

RITUALS AND TABOOS RELATED TO DEATH AS A REPOSITORY OF TRADITIONAL AFRICAN RELIGIOUS IDEAS: EVIDENCE FROM THE TIV OF CENTRAL NIGERIA

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Abstract

This paper examines Tiv Rituals and Taboo Related to Death as a Repository of African Religious Ideas with a focus on the Tiv Central Nigeria. It first of all makes clarification of some terms use in the study such as Tiv, death, rituals and culture. Furthermore, the paper discusses a metaphysical content of death rituals and taboos, the epistemological and axiological contents of death rituals and taboos in Tiv society. The study adopts an interdisciplinary method which makes use of interview, observation and secondary sources for gathering information. Data were presented in narrative form and analyzed thematically. The study observes that Tiv Rituals and Taboos related to death are instrumented in understanding the Tiv world view. The paper recommends among other things, that some metaphysical concepts associated with Tiv death, rituals and taboos be investigated empirically. It also further recommends that the curricula at various levels of our education system should include cultural taboos and rituals to enhance the learner's understanding of traditional African religious and philosophical concepts.

Keywords: Ritual, Taboos, Death, African Religion, Culture and Tiv.

Introduction

Over the centuries, it has been observed by African scholars that African Religion has been expressed through culture. Cohen (1991) posits that African Religion has been inextricably intertwined with culture that the world view of the African people is therefore, basically religious. This religious worldview is the basis of the Africans interpretation of the world around them. Thus, it is not surprising that African religion has been observed to be expressive of African culture and philosophical thought (Mbiti, 1969). Eagle (1965) opines that African religion involves rituals and taboos which relates to death, beliefs, customs and behaviours. Thus, to understand a people's religious worldview, rituals and taboos constitute an important dimension. This paper analyzes the Tiv ritual and

taboos with a view to discovering their religious import. This is important in the study of Tiv religious thinking because probing the Tiv on their spiritual beliefs does not yield much in terms of why a particular ritual or taboos is observed.

Therefore, there is a need on the part of theologians to analyzed and synthesize disconnected ideas, which emerged as the informants describe how the rituals are conceived in African context. The work sought to answer the following research question: What religious concepts are embedded in Tiv death rituals and taboos? The question was broken into the following sub-questions: What do death rituals and taboos mean to the Tiv? Can death ritual and taboos assist in the understanding of Tiv religious ideas? A research of this nature is significant because as Mbiti (1969) states that religion is the strongest element in traditional African background, and exerts probably the greatest influence upon the thinking and living of the people concerned.

Religion permeates all aspects of Tiv society. Thus, wherever a Tivgoes, he/she takes along with him/her religion. Religion is a unique phenomenon in Tiv society that a cross country conducted by the British Broadcasting Cooperation (BBC) in 2003 described the Tivas “the most religious people” in the world (Rahner, 1977). Religion is one of the few factors that have succeeded in bringing together sizeable numbers of Africa and the Tiv under one umbrella, irrespective of ethnic and cultural considerations. This positive role notwithstanding, Christianity and Islam are associated with the condemnations of traditional beliefs and practices which have divested the cultural rituals and taboos related to death in traditional Tiv society.

Conceptual Analysis

Rituals

The word ritual viewed from broad spectrum means different things to different people. According to Goody (1964), ritual is the category of standardized behaviour by which the relationship between the means and the end is not intrinsic. Wilson (1971) described ritual as primarily religious action directed to securing the blessing of some mystical powers. For Mbiti (1975), a ritual or a rite is a prescribed way of conducting a religious action or ceremony. Turner (1967) defines ritual as prescribed behaviour for occasion which is not given technical routine but has reference to beliefs, mystical beings and power. Zuese (1979) ritual is mechanical human behaviour, ranging from simple custom of shaking hands and the daily etiquette of greeting, to a complex and solemn act of ritual sacrifice.

Through word, symbol and action, ritual communicates a religious language. Arnold Van Gennep (1960) referred to rituals or rites of passage which he said are designed to enable a person to move successfully through the various stages of life. The rites center primarily on birth, puberty, marriage and death. According to Firth (1965) protective and purification rituals are characteristics of these stages. He subdivided the rites of passage into the rite of separation, rites of transition and rites of incorporation. However, these different types of rites cannot be nearly separated from each other and often occur simultaneously within one particular stage of life such as death. Mbiti (1975) identifies different African rituals, which he categorized as personal rituals, agricultural rituals, health rituals, homestead rituals, and festivals.

