Exploring Mythic Narratology in Selected Indigenous Nigerian and Chinese Taboos for Social Control

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ABSTRACT

Aside the fact that myths constitute a vast majority of the content of the oral narrative genre, some mythical elements like totems and taboos also contain a high degree of the patronage of oral narratives. The analysis of mythic narratology in this presentation, an extraction from a larger research work, is partly influenced by William Labov's concept of oral narratives (2001, 2004 and 2006) which among other issues see oral narratives as 'a way of recounting the past events, establishment of temporal juncture between two or more referent events' or an orientation that identifies participants in action, the time, place and behaviour. Some of the taboos selected in this presentation are attached to some animal and phenomena totems across some indigenous cultures in Nigeria and China for a comparative analysis. Against the background of Branislaw Malinowski's (1927) view of "myth as charter", espoused in Robert Redfield's (1954) essay on properties and functions of myths which also received the attention of Isidore Okpewho's (1983) model of myths. The paper relies on the ability of certain oral narratives in effectively conditioning people's belief system and in creating and sustaining desired social control mechanism if properly channeled. It concludes that the Nigerian system should incorporate some of the indigenous creative aspects of their belief systems into the national outlook in order to ensure national cohesion.

INTRODUCTION

Mythic narratology is a term deriving from two familiar literary ideas – myths and narratives or the narration of mythic elements. Myth making processes, otherwise referred to as mythology has been classified into two parts – mythopoiesis and mythoclasm (Mineke Shipper, 2004:3). Mythopoiesis refers to the process of narrating or creating stories to confirm the ideas in an existing myth while mythoclasm refers to the process of creating stories to disconfirm or refute existing myths. Myth making being strong components of the indigenous people's belief systems depends on these two process for the entrenchment or debunking the particular myth.

Taboos constitute some of the mythic elements. Taboos are a body of the indigenous belief systems. Some taboos are verbal as they are orally expressed in overt manners while some are graphic or essentially non-verbal as they are only coded and understood without overt verbal expression. In whichever way the taboos exist, there are some narratives behind them. Even when some of the stories behind many taboos have since ceased to be narrated by the societies that created them, these oral narratives were the initial reasons the taboos became socio-culturally binding forces on the adherents. These stories are what Ikedinkwu Kanu (2014:102) refers to as the "encyclopaedia engraved in the chambers of the mind to be passed from generation to generation".

Taboos are narrated in different oral sources in African cultures such as people's, panegyrics, myths, legends, proverbs, divination materials, folktales and other oral traditions. Some taboos are merely narrated as tales for the specific purpose of explaining the taboos (Colding and Folke, 2001). In the Chinese indigenous cultures, most of mythic elements like taboos and totems have been incorporated in their epic literary tradition owing to their long tradition of writing. These mythic narratives have become the explanation of the zodiac signs in the Chinese calendar. For instance, each month in Chinese calendar is actually precipitated on the relationship with an animal totem whose narrative determines the people's expectation for the money.

As a result of the oral nature of most indigenous cultures of Africa, oral narration has assumed a central point in the transmission of virtually every aspect of the people's existence. Apart from the established traditional domains of oral prose forms like myths, legends, epics and folktales, oral narratives could be seen to have covered other non-prosaic oral genres. Traditional poetic sub-genres like the panegyrics, elegies, dirges and incantations are in many cases incorporated into narratives. In a similar vein, actions, dialogues and other dramatic performances were more often encapsulated in the oral narrations of the societies (Yar, 1972, Ropo Sekoni 1979, Okpewho 1992 and Ademola Dasylva, 1999).

Stressing the significance of oral narratives in indigenous societies, Akporobaro (2004) is of the conviction that folktales, an oral narrative sub-genre, provides the needed forum through which the creative imagination of the people is effectively and adequately expressed. And Ruth Finnegan (2012:346) recounts that oral narrations give room for various kinds of literary effects to be explored relying on the observation of Herskovits (1958) that African oral narratives are presented as art and dramatization.

