

Autochthonous Tarok Orature and Heroic Character Formation: A Neglected Link to Modernism

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1.1 Introduction

The Tarok people are found as a more or less homogenous ethno-national entity largely in Langtang-North, Langtang-South, and Wase Local Government Areas (LGAs) of southern Plateau State of central Nigeria. They are also found in large numbers in the adjoining LGAs of Mikang, Shendam, Kanke and Kanam. A current estimate of their total population in the core homeland and contiguous LGAs based on the 1991 National Population Census Figures is 420,000.

The latest genetic linguistic classification of the Tarok language places this linguo-cultural entity in the Tarokoid sub-group of Plateau in Benue-Congo (Williamson and Blench, 2000). Membership of the Tarokoid now includes only Sur (i.e. Tapshin in Bauchi State, but including Met in Plateau State), Yangkam (i.e. Basharawa), Pe (i.e. Pai), Kadung-Kwang-Vaghat-Bijim cluster (in Plateau and Bauchi states) and Tarok (i.e. Yergam) (Longtau 2008: 4-7) but without Arum, Chessu and Turkwam of Gerhardt's (1989: 359-376) proposal.

Every ethnic nationality has its own unique language and culture that distinguishes and separates it from any other. At the same time, every human society shares certain values that may be similar or almost identical to other ethnic speech communities. The essence of the above two assertions, which seem somewhat ambiguous and contradictory at face value, is to demonstrate that each ethno-

national culture has something special and unique to contribute to human civilization and fulfilment of national aspirations.

In a country like Nigeria where the concept of nationhood is accepted theoretically, most people are, in practice, still bound by parochial and primordial loyalties. Perhaps a good starting point in civic education and the entrenchment of true patriotism is to undertake a study of heroic character formation in a bottom-up approach. In this treatise, a case study of autochthonous Tarok orature exemplifies the nitty-gritty of what a particular society can offer and especially as building blocks for a sturdy national framework for sustainable national re-orientation. An abandonment of this in the quest for modernity will be a missing link, with disastrous national consequences and disjoints.

1.2 Attributes of the hero from antiquity to the present day

The concept of the hero or heroine has been with mankind since the dawn of civilization to the present era. Indeed, Otto Rank has stated in his book, *The Myth of the Birth of the Hero* (2008: 1), that famous world civilizations “all began at an early stage to glorify their national heroes - mythical princes and kings, founders of religions, dynasties, empires, or cities - in a number of poetic tales and legends”. In general, however, the attributes of the hero include his being a patriot whose cause is concern with the welfare of his contemporary society. He is a brave and expert warrior and a deliverer of his people, one who can perform extraordinary feats in battle.

The hero may equally owe his existence and popularity to a communal crisis. He may even fight and die in defence of his clan or ethnic nationality. The valiant protagonist also fights for justice and enjoys the support of his people. They can identify with his socio-economic and political achievements since these values are embodiments of the people’s cherished culture. As a matter of fact, he sets high standards which become ideals for others to emulate.

Being human, the hero is not invincible; hence he sometimes relies on supernatural forces such as the intervention of the gods, the occult, charms, magic and talismans, so that nothing is left to chance that might easily jeopardize his career in heroism. The hero is very often egotistical, and is very much concerned about his fame and honour. He may also be a benevolent father and founder of a new

community, like the humble and self-effacing Gwangtim in Dul Johnson's novel with a Tarok setting, *Deeper Into the Night*.

In Changchit Wuyep's *Jiji Volumes I and II*, also with a Tarok setting, the eponymous hero has an extraordinary upbringing in the jungle world. In this unique world of his early childhood, he was able to access the supernatural and interacted with animals and birds. At critical moments in his heroic exploits later in life, he is able to enlist the support of these forces to personal advantage. That is why, at some points in the narrative, the story acquires the outlook of surreal literature. Furthermore, Jiji relocates his people from a barren, poverty stricken landscape and resettles them on a spacious and prosperous landmass.

In some European and Asian narratives, the hero is perceived as a god or demi-god, because the father may be a god and the mother a human being; hence his capacity to perform extraordinary, supernatural feats. In addition, the hero's salvific fate as the deliverer of his people may have been preordained.

1.3 Avenues for heroic character formation in Tarok cosmology

There are several avenues for heroic character formation among the Tarok ethno-nationality. Some could be in battle, hunting expedition, communal farming, building, crafts, dance and music, among other ethno-art forms. Our focus in this research is on the often neglected informal settings that are critical to laudable personality development, especially through songs, which should however be codified and articulated in the context of formal education. Such applications will become a logical follow-up to Lar's (2005) summary of endangered Tarok orature. Several song types are provided and analysed in the course of this study to bring out the heroic character formation traits¹ according to the social stratification of children, young people, women and male adults. The ensuing data on and discussion of Tarok orature and heroic character formation are therefore organized under the following sub-headings: the world of children; shepherd boys' sub-culture; the tradition of *ikyan*² or 'uncle-ship'; *ntəm-isur*, 'evening discourse'; *nsal*,

¹ A formal and comprehensive treatment of this subject has been lacking in published works on Tarok. Suffice it to mention that 'heroism' as treated here includes intrinsic core values that are unconsciously instilled but can play out as formal feats when interpreted in literature.

² Tarok words are in italics and transcribed according to the orthography found in Longtau (1993, 2008). Tarok terminologies themselves form the basis for description, discussion and analysis.

‘play at night’; the social life of young people at *agəntəng*, ‘sacred playground’, and heroic character formation in legendary personalities.³ At the end of a discussion of the above salient points, a conclusion/application of the research is drawn.⁴

2.0 Heroic character formation in the world of Tarok children

An appropriate starting point in the study of Tarok cosmology with regard to the people’s orature and heroic character formation is the field of children’s experience, as well as the adult world’s demands on, and expectations of them. The goal of parents in the socialization of children is to give them an advantage of a head start in life. This is done through several processes, including practical demonstrations, verbal instructions, and informal teaching.

2.1 The value of timeliness

Children and young people play pivotal roles in the Tarok process of communication. This is inculcated in diverse ways. The sole aim is approving the contribution of children by adults. For example, an adult sends a child on an errand. He then spits on the ground and tells the child to come back before the spittle dries up. This directive motivates the child, who tries by all means to meet up with the tall requirement. The child approaches this order as a game. He picks his *ikan-jwar*, being ‘the ring of a basket called *ajwar*’. With the introduction of the bicycle and the motor-cycle, *ikan-jwar* was later replaced by either the motor-cycle or bicycle wheel, and the child runs the errand effortlessly. Such a child is commended for returning speedily from the errand, without reference to the spittle which must have long dried up. The child may also be rewarded in kind or even with token cash as from the colonial period.

³ The genres of songs constitute the principal theoretical foundation for the research in order to keep on course without diversion into other types of Tarok orature (Lar, 2005: 36-37). The discussion of legendary personalities and miscellaneous heroism does not lie within the context of songs.

⁴ I undertook fresh field work to supplement and update the sparse information in the literature in order to make this a near state-of-the art article. The re-enactment of endangered songs by people who still remember them provided an opportunity of recording such as a major step towards revitalization and further research for documentation.

Some ‘music’ accompanies the rendering of this kind of courier services by children in the Tarok society. These are not transcribed here because they are essentially onomatopoeic words that mimic the sound of the rolling wheel or the vehicle, or representations of the clanging of bells, like: *gəlang...gəlang...* for people to give way. The child may be so engrossed in rolling the wheel and making ‘music’ that he may even forget the message on getting to his destination and return home very sad because of the dread of the punishment that is usually meted out to him for such a gross act of indiscipline.

