history shows that the loosening of moral bonds is often the first stage of disintegration, so that society is justified in taking the same steps to preserve its moral code as it does to preserve its government and other essential institutions.

In order to understand morality, it also seems essential to see its opposite, i.e. immorality. Many philosophical works suggest that immorality involves actively opposing morality, which means going against what is considered good or right; it is the breach of moral values, norms, or standards. (Trusted, 2002; Cahn, 2017; Timmons, 2017; Dwyer, 2011). They assert that immorality is often called wickedness and is a state avoided by good people. In general, morality can be understood as the human attempt to define what is right and wrong about our actions and thoughts, and what is good and bad about our being.

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Moral principles can, thus be understood as "the principles of right and wrong that are accepted by an individual or a social group." It is claimed that moral values or principles are vital driving forces that shape human behavior and endeavors. They guide an individual in society on how to conduct himself/herself appropriately. With regard to this, [Trusted, \(2002\)](#) stated that "Obligations to keep promises, to repay debts and to remain faithful in marriage are based on secondary principles and social values that are part of the moral code of a society."

According to [Türkkahraman, \(2014\)](#), social values show the ideal way of thinking and acting in a society. Some of these societal values, such as honesty, sedulity, helpfulness, and modesty, are believed to regulate and organize people's daily lives. When families fail to bring up their children by nurturing them with key social norms, values, and virtues, a generation gap will be created and problems begin to appear in society. With regard to this, [Türkkahraman, \(2014\)](#) asserts, "Social problems increase where values are not functional." He further stated, "Increasing gap between ways of thinking and behavior of an ideal society and actual world considered to be indicator and ignition for several social problems" (ibid). Thus we can say that the improper functioning of social values results in social problems.

The society in which we live, as well as our familial and cultural upbringing, can have an impact on our moral ideals ([Trusted, 2002](#)). As it is known, our society is going through rapid and profound changes due to globalization processes. Unless we design different mechanisms and educate our children with the moral values of our ancestors, we might face serious social problems and may be

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challenged by failing to cope with alien cultures. To this end, many scholars have suggested that "... moral teaching in childhood has a very great influence on us all" ([Trusted, 2002](#)). The works of many scholars have also shown that morality is something learned through training and education, with much of this training occurring through socialization, examples, and authority ([Trusted, 2002](#); [Türkkahraman, 2014](#)).

Overall, it can be said that social values play a significant role in a society's culture; they hold the society together as they are shared in common and account for the stability of social order ([Trusted, 2002](#)).

The study at hand was conducted to find out the moral principles and social values of the Oromo people as depicted in their folktales. Specifically, the study aims to find out how the older generation has been educating their children about moral principles and social values using folktales.

Conceptual Framework

In a society, moral standards act as guiding principles that establish what is right and wrong. These ideals, which are frequently derived from religious, philosophical, and cultural traditions, influence people's moral conduct and judgment. They encourage qualities that support both individual growth and peaceful cohabitation, such as honesty, respect, integrity, and compassion. Moral values, which are passed down via family lessons, education, and community customs, contribute to the stability of society and guarantee that people follow moral guidelines in their day-to-day activities.

Social values, on the other hand, represent shared beliefs and principles that define acceptable behavior within a community.

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These values foster unity, cooperation, and mutual respect among individuals, strengthening social bonds. Examples include justice, equality, responsibility, and solidarity, which encourage people to act in ways that benefit society as a whole. Social values evolve, adapting to cultural and historical contexts, but their core purpose remains the promotion of social harmony and collective well-being.

The precise guidelines and standards that govern conduct in a particular community are referred to as norms. Laws and regulations are examples of formal ones, whereas conventions and traditions are examples of informal ones. Social life is kept predictable and orderly by norms that govern how people interact with one another. Certain standards are constant throughout generations, whereas others evolve in reaction to societal advancements and cultural changes. Adhering to norms reinforces a sense of belonging and identity, while deviations may lead to social consequences or the redefinition of acceptable behavior.

