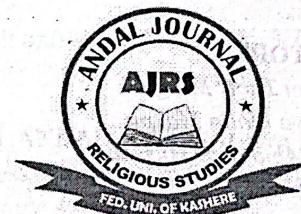


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Àbíkú in Yorùbá Mythology: A Discourse from an Islamic Viewpoint

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Abstract

Àbíkú (born to die) is a Yorùbá phenomenon that categorises some children as possessed. Yorùbá believe that such children are parts of a spiritual cult that belongs to the realm of malevolent spirits (*Jinn*). The objectives of Àbíkú child is to enter into the womb of a pregnant woman; be born as a child; and die at a time agreed in the Àbíkú coven. The process would then be repeated through multiple rebirths or reincarnation. This study thus aimed at examining the concept of Àbíkú from cultural and Islamic viewpoints with a view to making recommendations that would help improve the perceptions of Yorùbá Muslims to the phenomenon.

The paper adopted a descriptive research type with interview as the major research tool. Carefully and purposively selected five (5) Yorùbá traditional believers and six (6) Yorùbá Islamic scholars were interviewed using reparatory grid technique.

The study revealed that inadequate medical awareness; poor understanding of the teachings of Islam on *Tawakkul* (absolute reliance on Allah) and superstitious beliefs are some of the factors responsible for the perceptions of Yorùbá Muslims to Àbíkú.

The paper concluded that the existence of Àbíkú spirit is undeniable. However, it would be wrong to ascribe every child or infant mortality to Àbíkú. Thus, it recommends that Yorùbá Islamic scholars and experts should educate populace further on the importance of medical compatibility of intending couples; teachings of Islam on *Tawhīd* (oneness of ALLAH) and *Tawakkul* and the significance of following the teachings of Prophet Muhammad (SAW).

Keywords: Àbíkú, Yorùbá Muslims, *Jinn*, Rebirth, Reincarnation.

Introduction

Bolle et.al (2023) describes myth as a symbolic narrative that although has no known origin, it is linked with tradition and often associated with religious beliefs. It includes accounts of gods, superhuman and supernatural beings, extraordinary events or circumstances that occurred at unspecified times and understood as something that is beyond ordinary human understanding. Raymond (1980) describes myth as a visionary expansion into awareness of alternative realities. Many nations and peoples around the world have their own myths. The Yorùbá people of Southwest Nigeria have as part of their myths, the belief in benevolent spirits known as *Àbíkú*, a belief that hinges on infant or child mortality.

Infant mortality constitutes one of the biggest challenges of developing countries in the world particularly nations of black Africans. Despite the rise in awareness, education, and religiosity in Nigeria, child or infant mortality continues to pose threat to the belief and education of people especially in Southwest Nigeria where cultural beliefs strongly hold that child mortality could be a result of the *Àbíkú* spirit. Study carried out by Ogunjuyigbe (2004) reveals that child mortality remains disturbingly high in developing countries including Nigeria. Unicef.org (2021) observes that, Nigeria still records one hundred and seventeen (117) deaths in every one thousand (1,000) births. This fell short of two hundred and eighty-one (281) reported by Unicef.org in 1984 (Ogunjuyigbe, 2004) and National population Commission (2004) report of two hundred and one (201).

While studies also reveal that child or infant mortality could be credited to the prevalence of diseases such as measles, diarrhoea, malaria, acute respiratory infections, tetanus, malnutrition, sickle cell, anaemia, pneumonia and above all, ignorance and lack of adequate medical care, the *Àbíkú* thought remains deep-seated in the hearts of many people in the Southwest region of Nigeria (Feyisetan et.al, 1997 and Ilechuwku, 2007).

Àbíkú mythology in Yorùbá Cosmology

Àbíkú mythology is a system of belief that initially sought to explain the frequent loss of children to the cold hands of death prevalent since time immemorial. It is a way of seeking

"plausible explanation for 'mysterious' loss of children in their young ages. The *Àbíkú* thought found its way into the African Yorùbá mind and gained prominence in the Yorùbá traditional thought system. Thus, the first suspect in child mortality among the Yorùbá in Nigeria is the *Àbíkú* spirit. Omoregbé (2012: 4) notes:

Àbíkú mythology depicts an ancient phenomenon prevalent in African culture, which seeks to explain repeated deaths experienced within early period of life of a child or deaths which occur at the pinnacle of success as an adult. In some cases the deaths occur at a point when the child blossoms and about to graduate into adulthood.

Similar to *Àbíkú* are *Emèrè* and/or *Ogbanje* in Yorùbá and Igbo cultural beliefs respectively. Although, there might be differences between *Emèrè/Ogbanje* (malevolent spirits of children) and *Àbíkú*; the majority of Yorùbá people believe that *Emèrè/Ogbanje* spirit is the cause of *Àbíkú*. This belief is expressed in *The Role of Yorùbá Emèrè and Igbo Portal gods in Àbíkú/Ogbanje* by J. O. Awolalu and P. A. Dopamu cited in Osanyibi and Adedeji (2016). Osanyibi and Adedeji (2016) explain that *Àbíkú* is a cycle of wicked spirits that enter the wombs of pregnant women magically so that they are born as humans. Usually, the motive of an *Àbíkú* is to die shortly after birth or at prime. Their main objective is to torment the mother and family. Awolalu and Dopamu (2005: 1) also quoted Idowu (1962) through his popular work *Olódùmarè: God in Yorùbá Belief* where he postulates:

Wandering spirits of children given to the prank of entering into pregnant women and being born only to die for the sheer relish of the mischief. Anyone of them who is being sent on this errand of mischief must covenant with his 'companions' that on a named date he would 'return to his normal life'; that is, he must die from this world. Whenever anyone believed to be of this company is born, the parents take every care to prevent his 'returning'. Very often, it is believed, he will 'return' in spite of every precaution.

