

INVESTIGATING THE OGBANJE PHENOMENON IN IGBO COSMOLOGY: A RATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

Eruka, C. Raphael, PhD

Department of Philosophy

Madonna University Nigeria, Okija Campus, Anambra State

drerukar@gmail.com

DOI: 10.13140/RG.2.2.21236.83849

Abstract

Cosmology contextualizes the world of the people and links their identity to their world of being. It is the perception of the world of the cultural people that provides interpretation to the complex issues that confront them. The Ogbanje phenomenon is one such complex theme in the Igbo world-view. The pervasiveness of the phenomenon makes it a household name in Igbo communities. The high endemicity explains the reference to it as a phenomenon within the ethnic settlements alongside the amalgam of its characteristics. A lot has been written about Ogbanje, some of which endeavoured to affirm the reality of the phenomenon. It has to be underscored, however, that knowledge is not always static. The revisiting of known cosmological themes in different research may be an occasion for uncovering new perspectives on what was known earlier. These may provide opportunities for the deepening of understanding, the alteration and, or modification of earlier held views in the light of discoveries. The impact of epistemological insight on culture, and their correlation respectively is understandable. This underlines the reality of cultural dynamism. The import and even contents of cultural givens may give way in the context of new finds that charts the course for a more accurate interpretation of the reality therein. The current work undertakes to investigate the Ogbanje phenomenon on purely rational grounds. This simply refers to the logic of the presenting problem followed by its intricacies and matrixes. The research surveyed the spread even beyond the Igbo geographical enclave; attempted an explication of the meaning vis-à-vis the grand narratives of its origin; the views of other scholars on Ogbanje and the characteristics of the social-cultural presentation as observed in its victims. Finally, the research offered contextual analysis and criticism of Ogbanje as regards our conventional state of knowledge which unfortunately provides a platform for operation as a reality of the people's existential and phenomenological encounter with Ogbanje. The work proffered fresh insight that may lead to a paradigm shift in conventional understanding and lived relation with the Ogbanje phenomenon.

Keywords: Igbo, Africa, Ogbanje, Reincarnation, Phenomenology

Introduction

The Igbo are replete with varieties of cultural experiences. Some of these are ordinary. Others could be said to be extraordinary experiences in that they border especially on the existential, phenomenal and metaphysical interplays in Igbo cultural realities. Some of these experiences are deep encounters that have defied time, and as such, reported in different ages. The pristine Igbo was familiar with some of these encounters and manifestations; being that they were desirable in themselves and left a significant imprint on Igbo social, cultural, moral and existential matrices. On the other hand, some of them were repugnant and detracted from the quality of life of the Igbo group that encountered them. While Ilo-uwa would pass for Igbo positive anticipation and real-encounter felicitation, Ogbanje would be a typical example of an Igbo deep experiential encounter that was wholly negative, and always bent towards diminishing the quality of human existence.

Although the research is theme-specific, promising to focus the investigation within Igbo cosmological sphere; it may need to be emphasized that the phenomenon is not specifically and necessarily Igbo. Ogbanje deep encounter cuts across ethnic enclaves and boundaries; and as such, has been reported in non-Igbo ethnicities. Ogbanje has experiential and phenomenal equivalences in Southern, Mid-western and Northern regions of Nigeria. In terms of nomenclature, Eze (2020) underscores that in the East, Igbo land in particular, it is referred to as Ogbanje, in Yoruba land of Southern Nigeria, it is known as abiku; the Efik people of the North call it Mfumfum; in Edo, Midwestern Nigeria, it passes for Igbakhun (The Guardian, 21 June 2020). Onyekwere & Uche also attempted a sweeping nomenclatural list of this strange and curious phenomenon cutting across the regions of the entire country, Nigeria. Ogbanje (Ichekwu), 'Abiku, Eka-Abasi, Fon and Danwabi among the Igbo, Yoruba, Efik and Hausa respectively refers to those children who are born and die shortly after or later in their youthful age' (Onyekwere & Uche, p. 64). Thus, although the investigation has focused on the Igbo region of Nigeria, the phenomenon is far-reaching with its spread encountered among the definite ethnic groups in Nigeria, and perhaps beyond this national geographical boundary.

In Igbo land, Ogbanje is, phenomenologically, a deep experience that needs to be investigated anew; existentially, a problem within the culturally lived space that needs some sort of solution; metaphysically, a 'reality' in utter correlation with the non-material world that needs enlightened conceptual clarification. It is a metaphor in daily human relations and transactions and above all a theory that elicits interest in ethnological and philosophical studies. What then is this curious phenomenon, Ogbanje; put another way, what is it not?

