

THE EMERGENCE OF EARLY IGBO NOVEL: THE ROLE OF IGBO ORAL LITERATURE

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Abstract

This paper examines the Igbo oral forms that are incorporated in selected early Igbo novels and the extent to which they have contributed to the emergence and development of Igbo written literature. Unlike the contemporary Igbo novel writers, the early Igbo novel writers such as Pita Nwana, D.N. Achara, TagboNzeako, UdeOdilora among others made extensive use of Igbo oral forms in their creative works. Unfortunately, the Igbo oral forms employed by these writers are not fully exploited by the readers especially the Igbo youths. This is as a result of their poor reading culture and apathetic attitude towards the Igbo language. Therefore, this study aspires to identify some Igbo oral forms represented in the selected early Igbo novels with the view of determining their implications and impact in emergence of literary works in Igbo. To get about this, some early Igbo novels were studied. Related literatures were reviewed. Most of the data collected from library and literary works were interpreted and analysed descriptively. From the analyses, it is revealed that the phenomenon of incorporation of elements of the oral form into the early Igbo novel is real and this has positively impacted on the emergence and development of modern Igbo literature.

Keywords: Igbo, Oral, Literature, Novel, Emergence.

Introduction

Literature, whether oral or written exist in all cultures. By writing literature, people communicate ideas and feelings. By reading literature, people share these ideas and feelings. Prior to the introduction of the written form, and still, to a very large extent, after the introduction of the written form, the Igbo culture and consciousness were expressed, transmitted and perpetuated through the oral forms. The oral traditional culture forms an integral part of the Igbo man's thoughts and consciousness. The reason is that such individual originates from and in most cases is nurtured within the ethical and cultural circumstances where the oral tradition continues to play vital role as a major means of interaction and continuity. In support of this, Onyekaoonu, (1986:215), says, "The oral tradition becomes a sine qua non for cultural preservation and perpetuation.

Obviously, the traditional culture and ethics of the Igbo are steadily undergoing some changes as a result of the impact of foreign culture. Notwithstanding, some elements of the culture in which one has been genetically born and nurtured continue to dominate that person's thoughts, imagination and consciousness. From the above observation, one sees a clear picture of the relationship between the Igbo prose writers and the Igbo oral literature. To these writers, according to Obiechina, (1967:147), "Oral village storytelling as well as the other forms of oral tradition is a living reality and helps to inform and direct their attitudes and values. From Obiechina's view, one observes that the Igbo writers are bound to be influenced by the Igbo oral literature. In some of their works, elements of folktales, legends and myths abound and in their expressions, proverbs, anecdotes, traditional and philosophical sayings are freely applied.

It is pertinent to point out here that although the Igbo writers, writing either in English or in Igbo, exploit the Igbo oral traditional wealth for its cultural and aesthetic values, the originality of oral literature is more retained and preserved in the works written in Igbo than those written in English. The reason is not farfetched. Since the Igbo language is the vehicle with which the oral tradition is best expressed, the works in English, in spite of their ability to express Igbo thoughts and beliefs, fall short in their ability to retain in form, the originality of the Igbo oral literature.

However, this study tries to examine the truth of the incorporation of the oral forms into the modern Igbo novel or prose fiction, the nature and types of incorporation, the extent this incorporation of the traditional into the modern has manifested itself in the works of prominent Igbo prose writers and the impact of this on the emergence and overall development of modern Igbo prose fiction. For the purpose of this study, these terms: Igbo novel and modern Igbo prose fiction would be used interchangeably.

The concept of Oral Literature

Every society or community has a specific way or method of teaching, sharing and transferring its beliefs, norms, values, ethics, etc. from one generation to another. In Africa, such method(s) has existed before colonialism. The Igbo in particular appreciated and recognized their cultures, norms, beliefs, etc. and saw the need to pass them on from one generation to another. This need was achieved through oral tradition or literature.

Oral literature is, simply put, a literature that is transmitted orally from one generation to another. It is of the ancient. As the name implies, it is opposed to the written literature. It is transmitted orally and appreciated aurally from one generation to another. Okoh (2008:20) says, "Oral literature is spoken, sung,

intoned, recited, or chanted depending on the context". Similarly, Obi (2009:64) defines oral literature as, "the unwritten literature of any group of people handed down from generation to generation through the spoken word. It includes the major genres of prose, verse and drama, and sub-literary genres of tongue twisters, riddles, nursery rhymes, etc."

