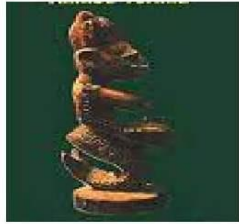




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Lighting: a Comparative Study
of Two Performances of Ahmed
Yerima's *Yemoja*



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Study of Widowhood Practices
in a Nigerian Society



Aspects of Nigerian Myths,
Legends and Chronicles



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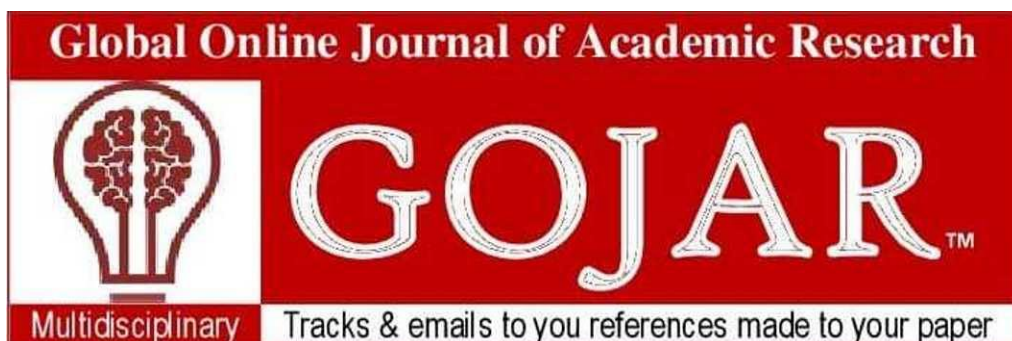
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Communication via the Language of Performance Lighting: A Comparative Study of Two Performances of Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja*

By

Nsikan Bassey Asuquo & Rasaki Ojo Bakare

Abstract

Background: Available literature points to the fact that the actual concern of each professional theatre worker and director is to be expressive, in order to effectively capture and communicate the intended message of the play to the audience. More so, the advancement in theatre lighting technology has come to be used to concrete visual forms that further the meaning of the text; thus, evincing sub-texts. Nonetheless, many theatre lighting designers have paid less attention to deploying the potential of lighting design as a veritable tool in enhancing play interpretation.

Objective: This study sought to demonstrate the significance of deploying expressive or interpretive lighting in play performances as a means for communicating the salient but sub-textual ideas embedded in plays.

Methodology: The outcome of two performances of Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja* (tagged: Performance "A", in which the myths surrounding the hero-gods were not projected, and Performance "B", in which the lighting designer deployed expressive lighting – i.e. using light to tell the story) are compared. As instruments for data collection, a total of 250 copies of the questionnaire were randomly administered to the audience members who watched the performance; interviews were conducted with the play directors and the lighting designers of the two performances; and focus group discussions were also conducted with a class of students specializing in lighting design and some of the audience members. Secondary data were collected from journals, textbooks, the internet and other related extant literature. Simple percentage analysis was used to analyze data for the study.

Results: It was found that the deployment of light and lighting effects to tell the story in Performance "B" could effectively evince and communicate sub-textual ideas such as the myths surrounding the Yoruba hero-gods in the play; whereas, these myths were non-existent in the first performance "A", in which the lighting was not effectively deployed as a tool of interpretation.

Conclusion: Design elements like light and lighting effects can play critical roles in furthering the meaning of texts in plays, if effectively deployed as interpretive or expressive tools, rather than used merely for the creation of visibility.

Unique contribution: The study has shown that in the absence of standard lighting instruments or gadgets conventionally required to produce a particular meaning, commonly found lighting instruments and gadgets can be improvised to simulate and communicate the desired effect and meanings to the audience.

Key Recommendation: For effective interpretation of a play on stage, the lighting designers should always endeavour to go beyond using light(s) merely for visibility to the point of a deliberate deployment of light and lighting effects as expressive tools – this enhances the audience’s understanding of every unfolding scenario in a play.

Keywords: *Yemoja*, Yoruba myth, subtext, communication and interpretive lighting

Introduction

Drama is an enacted story whose function is not just to entertain but also to communicate to and educate a society. This is why it is pertinent to note that when playwrights write plays, it is because they have an idea or a message they want to convey to society – it could be about religion, culture, politics, or to raise point(s) that can address issues that have been bedeviling the human society (Awoyemi 2019, p. 6; Hurwitz 2021, par. 3). When a play director picks a play to direct, the onus rests on the director to do so with the intent to clearly communicate to the audience, without ambiguity, the subject matter of the play. Often, very salient but sub-textual ideas in plays are left untold due to ineffective deployment of the expressive potentials of design elements, like light; yet, some theatre scholars, such as Ayo Akinwale (cited in Adeoye 2011, p.42) and Olympus G. Ejue (Ejue 2019, p.37) have argued against the necessity of employing interpretive lighting in theatrical performances.

Aim and Objective

The aim of this study was to investigate the potential of performance lighting (beyond mere illumination) in enhancing play interpretation. Therefore, as an objective, the study carried out a performance of Ahmed Yerima’s *Yemoja* (deliberately employing expressive lighting in the performance) staged at Department of Theatre and Media Arts, Federal University, Oye-Ekiti, on the 18th of December, 2021, in order to assess the outcome of how lights were used in the performance in comparison with a previous performance of the same play, which was staged in another Department of Theatre and Media Arts in Western Nigeria, on 21st

of November, 2021. Suffice it to state that since the aim of the comparison is not in any way to promote or disparage any institution but, rather, to validate or denounce the argument that expressive performance lighting can enhance the textual interpretation of plays, the two different performances are identified as “Performance A” and “Performance B” respectively (in the order of the date of their staging).

Conceptual Definition of Keywords:

Below are the meanings of some of the keywords in this study; explained in line with purport of their usage:

- *Yemoja*: This is the title of the play which, according to Yerima, is the story of a celebration of the river goddess, Yemoja. It is a self-conceived myth and an attempt at explaining the spread of the worship of the river goddess, from the Yoruba cosmology into the entire diaspora (2002, p. 6).
- Yoruba Mythology: the Yorubas are members of the West African people living chiefly in southwestern Nigeria. They are known to be the originators of the worship of the river goddess, Yemoja. The term, mythology, refers to a traditional story that is accepted as history and serves to explain the world view of a people. Therefore, by juxtaposition, Yoruba mythology in this context is the belief by the traditional Yorubas that Yemoja, Ogun, Sango and Obatala are (their) deities.
- Subtext is used in this study to mean the underlying meaning or the unspoken meaning of a text.
- Interpretive or expressive lighting is used in this study to mean the art of deliberately using or designing light(s) and/or lighting effect(s) to connote, imply, express or give explicit meaning to an action or object(s), or to give a semblance of, or to signify a generally acceptable notion.
- Communication: according to Agber and Ejue (2013, p. 17), communication is a conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional process in which feelings and ideas expressed verbal and or non-verbal messages, are sent, received and comprehended.

The Art of Playwriting and the Imperative for Creative Interpretation

A play, unlike other literary works, is a creative work intended to be artistically realized before an audience. Hurwitz (2021) corroborates the above assertion as he avers that:

Playwrights begin with something they believe needs to be said, whether that is a story, a political or religious point, a question to be addressed, or a humorous observation revealing the human condition. The biggest differences between plays and other forms of writing is that plays are meant to be experienced in real time and to be experienced communally (para. 3).

Also, Johnson (2000), in a bid to establish the huge creative responsibilities attached to the art of playwriting, avers that: “tonnes of moulding, creating, crafting, engineering and architecturing [are] involved in this unique business which involves the head, the pen, and the stage necessarily” (p. 11). To further stress on the huge task involved in playwriting which should not be wished away or taken for granted, Johnson juxtaposes the attached “wright” in the word, playwright, to the “wright” in the word, shipwright, as he avers that:

Few words exist with the word wright attached to them. One of such is ‘shipwright’. And strangely enough, it designates a builder of ships. If we can imagine the degree of technology which goes into the creation of a vessel which successfully cruises on the high sea, the intellectual demands carefully translated into physical properties through which the finished product is called ship; then we can appreciate the ingenuity which a man who must set about making plays, needs to reckon with (2000, pp. 11–12).

From the above quotes, it can be deduced that the art of playwriting is a serious task with deliberate intent to communicate to a people; as such, every theatre practitioner must be deliberate too, in carefully deploying every theatre means to elicit every bit of the meanings in every way possible.

An audience does not go to the theatre to hear the story of a play being told in its literal sense. They go to the theatre to watch the literal signs on text being expressed. According to Parker et al. (2009, p. 324): “The basic obligation of stage design is to give . . . meaning . . .” This invariably means that the actual concern of each theatre designer is to use their arts expressively. Parker et al. (2009, p. 324) goes further to aver that: through the manipulation of light in all aspects, the lighting designer assists in reinforcing the theme of a play.

In asserting the expressive power of Light, Appia (cited in Asuquo 2019b, p. 141) avers that: “Light is the most important medium on stage . . . without its unifying power our eyes would be able to perceive what objects were but not what they expressed”. Enna (cited in Asuquo 2009b, p. 27) succinctly adds that: the duty of the lighting designer includes the clarification and intensification of the meanings and concepts of a play.

This underscores the role of lighting designs in any theatrical performance as invaluable.

The Basic Functions of Stage Lighting

According to Boyce (2014, 43), “light is necessary to the human visual system to operate. With light, we can see; without light, we cannot”. The above assertion establishes, first, the prime and incontrovertible function of light in making theatre exist – without light, there cannot be a performance. In asserting the important role of light in theatrical performances, Crabtree and Beudert aver that: “Electric light had so many advantages to play in productions that its presence was unavoidable. Once adopted for the stage, there was no turning back. Electric lighting facilitated translucency effects and it also made radical colour shifts on the scenery on stage” (2005, p. 417).

Stage lighting has other objectives beyond creating visibility (Shelley, 1999, p. 29). These objectives include (but not limited to): providing illumination in a three-dimensional form of light and shadow . . . , composition and creation of mood. Corroborating this, Brockett states that light is used: to create visibility, selective visibility, and to aid composition; by directing the eye to the most important elements, it creates emphasis and subordination; light is also used to affect perception of dimensionality (alter apparent shape and dimension), and to enhance mood and atmosphere (1992, pp. 397-8). Brockett goes further to add that: lighting, among other functions, may reinforce "style", reflect the time of day, weather conditions, or season, and may suggest a play's period through the kind of lighting fixtures used on stage (1992, p. 400).

Synopsis of Ahmed Yerima's *Yemoja*

The play, *Yemoja*, is a mythology on Yoruba hero-gods – Ogun, Sango, Orunmila, Obatala, Esu, and, very importantly too, on the emergence of the river goddess, Yemoja. All these deities are endowed with human feelings, attitudes and frailties. The story begins with a town-crier announcing to the town's people that the Kabiyesi wishes to celebrate Yemoja - the river goddess.

The next scenario reveals Ogun visiting his lover, Yemoja, at her hut. He dances to her admiration and professes his love for her. In the midst of this romantic summit, a voice calls on Ogun to join them in a war against the people of Ijase Oke (who have come to molest his people). Ogun becomes enraged and responds that he is joining the warriors at the battle front. But Yemoja begs him not to go, asking that he spends the night with her. Instead of heeding her plea, Ogun calls on Esu to keep Yemoja company

till he returns from the battle. He then hands Yemoja his "calabash of life" and charges her never to open it nor look into it. He leaves for the battle.

Esu sees his company with Yemoja as a perfect opportunity to get back at her for turning down his love overtures in the past. He then tricks Yemoja into opening Ogun's calabash of life as a result of which she becomes partially paralyzed; at the same time, Ogun is seriously wounded at the war front by "a little boy". Yemoja begs Esu for help, but he stoutly tells her that the only condition on which he would agree to save her life would be if she would spend some nights with him. Yemoja argues that she does not want to be unfaithful to Ogun. After a series of arguments and bargaining, Yemoja agrees that she will spend a night with him. Esu then calls on Obatala to come and heal Yemoja.

While Obatala begins the treatment, Esu dashes to the battle-field and lies to Ogun that Yemoja deliberately opened the calabash of life because she wanted to have him (Ogun) killed; and that, at the very moment, she is having amorous affairs with Obatala. Ogun becomes enraged and dashes to Yemoja's abode for a confrontation with Obatala. He meets Obatala and challenges Obatala to a fight to death at the market square. Obatala in turn, runs to Sango (Ogun's foe) to fight in his stead.

Yemoja runs to Orunmila (a diviner) to help her consult *Ifa* to know what to do to avert the duel between Ogun and Sango. During the consultation, Orunmila reveals to Yemoja that she has a greater mission to fulfill - going into the river to become the mother of all sea creatures, answering to the needs of those who call on her for help. Therefore, as Ogun and Sango meet at the market square for the showdown, Yemoja steps forward to intervene. She explains that she cannot keep quiet and watch Ogun allow his temper to take hold of his manly wits; thus, bringing her love for him to the market square to ridicule. She asserts that she shall not be the reason the two men would fight and kill each other; rather, she would step into the deep blue sea answering to the different needs of all who call on her for help. Suddenly and supernaturally, she transforms into a mermaid and wriggles her way into the sea.