Is Ogbanje reincarnation?

To begin to understand what Ogbanje is about, there is a need to locate its place in Igbo cosmology. Igbo cosmology is indeed broad and encompasses the entities and phenomena that make the Igbo worldview. In the Igbo *sitz-in-leben*, how is Ogbanje contextualized? Is the concept coterminous with reincarnation? Is Ogbanje a different conceptualization altogether? Igbo cosmology is replete with dualisms: dualism is among other things, a function of positive and negative correlational values. If reincarnation is earnestly desired as a positive value, it appears that among the Igbo, Ogbanje with its negative attributes is extremely repugnant, and as such, quite undesirable; thus, cannot qualify as reincarnation: a position said to be based on existential dialectics, thus not essential (Eneh, 1987, p. 108). From a different perspective, Ogbanje is said to be the downside of reincarnation. This understanding tends to look at the problem essentially rather than from human emotion and the sentiments of what in ordinary circumstances, one would have wished. If Ogbanje involves, in another sense, the Igbo dualistic universe – the physical world, (*animadu*) and the spirit world, (*animuo*) – and the transactions and traversing of these domains by entities ‘human’, so to say, that exert influence among the Igbo within the physical cosmological space, then, nothing would detract from qualifying the phenomenon as reincarnation. This is because where this substantial interrelationship takes place; there exists the phenomenon of reincarnation (Eneh, 1987, p. 109).

The above notwithstanding, Nzewi appears to have revolutionized the concept of Ogbanje in conceiving of it as generic. The implication of this is far-reaching, in that it would mean neither reincarnation nor Ogbanje as a specific notion: Ogbanje for Nzewi has a universal connotation within the Igbo cultural ambience. Her position is that ‘Every individual is believed to be an Ogbanje’ (Nzewi, 2001). To a greater or lesser extent, everybody at one time or the other tends to manifest Ogbanje features or characteristics, some sort of strange amalgam of human behaviour characteristics, perhaps, in a merely transitory or more enduring manner. However, there is the malevolent Ogbanje characterized by their known pathological status that progresses to chronicity and eventually mortality within a short span of life (Nzewi, 2001). This is the situation where Ogbanje becomes a case or an issue of real concern. If Ogbanje can be typified, then it means when we introduce the concept, we need to specify what we mean. In other words, if there is the malevolent type, there has to be the non-malevolent Ogbanje as well. The latter may perhaps refer to, as indicated earlier, the application of the concept as a metaphor – in which normal individuals manifest in their character certain queer traits, sometimes in a transitory, non-problematic manner. If this is agreed on, then the concept can hardly qualify as neutral; it always has something quite malevolent or quasi-malevolent about it. This observation seems to tally more with the greater Igbo

cosmological view: a situation in which Ogbanje is never desired or cherished but instead, every known device is applied to discourage its presence in families.

The insight above brings us to the point made by Akwaeke Emesi, in her work, 'Gender Transition and Ogbanje' (2018), in which she observed that Ogbanje is an 'intruder', 'unwelcome deviation'. She contends that Ogbanje is a spirit that does not belong to the family. They could thus be regarded as alien spirits quite unfamiliar with normal or conventional human experience. This is because they intruded into the family, coming 'from nowhere'. This is a clear case of the attempt at pure ontologization of the Ogbanje spirit whereby an alien free spirit being abnormal finds its way into the family. It is at best an intrusion into ancestry status. Since it breaks the ancestral chain, so to say, it has to be stopped from further progression in the generational process. For this reason, it becomes imperative that the Ogbanje should not be allowed to contribute to the lineage by reproducing. This is the understanding behind the need for clinical hysterectomy in the mothers involved as soon as Ogbanje is 'diagnosed' as depicted in Emesi's work. This is in effect, to forestall the possibility of Ogbanje reincarnation whereby it acquires ancestral status (Emesi, 2018).

From the above, it appears that the Igbo would not allow Ogbanje to be reincarnation and can go to the extreme to ensure this is so; from mutilation of the corpse of the dead baby, as would be discussed later to the final answer advocated in Emesi, it all amounts to a spirited effort to ward off the occurrence of this phenomenon. However, the fact is Ogbanje depicts the downside of reincarnation since it involves the phenomenon of birth, death and rebirth. So, at this point, let us deepen the investigation into what Ogbanje is all about.