In a related essay on the roles of African narrative arts, Jelan Hussein (2005: 15) asserts that every African society south of the Sahara has a long tradition of transmitting its creative experiences through the medium of oral narrations. This is in line with the observation of Labov (2022) that oral narrative practices extend over a wide range of literary and creative experiences such as short stories, poetic and prose epics, drama, folktale among others.

In the Chinese context, the position of oral narration is of no less importance among the minority Chinese cultures. Citing the case of Tibet tradition, Young Enhong (2004:20) opines that from the earliest times to the contemporary periods, oral narratives remain the most vigorous art form as it combines the verse, prose and opera forms.

It is rather apposite here to seek a meeting point between the focus of this paper and the thematic thrusts of the NOLA 7th Conference. I wish to agree with the argument that there is the need to shift the entire relevance or preoccupation of oral narration from the sole medium of oral expression; that which is restricted to the interlocutory exchange between the human narrator and audience, to include all interactions between and within the human and non-human channels. This expansion would definitely further enhance the furtherance of the significance of this paper.

As broad as the oral narrative type known as myths is, it may not be necessary to begin to explain or highlight some of the branches of the subject. Some archetypal variants of myths such as the aetiologic heroic, religious and some other classical types may not need some elaborated form of explanation. Same cannot be said about totems and taboos, two mythical elements that have not been so popularly discussed as myths in many parts of Nigeria. While totems are generally non-verbal mythical concepts, taboos are verbally expressed but the expression of taboos is very terse.

The English word "taboo" originated from the Tongan concept of "Tabu". The usage in English dated back to around 1777 when the British explorer, James Cook borrowed it from his visit to Tonga. It broadly means prohibition. The coverage of the concept is culture-bound as its application is restricted to a given socio-cultural entity. That is, the restriction or prohibition placed on a certain behavioural pattern in one society may be permitted in another society. In a similar vein, the meaning of the word itself has attracted varied interpretations. Taboos have been viewed among other things as ways of training children and youth, as ways of regulating the behaviours of people in the society and as means of condemning vices and for entrenching virtues (Ogunwole 2005:44).

Though the religious dimension to taboos is popular and recognised in this presentation, the significant aspect of this sacredness is the fact that the fear of imminent danger in the event of violating a taboo has crept into the consciousness of the people thereby forcing them to comply to the dictates of the taboos even in secular contexts (Afe, 2013:97). It is generally believed that the taboo is a prohibition against any form of behaviour that contradicts social or cultural norms of the people and that its violation attracts the anger of the community's deity bringing about a punishment. While taboos generally apply to the society, in some cases, particularly among the Yorubaland, taboos can be said to be clan, family or compound specific.

Igbo land, before the colonial period, the society had an indigenous means of preserving and maintain social order. The concept of crime as it subsist nowadays was not in vogue then. Instead, there were two level of offences – public offences also known as abominations called aru or something the earth abhors. And, the other private offences known locally as mmehie which are lighter in intensity than the public ones. Offenders may face punishments ranging from open disgrace, degeneration into the Osu (outcasts) or banishment from the land depending on the gravity of the offence. Some of these offences warranted sacrifices to the god/goddess for the cleansing of the whole (Onyeozili and Ebbe, 2012:33).

The social implication of violating a taboo is further amplified by Keith and Kane (2006) in their position that some fatal taboos are like "a radioactive fuel rod". Innocent people who come in direct contact with violators become corrupted. In a context that is more contemporary in outlook, taboos are seen as prohibiting filthiness and other practices that can make life unbearable for people.

In the words of Sigmund Freud (2015) even the most primitive societies of the world designed some taboos to regulate the activities of their members. The taboos were put in place as mechanisms to minimize the effects of crises which are inherent features in all human societies. While contemporary societies have their social control mechanism in laws, constitutions, charters and treaties. These documents are mostly written and protected by designated institutions. They are also reflected in the literatures of the societies to educate, enlighten, inform and guide members of the societies. In indigenous societies, their myth-making processes are expressed and transmitted the oral means.

