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Oral Literature and Igbo Folktales in Selected Works of Fredrick Ogbalu

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Abstract

The oral traditions of every given people are imbedded in and conveyed by their oral literature, among other mechanisms. This study examines Igbo oral literature and selected Igbo folktales in Fredrick Ogbalu's *Nza na Obu* and *Mbediogu*. The study is anchored on Robert's Indigenous Existential Phenomenology Theory, which describes the existential connectivity among a society's culture, and existential phenomena and systems making up its panorama, which must be upheld and consciously used, promoted, preserved and sustained across generations. Exploratory survey design and qualitative method are employed to analytically describe oral literature and folktales, particularly the selected Igbo folktales in Ogbalu's selected works. The analysis involves interpretive devices, analytic description and text-content analysis. It reveals that oral literature plays a significant role in projecting, disseminating, preserving and sustaining a culture; folktales are major aspects of oral literature that play such role; and Ogbalu is a pioneer Igbo collector of folktales, who laid the foundation for modern Igbo written literature. The study concludes that oral literature and folktales educate and socialise the younger generations, foster sense of community, and preserve the culture of a people, such as the Igbo people of Southeast Nigeria. Among other recommendations, the study calls for sustained use, advancement, and teaching of oral literature and folktales among contemporary Igbo as well as other indigenous peoples across the globe.

Keywords: Oral literature, Folktales, Igbo, Fredrick Ogbalu, Oral traditions

Introduction

Folktales and other aspects of oral literature are transmitted more orally than written across generations. Explaining the source of modern African writing, Emenyonu (1978)

writes that "… modern African writing has borrowed a great deal from the folktale tradition" (, p. 17). He also contends that "… folktales are an authentic heritage, and literary artists will continue to use elements of them in their works" (p. 17). This is what we see is modern novels, short stories, poems, and drama. Each form of oral literature has its characteristics, just like the genres of written literature. Folktales in Africa as well as some continents support and reinforce the basic tenets of cultures. Oratures, such as cultures, which produce them constantly, evolve across time, culture, place and regional style, performer, and audience for a variety of reasons (Robert, 2015).

As Taiwo (1976) has noted, "in Africa as elsewhere, oral literature reflects the people's way of life; what oral literature is current in any area depends on the character, temperament and occupations of the people" (p. 4). The implication of the above is that a sea faring people would base much of their folklores on sea, rivers and other water bodies. They are also bound to be deeply involved in fishing occupation. Where hunters are many, there are folklores that are symbolic of hunting. Where farming is the predominant occupation, the people's folklores also reflect farming, hunting and other agricultural practices. Therefore, the folklores of the Igbo are likewise, involving their panorama, all practices and societal systems that are peculiar to them.

Indigenous scholars advocate the sustenance of oral literature and other forms of oral knowledge, emphasising the dire need for cross-borrowing, modification, change, innovation and blending rather than attrition, endangerment, acculturation and erosion of indigenous knowledge systems (Prah, 2009; Adie et al., 2018; Anyanwu, 2023; Nkereuwem & Robert, 2023; Nwode, 2023; Anyanwu et al., 2024). The literary artist can narrate both past and current societal events– legendary, myth, poetry, folktales, songs and proverbs, among others, through literary perspectives, approaches, narrative techniques and plot development (Robert, 2016). The negligence of folktales in literary criticism is evident in the paucity of written and published collections on Igbo folktales. Given the backdrop, this study rises to explore Igbo folktales in Fredrick Ogbalu's *Nza na Obu* and *Mbediogu*.

Oral Literature

Literature consists of oral and written forms. It informs, educates, instructs and entertains; transmits culture, norms and values; creates from nowhere and represents the society in both concrete and abstract forms, reality and imagination (Robert & Besong, 2016). Oral literature is etymologically traced to the Latin term 'litera', "letter of the alphabet" (Ong, 1982, p. 11). Igbo folktales are aspects of Igbo oral literature. Those examined herein in the written form. This means that oral literature can be in written and oral. Oral literature comprises myths, tales, legendary, epic, proverbs, song, chants, rites, rituals, poems, riddles and jokes, idioms, oral drama, and dance, to mention but a few. On the other hand, written literature comprises prose, drama and poetry, which are regarded as genres of literature (Nkereuwem, 2023; Nkereuwem & Robert, 2023; Robert & Anura, 2018).