Ogbanje – further inquiry

Etymologically, Ogbanje refers to the repetition of errands: from 'i gba nje' – rounds or cycles of going and coming! The errand in this context is extraordinary, in the sense that it involves transitions between two known but quite different worlds – the world of humans and that of spirits. Eneh sees it in this light when he states that 'Ogbanje is, therefore, any child believed to be repeatedly coming back to life only to die again' (Eneh, 1987, p. 106). Anibo in Onyekwere & Uche (2006), describes Ogbanje as 'repeaters or born-to-die children who enter into the wombs of pregnant women only to be born and die shortly' (Onyekwere & Uche, p. 64). The repetition of errands is for the sake of continual birth, death and rebirth; the end can only be the orchestration of travails in families by the vicious cycles. Achebe in trying to define Ogbanje hinted at the nature of the subject when he said that they are 'those wicked children who, when they died, entered their mother's wombs to be born again' (Eneh, 1987, pp. 106 – 107). The Ogbanje is believed

to be not just any child, but a ‘wicked’ one. Part of this portrayal lies in the fact that such children ‘may decide to come to the woman as many times as possible’ (Onyekwere & Uche, p. 64). The Ogbanje scene is indeed a frustrating one as the family involved gets entangled in the quagmire. Isichei as reported in Eneh adds that the Ogbanje is a ‘wicked’ spirit which takes the form of a beautiful child (Eneh, 1987, p. 110). In this postulation, Ogbanje is essentially a malevolent spirit that takes on the physical form of the child. As beautiful, the child has outward appeal. Wikipedia understands Ogbanje as an ‘a term in Odinani (Igbo ...) for what was thought to be an evil spirit that would deliberately plague a family with misfortune’ (Wikipedia). The encyclopedia maintains that literally, in Igbo language, it means ‘children who come and go’; and just as well, it has been used metaphorically for rude, stubborn and frustrating children. Therefore, the presence of Ogbanje is a sign of frustration, both to the woman, that is the mother particularly and the family in its extendedness generally. The chain of pains caused by Ogbanje widens in its concentricity especially when one considers that the notion of the Igbo family is typically that of an extended entity steeped in the sharing of the benefits and burdens of lived daily experience. The phenomenon becomes more concrete when one considers that the extended family-based existence was more vividly and formidably lived in pristine Igbo communities.

The death of an Ogbanje does not bring sadness or grief to the family. What bothers significant relatives is how to stop the repeatable encounter and for this reason, the corpse is treated with disdain or scorn (Eneh, 1987, p. 107). Ogbanje is *ab initio* free spirit being; so although in the form of a child, it has clear knowledge of its mission. Emesi believes that Ogbanje is essentially a spirit – a spirit who looks incredibly convincingly human (Emesi, 2018). If this is true, it is thus supposed to know when it is treated badly. If it does not appreciate the treatment which may include mutilation of the dead body, then it should refrain from attempting another journey into the family (Chinua Achebe). The problem lies in the fact that despite the horrific treatment meted out to them at death, some defy the odds to dare come back. In Soyinka’s poem, *Abiku*, as found in the collection of Nwoga (1982), the branding of *abiku*’s chest with the fragment of the burnt shell of the snail, does not deter it, since, ‘You must know him When *Abiku* calls again’ (Soyinka, 1982).

The timeframe for the death of the Ogbanje as very early in life, it seems, has been over-emphasized. Although many of them die young, usually within the first three years of life (Eneh, 1987, p. 108), some exceed this short span. Michael Chiedoziem Chukwudera in his ‘Legend of the Ogbanje’ (2021) has one of his interlocutors explain that there is no fixed time frame for the death of Ogbanje; an Ogbanje dies when he or she has finished the specific assignment given to him or her (Chukwudera, 2021). This then suggests that

although Ogbanje may die within the first three years of life, some may well live right into middle to old age!

Another version of the death projection as reported in Emesi's 'Fresh Water' is that they are 'most often children that die stillborn or children that die before they are married (marriage in Igbo culture makes one 'complete', as the saying goes). The physical beauty and attractive feature of Ogbanje has caught the attention of writers on Ogbanje. In 'Freshwater' by Emesi, Derick Ofodirinwa has this to say: 'Ogbanje who do not die during infancy are believed to grow up to be very attractive and rebellious'. On this account, children who show these traits are often labelled Ogbanje. They are as well referred to as special children often having higher spiritual endowments (Emesi). Besides the endowment with beauty, Ogbanje may present as child prodigy; some are marked thus outstandingly by this natural precocity of the intellect.

