

## Images of Children in Igbo Aetiological Tales

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**Abstract:** *Humans seek to mediate meaning and assign order to their rather chaotic world. In the pursuit of meaning and to account for phenomena, they coin tales for things and situations they cannot otherwise explain. Cultures all over the world have their aetiological tales, stemming from their ideology, which accounts for why things happen or are the way they are. Through their aetiological tales, the beliefs, culture and tradition of the Igbo regarding the creator and the created are exposed. The child is one component of society that is considered important. Nonetheless, it is conceptualised differently in each culture. The study, therefore, seeks to determine how the child is conceived of in Igbo ideology through Igbo aetiological tales. Eleven tales are purposively selected from Eke na egwurugwu, a book of aetiological tales. The research methodology adopted is qualitative; the tales are analysed using the precepts of paradigmatic structuralism to decipher their deep structures. Following structural analysis, six images of the child are discerned, namely - the child as valuable, the child as a sacrificial object, the child as a saviour, the child as foolish/stubborn, the child as insolent and the child as violent. It is observed that the Igbo aetiological tales are multifunctional in that, aside from helping to assign reasons behind many situations, they also help to explain the rationale behind some Igbo customs and practices. Even more, they reveal the Igbo ideology about the child. It is hoped that the study will, among other things, provide an in-depth understanding of Igbo philosophy.*

**Keywords:** Aetiological tales, Child, Igbo, Structuralism

### 1. Introduction

Generally, etiology is the study of causes, origin or reasons why things are the way they are. As a branch of knowledge, it cuts across diverse disciplines. However, in literature, etiological also written as aetiological tales are those narratives that provide the origin of various social and natural phenomena. Humans seek to assign meaning and order to their rather chaotic world. There are phenomena that man cannot account for and for such occurrences, they coin tales to serve as a rationale. Cultures all over the world have narratives with which they provide explanations for prodigies that they cannot otherwise justify. Aetiological tales are used to explain present behaviours or a known feature of humans, plants and animals. They are also

used to account for the origins of many rituals and ceremonies, and they stem from cultural ideologies.

Finnegan (1970) thinks of aetiological tales as a type of myth that is not religious in nature. She states its defining characteristics to include entertainment and didacticism, adding that what distinguishes it from other folkloric tales is the ending. Aetiological tales end with ‘that is why...’ This expounds why it is also known as the ‘why’ or ‘pourquoi’ tales. Dundes (1984) tilts towards Finnegan’s view. To him, there is a clear difference between aetiological tales and aetiological myths. He defines the aetiological myth as prose narratives which, in the society they are told, are considered to be truthful accounts of what has happened in the remote past. They are accepted as a part of the faith and often have some sacred roots. Dundes (1984), in essence, is saying that aetiological myths are stories that are strongly tied to religion and rituals. Ikwubuzo (1999) notes that aetiological myth offers explanations as to why certain phenomena exist. Koning (2022, p.164) defines aetiological myths as those that mostly deal with “gods, monsters or heroes who in some distant past performed a certain deed, the result of which shaped a particular aspect of the world and/or its inhabitants as seen today.

Following the above views, aetiological tales do not have religious affiliations, whereas aetiological myths have. Mbah and Mbah (2007) agree that there is a difference between the two but prefer to separate them. To them, because of the difference in content and purpose, myths should not be yoked with the aetiological prefix. They explain aetiological tales to mean the tales that provide a rationale for otherwise inexplicable occurrences, and myth as a religious narrative with a serious theme backed by a ritual. They outline the differences between aetiological tales and myths to include that aetiological tales are often ridiculous, illogical and full of childlike mentality, whereas the myth is considered serious and sacred. More undoubtedly, Bolle (1975) distinguishes an aetiological tale from myth. While an aetiological tale provides an answer to the question *why* such and such are the way they are, myth answers the question *whence*, indicating the validity or basis of something. More so, the aetiological tales are imaginative because they are not supported by any historical or scientific evidence, unlike the myths, which are regarded as factual.

