

Salvation and Morality: the Interconnections in African Thought

Godson Ahorator, PhD

University of Ghana, Legon, Department for the Study of Religions, Ghana

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Abstract

A careful study and analysis of the religio-cultural practices of most tribal groups in Africa reveal that there is usually interconnectedness between the notions of salvation, morality and the conceptualisation of evil. It is thus believed that the ethical values and moral practices of such societies are sustained mainly by this interconnectedness of the concepts of the afterlife, morality and evil. As such, salvation among Africans in general can be said to have been greatly influenced by the ethical value systems of indigenous African societies from the perspective of their conceptualisation of evil. An investigation into the worldviews of the Tongu Mafi people reveals that this interconnectedness is firmly grounded in the beliefs and practices of the people. I contend in this paper therefore that the core indigenous beliefs, worldviews and practices of Africans are resilient and capable of sustaining their soteriological and moral practices. This paper is based on a phenomenological study of the Tongu Mafi people of Ghana mainly through interviews and observation of their religio-cultural practices. It concludes that the intersections of notions of salvation, morality and evil are couched in two moral principles: living a good life and avoiding evil. These two moral principles must be observed simultaneously in life for they constitute the foundations of the soteriological concerns and moral praxis of the Tongu Mafi people.

Keywords: Salvation, morality, evil, worldview, praxis

Introduction

While in other cultures and religions cremation may be regarded as means of disposing dead bodies, among the Tongu Mafi people of West Africa, it is a traditional punitive mortuary rite for evildoers. The normal and dignified means of disposing the dead is by earth burial. The belief and practice of cremating the dead in order to expiate the soul persist among the people of Tongu Mafi. Based on the findings from data gathered from

fieldwork (mainly from oral sources and observation of religio-cultural practices) across the width and breath of Mafi Traditional area in Ghana, this paper examines the traditional notion of salvation in Mafi thought, the conceptualisation of morality and the determination of ethical values by the Mafi people.

The Tongu Mafi people are a section of the Ewe ethnic group located at the south-eastern part of Ghana. The Mafi people share a lot in common, in terms of their traditional beliefs and practices, with other Ewe as well as other traditional societies in Ghana. However, their beliefs in the ‘hereafter’ and other soteriological concerns are different. There are certain crimes, abhorred vices, and human conditions that deny the individual and perpetrators of such crimes from being buried with the ancestors or in the normal cemetery. These include homicide, abortion, sorcery, accidental deaths, as well as persons who are afflicted with certain diseases considered to be an abomination. Some of these diseases are yaws, hernia, epilepsy and lunacy (Ahortor 2015: 83).

Homicide and abortion are considered so grievous that the perpetrators are cremated as a form of expiation for their souls. There have been instances where corpses were exhumed from the cemeteries for cremation by members of the deceased’s family in order to expiate the souls of the dead and avoid the wrath of the ancestors through the haunting of the dead person (Ametewee and Christensen, 1977). The dead of this kind are not only a threat to the living, particularly the family members, but they are not even accepted or welcomed by the ancestors to their part of the world without expiation by cremation. In other words, they are denied salvation.

The notion of salvation is interconnected with cosmological belief in the duality of human life and this salvation can be realised in both the mundane and the hereafter. The realisation of salvation in Mafi thought is understood and explained in terms of the moral praxis of the people. Both the notion of salvation and ethical values of the Tongu Mafi people are not explained without reference to the concept and reality of evil. Most of the rituals and other daily practices of the Mafi people are meant to deal with the threat ever posed by evil to the human society. The Mafi experience confirms the postulation of Martin Riesebrodt that the core claims of religion are to “avert misfortune, overcome crises, and provide salvation” (2010: 89). In Mafi experience the challenge of evil must be avoided if possible and all efforts are geared towards this goal; but when the people are faced with the challenge the required rituals are performed to overcome the crises; and a society free of evil is believed to abound with abundant life as expressed in *dagbe*. The etymological explanation of *dagbe* (*de-agbe*) is “to redeem life”. A “redeemed life” corresponds with salvation in the mundane.

