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JIS
c/o Department of Linguistics, Igbo & Other Nigerian Languages.
University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
Enugu State, Nigeria.
e-mail:
GSM. 08030827452

Typesetting and Printing by:
Ifedimma Communications,
17, Catering Rest House Road, Nsukka.
GSM 08064063079, 08030990379, 08038362190.
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ISSN: 1597-7250
Vol. 1, 2006

Published by Igbo Studies Association (ISA).
**Table of Contents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Title Page</th>
<th>i</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Call for Papers</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editorial</td>
<td>iii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Articles</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.N. Emenanjo</td>
<td>After the Two Fredericks: Igbo Language Studies Beyond 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.N. Njoku</td>
<td>The Imperative and Challenge of Igbo History and Culture Studies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>O.O. Enekwe</td>
<td>Performance as Solution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inno. U. Nwadike</td>
<td>Amụmmanụ Igbo Kamgbe 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G.I. Nwaozuzu</td>
<td>The Child as an Image of Innocence and Credibility</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.N. Emenanjo</td>
<td>Language and Folklore Among the Anioma People of Delta State: Issues of Relevance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Ohiri-Aniche</td>
<td>Nkuzi Na Ọmumu Asụsụ Igbo Kamgbe Afo Ndi 1990</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.S. Ikeokwu</td>
<td>Igbo Studies and the Igbo Alternative to Feminism: A Brief Critical Note</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L.N. Chinagoroğom</td>
<td>Asụsụ Igbo na Ọganiihu Ala Igbo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.N. Chukwukere</td>
<td>Meeting the Challenges of Identity, Gender and Other Relations in the 21st Century Igbo Literary Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B.M. Mbah</td>
<td>A Government Phonology of /ŋ/ in Igbo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E.E. Mbah</td>
<td>Move-Alpha in Igbo Syntax</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.N. Atoya</td>
<td>An Ethnographic Account of Greeting System in Ngwa Dialect of Igbo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N.C. Kammelu</td>
<td>A Decade of Igbo Studies: A Survey of Colleges of Education in the South West of Nigeria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M.C. Onyejekwe</td>
<td>Gender and Language Use in Some Selected Igbo Poems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joy Oluochi Ugyuru</td>
<td>Intonation and Meaning in Ika</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C.N. Akaeze</td>
<td>Igbo Oral Drama: A Focus on Odo Mask Performance of Igbo Eiti</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F.O. Ọrụbụeze</td>
<td>Achebe's Image of Colonialism in His Literary Works: The Triumphs of Materialism in Igboland</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Osita C. Ezenwanebe</td>
<td>The Emergence of Modern Liberated Igbo Women in Igbo Literature</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*JIS Vol. 1, 2006*
The Diversity of Igbo Myth of Origin: A Brief Survey

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1. Introduction

Myth of origin has been identified as one of the classes into which Igbo myths could be categorized (Nwaoguzu, 1980; Chukwuma, 1994; Ikwubuzo, 1999). Myth of origin itself could be sub-categorized into (i) creation myths and (ii) aetiological myths. The former gives accounts of “the beginning or coming into existence of the world, man, animal, vegetation, etc, through the action of a Being or some beings” whereas the latter offers “explanations as to why certain phenomena, for instance, death, broom-like rays of the sun, configuration of the stars, etc., exist”, why certain cultural traits and natural features survive where they are found today (see Ikwubuzo, 1999:14).

One observable feature of Igbo myth of origin is its diversity of versions. There are instances of different myths of origin in different communities of Igbo land. There are as well instances of the same myth of origin told in varying versions in different communities or locations. This element of variation could be attributable to the oral nature of myth. As it is true of other forms of oral literature, the composition, performance and transmission of myth is oral based. And because its storage also relies on memory, there is the problem of recollection during subsequent performances. This is because an oral artist is vulnerable to forgetfulness. Loss of memory may lead to omission of some elements of the original story. Again, as different narrators hand on traditional stories verbally from generation to generation and from one place to another, the original contents and forms may be distorted, adulterated or even lost. We have elsewhere discussed some of the features of myth as a genre of oral literature.

Another reason that may account for the variations noticeable in the myths is the possibility of creativity-in-performance or what is commonly referred to as “composition-in-performance”. The individual narrators are creative. They are at liberty to exercise their poetic license and demonstrate their creative skills during their performances. This means that the myth - narrator can recreate or introduce new elements into a story. But in spite of the narrator’s innovation, the original theme of the story could be retained.