Chukwudera, in further confirmation of the above observations, expanded the features of Ogbanje to include the manifestation of 'strange and odd personalities; they also have extra-ordinary abilities – often superior intellect or insight into the human condition – that make them outstanding' (Chukwudera, 2021). The Ogbanje, in a strange twist, is said to be capable of interspersing sociability with exclusivity; thus, the social habit does not subscribe to easy characterization. In terms of social expectations, the Ogbanje is not predictable. They are said to be troublesome and short-tempered (Temi, Iwalaiye, 2021).

Grand narratives of the origin of Ogbanje

The origin of Ogbanje borders on the strange and paranormal. The origin cannot be accounted for in as straight a manner as normal children. John Pepper Clark in his poetic work (Abiku), made adumbrations to Ogbanje as a wondering spirit that moves with the likes (Clark, 1982, p. 61). This calls to mind the existence of the Ogbanje league as depicted in the line 'Follow where you please your kindred spirits' (Clark, 1982, p. 61). In Igbo, besides 'ichekwu', Ogbanje is also referred to as 'ndi-otu' (the leagued; maintainers of fellowship albeit secretive in their operations). As yet-to-be-incarnated free spirits, the Ogbanje enters into contracts in the league. Part of it has to do with fixing the number of years that pertain to its span of life. The pact or contract is sealed in iyi-uwa, a stone object. This is deeply buried in the ground and unless excavated and destroyed the child is surely going to die according to plan. Any attempt to outlive the agreed contract attracts the wrath of the members who begin to attack the child. The child is thus visited with all sorts of ailments (Eneh, 1987, 107). From another perspective, 'the iyi-uwa', as the signature to the contract, carries with it authority. It enables the child to return to earth and locate a targeted family. The iyi-uwa as well connects the child to other members of the spirit league. The cycle becomes interrupted if the iyi-uwa is discovered or unearthed and

destroyed (Eneh, 1987, p. 107). Onyemelukwe aptly describes the process: ‘To stop the cycle of an Ogbanje, it is necessary to find the charm, called *iyi-uwa*, he or she has hidden. Once that is found and destroyed, the child will live’ (Onyemelukwe, 2017, May 17). The *iyi-uwa* is thus comparable to a natural tracking device that keeps the Ogbanje within view in the league, the loss of which depicts the vanishing of the ogbanje from the league radar!

For Achebe Chinwe, Ogbanje originates at the two portals of entry into the world guarded by two spirits. The water entry point is guarded by a female spirit (Nne Mmili) while the land portal is guarded by the male counterpart (Onabuluwa). Based on this observation, Achebe identified two broad categories of Ogbanje: Ogbanje Enu and Ogbanje Mmili (Achebe, 1989, p. 31). Ogbanje Enu deals finally with Onabuluwa as a terrestrial guard while Ogbanje Mmili has dealings with Nne Mmili as guardian of the marine portal. Ab initio, the Ogbanje spirit entered into a contract with the Supreme Being, Chukwu and the personal guide (*chi*, guardian angel). This pact is original. However, at the points of entry, the guardians of the portals renegotiate these contracts in their favour, thereby depriving the Ogbanje of the benefits of the original contract (Achebe, in Temi Iwalaiye, June 19, 2021). The water entry guardian can easily do this because it has the power to ‘bestow riches, beauty, and ephemeral but phenomenal success in business, the performing arts, or give psychic powers’ (Achebe, in Iwalaiye, 2021). In Igbo cosmology, the marine spirit is known among other things for the bestowing of special gifts such as wealth, talents and personal endowments or accomplishments. The issue here is that Nne Mmili (popularly called mammy water), does not bestow gifts for free. It is always in exchange for something substantial on the part of the recipient, such as a short span of life, disorderly marriage or calling on one of her spirits to marry the person) (Achebe, in Iwalaiye, June 19, 2021).

Onabuluwa, the masculine counterpart, in Achebe’s terms, is ‘more crude, dramatic and coercive’. He possesses higher power of persuasion, and as such, convinces people to alter their contract. For example, if a woman is destined for fruitful marriage, Onabuluwa may ‘renegotiate for her to be a person of dazzling beauty who turns down men’s advances and if eventually succeeds in contracting marriage, she becomes childless (Achebe, in Iwalaiye, 2021). Here as in nothing more comparable, Igbo dualism plays out in its worst forms – always culminating in the exchange of the less for the greater: shadows for substance; the counterfeit for the real; the life-destroying for the life-giving!