In general, moral values, social values, and norms collectively shape the ethical and behavioral foundations of a society. They provide individuals with a sense of direction, fostering personal integrity, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. While moral values guide ethical decision-making, social values promote unity, and norms establish order, all three elements work together to maintain stability and progress. As societies evolve, it is essential to preserve and adapt these principles to ensure they remain relevant and meaningful for future generations.

Research Questions

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In order to address the problems stated and fill the gaps indicated above, the following main research questions were designed to be answered in the course of the study.

1. *What are the moral values depicted in Oromo oral narratives/folktales?*
2. *What are the immoral acts usually ridiculed or condemned among the Oromo as reflected in the folktales?*
3. *How have the Oromo been maintaining their accepted social values as depicted in the folktales?*

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Hereunder, an effort was made to review the fundamental research method, appropriate data collection tools, sampling technique, and approaches to data analysis and interpretation. Qualitative research methodology forms the basis of this study. This is because the basic research questions typically deal with the what, how, and why of the stated problem rather than numerical data that can be tallied, measured, and statistically confirmed. Additionally, since the goal of the study is to investigate and uncover the moral principles that are represented in the folktales, qualitative research methods are more appropriate for addressing these societal and public affairs issues.

Various methods were employed to gather the Oromo folktales that were needed for the study. Most of all, the folktales that the society uses in various contexts were gathered through focus group discussions and interviews with notable elders and people of various backgrounds. Thus, the primary data were gathered from several informants who participated in a series of interviews and focus group discussions from different Oromo settlement areas including Gimbi, Nekemte,

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Bako, and Bedele districts. Purposive and snowball sampling techniques were used to choose the informants since these methods are seen to be the most extensively used and suitable for the type of study being done. This technique was used deliberately to select participants who have special expertise relevant to the study's objectives, and with the belief that it ensures in-depth information and insights from a targeted group rather than random selection.

Apart from the primary data, the study also utilized secondary data, which are folktales gathered and published in book forms by various researchers and bureaus such as Oromia Culture and Tourism Bureau, East and West Wollega Zones Culture and Tourism Bureaus etc.). Ultimately, the unprocessed data collected through the previously mentioned methods were sorted out, and the relevant data were translated into English, and then coded, examined, critically analyzed and interpreted from the functional theory folklore, which suggests that folktales serve specific social, cultural, or psychological purposes, such as reinforcing norms, educating, or entertaining communities. The theory is used to analyze how folktales help transmit values, preserve traditions, and address societal challenges.

For this type of research, transcribing the information collected on tape and video recorders is the first step in the data analysis process. Next comes the raw data selection, translation, and coding. After the folktales were chosen and translated, their content was analyzed and interpreted using the functional theory of folklore. For this article, only the synopses of the folktales were presented to save space.

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RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Finding the moral lessons ingrained in Macha Oromo folktales is the main goal of this section. The information gathered from secondary sources, focus groups, interviews, and field observations is presented and discussed hereunder. During the analysis, an effort was made to uncover the moral principles that the society upholds and the transgressions that it discourages through the use of folktales or storytelling.

Faithfulness and Truthfulness versus Infidelity and Falsehood

The behavior of a person who stays true to a relationship without engaging in sexual activity with anybody other than their spouse is referred to as faithfulness. Conversely, the term "infidelity" refers to the act of being disloyal to a sexual partner, be it a husband or a wife. The word connotes inconsistency, disloyalty, unfaithfulness, treachery, adultery, and similar behaviors. In society, being faithful and truthful in a relationship is admired, whereas infidelity and falsehood are strongly frowned upon. As a result, faithfulness to one another is expected of both men and women in society. Numerous folktales gathered from the study area highlight the value of remaining true to a spouse and illustrate how disastrous it would be for someone to be discovered lying and having an extramarital affair.

Let's read the following folktale synopsis; (henceforth, FT-1) to confirm this reality.