According to Ray (1976), the main purpose of rituals of passage is to create fixed and meaningful transformations in the life of the cycle (birth, puberty, marriage and death) in the ecological and temporal cycle (planting, harvest, seasonal changes and New Year). Rituals have a sacred dimension. Adler, cited in Akiga (1939) maintains that ritual is the language of religion. It brings into our daily life the invisible world of this spirit and the unseen of God. Rituals (death rituals included) are therefore, important in understanding a people's religious and philosophical outlook.

Taboos

The Polynesian word taboo means that a particular person, object, word or action is to be avoided (Downes, 1971). Scholars such as Smith (1998); Durkheim (1915) and Radcliffe-Brown (1939) have observed that an important quality of taboo is its association with the sacred. According to this theory, anything taboo is sacred and dangerous and is therefore to be avoided. What is sacred, dangerous and forbidden is unregulated contact between the sacred and the secular (Gundu, 1982). Shishima (2000) has observed that taboos among some African societies such as Igbo, Tiv, Akan, amongst others, are associated with the supernatural beings. Rannie (1977) also observed a link between taboos and religion amongst the traditional shone. Taboos are therefore, associated with a people's metaphysical ideas. Mary (1960) sees taboos as an element of all those situations in which attitude to values are expressed in terms of danger behaviours. Steiner sees taboos as playing an important function of protecting societal values. This implies that in taboos are enshrined values.

Taboos are associated with impurity and contagion (Isha, 1996). Any person who comes into contact with something tabooed becomes taboo himself and is therefore expected to go through prescribed ritual purification. Taboo behaviour expresses and reinforces the values and sentiments important to the maintenance of society (Edwardo, 2003); Mary, 1960). Rahner (1977) and Rubingh (1969) have realized the symbolized nature of taboos. Taboos are a symbolical way of pointing a warning finger at the contrast to the ideals which are held by the individual and the group. In other words, in taboos are embedded a people's philosophy. Taboos are cultural and religious phenomena which help in maintaining order, cohesion and integration in Traditional African Religion. They are obeyed because apart from being sanctioned by God, the deities and the ancestors, taboos are guarded by the society as well (Abang, 1987).

Taboos are subsets of totemism which involves a mystical and ritual relationship between such a class of species of animals, or plants and a social group. This relationship includes taboos, projected kingship, saviour saved complexes and so forth, hence totemism is a basic organization principle relating man to nature and the super-human forces in his environment (Temples, 1969). There are different types of taboos in Traditional African Religion. These include: Sex taboos, food taboos, death taboos, cultural taboos, royal taboos, taboos for pregnant women, taboos for mothers, and so forth. These taboos strengthened the values and moral beliefs which form the basis of social life in the society. By terming them as sacred or divine injunctions, taboos have the greater power to direct human actions and sayings. They help in maintaining law and order in traditional African societies.

Culture

Culture according to Isha (1986) refers to people or society total way of life, including customs, traditions, beliefs, emotions, ideas, behaviours and values of things. Ajayi (1981) defines culture as:

A configuration of learned and shared patterns of behaviour and understandings concerning the meaning and value of things, ideas, emotions and actions of human beings in the society. This configuration of patterns and understandings arises, out of language communication with a social group and help an individual to adapt to his physical environment, his biological nature and his group life. Ajayi further explains that culture often refers to the aspect of human direction in terms of his taste, refinement and interests in

music and arts. In this context, culture means civilization, development or improvement acquired through learning and education. Culture is made up of a people's customs, traditions and beliefs, their behaviour, dress, language, their work, their way of living, network, relationships and their attitudes to life, the focus of group loyalties and the way they perceive the world (Shishima, 2000). Culture is not inherited biologically, but rather learned from childhood all-through adulthood.

Death

Death is the cessation of heart beat or the ending of life or the extinction of the individual system (Mbiti, 1969). Once a person is pronounced death, life in this world is lost. Death is the termination of the physical and earthly life of the human beings (Ushe, 2010). Death involves the cessation of life to complex tissues of brain-dead or loss of irreversible characteristics to psychological stage of death (Abeghe, 1980). Africans believe that death is a transition to the final destiny of humankind. It is not the end of life but rather a continuation of life in the world beyond (Abraham, 1933). Thus, at death, the human soul departs the body to the world of spirit popularly called "Ancestral Abode" (Mbiti, 1969). This belief makes African people to consider the unseen world as interpenetrating the unseen world of the spirit. This is why the Africans regard death as a greater teacher, using the dead as its instructional materials (Ajayi, 1981).

