

# ihafa

*A Journal of African Studies*



Vol. III No. I, 1999



## IHAFA: A JOURNAL OF AFRICAN STUDIES

**Editor:** Sam Uzochukwu  
**Associate Editors:** J. A. Emovon  
 A. Uba-Mgbemena  
 O. O. Ajikobi  
 B. O. Ayankogbe  
**Production Editor:** C. U. Ogbulogo  
**Busines Editor:** I. O. Alaba  
**Editorial Advisers:** Prof. Muhammed Nur Alkali, University of Maiduguri  
 Emeritus Prof. Adeboye Babalola, University of Lagos.  
 Prof. R. N. Egudu, University of Benin  
 Prof. V. C. Uchendu, University of Calabar.

### EDITORIAL POLICY

*IHAFA: A Journal of African Studies* is devoted to publishing scholarly works on African Literatures, Languages, and Cultures. The name *IHAFA* is an acronym from the indigenous Nigerian words of *Afa* (Igbo) *Ifa* (Yoruba), and *Iha* (Edo). These words translate as divination - a repository of wisdom and knowledge in our traditional society. The languages from which these words are derived are the ones originally taught in the Department of African and Asian Studies, University of Lagos. We welcome serious, well-research articles written in English. Articles could be descriptive or theoretical.

*IHAFA* is published once a year and apart from scholarly articles, we also welcome book reviews and correspondences on issues arising from publications in the journal.

Two copies of typescripts not exceeding 15 pages of double-spaced quarto, with references at the end, should be sent to:

The Editor.  
*IHAFA: A Journal of African Studies*  
 Dept. of African and Asian Studies,  
 University of Lagos,  
 Lagos, Nigeria.  
 e-mail: unilagarts@hotmail.com

The subscription rates for single copies are as follows:

Nigeria: Individuals N450.00, Institutions N550.00 (including postage)

Countries outside Nigeria: Individuals \$15, Institutions \$20 (including postage)

## CONTENTS

Page

### Literature

Revisiting Their Visions: African Writers and the Question of Commitment .....	1
✓ * A Classificatory Model for Igbo Myths .....	12
The Sturcture of A Text of Agbelele Verbal Art .....	23
.Towards an Interpretation of <i>Eke Une</i> : An Igbo Mythical Poem .....	37
Criticism Trends in Igbo Fiction .....	49
The Main Concern of Poetry: The Igbo Example .....	61
A Preliminary Analysis of Itan Orirun .....	69
The Language of the Igbo Novel .....	84

### Language

Aspects of NP Movement in English and Igbo .....	95
More on the Transposition of Yoruba Qualifiers .....	109
On the Concept of Circumfixation in Igbo .....	119
Biligual Documentation and the Nigerian Language Translator: The Case of Igbo .....	133

### Culture

Preliminary Notes on the Formation of Some Place Names in Lagos State .....	144
The Use of 'Pragmatic Presupposition' in Generating Yoruba Verbal Jokes .....	155
Images of Women in Tiraditional Yoruba Proverbs .....	163



## A Classificatory Model for Igbo Myths

IWU IKWUBUZO

### Introduction

Nwaozuzu (1980:1) has rightly noted that oral literature is part of folklore. With particular reference to Igbo, he identifies ten distinct components of folklore, seven of which, he claims, had earlier been grouped together by Emenanjo as constituting Igbo oral literature. These as modified in arrangement by him are:

(1) Drama (*Egwüregwü*) (2) Myth (*Akuko ifuru*) or simply (*ifuru*) (3) Poetry (*Abü*) various forms (4) Legend (*Akuko Mgbaka*) (5) Folktale (*Akuko Ifö*) or simply (*Ifö*) (6) Anecdote (*Ükâbüülu*) (7) Proverb (*Ilu*) (8) Praise names (*Eriñkèle*) (9) Riddles (*Agwugwa*) and (10) Tongue-Twisters (*Okwu ntuhü*). These components embrace the three major genres into which oral Igbo literature is classified, namely, oral poetry (*abü ödññàlà/önü*) folktales (*ifö*) and traditional drama (*ejije ödññàlà*). In the place of '*Ifö*' which has hitherto been referred to as one of the major classes of oral Igbo literature, we propose the use of the term, *Akuko ödññgha ödññàlà* (traditional prose narratives) in order to accommodate myths (*ñkòmñrñkò*), legends (*ñkòkñrñkò*) and anecdotes (*ükabüülu*) which are other types of traditional narratives that are also rendered in prose like folktales (*ifo*).