Furthermore, Green (1997) states that an aetiological tale is a folkloric genre comprising belief tales, folktales, myths and legends. He submits that the difference between these forms of aetiological tales is their purpose and content. The belief tales provide rationale, the folktales instruct and impart morals, the myths are centred on demi-gods, while the legends are stories about heroic humans. Aetiological tales seek to give explanations for some given phenomenon that arose as an answer to man’s curiosity (Wessels & Klooster, 2022). For Childs (1974), aetiology is conceived of as a story that arose from the stimulus of an effect and a cause. Irrespective of this, he further notes that the issue at stake in the definition of aetiology is how the link between the cause and the effect is created. However, for

this study, the definition of aetiological tales is operationalised to mean those narratives that account for incidents that do not have religious ties and are not re-enacted through ritual. They are prose narratives that are illogical and are used to provide answers as well as teach and instruct.

The Igbo are a tribe that inhabits the eastern coast of Nigeria. They are a society distinguished by their peculiar beliefs, traditions, festivals, history, struggles and lived experiences. Like all other societies, members of the Igbo society are grouped in strata based on factors such as age, economic status, social status, etc. Members of each stratum acquire their image based on the beliefs centred on them. The child in the Igbo worldview is one who is not married and, as such, is not saddled with responsibilities. Okeke [2019, personal communication] asserts that the Igbo child is one whose parents are alive, regardless of age and marital status. The child only becomes an adult at the demise of his/her parents. He explains that there are roles that are reserved for adults, and the child cannot perform those roles while his/her parents are alive. This implies that the Igbo do not adjudge childhood based on age or experience as Westerners do.

The Igbo child is valued. S/he is envisaged as the future. For this study, the term 'child' is used to designate not only an infant, but any character whose role in a tale has been conditioned by their relationship with their parents. There are many beliefs revolving around the Igbo child, and the Igbo aetiological tales serve as a better avenue to account for the origin or the reasons behind such conceptions. This study, therefore, seeks to ascertain how the child is conceived of in the Igbo worldview by analysing aetiological tales featuring the child. It is hoped that the study, amongst other things, will illuminate and expound on the various beliefs surrounding the child and what informed them. A study of this nature offers a window into the societal values of the Igbo people, revealing how the child image is understood, constructed and idealised in their aetiological tales. Therefore, this study gives a deeper understanding of the cultural, historical and moral frameworks that have shaped the image of the child in Igbo aetiological tales.

## **2. Review of Related Literature**

Aetiology in literature is a deliberate attempt to explain the origins of some concepts, phenomena, customs and traditions (Ugwueye & Ihemekwala, 2017). In the view of Wessels and Klooster (2022), although aetiology is basically understood as diagnostics from a medical connotation, aetiological stories in literature, religion, politics, and other areas highlight a strong emphasis on effects and are used to introduce something. With this in mind, it shows that there is a connection between aetiology and innovation. Hence, for a proper understanding of aetiological tales, recipients need to be convinced that the proposition generated from the appropriate origin in aetiology is in line with acceptable tradition. Aetiology, therefore, serves as a link between the past, present and the future as they link phenomena/objects to their origins.

Who is a child or what one can refer to as childhood, are views that have contrary opinions as a result of the paradigmatic and syntagmatic evolution of the concepts. Bera and Bhaumik (2023) note that while the term *child* is often biologically defined, *childhood* can hardly be referred to as a scientific nomenclature. In medical terms, childhood connotes a post-infancy period that ends with puberty. This makes adulthood the polar opposite of childhood. To Bera and Bhaumik (2023), two varying definitions of childhood are popular. One is a faulty adult and the other an icon of innocence. They further note that since the 19th century, the innocence, spontaneity and creativity of a child have been changed by modern cultures because of the overdose of surveillance and supervision from parents, guardians, and schools. This is because children are the worst minority that are subjected to multifarious oppressions in different facets of life. Zipes (2014), in his exploration of the relationship between storytelling and the formation of self in youths, notes that children exposed to fairy tales develop the ability to cope with all kinds of adversities in their lives.

Lechner (1991) studies the image of the child in Chinese folktales. For her study, she uses picture books that are published in the United States but set in China or Japan. Getting books that had child protagonists was difficult, as children in such contexts seldom play significant roles in such books, as they are retellings or folktale adaptations. Two motifs are identified in Chinese folktales. One of the images is the child as saviour or protector of their people. The other is that of the loyal child within a family setting, whose ingenuity saves a member of their family. Aside from the two motifs, Lechner (1991) further discovers that the child can be construed as a hero. Unlike Lechner (1991), who opined that children are not so significant in Chinese folktales, Macijauskaite-Bonda (2009) states that children are represented in all Lithuanian folklore with roles such as main characters or protagonists. The study focuses on the phenomenon of supernatural birth and the rules of child rearing. It also discusses the relationship of the child with the outside world. Harlick (1998) examines the role of children in Theban tales and the cruelty that is meted out to them. The cruelties discussed are abduction, abandonment, exposure and murder. Through her study, Harlick (1998) explores how Greek traditional tales of the Theban reveal many facets of life in a mythical world where children play a significant role. Regardless, children in the tales are usually passive in nature. Children who are abducted, exposed or murdered often did or do not have control over situations in the tales.

