The Types of the Hero in Representative Texts of Ohafia Igbo Oral Epic Songs

Chukwuma Azuonye, University of Massachusetts Boston
THE HERO IN IGBO LIFE AND LITERATURE

EDITED BY
DONATUS NWOGA
AND
CHUKWUMA AZUONYE
Chapter 2

The Archetypal Hero in Igbo Oral Narratives

By

Chukwuma Azuonye

Introduction

Despite the rapidly growing evidence to the contrary, it is still assumed in a number of circles that the Igbo are "a people without heroes". The truth, however, is that there is no such thing as "a people without heroes". The hero is a universal archetype which lives in the collective unconscious of humanity, from where it is projected in the appropriate circumstances onto a special breed of men acknowledged by their contemporaries and subsequent generations as surpassing all other men in their physical, intellectual, spiritual and moral excellence. But excellence in itself is not enough to distinguish a man or woman as a hero. A hero is essentially a man who applies his superior endowments to the defense of the security and honor of his people in time of crisis. And quite often, he is the selfless lamb of sacrifice who submits to suffering or lays down his life in the pursuit of a common cause. Indeed, it is this self-sacrificing virtue, more than anything else, that immortalizes the hero in the memories of his people. His exemplary life is not only a thing of beauty that endures for ever; more importantly, it is a dynamic image of the sublimest limits of positive human action which, by inspiring emulation, serves to promote the continuity of the spirit of enterprise in the life of a community. It is perhaps not too much to say that it is ultimately on the survival and continuity of this spirit of enterprise the heroic spirit that the health, power and progress of any human society depends. A society without heroes (if such a society can be found) is a doomed and backward society. Such a society lacks the essential positive force to drive it forward to greater and greater heights of excellence. Not surprisingly, the noblest arts, rituals and official histories (or myths) of every society are devoted to the projection of the lives and careers of its greatest heroes.

The Igbo as a part of humanity partake fully in the capacity to project the archetypal heroic image onto their men of distinction, and recent investigations of Igbo oral traditions reveal an almost
inexhaustible wealth of heroic narratives in every autonomous
community. According to one informant interviewed at Enugu-
Ukwu:

Heroes are many in our area ....In fact, there are so many that I do not know
which ones to talk about and the ones to leave out. All the same, we have
some who are more prominent than others, who left indelible marks in the
world with regard to their extraordinary behavior... (Obineme, 1986).

Similar testimonies have been recorded from many other areas of
Igboland and, in most cases, there is evidence of the crystallization
of the heroic legends of the communities concerned into the form of
the epic, panegyric poetry, and related genres.

I have elsewhere examined the image and significance of the
hero in two major types of the Igbo epic recorded so far (Azuonye,
1984b; see also Chapter 27 below). In this paper, I will attempt a
fairly detailed examination of the dominant and recurrent features of
the life of the typical hero of Igbo oral narratives in general.
Attention will focus on those traits and incidents which may be
properly described as archetypes by reason of their archaic features
and their similarity to traits and incidents found in the lives of
heroes in other cultures, all through the ages. My purpose (Section
2, below) is to distill from these features an archetypal hero-pattern
for Igbo oral narratives comparable to those discussed in Okpewho
(1979), for African epic heroes, and in von Hahn (1876), Rank
(1909), Raglan (1934), Bowra (1952), Campbell (1956), de Vries
(1963) and Dundes (1980), for Indo-European and related heroes of
tradition. In the concluding section of the paper (Section 3), the
significance of the archetypal hero-pattern in the Igbo tradition will
be examined chiefly with reference to the wider implications of the
assumption that the Igbo are "a people without heroes".

The Archetypal Hero-Pattern in Igbo Narratives

The materials for the present study of the pattern of heroic life in
Igbo oral narratives include Afictional tales (akuko-ifo) and
Ahistorical tales (akuko-ala). The later includes myths and legends,
and their crystallization in the form of epic. The legends were
recorded by my oral literature students at the University of Nigeria,
Nsukka, from over fifty different autonomous communities scattered
across Igbo land. The fictional tales and myths have been taken mainly from Ugochukwu, Meniru, and Oguine (1972) and from my own collections. The epic texts are all from my own field work at Ohafia and Aguleri and the studies based on them (Azuonye 1979, 1983a, 1984a, 1984b, 1985a, 1985b).

Some of the elements of the pattern appear to be primary, in the sense that they are either obligatory or of more frequent occurrence than others. The rest appear to be secondary, in the sense that they generally feature more as embellishments than as essential elements in defining the heroic image. In this rather exploratory study, no attempt has been made to categorize the elements of the pattern. This is matter for future research when more data from other parts of Igbo land become available.

Altogether, nineteen major motifemes are proposed here for the Igbo hero of tradition. These range from the typical, essential formulaic, identity of the hero (I), through many themes relating to his ancestry and parentage (II), the special circumstances of his conception, birth and upbringing (III to VI) and the details of his heroic career (VII to XVII) to his transition (XVIII). The special mark of the hero (XIX) with which the present pattern ends is a notable addition to the standard Indo-European and African hero-patterns, and it is indeed surprising that such an important motifeme which looms so large in heroic tales across the world is hardly given the prominence it deserves in the many hero-patterns available in print.

Dundes (1980:232) doubts the usefulness of "a universal hero-pattern allegedly applicable to all human societies." But the truth is that such a pattern, if it can be found (and I believe it can be found) is clearly as useful as, if not more useful than, "an empirical study of the entire life stories of individual heroes." Whereas "an empirical study of the entire life stories of individual heroes" merely confirms the well-known fact that such stories represent a mythical standardization of individual historical personalities into an archetypal pattern, "a universal hero pattern" is clearly of value in highlighting the essential psychic and cultural unity of man. We should be reminded again and again of this unity - of our essential affinities with other men and our common aspirations, hopes, dreams, fantasies and predilections - as we ponder each motifeme in
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the Igbo hero-pattern.

I. The Identity of the Hero. The archetypal Igbo hero is essential a fighter - a warrior or hunter who defends his people against hostile environmental forces. The eponymous ancestral figures - the founding fathers of the numerous small autonomous communities (mba) which make up Igboland - are represented in migration legends as the great fighters who weathered the hostility of new, difficult settlements, chasing away fierce autochthonous people and wild animals in order to secure the land for posterity. The successors of the great ancestors are the big-game hunters and head hunters who, as the warriors of the heroic age (Azuonye 1983b) defended the ancestral heritage and sought honor in wars fought in faraway lands: expansionist and territorial wars, slave-raiding wars, and resistance against foreign domination, including Benin and British domination. The Igbo heroic age came to an end with the so-called Pax Britannica following which the last generation of Igbo war heroes were humiliated by the British in public gun-breaking ceremonies, imprisonment, exile and displacement by warrant-chiefs supported by the full arsenal of colonial military might, money and language.