No previous study, to the best of our knowledge, has explored the incidence of variations in Igbo myths of origin. This paper therefore sets out to make a brief survey of the element of diversity of Igbo myths of origin. Some samples of extant Igbo myths of origin drawn from creation myths and myths of origin of death will be examined to illustrate this feature of variation.

2. Concepts of Creation in Igbo World View

In many mythologies, the origin of the world is usually attributed to an independently existing Creator who made all things by his will. The Jewish myth of creation is a case in point. In some myths too, the formation of the world is not totally attributed to such a Supreme Creator but to some being or set of beings of an intermediate character. These agents or messengers, which may be animals or spirits are often depicted as working on God’s instructions and they report back to God as they carry out his instructions. These two ideas about creation – conceiving God as a sole creator and as working in consonance with creative agents – may be found in creation of myths of the same society. In traditional Igbo society, like other societies, these two concepts of creation are found. This fact itself constitutes the first kind of variation in terms of conception. We have some Igbo myths, where God (Chukwu) alone is depicted as the sole creator having himself handled every aspect of creation from the beginning to completion. There is a mythic view, according to Uba (1982:92), which holds that God is responsible for all creation, knows everything, does everything but hardly concerns himself with anything.

2.1 God, the Supreme Deity as an Independent Creator

Nwala (1985:28) cites one of such Igbo creation myths where no intermediaries are shown to have played any creative role.
According to it, the Supreme Being, (Chukwu) "created the universe - the sky, (elugu)w, the earth, (elugw)u, spirits, man, animals and everything in it". The first man created is said to be Ifenta, "Junior Light" and the first woman, Obo- omananya. Chukwu himself, symbolized by the Sun, (Anyanw)u, that gives life is the Absolute Being and Force from which all powers radiate. Nwala explains that the name Ifenta indicates that man is next to Chukwu in order of created beings in the visible order.

The myths goes further to say that Chukwu instructed the first parents to have the universe as their home and everything in it for their good. At the beginning, man and every creature lived like brothers and kinsmen. Spirits, animals – tiger, snakes, and birds – and even the earth and the sky were all together. Man joked and wrestled with spirits and animals. Chukwu showed the first man two types of fruits but allowed him to discover the rest of things by himself. Man was also allowed freedom of action. It is said, according to the story, that because of the constant quarrels among women and the careless use of their mortar, the sky withdrew upward. Chukwu also moved away from earth.

Certain motifs of this myth remind one of the creation myth recorded in the Bible. The motif of Chukwu asking the first parents to have the universe as their home and everything in it for their good (a motif also found in another version of Igbo myth presented by Odunke Artists) is parallel to the biblical story where God asked Adam and Eve to have dominion over all the earth. Other similar motifs include the creation of the first man and first woman; allowing man freedom of action; showing the first couple two types of fruits (though none is said to be forbidden) and depicting the woman as the cause of the confusion which leads to the withdrawal of God’s presence from the earth. All this emphasizes universality of myth beyond African continent.

Some elements of the myth examined above vary in another version of creation myth cited by Ubesie (1978:134). According to this version, when Chukwu created the universe in the beginning, he provided man with everything that he needed. This time heaven and earth were close to each other, which made it possible for man to touch the sky. Whenever man became hungry, he would cut a piece of the cloud, cook, and eat to his satisfaction. It is said, according to the story, that it was when man became greedy that God caused the heaven to withdraw from the earth (not through woman’s action as indicated in the other version). Hence, man’s hand could no longer reach it.

The common motif in these two versions of myth is the harmonious order that prevailed originally before it was upset by man’s attitude and hence the withdrawal of heaven from earth. However, the two accounts differ. In the first story, it is man’s indiscipline and abuse of his closeness to God and heaven that caused the heaven to withdraw from earth whereas in the second story, it is man’s greed in the utilization of the divine provision that led to the withdrawal.

Another Igbo myth of creation, which portrays God as an independent Creator, is recorded by Ugonna (1984:16-17). According to this account, God first lived alone in heaven but later created innumerable spirits to live with him. When he created the world (oma), there was at first a mass of formless dust, which in the course of time compressed into firm earth. Chukwu then caused water to cover the whole earth.” Later the water subsided and gathered in hollows thereby causing wet earth to appear. The earth that appeared was initially not firm just like a clay pot that was newly made; but with time it solidified.