The Tiv

The name Tiv according to Ushe (2007) has a triple meaning. Firstly, it is the term that designates the people as an ethnic group. Secondly, Tiv refers to their language. Thirdly, it refers to the one ancestor Father, Tiv, to whom all Tiv people trace their common ancestry. The Tiv as a people are one of the largest ethnic groups in Nigeria and Africa as a whole (Ushe, 2007). They are great farmers who inhabit Benue, Nassarawa, Plateau, Taraba, Adamawa and Cross River States of Nigeria, respectively. The Tiv speak Tiv as a language which belongs to the Bantu sub-family of the Benue-Congo-family (Ushe, 2010). The socio-political organization of the Tiv is based on kingship system with compound head (*Orya*), clan (*Ityô*), kindred (*Ingyôr*) and land or society (*Tar*) as structure of organization. This structure of socio-political organization however, has undergone some slight changes in the new dispensation due to the advent of modernization in Africa.

Metaphysical Content of Death Rituals and Taboos

An analysis of death rituals and taboos provides an opportunity to explore the metaphysical aspect of life. It is a study of being (ontology) in different aspects reflects the ultimate meaning of human life. Rituals and taboos are a repository of traditional Tiv metaphysics. There is evidence of metaphysical themes in Tiv death rituals and taboos. We will examine some of these themes in this research paper. Death is a universal phenomenon which causes anxiety, awe, fear and wonder in human beings all over the world. The salutary fear that death marks the end, not only of life, but also of everything he or she possesses is a major reason why human beings are afraid to die (Rahner, 1977).

Schouppe (1986) posits that even among the world's most intelligent of human beings, there exist terrible fears of death couched in superstitious beliefs that there are some people who possess the power and ability to use some magical powers (witchcraft) to kill other people. Thus, Akiga (1964) asserts that he or she that fears death through a sincere belief in its existence and potency, automatically through self-suggestion within his or her own mind becomes not only enslaved by the fear but a ready victim of the evils his or her mind invents. Thus, according to Tiv religious thought, death is the last crisis every individual must face. It is the crossing from the corporeal world to the spiritual world (Downes, 1971). Through death, the deceased persons are metaphysically transformed from the physical state into the spiritual state. They are made into revered ancestors (Makar, 1975). This remaking into spiritual form involves the symbolic destruction of the old and the creation of the new state.

At this critical period, the deceased is not what he/she was but he/she has become momentary anomalies, steeped of the old his/her former mode of being, ready to be something new (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1977). The Tiv therefore, speak mythologically of death as a monster that came visiting the homes of human beings (Downes, 1971). Through traditional stories and folktales, the Tiv people try to explain the origin of death and its possible location, using personal or anthropomorphic terms. Some think of death as an animal or a snake, others regard it as a spirit or a witch (Abeghe, 1980). According to Akiga (1939) death and birth are similar processes in Tiv worldview. This is because the two processes are associated with entering into other worlds: birth leads into the world of the visible, while death leads into the world of the invisible. They are both associated with death and rebirth. Shishima (2000) commented on this traditional African belief thus:

Being born must therefore, be thought of in terms of the category of passage. To come here is to leave the beyond; it is to be in transit, to change one's state. Being born here means dying up there and at the end of life, the opposite is true: to die here is to be born up there.

In other words, African (the Tiv included) metaphysics sees birth and death as closely related processes. It is important to note that the Tiv see a close link between an unborn baby and newly born baby with the world of spirits. Similarly, the Tiv revered old people as being closer to the world of spirits by virtue of their age (Mbiti, 1969). An unborn baby and a newly born baby are believed to discover hidden knowledge and reveal it in the same way as spirits assists diviners to discover hidden knowledge (Ushe, 2005). Thus, baby blood and old age are associated by the traditional Tiv to closeness to the world of spirits. As Ushe (2010) explains:

Childhood, like old age, constitutes an intermediary or transitory stage, a period of progress, while the child tries to free himself/herself from the control of the other world; the old man/woman prepares to return there.

Thus, the Tiv strictly prohibited the burial of deceased during mid-day as people are not normally born and do not die during mid-day. The general view seems to be that people are born and die when it is cool. According to my informant, during mid-day, it normally hot and spirits will be resting and therefore, it is also a bad time for the deceased's spirit to start on a journey. The Tiv said people who died during mid-day died because of spirits such as the avenging spirit. Otherwise, people normally die before or after mid-day (Mbiti, 1969). Even in urban areas, burials do not normally take place between one and two in the afternoon. This indicates that burial taboo related to death is still being strictly observed even by the modern day Tiv.

The act of dying according to Tiv belief can be delayed. The people believe that someone might not die until someone close to his/her heart and is far away comes to see him/her (Mary, 1960). Thus, it is a taboo to deny a critically ill person whatever he/she wants for he/she will take long to die. In most cases, the dying person would be willing to say his/her last words to one or all of his/her relatives. Sometimes, the dying person asked for his/her son-in-law to be sent for. As soon as he arrived, the dying father-in-law or mother-in-law as the case may be requested that everybody except the son-in-law leave the room. He/she

spent a few minutes with the son-in-law and then peacefully died (Mbiti, 1969). In another instance, a critically ill patient at a hospital may ask his/her close relatives in rural areas to come and see him/her. The relatives arrived after some hours and he/she spent some minutes with them and died (Eagle, 1965).