The origin grand narratives portray the Ogbanje process as a fraud. At best, it is intriguing in distortion; the alteration of good for evil. This alteration is always a posterior event; a kind of an afterthought. In this malignant process, the original contract is faked and a dummy is sold to the Ogbanje. Another way to view it is that it is a deprivation of

substantial value and the replacement of such noble values with shadows, tricksterism and conceivably frustratingly fantastical values. In this case, the mission is to truncate the process to good living or positive accomplishments.

Contextual analysis

Every distinctive community or ethnic group, conscious of itself as a cultural entity, operates within a cosmological space. Achebe postulates that 'one's assumptive world is an expression for a highly structured complex interacting set of values, expectations and images of oneself and others which one develops (Achebe, 1992, p. 25). Igbo cosmology is an intriguing one with a complex of values that over the years have made the people who they are. It is laden with phenomena part of which go into defining the course of the existence of the people. The people have to anchor their existence on a worldview through which they derive inspiration for the totality of their actions. People's orientation in life is modulated by their worldview. Therefore, people must have to operate within a given world view or they are constrained to systematize one – specs or window through which they view the rest of external reality. The world in its aspects is simple, yet in another dimension complex; thus necessitating a compass with which to navigate through it. This appears to be true with the Igbo and the encounter with the Ogbanje phenomenon. The concept seems to be an attempt to explain certain existential realities and problems of life that threatened to defy explanation. Every community wrestles with the obscure in its effort to shift its epistemic frontiers or achieve an outright epistemological breakthrough. No community would want to surrender to ignorance or epistemic opacity, especially in issues that matter to them fundamentally. On the contrary, the people would rather bask in the pool of values and knowledge with which they can be identified and which they work hard to bequeath to future generations. The Igbo forebears would not be an exception. The agglomeration of a range of symptomatology, for example, into an encapsulation or circumscribable concept, and some sort of working diagnosis of a raging disorder, would be typical in the emergence of the Ogbanje phenomenon.

The unfortunate turn to this is the temporality framework and scene. This too plays an important role in any attempt at offering a rational interpretation of the Ogbanje phenomenon. There is a dynamic trend in the reflective understanding of Ogbanje that promises fuller comprehension of the emerging parametric criticism within its contextual history. Ogbanje conception and encounter had their high points in the mythical and pre-scientific Igbo world. The worldview was largely mystical, mythological, even conjectural and cosmogenic. The Igbo world was not unique in this approach for in a comparative timeframe and pre-scientific era, other climes, not excluding Europe fell for a similar methodological approach to their existential value and epistemic problematic. For

example, 15th to 16th century Europe subscribed to mass hysteria, diagnosed witches and wizards capriciously and dealt with suspected cases with summary ruthlessness. Ben-Yehuda, in his work, 'The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th centuries' observed that from the early decades of the 14th century, until 1650, continental Europeans executed between 200,000 to 500,000 witches. The casualty is huge by any measure. The temporality problematic is even more succinct here together with the dynamism of human understanding for while one age may have considered the operation germane, another, far removed from the former in time, may view this as anachronistic and bizarre. Yet, from another perspective, in terms of the category of victims, the insight elicits further interest. Ben-Yehudah reveals that the majority of the victims were old women and invariably the abject poor (Ben-Yehudah, *Online*). The category of the victimized is known to be susceptible to instability, and strange or deranged behaviour, all stemming from circumstances surrounding abject poverty and geriatrics. With the broadening of the knowledge base, a lot has been gained in terms of clarifications of previous understanding. This includes the irrationality in mass executions in the West in the referred period above but this irrationality was once viewed as 'the rational path to tow'; the true solution or remedy to the diagnosed problem of the day. It is in this spectrum that further analysis of the Ogbanje phenomenon would be based.