Nwaozuzu (2006) explores the child as an object of innocence and credulity in Igbo folktales. She notes that the child is one of the stock characters in Igbo stories. She views the child as one who connotes the quality of being harmless, naïve, and not knowing wrong or evil. She analyses folktales that show the innocence of child characters and how they reflect the naïve state of children. Nwaozuzu (2006) proposes a schema that presents two approaches to the evolution of a child's

personality in Igbo folktales. The first approach proposes that a child who is raised in an atmosphere of love, care and trust grows up with a positive attitude and becomes an asset to their parents and society. The second states that a child who is brought up in an atmosphere of exploitation and abuse of innocence will definitely have a negative attitude. They will be a liability to their parents and society. Since the above propositions of Nwaozuzu (2006) hold sway in the folktales that she studied, the ability of such propositions to be universally applicable cannot be ascertained. Alieva and Muratova (2024) examine archetypes and motifs in English fairy tales and folklore that depict childhood. They identify key themes such as innocence, vulnerability and adventure. These attributes show the naïve nature of the child and the dangers that they face. The child in the English fairy tales and folklore is also depicted as a hero who handles seemingly insurmountable challenges. This attribute is in line with the findings of Lechner's (1991) findings on Chinese folktales. Irrespective of age, they are given roles that show them as brave and resourceful. The child is further portrayed as a trickster, who resorts to cunning, cleverness and playful disregard for rules. Alieva and Muratova (2024) note that the motifs derived from English fairy tales and folklore resonate with the general notions of childhood. They reflect broader societal values and cultural norms of a people, specifically in the areas of morality, gender and the idealisation of youth.

The reviewed literature highlights that studies have been carried out on the image of the child in folktales. However, much attention has not been given to their depiction in aetiological tales. This study addresses this gap by examining how the child is conceived of in aetiological tales. This will bring to the limelight the portrayal of children in Igbo *why* tales, as they mirror the Igbo past and future.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The theory this study subscribes to is structuralism. Structuralism is a literary theory that has two approaches, viz, the syntagmatic and the paradigmatic. The syntagmatic approach looks at the sequence of events in a narrative, while the paradigmatic approach looks at the deep structures in a narrative. However, this study will employ the paradigmatic approach to elicit the deep structures in the tales. This approach is subscribed to because it will enable the researchers to study Igbo aetiological tales centred on the child, decipher their intrinsic compositions so as to mediate their similarities and draw an informed schema. The paradigmatic approach was propounded by Claude Levi-Strauss in the year 1957. Goring, Hawthorn and Domhnall (2010) aver that the paradigmatic approach was used by Levi-Strauss to educe the deep structures in myths of diverse cultures. Abrams and Harpham (2012) submit that the paradigmatic structural approach is used to mediate the deep structures in a narrative(s).

#### 4. Methodology

The qualitative paradigm is adopted for the study. Eleven aetiological tales featuring the child are purposively drawn from Nwadike's *Eke na Egwurugwu*, a compendium of Igbo aetiological tales. 'Otu ehie na abali siri bido' (How day and night came to be), 'Ihe kpatara a naghị ahụ Chineke anya' (why we do not see God), 'Ihe mere mmadu nwuo o naghị ebili ozo' (why people do not resurrect after death), 'Ihe mere egbe eliigwe ji eme mkpotu ma o gbasia' (why there is an aftermath sound following the thunder), 'Etu ji si bia n'ụwa I' (How yam came into the world I), 'Etu ji si bia n'ụwa II' (How yam came into the world II), and 'Etu ji na ede siri bia n'ụwa' (How yam and cocoyam came into the world) 'Ihe mere mmadu ji anwu anwu' (why humans die), 'Ihe mere mmadu ji enwe akara n'azu I' (Why humans have a gully at their backs (spinal cord) I), and 'Ihe mere mmadu ji enwe akara n'azu (spinal cord) II' (Why humans have a gully at their backs (spinal cord) II), 'Ihe kpatara a naghị ahụ mmuo anya' (why spirits are invincible). The images of the child are formed from the salient motifs in the tales.