The need to adopt or adapt the mythical belief system into Nigeria's quest for social cohesion is the basis for the comparative analysis of mythic narratology between indigenous Nigerian and Chinese cultures. The Chinese system has evolved an effective combination of the indigenous and modern modes into enduring social control measures through the Dragon myth controls communal existence (Sri Ranjan and Zhou Chang 2010:78). The Nigerian system however continues to disparage their mythic worldviews succumbing to the ravaging but rather baseless influences of foreign religious and hegemonies.

The analysis of mythic narratology in this study is influenced by William Labov's concepts of oral narratives (2001, 2004 and 2006) which among other issues see oral narratives as 'a way of recounting the past events', 'establishment of temporal juncture between two or more referent events', or an orientation that identifies participants in action, the time place and behaviour. Though the Labov's concepts failed to identify mythography as one of the constituent of these narrative processes, his focus on narratives as "a folk theory of causality" puts the narration of taboos squarely within the ambit of oral narratives. Though some taboos are verbal in that they are verbally articulated, some are non-verbal in that they are not expressed overtly; yet, there is a narration behind every taboo.

Though the stories behind many taboos have since ceased to be narrated by the societies that created them, these oral narrations were the initial reasons why the taboos became binding socio-cultural forces on the adherents. These stories are what Ikechukwu Anthony Kanu (2014: 102) refers to as the "encyclopedia engraved in the chambers of the mind to be passed from generation to generation". The taboos are narrated in different oral sources in Africa such as in the panegyrics, proverbs, legends, myths, divination materials, folktales and others. Some are also narrated as mere tales for specific reasons of revealing the taboos. In China, most mythic narratives have been reduced to writing owing to the long tradition of writing. These myths are the narratives behind the zodiac signs in the Chinese calendar. Each month in the Chinese calendar is actually precipitated on their relationship with the animal whose narrative determines the people's expectation for the month.

The Rat: A Taboo in Nigeria and China

Several mythic narratives underline the taboo of the big rat in the indigenous cultures of many Nigerian societies. The Giant grey rat is tabooed among indigenous ethnic sub groups in the Yoruba nation of the south west such as Ondo, Idanre, Owu, Oluoje and the Onikoyi. This same animal is a taboo, forbidden among the Tivs of the middle belt region of Nigeria. Incidentally, each community has a peculiar tale backing up the myth that makes the same totemic animal a taboo in the community. Here are the narratives.

An oral interview with people of Idanre in Ondo State of Nigeria presented the researcher with this oral narrative in how it became a taboo to eat the big rat (òkété) in the town.

> Idanre and Benin are said to be brothers according to history. The two brothers who are said to have migrated from the throne of the Yoruba, Oduduwa. And as was the tradition the, every migrating prince from Ile Ife eventually became the ruler of their receiving community. The elder brother became the Oba of Benin while the younger one became the Owa of Idanre. The elder brother went to Benin with their mother and died there. There was a dispute between the two brothers on where their dead mother was to be buried. Since the mother died in Benin, she was buried there. This angered the younger brother who sought the assistance of a man who turned into a big rat and dug a tunnel from Idanre to Benin through which the corpse of the mother was brought to the younger brother in Idanre. The man that assisted the Idanre King eventually died as a big rat.

According to our source, the Idanre king decreed that the big rat should not be eaten by anyone in the town. This decision could be as a mark of respect to the animal that had been benevolent to the King. The consequence of violating this taboo, according to our source is that the violator's mouth shall become white or grey like the colour of the big rat.

This same big rat (òkété) is a taboo among the people of Ikoyi. The Olukoyis are the traditional guards (ès. ó). of the Old Oyo Empire. They are trained warriors and like the security guards of the present day leaders, they were brave enough and prepared to lay down their lives in the event of a risk to their principal. In an oral interview with Prince Adewale Ifakunle on the 25th of June, 2015, the following account of how òkété became a taboo among the Olukoyis was narrated.