FT-1: The Adulterous Wife

Long ago, there lived a husband and a wife in a village where the wife became persistently nagging him. He sought advice from his friend and decided to leave the house

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for a week to visit distant relatives. The wife prepared food for him and offered to stay for more than a week if needed. The husband returned to his home, dyed himself with charcoal, dressed as a beggar, and asked her to stay the night with them. As the night wore on, her lover arrived and asked her to bring him food. She slaughtered a lamb and gave the meat to him. The wife and lover enjoyed dinner together, drinking local beer. At midnight, while she was sleeping, the pseudo beggar beheaded her lover and buried the corpse in the backyard. In the morning, the pseudo beggar acknowledged her and went back to his friend's home. After a day, he came back home on the pretext that the horse refused to go forward, which is an indication of bad luck. She welcomed him and told him that one of the lambs was lost and that it was likely eaten by a tiger. While they were talking to each other, a cock crowed repeatedly and unusually, and she asked her husband what was going on. The husband calmed her down and told her that a cock was claiming the corpse was in the backyard. He asked her to check the head and approve it. She found the head of her lover there. The husband revealed the truth; he became angry and amputated her hands, blinded her, and told her to leave his home.

According to this folktale, the husband found out that his wife was having a sexual relationship with another guy by dressing like a beggar at night in his own house. In addition to being damaging and cunning, the woman in the folktale is portrayed as not being good, truthful, or honest to her husband. Naturally, the moral of the story is to teach people to be obedient to one another and to denounce infidelity in general. As depicted in the folktale, young people are being indoctrinated

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Similar to this, there are several instances in which the Oromo use folktales to encourage faithfulness and denounce infidelity. For example, in the following folktale, the queen was depicted as adulterous; and the tale mirrors the ultimate result of being engaged in such activity.

FT-2: The Unfortunate Queen

Once upon a time, a young queen used to live with an old king who was weak and unable to fulfill her sexual desires. She sought another man with whom she could enjoy her life and decided to discuss the matter with a bodyguard. One day, she invited the bodyguard to stay with her and plotted to poison the king's food to live peacefully with him. The king passed away, and the people mourned his death. The queen was appointed as the king's heir and led the country for a few days. She appointed the bodyguard as chief of the bodyguards, leading to lawlessness. Later, she became bored with the bodyguard and wanted to change him into a younger, muscular one. The former bodyguard, who had heard the plot, assassinated the queen and declared himself the king. He married a beautiful woman and began to lead the country thereafter.

This folktale, in which the queen kills the monarch by poisoning the food to intensify her sexual relationship with the bodyguard, appears to warn males against dating women who appear disloyal. Later in the folktale, when she sought to leave the bodyguard again in favor of another guy, it is further evidence of her unreliability. The bodyguard killed the queen and assumed the throne after learning from his friend that she was about to reject

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him. The king and the bodyguards were shown in the folktale as being honest and true to the queen, but the queen was shown as promiscuous and licentious. The folktale illustrates that no matter how admirable a woman may be, she will always be powerless to prevent the death penalty or the horrendous suffering that can follow adultery.

The primary purposes of these two folktales (FT-1 & FT-2) are to instill in children the value of remaining true to one another and to denounce adultery in society, illustrating the dire consequences of engaging in such behavior. In an interview made with the informants, the researcher learned that the stages of telling such stories to children seem to have been completely abandoned; and the current generation is not acting by society's traditional norms. The change in lifestyle, social media, religious institutions, pornography, various media outlets, etc. seems to have replaced the storytelling practices of society and the moral values that used to be taught via folktales. Many researchers fear that a society that doesn't pass its traditional values to the current generation is in danger. For example, while discussing the importance of preserving a given society's lore, Jen, B. (2016:36) stated, "...any society that fails to pass down its history, wisdom, and mores which are enshrined in folklore to their succeeding generation is doomed".

