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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 (Nwaozuzu, 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 Igboland. 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 elsewhere¹ 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, (*eluigwe*), the earth, (*eluwa*), 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, (*Anyanwu*), 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 his 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 (*uwa*), 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 (*anyanwu*), the moon (*onwa*) and stars (*kpakpando*) were formed. *Anyanwu* is conceived as the male, *onwa*, female and *umu kpakpando*, the children. The powerful *Anyanwu* rules during the day time while *Onwa* and her numerous children, *umu kpakpando*, come out at night.

The myth also has it that there was no life in *uwa* (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, *Qji*, *Ododo* and *Edo*, they constituted three continents. *Chukwu* used *akwukwọjuphia* (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 *Qji* family shown to be constituted by his sons. *Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwọ* later in the narrative increased and multiplied spreading through the length and breadth of *Qji* 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, *Ojaadili*.

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 egwurugwu wee kewaa igwe
abuo

Ma elu ma ala buuru sooso mmiri
Okpoko, nnunu mma na-eje ozi
Si na ya ahula nti ya
Site mgbe ya ji chewe
Ka ala okpoo segote
Na o teela ya ji na-efeghari
Mana ihe ya na-atu 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, Obasi di n'elu

...

Mgbe o huru ka ubochi si dewe onu

O zipu Mbe, nwa Aniga,

Si ya ka o jee n'uwa lete koro ya ka

Uwa ya na-cke si kwuru (2).

(*Ebunu Ukpabi*, *Obasi*, 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 and report back to him. *Ogwumagana* who discovers that the earth is very soft recounts what transpired in his mission as follows:

O si m

Na ya choro imata

Ka o lu okike ya ji n'aka si aga

Mu jee lete ka ala si kwuru

Zighachi ya ozi n'eluigwe

M wee zopu ije

...

Mgbe m ji ridata n'uwa

Elu ala di tolitoli

(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 Gaagaanogwu,
Eke ogba na Ebunu Ukpabi
Wee banye oju
Kewe uwa na ihe niile di n'ime ya
Kezuo uwa na anyanwu ano di n'ime ya
Afo, Nkwo, Eke
Wee bata n'Orie kee mmadu
Ka o ribe uwa

(Odunke Artists, 1977:4-5)

(I, the son of *Gaagaanogwu*,
Eke Ogba and *Ebunu Ukpabi*
Swung into action
Creating the earth and the four suns in it:
Afo, Nkwo, 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
Ubesie) 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
Okafor (1992:16), when the mother of
Hornbill (*Ogbughu*, *Akama* – *akama* or
Okpoa) died, "Ale (variously called *Ala*, *Ali*,
Ana or *Ani* in different dialects of Igbo
language), the earth was not; so *Ogbughu*
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 *Ala*". 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 *Odala* (*Khaya*
mahogany), the third and then *Oji* (kola tree).

In the myth, as we have seen, *Ala* is
portrayed as both a creature 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. Nwaozuzu (1980:12) 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 versions, it is said that
the first man germinated from the earth
(*'mmadu si n'ala pulite'*) (Afigbo, 1982:2).
And in the version collected by Nwosu cited
above, it is related that *Chukwu* (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
Okafor (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 whom 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 Igboland. 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 *azu igwe* (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 shoot 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 *Odanduli*. 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 grave 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—*Eke*, *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwo*—are 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 *Eke*. *Orie* followed; then *Afo* 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. These four market days are referred to as "four sons" created by God alongside the earth in the version of myth recorded by the Odunke 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, *Eru* (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*, *Nkalu*, and *Oru*, 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 *Ahijafo* 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. Maduekwe's (1979:20) poem, '*Ji*' (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.

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 (Nwaozuzu, 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 (*ala*) 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 (*ala*) 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 sere aka nwa agwu*" – 'If God withholds 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, *Osebuluwa*, 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 Hexahaameron" (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*, *Orie*, *Afo* and *Nkwọ*. 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 Hexahaameron, 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 Hexahaameron.

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.

1. Ikwubuzo, I (2000) "Myth As a Genre of Igbo Oral Literature". In A. Uba-Mgbemena (ed.) *Igede Igbo, Journal of Igbo Studies*, vol. No. 1: 41-46.
3. *Gaaganogwu* is an epithet for a hero, a praise name.

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