Ushe (2010) observed this belief in death as an entity which can be controlled when he says, "relatives come from far and near to the sick man/woman, and when death is imminent, they will beseech him/her not to die before sunset". The Tiv have a strong belief that an ill person reaches a stage when he/she knows that he/she will not recover but will certainly die. It is said during that stage, the ill person will be close to the world of spirits and will avoid looking directly into the eyes of the living (Goody, 1964). It is believed some ill people at this stage even speak words or even behave in a manner which suggests that they are going to die. Ajayi (1981) confirmed this belief among the Shona thus:

There is a belief that, when a man/woman is dying. He/she sees in a vision of the spirits of his/her dead relatives. Some of them take him/her by hand, and try to lead him/her away from life. Others strive with these, and his death or recovery is dependent on the result of the struggle.

This Shona religious thought ramifies with the Tiv who believe that magic can cause an ill person to delay dying. Some people are said to use magic which can make them live longer and the type of magic has the negative consequence of prolonging the dying process (Imo, 1991). It is said that some people eat the heart of a tortoise or use the fat of a python to strengthen themselves. People who use such magic die a slow and painful death (Awolalu and Dopamu, 1977). The heart of the tortoise or python is said to take long to stop beating after the creature has been killed. Similarly, a person who used magic from these creatures will have his/her heart continue to beat when the rest of the body is incapacitated. In such a situation, the Tiv would perform a ritual to expedite the death process. They would burn the fat of the tortoise or the fat and skin of a python so that he/she could die (Ray, 1976).

This ritual is done by a powerful native doctor or magician to destroy the force that hinders the dying process. When the person dies, a ritual must be conducted to inform him/her consanguine of the death so that they will not encounter misfortune. Death is believed to bring about mystical danger to the consanguine of the deceased (Onwubiko, 1992). The ritual of informing the relatives is meant

to protect the consanguine of the deceased against mystical danger (Zuese, 1979). All relatives are ritually informed about the death either by word of mouth, or some ritual act. One of such ritual act involves throwing millet seeds into the fire, while names of the deceased's relatives who are far away are being mentioned and the death message put a cross.

It is believed by the Tiv that relatives of the deceased who have not yet received the bad news of the death will encounter bad omens or some misfortunes which will be a sign that something is wrong in the family (Abang, 1987). This might be in the form of an attack (verbal or physical) for no apparent reason, seeing a green branch falling off a tree or a plate breaking while you hold it, or a Cameleon crossing your way while walking on the road (Onwubiko, 1992). It can be inferred from the Tiv taboos that the Tiv seem to see death as a concrete entity. They appear to view it as something which actually exists and can be invited by human actions. It is strictly prohibited to sit while holding one's cheek as this symbolizes someone in mourning and is likely to bring about death (Shishima, 2000). When someone is seriously ill relatives should not cry as this is likely to cause his/her death. It is also forbidden to carry two stones or logs to be used for burial as this is believed to cause more death:

You have planted death in the family, next time when death strikes, people will die in two or more. Your behaviour of carrying objects in twos is likely to result in another death (Gundu, 1982).

Thus, any action associated with a funeral is discouraged during normal times. To the Tiv, death exists and it is to be feared in the same way bacteria and viruses exist and are feared in a scientific world. That death is an entity which exists is shown by the following euphemistic expressions:

"Ku nguertsôôr u ka u tôôr wan ikyev u wundungôkyev u vaanzendengbenda" (death is like an eagle which takes a chick, leaving the mother hen mourning), *kuyira un* (death calls), *kufa ma or ga*(death knows no chief), *kukaanyam*(death is an monster), among others (Abeghe, 1980).

The Tiv to further show the concrete reality of death, the body of the deceased is carried out of the hut not through the door but an opening made in the wall for the purpose of taking out the body. This is done to prevent death from striking

again. This old burial practice is no longer being observed by the due to the advent of westernization. The Tiv people have a belief in a shadow (*gbajirji*). If a shadow is seen in hut where the deceased is lying in state, burial of the deceased would not take place until the shadow disappears, lest the deceased's spirit comes back to trouble the living. This taboo points to the Tiv belief in a soul which can manifest itself in the form of a shadow. The Tiv hardly differentiated between the shadow (*gbajirji*) and guardian spirits (*jirjingu or*), the spirit-double or the double-ego which is so vital that no person can run away from it. This is because the people believe that the essence of human personality is a sort of spirit-entity that acts on the spiritual counterpart of the human beings (Ushe, 2007). Some African tribes call this guardian spirits or double-ego *Kuchi*, *Nkrabea*, among others.

