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Original Article

### Utilisation of Sketching as a Foundational Strategy for the Visual Interpretation of Tumbuka Folklore Narratives of Malawi

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*Visual Interpretations,  
Storyboard,  
Structural Narrative Analysis,  
Propp's Morphology of the Folktale,  
Dramatis Personae,  
Narrative Functions,  
Sketching.*

Documenting and preserving folklore are crucial in the protection of intangible cultural heritage (ICH) since it ensures that the transmission of traditional knowledge and cultural identity of a community is passed on across multiple generations. However, the tradition of oral folklore storytelling, notably among the Tumbuka tribe in the Mzimba district, Malawi, faces serious threats due to modernisation, urbanisation, and the diminishing number of elder traditional knowledge bearers. While literature, digital sources, and some forms of visual art have emerged as techniques for conserving cultural narratives, the role of sketching, particularly as a preparatory stage in painting, remains underexplored. This study looked into how sketching, as a formative stage in painting practice, can be an effective tool in documenting, interpreting, and preserving Tumbuka folklore. In the study, these sketches served as visual interpretations of folklore, making the intangible cultural content accessible across linguistic and temporal boundaries. The study used secondary folklore narrative sources as data for the creation of sketches, which uses the exploratory research approach and structural narrative analysis. Through this method, 15 storyboards were developed as sequential visual narratives, each capturing key moments and themes from the selected folk tales. This approach integrated sketching with narrative analysis by visually mapping Proppian functions and character roles, demonstrating how visual sequencing can embody oral structures. By highlighting the significance of formative narrative sketching, the study helped to create a concrete method that effectively interprets the ICH of a community into a visual format, enhancing its dissemination. While focusing on the Tumbuka in Mzimba, its implications extend to broader cultural preservation initiatives in Malawi and other contexts.

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## INTRODUCTION

Folklore, encompassing folktales, myths, and legends, constitutes a vital component of a community's Intangible cultural heritage (ICH). It functions as a vehicle for transmitting cultural values, beliefs, and worldviews across multiple generations within a community (Banda, 2016). Ratri *et al.* (2021) note that folklore promotes societal values such as honesty, kindness, and forgiveness, while also offering insights into a community's collective memory, relationships with the environment, and human behaviour. As communities change over time, cultural expressions anchor the members of the society to their roots, helping them preserve their identity as their social and environmental conditions change (UNESCO, 2019).

In the context of the Tumbuka Tribe in Malawi, however, the oral transmission of this folklore is steadily declining due to the impact of modernisation and globalisation. Only a few individuals within communities today pass along this folklore orally, while written and visual documentation of this tradition remains limited (UNESCO, 2017). This lack of documentation contributes to the deterioration of cultural heritage. In response to this, scholars such as Sidhartani *et al.* (2019) recommend that folklore can be adapted into various contemporary media as a strategy for

preservation, thereby transforming intangible heritage into lasting, accessible records.

This study examines the role of sketching as a foundational tool for adapting Tumbuka folklore narratives into visual artworks. According to Sidhartani *et al.* (2019), to effectively visualise folklore, the artist must consider the cultural and social values inherent in the story, ensuring that these values are preserved in the final work. Sketching facilitates this process by enabling artists to engage with the narrative structure, isolate key scenes, and experiment with compositional ideas before committing to the final work. Through iterative drawing, sketching acts as a bridge between oral storytelling and visual interpretation, allowing for the exploration of character portrayal, environmental contexts, and symbolic motifs (Namin, 2017).

## Statement of the Problem

Due to the influence of globalisation and modernisation on their societies, many Indigenous tribes worldwide are witnessing a decline in traditional knowledge preservation (Slade & Pak, 2014). In Malawi, the storytelling practice has been losing ground due to changing lifestyles, and the ageing and dying of the elderly keepers of this folklore. The UNESCO Commission in Malawi and other authors have digitally recorded and documented over 250 stories to preserve folklore. However, according to a preliminary enquiry by the

researcher, limited studies have been conducted in Malawi on artistic interpretation of folklore and, in particular, the utilisation of painted artwork as a method for disseminating cultural values and documenting folklore from the Tumbuka tribe in the Mzimba district of Malawi. To address this gap, this paper concentrated on formative sketching, which is a critical stage in the process of creating Paintings that are envisaged as interpretations of intangible cultural heritage. Through the development of sketches informed by Propp's structural narrative analysis, the paper explored the essential techniques required in the visual interpretation process, which could further lead to the preservation of ICH through Painting.

### Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were to:

1. Identify selected Malawian folklore narratives that contain major cultural themes from the Tumbuka tribe in Mzimba District of Malawi.
2. Create preliminary sketch compositions in pencil of the selected folklore narratives that link oral narratives to visual interpretation.

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Visual Art has long served as a compelling medium for storytelling, making it an effective tool for preserving and interpreting folklore (Martinez, 2023). The use of visual media to convey folklore dates back centuries, with ancient Greek folklore depicted in temple murals, gold jewellery, and pottery as early as the 7<sup>th</sup> BC (Carrassi, 2017). These historical practices highlight the critical role visual interpretations have played in transferring cultural knowledge across generations.

However, folklore is a dynamic heritage that evolves, adapting to contemporary contexts. Ben-Amos (2020) argues that folklore functions as a living tradition, continually reshaped by individuals who engage with it. This understanding reinforces

the importance of adaptation methods in folklore preservation, which allow it to resonate with modern societal values and experiences. Understanding the fluid nature of folklore calls for the exploration of alternative media, such as visual art, to document and disseminate these narratives more effectively.

Creating folklore-inspired artworks involves more than just reproducing tradition. Kencis (2015) suggests that folklore interpretations are deeply influenced by the socio-economic and cultural views of the time. The perspectives of individual artists, along with their chosen mediums and style, significantly impact how folklore is visually interpreted (Sidhartani *et al.*, 2019). Thus, visual art becomes a form of reinterpretation, allowing for a continuous dialogue about the lessons and influence of the folklore within a community.

Sketching is an essential preparatory step in the creative process, particularly for visually interpreting folklore. Historically and in contemporary practice, artists have used sketching to plan compositions and explore narrative ideas (Kim, 2023). Sketching helps bridge the gap between intangible cultural narratives and tangible visual representations. As Roque (2022) notes, effective understanding of cultural heritage requires methods that merge abstract meanings with physical depictions, something that sketching excels at achieving.

More than just a technical exercise, sketching promotes in-depth analysis and critical reflection of narratives (Leblanc, 2015). It enables artists to interact critically with folklore by taking apart and reassembling its components. In this regard, sketching is not just a preparatory tool, but also a form of cognitive engagement that allows artists to preserve the cultural essence of folklore while making it accessible to new audiences.

Contemporary artists are increasingly drawing upon folklore as both an inspiration and a framework for their work, contributing to the ongoing preservation

and reinterpretation. For example, artist Harmonia Rosales integrates traditional folklore, explores mythology, and the relationship between spiritual beings and humans. In the painting, *King Shango* (2021), she portrays *Shango*, the God of Lightning and thunder, who rules among the people with oppressive authority. A leader with Magical abilities, his cruelty and envy turned his people against him. Various versions of the myth state that

*Shango* was either assassinated by his general or committed suicide. The painting concentrates on the moments following his death, depicting the king's lifeless body in a mortal form while also expressing his otherworldliness. The painting provides a broad background with plants, such as the iroko, a tropical forest, and date palm, locating the story in Africa (Rosales, 2021).

**Plate 1: "King Shango" (2021), Harmonia Rosales**



**Source:** [www.hyperallergic.com](http://www.hyperallergic.com)

## METHODOLOGY

This study employed the exploratory research design, which is suitable for developing initial insights, defining research problems, and laying the groundwork for further investigation (Swaraj, 2019). Exploratory research was appropriate in this context because the use of sketching to interpret folklore within visual arts remains underexplored, particularly regarding the Tumbuka tribe of Malawi. Swaraj (2019) states that exploratory research aims to define concepts better and facilitates the identification of viable research directions while disregarding the less relevant or impractical ideas.