> The progenitor of the Olukoyis who was also the first Olukoyi was a warrior who embarked on mercenary war fares. This is why a section of the praise names of the Olukoyi is "Aroni ko gbele, Onikoyi ko simi ogun". On one of his frequent expeditions, the great Olukoyi did not return home. His followers all embarked on a search for this great warrior but never found him either dead or alive. At a point during the search for Olukoyi, the search party saw a large rat (òkété) emerging from a hole nearby. The herbalists among them prevented the people from killing the rat nor eating it as he said the rat was connected with their missing father. From that day, the big rat became a taboo for all descendants of the Ikoyi lineage. The repercussion for violating this taboo is that the violator would lose all his protective powers and become vulnerable to attacks and his fortunes will begin to dwindle.

This same giant rat (òkété) is a taboo among the Oke – Itase people in Ile Ife, Osun State of Nigeria. According to the Yoruba divination practice, Orunmila who is the Yoruba deity for divination is said to be progenitor of the people of Oke – Itase. In an oral interview with Chief Awotunde Aworeni, who is the leader of the Orunmila worshippers in Oke – Itase on the 27th June, 2015, another mythic narration of the òkété taboo was narrated.

> Orunmila was the source of the divination oracle among the people of Oke-Itase from where the practice of Ifa oracle spread to other parts of the world. Orunmila was said to be in a dilemma over a particular issue, he made an agreement with the giant rat who eventually gave Orunmila the way out of his problem through a sacrifice that involved the meat of the giant rat. Orunmila therefore proclaimed that none of his descendants should kill or eat the giant rat. If the people of Oke-Itase should require the giant rat for any sacrifice, the rat should be purchased for a price and not hunted. The punishment for

> violating this taboo is that any portion made with the òkété rat would lose its efficacy or potency and the violator would suffer ridicule and shame.

In the Chinese context, rats are generally hated for their destructive tendencies. The rats have an ambivalent representation in its cultural representation. Interestingly, the rat has a very significant and iconic position in the context of Chinese mythic symbolism. According to Man ping Chu (2009: 127) a literary scholar in a Chinese university, the place of the rat in Chinese mythography can be best captured in the following words.

> The rat is the first creature in the old Chinese zodiac. It was associated with money. When people hear a rat scrabbling around for food at night, it is said to be "counting money". The term "money rat" is a disparaging way of referring to a miser. In some old legends, rats can turn into demons, male demons usually in contrast with the fix that turns into a female demon. Chinese are however divided on whether it is complimentary to say to someone's face that he or she looks like a rat'

The Dog: Tabooed in Nigeria and China

The dog is another animal taboo whose image in the mythography or both Nigeria and China has caught the interest of this research. This is so because the dog also has a dual representation in the mythic narration of indigenous cultures of both nations. In Nigeria, the dog is a popularized delicacy of the Ondo people in Ondo State and the Calabar people of Cross River State. The Kaje people of Southern Kaduna in Kaduna State are also known to enjoy the dog meat delicacy in Nigeria. Yet, many indigenous ethnic groups in Nigeria are forbidden a taste of the dog meat. Here are some of the oral narrations of the mythic dimensions to the dog taboo.

The first mythic narration was obtained from Chief John Adeleke, from Oyewole Compound, Ara, Osun State of Nigeria on the 28th June, 2015. It recounts the tabooing of the dog in Ara.

> So long ago, one of the priness of the Alaafin, the paramount ruler of the Yoruba nation was very ill. The Council of Kings in the company of the King of Ara went to visit the Alaafin to pay homage to the ruler. They went in company of the King of Ara's dog. Unusually, the dog had killed a giant rat (òkété) in the way in the day time which is considered a taboo. On getting to Oyo, it was revealed that a giant rat would be needed as part of a sacrifice to cure the Alaafin's prince. The visiting Kings promptly gave the quarry killed by the King of Ara's dog to the Alaafin for the sacrifice. The rat was used and the Prince became well. The Alaafin decided to celebrate his son's recovery with a huge party. The dog that killed the giant rat was outrightly forgotten and neglected. During the party, the dog out of frustration spoke like a human being to express its disappointment and ran out of the party. All the kings were surprised and tried to capture the dog. During the chase, the dog met a farmer who begged to be covered with the empty basket held by the farmer. The farmer obliged the dog. When the dog was uncovered, it had turned into a rock. The news spread across the area. The people decided to deify the rock and to slaughter a whole cow annually to worship it. From that day, it has become a taboo for any indigene of Ara to kill, eat or even rear a dog, especially, people from the royal household.