Generosity and Humanity versus Meanness and Cruelty

While generosity is used to describe the trait of being kind to others or the practice of giving or extending a hand, stinginess is used to denote the antithesis of generosity. Likewise, while humanity refers to a person's

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behavior in which he/she treats someone with compassion, cruelty refers to the willful infliction of mental or bodily pain onto another. One attribute that is valued highly in society is generosity; those who possess it are respected and well-liked in contrast to those who are cruel and stingy. The traditional Oromo society used to inculcate such virtues to their children using their folktales.

Many folktales are utilized by society to promote generosity and decry stinginess. People in the study area are cautioned not to be overly stingy as it is demonstrated in the folktales that follow.

FT-3: Stepmother and stepchildren

Once upon a time, a husband whose wife died accidentally was forced to take care of his two children alone. Later, he decided to marry another wife; however, the new wife refused to live with him unless he cast the children out. He kept the children at home despite her warnings. The husband devised a mechanism to keep the children at home for days, placing them in a granary. He informed his new wife that the god of his father also told him to abandon the children. He told her that the god (spirit of his father) dwells in the granary and needs to be fed three times a day. The wife continued to throw some food in the granary (for the god) for a few days. One day the husband went to the market and she discovered that her husband was cheating on her. Meanwhile, she boiled some water and spilled over the children and killed them there. When he comes home, the husband discovers that the children are killed; in the end, he kills his new wife in retaliation.

The folktale portrays the stepmother as being unkind to her stepchildren; and at the end, she faces punishment for both her ungenerous behavior and her callousness.

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Thus, as the folktale illustrates, terrible retribution follows, especially for women in society who are ungenerous to others and refuse to accept the hardships of doing their jobs at home.

This moral value is also evident in a number of folktales that have been gathered from the research area. For instance, the woman in FT-4 was punished for being stingy, self-centered, and dishonest. The woman in the folktale was portrayed as being solely focused on her demands and interests, to the detriment of her spouse. Ultimately, despite his stupidity, the husband was able to determine that his wife was stingy and had been lying to him for a long time. As a result, he brutally lashed her with a whip and gave her the order to leave his house and go to her parents' house.

FT-4: Water or Butter?

Once upon a time, a farmer married a selfish wife who used to cheat him by claiming she preferred clear water over 'shiro'[simple food/sauce] while dining. The farmer consulted his friend on the matter and his friend suggested him check the water one day. As being told, the farmer couldn't wait to check the reality. One evening, as usual, the wife melted butter for herself and served 'shiro' to her husband; this time the farmer refused to eat alone. He ate with her and discovered that she had been deceiving him. When he realized that she had been cheating him, he beat her with a whip, causing her body to bleed. He told her to leave his home and instructed her to go to her parents.

This kind of folktale instructs the youth to be cautious when eating food, prioritize others' needs, and avoid selfishness. Besides condemning selfishness and foolishness, the folktale highlights the importance of being

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clever and asking for advice in times of difficulty. As depicted in the folktale, an ideal woman in society is one who dutifully performs her roles as a wife and mother while having little interest in gratifying her personal needs and aspirations.

Giving to others brings benefits and improves one's standing in the community. This is evident as demonstrated in FT-5, where the youngster escorted a woman who was leaving the market after completing her affair and heading home. The woman in the folktale was portrayed as helpful and giving. In the end, the boy approached her younger daughter for marriage to reinforce his bond with the family after she treated him kindly and gave him everything he needed without reservation.

FT-5: The Generous lady

An old lady lived alone in the countryside with two daughters and a son. One day, while she was going to a market, she encountered a gentle boy who asked her some questions. They encountered various cattle, some white and others black. The boy asked which cattle were larger, and the lady answered that white cattle were larger. They passed by and came across heifers and bullocks, and the boy asked which ones were larger in number. The lady answered, "The heifers." When they reached home, the lady ordered her elder daughter to boil him coffee. The boy refused to take and drink coffee from the elder daughter. Meanwhile, the younger one was ordered to serve him and he accepted the younger daughter's coffee. The younger daughter prepared dinner and served the guest, and the boy stayed at home. The next day, the boy left for his parents' home, puncturing the ground in seven different places with his spear.