The emergence of the warrant chiefs dealt a great blow on the Igbo heroic spirit by ushering in an era of alienation and anomie (see Azuonye 1984a: 2). Dressed in alien physical and intellectual power, the warrant chiefs lacked the moral and spiritual excellence of the traditional hero and failed to gain the acceptance of their people. The reawakening of the Igbo heroic spirit had to await the emergence of the new Nigerian elite. The nationalist hero or leader typified by the young Zik (Dr. Nnamdi Azikiwe) who contended with the monster of alien powers led the way with his intellectual brilliance and charisma. Other types of contemporary heroes followed, including the "been-to" who returned from the whiteman's land with the "golden fleece"; the international sportsman who contented with the whiteman in his land and returned home victorious; the shrewd businessman who acquired wealth by outwitting white trading partners and brought prosperity to his people, the brilliant politician who maneuvered his way into power
in ways reminiscent of the Igbo trickster hero, Mbe, the tortoise.

All these are of course modern projections of traditional archetypes: the great wrestler, Ojaadili, who wrestled with spirits in their land; the great orator whose words could heal or destroy; the great medicine man or artist who traveled to the legendary Oru or other distant lands to acquire supernatural wisdom. The Amazonian Igbo female warrior who bestirred the world of men in the Igbo heroic age (see the cases of Nne Mgbafo and Inyan Olugu, in Azuonye 1979, 1984b and 1986) made a remarkable re-emergence in the Igbo Women's riot of 1929 while the traditional warrior imbued with supernatural powers returned to the battle fronts of Biafra in the Civil War of 1967-70.

The hero has no fixed identity. His identity changes in tune with the circumstances of each generation, but within a gestalt pattern focussing the qualities discussed above. Thus we are told by Ogbaa Kaalu, an Ohafia singer of tales (Azuonye, 1979: 387; and 1981c).

Today, head-hunting is out of fashion. But if you grow rich or become highly educated, especially if you go to the white man's land and return with your car and immense knowledge, we would naturally perform (heroic songs) for you. The point is that by doing these things, you have won your own battle honors. Passing examinations and bringing home the white man's money, these are the prevailing kinds of war we have today. If you achieve these, they are counted for you as your own battle honors. The same is true of building a big house, one that is truly imposing. People will say (on seeing it): your money is your own battle-trophy. On the day such a house will be opened, we would normally perform for you, for by building it, you have won your own head in battle, for things of this kind are the only kind of head-hunting that exists in our present-day culture.

But whatever may be his particular sphere of action the Igbo hero fits into gestalt pattern, the main elements of which are described in various dialects of Igbo by a plethora of words and expressions which focus on aspects of his superior powers. He is dike, i.e di-ike (strong one; master of strength), ome (causer; causative agent), mmuo (spirit; superhuman), okaa (superman; he that surpasses all others), odogwu (mighty one; gigantic one; giant among men), arusi, arumsi, alusi (spirit; god; divine), ikor (war drum; inspiring war leader); ogbuu (killer; destroyer), onye-oke (great one), etc. The fixed formulaic epithets - praise-names, titles and the like - emphasize the unusual features of the hero's life, behavior and
associations. He is compared to the gods, spirits and other supernatural beings as well as to the forces of nature - wind, water, thunder, lightning, rock etc. He is, for example, *gaa-gaa-n'ogwu* (he that walks freely over thorns), *ekwu-eme, okaa-omee*, (he who if he does not lead the way in a battle there can be no forward march), *anu-a-na-agba-egbe-o-na-akpa-nni* (beast that feeds unperturbed in the face of a shower of bullets), *ofulu-ogu-machaa-onu* (he whose mouth waters in the face of battle) and many many others (see Azuonye 1981b).

In some cases, the same hero combines many of the traditional attributes of the Igbo archetypal hero. But the great majority of heroes are highly specialized, confining their activity to only one area or another.

II. *The Ancestry or Parentage of the Hero*. The ancestry or parentage of the typical Igbo hero is usually remarkable or extraordinary. In the great majority of cases, he is the child of a pauper who rises to eminence either through the discovery of a hidden inner potential or through the assistance of a supernatural helper. In a number of cases, especially in the stories set in the Igbo mythical world of Iduu (usually identified with the ancient Benin Kingdom), the hero turns out to be the child of a king or a royal virgin or the child of a witch; but generally in these cases, the hero's legitimacy is in doubt and thus he is usually a rejected or oppressed son often brought up by paupers. Thus, in effect, he is even in such cases still the child of lowly parents and ancestors. We can thus say that typically the Igbo hero is the republican, achievement-oriented leader who, lacking the privileges of an aristocratic birth, rises to eminence through the instrumentality of some innate supernatural attributes or his own force of personality and effort.

In some cases, the hero does not have one or both parents. Onoja nwa Oboli, the Igala warrior in Nsukka and Anambra heroic traditions, was reputed to be the son of an Igala Queen and "was scorned by his associates as being fatherless" (see Afigbo 1981:119). But Igu, the folk hero of Mbano, does not have any known parents or ancestors:

Igu did not come out of any woman's womb. He exploded like an oilbean
fruit. He existed of himself. He had no father, he had no mother. His lineage is not in existence at all (Onuoha, 1984).

Similarly, Tabansi Ishekwulishe of the heroic tradition of Ogbendida, Onitsha,

does not have a father or mother. All we know is that after sometime, he came out and began performing heroic feats and after a while he disappeared again (Ibuzu, 1986).

The idea of the unborn parentless hero is probably related to another allomotif which presents the Igbo hero as illegitimate in the sense that his legal father, as in the case of Jesus of Nazareth, does not play any natural part in the pregnancy of his virgin mother. The hero's mother either suddenly becomes pregnant or conceives through the agency of a magical object, the intervention of a supernatural force or in some unnatural, at any rate unusual, means.

In other cases, the hero's virgin mother is abducted by an animal who far out in the forest becomes the father of the hero. A typical illustration of this is the abduction of the mother of Nwoke-Orie, the folk hero of Orodo, by a leopard who ultimately fathers the hero:

A long time before the first white man came, there was a horrible leopard which belonged to Eze-Ala (chief deity of earth). This leopard ravaged the town, killed animals and frightened men. People were afraid to travel alone although the leopard did not kill or eat anybody. The story of the fearful animal spread far and wide. One Eke-market day, the leopard appeared and snatched one beautiful young girl called Ekemma and hurriedly carried her away. People cried, shouted, rang bells, beat drums but to no avail. Everybody was stricken with fear. People gazed with open mouths. It was concluded that Ekemma had been devoured by the infernal creature. There was mourning for her loss....Many days passed. Many weeks followed. Many moons came and went. Then, one Eke day, Ekemma reappeared exactly at the time of her disappearance. Those who saw her first started to run away, supposing it to be the apparition of her ghost. But when they stopped at a distance and looked back, she beckoned on them. With a mixture of courage and fear, they went back and discovered that she was pregnant... (Akanazu 1978:39-40; see also chapter 24).

There is a suggestion here that the leopard which abducted Ekemma, the hero's mother, is a surrogate of the local Earth deity. This is surely reminiscent of the abductions of fair maidens in Greek mythology by Zeus and other Olympian gods in the guise of various
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animals. The motif is thus tied up with a universal hero-trait, the idea that the hero is the son of a god.