The term "oral literature" has come to be used for phenomena that involve traditional oral narrative (Ong, 1982). What this implies is that the definition of oral literature only differs

from that of written literature in terms of its nature and constituent elements (Nkereuwmen, 2023). Robert (2017a) defines oral literature as what "refers to all forms of expressions that are first presented and transmitted verbally (orally)" (p.1). Oral literature is noted to have emerged as a means for keeping or storing stretches of language for both present and future uses either in oral or written form, and from where what is or has been kept gets developed into writing (Bahr et al., 1997). It is a mechanism for "fixing thoughts and ideas in memorable, recoverable and keep-able forms through the medium of language," whereby what has been kept (in memory) is "re-enacted, re-told and re-read" (Bahr et al., 1997, p. 175). It follows that the human memory is the base of oral literature.

Elemuo (1998) writes that "oral literature, as an art form (folktale or folklore), means especially those forms or manifestations of folklore which make use of language in a very creative manner" (p. 1). Song, one form or aspect of oral literature, is said to be the highest level of memorisation (Webster, 2006; Bahr et al., 1997). Sherzer (1990) has shown that oral literature has variety of forms. Oral literature is literature in its spoken form, also regarded as 'orature'. It is orally rendered and transmitted from generation to generation (NOUN, 2013). Oral literature is a means of expressing thoughts, ideas, facts, emotions, experiences, shared ways of life, and narrating stories peculiar to a given people. People, animals, phenomena and things are subjects of such symbolic expression, which could be verbal or non-verbal, using language (Nkereuwem, 2023; Nkereuwem & Robert, 2023). Tales are stories in their peculiar forms, conveying symbolic messages across generations. The words of Achebe (1987) about tales read:

> …It is only the story that can continue beyond the war and the warrior. It is the only the story that outlive the sound of war drums and the exploits of brave fighters. It is the story that saves our progeny from blundering like blind beggars into the spikes of the cactus fence. The story is our escort, without it, we are blind. Does the blind man own his escort? No neither do we the story, rather is the story that owns us and direct us (1987, p. 15).

Furthermore, oral literature, like oral history, has to be preserved across generations. While attempts have been made by some Igbo and other Nigerian writers to document oral literatures of the different Nigerian peoples, there currently exists a vast gap in literature on the subject matter, as the scholastic engagement with Igbo oral literature in general and folktales in particular remains insignificant for many years now. This study is an attempt in that direction, as it concerns itself with examining oral literature and Fredrick Ogbalu's selected Igbo folktales as indigenous literary means of preserving, promoting and sustaining Igbo culture, literature, identity construction, and indigenous knowledge and literacy.

Folktale

The folktale, as literature, is a functional language performance. Emenyonu (1978) posits that "the function of the folktale is primarily to entertain" (p. 3). This is most fully appreciated when it is remembered that during the period when the folktale tradition was most important in the history of the Igbo people, such things as radio, television, newspapers, cinema and

various other forms of modern entertainment were either non-existent or not easily accessible to most people. Therefore, Igbo folktales provided a form of relaxation at the end of the day's work" (Emenyonu, 1978, p. 3). This is why Knappert (1971) is of the opinion that "the nights in Africa are an exciting background to thrilling tales" (p. XIII). The folktale performance requires a work-free period of the day, since "one cannot enjoy a poem or a story when one is seriously engaged in farm work" (Knappert, 1971, p. XIII).

Emenanjo (1977) has noted that folktale is a literary art. It is a means through which peoples express a lot about themselves and their cultures orally. It conveys about a people across generations into the contemporary time. African literature is a rich universal phenomenon and an element of cultural universal (Andrzejewski, 1975). In the same vein, Knappert (1971) has stated that every cultural society has its peculiar oral literature in forms of songs, stories (tales), riddles, proverbs, jokes, etc., which all reflect the people's dress code, customs, worldviews, traditions, etc. These, no doubt, are aspects of oral literature, inclusive of folktales, which play crucial role the disposition of cultural identity and possessions. Finnegan (1984) has described the concept of folktale as the means by which the traditional rural cultures of many communities in the world are preserved. Adie and Odoh (2018) have stressed the need to leverage traditional media for the development, promotion and preservation of indigenous knowledge, cultures, and systems across African rural communities. Writing on the literariness of the folktale, Taiwo (1976) argues that "the traditional narrative form is usually self-contained; it is sufficient in itself for structure, style and purpose" (p. 84).