A natural outcome of this form of heroic character formation usually manifests itself strongly in the subsequent years of formal education and in the vocations of the Tarok child. He is active, agile, athletic, and full of commonsense and discipline; and some are attracted to para-military lifestyles. Thus sending children on errands even while it is raining is regarded as normal and a win-win scenario. The child may actually be the winner because he would have got a free bath, physical exercise and a reward in kind, in addition to his developing a capacity for endurance, whereas getting wet in rain at any other time is not perceived as suffering inconvenience.

Tarok men delight in seemingly unfair treatment of children but are invaluable for inculcating heroic attributes in children. For instance, a man after eating will use the hair on a lad’s head as a hand towel to clean up. This is called *Mbil awo nkpanɡ ũyen ki ishi na a mak*, literally, ‘cleaning hand of porridge for child on head so-that he grows’. The boy is made to believe that the food remnants will make him grow tall. The aim in the worldview of the adult is to teach the child to endure the most degrading form of humiliation without realizing it. When the child is grown up and becomes aware of the ill-treatment he laughs over it and appreciates how to put up with similar challenges in life.

An adult may also collect roasted maize or millet from a child and remove rows of seeds, under the pretext that he will show him/her the way to his/her matrilineal uncles. This is called *nnyam asq̄l nzhi okyan*. The empty rows are symbolic of the ‘way’. The child will be inquisitive to know how the act is related to the literal road. No explanation will be proffered but the child will soon realize that he or she is expected to learn to bear certain types of injustice without complaining. The

desire to know more about the uncles would make the child so happy that the injustice no longer matters much.

In those days when a scanty loin cloth, *mbente*, was the chief covering of the private parts, a male adult would borrow the one belonging to a lad to cross a stream or even swim with it in order not to wet his. This is referred to as *nkwak ndəng kə mbente ovan*, literally, ‘swimming with the loin cloths of children’. The practice shows not wickedness but a lesson to prepare the child to internalize core values in order to be able to put up with hard facts of life later in the adult world.

2.2 Pre-vocational training

There is a multi-thematic children’s game-song which highlights various aspects of pre-vocational training (Longtau 1997: 235-243). Beer-brewing is central to the Tarok traditional society for its social and economic values. The girl-child gets familiar with its processing very early in life. It is the high point of the game-song. Girls mimic their mothers in the grinding, cooking and sieving of the liquor. A typical song that accompanies the action goes like this:⁵

Ki-kok, ki-kok,
Nce mi nce ikaba...
 My brew is of rice.

(The song is repeated over and over.)

The *ki-kok, ki-kok* mimics the act of grinding on the stone mill.

Another song to accompany the sieving process is:⁶

Kuk kuk kuk
Kangshat kuk kuk kuk
 I am sieving with the sieve *kuk kuk kuk*.

(The song is repeated over and over.)

The *kuk kuk kuk* mimics the act of sieving using the cornstalk sieve, *akangshat*.

Ikaba, “rice”, is one of the cereals not used in brewing, but this is permitted in the world of Tarok children. The other common cereals used in the game-song include *imar*- “millet”, *ikur* - “sorghum”, *izangzəng* - “finger millet”, *apil* - “white millet”,

⁵ Childhood reminiscence.

⁶ Childhood reminiscence.

akat - “brown millet”, *iku'yang* - “early maturing sorghum”, and *ikondong* - “maize”. Sorghum is the staple crop of the Tarok people. But children accord equal importance to the other grains on the basis of their own thought processes and worldview.

At the end of a successful brewing exercise by each child without any discrimination in gender, the senior one among them usually comes to sample the quality of each brew. He/She will pronounce a verdict that is linked to a behavioural fault of the child that needs to be corrected. The senior child might say: “Your liquor could have had an excellent taste, but on account of your quarrelsome nature the taste is somehow vitiated in quality”. The common defective personality dispositions to be mentioned for the children will include quarrelsomeness, display of temper tantrums, aggressiveness, moodiness, pilfering, slothfulness, and so on. This commendation/condemnation mode of communication causes no offence to the child because it is cast in the game mode. Instead, it entrenches socially acceptable behaviour while discouraging deviant character traits, and this inspires the child to opt for acts of heroism that can earn him/her societal acclaim (Longtau 1997: 233; Lar 2007: 77).

A bold and obstinate child can even mimic the slow or sluggish way the mother goes about the brewing chore. This will attract a paroxysm of laughter, but a sure reprimand from the senior children. Such a paradox is common in the social life of the Tarok society, due to its underlying republican philosophy (Temlong, 2007: 48-51) that makes heroism widespread. A child is free to assert his or her independence within tolerable limits of the significant others.

After the assessment of the quality of each child’s brew, the next game gets all the children into a happy mood. The small children sit on the ground in a row. The leader sings a series of taunting songs, touching the legs of each child. The leg to be touched by the end of the song is folded. The child whose both legs are folded will walk and squat on the way to her maternal uncle’s house. One of such songs goes like this:⁷

*Car ga ndəng ga wur igwali ka'shi ikpang ga ndəng.
O ya mi ya uya aDashe Morim mi ra ayang jem kat.*

⁷ This song was re-enacted by Mrs. Fibi Longtau, 61 years of age, on 15th July 2014 at Jos.

*Izun kpak te o wur ocar wo ka'səm tu ude yar mi ya?
Təm carcar kə Nwolop təm kang bu lok mi rak nggaa...*

A line-by-line free translation of the above Tarok text is:

A woman went to the river to catch fish with the 'water calabash'.
You can see that I am the child of Dashe Morim, I cannot go hungry.
In the dry season, you carry your wives on your backs, but who will do that for me?
Just sit quietly and wait for me, you beloved woman of Nwolop.

When all the children have successfully had their turn, the senior children will assist the leader to carry the children who had been squatting back to the play ground in much excitement and joy. The leader exhibits rare qualities. Unlike the adult males in the song who were unable to pamper the woman who sung the lamentation, she will joyfully carry each child back to the play ground as a reward and show of appreciation for their imaginary hard work.

2.3 Baby-sitting

The Tarok child learns how to take care of his/her siblings at a very early age. Parents usually go to the farm and leave the younger ones in the care of older children of both genders. The Tarok children imitate their mothers in taking good care of babies, making sure they are properly fed and sleep well. The elderly children sing a lot of lullabies in the process of catering for their siblings. A typical one is rendered as follows:⁸

*Mar yam bu mar ba ye ye
Unang ayen a ga ce ki yəng ya?
Upo ayen a ga ce ki yəng ya?
Unang ayen a ga ce uyen ra nda ki Kongkong.
Upo ayen a ga ce uyen ra nda ki Kongkong.
Ra yam bu ra ba ye ye.*

A line-by-line free translation of the above Tarok text goes thus:

Please do keep quiet.
Where has the mother of the baby gone that he is crying?
Where has the father of the baby gone that he is crying?
Where has the mother gone? Baby, just sleep and forget.

⁸ Childhood reminiscence.

Where has the father gone? Baby, just sleep and forget.
Please continue to sleep.

Through the art of mimicry children begin to appreciate, adopt and perform the responsibilities and roles of adults; and in later years, they grow to assume such roles with ease. The following words, phrases and exclamations are devices the child employs to achieve empathy alongside the soft tune of the song: *Kongkong, yam bu, ye-ye*. In the worldview of the Tarok child, both parents share in the role of child care and not just the mothers. The baby-sitting act is not an exclusive preserve of the girl-child either. The word *Kongkong* is a pun involving a place and an animal name and the verb ‘to forget’. The advice to the baby is to forget about the parents and just go on sleeping.