Abraham (1933) posits that the shadow is black and when a person dies the shadow disappears. He argues that a corpse has no shadow, and that a coffin with a deceased person does not cast any shadow. Rubingh (1969), however argued that a corpse has a shadow but the deceased may show his displeasure by projecting his/her shadow in the wrong place. Such a shadow might be seen on the wall of the hut or room where the deceased is lying in state. Still, Zuese (1979) opines that a person has two shadows-a white shadow and a black shadow. The black shadow is the one which is seen every day, while white shadow is not normally visible and is the one which becomes an ancestral spirit.

The white shadow is supposed to disappear soon after someone's death. If the white shadow does not disappear and instead appears on the wall of the hut where the deceased is lying in state, it will be a sign that the deceased restless and wants something done. The Tiv believe in a shadow which can appear if the deceased is unhappy with something. The shadow represents the Tiv concept of a soul. This indicates that the Tiv have a strong belief that a person consists of two separate entities: a soul and a body (Odetola and Ademola, 1987). According to Tiv belief, the spirit of the deceased person is powerful and has human feelings. The spirit continues to have human like emotions such as anger and thirst (Victor, 1969). The Tiv people believe that the restlessness and anger of the spirit can cause misfortune among the living in the society (Abang, 1987). Thus, there are taboos to show respect for the deceased's body. It is a taboo to speak ill of a dead person no matter how wicked or bad he/she might be.

Similarly, it is a taboo to allow a human being to die with his/her eyes and mouth open like an animal, the deceased spirit will grow angry and restless and

come back to trouble his/her consanguine (Wilson, 1971). The Tiv also forbid spitting because of the deceased bad smell even if the body is giving bad odour. To do so is seen as a sign of contempt, hatred and dislike for the deceased and this is believed by the people to invite the wrath of the deceased spirit (Ushe, 2005). In addition, it is forbidden to eat food at a funeral of a young person. The Tiv believe that since the death of youths is considered to be pre-nature and unhappy one, eating food at the funeral will invite the anger of the gods. Even now, entertainment during the funerals of young people is seen as an act of inviting more calamities in the society (Downes, 1971).

The Tiv allowed the eating of food and drinking of alcohol only during funerals of old people whose death is believed to be a happy one. The Tiv interpreted refusal to eat food and drink alcohol at such deaths as arrogance. It is believed that to do so would render the spirit of the deceased restless, angry and dangerous (Rannie, 1977). Thus, the Tiv try as much as possible through ritual and taboos to cool the deceased's spirit. Firth (1965:204-205) analysis of the concept of cooling the spirit among the Shona equally applies among the Tiv. According to him:

At death, a new spirit with its appropriate superior powers enters the conceptual world of the community. Nobody knows quite how the spirit will react to its new environment or what secret, grudge the deceased might have harboured before his death, which explains the necessity of keeping the spirit "cool" and of discouraging it from returning to the homestead. In the Shona idiom, as in English, the concept of "coolness" carries overtones of calm, placid peacefulness, the opposite of "cool" is hot, much as the concept is used in the English expression, "hot tempered...".

The Tiv unlike the Shona believe the anger of the deceased's spirit soon after death can be claimed through ritual. To discourage the deceased from "stabling" or "harming" the living two seeds *ishohô* are placed in the grave one above the head and one below the feet of the deceased's body. Grass from watery places and the water-lily is placed in the grave to cool the spirit. Soon after the burial, the new grave is sprinkled with water as a way of cooling off the spirit. To calm the deceased's anger, the blood relatives must sacrifice a goat known as *ivoivihinshima*, (the goat of anger). The meat of the goat of anger is not allowed to be boiled as it is believed the deceased's anger will increase as the heat in boiling

water increases. Instead, the goat's meat is supposed to be roasted (Rubingh, 1969). To ensure that the deceased's anger is completely done away with, all the meat of the goat of anger must be consumed on the same day and all the bones burnt so that nothing remains.

The Tiv believe that soon after death, the deceased spirit inhabits a dry land and is therefore, bound to feel thirsty (Ushe, 2007). Thus, the ritual the ritual beer is presented to quench his/her thirst. The ritual beer of water or beer of the thirst is conducted before the deceased spirit is accommodated in the family through the home bringing of the deceased ceremony. This however, shows that the ritual of beer of the thirst is meant to symbolically cool off the spirit which is lonely and restless (Avel-Ivano, 1976). The Tiv fear the deceased's spirit because they believe it has acquired extra powers which it can use to influence the living at times causing misfortunes (Bell, 1992). according to Edwardo (2003) the deceased can cause unusual and mysterious happenings such as causing bees to sting people at a funeral, giving a bad smell, increasing the weight of the body in the coffin such that no one can lift it and at times making the body to expand such that it cannot fit through the door.