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The mother was surprised by the boy's behavior and worried about the potential malevolence of the situation. Later, the lady's son calmed her down and explained the myth. The son suggested that the boy's question about the number of cattle might be about the family's children, as the sisters were relatively white and their elder son was almost black. Heifers and bullocks meant daughters and sons, and the boy's refusal to accept the elder's coffee meant he needed to marry the younger one. The boy punctured the ground in seven different places may mean he would return after seven days. The lady was astonished by the son's interpretation and began to wait for its realization. After a week, the boy sent elders to her home and asked to marry the younger daughter according to the society's culture.

According to the folktales, generosity enhances one's reputation, but stinginess ruins it and brings retribution. All things considered, the folktales subtly suggest that in addition to other virtues, generosity and abstaining from stinginess are required in order to gain acceptance in society. Had the lady ignored the boy and become mean to him, she wouldn't have got a son-in-law. Thus, while being generous and humane are virtues praised by society, selfishness, and cruelty are vices that are highly condemned and lead to punishment.

Harmony and Unity versus Treachery and Disagreement

While harmony or unity is defined as the quality of being together in agreement or accord, treachery is perceived as the act of betraying trust, usually for one's own benefit (OALD). As the proverb has it unity is strength. When people are in harmony or in

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan.– March 2025, 14(1), 135-151 unity, there is victory. Thus unity is one of the social values any institution, person or society preaches to its members. The Oromo, like every nation in the world, has been upholding unity and discouraging treachery using stories. As clearly indicated in the following folktale, the three bulls were attacked by their enemy because of their lack of unity and engagement in treachery.

FT-6: The Lion and the Three Bulls

Once upon a time, a lion encountered three bulls: red, white, and black. Because of their unity, he couldn't eat them. He devised a mechanism to separate them and eat them one by one. He befriended them and claimed to protect them. One day, he threatened the white bull, claiming it was a threat to them. The Red Bull and Black Bull agreed, and the lion killed the white bull. Later, he told the black bull that it was dangerous for him to be with a red bull as he was easily visible to the predator. The Black Bull agreed, allowing the lion to kill and eat the Red Bull. Finally, the Lion confronted the Black Bull, who realized his mistake at the last minute and devoured him too.

Children are told these kinds of folktales to instill in them the value of living in harmony with one another rather than listening to their adversaries. Such stories are told to children to teach them that people are more powerful and stronger when they work as a team than when they work alone. The narrative, in short, underscores the significance of collaboration, unity, and solidarity in accomplishing a shared objective. Had they lived in harmony and fought the lion together, they wouldn't have been devoured one by one by the enemy. Here while unity or harmony is praised in the story, treachery or betraying one's friend for one's own benefit is

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condemned. Failing to realize its ultimate consequence, the bulls in the story betrayed each other and wanted to live separately; yet, they ended up being devoured by their enemy. One who reads or is exposed to such kinds of folktales can easily learn that achieving harmony is essential for the advancement, fulfillment, general well-being, and survival of the individual as well as the group to which they belong. The folktale proves that harmony keeps people together despite their differences and averts hostility and bitter conflict.

Similarly, the following folktale (FT-7), as in a number of the folktales collected from the study area reveals that treachery is a vice to be condemned. Here follows the summary of the folktale.