The structure of the song itself is not only formulaic but also standard: it is a plea in the opening line and goodwill in the closing. No wonder compositions by children and young adults are easily taken over by adults using *orim* ‘living dead’ sanctions (Longtau 1997: 251, Longtau et al. in review). The fact that not every child sees baby-sitting as delightful can heighten its heroic character formation role. In bad scenarios stubborn and playful children can maltreat, scold and spank the babies. They damn the consequences of severe corrections and punishment. Such unfortunate babies only sleep after much sobbing.

The baby-sitter child looks forward to the parents’ return from the farm with great expectation and relief if the sibling was troublesome. The joy of the mother bringing home soup ingredients, firewood and fresh food items usually compensates for the drudgery and any ill-feelings of hard labour that the child has endured in the course of the day.

This baby-sitting role of the older child is preceded by an earlier childhood phase called *Nnəm-ngbam* ‘uninhibited playing’. That is when children spend most of their time playing and parodying adults, especially their mothers. And when these children are ready to carry out actual household chores, they fit into the roles effortlessly. There are many other areas of children’s poetry and creative arts, but these hardly have anything to do with character formation. One example is a taunt in the leg-folding game-song:⁹

⁹ Recollection from childhood.

Ucar ga ndəng.
Ifang ga ramci.
Vang ku Laka.
ULaka Dunggul.
UDunggul Zhezhe.
UZhezhe Butnap.
UButnap Dangdang.
UDangdang Gbacilang.
UGbacilang Mamzuk.
UMamzuk Bəkbəri!

A free translation of the above Tarok text is as follows:

A woman went to fetch water.
 Her finger got bitten (by a snake).
 She married a person of the Laka (clan).
 A Laka man (whose name) is Dunggul.
 Dunggul is (a child) of Zhezhe.
 Zhezhe is (a child) of Butnap.
 Butnap is (a child) of Dangdang.
 Dangdang is (a child) of Gbacilang.
 Gbacilang is (a child) of Mamzuk.
 Mamzuk is (a child) of Bukburi!

The interpretation of this game-song is not very straightforward since the poetic clues are embedded in the social context. This poetic rendition is an insult directed at a family for maltreating a woman, with an allusion to a snake-bite resulting from the probable negligence she suffered. This explains why she had to forsake the earlier wedlock for an alternative marriage into a different family. The taunt is made punchy in the selection of names, whose meanings speak volumes. The long genealogy amounts to ridicule since they are unable to solve a simple problem such as a snake-bite. The resolution of the contradiction comes in a change in the surname to a non-Tarok one: *Gbacilang*, who liberally poured ‘*zuk*’, healing anti-venom called *mmam* ‘enigma’ on the bite. This act of benevolence gave her a good reason to marry him. The medicine man must be powerful, and whoever charges him for marrying another man’s wife does so at his own peril.

The professionalism in a composition like this would be award winning in other climes. The straw that breaks the camel's back is in the ideophone *bəkbəri*, meaning 'after all you have won' and the proud child folds his or her leg in the game. By the time the child has both legs folded after several turns and repetitions of the song, he or she is rewarded by the treat of being carried by the leader in a relocation gesture that is symbolic of the new marriage.

2.4 *Nwa Inyil*, bird scaring

When millet and early sorghum are maturing, children are sent to scare off the birds at about 6-9 a.m. and 3.30 – 6.00 p.m. The children sing a lot to while away time. The songs equally serve the purpose of frightening the birds away from the farms. Two of such songs are transcribed here:¹⁰

a. *Anyil aa? Anyil aa?*

Anyil aa? Anyil aa? Yeye!

Anyil aa? Inyil fa ki imar!

Anyil aa? Anyil aa? Yeye!

Ghei nggei! Ghei nlewa!

Ghei nggei! Ghei nlewa! }

Ghei nggei! Ghei nlewa! } (2x)

Nggei, nlewa.

Ghei nggei! Ghei nlewa! }

Ghei nggei! Ghei nlewa! } (2x)

Nggei, nlewa.

A translation of the above Tarok text is as follows:

You bird? You bird?

You bird? You bird? I-laugh-at-you.

You bird? Bird you-come-out to-eat millet!

You bird? You bird? I-laugh-at-you.

Go-away you-red-bishop! Go-away you-large-bustard!

Go-away you-red-bishop! Go-away you-large-bustard! }

Go-away you-red-bishop! Go-away you-large-bustard! } (2x)

¹⁰ These songs were re-enacted by Messrs Nanchang Gambo (46 years), Nanjul Gambo (40 years) and Nanchang Fanmak (37 years) at Nyapkai village 28th June 2014.

Red-bishop, large-bustard.

Go-away you-red-bishop! Go-away you-large-bustard! }
 Go-away you-red-bishop! Go-away you-large-bustard! } (2x)
 Red-bishop, large-bustard.

b) *Nang nggei mar ka'wang*
Car nggei mar ka'wang
Ha nggei! Ha lewa!

The above text can be translated as follows:

The big red bishop has hatched its young at the waterside.
 The female red bishop has hatched its young at the waterside.
Ha red bishop! *Ha* large bustard!

The ingenuity of the children is not only in the composition of the songs in line with the belief of the Tarok that the red bishop is the leader of other birds which are pests, but also in the design and construction of scarecrows. They use the sistrum or broken calabashes or any metal objects they can strike, to make and create much noise. They also strike stones to create weird sounds to scare off the birds. Indeed, Ogazie has also affirmed the aesthetic and practical role of musical composition in child upbringing and has asserted that “When children are exposed to, trained in and acculturated with music, they have unlimited opportunities to express their ingenuity” (2013: 180).

Mothers normally take *mməng*, ‘gruel’, and leftover food to the children on their way to the farm during the morning duty.

2.5 *Nkam-Igwal*, ‘payment for use of anatomical arms’, at the manual crop harvest

The harvesting of crops like millet and sorghum is done by communal neighbourhood labour. The children are responsible for collecting the harvested heads of guinea-corn or millet to a central pile. They may sing any entertainment songs. They stretch out their arms as containers to collect the harvest. The to-and-fro movement to collect the harvest is very strenuous. But the child is compensated at the end by being allowed to take home the very last collection. The mothers typically encourage their children and wards to take advantage of the special offer.

The men on their part would have noticed the more hardworking children and similarly encourage the young ones to take full advantage of the opportunity as well. The children therefore stretch out their arms to the utmost limit in order to collect ample portions of the harvest. This exercise eases off the fatigue that the children have endured in the course of the day, and their display of greed attracts much commendation and laughter from the adults and the children alike.

Through this rewarding process that ends the harvest, the child is taught the dignity of labour and the heroic feat of straining himself to the limit of his/her endurance in order to take home an abundant harvest for the mother. The praiseworthy climax in this process is that each child is given an equal opportunity to compete; and so justice is seen to have been done when some of the children distinguish themselves and emerge as champions. Indeed, the sheer display of such virtues as patience, a determined willpower and physical strength are moral values of intrinsic worth that can see them through life, once the children can cultivate such affirmative character traits at this early stage of life.

3.0 Heroic character formation in the Tarok shepherd boys' sub-culture

The Tarok shepherd boys' sub-culture (girls included) is for children from ages 10-18. Theirs is an exclusive world that is like a cult and a sub-culture. Its lifestyle is about survival and the will to excel. Zwalchir (2007: 86) succinctly captures it in these words:

A father's primary responsibility is to bring up the male-child in such a way that makes him to become a responsible adult. However, in the Tarok society the male-child is a trainer in his own right. Their exclusive vocation as shepherds affords them the singular opportunity to play several pivotal roles in society.