In Mafi thought, evil is generally expressed in action. However, in Mafi metaphysics, thoughts and emotions can also be classified as evil. In this

regard, suppressed ill-feeling and living in enmity with neighbours, particularly relatives, are considered evil acts. This negative behaviour could manifest as “disease of animosity” and if remedies are not provided timely, it could lead to destruction of life. While punishment can serve as corrective and deterrent measures in moulding good character in society, reconciliation of estranged parties is encouraged to ensure peaceful and harmonious co-existence in Mafi society. The objective of this paper is, therefore, to expose the resilience of traditional beliefs and worldviews in indigenous African societies and continuity in moral praxis. A holistic approach is to analyse the interconnectedness of salvation and morality. But whatever the approach, the ultimate goal is to prevent evil in society and facilitate the realisation of salvation in both the mundane existence and the hereafter.

Mafi Traditional Notion of Salvation and the Hereafter

The notion of salvation cannot be described as a straightforward concept in the Mafi traditional religious and philosophical worldview. Salvation is understood to be a blissful and perfect state of humankind after death guaranteed for those who adhere to the ancestral cult and worship. The goal of the Ewe and most Africans is to join their ancestors after death (Dovlo 1993). But the conditions that qualify the individual into ancestorhood find expression in their daily ethical behaviour and other forms of mundane existence. There is the common belief in African traditional societies that not every person qualifies to become an ancestor after his or her death. This belief explains the different sections allotted for different categories of spirits in the hereafter. The utmost care taken in mortuary rites is also to ensure that the belief and image of the ancestral home as an ultimate goal in the life of the Mafi constantly remained sacrosanct. In contrast to the ancestral home is the space for wandering spirits, the spirits of persons who could not make it to the ancestral home, mainly constituted by persons who suffered accidental deaths and those who by the cultural and moral standards of the society are considered evildoers. The image of restlessness in this part of the spirit world can be deduced from the invasion of the spirits into the mundane world for urgent expiation rituals in order for their souls to experience peace. They are reckless in threatening the lives of others, particularly their family members with the very acts which sent some of them into the predicaments they find themselves in the underworld. The notion of soteriology in African thought is therefore seen as individual and communal efforts to find place with the ancestors after death.

The significance of the ancestors and their attraction comes clear in religious, cultural and social practices of the people. They have living memory; their names are mentioned in libation, prayers are directed to them, requests are directly made to them and they are believed to be reborn into

society. This Mafi soteriological belief is captured in Dovlo’s writing that “salvation also consists of joining the ancestors after death. The ancestors form a community and inclusion in that community implies salvation. In this ancestral community, individual human identity is not fully lost but through becoming part of the community, one’s identity is, in a sense, preserved” (1993: 56). It is also in this context that attempts are made by the living to get rid of memories of persons who do not participate in the ancestral community.

There is the belief that people who do not join the ancestors are condemned to ‘hell’. From the discourse between the living and the dead through the diviners, one can discern that the spirits outside the ancestral home experience restlessness. These disembodied spirits or ‘wandering spirits’ especially of victims of accidental deaths pose harm to the living until the rituals to expiate their souls are performed. Similarly, evildoers such as witches, murderers, sorcerers and those who cause abortion must find space outside the ancestral home. They also become ‘wandering spirits’ and even more fearful than the victims of accidental death until their souls had been expiated. The mortuary rites in Mafi are performed according to the soteriological beliefs of the people. The rites are normally meant to facilitate easy transition to the appropriate sections of the spiritual world by the deceased. Those who deserve to be buried in the cemetery and join the ancestors in the afterlife are buried with the appropriate ceremonies. The spirits of deceased persons who voluntarily request expiation are offered that rituals in line with the soteriological beliefs and conditions.