The research was conducted in the studio of the Department of Fine Arts and Design, Kenyatta University. The researcher used secondary data sources such as literary materials from books, journals, articles, and digital resources such as documentaries and audio recordings. These

materials were used to collect and analyse folklore narratives of the Tumbuka tribe from Mzimba, Malawi. Mazhar *et al.* (2021) define secondary data as information already acquired by someone else, statistically processed, and stored in computerised databases or books and paper filing systems.

The narratives were selected based on the presence of visual cues and descriptive indicators within the text as well as their relevance to the cultural heritage of the Tumbuka people. The extraction and interpretation of these visual elements were guided by the structural narrative analysis, which helped identify culturally significant moments suitable for visual representation. This analytical tool helped the researcher to break down each narrative into scenes that could be visually interpreted, leading to the development of sketch compositions.

The storyboard sketching method was employed as a primary creative strategy in the idea development



to visually map out the flow and sequence of events in each narrative. A storyboard is defined as a sequence of visual cells, such as sketches, paintings, or photographs, arranged in a specific order to convey a coherent narrative (Hasan & Wijaya, 2016). Storyboards can depict imagined and actual occurrences and effectively develop ideas for illustrating folklore narratives. The researcher therefore developed sequences comprising two to four sketches for each narrative. While the concept of storyboards is frequently linked to cinema, film, animation, and comic strips, it was also helpful in the design process of sketching folklore narratives that led to the final visual compositions of the narratives. Therefore, the researcher developed storyboards for each folklore by incorporating narrative-structured sketches from which critical and consequential scenes would be selected and further developed into paintings.

## ANALYTICAL FRAMEWORK

In this study, Vladimir Propp's structural narrative analysis was utilised to examine the recurring narrative functions within selected Tumbuka folklore. Propp's theory, which was originally developed for Russian folktales, lists 31 narrative functions and 7 archetypal character roles, each of which has a distinct purpose in moving the plot forward. These components offer a methodological approach to analysing the structure of a narrative and understanding how it progresses (Aqeel *et al.*, 2023). Not all folklore contains all of Propp's functions and characters; this framework is, however, informative in the structural development of sketches for the folklore.

### Propps Character Roles and Functions

According to Suwarno & Suparto (2023), Propp categorises characters into specific narrative roles known as *Dramatis personae*, which include:

- The Villain: Opposes the hero.
- The Donor: Prepares the hero or gives them a magical object.

- The Helper: Aids the hero in the quest.
- The Prize (princess): Object of the quest, often with a controlling father.
- The Dispatcher: Sends the hero on the mission.
- The False hero: Appears to be good, but is bad.

They also explain that Propp identified 31 narrative functions that commonly appear in folklore. While not all functions appear in every story, some of the most relevant to this study include:

- Absentation: A family member leaves home.
- Interdiction: A command or warning given to the hero.
- Violation: The hero breaks the interdiction.
- Trickery: The villain attempts to deceive.
- Villainy (Lack): A problem occurs.
- Reconnaissance: The villain seeks information.
- Victory: The villain is defeated.
- Punishment: The villain is punished.
- Complicity: The victim is fooled.
- Departure: The hero leaves home.
- Beginning counteraction: The hero decides to act.
- Receipt of magical agent: The hero acquires a magical item of aid.
- Liquidation: The initial problem is solved, and the villain is punished

### Application to the Study

Propp's Morphological model provided a structural analytical framework for developing storyboard sketches in this study. Through the identification of essential narrative functions and characters within the Tumbuka folklore, key moments such as Lack, Struggle, and donor intervention were sketched out visually. By basing visual interpretations on the

structural functions, the sketching process remained faithful to the narratives' moral and cultural context, supporting the Study's aim of translating oral and written narratives into significant and creative visual forms.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In this study, this organised analysis was useful in creating narrative storyboard sketches because it provided a clear framework for visualising the development of events and character roles in each

story. By identifying distinct Proppian functions such as interdiction and villainy and matching them with crucial scenes, this study was able to create sketches that adhered to the folklore's cultural significance and logic, making the sketches both a visual tool and a storytelling map. Below are structural narrative analyses of selected Tumbuka narratives and the storyboard sketches created as a result.

### Narrative 1: Chiuta's Return to the Sky

**Table 1: Main Characters and Their Role**

Character name	Role	Description of the Role in the Narrative
<b>Chiuta</b>	Donor/dispatcher	Chiuta is a deity who is also a creator. After initially living among people, he withdraws to the sky after humans are careless with fire.
<b>Humans</b>	Villains (accidental)	Discover fire but end up being careless with it, which leads to chaos and destruction on Earth.
<b>Animals</b>	Victims	Suffer as a result of the destruction

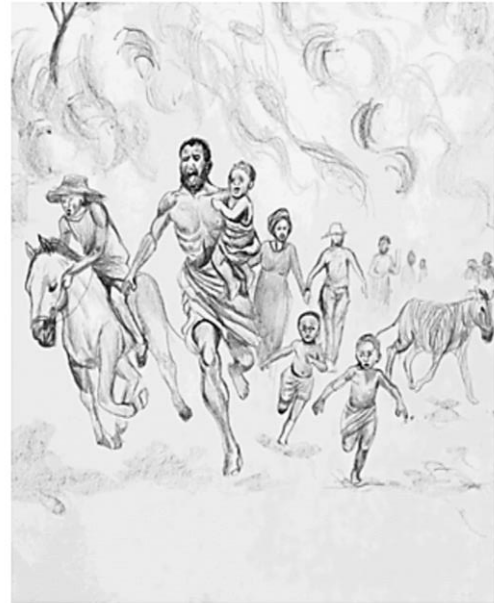
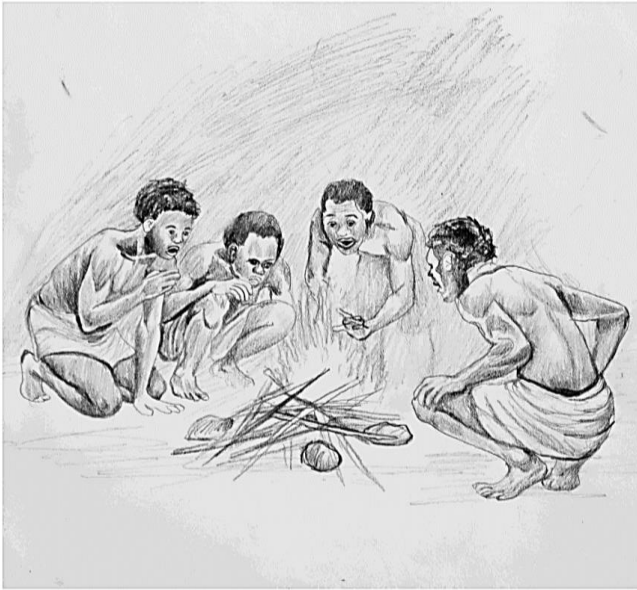
### Narrative Functions

- a Absentation: Chiuta leaves the earth and ascends to the sky.
- b Interdiction: Chiuta's eventual departure implies that harmony was expected among animals, humans, and God.

- c Violation of Interdiction: Humans abuse fire and cause a disturbance to the existing balance, which ends the harmony on Earth.
- d Villainy: Humans, though accidentally, cause death and destruction.
- e Departure: Chiuta ascends to the sky as he severs his presence on earth.

### Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 2 (Scene 1): Humans Discover How to Make Fire    Plate 2 (Scene 2): The fire gets out of hand**



**Plate 2 (Scene 4): A Critical Scene where Chiuta, Who Once Lived among Humans, Ascends to Heaven As He Is Fed Up with Their Reckless Behaviour**



### Observation and Interpretation

The narrative shows the progression from harmony to negligence, which leads to destruction. It explains the mythological origin of the separation between the divine and humanity, which stems from the

failure of humans to be moral and responsible beings. This folklore narrative, therefore, reflects the Tumbuka tribe's worldview in which immorality has spiritual consequences.