Igbo literary scholars have carried out studies on most of the distinct forms of oral Igbo literature listed by Nwaozuzu. In the studies, attempts were made to propose some classificatory models for the literary forms. We have, for instance, the classifications of oral poetry in Egudu and Nwoga's (1971) and Ogbalu's (1978) collections of oral Igbo poetry; Uzochukwu's (1981) study on Igbo elegiac poetry and his (1982) critique of the classification of oral poetry; Nwachukwu-Agbada's (1992-93) study on Igbo proverbs; Emenanjo's (1989) and Ikwubuzo's (1992-93) studies on Igbo riddles, and Ezikeojiaku's (1985, 1996) studies on ritual poetry amongst others. On traditional prose narratives, we can find some classificatory frameworks in Egudu's (1974) study on Igbo anecdotes; Ugonna's (1980b) classification of Igbo folktales; and Nwozuzu's (1980) paper on the socio-cultural significance

of the Igbo myths. In Ugonna's (1979, 1980a, 1980b, 1984) extensive studies on Igbo traditional dramatic displays, the issue of classification has received no less attention.

On the classification of myths in particular which is the focus of this paper, a number of criteria have been suggested by different scholars. The use of 'context' (Finnegan, 1970), 'function' (Beier, 1980), and a combination of two modes like 'theme' and 'function' (Bamikunle quoted in Emenyonu, 1987) are some of the classificatory models that have been advocated. Any of these models can also be used for the classification of Igbo myths. Nwaozuzu (1980:3) used the 'content' criterion and categorised Igbo myths into three: myths of origin, myths of death and myths of magic. This classification in our opinion, narrows our knowledge of Igbo myths which, we think, deal with a wider spectrum of subjects. To allow for a comprehensive view of Igbo myths, we shall attempt here, a classification that will cover a variety of subjects of myths.

### Classification of Igbo Myths:

Notwithstanding its apparent overlap, we subscribe to the use of content criterion in classifying Igbo myths. We think that our classification of Igbo myths would be more informative if we use that model. But first of all, we would at a broad level categorize Igbo myths into two, based on their spread: (1) Common or popular Igbo myths, and (2) Place or local Igbo myths.

Popular Igbo myths are those whose knowledge has some measure of spread or popularity in the Igbo world. They circulate across towns or communities in Igboland. In other words, their knowledge is widespread, though there may be different versions as there are different communities. A good example of myths that fall under this category is number 1 in the appendix.

Place or local myths on the other hand, are those which are associated with localities. We have many instances of myths which are confined to particular localities in Igboland, and they treat issues or subject-matters that are peculiar features of those localities in which they occur. There is found in every community in Igboland one myth or another that may not be known outside that community. It is possible, however, for such myth(s) to spread through contact with people from the communities. Those myths that concern



particular localities may be stories about some cultural traits, origins of certain institutions, customs, beliefs - and some natural features like hills, rivers, trees, animals, etc., found in the localities. They are held by the members of the communities in which they are found. That is, where the people are bound by a common area of habitation or faith. The members of such localities may also associate the myths with geographical spots or particular episodes. Myth 3 is an example of these. It should be noted that the localized nature of these myths does not nullify the claim of universal myth.

