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MYTHS: The Most Persistent, Resilient, Lasting, Enduring Artifacts of Culture

Introduction

Throughout the history of human civilization, myths have been an integral part of human society. Myths have no cultural boundaries as they can be found in all cultural societies. Myths are stories used to give meaning to a phenomenon or symbolic manner to the natural cycles that surround humankind. Myths are used to explain and understand our existence in our world whether it is something that we can tangibly see or not.

The saga of a myth is past down from one generation to the next. For the purpose of this assignment, I will be analyzing two articles (**American Popular Culture** by Kottak and **Art** by Ember) that deal with myths. With these articles, I will attempt to manifest the similarities of the points raised by both authors within the context of their articles. Finally, I will be concluding the analysis of the articles with some insights.

Myth: is it really FICTITIOUS?

The general view or opinion is that a myth is something that is false or not true. Today, humans are more reflective, philosophical and analytical of events placed before them. We started out as mythical thinkers, moving to a mystic, asking questions approach. Then finally moving to an analytical way of thinking. Today, it is harder to believe in myths as we are focused on numbers, facts and statistics. Stories were told by the word using imaginative pictures, then transgressed to words, arguments and intensive language and finally a reliance on numbers and statistics.

However, Kottak (1994) and Ember (2002) pointed out that people cannot really say that myths do not bear any truth in them. First of all, myths are narratives that are usually

reinterpretations of social groups about historical/past events regarding people or objects that may have caught the attention or curiosity of *those who created* the myths. The characters in myths may really exist except that the way their attributes (or the words used to describe them) may sound unearthly for others. Thus, the reliability and validity of a certain story is biased or dependent on the one who interpreted/told it and what language was utilized. Second, myths are part of the oral tradition. In that way, one can say that the original version of the story may actually be true. However, the succeeding versions may already be edited, rephrased or some parts may have been deleted since the mode of transmission is by word of mouth. The last point introduced regarding the authenticity of myths was that they are expressions of the deepest thoughts and feelings of a certain society. Hence, people cannot argue with what that certain society *feels* even if they *think* otherwise. If they do so, they are being ethnocentric.

Myth: Is it just another term for RELIGION?

Using the sociological perspective, it can be proven (using the 2 articles) that indeed, the word “myth” can actually be another term for religion or that both words mean the same thing.

As Ember (2002) puts it, religion is a product of the human need for explanation about events that cannot be comprehended (such as dream and death). Kottak gave the example of story of Adam and Eve regarding how religion explains *why* humans came into existence.

Another aspect of how myth and religion can mean the same thing is by looking at the characters in mythical and religious stories. According to Kottak, the central characters in myths need not be unreal, superhuman, or physically immortal. Their names usually depict the origin of their identity. Commonly, they are accompanied by secondary characters who personify the virtues needed to succeed in their quest. They can be real people, particularly those whose lives were quite meaningful (or should I say, dramatic). In comparison, the Bible’s central character is

a human who ate, cried, and bled to death. His name actually means “the anointed one” which reveals the truth about Him. His apostles were the ones who continued his lifework. And lastly, His life was quite dramatic given the fact that he experienced being imprisoned, flagellated and worshipped by people.

The last probable reason for having a similar understanding of myth and religion is because both have been concerned with demonstrating that people stand apart from nature, and that humans are unique (Kottak, 1994)

However, the discourse on religion is quite vast and not all facets of it are contained within the context of myths.

Myth: Does it have a UNIVERSAL THEME?

Myths may have universal themes (Ember, 2002). In the sub-article, “Disney Myth and Ritual”, Kottak (1994) mentioned that Disney mythology shows similarities with myths of other cultures and can be analyzed in the same terms. An example of which is binary opposition (such as master and slave, heaven and hell, and intercourse). In the case of myths, Kottak refers to the binary opposition between nature and culture as the universal theme. He used the film, **Cinderella** as an example of his analysis. In Cinderella, the binary opposites are the cat and the mouse. The cat, who is supposed to be the domesticated animal is actually the antagonist as it tries to sabotage Cinderella’s plans. The mouse on the other hand, is the one who helps Cinderella in achieving her plans and also in cleaning the household. In the film, the non-human characters are bestowed with human traits and capabilities to mediate and resolve the oppositions.

In the Philippine setting, myths also use the theme of binary opposition. An example is the myth, **Mga Esposang Bituin**. Basically, it is an explanation of why there are mestizos and

mestizas in the country (the common men married goddesses). In the myth, the “naghaharing-uri” (or the *esposas*) is in conflict with the women of Batan because the husbands of these women want to leave them and marry the beautiful goddesses who arrive during the night to bathe at the waters of Batan. Moreover, the universal themes that were given by Ember are also present in the myth such as catastrophe (the livelihood of the people were destroyed when the *esposas* come and bathe near the area where they plant their food) and sibling rivalry (the men fight to have the prettiest *esposa*).

Conclusion

A myth is very practical. It is not a dead, dry, formal, outward form, and show, but divine, living, vital, dynamic, liberating. It is a living tradition: it has survived alien influences, serves as the record of deepest cultures, and it is the dark spring from which flows the offspring – a new culture, a new world.

REFERENCES:

Ember, Ember and Peregrine. Anthropolgy, 10th edition. 2002. Chp. 26

Kottak. Cultural Anthropology, 6th ed. 1994. Appendix: American Popular Culture.

Ginto't Bulaklak (for the Esposang Bituin)