He continues:

However, the oracle usually prescribes a sacrifice whereby a substitute may be offered as a satisfaction for a breach of the covenant and that is believed to have the effect of preventing the person from being carried away by his ‘companions’. This sacrifice is found necessary when the person is very ill and is in danger of dying, or if there has been an urgent warning by the oracle. It takes its name thus from the purpose it serves – that of altering the agreement made between the person and his “companions”.

Thus, the children categorised as *Àbíkú* are children believed to belong to some strange but usually malevolent spirits who take up human forms to live among humans with the sole aim of causing grief to their hosts and parents. They enter into the wombs of pregnant women with the purpose of causing their earthly parents to grieve. One prominent attribute of such children as noted earlier is that they often die before puberty or soon after puberty. In exceptional cases where parents have made great efforts to make them stay alive, they live and die only after they have attained maturity. Yorùbá beliefs in spirits and spirituality also hold that mysterious invisible beings roam the human world in hours regarded as odd-hours of the day and night (Jimoh, 2015). Among such mysterious invisible beings are the *Àbíkú* spirits.

Yorùbá traditions consider the children who have the *Àbíkú* spirit as *born-to-die* because they will never outlive their parents. Thus, Yorùbá traditions hold that such children belong to some spiritual sinister cults where they constantly make *àdèhùn* (covenants) with their heavenly mates to go to certain families on earth and return to them (their mates - *Egbé*) at an appointed time (Mateja, 2011; Ebhomienlen, 2015). Yorùbá believe that such children deliberately go through birth and death with the same parents to whom each of them was born in the first instance repeatedly to torment the said parents for the joy of it.

The birth of an *Àbíkú* is not different from the birth of other humans but often they possess specific traits that distinguish them from normal children. Among such traits are frequent cycle of birth and death; mysteriously saying things that often come-to-pass; having special

names and frequent unexplainable sicknesses including regular loss of consciousness (Ilechukwu, 2007 and Balogun, 2013).

An *Àbíkú* child may die soon as he/she is born, few days after birth, few months after birth or few years before puberty, Yorùbá call this *Àbíkú-ewe* (a child that died at infancy). When the *Àbíkú* child dies after puberty at a time when parents are still alive and are beginning to have great hopes of seeing their children outlive them, Yorùbá call it *Àbíkú-àgba* (an adult *Àbíkú* or a child that died after puberty or before the dead of the parents). Yorùbá also hold that *Àbíkú-àgba* are a kind of *Àbíkú* that though were unable to return to their spiritual mates due to the efforts of the parents to see that they do not die young would still die at a time in the future before the death of either of their parents. However, Yorùbá beliefs do not suggest that all adolescent or teenage deaths or deaths before the parents are an effect of the malevolent *Àbíkú* spirit. Thus, Yorùbá do not link all *Àbíkú-àgba* with or to the malevolent cult of *Àbíkú*. Therefore, Yorùbá people often mention the term *Àbíkú-agba* when supplicating against early death (Mateja, 2011).

Olomola (2018) describes children of the malevolent *Àbíkú* cult as “*àwọn ni ọmọ ti nwón māa nwá ti nwón sì māa nló*” (children who repeatedly come to earth through birth and die at infancy). Omorogbe (2012: 4) notes further:

In both the Yorùbá and Ibo customs, *Àbíkú* child is believed to have covenanted with higher spiritual powers in the spiritual realm to come to earth briefly only to torment the parents and return to the spirit world that is really her abode. The *Àbíkú* child selfishly arrogates to herself the power to enjoy two worlds. In the spiritual arena, *Àbíkú* is revered and worshipped as a Queen and the successive trips to earth through birth and return through death elevates her position and regard in the spiritual realm. In some societies *Àbíkú* spirit is represented by certain images and worshipped as a god. As in most African religions, libations and sacrifices are offered to appease or supplicate to the *Àbíkú* spirit. In this case *Àbíkú* becomes an Idol deserving to be worshipped as the herbalist, native/traditional doctors or diviners prescribe.

As noted earlier, Yorùbá believe that *Àbíkú* spirits magically enter the womb of pregnant women to torment them if they walk outside their homes or to places like markets, midst of banana trees, possessed trees, riverbanks, T-junctions, refuse dumping areas and other public places at periods Yorùbá categorised as ungodly or odd hours, such as midday and midnight. Yorùbá believe that such places are abodes of demons and other malevolent spirits. Therefore, Yorùbá elders often advise pregnant women to avoid walking around during the odd hours or around the places designated as abodes of demons and other malevolent spirits (Olomola, 2018).

Àbíkú spirit wander around to look for pregnant women whose foetus would be possessed. Thus, the body of the foetus becomes the carrier with which they assume life as humans. It is also a common belief among Yorùbá people that *Àbíkú* spirits chase out the foetus of the pregnant woman. Hence, as a precaution, several pregnant Yorùbá women often attach safety pins on their garments. This, according to popular sayings helps prevent an attack of/from *Àbíkú* spirits (Owonikoko et.al, 2017).

Although, the belief expressed above does not agree with logic, it is widely believed among Yorùbá people. Nonetheless, Yorùbá tradition does not explain what happens to the children forcefully exiled from the mother's womb by the *Àbíkú* spirit. Thus, such notions are abstract and beyond scientific proofs. Nevertheless, to prevent the attack of the malevolent spirits, Yorùbá elders often advise pregnant women to abstain from movement during the odd periods and avoid the places mentioned earlier as much as possible at all times. Thus, if it is mandatory for pregnant women to walk at those hours or to the places suspected to be abodes of malevolent spirits, Yorùbá elders often advise pregnant women to tie a stone and/or safety pin to the tip of their cloth to prevent any spirit from tormenting them (Ebhomienlen, 2015).