According to this myth, there was darkness everywhere at first but God caused his powerful spirits to form luminaries. Thus, the sun (anyanw)u, the moon (omew) and stars (kpokpando) were formed. Anyanw]u is conceived as the male, omew, female and umu kpokpando, the children. The powerful Anyanw]u rules during the day time while Omew and her numerous children, umu kpokpando, come out at night.

The myth also has it that there was no life in umu (earth) but eventually life appeared in water and after, on land and then grew all species of plants and animals.

The formless and desolate nature of the earth, the covering of the whole earth by water, the engulfing of everywhere in total darkness, etc. mentioned in this myth, are all features which most creation myths associate the universe with at the beginning of creation.
After Chukwu had severed the land into three equal parts for his sons, Oji, Okeodo and Edo, they constituted three continents. Chukwu used akwukoonyughi (hypnotizing plant) to hem in the boundaries of these three territories to prevent man from straying away into the land of the spirits. When Chukwu saw that his three groups of sons had attained maturity, he allowed each to strive within their respective groups among themselves. The Oji family shown to be constituted by his sons. Eke, Orie, Afo and Nkwo later in the narrative increased and multiplied spreading through the length and breadth of Oji continent (Africa).

This myth does not only portray the black race as the emanation of the Igbo stock but it also posits that the origin of the entire humankind is traceable to the same source.

2.2 God, the Supreme Deity, Working with Creative Agents

The second concept of creation we identified above which is also true of some Igbo myths of origin is the depiction of God as not an independent creator.
The Igbo society has myths that credit some aspects of creation to agents other than God himself, though such agents are portrayed as working on God’s instructions. One example of this category of myths is the version of Igbo creation myth presented in the Odunke Artists’ (1977) dramatic work, Ojiaadi.

In the myth, which gives an account of how the cosmos, nature and man are brought into existence, God is not totally ascribed with the responsibility of creating the earth. Rather, he is shown to have delegated some responsibilities to some animal messengers.

The myth gives a picture of the beginning of time when there were some forms of disorder, and how God worked with the assistance of some agents namely, Hornbill (Okpoko) Chameleon (Ogwumagana) and Boa (Eke Ogba), to ensure the completion of the work of creation. These messengers were sent to earth on different occasions to inspect the progress of God’s work of creation. Initially, when the earth was covered by water, the Hornbill is reported to have continued to fly in the air while waiting for the emergence of dry land. The state of the earth at the beginning is shown in the following excerpt of the narrative:

Eke na egwuregwu wee kewa iwe
abu

Ma elu ma ala buuru sooso mmiri
Okpoko, nnuntu nna na-eje ozi
Si na ya ahulu n’al’ya
Site mgbe ya ji chewe
Ka ala okpoo seghote
Na o teela ya ji na-eferghari
Mama the ya na-aetu anya ya
Enweghi isi
(Odunke Artists, 1977:1)

(The Boa and the Rainbow split the sky into two:
Water covered both the firmament and the land,
Hornbill, the beautiful messenger bird
Said that he has suffered hardships
From the time he awaited
The emergence of dry land;
That he has been flying for a long time
But his expectation was to no avail)

The Hornbill who is the first messenger to be sent out by God to go and inspect the state of the earth cannot find a place to perch because the earth is covered by water. Later, God sends the Tortoise (Mbe) to go and inspect the work of creation as the following part of the story indicates:

Ebunu Ukpabi, Obasijji, the God who is in heaven

…
Mgbe o huru ka ubochi si dewe onyi
Ozipu Mbe, nwa Aniga,
Si ya ka o jee n’uwa lete koro ya ka
Uwa ya na-eke si kwuru (2).

(Ebunu Ukpabi, Obasijji, the God who is in heaven

…
After observing the situation
Sent out Tortoise, the son of Aniga,
To go and inspect the earth and tell Him
The state of the earth He was creating).

But the Tortoise does not return and God sends yet another messenger, Chameleon (Ogwumagana), to go and inspect the earth.