Ogbanje appears to be a misnomer. It does not appear that the concept represents what it claims. Ogbanje means 'one who has engaged in repeated reincarnation' (Nzewi, 2001). To achieve this, a roaming free spirit finds its way into the woman's womb and intrudes into the family. This understanding is well articulated in Akwaeke Emesi. This could only be believed from the mythical point of view in the pre-scientific era; otherwise, philosophically, it does not square up to reason. It is clear knowledge in the 21st century, the whole process of human conception. If Ogbanje is a spirit, to be embodied during pregnancy it has to enter into the womb in form of a soul. It is scientific knowledge that there is no free spirit in space that on its own navigate into a woman's womb during pregnancy. Within the bounds of normality and the natural, this a-biological phenomenon is not known to obtain. Every pregnancy is the result of the fusion of the female ovum and male spermatozoan to form the zygote. It is at the moment of this formation that the soul is created and incarnated. The dominant theory (Christian classical theory) has it that the soul enters the body at conception (Wikipedia). It is untenable the postulation that the uniqueness of the individual can be disrupted by pre-scientific strange conjecture or mythology. A thing is what it is and no more. If it is A, then it is A and not non-A. This is the law of identity (Nwala, 1997, pp. 56 – 57; Uduigwomen & Ozumba, 2000, pp. 203 – 205). One spirit cannot, therefore, incarnate a multiple times and be identified as different children to the same family. Each child thus comes with his or her soul (spirit). The

uniqueness of each child also implies the non-repeatability of the essentials of that child. The soul being the most essential component of the human person does not admit the process of repeatability. The uniqueness of the individual permits the preservation of the specific individuality of that person with the implication that there cannot be a multiplication of that uniqueness recognized in different individuals.

If this be true, then the application of extreme measures to ensure the cessation of the malevolent spirit's cycle of return is at best 'a non-sequitur' or a clear case of absurdity. Hysterectomies are uncalled for; although the call may have some speculative merit, the scientificity of the intent is quite untenable or false. The discourse in Emesi in this case stems, perceivably from the gender identity problematic in which Ogbanje fits in the range of possible natural distortions.

Chinwe Achebe's association of Ogbanje with the goddess and god of marine and terrestrial entries into the world respectively makes for a curious analysis. Her position is that Ogbanje is nothing less than fraudulent activities and interventions of spirit entities. The pre- but potential Ogbanje spirit does enter into an original positive value-laden pact with the Supreme Being, Chukwu and the personal divine guardian or guardian angel, chi, only for malignant counterfeit spirit entities to renegotiate the pact a distance from the formers and exchange the original pact with a dud. This too does not square up with the right reason. There is the Greek counterpart in the pre-philosophical era, in the times of Homer and Hesiod, in which the gods and goddesses were characterized as erratic in their behaviour patterns. Garvey & Strangroom (2013) were clear on the complex nature of the Greek gods and their despicable conduct as portrayed in Homeric poetry. In their view, '... the gods are more complicated and interesting than might at first be thought. Most noticeably, they are guilty of extra-ordinarily appalling conduct', (Garvey & Strangroom, 2013, p. 23). These gods and goddesses outdid humans in their debased conduct: cheating, stealing; causing strife in social relations among humans, kidnappings and deceptions. Garvey and co. added that 'They become angry when slighted and inflict spiteful, childish, sometimes horrible punishments. They meddle in almost everyone's affairs' (Garvey & Strangroom, 2013, p. 23). Even among humans, the activities of the Greek gods do not make sense nor qualify to be condoned. The Greek world was largely mythic in the time under consideration; a world distorted by the complicated activities of the gods that made ordinary human living almost unbearable. Greek philosophy arose precisely as a reaction to this worldview of Homer's creation, based mainly on caprice and far from the expectations of conduct based on noble moral values. Philosophy thus emerged partly as a response to a chaotic cosmogony to carve out a worldview based on human rationality and values capable of ennobling the human person rather than whims intent on dehumanization. Philosophy was thus on a mission of restoration of cosmic order. As

against reason, the Homeric poems were based on myths. In this, it can be spotted how perceptions of people compare favourably in different cultures within given similar timeframes.