Now, using our content criterion, we may categorize Igbo myths into the following classes:

1. **Myths of Origin** (*Ìnkòmìrìkọ̀ Epumepu*) This could be sub-categorized into: (i) creation myths (*Ìnkòmìrìkọ̀ òkikè*) and (ii) aetiological myth (*Ìnkòmìrìkọ̀ Yamèrè*).

(i) **Creation Myths** (*Ìnkòmìrìkọ̀ Okike*)

These are myths that talk about the beginning, or coming into existence of the world, man, animals, vegetation, etc, through the action of a Being or some beings. In this kind of myths, creation may or may not be totally credited to God. Other agents or messengers may be shown to have partaken of the creative function. Myth 1, for instance, ascribes the creation of earth to God (*Chukwu*).

To be included in this category are Igbo myths that talk about cultural heroes who are credited with the completion and ensuring the fitness of the world. An Nri myth, for instance, has it that when in the beginning *Chukwu* sent Eri down from heaven, he discovered some form of disorder - the earth was waterlogged and unfit for human habitation. Eri complained to *Chukwu* who sent down an *Ọka* blacksmith to dry the water up by blowing on the earth with his bellows.

(ii) **Aetiological Myth** (*Ìnkòmìrìkọ̀ Yamèrè*)

These are myths that offer explanations as to why certain phenomena exist. Some explain to us why certain cultural traits, institutions, customs, beliefs and practices are found among some people. Others point out why some natural features like hills, valleys, rivers, etc., occupy the spots where they are found today.

Bolle (1975:794) tells us that aetiological tale "explains the origin of a custom, peculiar condition or feature in the nature, or the human or divine world". Distinguishing between myth proper and aetiological tale, he says that an aetiological story "answers the question *why* such and such is the case and a typical myth "answers the question *whence* and thus indicate the basis of something or the validity of a custom". According to Okpewho in Jones (1980:14) "aetiological tales set out primarily to explain the roots of a society's traditions, custom or natural phenomena."

Most Igbo myths fall under this category of aetiological myths. Examples include myth 1 which gives an account of the origin of colour differentiation in the races we have in the world today; myth 7 which explains that river *Iyiochoro* occupies its present location because it ran to that spot after a quarrel with its mother, *Iyiocha Akpata*; and 3 myth which explains the reason why River *Nvene* is bigger than River *Ogami*.

We can identify further three subcategories under aetiological myth:

(a) Taboo/totemic myths, (b) deity/religious myths and (c) myths of death.

(a) **Taboo/Totemic myths** (*Ìnkòmìrìkọ̀ Gbasara Nsoàl'à/The Nsò*):

These are myths dealing with some totem animals and conducts that are considered taboo in some communities. There are some trees that are also considered as totems. In such communities, it is a taboo to either kill or eat certain animals, for instance, python (*èkè*), monkey (*ènwè*), snail (*ejulà*), or to fish in certain streams where, perhaps, the people claim that they have affinity with the fish or that their god owns them. In Igboland, some rivers and streams are not fetched on certain days. The Okpogho tree in Eziokpala Ogbunka in myth 4, for instance, is held as a totem. The people believe that it is the source of their life. Our consideration of taboo/totemic myths under aetiological is predicated on the fact that hints of the origin (why it is so held) of the taboos are given in the myths.

(b) **Deity/Religious Myths** (*Ìnkòmìrìkọ̀ Gbasara Arụsị/Okpukperechi*)

These are myths that speak about certain deities, about why and how certain objects have been deified and are worshipped in shrines built for them. They are found in different communities of Igboland. Because the Igbo are highly religious and indulge in several traditional religious practices, it is not



uncommon to find a good number of myths which give impetus to their religious attitudes and activities. These myths deal with the gods (*um̄ar̄is̄*) which are worshipped and revered for various reasons. Myth 5 is an example of myth with religious significance. Some deities are annually thanked or sacrificed to because of their supportive or protective roles in the life of the people. Their devotees make it a point of duty to appease them in order to solicit more support from them. The deities include the major ones like *Alà* and *Amadijōhā*; river deities, tree deities, etc.