The lad is so committed to playing out heroic feats that he or she takes so many risks in order to contribute to the wellbeing of his/her immediate family. The young shepherd/shepherdess acquires such virtues on his/her own due to the sheer willpower and determination to outclass one's peers. Some of such traits are illustrated in this section.

3.1 Activities related to livestock herding

3.1.1 Initiation into the *Nggare*, ‘children’s cult’, and its functions

The shepherd boys/girls may be classified into two: *Nggare* members and non-*Nggare* members. That approximately fits a senior versus junior category. This is a social categorization of the children in the fashion of William Golding’s older boys and little boys or “Littluns” and “Biguns” in his famous novel, *Lord of the Flies* (2009: 64). The Tarok shepherd boy has to be initiated by being tied up and placed in the holes of black ants, *irishi*, in order to take a seat at the *Nggare* section of *atak imol* ‘resting place’. The initiate is given a whip made from slender sticks which he holds for that day, and is not to use them on anyone. The discipline associated with the holding of the whip that may not be used on humans is to instil self-control. The temptation to use the whip is quite high, but the thought of re-initiation with its harrowing experience is an effective deterrent. The Tarok people do not mete out corporal punishment indiscriminately. Unlike the adult initiation ritual, however, the whip is collected back from the initiate so that adults at home will not know what has happened. The next morning after the initiation, the initiate brings the capping of his evening meal, *ishi-nkpang*, to the ‘elders’ in appreciation of the honour done him.

Members of *Nggare* are the senior children who exercise authority over the junior ones. They administer all the affairs in the bush that are connected with the welfare of the livestock and discipline. They sit at *imol* usually separated from the juniors. They try serious cases. They eat the choicest fruits collected as the children go about herding. They remind the juniors by singing:¹¹

O ya ntetelu te, o ri nnyiwo ri.
O ya mbənggang te, o ba ūponzhi

When you see the tiny (fruits), you may eat.
 When you see the big (fruits), you must bring them to the king.

The young ones know too well that the song refers also to rodents, edible roots and so on. As a matter of fact, the elderly shepherd boys usually keep their loin clothes

¹¹ Childhood reminiscence.

dry and only use those of the younger boys in swimming in order not to expose their own nudity. Afterwards, the young ones receive and put on the wet loin clothes while the elders wear theirs, which were kept dry on tree trunks or nearby bushes. The seniors make incantations and pour libations and offer portions of roasted rats, lizards, millet, ground nuts, *mmak* 'flour paste', and other such edible items to the ancestors before consumption. They supervise wrestling, racing and hockey competitions. They also prompt the juniors to challenge rival shepherds from other villages to duels and fights. The challenge might be thrown at Fulani herders too.

The diversity of the activities of Tarok lads affords them the opportunity to develop various character traits. For example, the young shepherd leaves home in the morning with a small calabash containing a flour paste, *mmak*, as a lunch box. The paste ferments and is full of yeast. The crust that forms at the top, called *ishi-mmak*, is a delicacy that senior boys take from the junior ones. Some of the porridge is used for preparing a delicacy from the broth of cooked rodents and even mutton and meat of kids which the lads provide for themselves under the pretext that the lambs and kids died of natural causes. When they are thirsty and the watering point is far off, they use the ends of their sharpened sticks to dig the roots of a herb called *mbini* to eat because it is succulent and can effectively slake one's thirst. Such a diet keeps the children very healthy. They make curd out of goat milk. The herd-boys develop a high masculine prowess and endurance capacity through indulging in sporting activities such as *mma-nggwak* 'wrestling', *mbarbar* 'racing' and *ikalo* 'hockey'. It was common practice amongst the lads for a snake-bitten finger to be cut off using *nfonka*, 'axe', to stop the poison from spreading into the blood stream. As the children dig holes in search of rats, *ipi*, snakes could easily be encountered. The children also have remedies of *ndau*, 'arum lilies', at the *Nggare* section of *imol* for the dressing of fractures for both children and livestock and for all manner of wounds resulting from instigated fights with sticks and injuries sustained during sporting activities. Through these close and intimate interactions with the environment and outdoor nature, the young shepherds learn the art of solo survival, a keen awareness of medicinal herbs, different edible roots and fruits that are not known to urban youth.

3.1.2 Formal taunts

3.1.2.1 *Nca Mbək*

There is a taunt called *nca mbək*, which literally means ‘constructing a woman’s bedroom’. This is drawing a circle around somebody standing as a declaration that the person is one’s “wife”, and the person’s continued standing in the circle is the ocular proof and symbolic acceptance of the husband’s bedroom which he has built for “her”. In practice, however, nobody who is man enough would accept such a degrading and humiliating status of being declared a ‘woman’ by one’s fellow male and contemporary. The logical action to take at that point is to engage the fellow in a wrestling contest and to topple him in the match, thereby reversing the man’s false claim and asserting one’s masculinity.

3.1.2.2 *Ñyep Akpar*

There is another taunt alluded to in this saying: “*A təm ñyep akpar ocar k̄a n̄zhi*”, literally, ‘he is just sipping the menstrual flow of women at home’. A normal traditional Tarok young man is expected to be engaged in one form of outdoor work or another, whether in the dry or wet season. To be found indoors at a time one’s contemporaries are outside on assignments or hunting expeditions is proof that one is a mere sissy, an effeminate. In order to embarrass the young man to desist from such untoward behaviour, the above mentioned disgusting and foul imagery is deployed to discourage him from staying indoors. Hence he is usually told in the presence of his peers that he stays at home because he delights in licking women’s menstrual flow. This truism is reflected in Dul Johnson’s novel, *Deeper into the Night*. In the given fictional work, one of the characters, Chirmam, a boy, is noted to be too close to his mother, something considered a taboo. To discourage him, his contemporaries say that Chirmam is “Hanging around women in order to lick menstrual blood” (2014: 11). There is no gainsaying the obvious role of such a trigger in character formation.

3.1.2.3 Obscene songs

The shepherd boys are full of obscene songs performed outside the public domain. Such songs are taunts that invite fights within and outside the herding party. Tarok

people perceive this as a natural avenue for the development of martial talents. A song in mixed Ywom and Tarok languages has that function:¹²

Leading: *kābāl kābāl kātuta ye*

Refrain: *igap onang wó*

Leading: *a rām wó rām ti i gwang ki'mol ye*

Refrain: *igap onang wó*

(Repeated to the level of provocation, the other group of shepherds is bound to accept the challenge by singing back the same song or they have to run away, if they see that they cannot withstand the challengers.)

A translation of the above text is as follows:

(The meaning of line in the Ywom language is unknown.)

Your mother's clitoris (is big).

If you are angry let's meet at *imol*.

Your mother's clitoris (is big).

On sighting Fulbe herders the lads sing:

Ponzhi Bwarat nak íbál ká ce?

Ponzhi Bwarat ce ita boli. (2x)

Ponzhi Bwarat nám Ponzhi Gwoi. (2x)

Where has the Chief of Bwarat kept his goats? (This is an allusion to the need of being wary of enemies.)

The Chief of Bwarat had intercourse with a lizard. (This is allusion to the need for acquiring supernatural powers.) (2x)

The Chief of Bwarat had beaten Chief of Wase. (2x)

This taunt is a boast about the tribal chief who has the power to ward off any threat foreigners may portend. It is also a plea to the chief not to abandon his subjects.

On sighting Fulbe women hawking milk the children usually taunt them by saying:

Car Bororo ká nnap ngga nranggang oza va ta dák. }

Nang Bororo ká nnap ngga nranggang oza va ta dák. } (2x)

Car Bororo gyattang gyat.