(Ogwumagana who discovers that the earth is very soft recounts what transpired in his mission as follows:

O si m
Na ya chere  immigrata
Ka eli okike ya ji n’aka si aga
Mju jee lete ka ala si kwuru
Zighachi ya ozi n’elugwe
M wee zoom ije

…
Mgbe m ji ridata n’uwa
Ehu ala di tojithi

Iwu Igwubuzo - The Diversity of Igbo Myth of Origin: A Brief Survey

150
(He (God) said to me
That He wanted to know
How the work of creation was progressing;
That I should go and inspect the state of the land
And send Him back the report to heaven
I set off

... When I came down to the earth
The ground was morass.)
Ogwumagana who claims to have been and worked with God alongside the Boa (Eke Ogba) from the beginning to the completion of work of creation, reports their joint role in the following account:
Mu, nwa Gaigaanogwu,
Eke ogba na Ebunu Ukpabi
Wee banye ohu
Kewe uwa na ile nile di n’ime ya
Kezuo uwa na anyanwe anq di n’ime ya
Afo, Nkwu, Eke
Wee bata n’Orie kee mmadu
Ka o rube uwa
(Odunke Artists, 1977:4-5)

(I, the son of Gaigaanogwu,
Eke Ogba and Ebunu Ukpabi
Swung into action
Creating the earth and the four suns in it:
Afo, Nkwu, Eke,
Then on entering Orie, created man
To enjoy the earth)
One element that we noticed in the two stories
(the one recorded by Nwala and the other, by Ubie) cited earlier which also occurs in the one recorded by the Odunke Artists is the theme of God’s providence for man. Man is portrayed as the beneficiary of the earth, which God created. God is said to have created man after other things so that man could ‘enjoy the earth’. This motif is universal as it is not peculiar to Igbo myth.

One of the animal agents, the Hornbill, mentioned above, also occurs in one other version of Igbo myths of origin. According to this version collected by Talbot and quoted by Okoro (1992:16), when the mother of Hornbill (Ogbuogu, Akama – okama or Okpaa) died, “Ale (variously called Alu, Ali, Ana or Ati in different dialects of Igbo language), the earth was not; so Ogbuogu could not find a place to bury the dead”.

After flying up and down, bearing his mother on his back for a long time, he made her a grave on his head and buried her. (This explains why the bird has a kind of mound on its head when observed). This element occurs in the preceding myth. The only difference is that it is said in that version that Hornbill opened up his nose and buried his mother.

After sometime as the bird flew over the water without finding a resting place to perch, “he saw one fine woman and one man, both big too, swimming in the water. He watched and saw that they were making something. Not long after, land began to appear. When this had grown quite a big land, Ala (Earth) cried: “when any man dies, let him be buried here”

She stretches her own body over the land and made both the earth itself and the crops. When the dead are buried, they return to earth. That is why our people say: “We are of the same skin with Alu”. The role of Ala in this creative exercise is very prominent. The myth also credits the emergence of trees to Ala. These trees include Oji (the iroko), which is said to be the first, Akpu (the silk cotton tree), the second, and Ojata (Khaya mahogany), the third and then Oji (kola tree).

In the myth, as we have seen, Ala is portrayed as both a creator and a creator. Originally, Ala was non-existent as other Igbo myths of origin have it. Water covered everywhere before its emergence. Ala is believed to be the source of life of both human beings and plants, the receiver of human body after death. Nnadozie (1986:12) describes Ala as “the Igbo Earth and Fertility goddess who fashioned the human body and to whom it returns after death”.

There are other versions of Igbo myths of origin where Ala is very significant in creation. In one of such myths, it is said that the first man germinated from the earth (‘innada si n’ala putila’). (Afigbo, 1982:2). And in the version collected by Nwosu cited above, it is related that Chuks (God) formed human body out of Himself. But prior to assuming the visible human nature, He was pure spirit and had to put on the visible form by sticking sand (earth) on Himself (Nwosu, 1983). All this is, perhaps, the reason why Okoro (1992:18) notes that, “the concept of the world as made by God and Ana ... is recurrent motif in Igbo cosmogony”.

In the myth presented by the Odunke Artists where God’s use of creative agents is related, the creation of the earth is portrayed to have taken place in the four-day traditional Igbo week referred to as “four suns”. In the
account, the creation is concluded on the last
day with the creation of man—as in the biblical
myth of creation recorded in the book of
Genesis. But unlike the Jewish mythology in
which God alone undertakes the work of
creation and finishes it in six days, God
completes the exercise in this Igbo myth in
four days in conjunction with other beings
gthom He sends on inspection mission in the
course of the creation work.