Emenyonu (1978) has noted that folktale is oral literature that deserves a significant scholastic engagement. He noted that folktale, like other integral parts of literature, had existed in Africa long before the coming the colonialists. It was and remains one of the sources and forms of oral tradition, custom, and knowledge transmitted by the words of the mouth or by custom and practice. Folktales are part of oral literature and are very popular in Igbo culture. They are used by both men and women, young and old. They differ from other prose narratives in the culture. These narratives include myths, legends and folktales, the aforementioned narratives come under the rubric ''Tales''. The cultures that produce them constantly evolve and change across time, culture, place and regional style, performer and audience for a variety reasons. For example, if a story loses its relevance because of changing values and social condition, it is discarded or modified and new stories are born.

Theoretical Framework

The study is anchored on Odey S. Robert's Indigenous Existential Phenomenology Theory (IEPT), put forward in 2017. IEPT postulates that there is an existential connectivity between and among both divisible and indivisible elements of cultures, phenomena, humans, and the non-humans alike (Robert, 2017b). Existential phenomenology involves studying, analysing, conscious engagement with and commitment to, and conscientiously doing all that upholds, supports, preserves, sustains, promotes, develops, spreads and transforms the phenomena inherent to a given people amidst some traces of universality. According to IEPT, the connectivity doubles as physical and metaphysical, natural and artificial, innate and

physiological, and in physique and behaviour. All the elements constituting the panorama of a given society fall under one category, the indigenous phenomena of the culture. These indigenous phenomena are the thrust of indigenous phenomenology. That is, indigenous phenomenology concerns in totality the indigenous phenomena and all other embodiments of every given people.

Panorama covers existential phenomena, societal systems and practices of a given people. IEPT demands individuals and groups having the aforementioned to value, transmit, and sustain them across generations, and always remain critically conscious of them in relation to or comparison with those of other cultural groups (Robert, 2017b; Besong, 2019; Besong & Robert, 2020). Furthermore, indigenous culture, language, knowledge, literature, history, worldviews, thought system, and other nationhood systems are the integral parts of the whole panorama of a given people, which together embody their existential phenomena. It also emphasises the need for the people of different cultures to be critically conscious of what to do to uphold, promote and sustain their indigenous cultures in their entirety (Robert, 2017b).

In terms of socialisation and indigenous knowledge, IEPT emphasises indigenous and metaphysical innate and nurtured traits that rouse the consciousness of a person and a people to their personhood, existence, nature, being, dignity, and abilities. Here, the theory links oral literature to folktales, written literature, language, history, communication, knowledge, and culture in its entirety. It also highlights the existential connectivity among folktales, other forms of oral literature, culture, contemporary trends, child education, and socialisation. As affirmed by Besong (2019), IEPT rouses the consciousness of contemporary people of every culture, particularly Africans, to their cherished systems and practices, which are most often than not neglected, endangered and put to extinction in contemporary time. This view highlights the relevance of IEPT to this study as well as other studies on indigenous cultures, languages, literature, and systems of society. As such IEPT is apt for the present study.

Related Studies

Ugwuoke and Onu's (2023) comparative structural analysis of two Igbo folktales relates to the present study. Anchored on the Proppian model, the aim of the study was to determine the structure in relation to linear structure of Propp's structure of Russian folklore. The analysis proved that Igbo folktales exhibit the thirty-one functions proposed by Propp in a story, and display sequential arrangement. It emphasises that context determines the occurrence of the thirty-one functions. Thus, not all stories have the thirty-one functions. The striking feature of the structural pattern of the Igbo folktale is the reward and punishment model. By unveiling the structural patterns of Igbo folktales, the study contributes to bringing Igbo folktales to limelight, thereby promoting Igbo oral literature and culture and showing how Igbo folktales tally with and differ from Russian folklore as well those of many other cultural groups of the world.

The study by Oraegbunam (2021) on the developmental trajectory of written Igbo poetry between 1975 and 2015 relates to the present study. It demonstrates that although written Igbo poetry began with the publication Akwukwo Ukwẹ n'Asusu Ibo by the Church Mission

Society (C.M.S.) in 1934, the Akpa Uche's *Anthology* of 1975 is often considered the first because that is the first written by an Igbo. The study opines that the missionaries laid the foundation for the Igbo written poetry. The implication is that there oral poetry among the Igbo before their encounter with the colonial missionaries. The study concludes that since the 1975 publication, Igbo poetry has been growing significantly in volume. As regards the present study, the work is remarkable for engaging with an aspect of Igbo oral literature from a historical perspective. Although it traces the history of written Igbo poetry, the study leaves out the Igbo folktales examined by the current study.