Narrative 2: The Young Wife's Test

**Table 2: Main Characters and Their Roles**

5	Role	Description of the role in the story
<b>The husband</b>	Dispatcher/ judge	Sets the test to uncover the truth about who is responsible for eating the guinea fowl
<b>Third wife (Youngest)</b>	Villain	Ate the guinea fowl and lied about it, blaming the dogs instead
<b>First and Second Wives</b>	False Villains	Take part in the test to prove innocence
<b>The dogs</b>	False Villains	Wrongfully accused of eating guinea fowl by the youngest wife

**Narrative Functions**

- Villainy: The third wife eats the guinea fowl meant for the whole family and lies about it.
- Mediation: The husband confronts the wife, suspecting she is guilty.
- Beginning counteraction: The husband formulates a test to identify the true suspects.
- Departure: All three wives and the dogs head to Lake Kazuni, where they begin the test of crossing over the Lake using a rope.
- Punishment: The truth is revealed after the youngest wife falls into the water and drowns, and justice is served.

**Storyboard Sketches**

**Plate 3 (Scene 1): A man works in the field with his two wives after tasking his third wife to stay home and prepare a guinea fowl for lunch.**

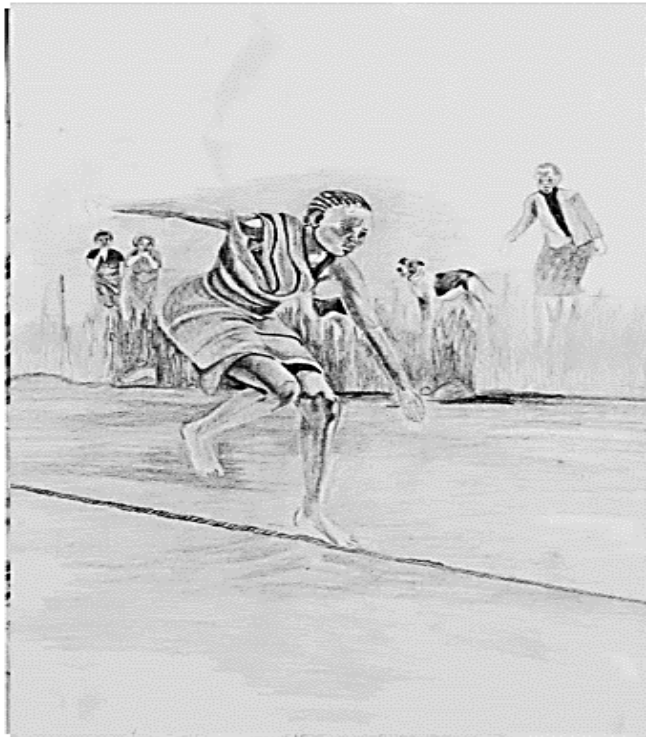




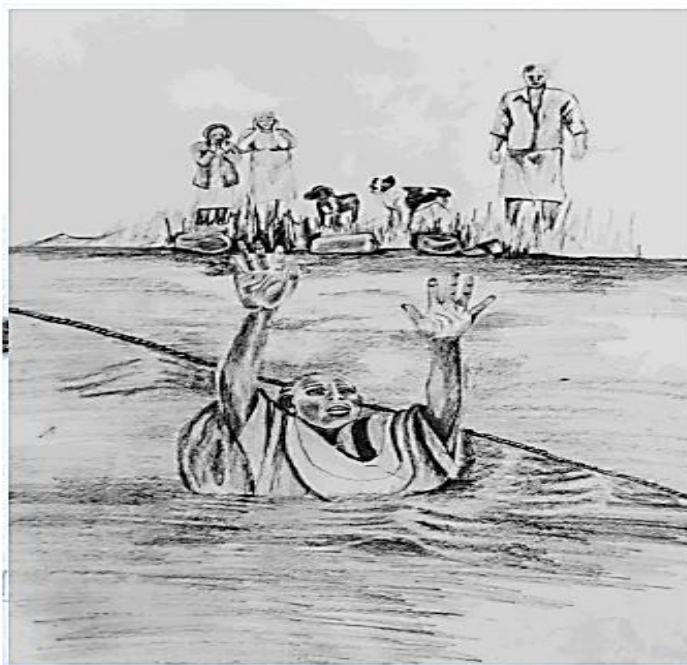
**Plate 3 (Scene 2):** The young wife, being greedy, eats the guinea fowl before her family returns. She plans on blaming the dogs for her misdeed.



**Plate 3 (Scene 3):** The first key scene where the young wife guiltily trembles on the rope set to test her innocence.



**Plate 3 (Scene 4):** The second key scene where she is proven guilty, as she is the only one who falls into the lake after the other wives and dogs successfully cross the lake on the rope.



### Observation and Interpretation

The narrative follows a linear structure where a wrongdoing is followed by a test through which the transgression is exposed, and then justice is served. This folklore emphasises the value of truthfulness

and accountability within the Tumbuka culture. It should also be noted that the narrative displays the use of supernatural means to achieve justice. This is a recurring aspect of Tumbuka folklore, further alluding to the fact that the tribe is highly spiritual in its beliefs and practices.

### Narrative 3: Baza Dokowe's Last Stand on Hora Mountain

**Table 3: Main Characters and Their Roles**

Character's name	Role	Description of Role in the story
Baza Dokowe	Hero/victim	Tumbuka leader who defends his tribe's sovereignty to his death
Ngoni opponents	Villains	Expansionist forces whose aim is to suppress the Tumbuka people
Ngoni sympathisers	False heroes	Consulted British missionaries to mediate on the situation, only to cause further conflict
Ngoni soldiers	Villains	Carried out the attack on Baza Dokowe
Tumbuka people	Helpers	Stood behind their leader till the end

### Narrative Functions

- Absentation: Baza Dokowe prepares for battle as the conflict with the Ngoni grows.
- Villainy: Ngoni aggression threatens the Tumbuka authority and culture.
- Mediation: Baza Dokowe becomes aware that he is being sought after by the Ngoni warriors.
- Beginning counteraction: Baza Dokowe refuses to submit and defends his tribe.
- Departure: He withdraws to Hora Mountain for his final act of resistance.
- Receipt of magical agent: The hidden ivory on Hora Mountain is a symbolic object for hope and the cultural legacy of the Tumbuka people.
- Liquidation: The narrative preserves the identity and cultural heritage of the Tumbuka people.

### Storyboard Sketches

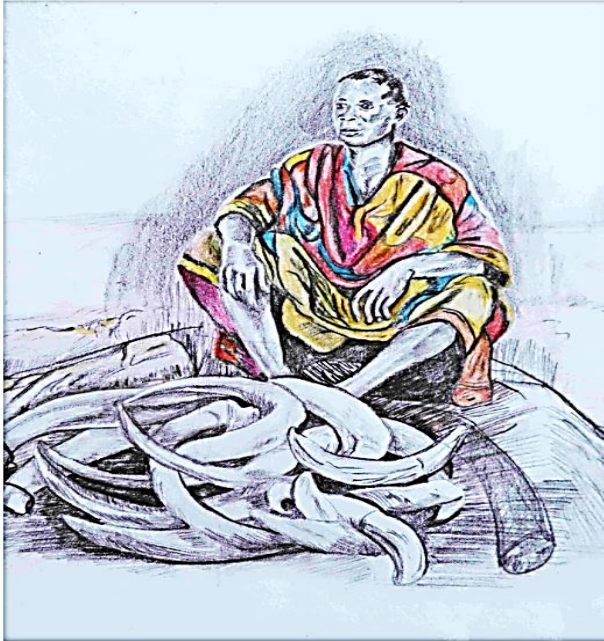
**Plate 4 (Scene 1): Ngoni Warriors Make a Formation as They Plan to Attack Baza on Top of Hora Mountain.**



**Plate 4 (Scene 2): Baza Dokowe Defiantly Waits for the Ngoni Warriors at the Peak of the Mountain**



### Plate 4 (Scene 3): The Key Scene is of the Day He is Captured, He is Dressed Regally, Maintaining His Fearlessness



#### Observation and Interpretation

The narrative matches Propp's design as a legendary tale about a hero's resistance. In the narrative, cultural icons such as Elephant tusks and Hora Mountain stand out as components of the Tumbuka heritage. The narrative highlights the Tumbuka principles of leadership, cultural independence, and a collective identity by fusing

mythological themes with real-life occurrences. The elephant tusks serve as a symbol of hope and resilience, Hora Mountain becomes a sacred landmark of the Tumbuka tribe, and Baza Dokowe's resistance serves as a symbol of the importance of cultural sovereignty. It can therefore be noted that folklore can mythologise history to cement communal values in the present-day societies.