FT-7: Fire, Water, Truth, and Falsehood

Once upon a time, there lived friends named Fire, Water, Truth, and Falsehood. However, Falsehood was unhappy with their harmony and wanted to destroy them. One day, he proposed to go on a trip together to find free places and to become kings independently of them. They all agreed and started their journey. At their destination, Falsehood told Water that Fire was an enemy and should be extinguished by him; Water agreed and abolished Fire. Then Falsehood tried to distract Water by putting him on a stone found on a cliff and pushing it down so that it would splash and remain there; it did and succeeded in destroying water too. Now Falsehood had to get rid of Truth; it pushed Truth down a boulder to crush him. Truth managed to scramble away and when the boulder crashed down there were diamonds and gold and all sorts of valuables inside. Falsehood appeared and checked and found that Truth was alive with its minerals. He wanted to get the minerals similarly. He told

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the Truth to push him under the boulder. Truth did it and Falsehood died there.

Apart from upholding the moral value of harmony or unity, this story (FT-7) demonstrates that despite challenges, truth eventually succeeds, proving that even in difficult times, it can prevail and succeed. From the folktale, one can learn that the effects of betrayal or treachery on interpersonal and social relationships can be disastrous. Had it not been for its treacherous behavior, Falsehood wouldn't have been put to death at the end and destroyed its friends (fire and water). Thus, the folktale warns those individuals who want to work against group members and upholds the importance of being in harmony, living together tolerating each other.

Hardworking and respect for culture versus laziness and shamelessness

As in any culture, the Macha Oromo values a person who tends to work with energy and commitment rather than those who simply sit and eat or beg. The story below illustrates how, in Macha Oromo culture, laziness and failure to respect others lead to disagreement and divorce among couples. As seen in the tale, one has to be a hard worker and live up to the expectations of society to survive in a relationship. It is considered shameful if one particularly a woman is lazy, doesn't have feminine traits, and doesn't care about social values such as respect for elders mainly for one's mother-in-law.

FT-8: The Shameless Bride

Once upon a time, an old lady who had a son needed help with household chores. She advised her son to marry a clever work-oriented girl. The boy found a beautiful girl and brought her home. However, he later

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found her uncooperative and unprepared for work. His mother tried to correct her behavior, but she failed. The mother devised a strategy to encourage her to work on being a role model by waking up early and cleaning the room. One day, the old lady and the boy conversed loudly to wake her up from sleeping by saying "Let me clean today; no I will clean it...." etc. The boy and his mother tried this tactic for some days while the bride was sleeping. One day, while they were shouting, the bride/wife told them, "Don't shout at me; clean the room turn by turn if you need". The boy, losing his patience, eventually divorced her and married another hardworking girl.

As the story has it one has to be a hard worker, respect elders and live up to the expectations of society. Laziness and shamelessness result in retribution. Apart from this, the folktale's lesson is that a woman ought to get up early, tidy her room, and make breakfast while her husband is still asleep. Either way, it is not required of a man to get up early in the morning and take care of the house while his wife is asleep. It appears from the folktale (FT-7) that a man marries a lady to handle these kinds of home tasks. Thus, one has to be a hard worker, diligent, respect the norm, and live up to the expectations of society to be acceptable.

Many other folktales bear the same message and that the society under focus uses to inculcate their children the importance of hard work, respect for the norm, and being industrious. One of these folktales is the one in which a lazy he-monkey misleads an industrious she-monkey and puts her life in danger. Here is the summary of the story.

FT-9: The Lazy He-monkey

Once upon a time, there lived, a slothful he-monkey who used to lead his life by wandering

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in a village without any work. While he was wandering in search of food and a partner, he encountered a she-monkey who was weeding crops in her field alone. The he-monkey went close to her and asked her why she was suffering while she could sit and eat without any work. He boasted and told her that he had lots of property in his estate and needed an industrious she-monkey to help him in his life. Even though she was a bit ambivalent about the idea, she was convinced and began to follow him. While she was accompanying him to his false home through the forest, he mated her once and began their journey. At one point, he showed her a certain rich man's compound and told her to eat food from it to her fill and bring some for him. As soon as she entered the compound, the owners caught her and beat her to death. She cried and asked him why he was quiet while they were beating her to death. While he was running to escape, the dogs chased and blooded him too and he slightly survived the injury.