Oral literature is the earliest form of literature that is handed down from one generation to another generation. As the name implies, it transmitted orally and appreciated aurally. In his own view, Nwadike (1992:1) states that the Igbo literature has been in the oral form until the emergence of written. It is transmitted orally from one generation to another. He points out that the Igbo oral literature comprises folktales myths, legends, etc. from the views above; one finds out that the oral literature is not written. It is transmitted orally from one generation to another.

It was observed that the oral literature is universally owned. Nwadike (1992:36) as well as Greenway in Okoh (2008:22), supports the observation that the oral literature is universally and communally owned by the people of a particular group and culture. Before the coming of the Europeans along with their written literary culture, oral literature performed some crucial functions among the Igbo. Typical of such functions includes its use for entertainment purposes after the day's chores as well as for imparting knowledge (Obi 2006:117).

From Obi's view, one observes that the Igbo oral literature served as a means of formal education before the introduction of the western education to the Igbo society. Besides, Clarke (1976:1) says, "The earliest form of literature was a simple account of some heroic deeds recited or sung by specially gifted individual who is known as bard or minstrel in the presence of the listening audience. From the above view, one sees that through the oral literature, people come together to share their norms, beliefs and ethics. Equally, Onyekonwu (1986:214) defines the Igbo oral literature as, "that body of Igbo folklore that has been orally transmitted from one generation to another as seen in its original and undiluted form by the folks". From the above definition, it is obvious that the Igbo oral literature is also transmitted orally from one generation to another.

Based on the functions of the oral literature, Obiechina (1990:183) says: "...oral literature gives members of the society a sense of belonging. It helps to direct and shape the activities of the society". In support of Obiechina, Egudu (1978:35) says, "people learn through oral literature facts of social relationship between man and his community or immediate world..."

Oral literature exists in the following forms: folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, anecdotes, idioms, riddles, tongue twister, jokes and other forms of verbal arts. Folktales, myths and legends are believed to be the most developed forms and existed in form of stories. In line with the above, Onyekaoonu (1986:245) says, "folktale is the commonest and the most freely told of the three major types of the traditional folk stories".

The Concept of Igbo Novel/ Modern Prose Fiction

Igbo prose fiction is by popular opinion defined as the corpus of modern Igbo fictions in the prose form written in the Igbo language. It is generally referred to as Igbo novel or "Iduuazi" in Igbo. In the Igbo literary studies, the word 'modern' is used to denote the written form that is opposed to the traditional or the oral form. Contrary to the nature of the Igbo oral literature as seen above, the Igbo novel or prose fiction is in the written form with a well-known authorship. But as in the Igbo oral literature, some modern Igbo prose works contain imaginary stories and events. In other words, it emerged from the Igbo oral literature. Onyekaoonu (1986:6) agrees with this because he says, "modern Igbo prose fiction would be understood as works of modern prose literature in Igbo, concerned with the presentation of imaginary characters in imaginary world or setting". From this view, one sees that the modern Igbo prose fiction has its root in the Igbo oral tradition or literature. In line with the above view, Emenyonu (1978) opines that the modern Igbo prose fiction, drama and poetry have their roots in the Igbo oral tradition. In support of Emenyonu, Onyekaoonu (pg 222) says, "Some Igbo creative writers see the corpus of Igbo oral tradition as a rich source of literary materials; open to them for exploitation for the purpose of producing their own original works". In addition, Okpehwo (1977:1) says, "The store-house of folk myth and fancy are gainfully plundered by writers for their own original literary production. Okpehwo's view clearly shows that writers incorporate some forms of oral literature in their various creative works.

Despite the major transformations that have taken place in the Igbo society in the past years, a large number of people especially the Igbo creative writers remain in close contact with the traditional cultures and institutions. Oral traditions continue to play important roles in their lives. The researcher observed that some early modern Igbo prose writers extensively incorporated some elements of the oral literature in their works based on their conviction that for any literature to be written in Igbo language about Igbo world view, such literature has to incorporate some elements of the oral tradition.