But the idea that "the greatest heroes are...so wonderful that they cannot be wholly human but must have something divine about them" (Bowra 1952:94), is pursued in another way in Igbo oral narratives in the picture of a number of heroes who are specially created by God in the romantic epics of the Anambra Igbo (see Azuonye 1984b and 1985). In the Ozoemena Ndive epic, for example, there is no sexual union between the hero's mother and father. The hero is specially created by God in such a way as to enable him fulfill a number of special roles on earth; the same is true of Ojaadili, the hero of the Epic of Ojaadili Udeoba. In most cases, the mother of the hero is not only a virgin but one married from a faraway kingdom after a long series of ordeals or prolonged customary processes. Thus, in the Ojaadili Udeoba Epic, the hero's mother is married from Iduu Kamerun after a very long and trying journey.

Where the hero is not especially created and planted into a virgin's womb, the full-grown hero is sent down to the earth by God (Chukwu), as in Nri Mythology:

Chukwu first made an ant heap and sent Ezenri to sit on it; then he took oton, ofo and alo, and put them on the ant heap; when the king sat on the ant heap, there was no dry ground, so Chukwu sent a blacksmith who blew his bellows and made the ground strong (Thomas, 1913, I:138; see also Thomas, 1913, I, 50-51).

In other cases, the extraordinary powers and life of the hero is explained in terms of a special divine purpose in his creation. Thus, we are told of Okeagu, the folk hero of Umuokuzu, Umuokanne, in Ohaji:

This ... was not an ordinary person ... The way God created his fellow human beings ... was not the way he was created (Ofurunna, 1984).

And of Igu, the hero of Mbano, we are told:

Our people believe that he had mysterious powers which nobody had ever had in the world. He got his power from Chukwu (Onuoha, 1984).

III. The Hero's Unusual Career in the Womb. What Okpewho (1979:87) says of the hero's "unusual career in the womb" in other African heroic narratives, applies very well to the
archetypal hero of Igbo oral narratives. To begin with, the conception of the hero is often unusual and the conceived hero tends to spend a much longer time than is usual in the womb. In ordinary folktales, the length of the hero's stay in the womb hovers around one and half years, but in the monumental romantic epics of Anambra, it ranges from two to thirty-nine years. The motif is well illustrated by the Anambra epic of Ameke Okoye. The hero's mother, Mbanugo, appears at first to be unable to conceive; but when eventually she becomes pregnant, the pregnancy last for thirty-nine years:

Mbanugo carried the pregnancy

And as the pregnancy grew
People began to wonder
At its unusualness both in size and duration.
After she had carried it for twelve months
Bystanders began to ask one another
Whether the woman was actually pregnant
Or afflicted with the stomach-swelling disease.
But when the pregnancy continued for twenty years,
People became tired of gossips
And tale-bearers only made mouths at her

For everyone had now heard of Mbanugo's non-stop pregnancy
Despite all these, the pregnancy continued for another ten years.
Making it a total of thirty years
Before the signs of labor came.
It came and went
And the pregnancy continued for another nine years
Making it thirty-nine years in all,
Then did the real labor come
On a day Mbanugo was trying to cross the village square of Adaja...(Ezinando, 1978:22-23)

Another aspect of the hero's "unusual career in the womb" is his temperamental response to the environment outside the womb. In Uga heroic legend, the unborn hero, Mmuoka Nwokike, responds violently to the weather conditions of the rainy seasons:

While in the womb, he showed a negative attitude towards the rainy season. Whenever it was about to rain, he would start jumping up and down in his mother's womb disturbing her. He did not like hearing the sound of thunder. If ever he heard that, he would start...jumping... If the weather was dry, he would keep quiet (Asiegbu, 1986).
Where the hero's mother is not subjected to this kind of anguish, she is repeatedly frustrated by the fluctuating fullness and emptiness of her womb as the unborn but restless hero wanders out and back into the womb over and over again. This motif also features in Uga hero legend, in the story of Alisiagwu Dim recorded by Asiegbu (1986). In this legend, the services of a dibia are enlisted to still the prenatal wanderings of the hero.

IV. The Advent of the Hero.

The coming of the Igbo hero is frequently announced by the unborn hero himself in a dream, vision or in some other way, quite often in a confrontation with his future or pregnant mother. In the popular tale of Oboghorita, the hero - a great medicine man called Uluagu (Ezeoke, in some versions) - confronts a notorious baby-eating witch, Oboghorita, and announces to her that he would soon die and reincarnate through her womb in order to destroy her. In fulfillment of this prophecy, Oboghorita suddenly becomes pregnant in her old age and after one and half years in the womb, the hero emerges. There is neither labor nor any other sign of birth. As Oboghorita climbs a raised platform to take some yams from her barn, Uluagu jumps out of her womb and takes to his heels. Oboghorita pursues but is frustrated by the hero's inborn magical powers. As she pursues, Uluagu flashes his naked bottom at her, whereupon the road multiplies sevenfold before her. While moving in and out of the mazes, Uluagu disappears into a distant country where many years later, he is able to destroy Oboghorita by the force of superior magic.

The Uluagu story contains most of the common allomotifs of the idea of the unusual advent of the archetypal Igbo hero. First, as in the heroic legends of other African societies, the Igbo hero often chooses the mode and time of his birth. He himself foretells his birth, otherwise it is revealed by divination through a dibia consulted in the course of his mother's extraordinary pregnancy. The advent of the hero is thus portrayed as the fulfillment of a prophecy, a fulfillment of a grand plan for communal deliverance. Thus, Okpewho (1979:86) observes: "There is about him (the African hero) something foreordained and omens of glory accompany the birth". It is, however, not only "omens of glory" that accompany the birth of the Igbo hero. The omens may be quite cataclysmic. There
may be a tumult in the heavens and the elements may be in total disarray. Thus in the Orodo hero tale of Nwoke-Orie, the birth of the hero is accompanied by drought:

Dry season ensued. Crops withered in the severe heat. Animals were dying of hunger because there were no leaves.... Then, one Eke evening, the rainbow appeared in the East. The fortune tellers said a big thing would happen. Immediately at night, it started to rain. This rain did not stop until the afternoon of the following day. During the night rain, there were also lightning and thunder. It was at this time that Ekemma gave birth to a bouncing baby boy. But nobody in the neighborhood knew of the birth until the rain stopped on Orie day (Akanazu, 1978:39-40).

Similarly, the birth of Odo Nwaozo Nwaeze, hero of Umulumgbe, Udi, after his aged mother's twelve-month long pregnancy is accompanied by mysterious death of "the fowls and goats in his father's house" (Ozor, 1986)

At birth, there is something unusual in the appearance or behavior of the hero which sets him apart from other children. He may fail to cry or otherwise cry in an unusual way. In the case of Odo Nwaozo Nwaeze of Umulumgbe heroic legend,

When he was born, he did not cry. He was humming "hu-hu-hu-hu-hu-hu-hu" and barking "ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba-ba"...he was not breast-fed. When you gave him breast, he would remove his mouth...It was only water that he took. He was not breast-fed like other Igbo people (Ozor, 1986).

Quite often he grows the upper teeth before the lower ones and may be born with one instead of two testicles. There may be six or more toes on each foot. There may be many other physical or behavioral mutations. Such heroic deformities mark out the hero from other humans and lead to further prophecies about his heroic mission.

As we have already seen above, the actual birth of the hero comes after a long prolonged labor, otherwise there is no labor at all; and the actual delivery takes place in an unnatural way with the hero jumping out or tearing his way out of the womb often fully dressed and armed with a special weapon of war or magical tool.