Nang Bororo gyatdong gyat.

¹² This song and the next 4 were re-enacted by Messrs Nanchang Gambo (46 years), Nanjul Gambo (35 years) and Nanchang Fanmak (40 years) at Nyapkai on 28th June 2014.

A married Fulani woman has died but my displeasure is their wandering about (implying not receiving a befitting burial).

An elderly Fulani woman has died but my displeasure is their wandering about (implying not receiving a befitting burial). (2x)

A married Fulani woman will be going about *gyattəng gyat* instead.

An elderly Fulani woman will be going about *gyatdōng gyat* instead.

This taunt seems to sympathize with Fulani women for the drudgery they pass through every day, but it is actually a biting commentary on a culture they know little about. However, the perception of the children that portrays hostility between the two peoples is far from being pathological. Consider this song Tarok children sing with excitement on seeing Bororo Fulani:

Ina ina ina ye

Ina aShindang ye

Ina ina ina ye

Ina oKiri ye

Ina ina ina ye

Ina oBororo ye

Cattle, cattle, cattle so many
Cattle belong to Shindang so many

Cattle, cattle, cattle so many
Cattle belong to Red-cows-Fulani so many

Cattle, cattle, cattle so many
Cattle belong to Borori so many

3.1.3 *Nker-Nwei* ‘appointment as police’

Tarok lads have a policing system by appointment. On each day the most obstinate junior one is appointed to make sure that the livestock do not stray and destroy crops. The senior making the appointment on behalf of the *Nggare* prepares a leafy whip and raises it up and sings the lines transcribed below 5-6 times. The appointee accordingly sings the refrain. This is how the song goes:

Nwuwei akətəkau k̄ ce? (5-6x)

Refrain: *A ken api itulum* (5-6x)

Alum bu k̄ ce ya?

Reply: *Alum mi na t̄* (pointing up).

Where is the *Nwuwei* of the Sudan bustard? (5-6x)

It climbed up the tamarind tree (5-6x)

Where is your sun?

Here is my sun up.

As these words are pronounced the boy is given the whip. The whip is now called the *nwuwei* and is given to the appointee as a reward. He dares not drop it until the *Nggare* collects it back in the evening at the time of dispersal. However, a bully is appointed to be giving commands to the appointee about keeping the entire flock in check. He runs after the boy beating him. In this way the child is taught to respect constituted authority and at the same time is punished for his bad character trait. He must show appreciation for this double-edged appointment by forfeiting his *ishi-nkpang* ‘top portion of porridge’ or *mmak* or both to the seniors on the day following the appointment. The child is beaten if he fails to produce *ishi-nkpang* but he has to lie to the parents when asked how one’s body seems to have sustained injury.

3.2 Activities not related to livestock herding

The term *ovan gi ibəl* has been used above to specifically refer to shepherds. However, it is a collective term used for lads within the age bracket of 10 – 18. In this section the focus is on activities all lads partake in whether their parents have livestock or not.

3.2.1 Odd jobs

An affirmative character trait exhibited by growing young men early in life is demonstrated by their commitment to family welfare even when they are not under any obligation to assume such a responsibility.

3.2.2 Farming

A classic example is for a lad to leave the family compound very early before members of the compound wake up from sleep. By about 9.30am to 10.00am he

resurfaces at the family compound. When asked where he went, he will say that since he would be tending the family flock while the family was farming, he decided to do his own part of the farm work before taking the animals to the grazing fields. This show of initiative and commitment to the good of the family is proof of good leadership attributes, which distinguishes and exalts the young man above his contemporaries. Such demonstration of devotion naturally wins the father's approval, and it is such a youth he draws very close to himself, sharing his deep thoughts and concerns with him. This is because the adolescent has proved he is trustworthy. That is why Tarok people say "the chick that would grow to become a cockerel can be identified among the other chicks".

3.2.3 *Nwa iSam*, 'monkey scaring'

Tarok young people take great pleasure in attempting tasks above their abilities. One of them is scaring off patas monkeys from maturing maize and sorghum. The lads do this without being solicited by adults to undertake the task, since baboons and monkeys can show up suddenly. A parent does not permit a lad to attempt such a risky task. A simple scarecrow can be set up. However, *ovan gi ibəl*, 'shepherd boys', have perfected an ingenious way of dealing with such pests. The children observe the routes the monkeys follow to destroy maize cobs and even the sweet stalks. They leave home very early in the morning around 5.30 a.m. to spray ground hot pepper on the wet grass on the routes. By 6.00 – 6.30 a.m. the monkeys come, and contact with the red hot pepper causes much irritation to the eyes of the monkeys. With closed eyes the monkeys try to escape but the boys usually succeed in killing most of them.

3.2.4 Tradition of *iKyan* - 'uncleship' labour

One's sister's male child (*kyan*) may be raised in the uncle's home. Sometimes it appears that such lads are more used in menial jobs and assignments but ultimately they turn out to be the best trained and sometimes most socially approved, admired and often well rewarded later in life. Tarok people have the belief that anything given to one in trust should be safeguarded more than one's very own possessions, hence the rigorous training of *ukyan*.

3.2.5 *Ntat iJi*, ‘archery’

In the dry season *ovan gi ibəl* spend a lot of time competing in the art of archery using their weapons (usually arrows). They improvise the adult bow and arrow to practise and perfect the skill of marksmanship. This becomes very handy in adult life and is applied in defence of the community.

3.2.6 *Ntat iGyat*, ‘snail shell game’

In the dry season *ovan gi ibəl* spend a lot of time competing with spent snail shells fashioned for a spinning game. A sharp and strong thorn may be attached with wax to the bottom of the shell. Winners have the privilege of striking the losers at the back side of the hand. The hand may even bleed but because of the lesson of endurance that has to be learnt, children still play such a gruesome game.

3.2.7 *Nggbap aFi*, ‘Bambara groundnuts game’

In the dry season *ovan gi ibəl* equally spend a lot of time competing in the Bambara groundnuts game. They learn how to prophesy good things about themselves in a competitive but healthy manner. Each child chooses the colour of *afi* – the Bambara groundnuts - in the competition and sings the praise of that token to attract favour in order to make his own chosen colour of the nut the winner.

3.2.8 Fishing and swimming

In the rainy season *ovan gi ibəl* spend a good deal of time fishing and competing in the art of swimming. This prepares them for the adult hunting expeditions that may take 2-4 weeks.

3.2.9 *Nsal*, ‘night plays’

Children have much fun during the full moon at the community play ground. It is an opportunity for all the children to socialize and get a lot of physical and psychological exercises. Boys engage in wrestling and one-legged racing competitions. The boys and girls participate in various sing-songs. In the process they learn good character traits for adult life.

4.0 Structured social interaction between adults and children

In this section, inculcation of heroic character traits is more structured because adults deliberately set out to teach the children.

4.1 *NTəm iSur*, ‘evening social discourse’

After the evening meals, especially when the moonlight is not bright, the family spends the evening in full relaxation after a hard day’s labour in a socially structured manner. This is called *ntəm isur* - ‘evening social discourse’. It is a formal learning class for children taught by adults. The women and children below the age of 10 meet in the family inner courtyard (*ashe amulok*) for this purpose. *Ovan gi ibəl* and adult males meet in the outer courtyard (*anungbwang*) with the family head. The time may be used for shelling groundnuts or some other simple chores. To while away time and socialize, the women narrate or *tap irusok*, ‘folktales’, drawing morals and applications for good character development. Sibomana (1981: 249-279) contains transcribed texts of such tales.