As clearly depicted in the folktale, there is little room for the one who doesn't want to work hard and tries to live by wandering here and there. Despite her hard work, the she-monkey in the folktale was portrayed as entirely foolish and thoughtless; even after being caught and subjected to harsh treatment by her avengers, she was unable to comprehend her foolishness. The slothful he-monkey, who represents lazy and dishonest people here, misled the industrious she-monkey who had been working diligently to lead her life. The folktale warns those who boast without any work and those who are easily cheated by listening to what people tell them. Thus, the story teaches us that there is no place in the world where one can simply sit and lead his life. Children who are told such

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kinds of stories learn that one has to work hard, and should keep away those who try to interrupt them from their work.

Trustworthiness versus Unreliability

Someone who is trustworthy is honest, dependable, and accountable. The antithesis of trustworthiness is unreliability, which is used to characterize an individual's unpredictable nature. Someone who is unreliable exhibits inconsistent behavior and is hard to rely on. Thus, trustworthiness is a moral value; a trustworthy person is one in whom we can put our confidence and be certain that the trust won't be lost, betrayed, damaged, or misplaced. According to some psychologists, being trustworthy can be attained by continuously telling the truth, honoring agreements and pledges, keeping one's word, abstaining from theft and dishonesty, abiding by the law, making the right decision, and so forth (Flores & Solomon, 1998). Some research works also reveal that a moral story that highlights a character's honesty is more successful in encouraging young children to speak the truth than one that highlights the negative consequences of lying.

Like any other human community, the Macha Oromo expects both men and women to possess the trait of trustworthiness because it is seen as one of the characteristics of a good person. Numerous folktales collected from the study area depict women as untrustworthy and unable to do their duties as men can. One famous instance is in the above-discussed (FT-2) scenario, where the queen assassinated the king to live in peace and satisfy her purportedly intense sexual feelings with the bodyguard. Regardless of her rank, the queen in the folktale defied her husband, the king, who formerly loved her and had

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planned to poison the food to kill him. She moved in with the bodyguard after killing her innocent husband (the king), whom she eventually betrayed once more in her quest for a new partner. The queen in the folktale was portrayed as an unreliable, unfaithful, and untrustworthy person. The fact that the queen was ultimately executed for her actions shows that those who are untrustworthy will ultimately pay a price for their actions.

Similarly, the following folktale bears the moral standards of loyalty and dependability. It serves as a warning to people who lack these qualities in society by illustrating the dire consequences of their actions. In the folktale, the wife's actions ultimately led to the deaths of herself and her lover.

FT-10: The hide of an ox

Once upon a time, there lived a husband and wife who owned only one ox. The wife had a secret lover, whom she favored more than her husband. One day, she decided to send her husband to the market while she stayed with her lover. She also planned to prepare beef for him. To do this, she said to her husband, "Yesterday, I heard that the hide of an ox was worth 2,000 birr." She suggested, "Maybe we should slaughter our ox and sell its hide to make a profit and get another ox." The husband agreed and without hesitation, slaughtered their only ox and took its hide to the market. However, when he arrived, no one showed interest in buying the hide. People laughed at him, as it was unusual to sell a hide at that time. Meanwhile, the wife enjoyed her time with her lover, preparing beef and a local beer, and spending the day happily. On his way home, the husband noticed a man sneaking out of the house and hiding in an empty granary. He quietly entered his home and sat down. The wife asked why he hadn't

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sold the hide. He replied, "It wasn't the hide worth 2,000 birr today—it was the ash from the granary." He then said, "I'll burn it and sell the ash at the market." Later, he set the granary and her lover on fire, catching both of them in the flames. Afterward, in a fit of rage, he stabbed his wife with a knife.