V. The Threatened Childhood of the Hero. The great majority of heroes are born with the threat of death hanging over them from the beginning. This is as true of the life of many Igbo heroes as of the lives of heroes in other traditions in Africa and elsewhere. In
the Oedipal tale of Isionye, "a giant of extraordinary prowess" in Enugwu-Ukwu heroic tradition (Okonkwo, 1986), the hero's life is threatened as in the universal archetype when it is prophesied that he would kill his father and marry his mother. Thrown into an evil forest, he survives and later flees to another country from where he returns to fulfill his horrendous destiny. Ultimately he flees and settles in a mighty forest, with his mother-wife and children, forming the present Umunnevo village-group in Enugwu-Ukwu" (Okonkwo, 1986).

Apart from this oicotype of the universal tale-type, the threat on the hero's life in his childhood features commonly in Igbo heroic tales set in the Igbo mythical kingdom of Iduu. In this cycle of tales, as illustrated by the tale of Omalinze (Ugochukwu et. al, 1972:1) the hero is the unknown male offspring of a king who has many wives but no male issue. The king procures a magical agent, usually fruit, which he gives to all his wives except the hated wife who lives in an isolated hut near a garbage dump. But a helpful animal (commonly a lizard) takes a rotten fruit, thrown away by the king's chief wife, to the hated wife and she eats it and becomes pregnant like other royal wives much to the surprise of everyone. One the day the king's wives would be delivered of their children, the king sends them to a river-bank with a servant instructed to kill all female issues born by any of the wives. All the king's favored wives give birth to females who are instantly destroyed, but when it comes to the turn of the hated wife, she begets the only male issue. Thinking that the king would be saddened by this turn of events and not wishing to kill the child outright, the servant surrenders the prince to the water in a container. Later the unknown prince is picked up by a poor woman washing breadfruit seeds by the waterside and brought up in her hut from where he ultimately rejoins the royal household.

There are as yet no recorded Igbo cases of heroes such as the type described as having been reared by animals or mythical figures as in Indo-European traditions (de Vries, 1963:213). But the possibilities are there. More common in Igbo oral narratives is a pan-African hero-type (the Mwindo type) who is provoked into an all-out war against his own father in revenge against his mindless cruelty toward his mother and numerous threats to his life. A related
hero-type found mostly in Iduu legends is that in which the threatened child hero, Nwakanna (Child-greater-that-his-father) or Nwakannekanna (Child-greater-than-his-mother-and-father), successfully accomplishes the "impossible tasks" set by his father with a view to destroying him ultimately displaces his father against his mother.

VI. The Hero's Prodigious Childhood. As Bowra (1952:95) has pointed out "The hero's career begins early and shows what kind of man he is going to be". Similarly, Okpewho (1979:89) says of the African epic hero, that he "reveals his strength, courage and other particular features at a very early age". This is very true of the threatened heroes discussed above. In the Anambra epic of Ozoemena Ndive, we are presented with the typical pattern of prodigious childhood:

And so Ozoemene reached the age of seven from the time he was born.
And he saluted his mother and father.
And they replied him.
And he said to them:
You will have to forge a hoe and a matchete for me,
I will go and lease a piece of land on which to work,
Because hunger is troubling our people. (See Azuonye, 1984:9; and 1985:18-19).

Ultimately an extraordinary large matchete of several kilometers in length and breadth is forged for Ozoemene by the great Agulu Oka smiths and with this he clears a large territory of over a hundred square miles, inhabited by monstrous spirits of various kinds, with six strokes of the matchete and plants maize on it. But before the realization of his ultimate plan planting yams on the farm, he finds himself in flight from Nduye-Nduye at the head of other monsters displaced from the forest, a flight that spans seven years.

The childhood of Ameke Okoye, another hero of the Anambra epic tradition is similarly prodigious:
Within a twinkle of an eye,
The child began to walk, to run and play games,
Like every grown-up in the town...
Aniemeka began to grow,
Growing into such an unusual size,
While his age mates were learning to crawl,
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He was already striding like a giant of long standing.
People who met him always asked,
"Is this not the child of yesterday?" (Ezinando, 1978:25-26).

Similarly, Odo Nwaozo Nwaeze of Umulumgbe heroic legend is presented as a wonder child:

As a child, he started speaking like old men, speaking like old men. People said, "When was this child born that he now tells stories like old men", saying "When...was he born that he tells stories like old men" (Ozor, 1986).

vii. The Hero’s Pre-eminence Among his Peers. The Prodigious childhood of the legendary hero is due to a large measure to his outstanding personality which distinguishes him at birth and which matures fully in his early manhood. As Bowra (1952:97) has observed, "the hero possesses those gifts of body and character which bring success in action and are admired for that reason. He may be strong or swift or enduring or resourceful or eloquent."

The typical Igbo legendary hero is a giant among men (odogwu). He possesses outstandingly commanding physical attributes of the kind possessed by Okonkwo in Achebe’s Things Fall Apart (1958). Quite often, he is a gargantua with an exaggerated physical size and anatomical features. Ameke Okoye, Ozoemene Ndive, Ojaadili Udeoba, Onja nwa Oboli, etc. of the Anambra and neighboring northern Igbo heroic traditions are typical gargantuan heroes deriving from the same folk archetypes as Ogu (War) and Mgba (Wrestling) in Achaara’s Ala Bingo (1933), which belongs to central Igbo heroic traditions.

Like his parallels in other African traditions (cf. Okpewho, 1979:94), the Igbo legendary hero is, in spite of his heroic deformities, generally possessed of outstanding good looks, quite often ungraspable and unimaginable. Thus we are told of Ozoemene Ndive in the Anambra epic of the same name:

And so it was that he Ozoemene,
That Ozoemene Ndive,
The day he was born,
After he had been born,
He neither looked like a spirit
Nor looked like a spirit
Nor looked like a human.
But when he started to walk
And it happened that he was actually walking,
If you saw him,
A person he was taller than,
That person was a dwarf,
But the person taller than him,
The person was a giant.
And so it happened that of all handsome men in the world,
He was the most handsome (Azuonye, 1985: 18, lines 26-39).

In some cases, the Igbo legendary hero presents the opposite personality and appearance: he is either extraordinarily dwarfish or ugly or both.

But whatever his looks may be, even where, in some cases, he possesses the physical size and outward appearance of ordinary men, there is something godlike or ethereal that radiates through him and makes him recognizable, wherever he goes, as different from other men.

In some cases, the hero is presented as a half-human, half spirit being. Here, the image of Alisiagwu Dim of Uga heroic legend is quite typical:

There was something extraordinary about his physical features. Unlike other Uga people, God created him half-human, half-spirit. One side of his body was spirit while the other side was human. The side that was spirit was painted white with chalk while the other side was left to be very black (Asiegbu, 1986).

Even when the hero is presented in purely human terms, he is bound to possess a heroic deformity of a sort to which his peculiar physical energy is attributed. At the very least, he is expected to possess a "single bone" in each arm. Thus, we are told of Ngwunaruogu, the folk hero of Mbu Akpoti in Isi-Uzo:

Ngwunaruogu was huge and strong. Our people believed that he had a single bone. In our town today, if you say that you can do something extraordinary, people will ask you if you are Ngwunaruogu (Nnadi, 1984).