Methodology: Content Analysis and Survey methods were used for this study. Under Content Analysis methodology, data were gathered from Ahmed Yerima's play, *Yemoja*, the video-recordings of the two performances, tagged "Performance A" and "Performance B", from the live performances (via observation by participation) and from some related extant literatures. Under the Survey method, focus group discussions and (Face-to-Face and Telephone) interviews were adopted as instruments of data collection.

Content Analysis: the decision to adopt content analysis method is to give room for a detailed and systematic examination of the text and the performances investigated in this study in order to ascertain the existence or absence of the theme of Yoruba mythology (which is the subject of discourse) both in the text and in the performances. After being in a live audience of the first performance, tagged in this study as “Performance A”, a scrutiny of an unedited video-recording of the performance was also carried-out by the researcher. However, in order not to limit the judgment to only the researcher’s view(s), a survey method is also adopted.

Survey Method: The decision to adopt survey was to allow for an intimate setting for a free-flow discussion in order to extrapolate empirical data from audience members who watched the performance under study. The focus group discussions were carried out with two categories of audience members; information was gathered from participants for data analysis. The first focus group discussion was organized with a group of 8 technical theatre students. The second focus group discussion was organized with 93 people (who watched the unedited video recording of “Performance A”). The participants were chosen based on two criteria: those who indicated interest, who as well watched the live performance under study, tagged “Performance B”. The participants were assured that they would only be mentioned as participants. A face-to-face and telephone interviews were conducted with the director and lighting designer (respectively) of “Performance A”. And a total of 250 (randomly picked) out of the 345 members of the live audience (of “Performance B”) were administered with copies of a questionnaire. The following questions guided the discussions and interviews:

- 1). From the author’s note in the play-text, do you understand that Yoruba mythology is one of the major themes in Ahmed Yerima’s *Yemoja*?
- 2). Do you agree that characters like Ogun, Sango, and Yemoja are portrayed as deities in the play-text?
- 3). Do you agree that “Performance A” effectively communicated the myths surrounding the characters of Ogun, Sango, and Yemoja as supernatural beings or hero-gods in the play?
- 4). Do you agree that “Performance B” effectively communicated the myths surrounding the hero-gods in the play?
- 5). Do you agree that the use of light as an expressive tool in “Performance B” aided in evincing and communicating the myths of supernaturalism surrounding characters like Ogun, Sango, and Yemoja?

Results from the Audience: Out of the 250 administered copies of the questionnaire (which contained the options: “Agree”, “Strongly Agree”, “Disagree”, and “Strongly Disagree”), 240 copies (i.e. 96%) were retrieved. 223 (i.e. 92.9%) respondents strongly agreed that the lighting in the scene helped them to understand that Yemoja entered into water (river), 7 (i.e. 2.9%) ticked “Agreed”, no (i.e. 0%) respondent ticked “Disagree” or “Strongly disagree”. But 10 (4.16%) respondents did not tick any option.

Results from Focus Group Discussions: A total of 8 Technical Theatre students and the researcher made up the Focus Group Discussion. The participants were all allowed to watch the unedited video recording of “Performance A”. After watching the video, 3 of the students admitted that though the myths surrounding the Yoruba hero-gods in the play were not effectively communicated, they could still identify the characters of Ogun, Sango, and Yemoja as beings with supernatural power because they were already familiar with the Yoruba myth surrounding their persons; they said that “Performance B” produced better information about the myths surrounding the characters. Five (5) members of the Focus Group Discussion claimed they could not gain any insight about the myth surrounding the Yoruba hero-gods from “Performance A” until they watched “Performance B”.

A group of 93 non-technical theatre audience members were also gathered for a focus group discussion. This was carried out to determine if the difference in the lighting of “Performance A” and “Performance B” could affect the perception of non-technical audience differently. 91 (i.e. 97.8%) out of the 93 non-technical theatre audience members said that although they were familiar with the Yoruba myth surrounding a character like Sango, it was only in “Performance B” that his fire-spitting prowess was communicated. The entire 93 participants averred that Ogun’s portrayal in “Performance A” only communicated him as a strong man; that it was not until the lighting that separated him (at Yemoja’s house) from the warriors at the forest in “Performance B”, that he was portrayed as a supernatural being with the ability to hear from/communicate with people miles away. 34 (36.5%) said even when they watched “Performance B” and saw the ambience transformation when Yemoja transformed into a mermaid and wriggled her body to the edge of the market square, they could not understand that she was entering into water (river) until they saw the projected scene on the backdrop as she was swimming in the river. 59 (i.e. 63.4%) participants said that the ambience transformation via the lighting aided them in understanding that Yemoja was entering into water. In the end, the entire 93 participants said that not only did the expressive lighting

in “Performance B” aid the interpretation of the unfolding scenarios in the play, but it also made the performance to be more aesthetically appealing to them.

Director’s Remark: According to the director of “Performance A”, “we tried our best in interpreting the play with available resources . . . ; yes, I believe the audience enjoyed it. But I must admit that the use of lighting designs in the second performance [‘Performance B’] produced a better and deeper interpretation.”

The Theory of "Form Follows Function": The concept of “Form Follows Function” is a design theory propounded by Louis Sullivan in 1896. This theory was initially associated with modernist architecture and industrial designs in the 20th century. The thrust of this theory is that the form of a building or object should be primarily based on its intended use, function or purpose. Beyond architecture and industrial designs, the theory has come to be applied in different fields of human endeavours. According to Sullivan (cited in Dubois 2021, para. 3), the phrase, “form follows function”,

. . . is the pervading law of all things organic and inorganic, of all things physical and metaphysical, of all things human and all things superhuman, of all true manifestations of the head, of the heart, of the soul, that the life is recognizable in its expression, that form ever follows function. This is the law.

Dubois (2021, par. 3), in summarizing the ideology behind “form follows function” states that, the “why” of what is to be built or designed should take precedence over “how” it is built or designed – this is the law! In other words, relating this theory to theatre practice (i.e. especially the area of lighting design), the reason for which any lighting (as a design element) is introduced or used in any theatrical performance is what should guide **how** the lighting is applied in the performance.

According to Parker et al., theatrical form in its simplest description is the communication of ideas between the performers and the audience (2009, p. 3). Therefore, in expressing or communicating the playwright’s and/or the director’s vision to the audience, the **form** of light (in any theatrical performance) **must follow** the rule of **expressive** or **communicative** engagements because, according to Appia (cited in Asuquo 2019, p. 141), light is a unifying factor for projecting the communicative or interpretative import of any theatrical performance. Therefore, not using light for an interpretive purpose(s) in theatrical performance is a negation of the rules of deploying design elements in theatrical performances; thus, it gives grounds for interrogation.

Communication via the Language of Performance Lighting in *Yemoja* Performances: A Comparison between “Performance A” and “Performance B” Versions

According to Agber and Ejue (2013, p.16), "It is through language that we express our ideas and feelings. These ideas are expressed verbally or through non-verbal means such as . . . anything to which people can attach meanings." Agber and Ejue (2013, p. 17) define communication as conscious or unconscious, intentional or unintentional process in which feelings and ideas are express verbal and or non verbal messages, sent, received and comprehended.

According to Danesi (cited in the “Forward” to Thomas A. Sebeok’s book, *Sign: An Introduction to Semiotics*, 2001), “. . . communication is grounded in the semiotic system of organism”. However, Sebeok (2001, p. 5) defines semiotics as “the phenomenon that distinguishes life forms from inanimate objects . . . the instinctive capacity of all living organisms to produce and understand signs”. More so, Saussure (cited in Sebeok 2001, p. 5), defines sign as “a form made up (i) of something physical – sounds, letters, gestures, etc.”, which he terms as the **signifier**; and (ii) “of the image or concept to which the signifier refers”, which he terms as the **signified**; while the relation that holds between the “signifier” and the “signified” he calls **signification**. Sebeok (2001) goes further to aver that the “signification” is an arbitrary one that human beings and/or societies have established at will (6). For example, according to Brawne (2003, p. 147), "How light is reflected and what we read into the qualities of that reflected light affects our perception . . ." In other words, the lighting serves as the signifier, while what we perceive serves as the signified – that is, the meaning. Barry (1999, p. 2) defines meaning as:

the referent of the sign [for example]: the mental representation of a preceding rainstorm as the meaning of wet streets, the mental representation of a feline as the meaning of the word “cat” or of a drawing of a cat. . . They are the meanings arrived at as a function of the denotations and connotations of these signs.

In the same context, as stated above, this study uses the denotations and connotations of different lightings used in the play performances in the study to refer to what they mean or communicate.

Though some signifiers have universal connotations and denotations, it is important to mention that where a signifier has different meanings for different people, the ostensible meanings alluded to the use of any light as a signifier in this study is culturally driven. This is because just as a culture of a people may differ from the culture of other people, meanings (the

signified) from different signifiers may also differ from one culture to another culture. Hence, for the purpose of this study, the inferences drawn from the signifiers (the lightings) are majorly situated within the cultural milieu of the Yorubas. This is so decided because Ahmed Yerima's play, *Yemoja*, used as a case study in this research, is contextually situated within the Yoruba cultural milieu.

According to Sebeok (2001, p. 9), there are six major types of signs that semiotics has cataloged and investigated. These are “symptom, signal, icon, index, symbol, and name”. This study, however, focuses only on signal, icon, index, and symbol because of their relevance in this discourse.

Pictorial Representations of some of the Scenes

Below are some of the scenes in the play that require expressive lighting.

Second Scene – Yemoja's abode (which simultaneously accommodates the situation where the Warriors at the battle-front are calling on Ogun to join them at the battlefield).

Performance “A” Version



Picture 1 Scenario: Ogun dancing to the admiration of Yemoja, but he is interrupted by the call from the warriors, telling him to join them at the battle-field (Yerima 2002, pp. 18 - 20).

The scene Lighting: As Light reveals Ogun and Yemoja, the voice of the warrior who is calling on Ogun is heard from outside Yemoja's hut. It can be observed here that the warriors who are calling on Ogun to join them at the battlefield are not seen. This way, the information of where they are calling from, is not properly interpreted and transmitted to the audience. By so doing, the audience is only left to engage in guesswork (as per whether the warriors are within Yemoja's abode), which can actually result

in misconceptions; whereas, the text says they are calling from a battle-front.

Performance “B” Version



Picture 2 Scenario: Ogun dancing to please Yemoja, but is interrupted by the call to join the warriors at the battle-field (Yerima 2002, pp. 18 - 20). This is a scene with a simultaneous setting – the scenario on stage right (from actor's point of view) is the war-front where the warriors are calling on Ogun to join them in the battle against the people of Ijase Oke. While on the stage left is Yemoja's abode, where Ogun is with Yemoja.

The Scene Lighting: In establishing the two different locales and their atmospheric conditions (with activities happening simultaneously) without the audience being confused, the lighting designer had to creatively employ the controllable qualities of light (i.e. colour, direction, movement and intensity) to enhance a clear interpretation of the scenes – while the greenish ambience is created for the warriors' scene in the forest to communicate a mangrove milieu of a forest scene (the battle-front), light is also used to create a clear atmospheric milieu around Yemoja's abode to communicate a normal daylight. This way, though the warriors at the battlefield are communicating with Ogun who is at Yemoja's abode (as the play stipulates), the audience can clearly see and understand that the two scenarios are happening at different places.

N.B. The above expressive lighting not only allows the audience members to see, understand and enjoy the actions happening in the two different locales simultaneously but enables the audience to witness Ogun's supernatural extra-sensory powers. The fact that Ogun (who is at Yemoja's abode) can hear the voices of the warriors who are in a faraway battlefield helps to interpret and/or implicitly communicate Ogun's **supernatural ability (of extrasensory perception and communication)**. To hear voices miles away is a rare attribute only associated with a deity – a salient theme not explicitly stated by any character in the play but implied in the text; this way, the lighting, beyond revealing actors and scenery, **expresses the**

inner essence of the playwright's/director's vision (the Yoruba myth that Ogun has supernatural powers) to the audience.

It should also be noted that, in the Performance “A” version of the play, the voice calling on Ogun to come and join them in the battlefront was heard from behind the stage (and no lighting was used to establish the locale of the scenario). By so doing, the audience members were left to wander about who is calling on Ogun, and where he or she is calling him from. Thus, the information or message is not properly interpreted and transmitted to the audience. The problem, here, is that the audience members who have not read the play before watching the performance are thrown into confusion and forced to start guessing where the voice is coming from. Some might have even assumed that the battleground was behind Yemoja's hut (since the voice is coming from there). And the audience's assumptions/interpretations would be as divergent as their individual discernment levels are diverse; as a result, not every audience member would get the right information that Ogun possesses supernatural powers (as a god).