The moral and value motifs in Igbo folktales are examined by Obiego and Eke (2020). Additionally, the study examined the influence of Igbo folktales on the formation of children's character. For the study, the art of child upbringing had been in existence in Igboland since time immemorial. The essentials of child upbringing are rooted in and conveyed through folktales, among other customary means of socialisation. The study portrays folktales as sources of values and morals, with which individuals, particularly the younger ones, can have their minds trained and positioned rightly. These aspects of oral literature are found to be valuable for maintaining positive relationship, tolerance and peaceful co-existence, wisdom for survival, hard work, respect, etc. among the Igbo as well as other peoples. The study charges contemporary families to deploy folktales for child upbringing in this changing digitalised society.

Values, as pathways for society, are examined literarily by Anyanwu (2018), who critically reflected on values in Nigerian literature. The texts used for the analysis are Chinua Achebe's *Things Fall Apart* (1958), *Arrow of God* (1964), and *No Longer at Ease* (1960). Representations and misrepresentations in the texts are unveiled. The study also interrogates social reality and how value systems are represented in the texts. The views represented in the novels are realised to be influenced by patriarchy, socialisation, consciousness, religion, and education. Socialisation is the peak of the representations. The study submits that perceptions and receptions are as aspects of Igbo culture, particularly the oral culture imbedded in oral literature. It charges emerging authors to avoid literary misrepresentations of cultural groups.

Another related study is Nnyigide's (2017) on the role of oral literature in the rise of early Igbo novel. It notes that Igbo oral tradition, oral history and oral literature are incorporated into some of the early Igbo novels. For the study, Igbo oral literature laid the foundation for the contemporary Igbo written literature. It shows that early Igbo novelists, such as Pita Nwana, D.N. Achara, Tagbo Nzeako, and Ude Odilora, extensively used Igbo oral forms in their creative works. Regrettably, the reverse has become the case among contemporary Igbo novel writers, just as many Igbo youths do not read early Igbo novels. The descriptive analysis reveals that the incorporation of elements of oral forms into the early Igbo novel led to the development of modern Igbo literature and exerted positive impact on it. As Nnyigide and Okoye (2016) confirm, the negative attitude among contemporary Igbo youths and writers exerts negative impact on Igbo folktales and other aspects of Igbo oral literature. Thus, the present study is imperative. The like other studies are direly needed too.

Obika and Eke's (2017) work on the major determinants of Igbo folktales-based conflict resolution relates to the present study on the basis of its engagement with Igbo folktales. It states that conflicts in the works of literature are expected to show the dominance of good deeds over bad ones. By this, readers are to be kept abreast of proper behaviour, as the guilty must be punished and the righteous should be rewarded. Nevertheless, the reverse is the case in Igbo folktales. There are three determinants or factors influencing resolution of conflicts. The first is the poetic justice, which is the generally expected one. Although there are numerous cases where it is applied, sometimes it is tampered with when it comes in contact with wisdom that unfortunately cannot be distinguished from trickery. The second determinant is the application of wisdom or trickery. The third determinant is the combination of wisdom with vengeance. The third determinant does not fail in Igbo folktales. It is with them that the Igbo curtail the excesses of both Tortoise and other stronger animals. Thus, in Igbo folktales, the most dominant of the three determinants in conflict resolution is the merging of vengeance and wisdom in a character. Clearly, the study highlights the role of folktales in conflict resolution.

The work by Ukah (2017), which explored Africa's rich folklore for literary symbiosis, relates to the present work. It notes that African folktales are portrayed negatively by Europeans in their written and even oral sources. The implication of this viewpoint is that the folktales of a people cannot be best or most appropriately written or narrated by outsiders. This explains why the European scholars portrayed African folktales negatively, with Eurocentric and biased mindset against Africa and its peoples, cultures, and societal systems. Meanwhile, they are non-literary scholars, who had little or no knowledge of folktales in general and African folktales in particular. To correct the narratives, crops of African writers emerged and began to write on Africa, and its peoples, cultures and systems. In their writing (plays, novels, poems, short stories and others), oral and written forms of literature are made to interact continually. The blend between oral and written literature is referred to as literary symbiosis, within which African writers use folkloric materials as the base of African poetry, drama and prose. Indeed, the study highlights importance of oral literature and folktales, and the imperative of writing on them.