#### Narrative 4: Mujima's Bad Behaviour

**Table 4: Main Characters and their Roles**

Character Name	Role	Description of Role In The Story
Mujima	False hero	His drunkenness led to negligence, and a noisy return led to the villain's success
Wife	Victim	She warns her husband about his behaviour, but is ultimately devoured due to his irresponsibility
Hyena Witchdoctor	Villain Donor	Tricks the wife by mimicking her husband's routine and eats her Gives hyena magical anklets that sound like Mujima's and advises the hyena on the husband's routine

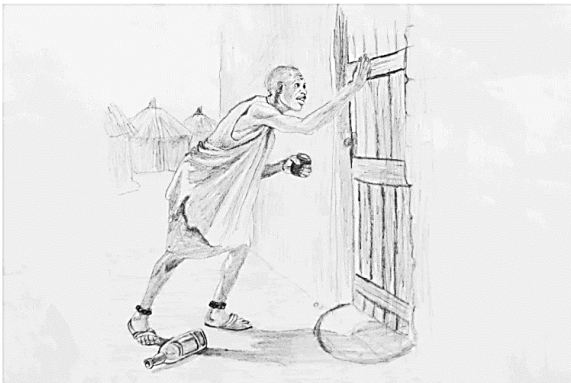


### Narrative Functions

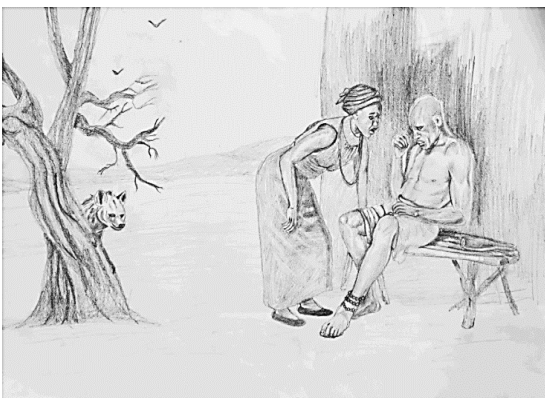
- Absenteeism: Mujima leaves the house every night to drink alcohol.
- Interdiction: The wife warns him to stop coming home late and making his usual noise.
- Violation of interdiction: Mujima continues his bad behaviour of coming home late while being noisy.
- Reconnaissance: The hyena hides as he secretly observes Mujima's routine.
- Trickery: The hyena wears anklets to mimic Mujima's noise
- Complicity: The wife opens the door, thinking the hyena is her husband returning home.
- Villain: The wife is devoured by the hyena.
- Punishment: Mujima's negligence is punished by the loss of his wife.

### Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 5 (Scene 1): Mujima Comes Home Late, His Anklets Making a Rattling Noise as He Staggers to the Door.**



**Plate 5 (Scene 2): The Wife Begs Mujima to Stop His Dangerous and Irresponsible Behaviour**



**Plate 5 (Scene 3): A Key Scene Where the Hyena Manages to Trick the Wife into Opening the Door, after which It Devours Her.**



**Narrative 5: The Wife and the Delicious Eggs**

**Table 5: Main Characters and Their Roles**

Character name	Role	Description of role in the story
Hunting group	dispatcher	Sets rule that initiates husband's moral conflict
Husband	False Hero	Breaks the group's pact and tells the wife the location of the magical eggs, but tries to warn her of the dangers of eating the eggs
Wife	Villain	Is greedy and ignores the warning
Giant bird	Villain	Punishes thieves and intruders

**Narrative Functions**

- Absentation: Men leave the village to go hunting.
- Interdiction: Hunters agree not to reveal the location of the eggs or take any home.
- Violation of Interdiction: The husband takes some eggs home and reveals the location to his wife.
- Trickery: The wife manipulates his husband into leading her to the secret location.
- Villainy: The wife continues to eat the eggs despite being warned by her husband.
- Victory: The giant bird successfully attacks and kills the wife, showing the ultimate power of nature.
- Punishment- the wife is punished for her greed by death and the husband is punished for his betrayal to his fellow hunters by losing his wife.

**Storyboard Sketches**

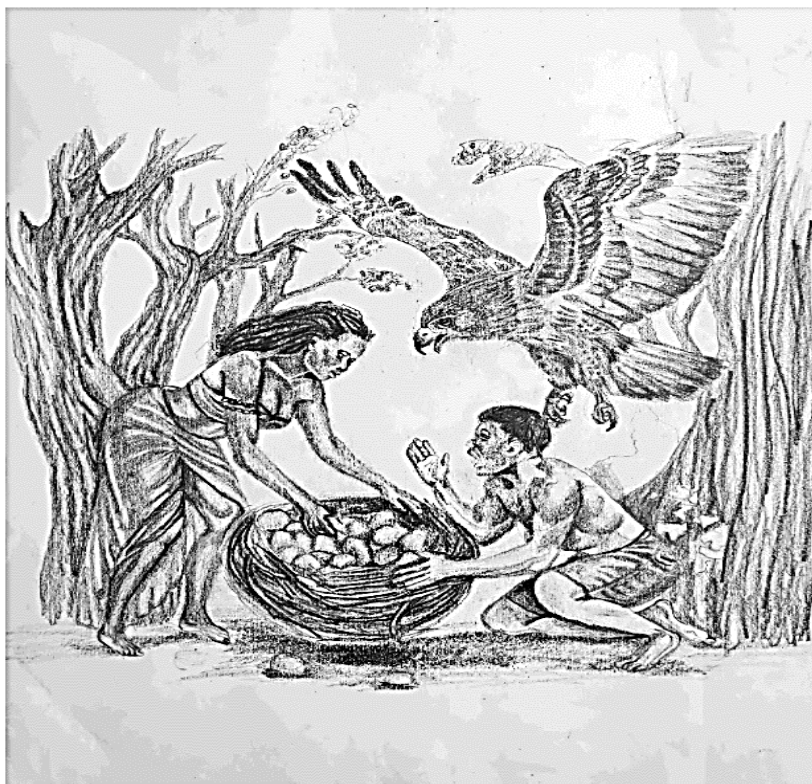
**Plate 6 (Scene 1): Hunters discover a nest of magical eggs and agree to keep it hidden**



**Plate 6 (Scene 2): One of Them Breaks His Promise and Tells His Wife**





**Plate 6 (Scene 3): This is a Key Scene where the Wife is Greedy and Keeps Going to Still the Eggs****Observation and Interpretation**

The husband represents the false hero who tries to save his wife from the giant bird, even though he is the one who put her in danger in the first place by revealing the location of the delicious magical eggs.

The wife, on the other hand, represents the uncontrollable greed and disrespect for communal rules. Overall, this Tumbuka tribe folktale serves as a cautionary tale about the inevitability of justice and punishment for misconduct.

**Narrative 6: Mungaja's Stealing Habits****Table 6: Main Characters and Their Roles**

Character Name	Role	Description of the role in Story
<b>Mungaja</b>	False hero	A young girl who repeatedly steals food behind her parents' backs
<b>Father</b>	Dispatcher	Attempt to correct Mungaja's behaviour by isolating her in a dilapidated house.
<b>Mother</b>	Helper	Attempts to help Mungaja survive her punishment by bringing her food
<b>Hyena</b>	Villain	Devours Mungaja after finding her alone in an isolated hut

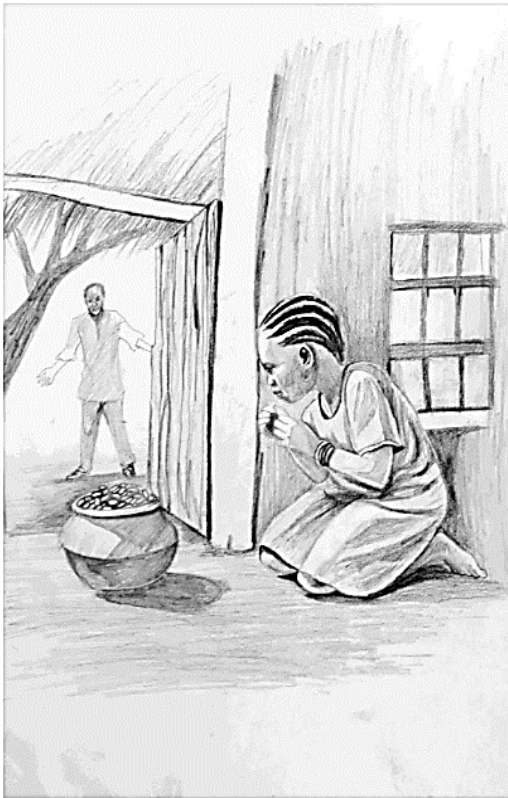


### Narrative Functions

- Interdiction: The parents warn Mungaja against stealing.
- Violation of interdiction: Mungaja continues disobeying repeated warnings.
- Punishment: The parents abandon Mungaja to live in a desolate hut alone.
- Villainy: The hyena finds an opportunity to prey on the vulnerable Mungaja.

### Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 7 Scene 1: Mungaja Stealing Groundnuts**



**Plate 7 Scene 2: Mungaja's Parents Scold Her for Her Bad Behaviour**



**Plate 7 Scene 3: Mungaja is Banished to Live in an Abandoned House and is Eaten by a Hyena**



**Observation and Interpretation**

This story functions as a Moral allegory grounded in social discipline, where the child’s repeated theft escalates into a life-threatening event. Propp’s Functions clarify how interdiction and punishment are used not only to move the narrative forward but also to endorse community ethics. Mungaja’s

character shifts from villain to victim, showing that unchecked bad behaviour often leads to tragic ends. The narrative reinforces honesty and obedience while also acknowledging the complexity of parental discipline, especially through the Mother’s hidden compassion towards her daughter.

**Narrative 7: Cow Vs Lioness**

**Table 7: Main Characters and Their Roles**

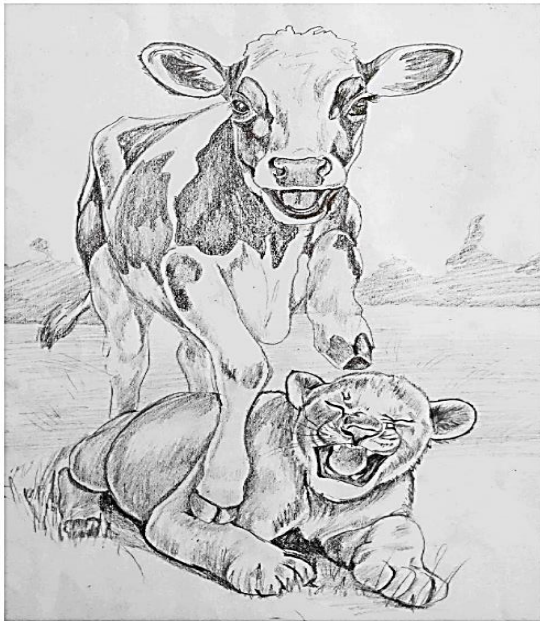
Character name	Role	Description of role in the story
Cow	Hero	Seeks refuge from the rooster, prays for strength, defeats the lion with divine help
Cows calf	helper	Supports the cow in seeking divine help
Lioness	villain	Pursues revenge for the death of her child
Lioness’s cub	Victim	Dies as a result of a play fight with cow’s child
Rooster	donor	Offers refuge and gives spiritual advice to cow
Devine power	Magical agent	Grants cow strength to defeat the Lioness

### Narrative Functions

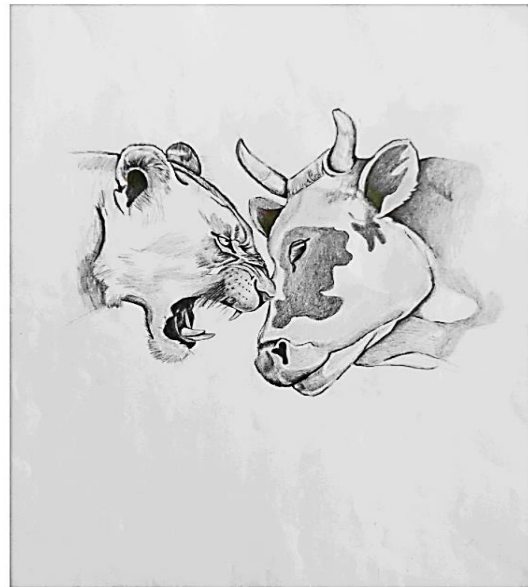
- Villainy: Lioness loses empathy for cow after her cub dies.
- Beginning counteraction: Cow aware of Lioness's wrath seeks protection at rooster's house.
- First function of donor: Rooster provides refuge and offers spiritual advice to cow and her calf.
- Receipt of magical agent: Cow receives divine strength through prayer.
- Struggle: Cow fights lioness.
- Victory: Cow kills lioness.
- Liquidation: Justice is restored after the lioness is defeated

### Storyboard Sketches

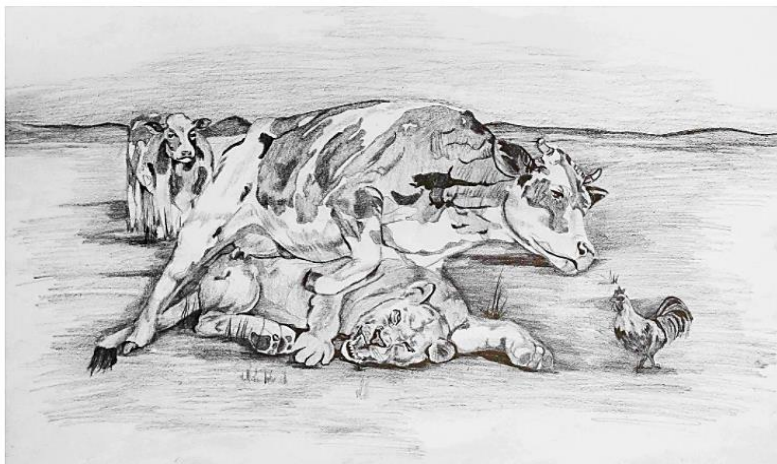
**Plate 8 (Scene 1): After a Game of Dare Over Food, a Calf Causes a Cub's Death**



**Plate 8 (Scene 2): Lioness is Furious with Cow and Promises to Kill Her Calf Too**



**Plate 8 (Scene 3): With the Help of Divine Intervention, Cow Kills the Lion**





### Observation and Interpretation

In the narrative cow represents the underdog who, through humility and prayer, triumphs over the biggest challenges and threats. The folklore, therefore, portrays the hero's strength as spiritual

and moral rather than physical. Culturally, the narrative highlights the Tumbuka values of prayer, meekness, and divine justice. As in other Tumbuka folklore, the animal characters in this narrative serve as metaphors for human behaviour.

### Narrative 8: Chipili the River Spirit

**Table 8: Characters and Their Roles**

Character Name	Role	Description of the Role in the Story
<b>Maliro</b>	Victim	A beautiful boy, envied by Chipili, and abducted into a river
<b>Chipili</b>	Villain	A supernatural river spirit obsessed with Maliro
<b>Mdangu</b>	Seeker/ Hero	A rational boy who uncovers the truth and mobilises action
<b>Villagers</b>	Helpers	Participate in rituals and sacrifices to rescue Maliro

### Narrative Functions

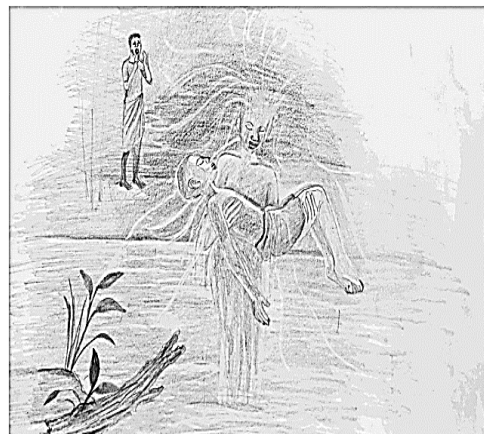
- Absentation: Maliro disappears mysteriously while playing near the river.
- Villainy: Chipili, the river spirit, abducts Maliro due to obsession.
- Mediation: Mdangu witnesses the abduction and informs the village.
- Counteraction: The community performs a ritual sacrifice, offering fabric clothes to the spirit.
- Rescue: The villagers recover a pale, weakened Maliro through the ritual.
- Return: Maliro is returned home and the balance is restored.

### Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 9 (Scene 1): Chipili, the River Spirit, Watches the Young Humans with Envy**

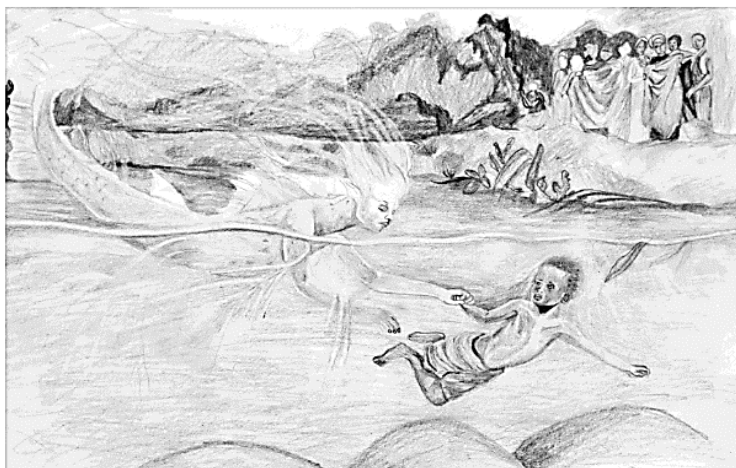


**Plate 9 (Scene 2): Chipili Captures Maliro, the Boy She is Mesmerised by the Most, as His Friend Witnesses the Kidnapping and Reports Back Home**





**Plate 9 (Scene 3): Chipili Holds on to the Young Boy as the Villagers Try to Negotiate for His Freedom with Offerings.**



**Observation and Interpretation**

This narrative demonstrates how Supernatural obsession disrupts the natural order, demonstrating Tumbuka beliefs about spiritual entities interacting with humans. The use of ritual and community action reflects a culture that believes in collective problem solving as well as respect for tradition. Chipili, while the villain, is not malevolent; her actions are driven by envy and desire to be like the

humans rather than malice. This aligns with the Tumbuka worldview that spirits are morally complex beings. The narrative also reinforces the sacredness of Natural spaces such as rivers and the belief that spirits reside in them. This shows that nature is valued among the Tumbuka and forms part of their heritage.

**Narrative 9: A Couple without a Child**

**Table 9: Main Characters and Roles**

Character Name	Role	Description in the Story
Ncawaka	Victim	Disabled daughter who faces isolation and internalised shame
Parents	Villain/ False heroes	They seek supernatural help and become both caregivers and critics, especially the mother.
Traditional Healer	Helper	Uses mystical powers to help the couple have children
Sisters	Helpers	Represent solidarity

**Narrative Functions**

1. Lack: The couple is unable to conceive, facing social ridicule.
2. Villainy: The Mother treats Ncawaka harshly due to her disability.

3. Mediation: Ncawaka's sister becomes aware that she has reverted to a stick due to her sadness as a result of her mistreatment.
4. Transfiguration: The other sisters decide to stand in solidarity with Ncawaka and revert to sticks as well.

5. Punishment: The parents are punished for their abuse of Ncawaka, as they lose all their children in the end.

### Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 10 (Scene 1): The Couple Without Children Prepare Sticks as Instructed, Give the Traditional**



**Plate 10 (Scene 2): The Traditional Healer Uses Magic on the Sticks to Create Children**



**Plate 10 (Scene 3): The Couple is Delighted to Finally Have Children, not Knowing one of the Children is Disabled and Will Face a Lifetime of Mistreatment**



**Plate 10 (Scene 4): After Years of Mistreatment, the Disabled Child Reverts into Being a Stick, Preferring it to Being Alive. Her sisters Watch in Sorrow as They to Contemplate into Turning Back to Being Sticks**



### Observation and Interpretation

This narrative illustrates the emotional aftermath of magical intervention, focusing not only on the joy that can result from the gift of children but also the dissatisfaction that humans can have with the gifts that they are given. Ncawaka's disability symbolises unfulfilled social expectations of motherhood, femininity, and usefulness as defined

by communal standards. The traditional healer serves as a symbolic means of hope and reality. Although the traditional healer is successful in helping the couple who could not biologically conceive to have children, this outcome does not resolve the deeper social issues of segregation and stigma on issues of infertility and disability. The folktale critiques conditional love and alludes to the

importance of family solidarity, empathy, and inclusivity. **Narrative 10: How the Tortoise Broke Its Shell**

**Table 10: Main Characters and Their Roles**

Character Name	Role	Description of The Role in the Story
<b>Tortoise</b>	Villain/trickster	Uses manipulation to benefit from the generosity of the birds and later betrays them at the feast.
<b>Birds</b>	Helpers	Provide feathers to the tortoise and allow him to attend the bird feast.

### Narrative Functions

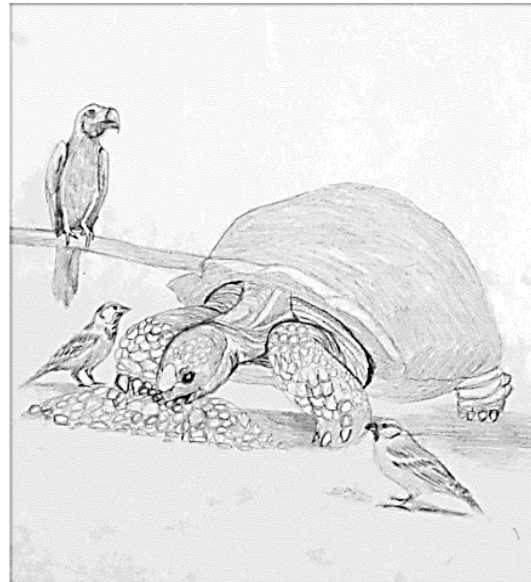
1. Lack: The tortoise desires to attend the celestial feast but cannot fly.
2. Trickery: He tricks the birds into giving him feathers to construct makeshift wings so that he can attend their feast.
3. Complicity: The birds manage to weave the wings on the tortoise's shell without knowing the tortoise's true character.
4. Villainy: Once at the feast, the tortoise claims all the food as his own, showing his greed and betraying the bird's trust.
5. Punishment: Since the tortoise does not know how to land, the birds set him up to crash land on jagged rocks.

### Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 11 (Scene 1): Tortoise Convinces the Birds to Lend Him Their Wings so He Can Attend Their Party.**



**Plate 11 (Scene 2): At the Bird's Feast Tortoise Misbehaves Eating Too Much Food, More than His Friends, the Birds**





**Plate 11 (Scene 3): The Bird Set Tortoise Up to Fall on Jagged Rocks****Observation and Interpretation**

These narrative functions both as a moral metaphor and an etiological myth. An etiological myth, also known as an origin myth, is a narrative that has evolved and has been recounted or written to explain the origins of various societal events (Abd El Hak, 2022). The tortoise's role as a morally flawed trickster demonstrates that intelligence

without integrity leads to disaster and ruin. The motif of a cracked shell explains both the origin of this natural feature as well as a symbolic reminder of the consequences of transgression. This narrative evaluates the fallout of selfishness and greed as well as the significance of communal justice.

**Narrative 11: The Origin of Death****Table 11: Main Characters and Their Roles**

Character Name	Role	Description of The Role In the Story
<b>Chiuta</b>	Dispatcher	Sends two messengers to deliver opposing messages about the finality of life or death to humankind, with a stipulation that the first message to reach the humans is the outcome
<b>Chameleon</b>	False hero	He is given the message of Life after death, but arrives too late due to his slowness.
<b>Lizard</b>	Villain	Delivers the message of permanent death, which humans receive first and accept as fate
<b>Humans</b>	Victims	They cannot change their grim fate and are left shuddering from the horrible message they receive from the lizard.

**Narrative Functions**

- **Delivery:** Chameleon and Lizard are both given critical messages to pass on to the humans about what will happen after death.
- **Departure:** The chameleon leaves for his quest to tell the humans that there will be life after death. However, he is too slow, and the lizard reaches the humans first with his message of the permanence of death.