In explaining the use of greenish ambience to communicate the mangrove environment of the war scene in the forest, this researcher situates the explanation within the ideology of "icon" as one of the "signs" in the field of semiotics. Sebeok (2001, p. 9): “an icon is a sign that is made to resemble, stimulate, or reproduce its referent in the same way”. So, the greenish colour in the lighting was used to simulate the natural ambience of a forest scene.

Performance “B” Version



Picture 3 Scenario: On sighting Ogun at his arrival at the market square, Sango begins to spit out fire.

Remark on the Lighting: Apart from a bright illumination to communicate a morning scene, the added light used here (by the lighting designer) for

the “B” version of the performance is a fire effect.

According to Yoruba myth, Sango is a Yoruba hero-god that spits fire (especially when he is angry). As a way of communicating this myth of Sango's fire-spitting prowess, the lighting designer had to use the fire effect to do a practical interpretation of the subtext. By creating this fire-spitting effect, beyond the aesthetics, the audience members, especially those who might not know who the character is (perhaps, because they arrived at the theatre late, after the name of the character was mentioned or that they have no prior knowledge of the myth that surrounds the person of Sango), without the fire effect, might have mistaken Sango for any other ordinary person who has come to fight Ogun. But with the use of the fire-spitting effect, the communication of the Yoruba myth on Sango is deepened and the audience is better informed of the nature of this special character and the unfolding scenario – an assertion which was confirmed by 99% of the respondents who filled the administered questionnaire.

According to Sebeok (2001), an index is a sign that refers to something or someone in terms of its existence or location in time and space, or in relation to something or someone else. For example, smoke is an index of fire (pointing out where the fire is); cough is an index of cold (10). Here, the fire is used as an index of the myth surrounding the temperament of the Yoruba hero-god, Sango (when angry).

To buttress the (above) assertion that the fire effect helped in clarifying the identity of the character, during the performance, immediately the character started spiting fire, many of the audience members (possibly those who are conversant with the Yoruba mythology) started shouting, "Sango"! But the fire-spiting effect was non-existent in the Performance “A” version of the scene, and the name-hailing at the character’s appearance on the scene was non-existent in Performance “A”.

Performance “A” Version



Picture 4 Scenario: At the Market-square, after Yemoja stops the fight between Sango and Ogun, contrary to the play-text, she walks out of the scene; rather than transform into a mermaid in the presence of the town's people, as the text stipulates.

Performance "A" Version



Picture 5 Scenario: Yemoja walks back to the scene after changing into a mermaid costume.

Observation: It is observed from "Performance "A" that beyond its use for illumination, light was not used to communicate any meaning about the supernaturalness of Yemoja, nor about her metamorphosis from a human to a mermaid transiting into the river – which is the core subject matter of the entire story. As such, the myth of her supernatural transformation from a human to a mermaid was played down or even nonexistent; she merely walked out of the scene and returned after a short while in a shining dress – as such, she could have been mistaken as an ordinary human being in the performance.

Performance "B" Version



Picture 6: Market-square. **Time:** Day, **Scenario:** As Yemoja is about transforming into a mermaid, thunder stricks, lightning flickers and the atmosphere becomes cloudy.

Remarks on the Lighting: Sebeok (2001, p. 10), states that: “an icon is a sign that is made to resemble, stimulate, or reproduce its referent in the same way”. Examples of an icon include: photographs (because they reproduce their referents in visual ways). Sebeok (2001, p. 11) goes further to aver that a "symbol is a sign that stands for its referent in an arbitrary, conventional way"; for example, a cross figure can stand for the concept of Christianity while white colour can be symbolic of cleanliness, purity, innocence, etc. Therefore, the use of lighting effects to produce a sudden thunder-strike and lightning, and the atmospheric transformation from the bright clear morning atmosphere to a bluish ambience, was first, to establish and reinforce the idea of a supernatural occurrence occasioned by Yemoja's metamorphosis from a human to a mermaid; secondly, to simulate a natural cloudy ambience of an impending rainfall. (This is because, according to the Yoruba mythology, Yemoja is a supernatural being associated with water); and thirdly, it is to enhance the illusion of a supernatural invocation of an aquatic milieu that would aid Yemoja's movement into the river (as implied in the play-text).

Performance “B” Version



Picture 7: Market-square. **Time:** Day. **Scenario:** As Yemoja metamorphosed into a mermaid, Iyaji, the head of Yemoja's priestesses, begins to eulogies her. Then she begins to wriggle her body away from the market-square.

N.B. As implied in the play (at page 60 and 62) by Yemoja, and the stage direction (respectively), after Yemoja metamorphosed into a mermaid, she moves into a sea. Yemoja: ". . . I shall today step into the big blue sea answering to the different needs of all who call me Yemoja, . . ." (Yerima 2002, p. 60).

N.B. Since the play explicitly states that Yemoja left for the sea (as the playwright attempts to communicate the origin of the worship of the river goddess), it becomes very germane to express the moment of Yemoja's entry into the river to become a river "goddess" – this is fundamental information which no word of any character (in the play) effectively communicates to the audience. As such, this very significant information on the incipience of the worship of the river goddess could have eluded the audience, if not expressed via lighting design. Therefore, a vivid stage picture of Yemoja entering a river had to be created via lighting design. As she wriggles her body towards the edge of the market space, the area is transformed into water which links her to the sea.

Performance “B” Version



Picture 8: Market-square. **Time:** Day. **Scenario:** As Yemoja gets to the edge of the market-square, the area turns to water (see **Down Stage Left** area of picture 8 above). The water serves as her links to the sea. The priestesses sing and dance in honour of her; which marks the incipience of the worship of the river goddess (picture 9 below).

Performance “B” Version



Picture 9: River Bank. **Time:** Day. **Scenario:** After Yemoja had disappeared through the water by the market, the people sang in her praise, then left. Afterwards, through the use of a lighting device known as projector, Yemoja is seen swimming in a deep blue river as she had said; and the people gather in worship of Yemoja (as it is today) at the river bank. A careful scrutiny of the picture above shows the image of Yemoja swimming behind the motif on the backdrop.

Performance “A” Version



Picture 10: The Market-square. **Time:** Day. **Scenario:** Rather than see Yemoja enter into the water or river as stated in the play-text, in the Performance “A” version of the play, Yemoja is seen returning to embrace Ogun.

Conclusion

In performance “B”, not only does the use of lighting design to establish and differentiate the battle-front from Yemoja’s abode help in communicating to the audience that the two simultaneous scenarios on stage are happening at two different locales, but the existence of the conversations between Ogun and the warrior at the battle-front (despite being miles apart) communicates and reinforces the Yoruba myth of Ogun’s possession of supernatural powers as a deity. Also, the creation of the fire-spitting effect by Sango and the creation of water and river effects that Yemoja entered into serve to communicate and validate the supernatural powers that these characters possess as well as the Yoruba mythology which surrounds the incipience of Yemoja and its worship. In Performance “A” version of the play, the water which Yemoja is to depart into (as the text implies) is not realized; instead, Yemoja merely walks out of the scene. This runs contrary to the longstanding myth which holds that Yemoja left the terrestrial world for the aquatic realm to become a river goddess who is worshiped today by different people in different parts of the world. This misrepresentation of the fact is one of the problems of not

using light for textual interpretation of plays.

Since a play performance is intended to be an interpretation of a text, the deployment of a design component, like light, must be for interpretive purposes. It is by so doing that even the minute but salient sub-textual information in a play can be effectively expressed, without ambiguity, for audience consumption. Expressive lighting also enriches the aesthetics deployed in play performances, thereby swelling audience interest and patronage.

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Interfaith Marriage among Male Muslims: Factors and Effects (A Case of Abeokuta Metropolis, Ogun State of Nigeria)

By

Waheed Adeyemi Situ

Abstract

In spite of the difference of opinion on the legality of a male Muslim marrying a Christian woman, some male Muslims enter into marriage with Christian women. This practice has been proven to have some negative effects on the couples, their children and in the Muslim ummah. Although there is existing literature on interfaith marriage between Moslems and Christians, most treat the topic from women's perspective; very few researchers have covered interfaith marriage from men's perspective, which is the focus of this study. Specifically, this study investigates the main causes and effects of male Muslims going into marriage with Christian women with the goal of suggesting ways of curbing the practice. This study employs quantitative survey research design, using questionnaire as research instrument. A 5-point Likert scale questionnaire was adopted and administered, using snowball sampling technique, among 106 Muslims sampled from families which are involved in interfaith marriage in Abeokuta metropolis of Ogun State. The data collected from the participants were statistically analysed with the use of SPSS version 24.

Keywords: interfaith, jihad, alh al-Kitab, ummah

Background to the study

In any society, religion determines people's day to day life and hardly can we find a phenomenon which is not guided by religion. Islam places emphasis on marriage as an institution of a great benefit to the individuals and society. Marriage has been in existence since the time of Adam as Allah provided for him a mate, Hawawu, and they had children. Allah says: "And among His signs is that: He had created mates for you from among yourselves so that you may find tranquility with them." (Q30:21). Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W) said: "Marriage is part of my *Sunnah*. And whoever does not follow my *Sunnah* has nothing to do with me." However, this is guided by law in Islam. Marriage between couples who

share different faiths exists in many societies from time immemorial, despite the fact that it is not devoid of one problem or the other. Many male Muslims are faced with challenges as a result of being married to wives who are non-Muslim. Allah discourages inter-religious marriage in the Glorious Qur'an, except the woman or man embraces Islam sincerely and wholeheartedly. Allah says: "Do not marry unbelieving woman (idolaters) until they believe; a slave woman who believes is better than an unbelieving woman, even though she allures you nor marry your (girls) to unbelievers until they believe..." (Q2:221).

This is a clear prescription for a Muslim before going into a marriage. From all indications, from the Glorious Qur'an and the Hadith of Prophet Muhammad (S.A.W), it is established that marriage is compulsory for all Muslims but guided by rules and regulations in Islam.

Allah legalizes the food and women of *ahl al-Kitāb* (Jews and Christians) for Muslim consumption. Allah says: "This day are (all) things good and pure made lawful unto you. The food of the People of the Book is lawful unto you and yours is lawful unto them. (Lawful unto you in marriage) are (not only) chaste women who are believers, but chaste women among the People of the Book." (Q5:6). Based on this, some male Muslims marry Christian women as wives. These marriages are not devoid of unpleasant implications on the couples, the children and the Muslim 'ummah (community) at large.

Most of the children from these families often end up practising Christianity, the religion of their mother, as most of the wives (mothers) domineeringly take the children to churches, as they do not usually practise Islam with their husbands, or revert to Christianity if a slight condition of hardship befalls them, their husbands or children when their husbands are too incapacitated to stop them from this practice. In fact, the context of the *ayah*, which does not expressly state the conversion of the Christian woman to Islam as a condition for the legality of the marriage, engenders different opinions from Islamic scholars. Some Islamic scholars submit that a Christian woman under the husbandhood of a Muslim man can continue practising her religion (Christianity or Judaism) without necessarily converting to Islam. Yusuf (1974), in his commentary on the *ayah* (verse), submitted that a Muslim man may marry a Christian woman with the expectation that the Christian woman would need to succumb to the interest of her husband, religious interest inclusive.

However, in spite of the permissibility of a Muslim man marrying a chaste woman from the People of the Book, some Islamic jurists, such as the Hanafis, frown at the lawfulness of a male Muslim marrying a Christian

woman. Niekert and Vertuyten (2018), using Multi Structural Modelling Equation as statistical analysis technique, carried out a research involving 21,373 participants in 22 Muslim-majority countries on attitudes of Muslim parents towards interfaith marriage between Muslims and Christians. They found out that although some Muslims allowed interfaith marriage, some have negative attitude toward sons marrying a Christian woman while some exhibited strong negative attitude toward a daughter marrying a Christian husband. Their respective attitudes depended heavily on the depth or level of their religiosity. The study did not look at the effect of the Muslim man marrying a Christian woman. Moreover, the areas or places where the research was carried out were traditionally and culturally different from the Nigerian, Yoruba and Abeokuta environment. The unique relevance of this research is that it fills a vacuum by being the first time a study on the effect of a Muslim man marrying a Christian woman was carried out in the Abeokuta, and probably also in the Yoruba, environment.

Nolte studied religious coexistence among the Yoruba people of Southwest Nigeria, exploring interfaith marriage between Muslims and Christians as a positive anchor fostering their relationship. Though he confirmed that the Muslim-Christian marriage is problematic, he did not focus his study on the factors and effects of a Muslim man marrying a Christian woman.

Hence, this work aims at investigating the factors that are responsible for inter-religious marriage and its effects on the Muslim homes and the general Muslim *ummah* in Abeokuta metropolis. This is to serve as a guide for Muslim children who are yet to marry and as a tool for awakening and encouraging parents and Muslim clerics to preach against interfaith marriage, particularly Muslim-Christian marriage.