The men relate (*shet nnap*) oral histories of clans, origins, and so on, to the older boys while shelling groundnuts. Most of the men’s narratives are about *Orim* ‘living dead’ and *Zhiritak*, the ogre as well as masquerades in order to instil values of manliness and curb mysticism.

There is a saying of the Tarok that summarizes our discussion thus far:

Idari iwomwom vā gān te, mi i wongsən na ka aməng ina awuwu ka'she apər, literally meaning that a dry stick that is already bent has to be straightened with the wet excreta of the cow inside fire. The underlined words are key concepts in this worldview. A dry stick, or a Tarok child, has no business becoming bent. So the worst treatment, even if it means using a waste product such as faeces, is applied to correct deviant behaviour so that a bad character feature is not formed. Therefore in traditional Tarok society, there is no one so arrogant, defiant and beyond discipline that he can emerge as an outlaw.

Another saying that illustrates the thesis of this paper is: *Uda nggo i gbak ikol anang wò*, literally: everyone rubs the camwood of his mother. This is said to a lazy person who likes good things but will not work hard to get them. The mother labours very much in order to prepare the beautification powder from the *ikel* tree.

It is mixed with mahogany oil for rubbing on the skin by both young boys and girls, and by women who are still strong enough to dance.

4.2 Some informal roles of women in fostering a heroic character in children

Tarok women keep livestock of various kinds. Such women are socially distinguished and highly favoured when visited by *Orim*, the 'living dead'. They engage the services of their children in raising the animals. Livestock is a form of currency for meeting unplanned family expenses. The husband has no control over the livestock of his wife.

During chores at the quern stone, *ako*, during the very early hours of the day in traditional society, the woman sometimes invites her daughters or female wards to work along with her. She sings a lot, recounting and extolling the feats of her mother, maternal siblings, uncles and aunts. Her daughters learn and internalize the names and achievements of such relatives in the process.

The Tarok woman owns a farm called *atak abu*. She has absolute control of managing the farm, including how to use the harvested crops. Her children and hired labourers help her. Children who are not old enough to join the community farming party called *acipər* learn how to farm at *atak abu*.

5.0 Tarok women and the entrenchment of heroism in adults

Tarok women and children are the most effective teachers and character moulders. Blench et al. (in review) succinctly put it thus: "Men, unlike women, remain distant from their children and apparently derive pleasure in observing the mistakes made by children until the period of initiation."

5.1 Battle taunts

The Tarok went to battle in the olden days together with their womenfolk. They were at hand to provide encouragement and refreshment. A man retreating from battle with a wound, or worse still an arrow sticking out at the back, was regarded as a coward. The women would taunt him with songs and physical assaults. The

mother would invite him to re-enter the womb. A man would try by all means to avoid any public disgrace through feats of heroism.

5.2 Social lampoons

Women are gifted in composing sayings, songs of praise and especially those used to lampoon any person for acts considered socially unacceptable. A woman who unadvisedly enters into matrimony may be taunted in a song that repeats this line: *Bere mbere ivang ya ta ro, bere mbere*, literally, ‘Hang hanging-like-a-monkey, is that a marriage just hanging like a monkey?’ It implies the woman is just chasing shadows in the man’s house and will never settle down.

5.3 Battle cry

In the event of war, an able-bodied man staying back at home will be ridiculed by his wife or wives through a symbolic action. The dry cornstalk roots called *ndungsul* will be removed and hit on the ground several times and the woman or women will remove the weapons of the man and set out for battle. The women are saying that the man should stay at home and light the fire for preparing meals like the woman. Such a provocation is intolerable and a man will avoid it by all means.

6.0: Character formation of young adults at initiation, and in life thereafter

6.1: Some socio-religious activities

Ovan gi ibal ‘shepherds’ formally transit to become *ovanzam* ‘youth’ through a socio-religious rite of passage called *Nnyam uyen*, literally ‘revealing the secret to lads’. It is a secret, formal school where the young man is introduced to skills he must acquire in life so as to amount to something in the community (Longtau et al. in review, Lamle 2010: 135). He is taught etiquette and how to relate with women in a proper way. As it were, the ‘tail’ of rascality of the shepherd’s life is cut. He is taught how to respond to a call to arms through the traditional communication gadgets as *nggapak* ‘cruciform wooden whistle’, *nka* ‘ocarina’, and *izúr*, ‘conical wooden whistle’ in response to internal and external threats to community life.

6.2 Activities at aGəntəng

AGəntəng¹³ is a sacred play ground for each clan or sub-clan. Only young people who have passed the age of puberty are allowed to perform there. Three principal dances are performed at the venue. In February/March, when sorghum heads are brought from the farms to the house, the *Ivám* dance is performed by men and women in praise of the crop. The men carrying bundles of corn well balanced on their heads can sing the praise songs with *abwa*, ‘zither’. A soloist can sing thus:

Yeye n ga n le bəba jem dō?
Ye na n ga n vang cit n le cit jem.
Ye mata ku ugulyat ye.
Mbukang gwang izər ka adut.
Yeye n ga n le bəba jem dō?
N le kang mi ba.
Mi kām ucar ki imwa.
Nggwoi wa yi wa.
Yeye umata ku ugulyat ye.

So should I go and return and come back in my own case?
 So I have gone up and come down already in my own case.
 So *Mata* (a type of flute) and *Gulyat* (a type of flute) are singing together.
 So *Bukang* (a type of flute) has jammed with *Dut* (a type of flute).
 So should I go and return and come back in my own case?
 I will come back afterwards.
 I will marry without any payment.
 I cannot live in Hausaland.
 So *Mata* (a type of flute) and *Gulyat* (a type of flute) are singing together.

The soloist is basically proud of being a great farmer who is independent and has the right to enjoy good music and his family. However, the main performance is a group dance using the zither and flutes in the manner of an orchestra.

The next day women perform the second type of dance by clapping their hands. This is called *nkpa mmək nkəlang*, ‘grinding corn for the whole family’. The words go thus:

nkpa mmək nkəlang wo ya wo

¹³ The information and songs were supplied by Messrs Sudan Domyil Dul (80 years), Yohanna Napgang (81 years) and Domde Dorfa (70 years) at Nacha on 27th June 2014.

yangye yeye, yeye, yeye.

Yes, it is time for grinding corn for the whole family
It is beautiful, yes it is.

The third type of dance performed at the sacred ground is *nkok*, which is meant for young girls to choose prospective husbands. The youth leader of a community sends a formal invitation to his counterparts in a community where he sees prospective wives for the dance. This is done in September/October and it is called *ndang-nz̄am* ‘sealing a dance’. This cultural dance is performed symbolically by placing the leaves of the *mmak* ‘tree species’¹⁴ at the sacred play ground. The young men in both communities would cancel all other commitments to concentrate on the preparation of their costumes and beauty condiments for the big dance and occasion. By September the last major farming activity is the planting of beniseed which provides the occasion for invitations. *Nz̄am nokok* itself takes place in March. Flutes and drums are the principal instruments used in performing *nkok*.

This dance can be performed also during land clearing in readiness for the rainy season.

6.3 Marriage

The dance described above was by far the most important avenue for young girls to choose prospective husbands. The public performance was an opportunity to show off one’s skilful dance steps and could not be missed by any young man. The men try to impress the girls with their dexterity at dancing and to display their musical expertise. A young man who performs very well becomes an instant hero and will have two-four prospective wives at once.