- Villainy: Lizard, having the Bad news of the finality of death, shatters the hope of the humans by delivering his bad news first to humans.
- Mediation: Humans become aware of the finality of death

### Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 12 (Scene 1): Chiuta, Discussing the Message of Life to the Chameleon and of Death to the Lizard, Discusses that the First Message to Reach the Humans is Final.**



**Plate 12 (Scene 2): The Chameleon Lingers and Delays, Even Though He has the Good Message of Eternal Life.**



**Plate 12 (Scene 3): Meanwhile, the Lizard Has Already Set a Meeting with Humans, Telling Them that Death Will Henceforth be Final.**



### Observation and Interpretation

This narrative is another etiological myth that seeks to explain the reason behind the permanence of death. It utilises animals to explain how certain characters and abilities can yield either good or bad results. The contrast between Lizard's speed and

Chameleon's delay underscores the delicateness of fate. Chiuta's distant but sovereign role reflects the Tumbuka tribe's concept of an all-powerful and yet distant god whose will is enacted through messengers and intermediaries.

### Narrative 12: How the Leopard Got Its Spots

**Table 12: Main Characters and Roles**

Character Name	Role	Description of The Role in the Story
<b>Tortoise</b>	Donor	Rewards good characters by beautifying them, and punishes the bad with ugly designs.
<b>Hyena</b>	Villain	Harms the tortoise and later asks it for a reward unjustifiably.
<b>Leopard</b>	Hero	Saves the tortoise and receives his spots.
<b>Zebra</b>	Helper	It is also given stripes for good character.

### Narrative Functions:

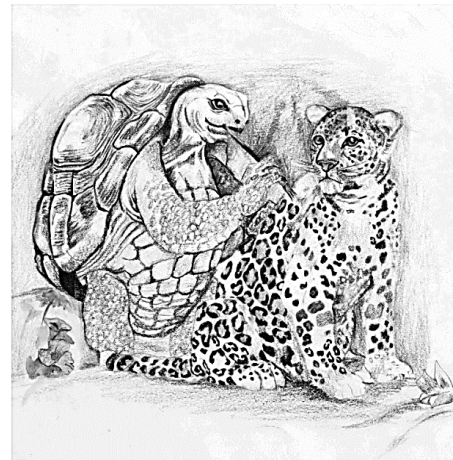
- Villainy: Hyena traps tortoise in a tree.
- Mediation: Leopard finds tortoise and hears tortoise's story.
- Beginning counteraction: Leopard decides to help Tortoise down from the tree.
- Liquidation: Tortoise is safe.
- Punishment: Hyena is painted with ugly spots, and he is mocked for his appearance.
- Wedding: The leopard is rewarded with spots, and the zebra is rewarded with stripes for good character.

### Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 13 (Scene 1): The Spotless Leopard Saves the Tortoise from the Top of the Tree where the Hyena Left It**



**Plate 13 (Scene 2): The Tortoise Paints the Beautiful Spots on the Leopard**



**Plate 13 (Scene 3): The Colour Sketch of How the Spots Turned Out****Plate 13 (Scene 4): The Envious Zebra Also gets Painted due to His Harmless General Behaviour****Observation and Interpretation**

The narrative links beauty and aesthetic transformation to ethical behaviour. The tortoise, though weak, plays the archetypal role of a donor, symbolically distributing justice. The leopard's spots become a visual metaphor for the rewards of ethical behaviour, while the hyena is doomed to

look ugly as a punishment for his immoral character. Zebra is represented as a generally good character, even though he does not play a role in saving the tortoise in this narrative. This demonstrates that overall good behaviour is always recognised and can also bear rewards in the future.

**Narrative 13: The Bird of Truth****Table 13: Main Characters and Their Roles**

Character Name	Role	Description of The Role in the Story
Malikande	Victim	A responsible man who saves up his earnings to support his family but is betrayed and murdered.
Komani and Nyifwa	Villains	Motivated by Jealousy and greed, they conspire to kill Malikande and conceal their crime.
The bird	Magical agent	A supernatural figure who reveals the hidden crime through song

**Narrative Functions:**

16. Absentation: Malikande, Komani, and Nyifwa leave their village in Nyasaland (modern-day Malawi) to look for work in Johannesburg.

17. Reconnaissance: Komani and Nyifwa find out that their friend Komani saved up his money to buy gifts for his family when they would finally return.

18. Villainy: Komani and Nyifwa stab and kill Malikande on their way back home, stealing the gift he bought for his family.

19. Exposure: The bird reveals their murderous act to the village back home in Nyasaland.

20. Mediation: The villagers now know Malikande's fate, even if Komani and Nyifwa thought the truth would never come out.



## Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 14 (Scene 1): First Variation of the Moment when the Truth was Revealed**



**Plate 14 (Scene 2): Second Variation of the Moment when the Truth was Revealed**



## Observation and Interpretation

This narrative is a moral metaphor that stresses the inevitability of truth, no matter how efforts are made to hide it. In the narrative, Malikande represents hard work and duty, while his Murderers embody dishonesty, envy, and betrayal. The bird functions as a spiritual device of truth and justice, demonstrating the recurring concept of divine intervention in the Tumbuka culture. This folklore

warns against the destructive nature of envy and asserts that the truth is not lost even if witnesses are absent. Its setting, bridging Johannesburg and Nyasaland (modern-day Malawi), also reflects a history of post-colonial migration and the dangers of moral loss when individuals leave behind their community structures as they migrate.

## Narrative 14: A Man with Two Wives

**Table 14: Main Characters and Roles**

Character	Role	Description of the Role in the Story
<b>Cidongo</b>	Victim	A daughter of a man's younger wife, who is buried alive because of the jealousy of her stepmother.
<b>Temwaci</b>	Helper	A loving stepsister who alerts the villagers after hearing Cidongo sing for help while underground.
<b>Elder wife</b>	Villain	She maliciously plots to kill Cidongo after being driven by jealousy and envy.
<b>Husband</b>	False hero	He is not available to protect Cidongo from his elder wife.

## Narrative Functions

- **Villainy:** The elder wife's jealousy drives her to plot against Cidongo to eliminate her from the polygamous family, even when Cidongo's mom, the younger wife, passed away at this point.
- **Trickery:** The elder wife tricks her biological daughter, Temwaci, by giving her a leaky pail.

This is to ensure that she stays out late, as her plot to kill Cidongo goes forward without any witnesses.

- **Beginning of counteraction:** Cidongo, even when buried, decides to sing a song to alert people that she needs to be rescued.



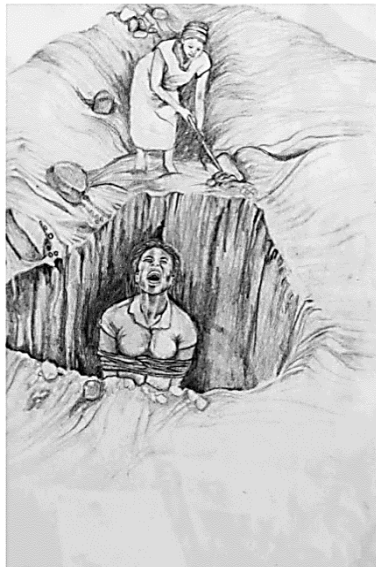
- Mediation: Upon returning home, Temwaci hears Cidongo’s ethereal song and alerts the rest of the villagers.
- Liquidation: Cidongo is rescued, and the elder wife faces punishment for her actions.

### Storyboard Sketches

**Plate 15 (Scene 1): The First Wife Watches with Jealousy as Her Husband Plays with Both Daughter and Stepdaughter**



**Plate 15 (Scene 2): Once the Children are a Little Older, She Buries Her Alive when No One is Around**



**Plate 15 (Scene 3): Villagers Gather at the Girl’s Burial Site after They Hear an Ethereal Song, Crying for Help**



### Observation and Interpretation

This narrative serves as a teachable lesson among the Tumbuka tribe on the disadvantages of polygamy with regards to the welfare of the children

involved. The narrative also highlights the value of sibling loyalty as well as the role of community in upholding justice.