Research Methodology

The paper used survey design and utilized quantitative technique. A five-point Likert scale was adopted to gather the primary data. A snowball method was employed to administer the questionnaire across five main areas in the Abeokuta metropolis, namely, Tótoró, Àdátán, Ìjàyè, Rounder and Àgó-Ìbà. The total sample for this study was one hundred and six (106) respondents. Both males and females participated significantly in answering the questionnaire. The face and content validity of the instrument was checked by giving the questionnaire to some experts in Islamic Studies. All the item-statements were considered good for the research. Reliability test was carried out through a test-re-test method and there were close similarity in the results obtained from the pilot tests. This

means that the items were reliable. Data collected were subjected to simple percentages analysis using the SPSS version 24.

Principles of Marriage in Islam

Five major principles must be observed for a lawful marriage in Islam. These are:

Hijābwa al-Qubūl (Offer and Acceptance): This usually means a man offering a woman a marriage proposal and the latter accepting; however, a woman can as well offer a man a marriage proposal. The basic rule on this is that either party must voluntarily and consciously accept the offer, and not compelled or forced to accept. The offer and the acceptance may be oral or written and should not be made under any influence of intoxication nor while any party is sleeping. Islam greatly disapproves of forcing, particularly, a woman into marriage. This is supported by the hadith of the Prophet (P.B.U.H) thus:

The Apostle of Allah said: “Do not marry the divorced or widow except with their consent and do not marry the virgin except with their permission. They asked: “O you apostle of Allah! How would a virgin give her consent? He said (to them): “By keeping silent. (Muslim, Hadith no. 3306).

Consent of *Waliyy* (Guardian): This is another principle in the validity of marriage proposal. The approval of the guardian of a woman is compulsory before a marriage is considered valid in Islam. The guardian could be the biological father of the lady intending to be married or any of her paternal uncles who must be a Muslim or the imam of her mosque or organisation or the *qādi* (judge) of an Islamic court. Approval of *waliyy* is so important that without it there is no marriage. Allah says in the Glorious Qur’an: “And wed them with the leave of their owners...” Q4:25.

Mahr (Pride Price): *Mahr* is a compulsory gift from a man to the lady. Allah says: “...And give them their dowers according to what is reasonable...” Q4:25. *Mahr* can be paid in advance or at the point of marriage or deferred to an agreed future time. No maximum or minimum amount of money is fixed for the *mahr* in the Qur’an but a sum could be fixed on the agreement of the contracting parties or by the mosque or the Muslim *’ummah* (community).

Two witnesses (*al-Shāhidān*): It is required that minimum of two witnesses which could be from the families of the man and/or the woman must attest to solemnisation of a marriage contract in Islam. This serves as mini publicity of a marriage.

Walimahal-Nikāh: This is the celebration of marriage ceremony. This is recommended but not compulsory, according to submission of the jurists. However, the Prophet enjoined the Muslims to observe marriage ceremony with at least a goat for people to dine with the couples. *Walimahal-nikāh* also serves as marriage publicity beyond the third principle of *nikāh* – two witnesses – as discussed above. The Prophet (P.B.U.H) said: “Celebrate (your marriage) even if it is with a sheep.” (Ibn Ismail Hadith No. 2047)

The observance of the above conditions is to ensure that the marriage is not unintentional and that it is openly conducted with the support and awareness of family members and the public. For a male Muslim going into marriage with a female Christian, following the aforementioned principles, it should be crystal clear that such a woman must automatically become a Muslim, and it must be emphasised that she cannot revert or reverse. If this could be achieved, the action will be regarded as *jihād* (act of propagation of Islam) according to *Sharī‘ah*.

Who should not go into Marriage in Islam?

An insane person, someone who is mentally sick (*al-majnūn*), whether a male or a female, is not allowed to marry in Islam as marriage covers a half of a Muslim’s faith. Similarly, an immature person who is not yet considered as *al-bāligh* (adult) is prohibited from marriage until such reaches the puberty age. An impotent man (*ōkōbō* in *Yoruba* language) is not allowed to go into marriage in Islam. A man must be sound and has capacity to have intercourse without any condition that can deprive the woman from having sex. Similarly, a woman must also possess the female organ for sexual intercourse. A woman with closed virginal (*lākíríbotó*) is not allowed to go into marriage, according to *Sharī‘ah*, because this would prevent the couple from having sexual intercourse and breeding children, thus jeopardising the objectives of marriage. A sick person that has a protracted health challenge(s) is not allowed to go into marriage. A man or woman can go for divorce if the other is unhealthy or a man can marry another woman to replace unhealthy wife. Thus, a man or woman going into marriage must be physically healthy. He or she must be free from any sort of communicable diseases, extremely bad body odour, mouth odour, eye cancer, leprosy, etc, that may be unbearable for either party.

In the case of the hermaphrodite, it is regarded as genderless. However, a hermaphrodite’s eligibility to go into marriage depends on the predominant sexual organ. If the female organ is predominant over the male organ, the person is considered to be androgynous. Thus, she is treated as a woman and could be married as a wife to a husband. In like

manner, a person is considered a male if the male organ is more predominant than the female organ.

Prohibited Marriage in Islam

Other than the prohibition of Muslims from marrying non-Muslims (unbelievers) and/or the contentious opinions on the lawfulness of a Muslim man or woman marrying a Christian man or woman, some forms of marriage are prohibited in Islam. Allah mentions the categories of people prohibited from marrying one another in the Qur'an. Allah says:

And marry not women who your fathers married except what is past. It was shameful and odious, an abominable custom indeed. Prohibited to you (for marriage) are your mothers; daughters; sisters; fathers' sisters; mothers' sisters; brothers' daughters; sisters' daughters; fosters mother (who gave you suck); foster sisters; your wives' mothers; your step-daughters under your guardianship, born of your wives to whom you have gone in - No prohibition if you have not gone in; (Those who have been) the wives of your sons proceeding from your loins; and two sisters at one and at the same time, except for what is past; For God is Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful. Also (prohibited are) women already married, except those whom your right hands possess; Thus has God ordained (prohibition) against you; except for these, all other are lawful... (Q4:22-24).

A marriage among these groups of people is subsumed as a consanguine marriage under the categories of prohibited marriages in Islam as discussed below.

Consanguine Marriage is a type of marriage between two couples who are closely related especially by blood. Etymologically, consanguine takes its root from two Latin words "*con*", a prefix which means "with", and "*sanguis*", which means blood; the combination of both means "with blood" i.e. related by blood. So, foster marriage, marrying one's sister, mother or niece is consanguineous (Marriam-Webster). And thus, it is prohibited in Islam.

Another form of prohibited marriage is polyandry, that is, one woman being married to more than one man at the same time. The word came from the Greek, "poly", which means "many" and "*andros*", which means "man" (Marriam-Webster). Allah also prohibits same sex marriage of any form be it man to man, which is called gay marriage, or woman to woman, which is called lesbianism. Same sex marriage, particularly man to man, was condemned by Allah. And Allah severely destroyed the people who practised gay sex in the time of Prophet Lut (Q9:70). Temporary marriage is a contract specified for a particular period of time which can be for some

months or years depending on the agreement between the couples. It was mostly practised by travelers or traders who used to travel to other places and stayed there for some time. The marriage is terminated at the expiration of the term of their agreement. Temporary marriage was said to have been allowed by Prophet Muhammad as contained in one of his *ahadith* compiled by Muslimas narrated by Abdullah bnMas'ud:

Abdullah bnMas'ud reported: We were on an expedition with Allah's Messenger (Peace be upon him) and we had no women with us. We said: Should we not have ourselves castrated? He (peace be upon him) forbade us not to do so. He then granted us permission that we should contract temporary marriage for a stipulated period given her garment and Abdullah then recited this verse: Those who believe do not make unlawful the good things which Allah has made lawful for you and do not transgress (Q5:87).

In spite of this hadith, *NikahMut'ah* (temporary marriage) is considered by the Sunni Muslims as unlawful and that the referred hadith has been abrogated (Q4:24). The practice is considered a systematic or indirect approval of prostitution. The Zaidi Shiites condemned it whereas the twelvers Shi'ites still allow temporary marriage in their doctrines (Sundawi, 2013). Submissively, any of the marriages above is illicit in Islam.

Demographic Profiles of Respondents

From the gender profiles of the participants, it is revealed that females participated most in the study with 65.1% of the sample size. A total of 34.9% was males. This reveals that females were more available than their male counterparts and they were ready to partake in the study. The participants fell between age 18 and 40 years. None of the participants was above the age of 40 years. Most of the participants were young couples within the age of 18 and 30 years. Age 26 - 30 was the highest with 34.0% and followed by age 18-25 with 33%. The result of the survey indicated that 35.8% of the respondents were single – children of couples of inter-religious marriage family. A total of 39.6% of the respondents were married and were still living together as husbands and wives. However, 20.8% had separated and only 4 respondents were recorded as widows.

Discussion of Findings

Factors of Inter-Religious Marriage

Eight item statements were used to investigate the factors that are responsible for a Muslim man going into interfaith marriage with a Christian woman as contained in Table 2 (See Appendix). It is established

from the result that 50% of the respondents agreed that irreligiousness can make someone change his or her religion. That is, if the level of someone's involvement in one's early religion is low, the practice of such a religion, generally, will not be part and parcel of such a person's life. Thus, with any minor reason(s), one could easily change his/her religion to join another one that appeals to him/her; 33% of the participants strongly submitted that irreligiousness could be one of the influencing factors that can make a person change his/her religion for another. Of the total respondents, 83% were of the view that irreligiousness is a factor capable of influencing an adherent to convert to another religion.

It was also gathered that experiencing a long delay before getting married can tempt a man or a woman to convert to another religion if their prospective partner presents that as a pre-requisite for agreeing to be their spouse. This fact is established from the Table as 61% of the total respondents agreed that a long delay in finding a prospective spouse can make one to change his or her religion if he or she could not find a partner from his or her own religion, and if conversion is made a pre-marital condition for the man or woman.

The item-statement, "lack of sound knowledge of one's religion leads to inter-religious marriage", was supported by 53.8% of the total respondents as 30.2% and 23.6% agreed and strongly agreed to the statement. This can be interpreted that many participants affirmed that if one does not possess a good knowledge of the doctrines of one's religion, he/she can take a decision outside the dictates of his or her religion at any time.

A total number of 66 participants, who form 62.2% of the total respondents, submitted that Western education neutralises stern decision to stick to marrying a Muslim woman as evident from the results depicted in Table 2. Thus, it can be generalised that Western education makes some Moslem men less discriminating and influences them into marrying Christian women. However, 40% of the respondents share the view that Western education may not necessarily influence a person to marry indiscriminatingly someone with whom one shares different faith.

From the results it is depicted that 51% of the total respondents attested that association with Christian friends can lead to inter-religious marriage among the adherents of the two religions. However, 40% of the respondents disagreed while 9% stayed neutral to the claim that when one associates with people with whom one shares different faith, that does not make one to marry from among the adherents of the other faith. In this case, we can conclude that a half of the respondents agreed while another half of them disagreed with the claim. Therefore, Western education, as an

influencing factor that makes one marry from other religious faithful, may not be strong enough but can be combined with other factors emanating from Western educational institution environment, such as peer group.

“Nonchalant attitudes of parents in guiding their children towards the choice of partner selection leads to inter-religious marriage” recorded 61.3% support. This implies that the number of those who supported that parents’ guide can influence children’s decision are more than those who did not see it as significant as only 33% disagreed while 5.7% were neutral to the item statement.

The result exhibits that lack of access to a stable Islamic education by Muslim children can lead to inter-religious marriage when they grow up. A total of 75.5%, which forms the majority of the total respondents and considered very high, agreed that if a child is not given adequate knowledge of Islamic education, the tendency for such a child to marry any person as a wife is high as he will not consider it as a discouraging act.

The statement, “Love of money can make me to marry a spouse of different faith from mine”, received a high support from the respondents as a total of 67% of the respondents are of the opinion that love of money can make many people to ignore their faith when it comes to the issue of selecting a wife or a husband. Only 24.5% disagreed to the opinion that love of money can make them to ignore his/her faith in selecting a wife or a husband. This set of people might be the few people who understand the hadith of the Prophet that enjoins the Muslims to consider religion first and most important and that they should not marry for the sake of money while 8.5% stood neutral to the opinion.

From the results exhibited in the Table, three of the eight (8) item-statements employed to determine the influencing factors towards marrying a partner with whom one share different faith have the highest percentages of acceptance, as follows: irreligiousness (83%); lack of access to a stable Islamic education by Muslim children (75.5%); and love of money (67%). This means that these three factors, among others, should be strictly and strongly given adequate attention, concern and focus to reduce the rate of male Muslims leaving female Muslims to marry non-Muslims, a practice which, in the long run, leads to children of such interfaith marriages taking to their mothers’ religion. In some cases, male Muslims – the husbands of non-Moslem wives – even drop Islam for Christianity, a situation which is abhorrent in the sight of Allah.