Finally, Ibeli's (2016) study on selected Igbo folktales that depict artistic representation of history also relates to the present study. The study avers that every society depends largely on literacy for growth. This suggests different forms of literacy, including indigenous literacy. The study's claim that literacy, base of the technological advancement and innovations in society. It avers that present and future wellbeing of society has bearings to its past events. That is, the society needs to look into its future by making a reflection on its past to be able to predict the future. Folktales are some of the literary mechanisms for doing so. The study reveals that Igbo folktales are powerful tools for the idyllic Igbo communities to come to terms with their culture, philosophy, literature, literacy, language, indigenous knowledge and societal systems. Besides, Igbo folktales are proven to foster classroom learning, and inspire individuals outside the classroom for socio-cultural and literary engagements.

Methodology

In line with the nature of the study, exploratory survey design and qualitative method are employed. Based on the adopted design, the conceptual framework is interpreted with reference to the given literature on the topic in an attempt to explain explored phenomena, with a theory. The adopted design allows for the use of the qualitative data analysis, which follows a general inductive approach, without any imposition of explicit theories on the data to test a specific hypothesis (Patton, 2002). To enhance a good structuring of the analysis, Fairclough's (2001) three dimensions model are followed. The dimensions are textual analysis, discursive analysis and socio-cultural analysis. They apply to this study. As Fairclough (2001) has noted, the analysis of a text comprises the study of the structures of language produced. Using systemic functional linguistics brings out the structural patterns of the folktales and their other features. The discursive analysis focuses on the production, consumption and reproduction of the text. Interpretation of the text is crucial at this stage to unravel the foregrounding elements or stylistically significant elements inherent in the text.

The case study Igbo folktales in Ogbalu's *Nza na Obu* and *Mbediogu* constitute the primary data. Library and internet materials on folktales, oral literature, and related thematic concerns constitute the secondary data. These include textbooks, journals, conference papers, special documents, government publications, monographs, lecture notes, and internet print materials. For reliability, only known legitimate websites, databases, and repositories are relied on for online data. Such repositories are Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Academia.edu, Semantic Scholar, CORE, and Microsoft Academic. The gathered data are analysed qualitatively, using interpretive devices, critical evaluation, objective interpretation, discursive approach, analytic description, and text-content analysis. Textual analysis brings out the cultural and didactic elements of the folktales. A thorough re/reading is done before the textual analysis.

Fredrick Ogbalu

Frederick Ogbalu was born in 1927 in Abagana, Anambra State. He was educated at CMS Training College, Awka; Dennis Memorial Grammar School, Onitsha. Other qualifications he obtained were through self-study. He had a B.Sc. in Economics. He taught at various schools and colleges: DMGS, Onitsha; St Augustine Grammar School, Nkwerre; St John's College, Diobu. Others include St Paul's College, Awka; Government College, Owerri; Alvan Ikoku College of Education, Owerri. He represented his Senatorial Zone at the Federal House of Representatives, Lagos. He was the founder of the Society for Promoting Igbo Language and Culture (SPILC). He had a printing press that was later turned into a publishing outfit. As a printer and publisher of University Publishing Company (also called Varsity Press), he was able to publish books on Igbo language and culture.

Therefore, anything that came his way was printed. These collectors kept his press busy. Art was not essentially in his mind, nor was truth. If he was interested in truth, he would have ascertained the authenticity of the items his students turned in. Money was obviously the consideration, not in the negative sense though. Any money he made, and money did come in, he used to finance SPIC. He used his finances to project the cause of Igbo culture. It would be

recalled that one of the objectives of SPILC was to encourage and assemble study materials with reference to Igbo language and culture– collection of Igbo oral histories, folklore, songs, arts, sculpture, carvings, etc. (Oraka, 1978, p. 95). Through his writings, Ogbalu had sufficiently inspired others to write and contribute to the growth of Igbo language and culture. A number of his books formed the prototypes and models for them to emulate, particularly in the sphere of literature. As Thus, his work reserves a pride of place in Igbo oral literature and folktales.

At DMGS, Ogbalu got a lot of moral encouragement from Rev. E.D.C. Clarke, his Principal. Rev. Clarke encouraged traditional dances, proverb contests and literary output in Igbo and provided prizes for same. When Ogbalu went over to St. Augustine's, he founded the SPILC first and, essentially, as a platform for attacking the New Orthography. He had a lot of followership from the staff of St. Augustine's and students like Adiele Afigbo, and Obiajunwa Wali, among others. When, therefore in 1949/50, a formal motion was made in the Chemistry Laboratory of DMGS to found the SPILC, Ogbalu did not quite like the idea, because the SPILC was already in existence. But he had to give way to more aged counsel. Ogbalu really started the SPILC and has continued to regard it as his baby (Emenanjo, 1977, p. 35). He considered himself a collector and an author.