6.4 Celebration feats by individuals

6.4.1 *Iyor*, ‘victory song’

The killing of a leopard is an opportunity for a celebration of heroism. The Tarok child has been prepared for such an occasion all his or her life. When a leopard is killed, *iyor* -‘victor’s song’ is sung. It starts as a communal celebration of heroism

¹⁴ Name also means ‘flour’ because the wood is subject to an attack of weevils giving out the powdery exudates from which the name derives.

and proof of one's physical and mental aptitude, manliness and social distinction. Women, children and all in the community will gather to see the warrior and the game he has killed. Shortly after such a public display the men will begin to sing thus:

Leader: *O yar iyam i ga wo wo.*

Refrain: *O'o*

Leader: *O yar iyam i ga wo wo.*

Refrain: *O'o*

Leader: *UCar Rim pan ka afifyan.*

Refrain: *Wo wo*

Leader: *UJila pan ka afifyan.*

Refrain: *Wo wo.*

Leader: Please carry the game and let us go.

Refrain: No

Leader: Please carry the game and let us go.

Refrain: No

Leader: Female *Rim* hit with a cooking stick.

Refrain: Please is it so?

Leader: *UJila* hit with a cooking stick.

Refrain: Please is it so?

Once children and women hear this chant/song with a double meaning, they guess what it means: that *Jila*¹⁵ is being invited to hit them with the cooking stick, or that they should know that the game has been taken over by *Orim*. Whatever is the interpretation, they quickly run back to their houses. *Orim* will appear and lead the warrior and men into the restricted grove, *mMandam*, for more celebration and the traditional sharing of the meat.

6.4.2 *Izan daməng* 'coitus avoidance songs'

When someone has been wounded by a leopard he will be taken to *Orim* shrine and treated by fanning the hair of the animal into a calabash with water using locust bean tree leaves. When that has been successfully done, the sacred oblong drum with four legs called *ikang* will be taken to the sacred playground and a song that will provoke the opposite sexes is performed in honour of the gallant warrior. This

¹⁵ Orim female diety.

is called *izan daməng*. Insults are traded through songs by men and women in order to discourage conjugal relationships throughout the community until the man has fully recovered. The sacred drum is placed at the centre and men form a circle around it. The women form an outer circle and sing also. Men guard the sacred drum well so that the women do not touch it. The men begin to sing thus:

Jele ye ya ye?

N gbap izan daməng a wo ya? (2x)

O gbap izan daməng wo i ya? (2x)

Yeye u ya mi ka njele te u nana a mi do?

Protruded-one (i.e. clitoris) what is it?

Do I dance *izan* of leopard for you to see? (2x)

You dance your *izan* of leopard for us to see? (2x)

What, you see me with the protruded-one then did you give to me?

The women will reply singing:

Zurum ye ya ye?

Yeye zurum ye ya ye? (2x)

Yeye zurum ye ya ye? (2x)

Yeye zurum yeye e?

Distended-one (i.e. scrotum) what is it?

Is it not the distended-one?

Is it not the distended-one?

What, is it not the distended-one?

As the women sing they will be clapping their hands and the drum will be beaten hard. The noise is believed to drive any feline creature far away from the community. The evening dance continues each day until the man starts to convalesce.

The *izan daməng* dance is also performed on the evening of the rite of *apər anizam*, ‘sacred fire at central shrine’, in the Lagan clan.

7.0 Funeral rites

7.1 Burial

Fitzpatrick (1911: 213-221) and Longtau (2000: 118-132) provide some description of funeral rites. Suffice it to mention here that all Tarok male adherents of traditional religion are buried with the face turned towards Wase, with the left arm serving as a pillow while the right arm faces upwards to hold the bow and arrow, because Wase is believed to be the only direction in which warfare is likely to break out. So even in death, heroism of epic value is a desirable trait.

Why was Wase seen as a possible source of hostilities? It is stated in Nansoh L. Vongdip's *Exploration in Tarok Culture* (2000: 1-13) to the effect that, "Tarok had early contact with the Hausa during the 19th century", specifically in 1822 under the leadership of Hassan Madaki. The newly arrived Hausa people, however, had a jihadist agenda. The Tarok who had welcomed them and assisted in carrying their goods saying to the carrier party: "yar i ga" did not know what would happen. The Hausa group then started calling them derogatively, "Yar-i-ga" (or Yergam), which is a corruption of what literally means "Carry and let us go" (Lannap 2000: 4). But Tarok were surprised that after such a friendly encounter, the guests soon engaged them in a sustained religious warfare, being part of the larger jihad movement of Usman Dan Fodio. The Sa clan at Pil, who had already formed a settlement on the plains contiguous to Wase, entered into peaceful, diplomatic relations with the newcomers. Other Tarok people, who were already in the Benue valley far away from any contact with the Hausas, had to move further away or withdraw tactically north-westwards to the mountain fortifications of their ancestors. It was only at the inception of colonisation and western Christian missionary activities in the area from 1903 that most Tarok came to resettle on the plains once more. But the bitter experience of sporadic surprise attacks from the Hausa community became enshrined in the people's cosmology as the most likely place from which a bolt-from-the-blue show of aggression could come at any time.

From the Judeo-Christian perspective, however, the idea of taking up arms in defence of oneself is forbidden. That should be the prerogative of the organized state to defend its citizens using its legally constituted armed forces. Indeed, the perpetual spiral of violence frequently witnessed between Palestinians and the

Israelis, and other Arab terrorist groups occasionally attacking Israel, is a sufficient warning against revenge missions. But from the purely Tarok traditional religionist viewpoint, fighting in defence of one's community, clan and ethno-nationality is a hallmark of manliness and a heroic feat.

7.2 *Ngga ngGa* - 'Mock death warfare dance'

In observing mourning rites, men perform a mock warfare dance called *ngga ngga* in honour of the deceased. The men dress in the full warfare regalia and mimic war tactics and mumble words to the effect that if death could be seen physically, it would be fought and utterly defeated. Dancers are directed through coded music from a *nggapak*, 'whistle'.

7.3 *Nkam uRim* - 'transition to the spiritual world'

The highest point of heroism is the ritual of successful passage into the world of the living-dead called *nkam urim*. Men, women and children witness such transition as the deceased disappears into the sacred grove where the living dead are expected to stay.

7.4 *Ijingjing* - 'wilful death'

Longtau (2000: 118-132) described this method of death and burial. In the distant past, a man stricken with leprosy or some disease might have thought is incurable would request for a special parting meal and ask young men to dig his grave. Members of his household and community leaders usually tried all they could to persuade the man not to contemplate such a horrific act that is tantamount to suicide. If he insisted, he would take himself to the graveyard and would fall inside the grave. Young men could then assist him by covering up the grave. There would be no mourning for such a wilful death. It is the anticlimax of heroism, and rated as second only to cowardice in Tarok cosmology. Elders have to perform rituals to cleanse the land of such an abomination.

8.0 Some legendary personalities

Our discussion of heroism and character formation would be incomplete without describing a few legendary figures.

8.1 Gandulong

He lived some 450 years ago. He is reputed for introducing the red sorghum to the Tarok people as a shepherd boy. It is alleged that he kept on visiting the underworld at the *Nkanjili* stream to bring out the seeds. In his old age as Ponzhi Bin of Ce clan he gave specific instructions to his male children that, after his death, his skull should be venerated in the *Nce awap*, ‘veneration of the dead’ festival. He was indeed outstanding given a controversy surrounding his birth either as a son to a slave woman or as a *bona fide* free-born child.

8.2 Ndong aLaka

Ndong the son of Laka was a contemporary to Gandulong.¹⁶ Laka had three brothers: uGhəm, uGərak and uNyinang. They all descended from the Jukun lineage of Ywom (Gerkawa). Laka had several children but Ndong stood out as a superman from birth. Nyinang had one superman too. He was called Balwang.