The narration of the dog taboo among the Oluoje's people of Ibadan, Oyo State bolders on the image of the dog's loyalty. In an oral account rendered by Dr. Sulaymon Raji on Tuesday, 8th August, 2017, the narration below was recorded.

> Olu-oje the progenitor of the Oje community in Ibadan was a warrior and a professional fighter. On an escapade, he had escaped from a

> fierce battle and attempted to return home. Unfournately, he died on his way home from the war front. Meanwhile, his dog had stood by his corpse. The dog attracted the attention of searchers to the corpse of its master. Getting there, there was no dress to convey the remains of Olu-Oje back home. They therefore killed the dog, skinned it and used its hide to cover the nakedness of the Olu-Oje and he was the buried. The Dog was there pronounced a hero to the entire lineage as it helped to cover the nakedness of their progenitor. Though the lores of the Olu-Oje does not prohibit the eating of dogs but it is a taboo to treat dogs with contempt by the people. Whoever violates this taboo shall suffer nakedness and public ridicule.

For its relevance in the myth making process of Chinese indigenous traditions, the dog also has a place in the Chinese zodiac. It is the eleventh creature in this mythic representation. According to Chu (2009:130).

> To the Chinese, if a dog runs toward you, it is a good sign: richness will be yours. But the dog is seen in a very different light in South and West China, specially among the minority people who live there. In their folktales, it is the dog that brings (sic) rice to mankind. In the Eastern Proince, Guangdong the story of a faithful dog which saved its master's life from fire is very popular. Another related story tells how a dog guarded its Master's belonging until it tied in Taiwan. However, in what appears like the ambient nature of the dog's image in China, "brother black dog" is a term for a man who runs after every woman he sees".

The Chinese do not kill nor eat dog more because of the close relationship between the owner and the dog. Killing the dog is like killing a very faithful friend.

Narratives of Snake Taboos in Nigeria and China

The snake is another specie of animals that are very common in all neighbourhoods around the world. Snakes are found in all forms of human settlements, urban, rural, arid, semi-arid, forest and aquatic. Snakes also abound across Nigeria and China in their shapes, sizes and colours. The black cobra specie, which incidentally is about the most verocious and temperamental of all the species (Nat Geo Wild) is also the most widely tabooed of snakes according to the data available for this study. From Igbo communities in Nigeria across some Yoruba sub-ethnic groups to ethnic minority groups in China, the snake is a taboo for varying reasons captured in popular mythic narratives in the affected cultures. Some of these narratives are analysed below.

Eke (Python) in Igbo land

Mazi Ignatus Okeke from Mbaitoli community in Imo state of Nigeria gave this oral account of the Eke as a taboo in Orlu, Oki and some other indigenous communities in Igbo land. The interview was granted on the 22nd June, 2015.

> The Python, known as Eke in Igbo language is regarded as a guiding spirit in some Igbo communities. It is a very common sight in most of these communities and whenever it appears, it is considered as god sent. The Eke is an expected guest in all significant celebrations such as wedding, naming, chieftaincy and burial ceremonies. The celebrants have to entertain the snake and honour its appearance. In another circumstance, the python can appear in the homestead of someone who has gone into the forbidden evil forest to fetch firewood unknowingly. It would remain in a conspicuous place in the offender's compound until the wood is returned to the grove. If any member of the clan should kill a python inadvertently, he or she shall perform the full burial rites of a human being for the snake. If the killing is done deliberately, it

is considered a heinous sacriledge and atonement must be made adequately to avert the punishment. Where a violator refuses to perform the necessary rites, the individual and indeed, all the family members are at the risk of dying mysteriously one after the other.