#### 5. Data Analysis

Following a paradigmatic structural analysis of the eleven tales, five schemas constituting the image of the child were discovered. The five images are as follows

(A) **The Child as Valuable/Priceless:** The child is considered important by the Igbo. It is believed that of all the possessions an Igbo person has, the child is the greatest. This representation of the Igbo child is seen in tales 'otu ehie na abali siri bido', 'Ihe mere e ji enwe mkpotu ma egbeigwe gbachaa' and 'Ihe kpatara a naghị ahụ Chineke anya'. In the first tale, a woman was being ridiculed by her co-wives "Otu n'ime ha enweghi nwa. Site n'ihu ya ndi nwunyeedi ya ndi ozo a na-akpari ya" (One of them had no child. As a result, her co-wives ridiculed her). The barren woman heard of a great priest in a faraway land who had helped other barren women beget children. Because of the importance attached to the child, she sojourned to see the priest. The priest promised to help her but asked her to exercise patience as the set of children available was the one that would cause her pain and sorrow; but then, because of the importance of the child, the woman disregarded the priest's advice and insisted that she did not mind the child's outcome. "A chorọ m nwa etu o bula o siri di" (I want a child at all costs). This desperation on the woman's part was borne out of the worth and significance of a child in Igbo ideology. Conversely, the rationale behind the priest's advice is that the Igbo lay greater emphasis on proper child training. It is held that it is better not to have a child than to have a badly behaved one. Upon the insistence of the woman and sensing the urgency of her needs, the priest yielded and gave in to her demands. True to the priest's warning, the child grew up to be villainous. He killed his parents and wreaked havoc. He also had a talisman with which he wanted to kill an old woman who had equal powers. They were locked in a fiasco such that when the boy releases his powers, there is day/light, and when the woman counters his powers, there is night/darkness. In that way, night and

day came to be. The implication is that the Igbo believe that the fate of a child is decided by the gods even before it is conceived. Again, the killing of the parents by the child points to the belief that parents with badly behaved children bear the consequences. Nonetheless, the child's power occasioning light/day instead of its subservient pair, darkness/night, shows the status of the child as the bright future and hope. Furthermore, in the second tale, the weight of the child is equally felt. This is evidenced in the way a mother whose child has been sick without any sign of getting better, damned the consequences and accosted God. God took his time in replying to the woman. The woman got angry and slapped him. God felt heavily insulted and decided from that day henceforth that no human would set eyes on him again. Even though the woman's attitude can be regarded as an act of disrespect, she did it out of fear of losing her most prized possession, her child. More so, in the third tale, the importance of the child is realised. A murderous lion killed a whole family, but for a pregnant member. When the child was born, even though it was not the lion's, it took proper care of it regardless. This indicates that the Igbo value the child regardless of paternity. They believe that the child is communal and does not belong to one person.

(B) **The Child as Saviour:** The child is also presented as one who salvages. This is evidenced in the tales 'Ihe mere mmadu nwuo o naghị ebili ozọ' (why people do not resurrect after death), 'Ihe mere egbe eliigwe ji eme mkpọtụ ma o gbasia' (why there is an aftermath sound following the thunder). According to the first tale, there were two little female orphans; the elder one was foolish, and the younger one was wise. One day, out of her foolishness, the elder one got them into trouble with an old and evil witch. The younger one, in her wisdom, rescued themselves and also stole the flute with which a dead person is called back to life. Back home, they used the magical flute to revive the dead until the sheep ate up the flute, thereby destroying the only means of resuscitating dead people. Thus, people do not come back to life. In Igbo dogma, age and size are not tantamount to wisdom, and this explains why the younger of the two girls was the wise one. This tale indicates that the child is conceived of as capable of salvaging dire situations and inventing or attracting solutions to problems. The Igbo regard the sheep as foolish and call one perceived to be foolish 'Aturu' (Sheep). This explains why it was the sheep, through its stupidity, that ate up the flute. Furthermore, in the second tale, Ebubeagu, whose family members were killed and his mother held captive, saved his mother from captivity and avenged the deaths of his family members. This tale suggests that the Igbo envisage the child as one who can save their family and avenge the wrong done to their relatives.