Thus, if the deceased had indicated his/her wish of where to be buried, it becomes taboo to bury him/her any other place other than the one his/her has chosen (Isha, 1996). According to Tiv belief, if the wish of the deceased is not considered, the deceased will make it difficult to transport his/her body or to dig his/her grave (Goody, 1964). If the deceased had indicated his/her wish to be buried in the rural areas and not in town, ignoring his/her wish might result in the car meant to ferry him/her from the mortuary to a town cemetery refusing to start (Ushe, 2005). Ignoring the site of the grave chosen by the deceased is believed to result in grave diggers encountering problems such as rocks, roots or water seeping into the grave (Isha, 1996). Hence, death is believed to empower the deceased who becomes more powerful than the living. The Tiv people have a strong belief that soon after death, the deceased's spirit goes on a journey. Based on this belief, the pre-colonial Tiv society did not allowed people to weep loudly and for too long soon after the person had died as this might stop the deceased's spirit from smoothly proceeding on its journey to *Adômuku*(the Ancestral abode). According to the Tiv, the deceased's spirit will be perturbed by the loud crying and turn back (Eagle, 1965).

The deceased's corpse must be ritually washed just like ordinary life anyone who plans to start on a journey washed his/her body on the way to the grave, the

deceased must be allowed to rest just like someone on a long journey needs to rest. The spirit of the deceased according to the Tiv, must be free to undertake its journey hence, the deceased's body must be undressed of anything which had been tied around it. This includes belts and bandages (Mary, 1960). The Tiv people believe that there is life beyond the grave. The people believe that the soul of the deceased embarks on a journey soon after death (Firth, 1965). Preparation of the body before and items put in the grave show Tiv belief in life after death. Ushe (2007:78) analysis of the Tiv concept of death explains this fact:

Life is an endless enterprise, Death is not an end; it is a vehicle from the ontology of visible beings. Death is part of life, it is a gateway to eternity, it is a gateway to life in the hereafter.

To the Tiv therefore, death is regarded as part of the natural rhythm of life but is seems it is dreaded because of its disrupting effect as earlier stated (Cohen, 1991). This conception of life after death is further illustrated by the terms used by the Tiv to describe death when someone has died; the Tiv use taboos and rituals also show that the spirit of the deceased is believed to continue to have sensory experience: it can see, hear and has emotions and desires (Avel-Ivano, 1976). The Tiv concept of Aging, Impurity, sacred Time and Causality, the Tiv have taboos and rituals which show that the burial ritual of the deceased is determined by age, conditions and status (Makar, 1975). The Tiv believe that a baby who dies before teething is not to be buried on dry ground but in wet places such as veils, river banks or in the sand of the river bed (Geertz, 1975). Burying such babies on dry ground and around the compound would lead to the mother of the baby failing to menstruate and hence, becoming sterile. Furthermore, burial of such babies on the dry ground is believed by the Tiv to lead to drought (Ushe, 2010).

Thus, a woman who died in her pregnancy or during child birth is buried in a wet area because she is regarded as wet. The same applies to the premature or aborted children; those died in advanced stages of pregnancy or in child birth were all regarded as wet and were to be buried in wet places (Ushe, 2010). While premature or aborted children were buried in the river sand where there was plenty of water (Rubingh, 1969). Bigger children were buried on slightly drier ground. Adults were buried on higher and drier ground than the ground on which aborted and young children were buried Zuese, 1979). It is important to note that one of the underlying concepts of these death rituals and taboos is that the process of growing up is the process of dying out. Babies are wet and are

buried on wet ground, while adults are dry and are buried on dry ground. Babies in the womb and those being born make their mother wet (Smith, 1998).

Aging as dying out process seems to be an important metaphysical concept among the Tiv. Those who are older are believed by the Tiv to be drier and to be closer to the ancestors (Iowa, 1973). The Tiv sometimes address their living grandfathers and parents as *Utermbangise*(ancestral). These people are in an advanced spirit state of aging and drying and therefore, are closer to the ancestors (Ushe, 2007). According to Tiv belief, aging is a drying process which raises the status of the spirit. The maturity of the spirit is believed by the Tiv to depend on the maturity and social status of the living persons (Mbiti, 1969). In particular, parenthood and age are very important for the spirit to acquire the full status of an ancestral spirit after death (Ray, 1976). This explains why the Tiv do not conduct the burial rituals of children and unmarried people. Ushe (2010:68) analysis on Tiv concept of the spiritual aspect of mankind explains this thus:

The spirit of a person who dies without children can never be fully mature. On the other hand, as a person becomes aged he/she is thought to grow closer to the spirits. Old people are believed to be very influential with spiritual powers and are regarded with a certain amount of fear and sometimes even suspicion. Thus, there is a correlation between the maturity of a living person and they believed maturity of his/her spirit.