The belief in *Àbíkú* results from the Yorùbá belief in the worlds of the spirits and the ability of spirits to force birth, death, sorrow as well as joy. The belief also rests on the concept of *Egbé*, which literally means 'society, association, or cult'. Yorùbá hold that every human being has heavenly or spiritual mates with whom every individual has been in the spiritual realm before coming into the human world (Mateja, 2011).

Thus, in the context of this research, *Egbé*, implies spiritual or heavenly cult of supernatural beings. Among the *Egbé*, there are hierarchies and some are more powerful than the others. Members of *Àbíkú* cult are *Egbé-Àbíkú*. In the case of *Àbíkú*, the influence of the *Egbé* -*Àbíkú* is enormously great and often reflective of the pattern and turns that the life of every individual *Àbíkú* takes (Mateja, 2011; Ebhomienlen, 2015).

Àbíkú is a malevolent cult whose sole objective is to afflict pains on their hosts among humans (i.e. parents) and often derives joy when their parents grieve. Yorùbá traditions also hold that while members of the *Àbíkú* cult are malevolent, some members of the *Emèrè* cult are actually benevolent especially when they are treated right by their hosts. Although, Yorùbá elders often describe them as kind, protective and exceptionally productive and helpful to their hosts – parents and spouses if they eventually grow old enough to start a family of their own, Mateja (2011) opines that *Emèrè* is part of the *Àbíkú* system.

It is also widely believed that the main targets of the *Àbíkú* spirits are pregnant women and others who have history of diabolical practices in their families or careless individuals. In all cases of *Àbíkú*, there are multiple losses of children due to reasons unknown by the parents or known to medical experts. It may also involve making the parents lose their wealth due to frequent sicknesses that will continue to gulp many expenses in an effort to save the child. Oftentimes, such children will die after the parents have lost everything that they possessed materially. This they do to torment the parents involved. It is therefore not surprising to hear that a child is *Àbíkú* when the same mother loses her infants consecutively. When a case of *Àbíkú* occurs, necessary atonements are prepared to wane them of the mother (Ilechukwu, 2007; Ebhomienlen, 2015).

Cases of *Àbíkú* are always very popular in the past, so much that Yorùbá people often cut parts of the body of children (corpse) suspected of having the *Àbíkú* spirit, mostly a toe or inflict several incisions on the body of the dead child. That way, they ascertain that it was the same child that died initially, that has returned to the family anew. Sometimes, aggrieved parents of the dead *Àbíkú* child burn or break some bones from its body before burying it. Adelowo (1990: 170) notes this phenomenon when he states that:

There are certain actions of the Yorùbá that are usually religiously symbolic. Burning of the born-to-die children symbolises displeasure with that type of children. It is also

a way of dissuading such children from repeating their terrible itinerary.

Therefore, Yorùbá believe that burning the dead child, mutilating or breaking its body parts would force the *Egbé* (cult members) of such a child to reject him/her due to the damage (from mutilation) blotched on its body before or after death which make him/her grossly distinct from her colleagues. Referencing Clark (1966), Omorogbe (2012: 5) quotes from his *Àbikú* where he writes:

No longer then bestrides the threshold

But step in and stay for good.

We know the knife scars

Seriating down your back and front

Like the beak of the swordfish,

And both your ears, notched

As bondsmen to the house,

Are all relics of your first comings,

Then step in, step in and stay

For her body is tired,

Tired, and her milk going sour

Where many mouths gladden the heart.

Documenting the several efforts that African parents make to curb the pangs of pain often caused by *Àbikú*, Omorogbe (2012: 5) affirms:

In attempt to placate the *Àbikú* child from the endless circle of coming and returning to and from the spirit world, the parents resort to magical powers and other rituals to forestall re-occurrence.

He continues:

The magical charms employed in the quest to prevent the return of *Àbikú* to the spirit realm includes charms and bangles, amulets and bells that are tied to the neck or ankles of the *Àbikú* child. The belief is that the persistent ringing of the bell as the *Àbikú* makes any movement would ward off the evil spirits.

Yorùbá also hold that such children may be denied basic rights such as clothing, proper sheltering, and good food even as a baby. People do this because Yorùbá believe that such children often find comfort and joy in the pain of parents who are good and kind to them. Hence, to force them to stay with the parents, Yorùbá culture recommends that children accused of possessing an *Àbikú* spirit be treated with disdain so that they feel hated and find no joy in dying, thus the parents in return find their desired joy and tranquillity (Omorogbe, 2012; Egunjobi, 2020). This oddly relationship between the parents of an *Àbikú* and the *Àbikú* child is one of the ways to prevent the unfortunate cycle of rebirth or reincarnation in Yorùbá culture.

In addition, Yorùbá priests often recommend specific rituals to force an *Àbikú* child out of his/her coven and making the child stay alive. Adelowo (1990) notes that traditional rituals in Yorùbá culture are often led by the *Awóro/Iworo* i.e. the Chief initiate/priest). To foil the agreement made by the *Àbikú* child in the supernatural realm, the *Ifá* (traditional) priest consults *Ifá* (the Oracle) to determine the nature of the child and the appropriate propitiations ('ebo) to make so that the child stays alive.