Effects of Inter-Religious Marriage among Muslim Families

Table 2 (See Appendix) displays the responses of the respondents to the

items designed to measure the effects of inter-religious marriage with Christian women among Muslim families in Abeokuta metropolis. The item “they suffer support from in-laws” reflects that 74.5% of the respondents confirmed that the couples are deprived the support of their parents, particularly those whose parents were against the union. This means that family consent and approval of marriage union is very core and significant for a well-laid marriage and a stable family life as stated in the Qur’an. Allah says “...and marry them with the consent of their relatives...” Q4:24. Only 15.1% disagree that the couple may not suffer family support while 10.4% were neutral to the item statement.

The Table depicts that marriage between persons of different faith may end up in divorce. This conclusion is supported by the responses of the respondents to the item-statement, “Inter-religious marriage seldom leads to separation/divorce”, as 58.5% of the respondents submitted to the statement. However, 19.8% disagreed with the statement while 21.7% were neutral to the statement. This means that an appreciable number of respondents, because they think differently or because of their experiences, do not support the statement.

It is depicted in the Table that interfaith marriage often reduces love between the man and the woman as the marriage grows in age. This can occur when one of the partners in interfaith marriage reverts to his or her at-birth religion or when religious practices, such as festivals, clash or when there is a conflict of interest or ideology in relation to the naming of a new-born baby. There can also be misunderstanding when a spouse is trying to pull the children to his or her religious side. This statement was supported by 60.4% of the respondents. However, 24.6% disagreed with the statement while 16% were neutral. This means that 40.6% did not support the statement. Although this is an appreciable number, the percentage of those who supported the statement is significantly higher than the percentage of those who did not support it.

The statement, “Inter-religious marriage begets misunderstanding”, was opposed by 24.5% of the respondents while 15.1% were neutral to the statement; this means that 39.6% of the respondents did not support the claim. Yet, the statement received the support of 60.4% of the respondents, thereby establishing the fact that misunderstanding is inevitable when partners in marriage do not embrace one faith; arriving at unanimous decisions, in religious matters, may be difficult in most cases. Undue interference, regarding issues of faith, from family and friends of the couple may lead to disagreements between the spouses.

Struggle over control of the children is another likely effect of inter-

religious marriage. A total of 67.1% of the respondents agreed that the matter of who controls the children is usually a problem in an interfaith marriage as each of the two parties would like the children to practise his or her religion. Even when the couple practises the same faith, the one who conditionally changed his or her faith may not bother if any of the children chooses to practise his or her former religion. From this result, it can be interpreted that each spouse would struggle to pull the children to his or her side. In some cases, the couple may create religious division among the children by struggling to win any of the children to his or her own side. I have a practical experience of a friend, at Camp, a suburb of Abeokuta metropolis, who married a Christian woman. The Christian woman retained her religion and that influenced the first born of their three children, a male child, to become a Christian while the remaining two children, who were female, remained Moslems. A similar situation occurred in Osiele, a suburb of Abeokuta metropolis, where the mother pulled all the children into Christianity with the exemption of one, the only male child of the five children of the family. The result of the survey corroborated these experiences.

Misunderstandings and disagreements between the spouses could generate incessant commotion in the family. This statement is supported by the result stated in the Table as 35.8% and 33%, which form a total of 68.8% of the respondents, agreed and strongly agreed to the statement that inter-religious marriage can bring about incessant commotions among couples.

From the Table, three of the six items used to explore the effects of inter-religious marriage among the couples recorded the highest percentages. “A couple of different faiths suffer support from the in-laws” recorded 74.5% submission by the respondents and has the highest percentage. This is followed by problem of incessant commotions (68.8%) and struggle over who wins control over the children (67.1%). This implies that these three crises and hurdles are usually confronted by couples from different religious background and practices. As most of the couples do not enjoy the support of the in-laws and are usually engaged in misunderstanding and commotion, thus, the marriage, sometimes, ends up in separation and/or divorce.

Effects of Inter-religious Marriage on the Children

As contained in the results, most children from inter-religious families often have misunderstanding among themselves. This may lead to unnecessary grudges and gossips as there is tendency for one child to follow his or her mother while the other follows the father. Since the children differ in religious practice, contradictions and differences of

opinion cannot be ruled out among them. Looking at the result, 59.4% of the respondents affirmed that an inter-religious marriage, where the children effectually share different faiths, has the tendency of breeding frequent misunderstanding in the family.

Equal number of respondents agreed and disagreed with the statement that inter-religious marriage can reduce love among the children. This is shown in their responses to the item-statement which recorded 46.2% (agreed) and 46.2% (disagreed). However, 7.5% were neutral which can be grouped with those who disagreed, forming 53.7% representing those who disagreed with the statement. This means that, even if there occurs some misunderstanding among the children, it may not necessarily make them to hate themselves as perceived by the 46.2% who agreed with the statement.

In some cases, the children can face confusion in religion selection. Some children can follow their father in his religion while others follow the mother. There may be some inconsistency in the choice of the religion the children are likely to practise. The result from the Table attests that 65.1 % of the respondents submitted that children from inter-religious family background face the challenges of religious selection.

The item-statement “A child who chooses the mother’s religion loses the favour and interest of his/her father” was supported by 49.1% while 37.7% disagreed with the statement while 13.2% were neutral. This means that it is unlikely for the father not to be displeased with any child who refuses to practise his religion except the father is a type who is irreligious and allows his children to practise any religion of their choice. However, a mother might not also be well pleased with any child who does not follow her in her religion, particularly if the mother is highly inclined towards her at-birth religion and never joined her husband in his religion from the first day of their marriage.

The Table also exhibits that 52.8% of the respondents disagreed with the statement, “A child who follows father’s religion may suffer some maltreatments from the mother”. However, 35.9% of the respondents agreed while 11.3% were neutral. The result reflects a true picture of an ideal family in Yorubaland and in Islam while the choice of the father is superior in the family. The result takes same direction with the previous item-statement, “A child who chooses the mother’s religious loses the favour and interest from his father”, which reflects the supremacy of the husband over the religious choice of the children in an ideal family.

Children of inter-religious marriage do suffer some psychological problems. Some of them do face problems with regard to choosing

between Islam and Christianity. If a wife does not practise Islam with the husband, the children face some maltreatments from either the father or mother depending on whose religion they follow. There is often misunderstanding among the children as there can be some disagreements on issues that have to do with religious rituals.

Effects of Inter-religious Marriage on Muslim 'Ummah

The results on the effects of inter-religious marriage between male Muslims and female Christians on the Muslim 'ummah reveal that Muslims lose most of their children to Christianity. The item recorded 81.1% support of the respondents. Only 4.7% disagreed while 14.2 were neutral to the statement. This reveals that most of the children from the Muslim families whose mothers or wives are Christians by birth are diverted to the religion of the mothers – Christianity. This might be as a result of the weaknesses of most Muslim husbands who fail to give strong religious practice background to the children at their childhood or as their neglect of the children to a total care of their mothers or a result of the death of the husbands before the children are mature to choose for themselves or decide on their own.

The Table also shows that 62.3% of the respondents agreed that most Muslims who marry Christians as wives often convert to Christianity. Only 19.8% disagreed with the statement while 17.9% were neutral. This might be as a result of the high level of irreligiousness of many Muslim men who out of their irreligiousness fall into marrying Christian wives and afterwards, instead of defending his religion and preaching it to the wives, they fall out of Islam to join Christianity.

It is also observed from the findings that most Christians who marry Muslim husbands stick to Christianity and fail to practise Islam with their husbands. The objective of *Shari'ah* which considers marrying non-Muslim wives as a form of *jihad* with the aim of converting the wives to Islam is defeated. This was confirmed from the responses of the respondents from the Table as 51% agreed to the statement, "Most Christians who marry Muslim husbands often retain their Christianity". Only 28.3 disagreed to the statement while 20.8% were neutral.

Muslim 'ummah is at a great disadvantage engaging in inter-religious marriage with Christian women. The 'ummah loses most of the children from this marriage to Christianity. Most of the wives do not really join Islam with their husbands and even many of the husbands, instead of winning the wives into Islam, it is them who are won into Christianity.

Conclusion

Though Islam permits Muslims to marry Christian women, it is found out that Muslims and Muslim 'ummah are usually at disadvantage engaging in inter-religious marriage with Christian women as enough Islamic education are not provided for the Muslim children right from their childhood to their adulthood, thus, they are simply carried away from their religion by Christian women who equally seize the control of the children. Muslim clerics have been resolute in the discharge of their obligations in guiding their congregants (parents and children) religiously and in equipping them with strong Islamic 'aqidah. Following the results from this study, in order to reduce the involvement of Muslim men in marrying Christian women and to achieve the reason why some men go into it as an act of *jihād* aimed at making the wives and the children to practice Islam, the following are suggested:

1. Inter-religious marriage with Christian women should be discouraged for Muslim men.
2. Muslim parents should give their children adequate Arabic and Islamic education through which they would have more knowledge about their religion.
3. Islamic organisations should establish marital counselling centres where Muslim singles will be orientated prior to marriage.
4. Muslim parents can support their children in searching for prospective partners.

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Human Rights of Widows: A Study of Widowhood Practices in a Nigerian Society

By

Suraiya Shahin

Abstract

The subject of widowhood practices remains one of the serious issues of our times and one which has elicited mixed interpretations. Nigeria, being a multi-ethnic society, has different forms of widowhood practices that reflect its cultural diversity. This study focuses on widowhood practices in the south-eastern part of the country which is populated mostly by the Igbo-speaking ethnic group, one of Nigeria's largest groups. Marriage, as one of the basic institutions of any society, is laden with many challenges for most couples. For the woman, this is worsened by the loss of her husband. In Nigeria's Igbo society, when a woman loses her husband, her identity suddenly changes. After the death of her husband, she no longer is viewed as a pure and complete woman. Widows in many Igbo communities are subjected to dehumanizing practices that cause them to suffer physical as well as psychological trauma. Unfortunately, such cultural practices are perpetuated by the *umuada* (patrilineal daughters) who call themselves preservers of the local culture and tradition. In spite of the enactment of many laws for the protection of the rights of widows, widows in Igbo society still face social discrimination and deprivation and are often denied their due inheritance. This paper analyses the phenomenon of Igbo widowhood practices with a view to understanding the cultural and social milieu in which such gender-oriented practices thrive.

Keywords: widowhood practices, Nigeria, Igbo Society, widows' rights, inheritance

Introduction

Customs and traditions are enthroned by the people of any given society. Unhealthy or oppressive customs and traditions, therefore, need not remain static but should be jettisoned by the people or replaced by wholesome practices that respect the rights and dignity of every member of the community. Culture should not be blind to the contemporary situations and circumstances of the society. Literature, as a mirror of the social phenomena has portrayed the theme of culture from many perspectives. This paper is focused on how cultural tenets and practices affect the

condition of widows in the south-eastern part of Nigeria, a region peopled mostly by the Igbo ethnic group. The study is based on published information on the widowhood practices and culture of Nigeria's Igbo society.

To understand the concept of widowhood practices in south-eastern Nigeria, one needs to have an in-depth understanding of the socio-cultural norms of the Igbo and their implications for individuals and the society at large. The Igbo are one of the major ethnic groups in Nigeria and also among the largest groups in Africa. The Igbo people of Nigeria believe that death is not the end of life as life is seen as a phenomenon that continues in the spirit realm even after someone's physical death. Ikenga-Metu, a professor of African religious anthropology, asserts that "death is not the final end of man in Igbo thought, all men continue to live in some form or the other after death" (62). This has implications for the plight of widows:

The Igbo culture makes it incumbent on the living to respect the wishes of the dead, while the dead are compelled to protect the living. Widowhood practices are therefore integral part of the funeral rites accorded the dead. These funeral rites are aimed at guaranteeing the admittance of the dead people into the abode of the ancestors, who, they believe, will ultimately reincarnate into the community of the living (Oreh 4).

As Ohale has noted, "the Igbo people have belief in life after death, in their ancestors and reincarnations. Central to the Igbo traditional religious thought is the concept of deceased's ancestors continuing to play an active part in the lives of their descendants" (62). Therefore, the world of the dead or the spiritual world is so authentic to the Igbo people that they consider a complete human community to be made of ancestors, the unborn, and the living. An aspect of the Igbo people's ontology is that the dead must be honoured and should not be treated as a mere body. He/she should be honoured according to the social status he/she had earned while alive. The Igbo believe that if the deceased is not buried properly by culturally following the rites and rituals befitting the dead's social status, he/she will turn into an evil spirit and wander about to attack the living members of his/her family (Okoro 323-350).

In this paper, a "widow" is defined as a woman whose husband has died and who has not remarried. Widowhood in Igbo society is associated with certain cultural norms and practices that suddenly change the narrative of a woman's life as soon as she loses her husband and makes her life traumatic. In the perception of many Igbo, she now becomes impure and unclean and, therefore, needs to undergo some rituals to effect her

cleansing. The Igbo people are known for various cultural beliefs and practices. Some of these adversely affect widows. Oreh, professor of adult education and community development, paraphrasing Boulding, says that a widow, among the Igbo, “is like a melancholy bird that sits wailing all night, increasing her distress without redeeming features” (5).