3. Instances of Variant Forms of the
Same Myth of Origin

As we noted in the first part of this
paper, there are instances of the same myth of
origin told in varying versions in different
locations. A good example of such myth is the
one that talks about the descent of a culture-
hero, his role in establishing the Igbo nation,
and his connection with the origin of some
food crops in Igbo land. We shall now proceed
to highlight some variant forms of this myth.
In one of its variants (let’s label it ‘Version A’
for easy ref), a culture personage, Eri, is said
to have been sent down from heaven or sky.

He stayed on anthill because the earth
was waterlogged. He complained to Chukwu
about the state of the earth and Chukwu sent an
Oka blacksmith to dry the water with his
bellows, fire and charcoal. In the days Eri
lived on earth, Chukwu fed him and his family
on the food called azy gwe (substance from
the back of the sky). But when Eri died, there
was great famine, which threatened to wipe
out the people because the heavenly food had
stopped coming. In an effort to find solution
to this problem, Nri, the first son of Eri, cried
to Chukwu and told him that they, the children
of Eri, were dying of hunger. It was then that
Chukwu commanded Nri to kill his first son
and first daughter and inter them in separate
mounds. Three weeks later, yam sprang
from the son’s grave and cocoyam, from the
daughter’s grave. Nri and his people ate the
yam and slept for the first time.

Later, according to the myth, Nri
killed his two slaves, a male and a female and
buried them in separate places. After three
weeks, palm tree germinated from where he
buried his male slave and breadfruit, from
where he buried the female (Afigbo, 1981:41).

Emeka (1989) gives account of
another variant of this myth (“Version B’)
where the same culture hero, Eri, features. He
is portrayed as playing an invaluable role in
the making of the Igbo nation. He met the
people in their natural state—a state
characterized by disorder, war and want. He
introduced order and better condition of life.
Here, where Eri came from is not indicated
other than that he came paddling his canoe
down river Omambala (now Anambra) and
settled in Eriaka near a tributary of the
Omambala known as Odanchi. In the
Omambala basin, he found that he lived
among indigenous people “who knew no law
outside their immediate caprices and desires.
The people also lived in scattered independent
groups and hunted in the forest or fished in the
streams and rivers and fought battles against
themselves.”

Unlike in one of the versions of myth
of origin already cited where cosmic order
existed before it was upset by man’s action,
this variant credits Eri with the creation of
better environment for man, and the institution
of codes of conduct that encourages healthy
human relationship. For instance, Eri is
reputed to have outlawed killing by violence
or witchcraft and suicide. In fact, he revealed
acts that should be regarded as abominations—
suicide, abortion, incest and carnal relationship
with one’s stepmother—among the Igbo. In
the myth, Eri is portrayed to be dishing out
laws to the Igbo race in a manner reminiscent
of what God did through Moses to the children
of Israel in the Bible book of “Exodus”. The
origin of many Igbo customs, rituals, religious
beliefs, social practices and codes of behaviour
could be traced to Eri, the progenitor of the
Igbo race.

The account of the origin of yam crop
given in this myth is slightly different from the
one given in the other variants (version A) we
have examined. This version tells us that
when Eri saw that the people needed a steady
supply of food, he began to think of what new
food he would introduce. After searching the
forest and bushes for a reliable food but to no
avail, he decided to turn to God in divination
to seek answer to his predicament. It was then
that God commanded him to kill his son and
daughter and bury them in separate graves
lying side by side, and then wait. After some
time, young shoots sprouted from the graves.
From the grave of his son sprang yams, oil-
palm trees and raffia palm trees while from the
gave of his daughter there grew vegetables,
cocoyams and pepper (meant to be women’s
crops). Here we notice some variation. In the
other accounts (Versions A & D) only yam grew from the grave of Eri’s first son and only cocoyam from that of his daughter.

This version in addition gives the account of the origin of the four Igbo market days, which constitute one traditional Igbo week. The four Igbo market days—Ekpe, Orin, Afọ and Nkwo—aren’t depicted to be originally spirit—friends who used to visit Eri, the founder of the Igbo nation. During their series of visits to Eri, they would not want to disclose their names to their host until Eri devised a tricky means, which enabled him to discover their names. When this happened, they stopped visiting as a group and subsequently visited one at a time.

Eri decided to establish markets after their names to remind himself of the day it was the turn of each to visit him. Their leader then who was also the first to visit was Ekpe. Orin followed; then Afọ and finally Nkwo. The sequence of their visits continued like that until they stopped coming to Eri but then their markets had been fully established. This makes the four market days referred to as “four suns” created by God alongside the earth in the version of myth recorded by the Omenka Artists.