Even more striking is the heroic deformity of Igu of Mbanọ legend:

He was a huge man that was bigger than his peers. No other man as huge has existed ever since. His thighs were as huge as the trunks of the ụrụ tree. Each of his eyeballs was as big as the full moon. His head was as big as the great rocks at the entrance to the Igu shrine (put together). Those great rocks at the Igu shrine were brought there by Igu himself. The fingers in each of his
hands numbered eleven... and each of them was as big as the trunk of a coconut tree. His body as a whole was different in every way from that of an ordinary human. He could eat five mortars of pounded cassava in one gulp and at the same time drink three pots of water (Trans. from Onuoha, 1984).

In the presence of Igu, Ezeokeke Onwukamba of Obinri, Oraeri, who is "a giant of a man, as big as five hefty men" (Okonkwo, 1986) is a puny mortal, and Igu himself is but a Lilliput before Ameke Okoye and other gargantuan heroes of the Anambra romantic epics (see especially Azuonye, 1984b and 1986b).

Just as he is different from other men in his physical appearance and personality, the typical hero of tradition in Igbo oral narratives is also different from other men in his habits, especially in the way in which he satisfies the natural instincts. Eating, sleeping, waking up and drinking are activities which he undertakes with elaborate ceremony or destructive force.

The hero's destructive energy is however never leashed against his own people but exclusively against other people, the enemy. In his home territory he not only comports himself with great restraint so as not to abuse his powers, he also often epitomizes the highest moral and spiritual virtues of his people. In an Mgbowo heroic narrative, Oluoha Ucheonwu, "The Champion that deserves a handshake" (Uzonu, 1986) is presented as such an epitome of moral virtue:

He did not drink wine; he did not snuff tobacco. He neither fornicated with married women nor with young girls. In fact he was an ideal character.

Celebrated as "one man that fought the fight of the people", Oluoha Ucheonwu's fame never went into his head and he remained respectable to his peers and elders alike to the end.

Occasionally, however, some outstanding personalities whose lives otherwise conform to the archetypal hero-pattern deviate from the path of moral rectitude and turn terrorists against their own people. Men of this kind, e.g. Alisiagwu Dim of Uga legend, are ultimately rejected by their own people as "negative heroes" or "anti-heroes":

Alisiagwu...was a cannibal and a great wrestler. He dug trenches into which people fell and anybody who fell in, would be killed by him. When the person is killed, he would take home the quantity of flesh he liked for meat and bury the remaining in the trench. Though he had many hero traits, he was what
may be called a "negative hero" because his heroic actions were not in the interest of Uga people (Asiegbu, 1986; cp. Anukili n'Ugama, in Umeasiegbu, 1986).

In the end, Alisiagwu is rejected by his people. He dies a miserable death, unmourned, unburied and is greeted with curses and maintains his moral probity from the beginning to the end is greatly loved his people and feared by the enemy. His death calls for the most elaborate heroic burial among his people and lengthy festivities among the enemy. Thus at the end of the heroic career of Mmuoka, Nwokike of Uga legend, we are told that he was buried with magnificent ritualism of a kind that has never been seen in Uga ever since his death.

Ihe ebube ihe ebube ka e jiri kwaa ya.
Oru o sirí kpaa ike ka e siri kwaa ya,
kwaa ya noo n'ebube ebube.
Umu ihe di iche iche ka e jiri kwaa ya.
A kwara ya akwa! (Asiegbu, 1986).

[It was with things of great splendor that he was mourned.
It was in accord with his heroism that he was mourned indeed with great splendor.
It was with a wide assortment of [beautiful] things that he was mourned.
He was truly given a befitting burial (free translation mine).

Intellectual excellence is another attribute which marks out the Igbo legendary hero from other men. This is of course a universal heroic trait. As Bowra (1952:160) tells us, "since wits are another sign that he surpasses other men, there is nothing discreditable in their use to secure a glorious end." Indeed, the Igbo legendary hero, like his African counterparts described in Okpewho (1979:95-97), quite often displays unusual strength of mind and aptitude both in games and in serious affairs of life. In the case of Ukurube, a folk hero of Ebem Ohafia, according to the version of the legend recorded at Ebem, Ohafia, in July 1977, his success stems from precisely the same kind of mental alertness and shrewdness for which the Igbo trickster hero, Mbe (Tortoise) is well known.

Ukurube is a never-do-well who neither goes to farm nor to tap palmwine; nor does he have in any kind of trade. But once upon a time, he falls in with a renowned wine-tapper who he now regularly accompanies to his palm groves to tap palmwine. As the friendship
between Ukurube and his master grows, Ukurube's father dies. But no one expects anything to come out of Ukurube. However, his master undertakes to finance the burial of his father and sends Ukurube alone to the palm grove to fetch as many calabashes of wine as possible.

In the palm grove, Ukurube falls asleep on top of a palm tree, having got himself drunk as he sipped drops of wine. As unease spread at home among the funeral guests and the host, Ukurube's master sends someone to go and look for Ukurube. Meanwhile Ukurube awakes and makes for home with some calabashes of palmwine. As chance would have it, he meets two Aro men on the way, one carrying barrels of gun-powder, the other carrying cases of imported hot drinks. The Aro men ask Ukurube to give them some palmwine: "One our way back home we shall pay you".

Ukurube agrees but cleverly strikes a good bargain; in exchange for the wine he takes some of the barrels of gun-powder and cases of hot drinks on the understanding that when the Aro traders come to pay for the palmwine everything would be squared up. With the gun-powder and hot drinks he now returns to his village and gives his father the kind of funeral no one had ever seen before in Ebem. But soon the Aro traders come for their goods, but Ukurube brushes aside their claims that the goods bartered for his palmwine were of superior value and insists that "whatever you will charge for your goods is the price I am asking for my palmwine". Frustrated and defeated in the battle of wits, the Aro traders leave Ukurube with his gains and return to their home.

The legend of Ukurube which belongs to the repertoire of Echeme Ugwu of Ebem is highly popular throughout Ohafia. Although Ukurube is a kind of deviant from the established heroic norms which urges positive demonstration of physical and moral virtues in pursuit of personal or communal honor, he is admired for his wits, especially in his demonstration of intellectual superiority over traders from the rival community of Arochukwu who claim to be the most clever people in the Igbo world.

ix. The Hero's Love of Danger. This is of course one of the most constant and universal of all hero traits, and as Okpewho (1979:101) has observed with reference to the lives of heroes elsewhere in Africa, the "love of danger" is "a frequent corollary
of the hero's self-esteem". Whether he is a warrior, hunter, wrestler, etc., "the hero spares no risks in pursuit of his man" and, generally, he displays an absolute "contempt for the certainty of death" in situations in which the honor of his race, nation, tribe, clan, family or self is at stake. Always compounded with this attitude is a complex of related emotions: love, loyalty and patriotism.