Oreh further notes that widowhood in Igbo society entails

a physical break in the family relationship and it is ranked by widows as the most stressful and devastating event in life. This is because widowhood does not only involve the loss of the role of a wife to the husband but also the loss of a person most supportive of the woman, the person who has played a central role in the woman’s life, the father of her children, the family breadwinner and the companion of the woman. This transition from wifedom to a widow happens so suddenly and swiftly that in one minute a woman who is a wife transits to a widow. It is at this moment that she starts to experience all the widowhood practices.... (6)

Widowhood Practices in the Igbo Society of Nigeria

Every culture and society has its cultural practices for the dead. Widowhood practices differ from one society to another. In the Igbo society, practices associated with widowhood include mourning rites, seclusion of the widow, shaving of the widow’s hair, limitation of the widow’s inheritance rights, suspicious behaviour of people towards the widow, and change in the widow’s social and economic status. Some of these practices have customary roots while others reflect the negative attitude of people towards the widow.

Widowhood practices in Igbo culture should be viewed also from gender perspective. The widow and the widower are human beings in the same society but they get different social response and treatment from the society. Generally, when a man loses his wife, the society sympathizes with him and treats him lovingly. The community surrounds him to pay due condolence to him. More importantly, they encourage him to remarry, pointing out that he needs another woman to console him and take care of him and, if applicable, his children. But we don’t find a similar sympathetic response when a woman becomes a widow. The moment she loses her husband, she becomes vulnerable to social bias and control. The same society doesn’t spare a moment before claiming that the widow is the killer of her husband while a man is rarely suspected of being responsible for the death of his wife. Furthermore, the widow is viewed as an impure woman in the family and the community. As such, she is required to undergo dehumanizing ordeals to purify herself (Dittrich and Carrel).

In his article, “The Widow’s Right in the Context of Fundamental Human Rights”, Edekobi comes up with the view that most widowers usually prefer to remarry soon after losing their wives while most widows choose not to remarry, especially when they have children. For fear of losing the children, they suppress their desire to remarry and decide to live in the same family compound in spite of the mistreatment of their in-laws.

The Igbo society displays clear gender disparity in the matter of mourning rites. While mourning rites are not traditionally imposed on widowers, widows are forced to cry their hearts out repeatedly during the early part of their bereavement (Agumagu). This mourning period remains a seclusion period only for the widow and the objective is to prolong her agony and anxiety. During the mourning period, the widow is subjected to emotional, psychological as well as physical torture. A widower, on the other hand, is exempted from such torturous rituals. According to Odimegwu, widowhood practices in African societies are given rise to by the sex roles and social expectations imposed by different communities. In the context of Igbo widowhood, it has been observed that the rites and rituals signify the traditional concepts about feminine roles, death, inheritance, and family structure (Tasie 155-162).

Ifeoma Okoye, a well-known Nigerian author, in her book, *The Trials and Other Stories*, also agrees on the point that the problems of persisting widowhood practices are the outcome of a patriarchal society that supports gender disparity. She has observed that in Nigerian society, widows face discrimination and are deprived their fundamental human rights. A patriarchal society believes that women occupy the secondary position to men and thus inferior to men. Okoye maintains that

It is discriminatory that widowers don’t go through dehumanizing rites and rituals. They don’t lose their property or children when their wives die. They easily acquire their deceased wives’ property. They remarry without losing their children to anyone (2).

Okoye, as a widow, encountered the phenomenon of widowhood and a few brutal occurrences that compelled her to reflect upon some of her experiences in the “Letter to the Reader” featured in *The Trials and Other Stories*, her collection of short stories. She writes, “I refused to undergo the subjugating, humiliating and dehumanizing rites of hair shaving to which many Igbo widows are subjected” (ii). She tells us that she has not written *The Trials* with the purpose of telling the widows’ stories to the people or entertaining them but to awaken them about the menacing system of widow practices. She has exposed the dehumanizing acts that are forced upon widows in Nigeria during the period of mourning. She

observed that there are some traditional rites and rituals that reduce the respect and dignity of widows.

She says that discriminatory patriarchal system of laws is also responsible for the persistent problem of widows losing their inheritance. Deprived of their property and inheritance, some widows become beggars, low-paid employees or prostitutes. In some cases, some widows are compelled to withdraw their children from school because of economic deprivation (1-2). Okoye notes that some widows are forced to marry their husband's brother in order to avoid losing their children if they remarry outside their husband's family.

While widowhood practices are common prevailing phenomena in Igbo culture, Umezinwa says that the degree of adherence to the rituals differs from town to town. Generally, however, the Igbo of South-Eastern states of Anambra, Abia, Enugu, Ebonyi, and Imo States treat widows in a very dehumanizing manner. The harsh practices meted to women make widowhood more traumatic than it ought to be. Death for the Igbo is caused by an ill wind; no death is natural. Every death is caused by witchcraft, bad medicine, or some other evil forces. Because of this perception, the family or relatives of the deceased starts investigating the cause of the death the moment a person's death is announced. If the deceased is a young person, they take investigating the cause of the death more seriously. A wife is normally the first person to be suspected; she is pronounced the murderer or an indirect cause of the death, depending on her relationship with her in-laws and the *umuada*, the patrilineal daughters.

A wife is taken as the prime suspect of the death because she is the closest person to her husband. Usually, she is placed under an oath during the burial period to ascertain her innocence. She is also asked to stay with the dead body of her husband until interment (Sossou 201-209). The case becomes more complex when the couple is traditionally estranged; this makes the suspicion that she killed her husband more intense. In this case, the widow is tortured psychologically and physically. She is forced to drink the water used to bathe the corpse of her husband.

Ohale elaborates on how a woman enters a state of impurity after she loses her husband:

In most areas of Igboland as soon as a husband dies, culture dictates that his widow must sit on the bare floor, neither taking bath nor changing her clothes...and secretly attempting to attend to her personal hygiene might attract some punishments (1-11).

In some Igbo communities, more severe rituals are inflicted upon the

widow after her husband's death. In the first period of mourning, she is kept in a secluded place, without having clothes on her body except a few leaves to cover the most sensitive parts of her body. She is prohibited from all outings and from mixing with people. However, in some urgent cases, she is allowed to go outside but accompanied by an older widow who must be a member of the *umuada* (the patrilineal daughters). While going outside, she must carry a calabash which symbolises that she is in the mourning period. In this period of mourning, the widow is culturally prohibited from touching any object, including her own body parts because she remains impure at that period. Thus, she keeps a piece of broken pot or a stick to scratch her body. She is given food cooked separately and served her in some broken plates (Sossou 201-209).

Further, the widow gives a loud wail at a certain period of time – morning, noon, and evening – as the custom demands. In the views of Sossou, this ritual of loud wailing reflects her deep sadness and a mark of honour for her deceased husband: “The fundamental social change in her life style is dramatized, emphasising her faithfulness to her husband's memory and her chastity during the marriage period” (201-209). Ohale takes this wailing of the widow at the arrival of good friends and relatives of her late husband as a public show of grief which is done to appease the family and the relation of the deceased and to prove her innocence (1-11).

One of the beliefs connected with following these rituals is that the dead husband hovers around seeking to interact with his wife. Therefore, the widow is guided, if she needs to go out of her hut for some serious work; she must come from the back door of the hut and must not enter through the same gate. While going outside, she has to carry a knife or stick which would protect her from the attack of her husband's spirit.

Meeks confirms the assertion that in some Igbo sub-cultures, such as among the Nsukka people, the widow is not left alone during her times of mourning and wailing and that the patrilineal daughters are always present there with her. He further notes that the formal lamentation for the deceased by the female relatives continues for three to six days. The female mourners collectively culturally sleep in the hut of the deceased. Every morning, large quantities of local beer are served them by their friends and relatives. Every day, at dawn, these mourning women give loud cries of grief at the sight of friends and relatives (226).

In most Igbo communities, it is compulsory for a widow to be placed in seclusion after her husband's death. This practice is maintained throughout the initial mourning period and ends with the interment of the deceased. In this condition, the widow is restricted from any interaction with people

(Ohale). The first period of mourning is most severe and health-damaging. In her twenty-eight days of confinement, the cultural practice restricts the widow from any social contact. She is not allowed to go to the stream, farmland or market (Nzewi 1-11).

After the first phase of burial rituals, the second phase of rites and rituals take place. In this stage, certain rituals are performed to purify the family members of the deceased. The widow, especially, has to perform all the purification rituals for she is still considered impure or defiled. The rites performed at this stage also denote the end of the marriage and the separation between the deceased and his wife forever. Soon after, the *umuada* take the widow to the secluded place of the compound where her head is shaved; her pubic hair is also shaved. After shaving her, the widow takes a ritual bath. Thereafter, she is dressed in new mourning attire; she will wear this dress for the rest of the mourning period. In the case of a pregnant widow, her hair and the dress she was wearing during the seclusion are buried; in the case of a non-pregnant widow, her shaved hair and dress are burnt to symbolize the beginning of the separation between the widow and her late husband (Nzewi 6-7).

After this ritual, the widow resumes a life of limited freedom governed by certain widow rules of behaviour. In this phase of mourning, she is permitted to interact with people, talk to anybody and go outside but she is restricted from returning home late during the night. Before resuming normal life, the widow must go through the last cleansing process to further purify herself and improve her personal hygiene. Her room and its contents are also cleansed. The *umuada* and the widow's friends and relatives help the widow in cleaning up the mourning environment. The filth is gathered in a basket which the widow carries to the bush, accompanied by a member of the *umuada*. This ritual of throwing filth is done very early in the morning to prevent people from watching the event. To forewarn people to look the other way, a woman from the *umuada* goes before the widow to give a warning cry. Then the widow is again bathed culturally and shaved properly by the *umuada*. This final ritual of cleaning indicates the last separation between the widow and her late husband. Now, she can resume her normal life in the family and the society. If she is young and interested in remarrying, she is allowed to do so but if she doesn't want to remarry, she stays in the same family with her in-laws (Nzewi 1-11).

Igbo beliefs behind widowhood practices

The Igbo regard burial and mourning rituals as culturally important on several grounds. Since Igbo people believe in two worlds (physical and

spiritual), death is not regarded as an end to life. As such, there is need to separate the widow from the spirit of her husband, protect their children and the deceased's property as well as maintain the peace and stability of the entire community through the widow's fulfilment of the widowhood practices. Ewelukwa (444) notes that mourning rituals in the Igbo society are performed to pay homage to the deceased and that such rituals celebrate the status of the deceased as the widow's late husband.

These rituals are also practised in favour of the widow, considering that these mourning rituals are believed to protect the widow from the menace of evil spirits. In the words of Okorie, "the traditional concept of death is also an important fact in the widowhood practices...since traditionally it is believed that the dead continue to participate in and influence the lives of the living, we saw in one area, where widows had to run very hot mixture across their faces to expel the spirit of their departed husband" (79-84). Tasié believes "the overall aim of the widowhood rites could therefore be summed up as to sever the ties between a dead husband and his living wife/wives" (155-162). Properly followed, the rituals bring some benefits to the widow and her family as, according to Ewelukwa, a feast and some form of economic package, in some Igbo sub-cultures, is awarded to the widow after her successful fulfilment of all the rituals.

Widowhood practices are also undertaken to enhance the deceased's smooth entrance into the spiritual world, to make him enter with peace and comfort and facilitate the harmonious relationship between the living and the ancestors. So, it appears the purpose of retaining these rituals is because they are perceived as cultural exercises by which the widow and the community are purified and protected.

Protecting the Rights of Widows in Nigeria

In Nigeria, discrimination against widows has reduced due to rapid growth in the education of women and amendment of local laws. Onyekuru notes that in spite of the enactment of laws to protect the widows, widows in Nigeria are still deprived inheritance rights and are still subjected to physical and psychological torture. There are two types of marriages in Nigeria: statutory (monogamous) marriage and customary (monogamous /polygamous) marriage. Although statutory law grants women right of inheritance after the death of their husbands, in practice it doesn't prevail. In customary marriage, controversies and conflicts regarding the matter of inheritance usually take place among the wives after the death of their husband.

According to Bukar Usman, Nigeria's renowned folklorist and writer

whom I communicated with while researching this paper, customary law pertaining to widowhood practices and the widow's right of inheritance differs from one ethnic group to another. He says that the widow's inheritance rights, in customary terms, largely depend on the cultural milieu in which the marriage is contracted. In his view, some Nigerian customary marriages are similar to the Islamic marriage and there are a large number of Nigerians who follow the Islamic religion and whose marriages are governed by the customary system.

Onyekuru is of the opinion that in Nigeria the widow usually loses out after the demise of her husband because there is no concept of co-ownership of property by couples. In Nigerian society, male relations of the deceased take possession of the deceased's assets thereby depriving the widows of their inheritance. In most of the sub-cultures of Nigeria, male relatives of the deceased traditionally inherit his wives (widows) and serve as social security for the widows. This practice is sometimes against the consent of the widows. When widows revolt against such discriminatory acts, the patriarchal society would accuse them of being the killers of their husbands, and this might result into several dehumanizing acts being inflicted upon them.