Salvation and the Mundane among the Mafi

In Mafi thought, salvation can also be attained in the mundane world. This is where the term *dagbe* is understood as salvation. *Dagbe* is also used in both ritual and ordinary spheres in Mafi religious and social practices. The word is often used or applied in rituals such as sacrifices and libations. It has also been a solemn request and the word in its ritual application captures the totality of the supplication made in libation and in sacrifices. Discussants are of the view that the good things one can pray for or request from the ancestors such as good health, prosperity, fertility, peace, success, bumper harvest etc. or prayer against inimical effects, barrenness, ill-health untimely death, poverty, frustration etc. are all summed up in the expression *dagbe neva* meaning “*dagbe* or abundant life should come”. Thus even though specific requests are made in prayers, rituals or libations, the celebrant concludes with solemn request for *dagbe*.

The context in which *dagbe* is used in rituals conflates two aspects of the reality of life in Mafi thought: one replete with abundant life and the other deprived of abundant life. The life full of abundance is requested but a deprived life should be forestalled. *Dagbe* as abundant life connotes total well-

being; of mind, body and in spirit. The understanding of this total well-being is a life void of threats from evil forces and the realization of abundance in the mundane world (Gaba, 1978, 1982; Bansah, 2013). Therefore, to live a morally good life, be blessed with success, and protected from the attacks of evil or inimical forces is a reflection of experiencing *dagbe* in the mundane. *Dagbe* is also a continuous experience. There should be constant renewal of *dagbe* through appropriate rituals and by conforming to the norms and traditions of the society. For this reason, it is usually requested over and over in traditional worship and rituals.

Apart from religious sphere, *dagbe* is also applied in everyday social interactions in Mafi. In welcoming visitors or guests, the host would ask, “What brings you to me?” The quick and short answer for good news is normally “*dagbe!*” The use of *dagbe* connotes peace and good life. Normally, someone sent to deliver a message which is bad news such as reported death or occurrence of disaster could not respond or say he brings *dagbe*. Similarly, one can inquire from a messenger whether the message he or she is to deliver is *dagbenya* meaning “*dagbe* message”. In everyday social interaction, *dagbe* is used primarily to mean good news. The meaning derived from the ritualistic use of *dagbe* cannot be different from its social use. In both cases, the religious and philosophical meaning of life is central in the application of *dagbe*. The good news is therefore what expresses and affirms life in its abundance. Most prayer requests are directed to the ancestors and they are believed to be the main source of *dagbe*. In one sense, they have set the standards by which *dagbe* is defined in both social and religious circles and on the other, they are the very object for ultimate goal for their descendants. To seek for good health, success and prosperity, the celebrants will not bypass the ancestors and request it from the Supreme Being. Even when these requests are granted, it is known in Mafi thought that it was God who granted them through the ancestors.

The salvation experienced in the mundane is regarded as an extension of the soteriological goal of joining the ancestors after death. The conditions for ancestorhood which find expression in the mundane existence are in themselves fulfilling. The blessing of living to an old age, exemplary life devoid of misfortunes and evil, is a symbol of *dagbe* and an experience of what holds in the ancestral home. The experience of salvation on earth and in the ancestral home is therefore inseparable. In Mafi traditional beliefs and practices, therefore, the notion of salvation in both the mundane existence and life in the hereafter revolves round beliefs in ancestral rites which are couched in the promotion of good life and avoiding evil. These beliefs conceptually affect the kind of life the people should live in their mundane existence. If they meet the required moral standards of society, they are granted the ultimate soteriological goal of being ancestors or at least joining them in the ancestral home. This soteriological goal and influence is captured by G. K. Nukunya:

“the ancestral rites serve as an important means of social control. The fact that only people of certain calibre qualify as ancestors regulates behaviour by making individuals and groups not only to conform but also to live such exemplary lives as to enable them qualify for the honour after their deaths” (2003: 59). The notion of salvation, the individual and communal efforts to attain it in both the mundane and hereafter existence and the traditions regulating the attainment of these goals are considered in both social and religious practices of the Mafi people. The ethical ideals of the Mafi people are not identified outside the scope of the notion of salvation. Both salvation and ethical values are not conceptualised without reference to evil.