(C) **The Child as a Sacrificial Object:** The child is visualised as one who can be used as a ransom to the gods to achieve or solve dire tasks. This conception may be

tied to the fact that the child is innocent and undefiled. In Igbo traditional religion, it is only that which is whole, unsullied and valuable that is acceptable to the gods. In the tales ‘Etu ji si bịa n’ụwa I’ (How yams came into the world), ‘Etu ji si bịa n’ụwa II’ and ‘Etu ji na ede siri bịa n’ụwa’, the child is portrayed as a sacrificial object. In the first tale, God gave Ezenri and Ezedama one tuber of yams each. Ezedama found the yams delicious and went back to God to ask for more. God told him that he knew they would find it delicious. He then told him that for them to have yams, Ezenri must send his son and daughter. God’s sending for the children instead of their father is in itself significant, for when they came, God gave them a pot from which yams came into the world. God’s action indicates that the child is worthy of being a co-creator with him. More so, in the second tale, which is pretty much a distorted version of the first tale, the child is sacrificed. There was famine, and man sought the face of God. In exchange for food (yams), God demanded that a certain woman, Ori Nta, should hit any object on a tree, tie her son to the tree and set both ablaze. The woman carried out the task, and after a while, yams grew out of the tree and came to be. Here, the child was offered up for yams to be. Also, in the third tale, it is said that yams and cocoyams came into being when God asked a certain man who sought his face over the adverse living conditions of man to kill and bury his son and daughter. The man did as he was instructed. When it was harvesting time, the man harvested yams from the boy’s grave and harvested cocoyams from the girl’s burial site. This accounts for why the yam is associated with males and the cocoyam with females. In this tale, the child is a sacrificial object desired by god. It will neither be outrageous nor ridiculous to assume that it is because of the belief that the child was sacrificed to get yams that led the Igbo to value yams so much so that, of all the farm produce, the yam is regarded as king. The yam is so treasured by the Igbo that it has a festival dedicated to it. Even more, it is only yam that has a title “Di Ji” attached to anyone who farms it the most. It can be inferred that the child is sacrificed not as a scapegoat but as something worthy.

(D) **The child as foolish and stubborn:** The child is, amongst other images, seen as obstinate and irrational. As pointed out earlier, the Igbo lay great emphasis on proper child training. In these tales, ‘Ihe mere mmadu ji anwu anwu’ (why humans die), ‘Ihe mere mmadu ji enwe akara n’azu (spinal cord) I’ (Why we have a gully at our backs (spinal cord) I), and ‘Ihe mere mmadu ji enwe akara n’azu (spinal cord) II’ (Why humans have a gully at their backs (spinal cord) II), the child is depicted as wilful and intractable. According to the first tale, humans became vulnerable to death because a certain old woman gave her grandchild yams to cook. She explained that she was going to the backyard to shed her old skin and rejuvenate. She instructed the child not to under any circumstances call out to her, as that would disrupt the rejuvenating process. However, when the old woman was halfway done shedding her skin, the grandchild called out to her to come and stir the yams. As a result, the woman’s metamorphosis was disrupted. The woman then turned to the child and



said, “Ewezuga mkpochi ntị gi, agaara m egosi gi ihe nzuzo dī n’ibi ndū ebighiebi” (Save for your foolishness, I would have shown you the secrets to eternal life). Thereafter, she declared that from then henceforth, the child and his descendants will be susceptible to death. Hence, death came into the world. In the second tale, a girl called Agbomma, who is the child of her parents as well as an exceptional beauty, refused all the men who came to ask for her hand in marriage. All the men from her village and other neighbouring villages were not good enough for her. Finally, the story of her beauty and her unreasonable criteria for a husband got to the spirit world. A halved-bodied spirit borrowed body parts and came to marry Agbomma. Agbomma was ecstatic because he matched her yardstick, and they got married. She got to know of her fate only when her husband led her across the human-spirit border into the spirit world. As soon as they were in the spirit world, he returned the borrowed body parts. Upon realising her grave mistake, she planned and escaped. But just at the boundary of the two worlds, the husband caught up with her and tried to catch her. He scratched off the skin on her back in an attempt to grab her. She escaped but with an indelible wound, which healed and became the spinal cord. Once again, the obstinacy and foolishness of the child have cost the human race. More still, in the third tale, which is closely related to the second tale, a certain boy decided to take the title ‘Nwa ka nna ya’ (A child greater than his father) as his alias. The name did not augur well with either the father or the community, as the father was the king. To make him see the folly in choosing such a name, he was given different challenging tasks to perform, and of these, he did well. Since he had passed the earlier tasks and had refused to back down, it was decided that the ultimate task, which is to go to the land of the spirits to fetch a magical object be issued to him. The boy sojourned to the spiritual realm and was able to deceive the spirits. He took the magical pot. However, when he was between the boundary of human and spiritual lands, the spirit tried to grab him but only succeeded in scratching off a lump of flesh from his neck down to his waist. Since he came back with the object and proved to be greater than his father, he cost the human race a smooth back for from then henceforth, humans all had a hollow at their backs. From the tales, it can be deduced that the child is seen as foolish and incapable of obeying instructions; as a result, serious matters should not be entrusted to the child, as it is bound to make mistakes. Again, it can be inferred that the child is imprudent and prone to making poor decisions. Agbomma married a spirit because she was not discerning enough. Still, the child is seen as reckless. The boy subjected himself to difficult situations because he was not wise. In all, the consequences of the foolishness of the child are not borne by him alone; it had far-reaching implications. Hence, a need for proper guidance. Nonetheless, the boy in the last tale was able to retain his name ‘Nwa ka nna ya’ because it is believed that the child is supposed to outdo his father.