Typology of the Modern Igbo Prose Fiction

The modern Igbo prose fiction could be classified based on the following:

- (i) **The mode** – this comprises realistic Igbo prose fiction like: *Isi Akwu Dara N’ala*, *Mmiri Oku E Ji EgbuMbe*, etc. and unrealistic Igbo prose fiction like *Elelianalhe O mere*, *Ala Bingo*, etc.
- (ii) **The length and Size** – this comprises some Igbo novel like *A SokataEze Anya*, *UruNwa*, etc, novella like *Ala Bingo* and other Igbo short stories.
- (iii) **The nature/quality of the story** – this comprises comedy like *JuoObinna*, tragedy like *UkpakaMiiriOnyeUbiam*, *OkpaAkuEriEri*, etc.
- (iv) **The content** – this comprises historical novels like *Omenuko*, *Isi Akwu Dara N’ala*, *JuoObinna*, etc Picaresque novels like *UkpanaOkpokoBuuru*, *Mmiri Oku E Ji EgbuMbe*, etc, Anthropological novels like *Dinta*, *OkukoAghasaaOkpesi*, etc, Adventure novels like *IjeOdumoduJere*, *Elelianalhe O Mere*, etc, fantastic novel like *Ala Bingo*.

Representation of Igbo Oral Literature in Early Igbo Novel

The early Igbo novel or modern Igbo prose fiction is the mirror or modification of the Igbo oral literature. Modern Igbo creative writers borrowed extensively from the Igbo oral literature. Nwadike (1992:19) agrees with this because he says that some modern Igbo creative works are rooted in Igbo oral literature. Onyekaonwu (1986:291) observes that the Igbo oral literature influences the Igbo modern writers a great deal. In his words he says,

Prior to the Nigerian civil war, majority of the Igbo novel writers have not been able to extricate themselves from the strong grips of the oral tradition (folk-tales) and their influences. It is not that some of them have not read enough of the English literature or African literature in English to widen their perspective and scope in their choice of themes, but it was their conviction that for any literature to be written in Igbo language about Igbo consciousness such literature or story has to incorporate a heavy dose of elements of the oral tradition. In some cases it is not a question of merely incorporating these oral elements but using the oral traditional content and format in

fashioning the framework and the story line of
their creative works

From the above views, it could be seen that the oral literature has been a vital tool for modern writers, especially the Igbo modern prose writers. These writers employ some Igbo oral forms in fashioning the framework of their stories so as to them a peculiar identity. Emenyonu (1978:2) agrees that modern Igbo fiction, drama and poetry have their roots in Igbo oral tradition.

The researcher also observed that some modern Igbo prose writers are moralists. Through their works they teach their readers one moral lesson or the other. Peck and Coyle (1993:108) agree with this because they say, "it is true that some novelists are moralists. They examine the relations between individuals and society and put forward their ideas about how people should behave..." Besides, Peck and Coyle (pg 108) are of the opinion that prose writers incorporate some oral forms in their works thus; "The story in a novel is almost a parable, a tale that makes a point, but in producing a novel the writer complicates the basic story by the addition of a great deal of tales..."

In similar vein, Kirszer et. al (2003:39) opine that the oral literature has influenced some works of modern writers thus; "Folktales and fairy tales, which develop along with other narrative forms have influenced works..." They also add that the folktales or fairy tales have an obvious theme or moral - good triumphing over evil. This is true. This theme could be seen in some works of modern Igbo prose writers.

In the case of modern Igbo prose works, one observes that some contain imaginary stories, imaginary characters and at the same time contain some elements of truth. This is a result of the influence of the Igbo oral literature especially the Igbo folktale on their writers. Again, their writers adopt this styles so as to enable them pass their message effectively. Literature whether oral or written is culture bound, and while written literature draws its materials from the people's culture, oral literature is an integral part of that culture and therefore a basic material for the written (Ekwealor1998:5). This opinion also points to the fact that the oral literature is a primary source of material for the written literature.