In the epic songs of the Ohafia Igbo, love and loyalty play a dominant role in the adventures of such female warriors as Nne Mgbaafo and Inyan Olugu (see Azuonye 1979; 1981a; 1983a; see also Chapter 27 below). Nne Mgbaafo is a young woman whose husband goes to hunting war in Ibibio territory but fails to return with his comrades-at-arms. After waiting for three market weeks (twelve days), Mgbaafo sets out in search of her husband. Dressed in the habits of a male warrior, she submits herself to the perils of the war front. On arriving at Ibibio territory, the enemy is so impressed by her courage that they give her back her husband who they had taken prisoner with the intention of selling him into slavery.

In the Epic of Inyan Olugu, the heroine's action is motivated by her sense of diminished honor. Her husband, Itenta Ogbulopia, is a coward (onye-ujo) who had failed woefully to meet the manly responsibility of his age and time: the winning of a human head in battle. Consequently, he and Inyan Olugu are subjected to public humiliations of various kinds in accordance with the custom of the day. Inyan Olugu therefore contrives a situation in which she sends her cowardly husband to embark upon a palm fruit raid in enemy Ibibio territory, a most perilous venture in those days. But as the enemy attempt to intercept Itenta while he is atop the palm tree, Inyan fires at them from an ambush killing four of them. She chops off their heads and gives them to her husband who, on his return, is hailed a hero amid the thundering of the heroic ikoro drums. For her part, Inyan Olugu is immortalized in heroic legend and epic songs as ogbu-etuwui-di-ya (killer-that-gave-the-honor-to-her-husband).

One needs to recall the conditions of the Igbo heroic age, especially in borderland areas such as Ohafia to fully appreciate the gravity of the perils to which Nne Mgbaafo and Inyan Olugu submitted themselves. It was an age of ubiquitous head-hunting, a
most dangerous sport undertaken by young men committed to securing for themselves positions of honor in their society by providing their manhood and battle-worthiness in single combat with stranger. Not every women and children could escape the hazard posed by head-hunting and very head-hunter knew that he himself was a potential victim to another head-hunter.

The hero's love of danger in his pursuit of honor commits him to a certain set of definite attitudes in his career. But as Bowra (1952:130) has observed, "There must always come a point when heroes encounter an enemy whom they cannot subdue and then, if they shirk and anything that would suggest that he is unworthy of himself. His honor is at stake in every encounter and he would rather perish than "shirk the issue". Thus, in the Ojaadili legend, the hero's pride would not let him shirk the awful prospect of engaging his own chi in a fatal wrestling bout in which he is ultimately destroyed (Achebe, 1964). Similarly, the death of Ameke Okoye, in one version of the Anambra epic (Ezinando, 1978), is a consequence of his uncompromising attitude in the face of the danger posed by the monster, Ika-pulu-enyi-n'isi (see Azuonye, 1984:4). By the same token the last of the heroic braves of Igboland faced the superior fire-power of the white man over every inch of the land the white man sought to seize. About the same time, King Nwaakpuda of Ameke Ibeku, having boasted that he would stop the white man's train from desecrating the land of his fathers, plunged into a horrendous death in an attempt to engage the fire-breathing monster (the train) in a single-combat.

x. The Supernatural Power of the Hero. One of the reason for the hero's intransigence in the face of awesome danger is that, quite often, he is imbued with supernatural powers. The hero many be aided by a supernatural prop - a god, a spirit or some other force - which he invokes in time of danger (see Okpewho, 1979:105-108). This is a common motif in the Anambra romantic epics, a motif apparently common to the tradition of the romantic epic in South-Central Nigeria as a whole (see Clark, 1977; Anene-Boyle, 1979; Akegwure, 1977, 1978; Edemode, 1977, 1978; Okpewho, 1985). In the Anambra tradition, Ameke Okoye, for example, is aided by a trinity comprising the almighty God (Chukwu), the hero's personal god
(Amoge) and his witch grandmother (Emembolu) There are similar supernatural props in the Epics of Ozoemene Ndive and Ojaadili Udeoba. Thus, in Ozoemene Ndive, we are told of the hero's prop, Ezeagu:

...she was Ozoemene's ochie:
It was because of her that Ozoemene had power;
It was because of her that Ozoemene had no power,
But Ezeagu dwelt on the borderland between the realm of spirits
And the realm of humans;
And she was Ozoemene's ochie,
Because of this Ozoemene's ochie she was
Whatever work Ozoemene would do,
If she did not give him the power, he couldn't do it

In the face of grave danger, the hero invokes and receives the aid of his supernatural prop (his witch grandmother) if many appear on its own, out of the blues and render help unsolicited.

Where the hero is not aided by external supernatural powers, he himself operates as a wielder of such inborn powers. This is what Okpewho (1979:108-113) calls "ritualized self-will" or "ritualized self-confidence" which may make the hero set himself against foes or even the whole world. Quite often, the hero, possessed of inborn supernatural powers, confounds his enemy by operating as an invisible man. Thus, on the battle front, Mmuoka Nwokike of Uga legend "would suddenly turn into a spirit, disappear and become invisible" (Asiegbu, 1986), and the enemy in disarray would surmise: "It is with a spirit that Uga people have come to war; he is a spirit". Mmuoka Nwokike also displays his power of invisibility in wrestling:

No one could ever wave his hands before his face... if you tried to catch his leg, it would become invisible. You would then fall to the ground but you wouldn't see him (Asiegbu, 1986).

The great majority of heroes with inborn powers are often invulnerable. In many cases, they confound the enemy by walking head-up in the thick of battle catching bullets. Tables told during the Biafran war presented such an image of Nzeogwu, Archibong and many other Biafran officers. Heroes of this kind not only have the power of catching and deflecting bullets but of causing them to
boomerang; for which reason they are often said to be in possession of a talisman called *O-biara-igbu-m-gbuo-omwe-ya*, "He that came to kill me but killed himself". They also have the power of conferring invulnerability on their followers. As we are told of Asadu Ogbene Itodo of Ofuruonu, Orba, Nsukka,

There was nothing that could happen to make a gun shoot before him. And all those following him, nothing would happen to them (Mba, 1984).

The hero's invulnerability may be acquired where it is not inborn. In such a case, the legend is full of scenes in which the hero returns to his source to recharge his powers. Thus, on one occasion when an Eha warrior is able to "shoot him on the forehead", Asadu Ogbene Itodo of Orba legend returns to his dibia, Okuo:

The dibia asked him, "A human being did this to you shot and got you?" He went back and recooked his medicine as he usually did. He shot him and the gun could not fire. He took a sword and struck him and it did not hurt him; then he told him to go back, that nothing would happen to him again (Mba, 1984).

An important complement to the hero's supernatural powers is his special weapon which he may be born with or which he may acquire in the course of his career. The weapon is usually magical, as in the case of the magical broom of Asadu Ogbene Itoto in Orba heroic legend (see page ** above). But where the weapon is not magical, it is either prepared in a special way or is of an extraordinary size or weight (cf. the preparation of Ozoemene Ndive's matchete in Azuonye, 1984b and 1985b and the charging of twelve guns by the Ohafia hero, Amoogu, while sitting in a nest of soldier-ants, in Azuonye, 1981a). Other weapons are suggestive of futuristic and advanced technology, as in the use of "television mirror" (3) by a number of heroes in the Anambra and related south-central Nigerian romantic epics.

xi. *The Concreteness of the Cause to which the Hero's Action is Devoted.* As has been pointed out above, no hero operates in isolation from the hopes, aspiration and years of the society to which he belongs. The hero is, generally speaking "a representative of his people, their spokesman and their exemplar" (Bowra, 1952:112). Only rarely does he act for the sake of action; he generally devotes his special powers to some concrete cause, in the service
of his people.