As pointed out above, the Homeric narrative in Greek antiquity is typical of mythologies that develop within a given cultural milieu (not excluding African-Igbo mythology). Nne Mmili remains the Igbo goddess of the water while Onabuluwa passes for the counterpart on land. They are depicted as tricksters – dispossessing people of their enduring values including the thwarting or alteration of their destinies for the worst through clever renegotiations. Pertinent questions arise invariably from this. First, is this renegotiation done in the light of the full consciousness of the parties involved? Is the would-be Ogbanje spirit aware of the supposed transaction? If it is fully aware as is supposed to be since it is a spirit entity; this awareness includes the fact of the positive valuation of the original pact with Chukwu – the Igbo Supreme Being – and his messengers; as well as the roles, authority and dominant powers of the Spirit(s) behind the original pact and the fact that Nne Mmili and Onabuluwa are subordinated to Chukwu and his messengers. This awareness includes as well that of the full implications of the trajectory of Ogbanje – the new path which the dubious spirits are out to cause. This knowledge is of utmost importance since one is not likely to choose wrongly in a transaction in which one is aware that one is bound to be cheated badly. These remain knowledge-based powerful dissuasive factors to the acquiescence towards any exchanges of the former gift for the latter; although, no surviving child ever remembered having been accosted by the malevolent spirits for any such exchanges in the strict sense of the truth of it. This is because the consciousness of what transpires would include full awareness or memory of the transactional scenes and the course of what transpired. However, the above are pointers to the fact that the narrative is a useful myth with all the didactiveness implied for prudent and moral living.

In what amounts to the same thing, the existence and search for the totem secretly buried as a tie with the league of malevolent spirits and compass for locating the same family over and over again, remains a useful myth as well. The whole piece is at best a work in heightened imagination or depth-speculative over-activity. The philosopher who wove these grand narratives into the intricate phenomenon of Ogbanje has succeeded for centuries and perhaps, millennia in anchoring the belief of the victims onto a possible solution to a near-unsolvable problem. Usually, the totem is said to be a piece of stone although according to Eneh, on digging deep into the selected ground, any hard object found there such as a piece of bone or metal can be accepted by the medicine man as the equivalence of the totem. Why theorize on the specificity of the totem and compromise on any hard object as the equivalence? The odds are the medicine men or dibia, being the

more knowledgeable group in the mythical worldview of the Igbo, do not believe in the existence of the totem. Agbakoba argues that wisdom resided with the medicine men or *dibia* or native doctors in pristine Igbo communities; these are the men who developed the theories and guided others on the path of wisdom. They are the specialists, the masters of those who seek knowledge for the sake of solving their problems (Agbakoba, 2006, pp. 92 – 93). Concerning the issue of totemism, a piece of stone or any other hard piece of object found after digging the ground for quite some time would suffice! The point of interest is if the pact-theory crumbles, as shown above, then the logic of totemism about Ogbanje cannot sustain. The strength of Ogbanje appears more to be a collective one. The league energy sustains the operations and programs of the Ogbanje in their individuality as spirit beings. Provided the Ogbanje participates in the league, it continues to derive succour and radar-tracking and control by the league. Loss of league membership or participation means loss of tracking by the fellowship, loss of league energy to continue operation and the cessation of its ability to unleash travails in families. Human effort plays a major role in truncating this associative process within the league by pure outsmarting of the Ogbanje whereby the *iyi-uwa* is identified and unearthed. This raises serious questions in that it could have been of significance also to identify in terms of statistics, the Ogbanje whose course had been cut short by this medicine-man intervention process. How did their lives fare afterwards? Did they radically transform in their erstwhile strange characters onto normality – stable and unnecessarily strife-free existential trajectory thenceforth? We may never know what's of relevance here since in the main everything was shrouded in conjectures devoid of endeavours at verifiability. The above notwithstanding, a classical case of Ogbanje would have been dead before effort is put into breaking its league chain.

It is mystifying that in the bid to end the cycle of the Ogbanje phenomenon, some child victims even at death become physically mutilated in the hope that the ill-treatment would deter the child from making further attempts to return to the family (Achebe). However, as Soyinka's poem 'abiku' shows, the defiant child in another run carries the mutilation mark back to the family. How can one possibly explain this? Eneh made a serious effort to explain this phenomenon from a purely psychological angle (Eneh, 1986, pp. 117 – 121).

The take of this work in this is purely philosophical. According to Parmenides, 'Thoughts are things'. Human thoughts are not-nothing. Since thoughts are not-nothing, they can transmogrify to concrete real objects including physical objects-beings. This goes for a range of other mental activities. The odds are there is the possibility of the concretization of the objects of thoughts in lived conditions or into realities of the moment. The mother in travail had been subjected to repugnant experiential situations of the continual burial of

her children most probably in their infancy; something she would, were wished away but they persist and continue to develop further in the line of the thought of the mother. Thought thus persists and builds on itself. Because the mother is deeply involved in the reminiscing and deep mourning, she gets an unfair dose of the physical picture of this nasty encounter – kind of a zerox of the negative experiential phenomenon. It is an entangle; the more she wishes away the picturesque presentation before her imagination, the more the vivid presence of the mutilation mark of her dead baby gets stuck in her mind. This reaches a fever-pitch or hyper-imagination point where that stamp or imprint gets physically cut into the developing, fragile child in the womb (foetus). Thus, the newborn comes out with physical and visible mutilation marks at birth. Thoughts are things and can undergo mutation – a transformational dynamic leap with marked impact; imaginations are things as well. They can translate to reality depending on the depth or degree of the concentration of the mind on the object of thought or imagination!