According to yet another variant of this myth we have come across (Version C) an unnamed personage simply described as “the first man” who “came down by a ladder found a watery marshy earth. Then an Oka blacksmith is called in to dry the earth with his bellows as we are told also in the ‘version A’.

This ‘version C’ relates that when the problem of how to feed the new human beings came up, E ru (believed to be the same personage called Eri in versions A & B), their leader, is told to kill his eldest son and daughter and plant their heads. Thereafter yam and cocoyam sprouted from the heads of the son and daughter respectively. Versions A & B of this myth do not specify the head of these sacrificial victims as the only part of the body their father was asked to bury.

One other story (version D) recorded by Ugonna (1989) which names the culture-hero as Igbo, and not Eri, has it that Chukwu directed that the flesh of his son and daughter should be cut into little pieces and buried in mounds. According to Ugonna (1989:1), after the migratory trips that led the Igbo to different camping sites when they left desiccating Sahara, they finally settled in Igboetiti between the Olu and Okigwe highlands where they developed their unique culture.

Myth has it that at this time Igbo had five sons, namely, Njoku, Isu, Osu, Nkala, and Ora, and undisclosed number of daughters. Their population grew steadily and eventually there was great famine, which threatened to exterminate the Igbo family. Igbo complained to Chukwu Okike (God the Creator) who then told him that their redemption lay in the immolation of his first son, Njoku, and first daughter, Ada. Consequently, Chukwu’s instruction was carried out and the flesh of Njoku and Ada were cut into pieces and buried in mounds. Tender shoots of yam and cocoyam later sprang up from the mounds where Njoku and Ada were buried respectively. With the crops harvested, the famine ceased. The Igbo in the Southeast Nigeria till today celebrate Ahiajoku festival in commemoration of Njoku, the sacrificed son of the Igbo. As the people continued to increase and multiply, scarcity of land set in and then another phase of migration started. The progeny of the five sons of Igbo migrated out in companies according to their father’s name, settled and consolidated in the different areas that could now be delineated as igbo culture area.

The immolation of the first son and first daughter of this culture-hero is one motif that has been consistent in the different versions (A-D) of this myth we have so far examined. But not all the versions of the myths of origin are in agreement that food crops originated from the immolation of some human figures. For instance, we have earlier cited a version (collected by Nwala, 1985) where the Supreme Deity is said to have showed the first man two types of fruits, ‘nkoro and akpa’ but left him to find out the rest of the things himself. Madueke’s (1979:20) poem, ‘Ij’ (Yam) makes allusion to another myth of origin of yam (version E) in which the crop is portrayed as being among the earlier vegetation that naturally sprouted from the ground as opposed to cocoyam that is foreign.

Notwithstanding the apparent variations in the myths so far cited, the similarity of certain motifs in them suggests that the Igbo as a people have an affinity and common traditional heritage, which dates back to antiquity.

Iwu Ikwubugo - The Diversity of Igbo Myth of Origin: A Brief Survey
4. Myth of Origin of Death

Finally, we shall illustrate the diversity of Igbo myth of origin with the myth of the origin of death. One of the versions relates that two animals, Nkita (Dog) and Mbe (Tortoise) are dispatched by God to send a message of death and life to mankind.

At a meeting of all the animals, after Chukwu has asked them to nominate a skilled runner who would go and deliver a message for him in the world, Nkita was chosen. Chukwu himself approved the choice of Nkita on the ground that all the animals had unanimously nominated him. He then sent him to go and deliver to mankind a message that there would be no death on earth and that everybody would live forever on earth.

Meanwhile, Mbe was angry and opposed to the choice of the Dog because he (Mbe) felt that he was the wisest animals and hence the most eligible for the mission. When he heard Chukwu's message, he went and defecated on Nkita's way and set out for the world first. When Nkita came out and saw the defecation, he stopped to give himself a treat and while this lasted, Mbe arrived the world and delivered a message of man's vulnerability to death to a crowd that had converged to receive Chukwu's message. He said to the people: "whatever happens, there must be death on earth."

Nkita arrived later and told the apparently troubled people to ignore Mbe's message assuring them that he was the one sent by Chukwu to give them a message that there would be no death on earth. The people who were apparently confused at the two conflicting messages sent a delegation to Chukwu to clarify the issue. Chukwu upheld Mbe's pronouncement arguing that it was the first message that got to the spirit's abode. This accounts for the reason why there is death on earth today (Emenanjo, ed., 1977).