The woman in the folktale is portrayed as being damaging and untrustworthy; Here, women are depicted as lusty, reckless, and irrationally obsessive beings solely focused on their erotic pleasure. They are also shown to be dishonest and untrustworthy to their spouses. Like any other human community, the Macha Oromo expects both men and women to possess the trait of trustworthiness because it is seen as one of the characteristics of a good individual. Men are generally seen as more trustworthy than women in society, and women are often viewed as unreliable or untrustworthy.

The representation of women as untrustworthy and unreliable people is a common theme in many Macha Oromo oral literary works. Numerous proverbs and folktales gathered from the study area depict women as weak, gullible, and easily tempted individuals who are only interested in themselves. In summary, as in any African verbal art, Oromo folktale is rich with stories and proverbs cautioning men against women's most dangerous flaw—their indiscretion; one of the best pieces of advice a man can give to another man in our society is "...do not trust a woman".

CONCLUSIONS

This study is primarily concerned with the assessment of folktale messages with a particular emphasis on the significant role that Oromo folktales have been playing in

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maintaining traditional moral standards. So far, oral traditions have been the primary means by which the Oromo people have passed down their historical and cultural tales from one generation to the next. Although this approach has proven successful, it is susceptible to distortion and loss over time. Hence, it is necessary to use written documents, digital archives, and other contemporary media to guarantee the durability and accessibility of these stories. Embracing these alternative forms of documentation will help safeguard Oromo heritage for future generations.

It has been noted that children can learn valuable lessons from a variety of folktales they are exposed to at different times. Folktales play a significant role in teaching the moral, social, religious, and cultural values of society to growing children. However, due to a variety of factors that appear to have undermined the storytelling tradition, many of the morally uplifting stories that we formerly knew have vanished. The widespread use of social media and the internet, the availability of both secular and spiritual songs, a shift in lifestyle, and the availability of radios and TV channels, among other things, appear to have had an impact on the practice of storytelling among the Oromo.

Thus, rebuilding our lost wisdom and attempting to educate the present and upcoming generations in order to help them behave themselves, that is, act in a way that is acceptable in society, seems necessary, particularly in terms of being kind, patient, self-controlled, and so forth. It seems that apart from providing amusement, the ultimate goal of storytelling in traditional Oromo society is to develop a person who is trustworthy, courteous, competent,

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cooperative, and complies with prevailing social norms. In other words, a variety of moral lessons are embedded in Oromo folktales for the young generation. It has been found that the virtues of humility, trustworthiness, bravery, gratitude, respect for elders and established authority, perseverance, adherence to social norms, unity, truthfulness, honesty, courageousness, loyalty to one's partner, hard work, and the likes can all be instilled in young children through folktales.

In addition, lessons on resisting vices including stealing, cruelty, rudeness, hostility, wickedness, dishonesty, etc. are also contained in the folktales collected for analysis.

Recommendations

1. These days, readily available technological devices can make it easier for everyone to collect, document, disseminate, and promote the different forms of oral genres. Thus, the folktales should be collected, filmed, or changed into movies and games and made easily accessible to children. They should be adapted and made readily available for children as in the case of Tom and Jerry on TV channels, YouTube, and other media outlets.

2. Curriculum designers should think about how to incorporate this social lore and bring it to the school environment; thus, storytelling practices should be included in the curriculum of primary school books. It seems necessary to think about changing the setting of storytelling practices i.e. from nighttime, fireside, or under-the-shade-of-a-tree entertainment to school classrooms.

3. Books containing these folkloric genres should be published and kept in the libraries

Sci. Technol. Arts Res. J., Jan.– March 2025, 14(1), 135-151 of schools, colleges, and universities; and teachers should encourage their students to collect, read, and bring them (social lore which is on the verge of being lost) to their schools.

4. Besides formal education, parents should make an effort to tell stories to their young children so that they get the chance to learn moral values that they can't get from schools and religious institutions.

CRedit authorship contribution statement

The author confirms the sole responsibility for the conception of the study, presented results, and manuscript preparation.

Declaration of competing interest

The author declares that he has no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

Data availability

Data will be made available on request.

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