Divine Che Neba, Adaobi Muo, "Entry on: Myth of the Departed River by NzeUmeokwonna G.C. Ezechukwu", peer-reviewed by Daniel A. Nkemleke and Elżbieta Olechowska. Our Mythical Childhood Survey (Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2019). Link: http://omc.obta.al.uw.edu.pl/myth-survey/item/736. Entry version as of November 01, 2026.

NzeUmeokwonna G.C. Ezechukwu

Myth of the Departed River

Nigeria

TAGS: African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions





We are still trying to obtain permission for posting the original cover.

General information	
Title of the work	Myth of the Departed River
Country of the First Edition	Nigeria
Country/countries of popularity	Nigeria
Original Language	Igbo
Country of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Nigeria
Full Date of the Recording of the Story for the Databasey	June 28, 2018
More Details of the Recording of the Story for the Database	Igbo-Ukwu
Genre	Myths
Target Audience	Crossover (Young adults + adults)
Author of the Entry	Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com Adaobi Muo, independent researcher, deskola2011@yahoo.com
Peer-reviewer of the Entry	Daniel A. Nkemleke, University of Yaoundé 1, nkemlekedan@yahoo.com Elżbieta Olechowska, University of Warsaw, elzbieta.olechowska@gmail.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Creators



NzeUmeokwonna G.C. Ezechukwu (Storyteller)

Age of Narrator: 62 (in 2018)

Social status: Chairman NzeN'Ozo Ngo Village and Vice Chairman NzeN'OzoIgbo-Ukwu

Profession: Retired Principal Grade 3

Language of narration: Igbo

Bio prepared by Divine Che Neba, University of Yaoundé 1, nebankiwang@yahoo.com and Ada Muo, University of Lagos, deskola2011@yahoo.com

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Additional information

Origin/Cultural Background/Dating

Background: Igbo-Ukwu is found in Anambra State, Southeast of Nigeria. It belongs to the Igbo ethnic group, one of the major ethnic groups in Africa. Thus, the predominant language of the town is Igbo. The town covers an area of about 29 square kilometers with an estimated population of 75,224 and is one of the biggest cities in Anambra State. The town is referred to as Igbo mkpun'assa because it is made up of seven villages – Obiuno, Ngo, Akukwa, Umudege, Ezihu, Ezigbo and Etiti. The seven villages are organized into three administrative quarters – Obuno, Ngo and Ihite. Igbo-Ukwu is culturally and historically significant for its sophisticated bronze architectural monuments excavated from three archeological sites in 1938 and 1957, and whose origin is dated around the 9th century A.D. The town is also popular for its market, Nkwo Igbo. Like many pre-colonial Igbo communities, Igbo-Ukwu ancestors practiced the Igbo Indigenous Religion (IIR) and therefore worshiped a pantheon of gods. At present, Igbo-Ukwu people are mostly Christians though a handfuls is still loyal to IIR. The people still observe festivals like New Yam, Odunke (mass return) and Masquerade and the Nzen'Ozo society are still revered. The masquerade institution represents a persistent belief that there is "coming and going" between the living and the dead, borrowing Achebe's term in *Things Fall Apar*t. Some elements of Igbo-Ukwu belief system are evident in its oral tales, including myths.

Occasion: Staged Performance

Summary

In the olden times, a river wanted to come and settle in Igbo-Ukwu. It came in the form of a young heavily-bearded man on a visit to the Nhi (Nri) priest who lived before the boundary between Igbo-Ukwu and her neighbor, Oraeri. The priest offered his visitor a seat and asked his first daughter, Ada-Nhi priest, to get them kola nut and some water for washing of hands. The daughter stepped out to do her father's bidding but took her time in doing that. After waiting for some time, the young man pulled his long beard and water began to flow and he washed his hands. The priest then perceived that his visitor was a river. Just as the visitor finished washing his hands, Ada-Nhi priest brought the kola nut and some water in a calabash. After the blessing and eating of kola nut, the young man told the priest that he needed a piece of land where he could settle. The priest called Ada-

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Nhi and told her to take the man to a jungle located between Igbo-Ukwu and Oraeri.

The girl took the young man far out of their community into the jungle specified by her father. When they arrived there, she pointed out the space to the man. He examined the forest and told the girl to hurry back home and never look back no matter the noise behind her. The girl agreed and turned back and began the journey home.

The young man stood on the space, spread his hands and legs, raised his eyes to the heavens and melted into a river. Then the river began to make its home. In the process, it violently knocked down trees, washed over rocks and drowned animals. The noise was so terrifying and the girl was afraid. The faster she walked, the closer and louder the noise became. She panicked and looked back against the young man's advice and the emerging river drowned her.

After waiting till night for her daughter to return, the Nhi priest suspected that the visiting river had swallowed her. He was infuriated. He took his *ofo*, symbol of priestly authority, and divination bag and went to the jungle and saw the new river already settled. The priest raised his *ofo* and began to curse the river. For a long time, he hurled curses on the new river but it sat unmoved. After a long time, the priest threw his *ofo* into the river; it parted into two from the middle but defiantly came together and stayed put. The Nhi priest grew angrier and more determined to avenge his daughter's murder. He began another series of incantation and when he did not obtain the desired result, the angry Nhi priest threw his divination bag into the river in frustration. The river exploded with a big bang and ran away. It crossed some villages and ran up to a place known as Anya N'ano and entered Agbaja town where it settled since then. Even today, it is still believed that whenever an Igbo-Ukwu indigene gets close to the river, it expresses discomfort in rumbles and sighs. There is even a near-valley- in Igbo-Ukwu which is believed to be the original home of the river. This version of the myth is widely-believed even till today. The myth attempts to explain why there is no river in Igbo-Ukwu as well the presence of a near-valleyin Igbo-Ukwu.

Analysis

Myths of transformation are recurrent in world mythologies. In Africa, the intimacy between man and nature, man and the spiritual realm makes it possible for these creatures to interact easily through the

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

process of transformation. Humanity, as most African myths record, has had access into the supernatural world through transformation. The spiritual world and a plethora of its messengers have equally visited and blessed mankind by transforming into objects or human beings to achieve their objective. In most traditional set-ups in African societies, it is believed that men are transforming into animals or trees for conquest and safety purposes. The manifestations in the *Myth of the Departed River* as the narrator puts it, can be likened to those of Lake Awing, lake Muanemguba and lake Oku in Cameroon, that originally were human beings who later transformed into water bodies. Legends report that some of these water bodies have settled in different areas, and each time they had to move, they transform into humans until they settle in their final abodes. Other instances within the African scenario include human animals (totems). Within these regions, each family has their animal protector (totem). In times of danger in particular, they transform into these totems for safety or conquest.

Classical, Mythological, Traditional Motifs, Characters, and Concepts	African Mythologies African Storytelling African Traditions
Other Motifs, Figures, and Concepts Relevant for Children and Youth Culture	Nature Religious beliefs Transformation Water

Further Reading

The Origin of Lake Oku (accessed: December 28, 2020).

Thompson, S., *Motif-index of Folk-Literature*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1955.

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.

Addenda

Method of data collection: Note taking and tape recording

Researchers: Adaobi Muo (trans.)

Editors: Daniel A. Nkemleke

This Project has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 Research and Innovation Programme under grant agreement No 681202, *Our Mythical Childhood… The Reception of Classical Antiquity in Children's and Young Adults' Culture in Response to Regional and Global Challenges*, ERC Consolidator Grant (2016–2021), led by Prof. Katarzyna Marciniak, Faculty of "Artes Liberales" of the University of Warsaw.