In the case of *Emèrè*, which many Yorùbá believe are benevolent, priests make a propitiation called *eru-Egbé* (gift of/to the coven) as an appeal with other members of the *Emèrè* cult. The propitiation is presented to the *Emèrè* mates in proxy by placing it on a flowing river, at the foot of banana trees and T-junctions etc. (Adelowo, 1990: 166) satisfactorily notes this when he writes:

This is usually given to foil an agreement among *Emèrè* children given to the prank of entering into pregnant women on being born only to die for sheer relish of mischief.

The propitiation, Yorùbá believe will appease the *Emèrè* cult members. In return, the *Emèrè* cult will allow the child to live peacefully on earth and enjoy wealth, support, and protection of its coven (Mateja, 2011; Ebhomienlen, 2015).

Yorùbá hold that a priest first consults *Ifá* to ascertain the nature of a child suspected of being *Egbé Àbikú*. This is because *Àbikú* and *Emèrè* cults could belong to water spirits, banana trees, *Irókò* trees etc. Thereafter, the priest then proceeds to perform the rituals known as *Ipihùm* (alteration of vow that binds the *Àbikú* child with his/her heavenly cult mates).

It is worthy of note that some *Àbikú* and *Emèrè* children are known to have made pacts or covenants with a male or female partner with whom they are lovers in the spiritual realm before they come into the human world and live for an agreed period of time. Aside having to die at the agreed time, such children are also unable to find a human spouse or give birth to human children because, they are already covenanted (Jimoh, 2015; Ebhomienlen, 2015). It is also worth noting that although, the *Emèrè* spirit is more prominent among females, *Àbikú* child can be a male or female. *Àbikú* is also identifiable by names they bear, incisions made on their faces and skin as well as objects like gourd; chain; *tira* – spiritual knots made with Arabic prayers, cloth or paper and thread (believed to be sacred) hung on their necks (Jimoh, 2015; Ebhomienlen, 2015).

One of the means by which Yorùbá also identify an *Àbikú* is through the special names often given to children suspected of having the *Àbikú* spirit. Names in Yorùbá cosmology are an

integral part of the culture and considered indispensable in matters of faith and life of every individual. Thus, in Yorùbá culture, names carry many values; they introduce the individuals who bear them. Yorùbá often say: “*Ilé làá n wò kí á tó s'omọ l'órúkó* (one pays attention to the family before naming a child); “*Orúkó omọ ni n roqmó*” (a child's name impacts on his/her life) and “*Órúkó omọ ni ijànù omọ*”(a child's name is his/her check) (Akinola, 2014). Akinola (2014: 66) also notes:

...one must consider the tradition and history of a child's relatives when conveyed on a common adage; “*Ilé laawoka to somoloruko* (one pays attention to the family before naming a child). Therefore, the child naming process is a rigorous one whereby peculiar and diverse interests are taken into consideration.

This is important because name is one of the shared characteristics of all things. Name defines the being of the bearer; influences the bearer's life and sometimes determines how others relate with the bearer in the society (Akinola, 2014). Yorùbá believe that names do not only communicate with the bearer but also communicate directly to others who call the bearer by such names. It is a common phenomenon in Yorùbá to attach parents' emotional state or events to names given to their children. In this regard, the *Àbikú* children are not exempted, they are given names that may mean an appeal, a protest, a disgust or victory as the case may be (Ogunwale, 2016).

Children suspected of having *Àbikú* spirit are thus christened names like *Durojaye* (stay to enjoy life); *Bamışaye* (stay and live with me); *Durodola* (stay and enjoy wealth); *Damilare* (save me the mockery of those who mock me); *Rotimi* (stay with me); *Bamitale* (stay with me until the final days of my life); *Jokotade* (stay with the crown), *Ikudayisi* (death, spare this for me); *İgbekoyi* (refuse rejects this one: in reference to the belief that such children should be thrown to the refuse dump to avoid their death or as a way of depriving them proper burial if they die); *Ayelàágbe* (it is in this world that we live); *Ayédun* (life or living

is sweet); *Aja* (Dog), *Àkisà* (Rag); *Àtàn* (Refuse dump) and *Kòsokò* (there is no hoe to be used for burial again) etc (Ogunwale, 2013; Akinola, 2014).

In the Yorùbá belief system, one of the most prominent causes of *Àbikú* is evil eye or witches. A family may be afflicted with loss of children, barrenness or more by persons who wish to punish the parents as a resort of hate, envy, resentment, or offence. The belief in the evil power of malevolent spirits and people who work with demons is also integral to the subject of *Àbikú*. A powerful diabolical person might use evil powers to haunt the parents involved. It might also be means of bewitchment by the witches who link with *Àbikú* spirit to inflict agony on the said parents (Omoyeni et.al, 2015).

Thus, Yorùbá beliefs hold that, not all cases suspected of *Àbikú* are natural. Therefore, in order to determine if truly, a frequent loss of children is due to *Àbikú* cults, Yorùbá often resort to spiritual consultations and rituals. According to Awolalu and Dopamu (2005), other traits or factors that help determine a genuine case of an *Àbikú* cult are:

- i. Repeated death and birth of a child that is believed to have exact same features including the sex of the child and other body features;
- ii. Proof of some unnatural prowess in the child i.e. traits that make him or her very distinct from her mates and others generally. This could be positive or negative;
- iii. Frequent sickness that gulps a lot of money from the family so much that it almost or fully ruins the wealth of the family;
- iv. Hallucination;
- v. Frequent loss of consciousness;
- vi. Some spiritual influences on people who interact with the child, harm him/her or benefit him/her;
- vii. Loss of money without plausible explanation;
- viii. Depression and so on.

It is note-worthy that although the factors mentioned above help to explicitly identify an *Àbikú* among the Yorùbá people, some of them may also be factors caused by the influence of the evil eye and or medical/biological problems.