### Narrative 15: The Peculiar Rooster

**Table 15: Main Characters and Their Roles**

Character Name	Role	Description of the Role in Story
<b>Rooster</b>	Victim	Misunderstood due to the misinformation regarding his red wattle.
<b>Hawk</b>	Villain	After figuring out that the rooster’s red wattle cannot harm anyone, he exploits the situation by abducting the rooster’s child as a way of showing dominance.
<b>Eagle</b>	False hero	He is an ally to the hawk and equally seeks to harm the rooster and his child.
<b>Chick</b>	Victim	Is snatched from his parent and offered the hawk to be eaten.

### Narrative Functions

- Villainy: The hawk abducts the rooster’s chick, escalating the encounter into permanent conflict between the birds.
- Complicity: The rooster unknowingly puts himself in danger by revealing to the hawk that he is harmless, hence becoming a target of abuse by the hawk and eagle.

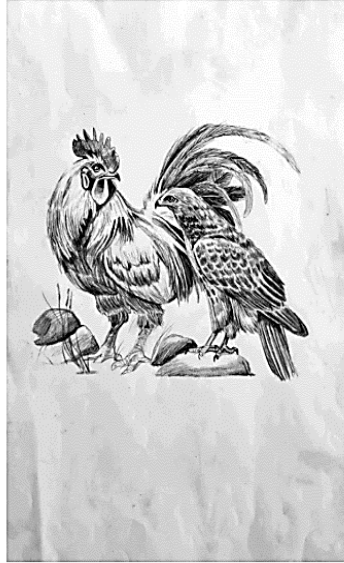
- Mediation: It is revealed that the rooster's wattle is made of flesh and not horns, rendering him harmless.

### Storyboard Sketches

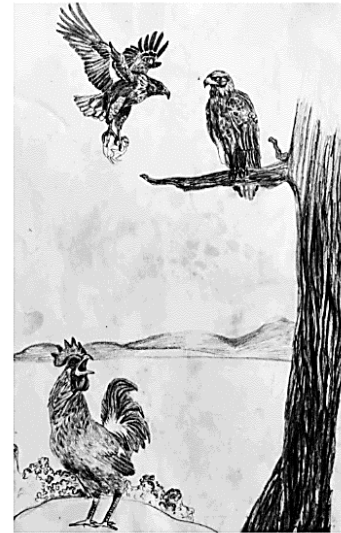
**Plate 16 (Scene 1): Hawk and Eagle Fearfully Stare at the Rooster's Red Wattle under His Chin, Thinking They are Harmful Horns**



**Plate 16 (Scene 2): The Hawk Cautiously Asks the Rooster if He Can Harm Others with the Wattle. Rooster Assures Hawk that He is Harmless**



**Plate 16 (Scene 3): The Hawk Snatches the Rooster's Chick to Prove to the Eagle that the Rooster is Weak and Harmless. Hence, the Beginning of Hawks Snatching Chicks**



### Observation and Interpretation

This narrative serves as a commentary on social cruelty. The rooster, an innocent and gentle figure, becomes a victim of false perception as the other birds falsely believe that his wattles are dangerous horns. However, the knowledge that a rooster is harmless after all makes him a target of abuse. The story, therefore, highlights how weakness, whether real or perceived, can lead to exploitation and bullying. This narrative aims to urge societies to protect rather than exploit the vulnerable. This is the Tumbuka Culture's way of passing on values of compassion and respect within their community.

### DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The generation of sketches in this study went beyond mere illustration of the narrative. The

process was based on the researcher's artistic creativity, which was guided by in-depth structural analyses of the narratives. To develop a visual composition of folklore narratives that represent the cultural heritage of the Tumbuka tribe of Mzimba, Malawi, this study found that it was important to first understand the cultural values and themes embedded within the narratives themselves. A narrative structural analysis, in this case, the Proppian model of analysis, provided a basis for this examination, which was then a vital tool for artistic interpretation.

Through this structural analysis, the main characters, their roles, and the main events within the folklore were subsequently captured through sketching. This analysis, therefore, provided visual indicators that were directly linked to the cultural

values and beliefs that form the intangible cultural heritage of the Tumbuka tribe in Malawi.

The study found that sketches were an integral part of creating a focused pictorial composition of a narrative. Storyboard sketching, in particular, despite mainly being used in film and animation, was a very informative tool in mapping out the flow of a narrative and the sequence of events within the narrative. Through these storyboards, each narrative demonstrated the emergence of the probable centre of interest or focus. This sketching followed compositional principles of design, such as balance, to ensure that the centre of interest was the main action within each frame.

All the drawings in this study were action-oriented. In each Tumbuka narrative selected, there was a pertinent action or activity that underscored the values, lessons, and consequences of the Tumbuka tribe. The illustrated actions and activities were also linked to the narrative analytical structure, where the key moments emerged through the sketches. Through this analysis, this study also found that Tumbuka folklore characters often represent moral attitudes. Therefore, the choice of their visual portrayals in this study was shaped by the significance of their role in the narrative. For example, in Plate 4, in the narrative *Baza dokowe's last stand* illustrated by the researcher, the main character represents courage and a strong allegiance to his tribe despite the inevitable defeat that awaited him. Creating sketches where such a character is the focal point of the composition was therefore a sufficient way of portraying some of these Tumbuka moral values.

This study also found that environmental settings dictate the tone and emotional atmosphere within a narrative. Some environmental settings, such as Lake Kazuni, where the narrative of the *young wife's test*, illustrated by the researcher in plate 3, takes place, have a deep connection to the Tumbuka people as a place where the elders would speak to the spirits ('*Lessons from Vwaza Marsh*', 2024).

Additionally, the researcher employed the style of realism in depicting the subjects of the narratives.

Although the sketches may appear self-explanatory, they are better presented accompanied by a short synopsis of the story. This was found necessary to focus the viewer's attention on the pertinent aspects of the narrative that form the underlying cultural context and message derived from the narrative.

## CONCLUSION

This study concluded that through a structured process of analysis, it was possible to construct creative sketches that provide an alternative avenue through which audiences can not only internalise oral narratives but also enjoy visual interpretations as memorable anecdotes that help to augment the narratives themselves. Folklore is an important source of moral, spiritual, and social education in the Tumbuka culture of Mzimba, Malawi. This study, therefore, examined the significance of Tumbuka folklore as a representation of Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH), which sustains traditional knowledge systems and reinforces cultural identity. Using Vladimir Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* as a structural analysis framework, the researcher was able to identify recurring functions and roles in these folklores, revealing a constant narrative pattern that communicates the shared cultural values within the Tumbuka tribe. These patterns demonstrate how these folklores are more than just a form of entertainment, but a structured method of indigenous information transfer.

Furthermore, the research found that visual techniques of expressing these folklore narratives, such as sketching, are crucial as a foundational step in translating and preserving this cultural heritage. In this study, sketching worked as an interpretive tool, crucial in the translation of these folklore narratives into visual sequences that maintained the flow and meaning of the original written and oral narratives. Through these sketches, the researcher was able to visually map the progression of the folklore into culturally relevant images based on



Propp's structural features. This method highlighted the importance of visual art in preserving ICH, especially when oral traditions are at risk of disappearing.

Finally, the study adds to the larger discourse on how the storytelling culture of folklore can be maintained aside from written and audio methods, showing that creative visual approaches like sketching provide the basis for visual mediums that make traditional knowledge accessible and meaningful to current and future generations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

When converting folklore into visual interpretations, future artists should use a method that prioritises the narrative cultural interpretation. Using Vladimir Propp's concept of character roles and narrative functions, artists can visually structure their narratives around known archetypes like the hero, donor, and dispatcher, as well as structural events like interdiction, deceit, and resolution. This alignment provides a systematic approach to storytelling that improves the artist's comprehension of the folklore before they begin the visual interpretation process.

The artist can then begin the sketching process with a clear understanding of the narrative structure. By sketching and later arranging those sketches in a storyboard format, the artist is not merely imitating events, but engaging in an analytical sketching process that allows them to investigate the narrative's underlying symbolic, emotional, and moral significance. This interpretative sketching is a critical thinking technique that allows the artist to internalise the values and lessons of folklore, where they can then decide on selecting the most critical scene in the narrative as the composition to be adapted into a painting.

Therefore, to preserve the cultural heritage of a community, artists should base their visual interpretations on a structured textual analysis of the folklore narratives of those communities. Through this analysis, aspects like venue, gesture, and

traditional symbolism can be inferred, forming strong visual indicators that become the source for the sketching process.

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