- (c) Myths of Death (*Nk̄m̄r̄ik̄ Gbasara Q̄nw̄*)  
There are Igbo myths that explain the origin of death in the world. Myth 2 falls under this category. This myth reveals that God employed the agency of animals to determine whether a man would live for ever or die. Then it was the dog (*nk̄it̄*) that announced to the people of the world that man would not live forever on earth but would eventually die.

## (2) Hero Myths (*Nk̄m̄r̄ik̄ Odogwu*)

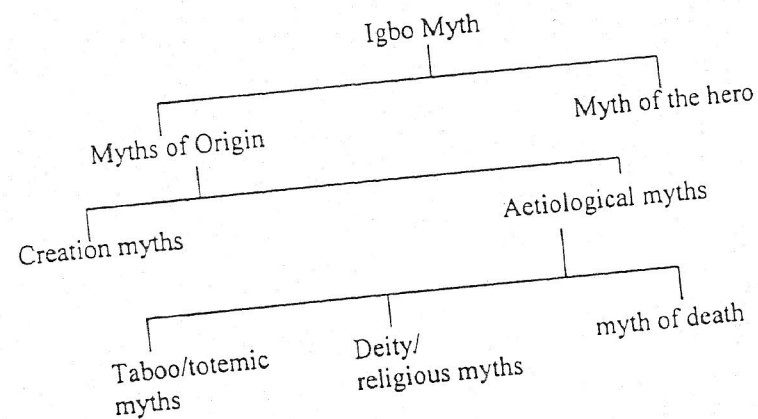
We also have the myth of the hero in which the hero's biography is related. Commenting on whether heroes are to be regarded as mythical, Raglan in Dundes (1965:156-7) says that most of them are. He explains that because the pattern career for a hero is generally known, there arises either from flattery or from a genuine belief the thought that the career of a hero must conform to a type. As a result, mythical incidents are introduced into the study of genuine historical heroes.

Mythical heroes are not always human beings. Ugonna in Nwoga and Azuonye (forthcoming) explains that the heroes could be river deities such as *Odeh̄ḡm̄a*, *Uras̄i*, *Nj̄aaba*, *Os̄im̄ir̄i* and *Um̄uagb̄ar̄a* (deities); animals such as *mb̄e*, *Ew̄i*, *Aḡi*, *Uḡo*, *Ogw̄umaḡal̄a*, *Eke*, *Ob̄u*, etc.

Where the myths speak of human heroes, he explains, it is usually ancestral heroes such as *Eri*, *Nri*, *Ar̄o*, *Ah̄jajoku* and other founders of various towns and villages. This explanation points to the fact that there are human and spiritual heroes. Myth 6 is an example of the myth of the birth of the hero.

## A Classificatory Model for Igbo Myths

Below is a graphic representation of our proposed classification:



## Conclusion:

In this paper, we highlighted that myth is one of the components of folklore. We noted that attempts have been made in some previous studies to classify the other components of folklore. The classification which was made of the Igbo myths is seen to be restrictive. It does not take cognizance of the varieties of Igbo myths. We have in this brief paper proposed a classificatory framework which, we hope, will give further insight into the taxonomy of Igbo myths.

## APPENDIX: EXAMPLES OF IGBO MYTHS

### Myth 1: *CHUKWU* (GOD) AND THE THREE SONS OF IGBO

When *Chukwu* (God) created the earth, Igbo was the first man he put on it. *Chukwu* and Igbo made a covenant and started to relate with each other. Later Igbo begot three sons. Then one day, *Chukwu* sent for the three sons of Igbo to come and have bath in a "wonder-working-stream".

When *Chukwu* made this call, it was the youngest son of Igbo that was at home. He ran, jumped into the stream and had his bath. Immediately, he became a white man. The second son, when he heard also went and had his



own bath. His body was not properly washed because at that time the water had started to dehydrate. This made him look yellowish and he became a yellow man. The first son of Igbo was not at home when *Chukwu* sent this message because he was away to his farm. When he returned and went to have his own bath, the stream was on the verge of total desiccation. As he stepped into the stream and put his hands to bath, the water dried up completely. Only his palms and soles turned white while the other parts of the body remained black.