A look back into the origins of the heroic ethos of a typical Igbo heroic society, Ohafia, any help elucidate this point. Surrounded as they were by non-Igbo Ibibio and Ogoja neighbors, the Ohafia people were forced early in their history to evolve an adequate system of constant battle-readiness. This need gave rise, in the course of time, to the requirement that every able-bodied member of the society should show evidence of his battle-readiness by publicly displaying the head of an enemy or alien won in battle or single-combat. Those who provided such evidence were publicly honored as ufiem (heroes) while those who failed were consigned to the pits of degradation as ujo (cowards) and subjected to numerous humiliations. In the course of time, this became and established modus vivendi a permanent preoccupation of the young people of the society. Thus what, to outsiders, appeared to be an inexplicable love of military adventure was indeed a practical experience for ensuring the security of the land.

All other actions of heroes are similarly solidly grounded in the society's need for security and honor. The list is endless: defending his people against animals, monsters and alien invaders; invading other lands in the search of something of value to his people; the creation of large farms to feed the people; the diversion of rivers and streams and removal of obstacles, etc.

xii. The Hero's Expedition to Another World or Other Worlds. At one point or another in his career, it seems obligatory that the hero must make an expedition to another world or other worlds. He may travel to a distant, usually fabled land or to the land of spirits or the heavens. Otherwise his adventures will take him to other realms in the human world.

It is interesting to note how this motif has in recent times been extended to include expeditions to the white man's country in search of education, money and power. True, indeed, for the great heroic journeys of the old legends are undertaken to faraway and outlandish lands in search of bride, magical power, knowledge or some other things of great value. In the Anambra epic of Ojaadili Udeoba, the hero's father Udeoba, travels to Iduu Kamerum in search of what turns out to be a virgin bride destined to beget his heroic son and savior, while later, Ojaadili himself travels to the land of
spirits in search of self-fulfillment before his revolutionary encounters with the tyrannical king of Iduu. In the Ezinihitte Mbaise legend of Nwankire (Akajiaku, 1984), the hero travels to Oru in search of the magical powers which serve him so well in pursuing his devastating mission of vengeance against his people of Aba - murderers of his first son.

In other cases the hero's expedition may be forced upon him. He may be exiled from home (e.g. Isionye, above). despatched on an impossible task (e.g. Nwakannekanna, page ** above). But perhaps the most common manifestations of the hero's journey is the series of encounters in which the hero, travelling across several worlds - earth, forest, underground and the heavens - fight and destroys a succession of monsters and supernatural forces (4). We find this pattern in epics of Ameke Okoye, Ojaadili Udeoba, Onoja nwa Oboli and especially Ozoemen Ndiwe (cf. Azuonye 1984b and 1985b).

xii. The Hero's Single-Handed Encounter with Great Dangers. The climax of action in all heroic legends is the situation in which the hero overcomes great dangers single-handedly. As we have already seen in our discussion of the hero's love of danger (IX above) and elsewhere in this survey, these dangers range from equal and opposing forces such as the hero's alter-ego in the enemy camp to overwhelming forces much larger in magnitude and power that his puny self.

It is true that in a number of cases the hero perishes in such an encounter, but in most cases he displays a marvelous capacity for survival in tight situations when he is surrounded by the enemy. The hero's escapade in such situations is one of the enduring delights of heroic romance. Here is a typical escapade from the legend of Asadu Ogbene Itodo of Orba, Nsukka. Asadu had gone to poach dresses from a woman's room and now finds himself surrounded by the enemy:

He cuts the dresses out of the warp and weft, tied them round his waist and what he did next was to jump on to the wall, push the roof in halves and covered those surrounding and waiting for him on the ground. From there he jumped off. The only thing that made others know that he had escaped were his bells jingling chako chako chako chako! He ran like that without coming to any harm (Mba, 1984).
This is of course less marvelous than many other more magical heroic escapades, such as that of the hero of Umulumgbe (Odo Nwaozo Nwaeze) from the legendary Onyeama n'Eke: Odo Nwaozo Nwaeze simply jumps into the smoke of palm fibre and disappears with all the money and goods received from the chief after he had restored his potency (Ozor, 1986).

xiv. The Great Prize of the Hero. The hero's triumph over great dangers usually earns him a great prize, one of the types discussed in XII. above. In the epic of Ezuma (Okpewho, 1984), the great medicine man of Ubulu-Uno wins the daughter of the Oba of Benin as prize after restoring the health of the king after an illness of several years which defies the arts of other medicine men. The prize however results in a war between Benin and Ubulu in which Benin is humiliated. In other legends, the winning of the bride, usually a princess, is the ultimate end of heroic action, the end towards which the hero's struggle against great dangers is directed.

The popular legend of Nwakannekanna and many Iduu romance present a rivalry between a tyrannical king and the son of his hated wife or a subject who the king wants to destroy. In the end the hero displaces the tyrant as king. In other legends, a low-born hero emerges from the ranks and saves his people from an awkward situation, in recognition for which he is made king. At any rate, the successful hero, in the end, often "achieves ranks and honors" and is "acknowledge by people" to use the phrase of Otto Rank (1909).

The discovery of hitherto unknown distinguished parents as in the story of Omalinze (Ugochukwu et al, 1972), the setting of a parent or parents free from original persecutors as in the legend of Ojaadili Udeoba, Ozoemena Ndive and other culture heroes already discussed, mention may be made here of Eze Chima of Onitsha heroic legend. According to Azikiwe (1932:23), "Chima established law and order and taught the people the art of living in peace. He organized Onitsha society after the pattern of Benin." Further, according to Azikiwe (1932:24),

Chima divided the country into nine duchies for administrative purposes. He appointed from among the surviving elders, chieftains for these political units. He established a secret political organization - the order of Ozo, for princes of the blood. This was actually a mutual benefit society for the nobility which
excluded from membership all who could not prove their descent from Benin, or who are not "free born" or son of the soil...

xviii. The Transition of the Hero. While it is true that many great heroes die in battle or in any of their other encounters with great danger, there is somehow always something mysterious, glorious or miraculous about such death. For example, the appearance of a rainbow marks the death of Nwoke-Orie of Orodo heroic legend (Chapter 24, below). Quite often, the hero dies as a result of the discovery or betrayal of his Achilles heel - the secret of his invincibility. In many cases, he foresees his death and prepares for it by bequeathing valuable objects or powers to his immediate offspring.

Some other heroes are immortal beings who, tired of earthly existence, willingly give way to death. A typical example is Onoja nwa Oboli of Nsukka heroic tradition (see Afigbo, 1981). Voluntary deaths of his kind are often marvelous. A in the case of Chief Abii of recent Mbaise legend, one part of the hero's hand especially his right hand (*aka ikenga*), amy refuse to die until it is "put down" by means of powerful charms (Personal Communication, D.I. Nwoga, 1982). As if to avoid such lingering piece-meal deaths, heroes such as Nwankire Abirika of Ezinihitte Mbaise legend (Akajiaku, 1984) take the trouble of neutralizing their mysterious powers before dying. But such neutralizations notwithstanding, the hero's death cannot fail to surprise. Thus Dikeoha of Umuchi, Akabo, "came back from where he went to cure people and just stood up in his room and died" and was later buried in an erect position (Ogbe, 1986). Whatever the case, there is always - in the words of Bowra (1952:128) - a special "splendor which irradiates a hero in the hour of defeat or death".