In addition, Ekwealor (2009:112) says that the Igbo traditional stories (folktales) serve as a vital tool for the modern Igbo prose writers. Many modern Igbo prose writers have borrowed and continues to borrow extensively what they present in their creative works from the Igbo traditional stories. Some incorporate some Igbo oral forms like the anecdotes, proverbs, folktales, etc. in their works. Some Igbo literary scholars like: Amano (2005),

Awugosi (2009 and 2010), Okediadi(2010) among others share a similar view with Ekwealor.

The Igbo Oral Forms in Igbo Novel/ Prose Fiction

Obviously, there is an evidence of the incorporation of some Igbo oral forms in the early works of Igbo novel writers. At this juncture, efforts would be made to x-ray some Igbo oral forms prominent in some early Igbo novels such as the folkloric elements in early Igbo novel, proverbs, metaphors and anecdotes, folksongs, etc.

Folkloric Elements in Early Igbo novel

As highlighted above, early Igbo novel writers incorporated some Igbo traditional stories also known as folktales in their works. There is a situation where a modern novel writer lifts a whole traditional story and recasts or remodels it for his own original work or where he makes the whole traditional work form a part of his own original work. Besides, there is a situation in which the modern Igbo prose writer brings in part of a whole traditional story to form part of his own original work. Also, there are cases where the writer transfers the character traits of a prominent animal character in a traditional story to a human character in his original work. This should also be regarded as part traditional story application. For example, the use of whole traditional story technique could be seen in D. N. Achara's *Ala Bingo*. The story in this book is probably a remodelling of an Igbo "Iduu" type of folktale titled "The famous king of the mountains".

Besides, a typical example of a case where a whole traditional story was employed as part of the writer's original work was presented in J.C. Maduekwe's *Dinta* (p32-35). Here, Kanelechi visited home from her husband's place and was pressurized by her younger sister, Ohiakara to render a folktale to her. During the moonlight play, Kanelechi narrated the story of a barren woman and a miraculously adopted daughter called "The e wetaran'agu".

D.N. Achara's *Elelianalhe O Mere* and L.N. Oraka's *AhubaraEzeAma* offer good examples of writers' use of part traditional story as part of their own original works. In parts of these two stories, incidents that involved divine intervention were presented. Pages 10-11 of *Elelianalhe O Mere* presented an incidence in which a bird secured the king's lost coral bead for Elelia and consequently, prevented Elelia from being killed by the king is part of a traditional story. Also, the incidence in which Elelia performed the three miraculous feats that qualified him to marry Nwoogo's daughter (pg 53-54) is part of a traditional story. In *AhubaraEzeAma*, the episode in which the dog, the cat and the water spirit, Okide, combined to secure Okonkwo's ring which

was stolen by the king of Edem and his daughter, is part of a traditional story. One can easily see how identical the motifs used by these writers in these stories are – lost but recovered coral bead and lost but recovered ring.

Again, a situation where the writer adopted the character traits of a prominent animal character in a traditional story for formulating a human character in his original work was found in Ubesie's *JuoObinna*. In the story, Ubesie endowed the character, Obinna, with all the character traits of the tortoise (mbe) of the Igbo traditional story. For example, in Ubesie's introduction of this character, Obinna on page one, he says;

E jiriokwundi a kowaakukomakaumanumanu, a sinaanu a na-amaatuyaihe a bumbe. Ma nanke a, o bummaduka a na-ekwumakayaihe a. Naniihe di ichen'etitimbenaObinnabunambebuanumanu, Obinnaburummaduna-ekwuokwu. Nkeozo, ma nkembe mere ma nkembeemeghi, o burunaaghughoadin'imeya, e boyambe. Mbeanaghiekwuokwu....

(If these statements are used for explanation about animals, the animal being referred to here is tortoise. But the statement made here refers to human being. The only difference between the tortoise and Obinna is that the tortoise is an animal while Obinna is a human being that talks. Another thing is that anything that is done by the tortoise or is not done by him, so long as such action involves playing of some tricks, the tortoise is held responsible because it does not talk...).