The concept of evil among the Mafi

The people of Mafi acknowledge the reality of evil. There are different concepts of evil. The details of the concept of evil in Mafi thought may vary but include what in Western formulation is classified natural or physical and moral evil. Roger Shattuck explains that “*Natural evil* occurs in the form of elemental disasters and scourges, which may affect any of us and over which we have limited control.” On the other hand, “*Moral evil* refers to actions undertaken to harm or exploit others in contravention of accepted moral principles or statutes within a society. These actions are subject to judgement and punishment; mitigation and aggravation; as well as repentance and remission” (2001: 50). By these definitions, the bulk of what constitutes evil in society can be labelled moral evil and attributed to human agency.

Whatever the labels or categories, such distinctions are hardly articulated in Mafi cosmological worldview. Evil certainly is not presented as a unified concept in Mafi cosmology but whatever the concept it has the same fears, images and approaches of remedy. Also, all forms of evil are a threat to the well-being and survival of the people and the totality of the society. In my discussions with opinion leaders, it was observed that evil is defined or explained in the context and philosophical understanding of life; acts that can destroy or negatively affect the good quality of life. It is this understanding of life that Birgit Meyer described that “like many other African peoples, the Ewe considered life as the highest value” (1999: 86). Therefore, in exploring and defining evil, life becomes a focal issue.

In Mafi thought, there is no worked out concepts as natural and moral evil. These concepts are well intertwined and seem impossible to separate the concepts. The various manifestations of natural evil such as earthquakes, droughts, and pestilence among others and described as “elemental disasters” are real in Mafi thought but they are also attributed to human agency. In Mafi cosmology, the “elemental disasters” occur as a result of certain commissions and omissions in human responsibilities and staying out of balance with positive cosmic forces. In practice, attempts are made to prevent the

occurrence and if it unfortunately happens, the cause should be traced and the required approaches for remedies adopted. Similarly, moral evil cannot be totally insulated from cosmological influences. It is believed that humans can manipulate some spiritual entities but generally, the influence of cosmological forces on human can yield either positive or negative results.

The frame for determining evil in Mafi thought is connected to how human thoughts and actions, and their consequences, conceptually impact human life. The destruction of human life is also explained in different concepts. The exoteric concept of destruction of human life borders on killing or causing death. It is evil to physically destroy human life and it is equally evil to use spiritual means to destroy the life of others or oneself. To this end, cold-blood murder, abortion, suicide, and killing with witchcraft or sorcery are deemed destruction of life and as such constitute most grievous forms of evil. Even after their death, persons ascertained to have committed these evil acts are subjected to punitive mortuary rites of cremation.

There is another form of evil which has to do with utterances. The act of killing might not have been committed but utterances that are judged to be threats to well-being and life are considered evil. In other words, verbal threats are considered a form of evil. Expressions like “we shall see”, “I will teach/show you” “I will deal with you” in Mafi metaphysics are laden with evil. It is also evil to tell someone that you will kill him or her. If the speaker does not reason up to withdraw the threat, settle differences, and reconcile with the victim, the latter could refer the case to elders, priests or chiefs. Normally, the life of the victim is said to be entrusted in the hands of the person threatening and in the past incorrigible persons of this behaviour are considered undesirable elements in society who should be eliminated from human communities. In fact, these persons are usually regarded as sorcerers in disguise. But of course, there are people who may use these expressions to boost their ego and have their way when in reality they may be harmless people. In addition, suppressed ill-feelings towards others, disrespect for the dignity and personhood of others, exchanging of vitriolic expressions and invoking of curses on other persons, are all considered evil because they can threaten human life and the harmony in society. The attempts and means to ensure stable, peaceful, harmonious and purposeful society by avoiding evil are the bases of the cherished values or ethical ideals of the Mafi people that reflect in everyday life activities.

Mafi Traditional Ethical Ideals

The key ideals of the Mafi people are expressed in almost all cultural and social practices. They are mostly inculcated into the people mainly through socialization processes. From childhood and about the stage of adulthood, the youth should internalize the key ethical values of the society.