Omorogbe (2012) argues that illiteracy, lack of information and knowledge are major reasons why Yorùbá people often believed in *Àbikú*. Thus, he opines that beliefs and practices related to *Àbikú* have watered down drastically in recent times due to the influence of modern science and technology. Hence, the popularity of *Àbikú* in urban civilised communities of Yorùbá land continues to reduce as the people are now giving more attention to neonatal and antenatal cares.

Muslim and Christian clerics are also encouraging their members to learn about their biological set-up before choosing a spouse to avoid problems related to rhesus and other medical incompatibilities. In Yorùbá rural communities where information, knowledge and literacy are still very low, people are poised to believe that the only solution to their problems are those proffered by the herbalists, local Pastors or *Alfas* (Muslim cleric).

Àbikú from Islamic Viewpoint

Àbikú represents a belief in the rebirth of children who often died at infancy and in other cases at young ages before parents could begin to relish in the joy of having them. Some suggest that Yorùbá view of *Àbikú* is consequent to lack of education and adequate health facilities but that argument does not answer some of the salient questions around *Àbikú*. Some of those questions are:

- i. Why is a newly born child bearing the marks inflicted on the body of previous child that died?
- ii. How does throwing a dead child into a refuse dump help restore the child to life and health, thus preventing him or her from dying again?
- iii. How does maltreating a child, denying him or her of proper care and a good name help sustain his or her life?
- iv. What is the role of traditional rites often performed to cut the bond between an *Àbikú* child and his or her heavenly or spiritual coven?

Those are some of the perturbing questions that need to be examined in order that one may have a good understanding of *Àbikú* and its relationship with reincarnation. It is worthy of

note that this researcher does not know of any record of Islam that explicitly contains a record of *Àbikú* or a direct verse from the Glorious Qur'ân or narrations from Ḥadîth that specifically mentions *Àbikú* or something similar or close to it. Nevertheless, Islam constantly teaches that life does not exist on earth without trials. The realities of life prove that no human lives on earth until the end without a trial.

While trials may differ in quantity and magnitude, every human being will have to contend with one problem or the other at a particular time in life (Hedayat, 2007 and Akanni, 2016). One of the most dreadful trials of life is the loss of a child. Although, science and technology seek to help find answers to the questions of life and make ease for humans, they do not have answers to all the questions of a human life. Among the questions of life that science and technology cannot fully explain are trials that are usually beyond human capacity or prevention. Akanni (2016: 664) writes:

There is always a gap, of greater or lesser extent, in all societies between the culturally grooved hopes and expectations of men and their fulfilment. Hence, practical scientific techniques, however, highly developed, can never be adequate to meet all human situations. Men, everywhere must adjust to events that they cannot adequately foresee or control. These adjustments may, at times, be practical but they are always emotional. Human beings cannot just take it; means must be found to adjust to both emotional and the practical aspects of the situation... (and these) have been important focal points for religious behaviours in all societies.

Akanni (2016) establishes a link between mental health and grief. He classifies the loss of one's child alongside other sorrow causing events in life as major determinants in the mental status of the aggrieved or bereaved. Since creed resides in the mind, Islam thus prepares humankind for the factors that may cause uncontrollable changes in the minds and consequently, affect the creeds of a believer. Thus, Muslims like every other human

community have always contended with mechanisms of coping with moments of grief and sorrow since they are inevitable parts of life. Confirming the attitude of Muslims to the death of children in the medieval period, Hedayat (2007: 1268), writes:

In medieval Muslim societies, a special genre of literature was developed for consolation for the death of an infant or child. These treatises extolled and elaborated on key Islamic concepts in regard to the death of a child designed to make the pain of a child's death more bearable. Three prominent themes in this genre are the virtue of patience, intercession, and substitution...

Thus, through teachings of the Glorious Qur'ân and Sunnah, Islam seeks to prepare the mind of believers and teaches how to cope with trials and tribulations of life without losing faith in Allah. The Glorious Qur'ân 2: 155 – 156 unequivocally states that Allah tests humankind with afflictions, which may include the loss of children.

Be sure we shall test you with something of fear and hunger, some loss in goods or lives or the fruits (of your toil), but give glad tidings to those who patiently persevere,

Who say, when afflicted with calamity: "To Allah We belong, and to Him is our return".

They are those on whom (Descend) blessings from Allah, and Mercy, and they are the ones that receive guidance.

The Glorious Qur'ân through the verses quoted above also relays the promise of Allah to reward believers who patiently accept His decrees and hold firmly to their belief. Glorious Qur'ân 29: 2 affirms that *Balâ'u* or *Fitnah*—trial or tribulation is one of the ways by which Allah distinguishes the believers from non-believers. Thus, while the unbeliever wails in his or her loss and seeks help with idols and others, a believer accepts the will of Allah and seeks help from Him only.

Patience and reliance on Allah at the time of hardship and trial is thus, one of the most distinctive factors between believers and unbelievers. Believers are also tested and afflicted according to the degree of their faith, trust in Allah and status with Allah. Mus'ab Ibn Sa'd narrated from his father that a man said:

O Messenger of Allah (SAW)! Which of the people is tried most severely?" He said: "The Prophets, then those nearest to them, then those nearest to them. A man is tried according to his religion; if he is firm in his religion, then his trials are more severe, and if he is frail in his religion, then he is tried according to the strength of his religion. The servant shall continue to be tried until he is left walking upon the earth without any sins (Kreidly, 2008: 276).

Thus, while Islam recognises biological problems, famine, diseases, war, crisis, and other factors as causes to the loss of children (Hidayat, 2007), it encourages Muslims to exercise patience while accepting the loss as the decree of Allah. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was tried with frequent loss of children as records affirm that he lost six (6) of his seven (7) children at infancy and young ages but he was patient, resolute and trusted Allah. His (SAW) patience and teachings therefore constitute a model for Muslims until the end of time (As-Sheha, 2006).