The Black Cobra (Agbẹdẹ dudu) in Ondo, Idanre and Ile-Oluji

Oral accounts narrated by three different people from the three Ondo dialect speaking people have it that a long time ago, women were forbidden from sitting on the blacksmith tools in the Ondo speaking communities. There was however a particular woman, a beloved wife of a successful blacksmith who ignored this taboo and sat by her husband in the Smith's workshop and even handled all the tools considered sacred. She ignored all the admonitions of blacksmiths in the neighbourhood who saw her action as a contempt against their male dominated profession. One day, the woman turned into the highly loathed cobra. She was killed. From that day, the cobra has been named 'Agbede dudu', the black smith by people of Ondo, Idanre and Ile-Oluji. The snake is killed but all family membes of blacksmiths are forbidden from eaten the cobra. Since she was the wife of their progenitor, she is considered a mother or relation of people who practice the craft.

The Lanioka Egungun Race

The Lanioka descendants are a race of professional masqueraders. They were of the stock of the early travelling theatre performers who combined theatrical practices with magic. In one of their performances, the leader of the troupe changed into python and all attempts to turn him back into a human being as was the normal practice failed. Since his accolades could not turn him back to his original human form, he crawled into the bush. From there and then, it was pronounced a taboo for any one of the descendants of the Alápà or Lániók. a to kill or eat the python since doing so would amount to killing or eating their progenitor.

The Snake Taboo in China

According to Chu (2009:129)

The snake is the sixth creature in the Chinese zodiac. It is regarded as clever but wicked and treacherous. Snakes were objects of worship in certain religions in ancient China. Dreams about snakes are interpreted in various ways. It is lucky to dream that a snake is chasing you. In Taiwan, dreaming about a snake also means you are going to lose wealth. Some aborigines there identified the snake symbolically with the penis.

The Monkey taboo in Nigeria and China

The monkey is another class of animal that has been widely tabooed in many indigenous cultures of Nigeria and China. Various mythic Narratives confer the status of taboos on different species of the monkey among the peoples of these ethnic nationalities. Some of the narrations are presented below.

In an oral interview with Mr. Alabama Ọmọmejí on the 24th June, 2015, the account of the "edun", a specie of the monkey was obtained as it relates to the Olówó, a ruler of the Owo people in Ondo state.

> The ruler of the Owo people was one of the children of Okanbi the only son of Odùduwà, the progenitor of the Yoruba nation of Ilé Ifè. He was involved in conflict with his siblings and he overcame them all with a sword known as "Ada" in Òwọ̀ dialect. He left Ilé Ifè with a crown and the sword. Some of the Ifè chiefs known as "Aworoloro" (Chief Priests) followed the Olọ́wọ̀ on the trip. The party got to the place known as "Òkìtì Àpáta" and could not advance. They were not plagued by a strange illness that killed many of them. They were also ravaged by starvation. In their despair, they saw this monkey that they wanted to kill for food. They could not kill the monkey, instead, each of them sustained injuries and got three marks on the same spots on their left arm. They consulted the oracle, they were instructed to follow the monkey that wherever the animal rested its tail on the ground should be their destination. The monkey guided them to Òkè-Imade where it rested its tail. Though they met an initial group of settlers, they settled at that point and the Olowo was crowned king. It was therefore made a taboo for any indigene of Owo to kill or eat edun. Any Prince or Princess who eats monkey will suffer strange ailments, Sore throat and other form of misfortune.

Monkey Taboo in Ìpè Àkókó

Mr Olude Oluwagbeja narrated how it became a taboo for people of Ìpè in Akoko South-East Local Government of Ondo State. In an oral interview granted on the 25th of June, 2015, Mr. Oluwagbeja who also claims that the Akoko people generally migrated from Ile Ife like most other Yoruba speaking people is Nigeria.

> When the people of Ìpè got to their present day settlement, they were frequently attacked and lost many of their people and belongings to these incessant wars. A large colony of monkeys grew up in the mountains and forest around the Ipe people. When the invaders came next, they were distracted by the monkeys and gave the Ipe warriors an edge over their attackers. After several attempts to attack Ipe were frustrated by the monkeys, the invaders left Ipe alone and the town began to thrive. It was therefore declared a taboo for any Ipe indigene to kill or eat the monkey. Anyone who violates this taboo shall die of goitre.

The Monkey in Chinese context

According to Man Ping Chu (2009:130), the monkey also plays a significant part in the Chinese oral tradition. The account is explained further.