Conclusion

The work has provided lots of insight into the understanding of Ogbanje. Some grey areas have been cleared via this rational approach. This notwithstanding, other questions would need methodological approach from the empirical standpoint, for instance: Is Ogbanje a disease? Does it border on medical pathology? Can laboratory tests be conducted based on presenting symptoms that can link Ogbanje to a medical diagnosis of sorts?

It would make sense as well for more studies to be conducted on the psycho-physical interaction (a mind-body problematic) that would lead to a newborn baby bearing mutilation marks from previous encounters by the mother with a deceased sibling that did bear supposedly preventative mutilation marks meant to ward it off from ever attempting to intrude in the family business of social existence. Existing mind-body interaction theories since Descartes do not promise to offer easy answers in this apparent quagmire. This is not in effect to call to question the validity of the position of this work on this particular point but rather to seek alternative explanations if possible and contribute further to the pool of human understanding in this rather curious phenomenon. These would, it is believed by the present research, enrich our state of knowledge of the Ogbanje phenomenon in Igbo cosmology.

References

- Achebe, Chinwe (1986) *The World of Ogbanje*; Fourth Dimension Publishers.
- Achebe, Chinwe C (1992) *The Ogbanje Phenomenon – An Interpretation*, in, *Healing and Exorcism: The Nigerian Experience*: SIST Symposium Series; Manu, Mbefo & Uzukwu ed. Spiritan International School of Theology.

Investigating the Ogbanje Phenomenon in Igbo Cosmology: A Rational Perspective

- Agbakoba, JCA in Martin F. Asiegbu & Joseph A. Agbakoba, ed. (2006): *Philosophy and Praxis in Africa*. Hope Publications.
- Chukwudera, Michael Chiedoziem: afrocritik.com>legend-of-the-ogbanje: 11 – 12 Nov. 2021
- Emesi, Akwaeke (2018) *Gender, Transition & Ogbanje*: www.thecut.com
- Eneh, Ezennia S (1987) *Reincarnation: Fact or Fancy?* CECTA (Nig) Ltd.
- Eze, Chinelo: guardian.ng>life>abiku-ogbanje: 21 June, 2020
- Garvey, James & Stangroom, Jeremy (2013) *The Story of Philosophy: A History of Western Thought*; Quercus.
- Iwalaiye, Temi: Chinwe Achebe: www.pulse.ng; 19 June, 2021
- Lexico.com (www.lexico.com>definition>Ogbanje
- Nachman, Ben-Yehuda: *The European Witch Craze of the 14th to 17th centuries: A Sociologist's Perspective*: *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 86, No.1, July 1980, University of Chicago Press, pp. 1 – 31.
- Nwala, Uzodinma T. (1997): *A Modern Introduction to Philosophy and Logic*; Niger Books and Publishing Co. Ltd.
- Nwoga, Ibe Donatus (1982): *West African Verse: An Anthology*. Longman Group Limited
- Nzewi, Esther: *Social Science & Medicine*; vol. 52, Issue 9; May 2001; pp. 1403 – 1416: [https://doi.org/10.1016/50227-9536\(00\)002245-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/50227-9536(00)002245-8).
- Nzewi, Esther (2001): *Social Science and Medicine*, vol. 52, Issue 9, May 2001, pp. 1403 – 1416: sciencedirect.com
- Ofodirinwa, Derick: *Freshwater* by Akwaeke Emesi: www.goodreads.com
- Onyemelukwe, Catherine: *Ogbanje, The Repeating Children*: herineonyemelukwe.com; 17 May, 2017
- Onyekwere, OUC & Uche, MC: *The Medical and Social Dynamics of Ogbanje as an Occult and Paranormal in Nigeria*, in, *African Journals Online: Journal of Religion and Human Relations*; vol. 1, No. 5 (2013)
- Uduigwomen, Andrew F & Ozumba, Godfrey O, ed (2000): *A Concise Introduction to Philosophy and Logic*. Centaur Publishers, second edition, 4th impression.