In Igbo traditional story, the tortoise is known for trickstering, mischief and schemes for deceit and escape. All Obinna's activities in the story followed this pattern. The name tortoise in Igbo cultural belief is synonymous with the word trickster. So is the name Obinna in *JuoObinna*. A direct reference to an aspect of the type of tricks he played could be seen on page 175, where Onyido, in trying to reveal Obinna's character to Nnenna and Ogbenyeau, camouflaged his name with that of Obinwanne thus;

"NkekanjobunaogeufoduObinwannechooighoag hugho, o keakwaochan'isikaonye shell kuchirinti, ma o bu o sunyeuwekaptin o zuteren'ohi, supunkendiogwuaja o na-eyi".

(The worst part of it is that sometimes, when Obinwanne wants to play his tricks, he ties some white clothes around his head like someone deafened by shell shock, or he puts on a captain's uniform which he has stolen and removes the commoner's dress which he usually wears).

Igbo Verbal and Artistic Devices

The researcher observes that some modern Igbo prose writers incorporate some Igbo verbal and artistic devices to enable them bring out the aesthetic quality of their creative works. According to Onwudiwe (2006: 159),

The Igbo language is a language that employs a lot of coloration to create its images and therefore to serve the function of communication. These colorations are drawn from the pool of its oral traditions, and the proverb stands out the most widely used. It is as a result of this that a lot of people look at a well-made speech in Igbo (oral or written) as that which is replete with proverbs.

Verbal arts are not stories but an essential part of traditional lore. They include proverbs, riddles, traditional maxims, anecdotes, idioms, metaphors and similes that create sharp images, etc. In Igbo tradition, speech making, storytelling and even ordinary conversation demand some art which is sometimes referred to as rhetorics. In this art, language is used for maximum effect; almost invariably, to produce an elegant and persuasive speech. However, it has to be noted that a good speech does not necessarily depend on the amount of these verbal items brought into it, but by the masterful manipulation of even a few that are employed, for producing a most effective result.

Out of these traditional verbal arts employed by these writers, it seems that the most commonly used is the proverb. This practice is so pronounced that at times one finds where proverbs are used in a work just for the sake of using them and not because they serve any useful purpose in such contexts. This goes to reveal how conscious and eager the Igbo writer is over the use of Igbo proverbs. However, some of them do it so judiciously that a maximum effect is achieved.

Obviously, one observes that these verbal arts are the aspect of Igbo oral traditional that are most commonly used by modern Igbo prose writers in the production of their own original literary works. The reasons for such inclination on the part of the writers emanates from their usual belief that any literary work in Igbo that does not contain proverbs and other verbal devices should not be regarded as a literary work at all. But even at that, it is not all literary works in Igbo that contain these verbal arts nor could it be claimed that all Igbo writers employ successfully, these verbal arts or artistic devices in their works. It is possible that given all necessary opportunities and potentialities, the aspirations of these writers would be to excel in the use of these verbal arts. But the fact remains that not all of them are endowed with these potentialities. The irony of it then is that at times those that do not possess this gift for proper selection and usage of verbal arts struggle to make up this deficiency by resorting to indiscriminate use of proverbs. Another possible reason why the verbal arts are highly patronized by the modern Igbo prose writers is that they already form the integral part of the Igbo language and the Igbo man's way of expression and since these writers thoughts and ways of expression have very powerful influence on what they write, it is difficult if not impossible for a writer to completely avoid the use of some of these verbal arts.

Here, a few examples of the use of traditional verbal arts in the selected modern Igbo prose fiction and their traditional functions or implications in the works are also examined. For example, in *Omenuko* (pg 59), one finds this proverb that state that:

“O na-abuokokowammadu, mmaduibeyaakooya,
ma o kowaanuohia, o gaachiwe ahu yan'osisi”

(When a human being has a feeling of some itching, he finds someone who helps to scratch the itching area. But when an animal has the same feeling, it goes to a tree to rub its body).

Pita Nwana employed this particular proverb not only to achieve some aesthetic goals in his work, but most importantly to focus on an important traditional value of the Igbo society. In a typical Igbo traditional and cultural setting, every Igbo man regards himself as his brother's keeper and as such, one man's problems should be the concern of others. One should not therefore hesitate to go to his brother or friend or anybody for that matter for help whenever one is in trouble. In the story, Mazilgwe was Omenuko's friend, and when the latter still in self-exile for the crime he has committed against his land and people seeks for a way to initiate a reconciliation with his people

and the gods of the land, he did not waste any time in consulting the former for necessary advice on the necessary actions to take.