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) considered the loss of children as one of the greatest trials that humankind may be afflicted with on earth. Hence, he gave glad tidings that Allah has prepared great rewards for those who are patient and hold firmly to Allah in times of trial and hardship.

It was narrated from Umm Salamah that Abu Salamah told her that he heard the Messenger of Allah (SAW) say: There is no Muslim who is stricken with a calamity and reacts by saying as Allah has commanded: *'Innā lillahi, wa innā ilayhi raji'un. Allahumma indakah-tasabtu musibati, fa'jurniha, wa 'awwidni minha* (Truly, to Allah we belong and truly, to

Him we shall return. O Allah, with You I seek reward for my calamity, so reward me for it and compensate me,' but Allah will reward him for that and compensate him with something better than it." She said: "When Abu Salamah died, I remembered what he had told me from the Messenger of Allah (SAW) and I said: '*Innā lillahi, wa innā ilayhi raji'un. Allahumma indakah-tasabtu musibati, fa'jurniha, wa 'awwidni minha* (Truly, to Allah we belong and truly, to Him we shall return. O Allah, with You I seek reward for my calamity, so reward me for it).' But when I wanted to say *wa 'awwidni minha* (and compensate me with better), I said to myself: 'How can I be compensated with something better than Abu Salamah?' Then I said it, and Allah compensated me with Muhammad (SAW) and rewarded me for my calamity (Al-Khattab, 2007: 445).

Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was also reported to have promised that no Muslim who loses a child, two (2) or three (3) children but exercised patience, perseverance and hold firmly to Allah except that he or she is rewarded him/her with *Jannah* – paradise (Khan: 1997). Kreidly (2008, 94) recorded a similar narration in his translation of *Sunan Tirmidhi*:

Abu Sinan said: "I buried my son Sinan and Abu Talhah Al-Khawlani was sitting on the rim of the grave. When I wanted to leave he took me by my hand and said: 'Shall I inform you of some good news O Abu Sinan!' I said: 'Of course.' He said: 'Ad-Dahhak bin Abdur-Rahman bin Arzab narrated to me, from Abu Musa Al-Ash'ari: "The Messenger of Allah said: 'When a child of the slave (of Allah) died, Allah says to the angels: "Have you taken the fruits of his work." They reply: "Yes." So He says: "What did My slave say?" They reply: "He praised you and mentioned that to You is the return." So Allah says: "Build a house in Paradise for My slave, and name it 'the house of praise.'

Therefore, Islam aims at helping the believer find succour in time of trouble and peace in times of grief. This aims at protecting the believer from transgressing and committing grievous sins due to the grief of his or her loss.

Nevertheless, Islam clearly recognises the existences of *Jinn* (mysterious hidden creatures made from flames, Glorious Qur'ān 55: 15) and encourages the believers to believe in their existence and seek Allah's protection from their evils. *Jinn* are invisible beings, they are powerful and possess the power to shift shape, possess humans, and take human shapes. *Ābikú* is a category of *Jinn*. According to Yorùbá beliefs, *Ābikú* represents one of the powerful creatures of the unseen world (*Ālam al-ghayb*) that are capable of manifesting in human form through birth and probably cohabitating with humans to bring forth their kinds into the human world (Al-Ashqar, 1984).

It is worthy of note that not every case of child mortality can be related to *Jinn* or *Ābikú*. There are several reasons that could lead to infant mortality. However, this study finds that the interviewees considered *Ābikú* as a class of *Jinn*, which is a group of some of the unseen creatures that relish going forth and back into the human world as humans. Perhaps, it is part of the reasons why Prophet Muhammad (SAW) advised Muslims to observe prescribed etiquettes as a way of seeking protection of Allah before engaging in sexual activities. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) through his Sunnah encourages Muslims to pray before sexual intercourse and after, before eating and after, before entering the toilet and when coming out from it, before entering their home etc. Islam therefore admonishes a believer to observe the etiquettes as a way of protecting him/herself and his/her progeny from the attacks of *Jinn*, some of which begin from the point of copulation. Al-Ashqar (1984) and Sa'īd (2007) classified the *Jinn* that reside with humans and take part in the day to day activities of mankind as '*Āmir* (i.e. resident) and that which is in relation to children as *Arwāh* (spirits); the nature of such creatures and whether they are the same or different from *Ābikú* is unknown.

Analysis of findings

Among the *Jinn*, there are believers and unbelievers in the same way that such exist among humans. This is also reminiscent of what Yorùbá believe concerning *Emèrè* and *Ābikú*. Yorùbá hold that the former may be kind and benevolent, live a long life, and die at a time agreed with members of its coven, while the latter is inherently wicked and does not have the will to show kindness or love to the parents because its objective is to make them sad. Peter Fatomilola explained that, while Yorùbá often treat *Emèrè* with kindness and love as a way of making it stay with the parents beyond the time it agreed to return to members of its coven while they treat *Ābikú* with disdain to deny it of the joy it desires from causing the parents to grieve. This belief coincides with the attitude of the wicked and unbelievers among the *Jinn* as described by Islam.

Unarguably, Islam establishes that every human being would die only at the time decreed for them (Glorious Qur'ān 22: 5). Nevertheless, the birth and death of an *Ābikú* is not the same as birth and death of an ordinary human child. While it is admissibly true that the child dies at its time, the *Ābikú* spirit that possessed it lives on until its own appointed time. This is because Islam holds that *Jinn* have the ability to trick humans. They cohabit with humankind and share in the paternity of a human child. Hence, when the bereaved bury their dead child who an *Ābikú* *Jinn* had initially possessed, the *Ābikú/Jinn* only transited to its coven waiting for the next return to earthly life through another human pregnancy. This argument premises on the belief that *Ābikú* are spirits from the unseen world of spirits and *Jinn*.