As time went on, these three sons of Igbo multiplied, spread and became progenitors of the human races we have today - *Ọji* (Black) *Ọcha* (White) and *Edò* (Yellow).

### Myth 2: HOW DEATH CAME INTO THE WORLD<sup>1</sup>

Once upon a time, *Chukwu* called the animals and asked them to nominate from among themselves a skilled runner to go and deliver a message for him in the world. They went home and nominated *Nkịtā* (Dog). *Mbè* (Tortoise) became angry and said that he was the wisest and would be most eligible to deliver a message.

*Chukwu* said that he had chosen *Nkịtā* who was unanimously nominated by all the other animals. *Chukwu* then asked *Nkịtā* to go to the world and tell human beings that they would live forever on earth.

When *Mbè* heard the message, he went and deposited faeces on *Nkịtā*'s way and left for the world first. *Nkịtā* came out, saw the faeces and started eating it. While he was there eating, *Mbè* reached the world and informed the human beings who had converged awaiting *Chukwu*'s message, "that whatever happens, there must be death on earth."

All the people started crying. When *Nkịtā* arrived, he asked them what was the matter and they told him what *Mbè* had said. *Nkịtā* then told them to ignore him (*Mbè*), that he (*Nkịtā*) was the one sent by *Chukwu* to deliver the message. That *Chukwu* said that there would be no death on earth.

1. Recorded in Emenanjo, E. N. (1977) *Omalinze* Ibadan: Oxford University Press. It is translated and used in this paper for illustrative purpose.

The people congregated and sent a delegation to *Chukwu*'s abode to inquire which of the two conflicting messages they would settle for: what *Mbè* said or what *Nkịtā* said. *Chukwu* replied them and said that the first word (message) has reached the spirits' abode, that they would have to take the message they received first. This is why there is death on earth today.

### Myth 3: WHY RIVER NENE IS BIGGER THAN ỌGAMỊ IN UDI

Nene and Ọgami are both rivers and human beings sharing a common husband. Once upon a time Ọgami had a hoe with which she widened her river. This made it to be bigger and wider than Nene. When Nene discovered the secret behind Ọgami's expansion, she went and requested to borrow the hoe from her in order to widen her own river.

Ọgami lent her the hoe delightfully but Nene failed to return the hoe to Ọgami. She rather absconded with it to another village called Obiama. There, she used the hoe to widen her coast so much that she became bigger than Ọgami. This act of inanity sparked off quarrel between the co-wives. This accounts for the reason why up till now, water fetched from the two rivers cannot stay together inside one container. When they are mixed in a bottle, for instance, the bottle would break. This also explains why river Nene remains bigger than river Ọgami.

### Myth 4: WHY THE OKPOGHO TREE IN EZIOKPALA OGBUNKA IS WORSHIPPED

In the past, a certain river called Ezu occupied a spot at Ụmụnze. One day, the people of Ụmụnze provoked this river by violating its law. It then left, carrying other rivers along with it to Ogbunka. This explains why Ụmụnze people do not have even one river now.

When Ezu got to Ogbunka, it overflowed the small town. The people invited a medicine man who through his magical power made the whole water to collect in one big tree called Okpogho in Eziokpala. Since then they neither cut the tree nor use any of the fallen branches as firewood. The tree flourishes even in dry season as it bears green leaves all year round.

It is believed that this tree is the source of Ogbunka people's life. Any time its branch falls off, a prominent person must die in the town. The tree is given a special worship, for without it, the people of Ogbunka would have



been wiped out by River Ezu.