Similarly, the following anecdote, in Ubesie's *JuoObinna* (pg 44) was primarily used to recapture a very important Igbo traditional philosophy thus;

Nwamkpika a siyabiaka a gbaarayaajauto, oṣi ha hapunkeutogbawarayankendun'ihinaonyedindug a-etouto".

(A he-goat when told that some sacrifices should be offered on his behalf so as to make him grow, protests and says that it is not important to him; rather what he needs is the sacrifice that will enable him be alive, for he who is alive will surely grow).

Tony Ubesie used this anecdote basically on Igbo traditional belief and philosophy that life supersedes every other thing. Igbo believe that life is greatest. That is why they take some names like "Nduka", "Ndubisi", etc. In the story, Ikechukwu and Obinna had a very important business. As they were about to set out, they heard sounds of exploding bombs, followed by a stampede. They were now placed between two choices - attending to the important business before them or running for their dear lives. They of course chose the latter since it is their belief that if life is secured first, business will be attended to later.

In *OkpaAkuEriEri* (p.2), Odilora's introduction of Akubuzo; the headmaster newly posted to Abangwu primary is another good example of the use of Igbo traditional verbal art- metaphorical epithets in a modern Igbo prose fiction. He says;

Na mgbeochie, mgbeelubu ala oṣa,
mgbeuloakwukwobuuloakwukwo,
mgbendinkuzina-enwennukwuugwunansopuru,
mgbehedimasitabugooment a na-
ahunyan'obodo, otunwoke aha yabuAkubuzo-
okuna-agbaozara, o dimfeanyiaro, dike a na-
akpaogwun'anya-
bjaraihiuloakwukwodin'obodoAbangwu".

(In olden days when the sky was the land of the squirrel, when schools were schools, when the teachers command a lot of prestige and respect; when the headmaster was the visible government

in a community, a man whose name was Akubuzo the fire that consumes the dessert, he who is light but weighty, the strong man from whose eye-balls thorns are removed-came to head the school in the town of Abangwu).

The metaphors in the above example were not only used to enrich the aesthetic overtone of the passage, but they principally helped to evoke the traditional and cultural milieu in which the description is set. In the story, Akubuzo was a headmaster famed for his high-handedness for the purposes of maintaining total discipline in his schools. He was a man reputed for his integrity and hard work and for these personal qualities, he attained an impeccable reputation. In Igbo tradition and culture, it is usually the people who attain such social status that are qualified with such metaphors, usually in traditional praise songs and eulogistic incantations. This type of praise song is also extended to men who achieve great heights in the society, for instance excelling in war, killing of lion and making some remarkable contributions towards the development of the community. Odilora felt that Akubuzo qualified to be addressed in these traditional metaphorical epithets.

The Igbo Traditional Belief, Culture and Philosophy in Igbo Novel

This is another area of the Igbo oral traditional that is of interest to the writers of modern Igbo prose fiction. Igbo people's philosophy, belief, consciousness and indeed total world view are implicit in their oral tradition, and these are expressed through their songs, proverbs, conversations, and in other forms of oral performances. Some of the Igbo philosophical and cultural beliefs, having helped to form the thought pattern and consciousness of these writers go a long way in influencing the stories they present in their creative works. For example, the incident discussed in chapter five of *OkpaAkuEriEri* projected 'Eke' (python) as a totem animal in some parts of Igbo land. Also, the 'Oji' (cola) ceremony at the beginning of any serious event is a custom very highly cherished by the Igbo. Examples of this ceremony could be seen in some of TagboNzeako's works - *Nkoli*, *Juochi*, etc. Besides, in *Dinta*, J.C. Maduekwe, presented the Igbo cultural belief in Ogbanje" (changeling), a phenomenon by which children are born and they die in repeated succession. In the story, Maduekwe seems to be giving an optimistic impression that the "Ogbanje" phenomenon could be combated or successfully challenged, contrary to the general belief amongst the Igbo that "Ogbanje" issue is really a thorn on the flesh.