The initial education on ethical issues starts with parents and the family. But as the children interact in social activities, they internalize what they have been taught at home and at the same time learn others at first hand. The cultural and social practices serve as platform for exhibition and adding to the knowledge on ethical issues. The key ethical ideals of the Mafi people stress the need to live a good life. The explanations of what informed the cherished values are couched in the cosmological conceptualisation of life. What comes to the fore is the fact that human life is the highest value. The identification of any key ethical value is therefore conceptually influenced by firm belief and practices safeguarding the sanctity of life. The sanctity of life is primarily protected through the elimination of evil, or at least, reducing it to its barest minimum in the society. The need for any ethical value is considered on the basis of how it helps reduce evil and by so doing to promote good life. The translation of the ethical values into practice has been the bases for the moral codes, traditions and practices that reflect in the notion of salvation among the Mafi people.

Discussants seemed to agree that good neighbourliness is one of the most important ideals of the Mafi people. As a community that thrives on personal interdependence, it is normally expected of everyone to demonstrate good neighbourliness. The communal spirit or solidarity thrives on good neighbourliness through social interactions. In Mafi thought, good neighbourliness covers the expression of love. It is also suggested that love can be directed to a particular person but good neighbourliness is a communal requirement. There is a saying in Mafi that is used to buttress the importance of good neighbourliness: “It should be good for the neighbour ‘to eat’” and ‘to eat’ can be glossed as ‘to enjoy’. It is explained that with good neighbourliness, one will not envy, harbour ill-feelings or have evil thoughts against others in the community. Therefore the notion of avoiding evil and protecting life in general can be guaranteed in demonstrating good neighbourliness.

Another key ethical value of the Mafi people identified by discussants is truthfulness. Truthfulness is inculcated into people from infancy. The consequences of not speaking the truth can be disastrous and at times could lead to death. As such, there are different ways to exact the truth from persons suspected not to be truthful. One form is the ordeal. But in most cases persons are made to swear to prove their truthfulness. Swearing or *nutata* can have its own disastrous consequences. Some of the things or objects that people swear by include God, the deities, ancestors and stools. The belief is that if you swear falsely, you will be held responsible for the consequences even if it is death. Truthfulness is mostly cherished and as such lying is detested. If a person is known to be truthful person and is later accused of lying, it is very common for the family and society to jump to his or her defence. On the other hand, a

known or notorious liar is never taken seriously even if all evidence, for once, points to the fact that he is true. Despite the lack of trust in untruthful persons, the society usually deals with them patiently. There are proverbs to explain the resilience of truth. One is “the truth does not hide”. The belief is that one can suppress the truth only for a period of time. The truth without any human interventions will surely come out. The truth is not imposed on people but the community is equally aware that untruthfulness can destroy life. If the untruthfulness of a person, especially bearing false witness, leads to the death of another person, the witness would be held responsible even after his or her death. The false witness could not go to the ancestral home and would request for his body to be cremated.

All discussants made reference to *bubu* or respect as a key ethical value of the Mafi people. There must always be respect for the ancestors, chiefs, elders, parents, dead persons, other persons and for oneself. Apart from persons, the individual or community must have respect for sacred places and objects, authority, custom and tradition, and the rules or moral codes of the society. In the past, persons who show gross disrespect were considered incorrigible and should be eliminated from society. There are some of the forms of disrespect that attract fines and ritual atonement. To assault, either verbally or physically, your parents, elders, the chief or religious figures are forms of disrespect. An assault on any of these persons is considered an assault on the ancestors. Parents could disown their children for assault. If the differences between parents and children are not solved, the children at death will not have the support of the parents to be buried in the family cemetery. This development can obstruct the transition of deceased children into the ancestral home. Another form of disrespect is the use of offensive language.

Using disabilities as insults is unacceptable and regarded insult and disrespect to the disabled. The most offensive language in Mafi thought are those making reference to genitals especially of women. It is considered not only disrespect to the individual woman but a disgrace to the dignity of womanhood in general. These offenders are instantly hauled to the court of the queenmother for him or her to perform purificatory rite for the victim. This disrespect also carries a heavy fine.