### Myth 5: THE GOD, INWELE OF OGIDI: ITS ORIGIN

Inwele is the name of the man who begot Ogidi. he was a man of valor who was nick-named the "Inwele Ezechuamuagha Ebubedike. He conquered all the rivals of Ogidi town. He was a highly respected man and so when he died the Ogidi people carved his effigy as a memorial. He was later deified and worshipped as a god (*arĩsĩ*).

### Myth 6: NWOKE-ORIE (AN ORODO MYTH)<sup>1</sup>

...A long time before the first white man came, there was a horrible leopard which belonged to Ezeala (chief deity of earth). This leopard ravaged the town, killed animals and frightened men. People were afraid to travel alone although the leopard did not kill or eat anybody. The story of the fearful animal spread far and wide.

One Eke market day, the leopard appeared and snatched one beautiful young girl called Ekemma and hurriedly carried her away. People cried, shouted, rang bells, beat drums, but to no avail. Everybody was stricken with fear. People gazed with open mouths. It was concluded that Ekemma had been devoured by the infernal creature. There was mourning for her loss. The mother waited for days. Friends and relations started to express sympathy by visiting the parents. Some neighbours brought wine and kola according to the custom.

But the dead shall rise again. Ekemma became a great woman later. Soothsayers had explained that the animal belonged to the chief deity of the land; that it attacked only domestic animals on other days, but on Eke day it could attack human beings if so directed by the deity. Consequently Eke days became consecrated to Ezeala...

Many days passed. Many weeks followed. Many moons came and went. Then one Eke day, Ekemma reappeared exactly at the same time of her disappearance....

1. 'Nwoke-Orie' tale is an Orodo myth narrated by Moses Nwosu and collected by Paul Akanagu. Orodo is a town in the Mbaitolu Local Government Area of Imo State. Only the parts relevant for our illustrative need in this paper are culled.

### Myth 7: WHY THE STREAM, IYIQKORQ, GETS FILLED UP DURING THE DRY SEASON BUT DRIES UP DURING THE RAINY SEASON (THE ORIGIN OF IYIQKORQ STREAM IN QZUBULU)

In the olden days, there was no stream at the present location of *Iyiqkorq* stream. The location was originally only a path through which people went to Orie Akpu market in Qzubulu. On one Orie market day, a group of women going to the market discovered that water had covered the path. They shouted at the amazing sight because the path had been an old thoroughfare for both men and spirit.

When the people came and witnessed the occurrence, they were panic-stricken. This made the elders to go and inquire from the oracle to ascertain the cause of the unusual development. The diviner told them not to panic because the *Iyiqkorq* stream would occupy that spot in dry season alone and would during the rainy season leave to join her mother, *Iyiqcha Akpata*, to assist her in farmwork. The diviner also revealed that it was as a result of the fracas that ensued between *Iyiqkorq* and her mother *Iyiqcha Akpata*, that *Iyiqkorq* stream fled to, and occupied her present spot; but that notwithstanding, she would still respect her mother by going to assist her in farmwork during the rainy season. This is the reason why *Iyiqkorq* dries up, leaving only sand during the rainy season and gets filled up with water during the dry season.

### Bibliography

- Bamikunle, A. (1987) "Nigerian Playwrights and Nigerian Myths" A look at Soyinka, Osofisan and Sowande's Plays" in Emenyonu, E. N. (ed.) *Critical Theory and African Literature*, Ibadan: Heinemann.
- Beier, U. (1980) *Yoruba Myths*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Bolle, K. W. (1975) "Myth and Mythology" in Benton (ed.) *The New Encyclopedia Britannica*, Vol. 10.
- Egudu, R. N. and Nwoga, D. I. (1971) *Poetic Heritage, Igbo Traditional Verse*, Enugu: Nwankwo - 'fejika & Co.
- Egudu, R. N. (1974) "The Nature and Function of Igbo Anecdotes" A Paper presented at the seminar on Igbo Language and Literature Held at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka, 26th - 30th August, 1974.
- Emenanjo, N. (1989) *Atumatu Agumagu na Atumatu Okwu*, Ikeja: Longman.