There are many laws in Nigeria aimed at reducing dehumanizing widowhood practices. The 1999 Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, Chapter 4, on fundamental human rights, grants equality of rights, obligations, and opportunities to every Nigerian citizen. It also provides widows' rights to freedom in the choice of remarriage, right of inheritance and provides that no humiliating and dehumanizing treatment should be meted out to widows. On March 8, 2001, the Enugu State House of Assembly enacted some laws protecting the fundamental rights and welfare of widows and widowers. No person can compel a widow or widower to follow the dehumanizing and humiliating rites and rituals which are against their choices. The law says that anyone who contravenes the Provisions of sections 4 or 5 of the law will be fined or sentenced to two years imprisonment. In 2003, in Imo state of Nigeria, a law (law no. 12) was enacted to prohibit humiliating customary widowhood practices. Anyone who goes against this law will be liable to a fine of N10,000 or six month imprisonment. And on November 26, 2004, the Cross River State House of Assembly enacted a law to protect widows against maltreatment and domestic violence (CIRDDOC).

Conclusion

After going through the study of facts and myths of widowhood practices among the Igbo, this writer comes to the conclusion that the continuation

of these practices by Igbo people is sustained by the belief that widowhood practices are for the protection of the widow, for the welfare of the community, and for maintenance of mutual harmony between the physical and spiritual world. This study also reveals that widowhood practices are engaged in by all Igbo widows but the type of treatment, whether harsh or light, meted out to the widows, depends on the socio-economic background of each widow. Educated widows and those who are self-dependent or who dwell in the urban place are safer and more protected than the widows who are uneducated, who are dependent on the family or who dwell in the rural areas. The childless widow is the most humiliated because the society regards her as a witch.

Women should be empowered by being educated. Education plays a vital role in encouraging widows to revolt against humiliating cultural practices. One notes from Ifeoma Okoye's personal experience of widowhood that being an educated widow enabled her to revolt against the humiliating and dehumanizing aspects of Igbo widowhood practices.

It is really disappointing to see that the *umuada* (patrilineal daughters) who are responsible for ensuring that Igbo widowhood practices are carried out don't appear to be sympathetic but rather insist that the widows should fulfil everything the torturous practices demand from them. Such *umuada* needs to be educated to make them change their traditional patriarchal ideologies and understand that they need to treat their fellow women with dignity and mercy. Men and women are equally important in bringing about radical changes that would stop or reform these harmful and lethal cultural practices that subjugate and violate the rights of widows.

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Aspects of Nigerian Myths, Legends and Chronicles

By

Bukar Usman

Abstract

This is an introductory essay on Nigerian myths written by the author to introduce a historic collection of hundreds of Nigerian myths, legends and chronicles collected from different parts of the country and published as an aspect of his massive Treasury of Nigerian Tales (TNT) series. The stories introduced here are all mythic in orientation and include clan or settlement chronicles, tales related to rituals and traditional religious practices, narrations about epochal historical events, origin and cosmic tales, creation tales, tales about legendary heroes and heroines, tales that explain the origin and nature of the world, and tales about the exploits of the gods. This expository essay is divided into the following parts: introduction, definition, functions and features of myth, myth and history, special audience and narrators, classification of Nigerian mythic tales, and conclusion. The collected and discussed mythological tales are 213 in number.

Keywords: Nigeria, myths, legends, chronicles

1. Introduction

The first two books of the Treasury of Nigerian Tales (TNT) series are collections of fictional tales collected from all over the country under the auspices of the Dr. Bukar Usman Foundation (henceforth, the Foundation). These two books, *A Treasury of Nigerian Tales: Themes and Settings*¹, and *People, Animals, Spirits and Objects: Folk Stories of Nigeria*², contain 700 and 1000 folktales respectively. This anthology, the third book of the series, is definitively different. Unlike the first two books of the series, it is a collection of *historical* or *non-fictional* tales and consists of

myths, clan or settlement chronicles, tales related to rituals and traditional religious practices, narrations about epochal historical events, origin and cosmic tales, creation tales, tales about legendary heroes and heroines, tales that explain the origin and nature of the world, tales about the exploits of the gods and about the Creator

Himself. This category of tales is deemed to be factual even when the presumed facts seem too unfounded or too exaggerated to be considered true outside the cultural context of the tales.³

The words, “historical” and “non-fictional,” are italicized above as a way of qualifying their meaning within the scope of this discussion. No body of myths of any known group, region or race is altogether history or non-fiction. Fantasy, delimited by a given cultural context, has always been an aspect of myth. This point is elaborated upon in greater detail below.

Another qualification worthy of note concerns the scope of this work. Mythic tales included in this collection are limited to those gathered by field researchers engaged by the aforesaid Foundation. No tale outside those garnered by the collectors engaged by the Foundation was admitted in the two earlier-published collections of the Nigerian Narrative Series. We strictly adhere to the same principle here. Hopefully, this delimitation would give some insight into the nature of oral tales still in vogue across the country in the early decades of this century.

However, because narratives selected here strictly emanated from our field research, it is likely that some tales of mythic importance, which were not narrated to our tale collectors, may not have been included here. This is why this editor makes no claim whatsoever that this collection is an exhaustive anthology of the mythology of the over 500 ethnic/language groups of Nigeria. This book of tales of direct or indirect mythic relevance should be seen as a subset of the outcome of a nationwide tale-collection exercise put together to stimulate interest in more exhaustive and comparative research in this area. This notwithstanding, key mythological figures of Nigeria, whether captured by our tale-collection field workers or not, are liberally cited in relevant areas of this discussion.

Lastly, it is important to point out that the mere incidence of being selected or published here does not invest upon any tale the status of being the official or fixed version of any given myth, chronicle, or event. In the various communities where these tales were collected, the oral narrators were neither pre-selected nor prodded to tell particular tales or preferred variants thereof but were simply left to their own discretion regarding what tales they volunteered to our field researchers. And from narrator to narrator many of the tales varied. To a large extent, the versions published here remain as they were collected in the local languages and translated into English. In editing the tales, steps were taken to ensure that key elements of the transcribed versions were maintained. As a cautionary measure, readers should, however, bear in mind that for any narrative published here, another version or versions of it might exist in their tale-

bearing communities. It should be added that most variants only differ on matters of detail.

2. Definition, Functions and Features of Myth

Let's begin our exploration of the mythic tales of this anthology by asking, "What is myth?" Simply put, a myth is a traditional narrative, set in the distant past, which tells a given group of people about supernatural events and personages by which they make sense of their existence and environment or offer explanations for various natural and supernatural occurrences. As such, many mythic tales are about the origin or history of great ancestors, patriarchs, matriarchs, legends, and ancient events; and about why and how some cosmic or natural state of affairs came to be the way they are today.

Myth, however, embraces much more than the features highlighted above. Since it is difficult to proffer an all-inclusive definition of myth, it will be helpful to look at the way other scholars have defined or explained the term. Melville and Frances Herskovits offer a more elaborate definition:

On another level, we may define myth as those narrative forms that embody a system of symbolized values which in each separate society phrase the philosophy underlying its concepts, ideals and ends, and mark off its culture from all others as a way of life. Myth, in these terms, implies a social acceptance of approved symbols that, by transcending the generations, are at once the instrument of identification with the past and with the continuities of present and future. That is to say, like all manifestations of culture, myths draw their deepest sanctions from the fact that for the individual of a given society they existed before he was born, and that he carries the conviction they will continue after he is dead. Herein lie both the social and psychological importance of mythic symbols.⁴

The excerpt below, in a simplified way, defines myth as a literary device that has significant functions. According to this viewpoint,

Myth is a legendary or a traditional story that usually concerns an event, or a hero, with or without using factual or real explanations, particularly one concerning demigods or deities, and describes some rites, practices and natural phenomenon. Typically, a myth involves historical events and supernatural beings. There are many types of myths such as classic myths, religious myths, and modern myths... Myths exist in every society, as they are basic elements of human culture. The main function of myths is to teach moral lessons and explain historical records... Myths and their mythical symbols lead to creativity in literary works. We can understand a culture more deeply and in a much better way by knowing and appreciating its stories,

dreams and myths...Besides literature, myths also play a great role in science, psychology and philosophy.⁵

You would notice that in our discussion of myths, direct or indirect reference to an identified group – be it clan, ethnic or racial group, nation – is often made. This is because a myth is the property of a given culture, not that of an individual. An author or oral narrator may freely weave a myth into his or her tale but may not impose upon that myth a symbolic meaning which varies very much from that dictated by the myth-bearing culture. A myth is a cultural expression and, as such, must be understood within the context of a given culture. The symbolic values derived from myths are not open to random or personal interpretations but are essentially culturally fixed.

To understand the myth, therefore, one would need to understand the originating culture, for the myth is often the ethnographic root of the associated socio-cultural beliefs and practices. In many rural and semi-urban communities in Nigeria, taboos and many social acts are validated in myth. In “The Story of Bode-Ado,” (tale no. 150), for instance, incest is discredited. “The Legend of Ewane, the Drunkard” (no. 152) demonstrates the need to protect the role and person of the social critic. Even the supposedly trite pidgin English saying, “Water no get enemy,” popular among Nigerian groups, can be said to be rooted in such mythic tales as “Friendship of Fire and Rain” (no. 4) and “The Earth and God” (no. 5), which establish the supremacy of water over the other elemental forces.

In the realm of ritual and traditional religious practices, mythic symbolism revolves entirely around a given ethno-religious culture. According to Malinowski, ritual is shaped by myth. In his view,

an intimate connection exists between the word, the mythos, the sacred takes of a tribe on the one hand, and their ritual acts, their social organization, and their practical activities, on the other.”⁶

Among others, the following tales of this collection illustrate vital aspects of the above viewpoint: “The Gods Never Lie” (no. 97), “The Son of the Chief of Dagom” (99), “The Sorcerer of Amagbor Kingdom” (no. 101), and “Why the Devil is Superior to Other Deities” (no. 103).

This connection between myth and ritual emphasized by Malinowski sometimes puts on the reader the responsibility of acquainting themselves with the mythology behind a given mythic tale. For the reader who is content with whatever surface entertainment they may derive from a story, this may not be necessary. But a committed reader, searching for deeper meanings, would need to access the mythic background behind the tale. In

this book, the reader who wants to fully appreciate the import of some of the tales collected from the South-Western part of the country should have a basic understanding of the pantheon of Yoruba gods and the significance of some of the rituals engaged in by traditional devotees. Such cultural understanding would help one better appreciate, among others, tale nos. 103 – 110.

For an informed introduction to African religious myths and rituals, John S. Mbiti's book, *Introduction to African Religion* (second edition) would be a good read. According to Mbiti,

In many African societies it is told in myths that at the beginning God and man were in very close contact, and that the heavens (or sky) and the earth were united. For various reasons this link was broken and God became more distant from the people. But through worship man is able to restore that original link to a certain extent.⁷

This unity of religion and myth is represented beautifully in “The Earth and the Sky” (tale no. 1) and reflects a basic belief in humankind's fall from grace at the beginning of time, a popular tenet of many orthodox religions. The history of this fall from grace to sin is conveyed in religious simplicity in the following passage taken from the tale:

In the beginning of time, when God created the earth and the sky, the sky was so close that the hands of the people living on earth touched it without much effort.

The sky had a lot of fruits which human beings plucked and ate at will. Human beings had no problem at all in getting food to eat because the sky supplied them with food in abundance.

But, at a point, people of the earth made the sky to get angry because of their greed. They would pack food so recklessly that they went home with a lot more than they could eat. The rest was wasted and dumped in the dung-hill.

...

The sky could not control his anger. He was convinced that human beings were greedy beyond redemption. He had to teach them a lesson they would live with forever. Gradually, the sky began to move upwards. Human beings stretched their arms at full-length, but they could not reach the sky. He moved so far up that human beings could only see it in the distance high up there. And they lost the chance of enjoying the creator's easy providence.

This motif of punitive separation between the sky (God) and the earth (human beings) also motivated “The Birth of the Seasons” (tale no. 13)

and explains “Why the Sky is Higher than Land” (no. 14).

As Mbiti noted, something was needed to restore the above state of separation between God and the human beings He created. The latter identified worship as a remedial measure (“through worship man is able to restore that original link to a certain extent”), hence the worship of deities and ancestral spirits in many traditional communities.

Some of the major ways traditionalists approach God through are prayers, offerings and sacrifices. And God is approached by different ethnic groups of Nigeria through a number of deities and ancestral spirits. Many of the myths associated with the culture of Nigeria spring from the worship or veneration of these deities and spirits. This excerpt from Toyin Falola’s book aptly captures some aspects of this customary reality as they manifest among some Nigerian groups:

The Yoruba have constructed a hierarchy of spiritual forces...God is the supreme deity with the ultimate power, the creator of the universe, the final judge.

Below God is a plethora of gods and goddesses, the *orisa*. There is a god for most material items, and nonmaterial ideas; for instance, Osun and Oya are river goddesses, Sango is the god of thunder, Ogun is the god of iron. There are many major Gods, such as Ogun, and there are many local ones below them, associated with lineages, towns and geographical features... Gods are also associated with occupations...