Each time Ndong’s mother would lay him to sleep, he would stand up to dance singing:

Mmami uDong Dong Dong oga Laka.

I-am Dong Dong Dong of Laka.

This became a great concern to the mother and she reported it to her husband. It was dismissed as a mere tale until she set some men to hide somewhere behind the house and to eavesdrop on the boy as she departed from the house. True to her claim, the boy was heard singing the song. With the corroboration of the mother’s story, it was resolved the boy had to be killed. The mysterious infant pleaded for his life to be spared because he was sent on a special mission to help the descendants of Laka. He grew up quickly and got married. He became a great farmer and gave birth to Gəndəng, Lokbe and Dəmam.

He overshadowed his contemporaries and therefore there was much rivalry and competition with them. One day he was coming from the farm and demonstrated his powers by leaving footprints of himself, his horse and his dog on a rock that is visible up till today, at a place named after him. Another outstanding feat of his

¹⁶ The details on Ndong Laka was supplied by Mr. Samaila Sonbin Goitur, age 94, at Laka on 28th June 2014.

was the ability to go up a hill in a time of famine and bring grains to feed his family.

However, one day as he was returning from breaking sorghum heads for them to be ready for harvest, his archrival Balwang smote him with smallpox through diabolical powers. He was isolated for treatment but he died. He was buried but reappeared as a male lion. One day Balwang disguised himself so that his reincarnated brother would not recognize him and invited others to hunt the lion. As he shouted: *Balwang tar!*, *Balwang tar!*, ‘Balwang strike (it with the spear)!’, ‘Balwang strike (it with the spear)!’, the lion came in his direction and he killed it. That was the end of Ndong oga Laka.

The perfect match between the meaning of his name and footprints is a point that can generate controversy. However, accounts of his contacts with Ngas, Jukun and his maternal uncles at Gerkawa lend credence to the reality of his existence. At some point in his life-time he was driven away to Ngunji in the Ngas country. A lie was told about him that he would turn into *aməng-bəl*, that is, ‘goat dung’, which when applied to crops kills them. He then left Ngunji to sojourn at Wase Tofa. His bountiful harvest of millet became a point of envy and he was driven away. He went to his uncles at Gerkawa and stayed at a salt mine village. Each time Ngas people would come to buy salt, he would send gifts of salt for them to take back to their elders. This endeared him to them and they brokered a truce between him and the descendants of Laka. On his return to Laka land after surviving several extrications, he came with Orim, or masked ancestral spirits that his uncles had set for him. It became very successful but the other descendants of Laka are forbidden to participate up till today. Balwang and his descendants later regretted being rivals to Ndong.

8.3 Zhimak the musician

This legendary personality projected Tarok musical culture beyond Tarok land when he participated in FESTAC 77. He inherited the gift from his father Kem Zhigu. His outstanding heroism was such that nobody could record his music without permission. The equipment would fail. He later renounced traditional religion and converted to Christianity shortly before his demise.

8.4 Reverend Damina Bawado

Rev. Damina Rindap Bawado stands out as the most outstanding contemporary community leader in Tarok land. He had the ability to infuse hope in all. Therefore his sphere of influence was not limited just to the Church where he rose from a humble beginning as a cobbler to become the first Nigerian President of what is today the Church of Christ in Nations (C. O. C. I. N.) for about 47 years. He was also a master strategist in conflict management. His heroism was manifest when as a student at Gindiri he excelled so well and became a teacher and taught his own set of classmates.

8.5 Tyem Nimram of Wongdɔp¹⁷

Tyem Nimram of Dangre was the man that devised the technology of how to destroy thatched houses in walled cities. After leading one of such successful expeditions he was moved from Dangre to Labe (Lar wa bet) for his own safety so that enemies would not harm him.

8.6 Chief Solomon Daushep Lar

His political life made him stand out as a level-headed, calm, selfless, sacrificial and forgiving personality. He went to prison, alone taking responsibility for all the offences and misdemeanours, if any, of government officials serving during his tenure as Governor (October 1, 1979 to December 31st, 1983). He imbibed the ethos of his people (attending to one's interest after serving others, liberating the oppressed, providing infra-structural facilities all over the former Plateau State, etc.). He was a conflict mediator par excellence (Lamle, 2010: 201).

There are several other legendary personalities in Tarok land, some of whom are still living but space will not permit us to write about them.

9.0 Conclusion

Before drawing our conclusion, it is pertinent to show that life is not always about heroism in the Tarok culture. Plain and down-to-earth people have their place. This

¹⁷ The information was supplied on 28th June at Kensong village by Mr. Zwalnan Nankat, aged 92.

is typified when sometimes heroic attainments can be attributed to a very unlikely person. In folktales the Hare gathered all the wisdom in the world to carry up to the top of a palm tree, hoarding the entire content for exclusive personal use; but he was unable to lift it to his head. This is expressed in the saying: *uzum ran ntan te, ñiyiar mat na*, literally ‘Hare tied up wisdom and carrying it became impossible for him.’ It is the tiniest ant in the ethno-taxonomy of the Tarok, *izal*, that provided the solution - advising him to kneel with one leg, bend the other, and then first lift the bundle to the bent knee and finally put it on the head! Mr. Hare was so infuriated to find that more wisdom was out there with other people that he threw down the entire bundle and smashed it. That is why wisdom is available to everyone in the world.

In Tarok cosmogony, it is said that heaven once fell and covered the earth, but it was *izal* again, the least creature visible to the human eye, that put it back together again; that is why it is a busy scavenger cleaning up the entire house.

Similarly the monster *Zhiritak* was such a terror to the community. It was a left-handed tiny cock that dealt with it. Unknown to the ogre, the cock was carrying a little knife when it swallowed it. The cock pierced the huge animal’s stomach and came out. It was swallowed again and it kept on wounding the beast to escape again and again. Finally the terrorist died and the entire community had total relief. To be left-handed is considered such a handicap amongst the Tarok, yet it was such a character that saved the community.

The analysis seen in the backdrop of so much stereotyping/myths about the Tarok people may actually be simplistic. The assertiveness of the people is borne out of the heroic demands of their environment and rigorous upbringing. The Tarok are undoubtedly one of the most mixed ethnic groups, with the integration and assimilation of many ethno-nationalities from Jukun, Tel, Boghom, Ywom, Ngas, Pe, Tal, Yangkam and so on, which has left marks in their orature. Jemkur et al. (2005: 27-28) will be a befitting conclusion:

Tarok is undoubtedly one homogenous nation today. However it will be a scholarly suicide to sweep under the carpet the rich and diverse uniqueness of the components that make up Tarok today. It will be a monumental betrayal to

cork up the untapped reservoir of cultural history that nobody has recorded in writing to perish as uncelebrated heritage. (Jemkur et al. 2005: 27-28)

In a country like Nigeria where the concept of nationhood is accepted theoretically but most people are, in practice, still bound by parochial and primordial loyalties, perhaps a good starting point in civic education and the entrenchment of true patriotism is to begin with a selection of the salient, affirmative heroic values found in all of Nigeria's ethnic nationalities. Then a body can be commissioned in each state to do a further selection and standardization of the quintessential ethos of each ethnic community. The final text on each ethnic-nationality can be synthesized and an eclectic selection of these books can comprise the civics textbook for the given state. At the national level, the civics textbooks from all the states could be further selected and integrated to form a national course book at the tertiary stage of education, while at the same time retaining the manuscript at the state echelon for primary and secondary citizenship education. Thank you.

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