There are other ethical values considered very important and are seen as reinforcing the first three of good neighbourliness, truthfulness and respect. These are obedience, being responsible and industriousness. Discussants explained that obedient persons, that is, persons who obey their parents and elders could not be disrespectful. The advice parents give is to mould good character in the individual. The proverb, “the ear of the disobedient child is hooked by thorny vine” is used to warn children of the disastrous consequences of disobedience. According to discussants, disobedience is the first indicator that an individual will grow to be irresponsible person in the

society. Also, for a good life, *agbenyuie*, there should be a mutual respect between married couples and their families, ensuring peaceful and harmonious co-existence. The manner in which the married couples for instance manage their family can determine the respect the larger community will accord them and again measure their sense of responsibility. To be responsible also means the couple should be industrious. They should never be seen as lazy people.

Added to these is the fact that the individual in the Mafi community must be seen as sociable person. The belief is that a person who has these values inculcated in him or her will enjoy the blessings of the ancestors. He or she may be protected by the ancestors and likely to overcome machinations of evildoers.

The important ethical values of the Mafi people are a reflection of their cosmological views on life. Human beings are believed to be participating in cosmic patterns and to keep the position in balance there should be a balanced relationship between humans and other cosmic forces. As part of keeping the balance, humans are to follow their established custom and tradition believed to have originated from the ancestors. The efforts of the individual or the community to live a good life are geared towards fruitful living in the mundane world and transfer this status to the world of spirits. The moral codes and praxis stress this goal and to achieve this goal, one must avoid evil in all his or her endeavours. These are reflected in the ceremonies and rituals relating to *rites de passage* and interpersonal relationship as well as between the community and the spirit beings. Good interpersonal relationship buttresses cherished values of the Mafi people and as such there are taboos against evil acts that can negatively affect this relationship. The most popular of these taboos and rituals for their infractions relate to violation of mutual law of respect and animosity.

***Gudodoame*: A Violation of Mutual Law of Respect**

It is understood in Mafi thought that a responsible person is normally a respectful person. Respect is only an aspect of showing responsibility. In the family and society in general, thoughts, utterances and actions of citizens must be kept within the bounds of courtesy and mutual respect for the personality and dignity of each other. The acknowledged respect for one another governs the behaviour of members of the family and the entire society. Behaviour which is normally not accepted in the family unit cannot also be accepted in the larger society. For cohesion in both the family and larger society, responsibility is placed on each member of the society to respect the personality and dignity of others. The sanctions for any infractions on respect for the dignity of a person tend to be religious. They can be remedied if detected early or it could result in an untimely death.

Some of the expression of mutual respect of others relate to the use of food. Food is basic to sustenance of life and its denial is considered a threat to

life. As such, a child or ward, even generally persons who depend on you, cannot be punished with denial of food. For instance, a child can be given any corporal punishment but cannot be starved for any offence. It is also a taboo for the husband to refuse to eat food cooked by the wife out of anger. If the man refuses to eat the food out of anger but later eat food from the same woman, he is likely to be inflicted with a spiritual sickness or the sickness could be transferred to innocent children in the house. To avert the wrath of the spirits, the woman or other concerned persons must refer the problem to elders of the family for peaceful settlement. In the tradition of the Mafi people, it is also a taboo to hit a person with foodstuff or any cooking material. It is believed that the body is desecrated when foodstuff is used as a weapon in attacking it. When this happens, a purificatory rite must be performed to cleanse the body of the victim. Sources of food or foodstuff are also of much concern in Mafi ethics. There are some vegetables that naturally grow on refuse dumps or *adukpodzi*. For mutual respect for human dignity, it is a taboo to pick vegetables or foodstuff from refuse dumps for cooking. These regulations are meant to safeguard the wholesomeness and access to food as a necessary requirement for sustaining life. It is in this sense that violations of mutual respect on rules relating to food are considered *busu* – an abomination or evil thing.

It is also a disrespect of the personality of other persons by touching their bodies with human excreta or urine. It is believed that this desecration can cause disharmony between the spirit components of the physical body leading to malfunction or leaving the person prone to attacks from inimical forces. There should be quick solution to the problem through appropriate body cleansing. Another mark of irresponsibility and disrespect to the dignity of others is the use of obscene and offensive language on them. The punishment is most expensive. Other offensive expressions include verbal assaults on persons with disabilities especially with reference to their peculiar infirmities.