Another Igbo myth that relates the origin of death attributes it to an act of disobedience. According to this version, an old woman who wanted to rejuvenate by sloughing her skin was interrupted halfway by her little grandchild whom she had earlier warned not to disturb her. At the point of this interruption, her body resumed its form and in great pain and anger she pronounced a curse on her grand-child and died, leaving death and pain for posterity (Nwaoguzu, 1980).

The above examples of Igbo myths of origin – about creation and death - are by no means exhaustive for there are many others dealing with the origin of variety of elements of nature that are yet to be recorded.

5. The Claim of Chronological Order in Igbo Cosmological Concepts: Not Easy to Establish

Given the degree of variations noticed in these few samples of Igbo myths of origin, which we have examined, Okafor's (1992:16) view on Igbo creation myth deserves a critical consideration. He has noted that in Igbo cosmological concepts, there is a chronological order in creation. Elu (the heavens), he explains "was the first to be called into existence", supporting this position with a version of origin myth which relates that the first man came from above (elu) to find earth (alai) in an uninhabitable state. He argues that yam and cocoyam, which represent the plant kingdom, came into being after the watery, marshy earth had dried and become conducive for plant life. He further supports his argument with the account in another myth where it is claimed that the hornbill could not find a place to bury his dead mother because there was no earth (alai) at that time.

After citing and considering these myths, Okafor (18) reaches the following conclusions about Igbo cosmology:

"That the origin of the world is traceable to a wonderful being, Chukwu (God);
That the action of God is needed always to uphold the cosmic structure and order ("Chukwu mere aka uma agwu" – "If God withdraws his hands, instantly the world must end")
That there is some chronological order in creation".

We do not quarrel with the first two conclusions for as we have shown, even if some creative agents or messengers may be associated with the act of creation, the permission to do as is often credited to God. The second conclusion is implicit in the first one for if God is the originator of the world, then the cosmic structure and order we have are part of the creation. After all, Osebuhuwa, one of the names by which God is called, means, "the – Being – that – carries – the world". But establishing the chronological order in creation is fraught with problem. It does not sound convincing. This view is based...
on the fact that Igbo creation myths vary in accounts, contents and length as can be seen in some recorded collections of myths and in the different versions of the same story cited in this paper. If a narrator omits certain details of a myth, it becomes rather difficult to establish the chronological order in which things have been created especially if different versions are presented for analysis.

Again, account of creation in Igbo worldview need not have “smoothing of the Hexahamaeromon” (six days of creation) as also indicated by Okafor (1992:16). It need not be seen to match precisely with that of Hebrew mythology as recorded in the book of “Genesis for each culture has its distinctive worldview, notwithstanding the universality of myth. To support our position, we can see that in the version of creation account presented in Odunke Artists’ (1977) Ojaadili, it does appear that the whole creation is shown to have taken place in the four – day traditional Igbo week, namely, Eke, Orue, Afo and Nkwu. It would be more convincing to suppose that creation in Igbo cosmology might have taken place in four days, which the traditional Igbo society reckons as one week rather than in six days as pointed by Okafor. But a number of other myths do not indicate the duration of creation work. Since Okafor’s claim is not substantiated with a creation account, which shows this chronological order that has something of the Hexahamaeromon, it calls for more supportive and convincing evidence than he has provided.

6. Conclusion

In this brief survey, we have highlighted the incidence of variation discernible in Igbo myth of origin as exemplified by the different versions we examined. But underlying all these versions is one basic notion: a belief in a created universe and the fact that there must be a being who either as an independent creator or in working jointly with other creative agents brought the universe into being.

The paper has shown that a single society may have creation myth(s), which may not possibly be expressed the same way. There are factors, which, as we have highlighted in the first part of this paper, explain this element of variations: the oral nature of myth, the narrator’s vulnerability of forgetfulness, etc.

We also argued that the evidence presented by our exemplification of the varying versions of Igbo myth of origin invalidates Okafor’s claim that Igbo myth of creation has some chronological order, which has something of Hexahamaeromon.

Based on our findings in this paper, there is a research challenge for scholars and students of Igbo oral literature to synthesize the totality of Igbo myths of origin through the collection and collation of such myths from different communities in Igboland.

Note.


3. Gaagamaogwu is an epithet for a hero, a praise name.

Bibliography