The Islamic scholars and Yorùbá traditionalists interviewed rendered similar explanation of the nature and impact of *Ābikú*. They explained that for the *Ābikú* to appear in human world, it is necessary for it to assume the body of a human being. *Ābikú* assumes human body by possessing a foetus after it has been given breath of life. The child receives visions of the *Ābikú*, expresses its joy, feels its punishment and sadness. It also explains why the *Ābikú* spirit shares injuries inflicted on the body of the child before and after the death of the child. Similarly, subsequent mutilation of the child is reflective on the *Jinn*/spirit, which

may have been forced to return to earth after being rejected by members of its coven due to the defect afflicted by the parents of the initial dead child.

According to the information rendered by the Yorùbá traditionalists interviewed in this study, the view expressed here also agrees with the Yorùbá thought that such injuries make the *Àbíkú* distinct from other members of its coven and consequent to rejection. It also explains the possible reason why Yorùbá treats *Àbíkú* like a "thing" rather than a child. In view of this, the myth of reincarnation hinged on *Àbíkú* is reflective of the role of *Jinn* in the world of man. Therefore, the death of child suspected of having *Àbíkú* or *Emèrè* indicates the death of a possessed child but not necessarily the death of the possessor i.e. the *Jinn*. It thus can be said that, although, a new baby may bear the mark inflicted on a previous child, it is not the previous child that was reborn. Rather, the *Jinn*/spirit has been rejected in its coven due to the mark inflicted on it. Yorùbá believe that the *Jinn* therefore returns to the human world through the body of the new baby but subdued and unable to cause harm to the child or family.

Peter Fatomilola and Aberefa explained that Yorùbá belief system also holds that no matter the efforts that were made to stop *Àbíkú* from dying, it will eventually die young or at a time that will cause pain to the parents. In the case whereby the *Àbíkú* did not die after propitiations and or other traditional rites have been done, the *Jinn* has either been appeased or subdued for the time being. This may also indicate that the *Jinn* survives (although subdued) in the body of the possessed until the time of death destined for the possessed i.e. the human, which may or may not imply the death of the *Jinn*. This explains why Yorùbá believes that the *Jinn* will eventually return to its world. Therefore, when an *Àbíkú* dies, its *Jinn* i.e. the *Àbíkú* in the body has once again dispossessed it. However, such death indicates the death of the real owner of the body who had been deeply buried in the body prior to its death due to the repressive power of the *Àbíkú Jinn* that possessed it.

Tijani Wahid also explained that although *Jinn* do not have the power to kill, they are instrumental in causing many deaths. Thus, the death of the human whose body a *Jinn* assumed during pregnancy or after birth is the death destined by Allah for such individuals

and thus, marks the end of their lives. Individuals in this category who died at infancy might be regarded as part of the *Ahl al-Fatra* (in this regard, they are people who either were not opportune to receive the message of Islam or died before reaching the age of discernment or lacked will and ability to make their choices). This is because while *Jinn* possesses an individual, the individual loses his/her own will and power of making decisions. This is according to Khan (1997: 253) in a Hadīth reported by Abu Hurayrah, which says:

Allah's Messenger (SAW) said, "Every child is born with a true faith of Islam (i.e. to worship none but Allah Alone) but his parents convert him to Judaism, Christianity or Magianism, as an animal delivers a perfect baby animal. Do you find it mutilated?" Then Abu Hurayrah recited the holy verses: "The pure Allah's Islamic nature (true faith of Islam) (i.e. worshipping none but Allah) with which He has created human beings. No change let there be in the religion of Allah (i.e. joining none in worship with Allah). That is the straight religion (Islam)." [Sahih Al-Bukhari, Book 54, Number 226]

Abdus-Sam'i Hamzah explained that since they died without ever having a will of their own, they lacked the ability to discern what is good or evil due to the bondage of the devil that has rented their body unwillingly. Therefore, their judgement is solely with Allah but for the purpose of argument, they may be classified as *Ahl al-Fatra*. In addition, it is irrational to blame a baby or young child for its own death because a baby or young child does not possess the ability to cause death upon itself or to others. Therefore, Islam regards every child who is yet to reach the age of *Taklif*—maturity or discernment as one that is blameless. Thus, Prophet Muhammad (SAW) commanded that funeral services be performed for dead Muslims including babies and others who may have died before reaching the age of discernment. Ibn Shihāb reports that the Messenger of Allah says:

The funeral prayer should be offered for every child even if he were the son of a prostitute as he was born with a true faith of Islam (i.e. to worship none but Allah Alone). If his

parents are Muslims (particularly the father): even if his mother were a non-Muslim. And if after the delivery, he cries (even once) before his death (i.e. as proof of being born alive) then the funeral prayer must be offered. And if the child does not cry after his delivery (i.e. born dead) then his funeral prayer should not be offered, and he will be considered as a miscarriage (Khan, 1997: 253).

Nevertheless, if the child reaches the age of discernment and freedom from the *Àbikú/Jinn*, then his or her struggle with the demon (*Qarín*) would be the same with that of others. Thus, the Islamic law does not provide a separate ruling in such cases. This implies that at puberty when the ability to make decisions has been reached, every human is liable to the choices and decisions that they make. If an individual loses his or her mind (*Junún*) and the ability to discern right from wrong (*Tajkír*), Islam does not hold him or her liable.