The upholding of rules of mutual respect is an important responsibility and the break of any of these rules or laws means the person has “committed *gu*” (*do gu*). The offence of committing *gu* against a person (*gudodoame*) distorts or disharmonizes the relationship among members of the family and community which leads to sicknesses. *Gudor* is a disease of puffiness or bloated condition that affects children and adults who are polluted with *gu*. The required solution is *gudede* or “removal of *gu*” through prescribed rituals. *Gudede* therefore restores normal relationship among family members and the larger society. In brief, the main human conducts that constitute *gu* against others are following: to have sex in the bush or bared ground and unaccepted places; insulting the private part of a woman or insulting or accusing her of smelling; to touch a person with excreta or urine; to hit a person with cooking

utensil or a broom; to spit on a person; to kick a person, and to attack a person defecating. The ‘removal of *gu*’ or *gudede* can be performed by different ritual specialists but mostly done by the priest and priestess. The sanctions for *gudodoame* tend to be severe. Normally, *gudodo* that relates to sexual misconduct attract more severe punishment than the other forms.

***Enulele*: A Disease of Animosity**

One of the visible signs of disharmony and breach of mutual respect within the family is the *enulele* which literally means “catching *enu*”. It is believed to be a spiritual disease. Kathryn Guerts described *enu* as “a sickness caused by animosity” (2002: 282). In Mafi cosmological belief, exchanges of vitriolic expressions among adult members of the family impact negatively on children in the form of *enulele*. Insults and particularly pronouncements of curses on others pollute the atmosphere especially the air around the opposing parties and cause protective spirits to withdraw, thereby leaving the vulnerable such as children and pregnant women open to spiritual attacks. Even suppressed ill-will by adults, though unspoken, charges the family environs and atmosphere and consequently penetrating the skins of infants leading to their catching *enu*. *Enu* can manifest in different forms of diseases and it is believed to be resistant to medical treatment. Experienced elders can detect the infection of *enu* but apart from them, diviners are the main source for the revelation of the disease. If cure or remedies are not sought for especially in the performance of rituals and restoration of social harmony, victims of *enu* can easily die. Then in this case, the parties involved in the animosity could be liable to the death resulting from *enu*. They will be regarded evildoers. To avoid this labelling as evildoer which can affect one’s status in the afterlife, it behoves every member of the Mafi society to be responsible and respectful in his or her interaction with family members and others in the community. After any rituals relating to *enu*, there is still the need for reconciliation among the estranged factions. As much as rituals are instituted and performed to remedy the effects of evil acts, especially those impinging on interpersonal relationships, punishments are never ruled out as means of enforcing morality and redirecting people towards their soteriological goals among the Tongu Mafi people.

***Nugbidodo*: Reconciling Estranged Parties**

The justice system as expressed in the enforcement of the moral laws of the people is primarily aimed at restoring estranged relationships among the citizens. Punitive actions are normally taken against offenders as reformatory and deterrent measures but not to the extent that they would be hindrance to restoring normal relationships. After settling disputes and offending parties punished, all attempts are made to reconcile the estranged parties. This reconciliation ritual is *nugbidodo*.

The *nugbi* rituals in Mafi can be described as simple. The estranged parties meet the elders or whosoever will officiate the ceremony on the appointed day. There is no particular or special day set aside for the performance of *nugbidodo*. The ritual starts with a libation in which the celebrant informs the ancestors of the purpose of the gathering and requests their presence and blessing for the occasion. The parties are then reminded of the disastrous consequences of insincere participation in the ritual. The parties are made to drink from the same tumbler or calabash depending on which of them would be used. The ritual may look simple but the citizens know, perhaps by experience, that it cannot be taken for granted. The moral and soteriological significance of the ritual is known to the participants. As noted by Komi Hiagbe, “the *nugbi* ritual serves the all-important purpose of ensuring the aversion of any kind of evil that can result from the evil of enmity between the feuding parties. It also ensures that all that is inimical to the total well-being of individuals and the entire community are assuaged and peace and prosperity prevails” (Hiagbe 2008: 137). It is in this sense that *nugbidodo* is conduit for the removal of evil in society and the realization of *dagbe*, total well-being and abundant life, and in effect, the realization of salvation in the mundane that will lead to the hereafter.