Among the Tiv, the spirit of a chief has a higher status than that of his subjects. Similarly, the Tiv regard the spirit of the deceased grandfather to be more powerful than the spirit of the deceased father. Thus, among the Tiv, spirits fall in a hierarchy which result from age, maturity and social status (Bell, 1992). Death rituals and taboos suggest that the Tiv believe that death has aspects of impurity and contagion (Wilson, 1971). The hut where the deceased lay in state before burial must be swept and the dirt as well as the water used to wash the body of the deceased must be thrown into the grave as they are associated with death (Odetola and Ademola, 1987).

Those who come in contact with the deceased as well as the soil from the grave should cleanse themselves with water mixed with a soup called *akweshi*(purifying soup) in order to prevent accidental death (Isha, 1996). Those who dig the grave and bury the deceased must wash their faces, hands and feet

by the grave side to ensure that all the dust and soil from the grave are not carried home as this would be the same as inviting death (Eagle, 1965). It is also strictly forbidden for relatives of the deceased to come into contact with the deceased's property without first Deeping hands in medicated water. If a consanguine of the deceased comes in contact with the deceased's property before the ritual, he/she will suffer from leprosy. The mystical danger associated with the corpse according to Tiv belief is contagious. Death is a pollutant which makes people ritually unclean or exposes them to danger (Zuese, 1979).

Death rituals and taboos indicate that the Tiv have a concept of sacred time. The period of mourning is regarded as sacred time. Agricultural activities are suspended before the burial of the deceased (Temples, 1969). It is a taboo to conduct burial ritual on Sundays and the month of December because the spirits will be resting (Bell, 1992). Important rituals such as marriage and rain rituals should not be done during the month of December as spirits would have temporarily withdrawn from human activities in order to take a rest in the spirit world (Rannie, 1977). The Tiv attribute human sufferings to mankind's failure to observe traditional rituals and taboos. The unseen world simply responds to mankind's irresponsible behaviour. Death is caused by human agents. No death just occurs; there must be an agent responsible for it (Rubingh, 1969).

The Epistemological and Axiological Contents of Death Rituals and Taboos in Tiv Society

Taboos and rituals suggest that there are many alternative ways of acquiring knowledge. We learn that knowledge can be accessed through revelation. Thus, the Tiv sought for the service of *Orkpehenishor* (divine) after the death of a family member. This important ritual among the Tiv is meant to enquire the cause of their relative's death (Downes, 1971). The ritual is conducted even if the family member died of an accident or incurable diseases such as HIV/AIDS, Iborá, Hypertities, among others. The Tiv, because of their metaphysical outlook, find scientific or naturalistic explanations for death inadequate. In their primarily spiritual universe, they look for the cause of death in the spiritual realm. In African metaphysics, diseases and accidents are viewed as secondary causes of death (Ushe, 2010). The primary cause of the death is believed to be found from the supernatural world. This explains why the Tiv consult the diviner in order to establish the cause of death. Divination is therefore, an important source of knowledge.

The Tiv people also believe that the deceased can communicate his/her displeasure to the living through various ways. The manifestation of omens serves as a vital source of knowledge of the bad news about death. The Tiv interpret such unusual events as denoting the coming of death news. This source knowledge was regarded as true, especially at a time when the Tiv had poor communication technology. This must have served as an important purpose of preparing people psychologically for bad news. Taboos and rituals are trusted as a source of knowledge by the Tiv. They are regarded by the Tiv as constituting the accumulated wisdom of the generations of their forebears. They are not to be interrogated as is the case with scientific knowledge (Ushe, 2007).

This explains why the response one invariably gets from the Tiv when one seeks the underlying meaning of the ritual is: "our fore fathers have always done it that way" (Ushe, 2010). Taboos and rituals seem to suggest that empiricism is one way of accessing knowledge; through their experience and observation, the Tiv can have knowledge about certain events related to death. It is possible that certain taboos and rites were introduced after observations of certain patterns of cause and effect. When the Tiv observe a particular shadow (*jijingi*) in the hut or room where the deceased is lying in state they immediately conclude that the deceased is expressing his/her displeasure (Ushe, 2005). Taboos and rituals are also an important aspect of Tiv axiology. They are a source of material for philosophical discourse on axiological issues.