Conclusions

This study concludes that there are invisible beings that have the power to penetrate the human's physical realm through possession and cause trouble, confusion or misguidance for the humankind. Such belief is reflected in the Yorùbá mythology of *Àbikú*. The study confirms that infant mortality could be a trial from Allah. While the study established that the malevolent spirits or *Jinn* could afflict pains on anyone, observing the etiquettes of Islam as taught by Prophet Muhammad (SAW) would help prevent their attacks. Also, medical awareness and a proper understanding of the teachings of Islam on *Tawakkul* (reliance on Allah) and etiquettes from the Sunnah would protect Yorùbá Muslims from falling into *Kufr* (disbelief) due to calamities like a loss of child or children. The study finds that although there are similarities in the Islamic and Yorùbá views of *Àbikú*, the practice of tying pin to the body, propitiations, bad-naming a child, mistreating a child, mutilating a dead child and other practices associated with the notion of *Àbikú* do not conform with Islamic beliefs. Rather, they are acts that are closer to *Kufr* (disbelief). Islam holds that every child would die at the time destined by Allah. Hence, the *Àbikú* spirit can neither determine the time of birth nor the time

of death. From the study, it is also understood that the loss of children must be viewed from the point of faith, rather than beliefs that contradict the understanding of Islam.

Recommendations

1. Yorùbá Islamic scholars should emphasise teachings on *Tawakkul* and acceptance of His decrees especially when calamities such as loss of a child or loved ones occur.
2. Yorùbá Islamic scholars must make concerted efforts to propagate the *Sunnah* (teachings and practices of Prophet Muhammad – SAW and *Tawhíd* (monotheism).
3. It is also very important to promote marriage counselling as a means to further breaking the belief that repeated infant mortality is primarily caused by *Àbikú* spirits.
4. Yorùbá Islamic scholars should teach Yorùbá Muslims about practices that contradict the Islamic concept of *Tawhíd* (monotheism) such as the belief in tying pin to the body, doing propitiations, amulets and so on as a means of preventing malevolent spirits.
5. Yorùbá Islamic scholars should emphasise that every Muslim child should be named according to the principles of Islam and given names that are permissible in Islam.

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Oral Interviews

S/N	NAME	AGE	OCCUPATION	DATE OF INTERVIEW	VENUE OF INTERVIEW
1.	Nurudeen Ojulari Kashimawo, founder and proprietor of Mahdul-Munīr Islamic Institution, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.	60 Plus	Proprietor, Imam, Cleric/Muslim Healer and Preacher.	22/1/2020	Kashimawo Residence, Mabalufon, Ijebu-Ode, Ogun State.
2.	Sharifdeen Mahmud Muhammad Labeeb Adeboye	40 plus	Cleric and Muslim Healer	22/1/2020	Sagamu, Ogun State.
3.	Abdus-Sami'I Hamzah	40 plus	Cleric and Muslim Healer	15/2/2020	Crescent University, Abeokuta, Ogun State.
4.	Sulaiman Akala Ola-Adua	70 plus	BalogunMusulumi of Modakeke, Ḍışun State.	11/6/2020	Ola-Adua House, Oke-Otuba, Modakeke, Ḍışun State.
5.	Tijani Wahid A.K.A Iwosan-irÔrun	50 plus	(Chief Imam of ACADIP, Nigeria), Islamic Healer and Preacher.	13/6/2020	Opposite NNPC Fuel Statipn, Ondo Road, Modakeke, Ḍışun State



6.	Abdul-Fattah Adeyemi	42	Ondo West Local Government (Ondo Town)	28/7/2020	Ondo State
7.	Ifálolu Olabode	60 plus	Yorùbá Traditional Healer/ <i>Oluwo</i> of Ojokodo, Ika and <i>LukosiOnIfá</i> of Egbaland, Abeokuta, Ogun State	3/8/2020	Ita-Ika, Abeoluta, Ogun State.
8.	Fatoye Odofin	50 plus	Traditional Healer and Priest	3/8/2020	Ita-Ika, Abeoluta, Ogun State.
9.	Jelili Fatoye	60 plus	Traditional Healer and Priest	3/8/2020	Ita-Ika, Abeoluta, Ogun State.
10.	Sir Peter Fatomilola	70 plus	Traditional Healer/Priest/Actor/Teacher in the Department of Dramatic Arts, Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife.	10/3/2020	Ife, Osun State.
11.	Chief Áwólola Tunde Aberefa (Dr) (Araba Ògbóni Agbáye)	60 plus	Araba Ogboni Agbáye of Irabiji-land (Traditional Healer and Chief Priest)	14/3/2020	Osun State.

The Woes of Nineveh in Nahum 3:1-7: Its Nexus to Security Challenges in Post-Independent Nigeria

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Abstract

This work discusses the connection between the woes in Nahum 3:1-7 which are synonymous to the security challenges facing the Nigerian nation since after independence. Using the qualitative and descriptive method of research, the researchers discussed the various woes described in Nahum looking at how bloodshed, lying and deception became the order of the day, which became a detestable acts to God. In similar vein, Nigeria is facing same challenges as Boko Haram, unknown gunmen, Fulani militia, kidnappers, bandits and cattle rustlers, are causing mayhem and shedding innocent blood. Unfulfilled promises by politicians especially during campaigns, have contributed to the woes of the nation. This has also caused religious intolerance, breach of peace, and depression/trauma among the people. To stop the shedding of blood in the nation, what is required by government authorities is justice, redefining the security network, patriotic acts by politicians, reduction of social inequality and sincerity of purpose by our leaders becomes necessary. This will go a long way to stop the woes in the nation and avert the possible impending wrath of God.

Key words: Woes, Boko Haram, Unknown gunmen, Independence, insecurity, religious tolerance