Therefore, he turned his attention to collecting. To him, folklore was something collectible. If it was not collected or retrieved, it would be lost forever. For Ogbalu, a collector is one who gets hold of the material and disseminates it. He used his press to preserve the items. Ethnic glory was part of the pressure to become a collector. He was a busy man and had no time for the niceties of record keeping and printing. "Until very recently, it was not usual for Ogbalu to indicate the date of publication of his works" Nolue Emenanjo, ("The Ogbalu factor in Igbo literary history: An overview" in *Essays in honour of F.C. Ogbalu*, Umeasiegbu, 1988, p. 40). He authored many books. According to Umeasiegbu *(The Study of Igbo Culture)*, Ogbalu did not know how many books he authored. Umeasiegbu recounted having thirty-seven Ogbalu books on his book shelves, even though he did not know other Ogbalu's books. Chief Ogbalu has been rightly called the father of Igbo language and culture (Oraegbunam, 2021). In *Omenala Igbo* (*The book of Igbo custom*), Frederick Ogbalu requests his readers to write down the customs known to them and forward to him, for inclusion in the next edition or reprint of the work. He wanted the folktales of his people to be sustained across ages. That is the major reason for embarking on the 'collecting' spree. He was not interested only in tales but in all genres of folklore: tongue twisters, proverbs, riddles, songs, poems and fairytales. As some of his teachers in the primary and secondary schools encouraged him to write in Igbo, he discovered that there were not many collections available.

Ogbalu's *Nza na Obu*

This book was revised in 1997, but the date of publication was not indicated. It was published first by University Publishing Company (Ogbalu's Publishing Outfit), but revised by Thomas Nelson (Nigeria) Ltd in 1997. A book of seventy-nine pages, *Nza na Obu* contains twenty folktales. There are some illustrations by Douglass Hall. F.C. Ogbalu collected, published and

authored the following works: *Okwu Ntuhi; Mbediogu, Omenala Igbo, Nza na Obu, Ndu ndi Igbo, Ilu Igbo, Tortoise, the Fantastic Winner and Igbo Etiquette*. What he did in each case was to request his students to send in their entries. This means that in the real sense of the word, Ogbalu was not a collector.

His *Mbediogu, Nza na Obu*, and *Mmoo- Igbo Fairy Tales* (all folktales) gave the impetus for: Emenanjo's (ed.) *Omalinze*; Iroaganachi's *Oka Mgba*; Anya lwe's *Akuko Ufodu Kwesirika Umu Mmadu Mara*; and Nwadike's *Eke na Egwuruegwu*. His Igbo seems to have occasioned P.K. David's *Ilulu Igbo* and G.E. Igwe's *Onye Ikoro Wayaa Eze*. His *Igbo Songs and Poems* and *Egwu na Mbem Igbo* triggered and guided Sam Uzochukwu's collections and in-depth analysis of funeral dirges: *Mbem Akwa mozu* and *Abu Akwa mozu.* And, his *Omenala Igbo* occasioned: J. U.T. Nzeako's *Omenala ndi Igbo*; B.I.N. Osuagwu's *Omenala Igbo na Omenala Ha*; and Tony Ubesie's *Odinala Ndi Igbo* (Memorial Lectures 1 and 3, 2008, p. 24).

Some Igbo Folktales in *Nza na Obu*

The twenty stories are not arranged in any discernible manner. They are as listed below:

(i) Ihe mere Umunwaanyi ejighi agbaafu-onu
    Why women do not grow beards
(ii) Nwaanyi na-akpo di ya onyenuu
    A woman that calls her husband that man
(iii) Ihe mere Egbeeji ghiaputa n' udu mmiri karia n' okochi
    Why the hawk comes out only during the dry season
(iv) Ihe mere Egbeji ebulu okuku
    Why the hawk carries away chicks
(v) Mbe na umu atani
    The tortoise and offspring of atani
(Vi) Mbe na ahu mgbaza
    Tortoise and greed / skin disease
(vii) Obizara (Obizara)
(viii) Nwa a na-emegbu emegbu
    A maltreated child
(ix) Ndi mmuo ano na umu-ntakiri abuo
    Four spirits and two children
(x) Udeze (Udeze)
(xi) Nwannunu di egwu
    A wonderful bird
(xii) Ndidi na-emeri uwa
    Patience defeats the world
(xiii) Uremma (Uremma)
(xiv) Oji bu isi omume
    Kola nut is the head of all celebration
(xv) Maazi Ndubuisi (Mr. Ndubuisi)