The taboos and rituals serve to reinforce what are considered by the Tiv to be essential values of the community. These values include: respect, responsibility, family-hood and social stability (Odetola and Ademola, 1987). Family-hood is an important value among the Tiv. Kingship (*tsombor*) is something which mystically links the consanguine. Death creates a state of mystical danger to the consanguine of the group who are mystically linked through blood and spiritually. Once kin you are always kin. Nothing can be done to destroy kingship as it is a mystical relationship. The Tiv believe that all relatives of the deceased should be informed of the death so as to protect the consanguine of the deceased against mystical danger. All relatives are informed about the death either by word of mouth or by some ritual act (Rubingh, 1969). The deceased's consanguine are expected to attend the funeral. Failure to do so is believed to invoke the wrath of the deceased (Bohannan and Bohannan, 1953). Those who come after burial should do a ritual whereby they place a small stone on the deceased's grave as they identify themselves and explain to the deceased that they have come to mourn the deceased.

It is important to note that the traditional kingship system includes the deceased. The deceased's spirit is therefore, still closely linked to the living consanguine. The consanguine, especially the eldest member of the family should chose and mark the site of the grave (*tesejiir i timenuwar*). If a non-consanguine does that, the spirit of the deceased will be angered and trouble the living (Downes, 1971). Even a deceased married woman's spirit is believed to be interested in its own consanguine. Her consanguine should dig her grave first and lead during the burial ceremony and subsequent rituals. The *ityumbemkuritual* is meant to bring the spirit of the deceased back into the family fold. Death ritual and taboos promoted a sense of social solidarity. It enhanced the "we" feeling among the members of the community affected by death. Death is therefore, a unifying factor which brings together kin and non-kin. When there is death in the village, people are not allowed to work in the fields. The mourning period (*kuvaan*) for a deceased chief covers a longer time than that of a commoner. This wake-keep is meant to ensure that members of the community give moral and material support to the deceased family.

The taboos and rituals of death also show that the Tiv value marriage. Young males and females of marriageable age who die unmarried are buried with a rat, which is put on the sexual organs—a male rat for female and a female rat for a male (Ushe, 2010). The rat is placed on the deceased's genital organs as the following words are uttered:

We via orkpen ne, kakwase/nom u je ne, mayange de kera hide vazaanumacheiyoughga, which means you so and so, here is your wife/husband, do not come back to trouble us (Ushe, 2005:48).

We can infer from the taboos and rituals that the Tiv were essentialists in the sense that they believe values are permanent or objective. The values enshrined in the taboos and rituals are not to be questioned but to be accepted as they are. The Tiv have a hierarchy of values which supports Temple's (1969) argument that there exists a hierarchy of forces and primogeniture among the Bantu (the included). The value accorded to a being by the Tiv is dependent on the force of the being. For example, it has emerged from the analysis that age and status increase a person's force and respect in Tiv society. Those who die unmarried are of lesser importance than those who die married. The fact that the days of mourning for a chief are more than those of a commoner indicates that the chief is valued more than the commoner. It also emerged from the analysis of rituals

and taboos that Tiv moral system allowed for the segregation of certain categories of people in society.

Thus, befitting burial rites were not to be conducted for people of bad character and for those who died of incurable diseases such as *imande*(leprosy), *hôrbaa*(tuberculosis), *ikyungurkigbaan* (epilepsy) and *kyansa*(cancer), among others (Gundu, 1982). The Tiv at times find it necessary to practice euthanasia. There are times the Tiv quicken the dying process through the ritual act of burning the fat and skin of a python close to the terminally and critically ill person suspected to be a witch/wizard so as to quicken the dying process.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From the forgoing discussion, it is seen that rituals and taboos suggest a member of Tiv philosophical and religious concepts which have an axiological and metaphysical systems in understanding a people's world view. In rituals and taboos are treasured Tiv fundamental values such as family-hood, respect, responsibility and social stability. Death rituals and taboos are of importance in the understanding of Tiv epistemology. Knowledge can be accessed through empirical means, precognition and authority. Death is an issue that affects all mankind directly. No one can claim to be indifferent in the face of it. Tiv attitudes to death could be best conceptualized through rituals and taboos. Death rituals and taboos can therefore, function as alternative sources of Tiv philosophy and theology. Based on the above facts, the paper makes the following recommendations:

1. Rituals and taboos should be incorporated into the curricula of the various levels of our educational system to enable learners to understand Tiv religious though.
2. Empirical investigation of Tiv religious concepts such as the act of dying and the soul should be encouraged.
3. There is need for replication of Tiv concept of death ritual and taboos with other African ethnic groups to see if the same pattern emerges.
4. Since rituals and taboos exist mostly in oral form, theologians must start a programme to collect and analyse the rituals and taboos with a view to discovering Tiv religious and philosophical ideas.

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