...

The Igbo believe in Chukwu, the Supreme God, who has various messengers such as the sun, sky and earth... Land is venerated through a system of religious beliefs known as *ala*, which rewards and punishes people according to their behaviour... The Igbo also believe in the power of ancestors, as do many other Nigerian groups.

...

For the Kalabari, there are two forms of existence. The first is *oje*, the material world, the physical reality that can be seen. The second and more important is the spiritual order, known as *teme*. *Teme* is divided into layers of hierarchies of spiritual forces. On the very top are the creation gods, followed by the lesser gods including ancestors (“water people”) and local heroes.⁸

Local heroes or legends are generally venerated. One of the most outstanding of such legends is the Ijo’s Ozidi, the hero of the Ozidi saga believed to have been revealed to the Tarakiri clan’s traditional high priest.

The Ozidi saga is an outstanding epic whose summary below is justified by the insight it gives into the stylistic pattern of such traditional epics.

The Ozidi saga follows the pattern of other epics: A child is born following the death of his father. He embarks on a quest, during which he has a string of adventures, undergoes tests, and performs great feats of magic and strength. With the assistance of a female relative, he is triumphant and establishes his people. Ozidi was the son of a general who died before Ozidi was born, murdered by treacherous colleagues. The Ijo believe that a violent, unhappy death such as that prevents a dead man from joining his ancestors. It is the obligation of his heirs to restore the man's honor. This was Ozidi's quest: to call home his father from the place where the murdered man's body was unceremoniously dumped and to restore him to his proper place.

On his quest, Ozidi was guided by his grand-mother, Oreame, a supernatural being who was in charge of his fate. In keeping with the adventures of epic heroes, Ozidi engaged in battle with all manner of humans and monsters, always triumphant because the gods—including the Supreme God, Tamara—were with him.⁹

Not all mythic heroes are male. Inikpi, the great legendary figure of the Igala, who sacrificed her life to save the Igala nation, was a princess. Hers was not a suicidal mission but a response to the unusual demands of the ancestors that the king should let her daughter be buried alive in order to avert a devastating defeat of the Igala people by an enemy kingdom.

Other heroes, particularly those who began as founders of traditional dynasties, such as the Hausa's Bayajida, the Yoruba's Oduduwa, and the Babur/Bura's Yamtarawala, have since been transformed into symbols of religious and political power. The tale, "How Yamah and Amaha Kingdoms were Founded" (no. 90) indicates that political exigencies, rather than some decrees from the gods, could provoke the founding of new dynasties which future generations are likely to legitimize through myths. Myths therefore could also function as the ruling class's means of legitimizing religious and political privileges.

Some of the tales of this collection highlighting the worship of deities by different ethnic/linguistic groups in Nigeria include "The History of the Worship of Tere in Edeland" (no. 53), "Why It is a Taboo in the Ere Alako's Family to Eat Python" (no. 77), and "The Origin of Tubuog's Worship of the Moon" (no. 85).

Aside from being used to explain the origin of things, myths also serve as tools for explaining why and how things function (examples would include tale nos. 76-78). Often, the latter role is served in comparative terms, as

could be seen in such tales as “Why the Sun Shines Brighter than the Moon” (no. 24), “Why Lightning Precedes Thunder Blast” (no. 25), and “Why the Devil is Superior to Other Deities” (no. 103).

Mythic tales can also serve explanatory purposes by the manner in which they are used to explain *how* certain unusual things came to be. Such mythic explanations enable us to ponder about “How Foolish People were Created” (tale no. 30), “How Mermaids Became Half-Fish, Half-Human” (no. 88), and “How Àlàbá the Pawn Was Killed By His Mouth” (no. 179).

Underlying all the functions of myth highlighted above is the given group’s belief or presumption that all of the above mythic phenomena spring from history, not fantasy. We will dwell on myth and history in the next section of this essay. All we may note here are some of those tales whose manner of presentation position them as pure history. They include “The History of Oyo and Oro Celebration” (no. 39), “The History of the Blacksmith from Heaven” (no. 44), and “The History of Affor People.”

Other tales narrated in similar tone are those centred on long-standing compounds. Illustrious families promote and sustain their socio-economic or political relevance by telling and retelling their glorious “history.” Some of the tales fulfilling this function in this collection include “The History of Wárí Compound” (no. 41), “How Pere Compound Got Its Home” (no. 52) and “The History of Iyagba Compound.”

3. Myth and History

The difficulty often encountered by those who may wish to separate real history from myth is the belief by the concerned community or group that their pet myth is as factual as any historical narration. Even myths featuring supernatural beings, or animals playing the role of human beings, are deemed true by such groups. How should a scholar deal with this kind of confusion?

Generally speaking, and as this editor had observed in his book, *A History of Biu*¹⁰, the above situation is inevitable whenever anyone conducting a research find themselves in the domain of oral tradition. While the mythologist may be comfortable here, the historian, who must verify and date his or her facts, is likely to raise questions. Unfortunately, when dealing with “the origin of nationalities, clans, domains, and long-standing traditional institutions...especially when dealing with the genesis of homogenous groups, dynasties and old civilizations,”¹¹ the historian, anthropologist, and literary analyst cannot avoid the “twilight zone between folklore and history.”¹² Myth thrives within this twilight zone; yet, it cannot be ignored because of the important roles, some of which

were mentioned above, it plays in enriching art and stabilizing society.

The historian, in this writer's view, appears to be the one more concerned about the need to separate fact from fantasy. I felt that need while working on *A History of Biu*. And I tried my best to resolve the problem, hopefully to a large extent, by cross-checking oral tradition against written history and those ethnological data which shed light on the issues under consideration.

As for students of myth, their emphasis could be on the use and significance of the myth within the context of the relevant culture. What this means is that their concern with history may not go beyond "those facets of the culture or history which throw into special relief certain customary usages emphasized in the narratives, or clarify the meaning of certain historical allusions."¹³

4. Special Audience and Narrators

Unlike the ordinary folktale whose audience is the common folk, mostly children, historical tales are generally targeted at an adult or specialized audience. And not everyone can narrate a number of these tales. Some mythic tales are for the ears of the menfolk or professional groups while others must only be narrated by diviners or griots commissioned by the king. These are some of the features which separate historical tales from typical moonlight tales.

The relevance of historical tales does not necessarily lie on the morals of the tale but, rather, on their historical data, ritualistic value, philosophy, special knowledge or social enquiry. In general, they are narrated by elderly males to adult males of a particular family, professional or religious group. Tales about natural phenomena, history of ethnic groups, and the origin and exploits of illustrious ancestors fall into this general category.

To narrate some historical tales, one would need to have skill, not just age, on his side. Some tales are narrated at a great risk and cost to the narrator. The king's griot, whose duty it is to memorize and recall, during his daily chant, the names and great deeds of past rulers, and the momentous events of the ethnic group's past, must not make a mistake. In the past, some griots are said to have lost their lives because they forgot or misrepresented a royal act. This is why such recitatives are composed and delivered by professional verse-makers.

Besides, not everyone can compose such heroic verses or narrations as they require the use of appropriate imagery and proverbial expressions,

which only the most skilful composers endowed with exceptional retentive memory can handle. Moreover, many *historical* tales are not carelessly narrated since they are deemed to be factual and sacred; so, in spite of the existence of variants in some quarters, there are official versions of genealogical tales.

Divination chants also command similar requirements in composition and delivery. Infact, for mythological settings with formal systems of divination, such as the Ifa divination system of the Yoruba, only the *babalawo* is deemed skilful enough to chant and interpret divination verses. Among some groups in Nigeria, the traditional high priest and custodian of the main shrine serves as the sole narrator of any mythic communication from the spirit world.

Sacred narratives or chants are accompanied by idiomatic expressions and other forms of indirect use of language. “Odu Ologbon Meji” (tale no. 106) begins with such expressions:

No wise man can hold water at the edge of his wrapper.
The wise one does not know how much sound we have on earth.
No wanderer knows where the world ends.
A sharp knife cannot carve its own handle.

It takes experience and familiarization with historical allusions to make appropriate sense of such expressions.

Praise songs, such as this Sango’s praise taken from tale no. 57, are sometimes needed to enliven an oracular narration:

Sàngó Olúkòso, Arẹmu Ogun
The brave one and the husband of Oya,
An expanding fire on the roof
Èbiti fọwọ bẹhin soro
Breaker and cracker of walls
Breaker of walls, replacing them with ridges
Fire escaping from the eyes, the mouth and on the roof
Sàngó Olufiran the King of Kòso
The deity whom Timi seeks in absentia
Sàngó Tìmí who sees all things

This is one more reason why only experienced devotees can purposefully serve as narrators in this purely traditional area.

Composition and narration of tales dedicated to trade or professional groups is, however, more liberally restricted. Professional groups share mythic tales related to their profession within their respective groups.

Tales about blacksmithing, for example, are usually narrated by blacksmiths within their group or among those who share some common interest with them.

In traditional societies, the nature and demands of one's trade or skill often compels one to associate with those engaged in similar endeavour. And in such gatherings, particularly when assembled for the prime purpose of worshipping the god associated with their trade, tales of common interest to the group are shared by members of the group during moments of social interaction. For hunters, tales of such nature in this collection would include "The Day Death was about to Die" (no. 173) and "The Hunter's Supremacy over the Deer" (no. 180).

5. Classification of the Mythic Tales

Given the overwhelmingly mythological nature of the tales of this collection, classifying them into appropriate sections posed some challenges. Sometimes, one tale may bear the characteristics of tales placed in one or two other sub-groups. This may not be surprising as many of the tales have something to do with gods/ancestors or the cosmic order they have shaped.






In spite of the overlapping nature of the tales, they have been grouped according to the perceived dominant concern or objective of each set of tales (Groups 1-4) or their unique contribution to the assortment of the set (Group 5). The name given to each group of tales gives a clear hint of the organizing principle adopted in classifying the group. Under each of these groups, listed below, further explanations are given to guide the reader. Here, then, are the 5 classes:

1. **Creation and Cosmic Myths:** these are tales that tell how the universe and the supernatural realm emerged; how the heavenly bodies and elemental forces began or interacted; how the earth was populated by people, animals, and spirits; and how other named animate, inanimate and sundry beginnings came to be.
2. **Group Origin Myths and Chronicles:** these narrations that relay the settlement history of various groups and towns; the history of dynasties and family lineages; origin of social institutions or momentous interactions between them; evolution of notable social events, practices or taboos; and origin of group other transformational experiences.
3. **Oracular Myths and Chronicles:** these are narrations about gods, ancestors, spirits, traditional priests, offerings and sacrifices to oracles; rewards and punishment by spiritual forces asserting their supremacy

over human choices; traditional praise and worship songs; proverbial utterances; and sundry tales about spiritual phenomena and encounters.

4. **Legendary Heroes and Heroines:** these are tales of superhuman or mythic nature – they tell us about heroic acts by outstanding men and women; they are also apparently factual stories that happened in the distant past but are traceable to a nation or group of people; and may include partially or entirely fabricated narrations that have gained popular acceptability as true stories in the course of being handed down from one generation to another by oral tradition.
5. **Various Communal Chronicles:** these are miscellaneous communal tales that might or might not have qualified to be placed in any of the above four classes but are discretionally grouped together here for reasons of their variety and complementary mythic relevance.

Below is a tabular reflection of the number of tales featured in each of the above classes.

	Creation and Cosmic Myths	Group Origin Myths & Chronicles	Oracular Myths and Chronicles	Legendary Heroes and Heroines	Various Communal Chronicles
					
Range of Tales	1 - 38	39 - 96	97 – 146	147 – 172	173 – 213
No. of Tales	38	58	50	26	41
Percentage of Selected Tales	17.8%	27.2%	23.5%	12.2%	19.3%

Total (100%) = **213 Tales**

It is good to note that this statistical representation, as it concerns the number of tales featured in each class, does not necessarily indicate any preferential decision on the part of the editor. These selections simply reflect the number and nature of mythic tales our tale-collectors were able to gather from our various communities. Suffice it to say that the bulk of the tales readily collected from our folks across the country were mostly the common fictional folktale type – and these were featured in the first two books of the Treasury of Nigerian Tales series.

6. Conclusion

As we can see from the above submissions, mythic tales offer traditional folks of Nigeria creative ways of responding to perennial problems of existence which have challenged mankind in general across the ages. They are artistically, socially and spiritual important and both the literate and non-literate members of many communities that these tales or their practical implications seriously.

The advancement of science and technology has solved a lot of socio-economic problems, but still many questions remain unanswered. Questions about life and death, faith and destiny, may never be convincingly answered without recourse to some form of belief in a higher power.

Since most people seem incapable of understanding an abstract Supreme Being, their need for identification with ancestors and gods they can see and relate to is, from their viewpoint, understandable. What is of interest to us, as we shall see in the mythic tales themselves, is the capacity of the human imagination to create or re-enact stories that have gone through many generations but still provide powerful belief systems which help people to grapple with the many challenges of life.

Endnotes

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