> The Monkey is the nineth in the Chinese zodiac. The monkey plays a leading role in Chinese legend. Gods in Chinese mythology sometimes appeared in the guise of monkeys. A picture showing a monkey mounted on a horse is called "má-Shang Feng hou; a homogenic reading of this title gives the meaning" May you be straight away (má-Shang) elevated to the rank of count (Feng-Hou).

Taboo on Death

The inevitability of death continues to make it a highly mystified natural occurrence by all indigenous traditions of the world. Different issues and situations that surround death are encoded in myths across cultures. For instance, it is a taboo among the Hausa of Nigeria to give the impression that someone is going to die even when the person's illness is observed to have defied all solutions. When the Hausa person asks "Yaya

jiki?" Meaning "How is body?" Regardless of the situation, one still has to answer, "Jiki da sauki". Meaning "Body is well" about the dying man.

In a similar vein, the number "4" and 4-related numbers are generally regarded as traditional taboos. According to Fuyu Chen (2012:123)

> In Mandarin Chinese and most dialects, “4” is pronounced as "sì" (fourth tone), very much close to the other "si" (Third tone) which means death/to die. Numbers with "4" are generally considered unfavorable, the worst of which is "14". In Chinese "14" is usually pronounced as "yaosi", euphony of "dying/to die".

For this reason, the 4-related numbers are tabooed and avoided so that they would not make reference to death or dying. In most Nigerian and Chinese cultures and languages, euphemisms are created to avoid reference to death. In China, it is a taboo to mention the name of the dead or to even refer to the incidence of someone's death. Instead, the Chinese would just use the phrase "Take care of yourself". Whenever that is used, it means someone just died or had died.

In Yoruba Language, it is seldom heard that someone dies. Euphemisms such as "pa ipo dá" meaning "changes position", "fi àyè sílè" meaning "leaves the world", "re ibi àgbà nre" meaning goes to where the elders go", "je ìpè adeda" meaning "answer the creator's call", "fi ilé bora bí aṣọ" meaning "uses the earth to cover self like cloth" or "ṣe alaisi" meaning "becomes nonexistent" and a host of others are used to avoid saying that someone is dead.

When a king dies in Yoruba land, most popular way of saying it is "Ọba wàjà" that means the king has entered into the ceiling. In communities that are very indigenous, there are rituals that must be performed which will make the death of the king known to the ones who understand the signs. The death of the king is usually denied until such rituals have been performed. In an oral interview, Dr. Taofiq Sa'adu gave a mythic narration from the Ifá Corpus Owonri Aseyin which narrates the announcement of the demise of any Aseyin of Iseyin in Oyo State.

73 and 84 Age Taboo in China

Chen (2012:124) records that in China, a taboo is woven around the ages of 73 and 84 years and that this taboo is captured in a common saying

> At the age of 73 or 84, even if King of Hell does not summon,
> one would go there on his own initiative.

There is the fear of death for the aged ones that they may likely die in either of these two ages. According to Chen (Ibid)

> The origin of “73 and 84” taboo can be dated back to the spring and autumn period about 3,000 years ago. Records show (that) the two sages Confucius and Mencius passed away at the ages of 73 and 84 respectively. Even the Saints and not escape the Law of Nature. Therefore many people believe 73 and 84 are the destined years for them to leave this world, which has become a heavy psychological burden.

CONCLUSION

All the oral narratives in this paper are a confirmation of the practice of creative efforts in indigenous cultures which tend to regulate the interactions between man and people, between man and nature and between man with other environmental elements in the society. Taboo, a universal mythic element has attracted series of

narrations in varying dimensions with the purpose of enhancing social cohesion and for minimizing social conflicts.

RECOMMENDATION

The basic recommendation here is that the Nigerian society as well as many other indigenous cultures of the world, rather than rely on the influences of foreign religions and western civilisations, should emulate the Chinese example where the narration of mythical elements has been consciously implanted into the national lives of the citizenry to mitigate the problems of multi-culturalism and inter-ethnic crises in the emergent socio-cultural milieu.

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