(E) **The Child as Insolent:** In the tale ‘Ihe kpatara a naghị ahụ mmụọ anya’ (why the spirits are invincible), it was alleged that it was as a result of a child’s insolence

to her mother that made it impossible for humans to see spirits. According to the tale, in the beginning, the living and the dead dwelt and could see and communicate with each other until a certain girl touched her dead mother with the broom while sweeping. The mother complained, but the girl rudely told her mother to stop complaining or stay where she belonged. The dead mother was hurt and decided to stay in the spiritual realm. But before she left, she took a coconut, broke it in two. She took the side with her eyes and gave the girl the other side. She then declared that spirits would be seeing the living, but the living cannot see the dead. The Igbo place great importance on respect for the elderly. It is believed that the child is prone to forgetting himself and insulting his elders. Such behaviour has far-reaching consequences, such as a curse being laid on the child. It is believed that the words of an elder are effective on the child. More still, touching or beating someone with the tip of a broom is a taboo in Igbo dogma. If one touches another with the broom tip, the offender is to immediately touch the tip of the same broom on the floor and apologise to the offended. Even more, if one walks across a broom, one is to cross back; otherwise, the person will not be able to beget children.

(F) **The Child as Violent:** The child is pictured as violent in ‘Etu ehie na abali siri bido’ and ‘The mere egbe eliigwe ji eme mkpọtụ ma ọ gbasia’ (why there is an aftermath sound following the thunder). In the former tale, the child is seen as destructive. He destroyed lives and properties and killed his parents. In the latter tale, Ebubeagu first of all destroyed the properties of his foster father, killed members of his family and finally killed the lion. The Igbo believe that the child who is not properly trained can bring destruction on his household and community, as is the case with the boy in the first tale. Over-indulging the child can make the child untameable. More so, the child is seen as one who can get into a fight to protect his own or seek vengeance.

## 6. Conclusion

Eleven Igbo aetiological tales centring on the child were studied to ascertain how the child is conceived of in Igbo ideology. The tenets of the paradigmatic structural approach were subscribed to, and the deep structures of the tales were elicited. Six images of the child - the child as important, saviour, sacrificial object, stubborn, insolent and violent were extracted. The various images were explained relying on the Igbo prevalent beliefs and practices.

It is discovered from some of the tales that women are closer to the child. They care more for the child. It was also observed that in the tales, the male child is mostly violent and brave, whereas the female child is insolent and foolish, as obtained in some tales. More so, it was also observed that the Igbo aetiological tales not only serve as a rationale for why things are the way they are, but also their beliefs on the child and other members of society are made apparent. Even more, some aspects of Igbo culture and tradition, such as valuing and privileging the yam above other farm

produce and the 'broom tradition', and why the part of the coconut with eyes is reserved for the elderly, are all accounted for by aetiological tales.

Unfortunately, the aetiological tale is waning in importance as a result of many factors, including modernisation and civilisation. Nonetheless, it has a very big impact on the anthropological studies of Igbo culture as it exposes the origin and rationale behind many ceremonies, festivals, norms and behaviours of the Igbo.

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