(xvi) Nwunye eze (The King's wife)
(xvii) Dimbu (Dimbu)
(xviii) Nwa agutara na mmiri
A child picked from the water
(xix) Ije Maazi Okeke jere
Mr. Okeke's journey
(xx) Nwa -ka- nna
A child bigger than the father

Ogbalu's *Mbediogu*

This book was published by University Publishing Company, Onitsha. No date of publication is given, but it was reprinted in 2006. Ogbalu sometimes failed to indicate publication years. It contains twenty-five folktales and thirty-three illustrations or sketches. It is interesting to note that *Mbediogu* is a collection of stories about the tortoise.

Some Igbo Folktales in *Mbediogu*

In Igbo folklore, the tortoise features prominently. It is an ambivalent creature, strong in some stories but weak in others. He is kind, but also cruel. The following twenty-five stories are featured in *Mbediogu*:

(i) Mbe na Chukwu (Tortoise and God)
(ii) Mbe na Ngwere (Tortoise and Lizard)
(iii) Mbe ma Ejula (Tortoise and Snail)
(iv) Akuko maka Mbe na Ezi (A Story about Tortoise and Pig)
(v) Akuko maka Mbe na Apia (A story about Tortoise and Apia)
(vi) Mbe naAturu (Tortoise and Sheep)
(vii) Mbe Na Nduru (Tortoise and Nduru)
(viii) Mbe na Amuma (Tortoise and Amuma)
(ix) Mbe na Ugoloma (Tortoise and Ugoloma)
(x) Mbe na ndi mmoo na Igba nri na Ofe (Tortoise and spirit and a pot of food and soup)
(xi) Mbe na Ogbugba Amamihe (Tortoise and a calabash of wisdom)
(xii) Mbe na Nwunye ya na Onwu Nna ya (Tortoise and his wife and the father's death)
(xiii) Mbe na Umu Egbe (Tortoise and little kites)
(xiv) Mbenaotuoka (Tortoise and a grain of Maize)
(xv) Mbe na ehi eze (Tortoise and the King's Cow)
(xvi) Ugwo mbe ji agu (Debt Tortoise Owed the king)
(xvii) Mbe na Ududo (Tortoise and the Spider)
(xviii) Mbekwu na Ndi Mmoo kpuruisi (Little Tortoise and blind spirits)
(xix) Mbe na Nkita jere mgba (Tortoise and Dog at a wrestling match)
(xx) Nkita na Out Aro (Dog and one year)
(xxi) Mbe na Osa (Tortoise and Squirrel)
(xxii) Mbe na Utara (Tortoise and foo-foo)

(xxiii) Mbe naAkpa ji (Tortoise and a bag of yam)
(xxiv) Mbe na ewee (Tortise and Ewii)
(xxv) Mbe, Nkita na Utukuru (Tortoise, Dog and Utukuru)

Analysis

Here, the research attempts to provide answers about the formulaic opening and closing details and about how the stories start and end. Who gave the titles of the stories? — the students/pupils or Ogbalu himself? In terms of the lore and the folk, we have the raw lore, the stories; but nothing is said about storytellers? Accordingly, the story number one begins in a specialised manner: "At the beginning, when the heaven was the earth of the squirrel …" (p.5). The ending is commonplace. Story number fourteen begins thus: "Cold go away; go away from my neighbor…" (p.55). The opening and closing portions are ordinary.

The interactions between the raconteurs and audience are non-existent. Apart from a few songs interspersed in the stories, nothing extraordinary happens in them. Some other questions are: Are the narrators of the stories men or women, adults or children? Did the students read the Stories from storybooks? Did they ask fellow students to tell one another stories? There is no background information. Apart from getting some twenty tales in our archive or library, there is nothing to improve the quality of this collection. Primary school pupils may read it to while away time in school, when there is nothing better to do.