Conclusion

The notion of salvation is not preserved only in the hereafter but that it can also be experienced in the mundane. The ultimate soteriological goal is however the attempt and individual’s aspiration to become an ancestor, or at least, join the ancestors in the afterlife. The focus of soteriological ambitions relates much to becoming or joining the ancestors than reconciling with God. This focus orients the Mafi people towards the performance of rituals that ensure good relationship between the living and the ancestors and on the occasion of death a successful transit from the land of the living to the ancestral home. The collective responsibility of the living and their ancestors for the provision and attainment of salvation is expressed in the philosophical understanding of the various rituals for warding off and overcoming the effects of evil. The construction of morality in Mafi is not without reference to evil and as such the reality of evil has been a determinant of achieving abundant life, a conceptual notion of salvation, in Mafi thought.

Because life is considered the highest value, the main moral laws of the Tongu Mafi people are directed towards the protection of life. The worst threats to life come from evil forces; they can make it unfulfilling. The practice of evil is considered counterproductive to the cherished ethical values of the people. When the ethical ideals of the society are put into practice by the individual, his or her tendency to do evil would be minimal. But the threat posed by evil forces especially from the spirit realm and supported by

malevolent agents in the human society can render the victims helpless. As such the living must relate well to the positive or good spirits in order to court their protection against evil forces and blessing for abundant life. In Mafi moral decision-making, there is much more consideration for good and evil than right and wrong. As such, thoughts, utterances, actions and general behaviour of the individual and community in general must be devoid of what constitute threats to life. In marriage and family life, any behaviour that could bring about disharmony in relationship, and more importantly, threaten the life of the individual and others could be considered evil and appropriate rituals must be performed to avert any disastrous consequences. It is in this context that the violation of mutual law of respect in relationship, disrespect for human personality, and ill-feeling towards others even if suppressed, are considered evil.

As part of the socialization process and mode of inculcating morality the youth are warned of evil acts that can lead to cremation. The youth, even if not aware, are therefore reminded to be motivated by the ultimate soteriological goal of becoming an ancestor and live a good life. This soteriological consciousness conceptually and logically affects individual and communal praxis in Mafi society. A cultural analysis of rituals in Mafi usually shows some moral undertones for their performance. The moral order conceptually underpinning rituals and other practices in Mafi have soteriological focus and particularly directed towards the hereafter. The experience of the Tongu Mafi people reflects the claim of Christian Smith on cultural analysis that “[t]he relational ties that hold human lives together, the conversations that occupy people’s mental lives, the routines and intentions that shape their actions, the institutions within which they live and work, the emotions they feel everyday—all of these and more are drenched in, patterned by, glued together with moral premises, convictions, and obligations” (2003: 8). In Mafi, the obligation is to ensure good life in both individual and communal praxis by performing the necessary rites to avert, overcome and remedy the presence and effects of evil in society.

The soteriological beliefs, coupled with the individual’s efforts to attain salvation in both the physical and spiritual worlds, orient both the personal and the communal outlook of Tongu Mafi people’s ethical values and moral praxis. The interconnections between Mafi people’s cosmogony and moral praxis are evident in rituals and practices relating to their *rites de passage*. These rituals and other ceremonies in-between the stages of life are conceptually underpinned with the belief of the rituals to ward off or overcome evil and its effects on society. At the same time, a successful control over forces of evil would translate into morally good life in Mafi thought and it is the latter that provides salvation.

The attainment of salvation, whether in the mundane or the hereafter, is linked with individual and communal efforts in avoiding evil. The rituals relating to marriage, procreation and marriage life, on the one hand, reveal different modes and attempts by which the Tongu Mafi people hedged in ethical values they cherish; and on the other, the rituals and other practices underscore how soteriological ambitions can conceptually affect individual and communal moral praxis. In the same way, moral praxis affects the realisation of the soteriological goals of Mafi people because of its interconnectedness with the tenets of morality.

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