Folksongs in Igbo Novels

In Igbo traditional storytelling, it is a common feature to intersperse or punctuate the story with songs. This device helps to enliven the narrative. Besides, it is used to illustrate and emphasize a point in a story. In the oral performance, it helps also to ensure the alertness and attention of the audience as well as providing them with some respite or digression as the story telling progresses. This Igbo traditional technique in story telling is employed by many modern Igbo novel writers. It was observed that J. C. Maduekwe is the chief adherent of this technique. For example, in *Dinta*, songs were well interspersed within the story. These could be found on pages 12-13, 17-20, 34 and pages 72-73. In *UruNwa*, songs were found on pages 59-60 and 125-126. In *AhūbaraEzeAma* by R. N. Oraka, songs were found on pages 14-15 and pages 78-81. In *Achara's Ala Bingo*, there is one on pages 29-30.

Impact of Igbo Oral Literature on Igbo Novel/ Modern Prose Fiction

From the examples above, it could be seen that the incorporation of some elements of the oral literature into the written form has really helped and continues to help in the emergence and development of the modern Igbo prose fiction. Also, the incorporation helps in sustenance and perpetuation of the Igbo oral literature for the posterity. Furthermore, the researcher observed that in addition to the great role the Igbo oral literature plays in the emergence of the modern Igbo prose fiction, the filtration of some elements of the Igbo oral literature into the modern Igbo prose fiction equally helps the works of modern Igbo creative writers to acquire some peculiar features; especially its didactic nature.

One sees that the filtration of some oral forms into the written impacts positively on the latter. Also, it contributes to its didactic nature. It is very glaring that some modern Igbo prose fiction are didactic in nature. Some stories presented in them revolve around the Igbo belief that evil act do not pay or that every man must reap what he sows. Stories in *Omenuko*, *IheOnyeMetere*, *Elelianalhe O mere*, *IsiAkwu Dara N'ala* among others are good examples.

Besides, modern Igbo prose writers incorporate the Igbo oral forms in order to give their works cultural identity. This is based on the belief that the Igbo literature is one- novel, drama or poetry written by an Igbo in Igbo language, which expresses Igbo consciousness and worldview. So, these writers make extensive use of the Igbo oral forms in their works so as to identify fully with other Igbo writers and Igbo literary works.

The researcher also observed that the incorporation of some Igbo oral forms by modern Igbo prose writers contributes to the imaginary and fantastic nature of their works. Obiechina (1982:61) supports this thus; “the fantastic and non-realistic elements found in creative works are the offshoots of the folk narratives”. In other words, he attributes the fantastic nature of the events, characters, setting, etc. in some modern Igbo novels to the influence of the oral tradition on the writers. Obiechina is right because some Igbo prose fiction like *Ala Bingo*, *Elelianalhe O mere*, *IjeOdumoduJere*, etc contain fantastic and imaginary stories. Their writers made extensive use of some Igbo oral forms especially the folktale.

Conclusion

The study has been able to examine the Igbo oral traditional background in terms of its impact on the Igbo people generally and writers of modern Igbo prose fiction in particular. It also identified and examined aspects of the Igbo oral tradition that are exploited by modern Igbo prose writers. These have given a clearer picture of the extent to which modern Igbo literary works have been influenced by the Igbo oral tradition. From this exposition also, one can easily understand why works of modern Igbo prose fiction could safely be described as mirror of the oral tradition.

Apart from the fact the modern Igbo writers consciously incorporate some forms of the Igbo oral tradition especially the Igbo proverbs in their works, there is possibility that some of them see the measure as a way of preserving the cultural heritage of the Igbo. Obviously, this transfer of the tradition into the modern is very healthy in that it helps in no small way to preserve, transmit and perpetuate the oral tradition for the posterity. It also graciously captures the spirit of the Igbo language and, in fulfilling one of the functions of literature, helps to shape the future growth of the language, literature and culture of the Igbo race.

From the above discussions, one observes and understands that the influence of the Igbo oral literature on the Igbo modern prose writers has really played an indispensable role in the emergence and development of modern Igbo prose fiction. Besides, this phenomenon has helped the modern Igbo prose fiction to acquire some peculiar features, especially its moralistic and didactic features. It is hoped that this study will help to rekindle the interest of readers in exploiting and appreciating the cultural and moral values embodied in the Igbo oral forms incorporated in the works of Igbo novel writers.

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