It is not certain how Ogbalu obtained the titles of the stories. Story number one is entitled Mbe na Chukwu (Tortoise and God). Why is the title not Chukwu na Mbe (God and Tortoise)? Since God is a supernatural being, why should He not be listed first? The collector gave the titles as they came to his mind. The stories, except one, start in the usual stereotyped manner— Out Mgbe (Once upon a time). But tale number ten, "Na mgbe ochie, mgbe uwa di na anyaisi, Mbekwu nwa Aniga, malite inyaisi na n'ime anu niile di ndu n'uwa na ya onwe ya nwe ka ri siri ha niile n'amamihe." In the days of the ancient, tortoise began to boast that of all the animals alive in the world, he was the wisest (Ogbalu, 1975, p. 40). This is not really a special way of starting a story, but it appears different from the others. The closing of the stories is even more ordinary.

Contextually, this is a strange collection in the sense that the collector deviates from the usual way of putting together stories. Nothing is known about the people who tell the stories or those who enjoy them. How were the stories told or narrated? Again, the lore, although not wonderful, is more important than the folk. Our elders say, "If all stories about the tortoise are told, no one will go to work; if one writes down all the stories told in the land, there will be no paper for the writing." Like *Nza na Obu, Mbediogu* is below average, because Ogbalu did not have the folklorist typology and expectations in mind while embarking on his one-man crusade. Having said the above, this assessment is a reminder to Igbo scholars that F.C. Ogbalu should be held in high esteem. In his preface to *The study of Igbo culture: Essays in honour of F.C. Ogbalu,* Umeasiegbu writes,

It is now an open secret that some scholars make fun of F.C. Ogbalu, arguing that he does not 'know' Igbo whatever that means. I guess that what these learned men and women mean is

that Ogbalu was trained in economics and should have Igbo alone to linguists, folklorists and literary scholars. But let us, for purposes of rhetoric's, agree that Ogbalu does not know linguistics, folkloristic or literary Igbo. Is this why we should not recognize his pioneering effort? The proper thing to do, it appears to me, is to shake hands with him, thank him for his three or four decades of toil in the field and send him off to the Central Bank of Nigeria, or to any other bank of his choice (Preface).

Umeasiegbu is not alone in his praise of F.C. Ogbalu, because Ogbalu's contribution to Igbo culture, language and literature, particularly oral literature, is enormous and cross-generational. Ogbalu sees himself in the words of the blurb on Obiefuna thus: "Mr. Chidozie Ogbalu is a very well-known writer especially with regard to Igbo language and culture. But where he is best known is in the collection of the literature that passes from father to child." Indeed, he has written on different subjects concerning Igbo people and their culture and systems, including Igbo literature, language, oral traditions, thought system, and indigenous knowledge. He is a grammarian, amateur lexicographer, novelist and collector of orature, short stories, verses and texts of anthropological import. In other words, by virtue of his pioneering contributions to Igbo language, oral literature and culture, Ogbalu emerged the strongest in the area of collection of orature, proverbs, folksongs, poems, riddles, and folktales. Regarding his enormous contributions to Igbo literary development, Emenanjo (1977) has remarked that Ogbalu's "contributions serve intrinsic heuristic purposes" (p. 40).

Conclusion

Igbo folktales are an integral part of the rich cultural heritage of the Igbo people of Nigeria. These narratives, often passed down through generations, serve as entertainment and vehicles for moral instruction, cultural preservation, and social commentary. In contemporary literature, many Igbo writers have drawn upon these traditional tales, weaving them into their narratives to explore themes of identity, morality, and the complexities of modern life. Folktales in Igbo culture are more than mere stories; they encapsulate the values, beliefs, and social norms of the community. They often feature anthropomorphic characters, such as animals and mythical beings, and convey lessons about human behaviour, ethics, and the consequences of one's actions. The oral tradition of storytelling has historically played a crucial role in educating the younger generations, fostering a sense of community, and preserving the Igbo language and culture. The themes and motifs found in Igbo folktales are often mirrored in the works of Igbo literary writers. Federick Ogbalu is one of those writers, a pioneer one for that matter.

Recommendations

Several recommendations are made herein in sentential rather than listing form. Igbo teachers should emulate F.C. Ogbalu in different regards by in evolving, developing, promoting, and sustaining Igbo oral literature, folktales and other aspects of Igbo culture. More manpower resources are needed for teaching oral literature and folktales, while the available personnel should be offered career development opportunities, re/training, motivations, and rewards by

government, meaningful Igbo individuals at home and the Diaspora, and Non-Governmental Organisations. Collectors should undergo training so as to master the rudiments of the field. The Igbo curriculum should be expanded, modernised and indigenised. Past collections and other write-ups should be revised and reproduced for sustenance across generations. Lastly, Igbo oral literature, folktales, and other oral traditions should be digitalised.

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