But many heroes turn out to be more powerful in death than in life. Their spirit or ghosts may wreck more destruction on the enemies of their people that they themselves in their lifetime. Often their dead bodies disappear or melt into this air and in some cases they resurrect to begin a new cycle of heroic deeds. Reminiscent of the myth of Jesus Christ's resurrection is the transition of Mgbeemere ka Obvu, the hero of Ezza in Abakaliki, who surpassed all in magical art and amazed people by shaving his hair by removing his head and placing it between his laps:
When he was about to die, he called all his people and told them that he wanted to die like a hero... He said that he did not want to be buried in the earth. He wanted to follow the wind and fly away.

Although he is persuaded to accepted the rites of burial, his spirit insists on the true heroic transition:

The day he died, there was a heavy downpour from morning till the next day. The following morning, his grave broke into two and nothing was seen in it except the cloth which he was buried (Ngwuta, 1986).

The resurrected hero is indeed a common motif in Igbo oral narratives. It is sometimes adduced in an attempt to explain unusual longevity as in the case of Akalonu or "Ukpara Riri Ibe Ya Vuo" of recent Umuchie, Akabo, legend who is said to have resurrected after death many years ago and is still alive (in 1986) aged over 120 years (Ogbe, 1986). But in the case of Dioha Noona, the great medicine man of Oguta legend, resurrection reflects the dogged, "ritualized self-will" of the hero who insists on keeping death at bay until he has achieved a particular purpose

One day, he left for the farm to cut yams stakes, but little did he know that death knows no bounds and has no remedy. He cut the yam stakes and as he left for his home, he fell down and that was death! But in no distant time, he got up and carried his yam stakes and continued going, saying that "the hero does not leave his head in a foreign land." But on the way again, he fell down and died again. After sometime, he got up again and continued his journey and so it kept reoccurring until he got home with the yam stakes. At his home, he died again but kept on breathing because he had a magical charm called "Ishi-to-n'enu (head up no death). So he breathed for three days and his body decayed but he was still breathing. This continued until his son, who was a civil servant of Kalabari, came and brought down the magical charm from where it was hung on the roof and instantly he ceased t breathe (Okoronkwo, 1986).

Closely related to the resurrected hero are the heroes who simply disappear from the face of the earth on completing their earthly mission. They may disappear into water, earth, sky, underworld or in a whirlwind. Just as he is about to be crowned king, on returning from a successful expedition to the land of spirits, Ike-puta-obulu-ele of Onitsha heroic legend simply vanishes. According to the narrator,

What happened was that the spirits brought out his skin, made marks with nzu. They called his name and when they called him, he immediately became a spirit and ... died! (ibuzo, 1986).
Even more mysterious are the disappearances of Ojaadili, who ascends into heaven flanked by two disciples (Azuonye, 1984); Ameke Okoye who walks back into the land of spirits (Azuonye, 1984); Igwara of Ukwuani legend, who disappears into water (Anene-Boyle, 1979); the founding father of Amaawo village in Isuikwuato who turns into a termite, flies out of the window and has not been seen to this day (field notes, September 1983); and Igu of Mbano legend, who disappears into thin air in much the same way as he had come into this world (Onuoha, 1984).

xix. The Mark of the Hero. In whatever circumstances the hero makes his transition, he usually leaves a mark of his superior presence or his environment. Thus Onoja nwa Oboli, the Igala warrior who dominates the heroic traditions of Nsukka and Anambra areas is said to have left deep prints of his eleven-toad feet on rocks in various parts of the region. In Ezinihitte, Mbaise, the spot in which Nwankire made the powerful medicines in which he avenged the death of his son at Aba has remained bare of grass till today (Akajiaku, 1984). By contrast, the burial ground of Eze Okpo, hero of Otolo, Nnewi, "grew into a thick forest which was very dangerous.... No person dared make passage through that bush until the Christians cleared it with much prayers and fasting" (Nwosu, 1985). Similarly the place where Onoja nwa Oboli is said to have been buried in a hole "with rocks, tree trunks, stones and earth... is said to be haunted and at night the sound of drums and kaka kiva can be heard there" (cf. Afigbo, 1981:118).

Other marks of the hero include rocks, plants, streams and market day associated with their heroic deeds. Thus, after disappearing form the earth, Igu, the hero Mbano, leaves behind in what is now known as the Igu shrines, two rocks of great size and weight believed to have been deposited there by Igu himself. Another mark of the same hero is the Efuru stream which Igu is believed to have created by leveling the land between Mbano and Ehime and channeling water form the surrounding rocks into it (Onuoha, 1985). Related to the Igu rocks of Mbano is the great Ama Ikpe rock (Nkume Ama Ikpe) of Amankwu Aro on which the body of Osim, the great Aro ancestral hero is said to have been laid to rest (Okoronkwo, p. 1986). In Ogbendida, Onitsha, an Akpu tree
marks the place from where the hero, Tabanasi Ishekwulishe is said to have melted away in a cooking pot (Ibuzo, 1986), while in Orodo, Eke market days remain sacred to this day in memory of Nwoke-Orie who made his transition on an Eke day (Akanazu, 1987).

There are many other marks of the hero which can be observed in the material and religious cultures of various Igbo localities today: hero monuments; totems and tabus; festivals in the honor of heroes; and above all, shrines dedicated to the worship of heroes, which bear witness to their deification.

Summary and Conclusion
It seems clear from the foregoing that the concept of the hero not only exists in the Igbo oral tradition but that it exists in much the same form as in other heroic traditions in Africa and the world at large. This raises the perennial question of origins. Are the archetypal features of the life pattern of the typical Igbo hero the consequence of polygenesis or diffusionism?

To many an alienated educated Igbo and diehard cultural imperialist and detractor, any question of the independent origin of these archetypal features must be ruled out. They must be the consequence of diffusion form the 'superior' Hebraic-Christian and Graeco-Roman myths which are assumed to be the source of all great images in our contemporary culture. Indeed many of my Christian students have expressed great shock and concern over the suggestion that prophecy, divine conception, virgin birth, shamanistic ministry replete with miracles, martyrdom, resurrection and ascension into heaven are so much a part of the indigenous Igbo hero-pattern as there are a part of the life of Christ. For them, this is nothing short of a blasphemous imitation of higher divine reality.

But the truth is that the concept of the hero in Igbo oral narratives is not the product of imitation or of the forces of diffusionism alone. As we have suggested elsewhere (Obiechina and Azuonye, forthcoming), the facts of early Igbo history suggest that the archetypal heroic image in Igbo culture has evolved spontaneously over the centuries in response to the peculiar pressures of the Igbo natural environment:
The picture that presents itself forcefully to us in one in which primeval and later encounters with the hostile forces of the natural environment were quickly translated into myths of survival and continuity, the mainstream of which has come down to us in the form of *akuko-ala* or *akuko-ani* .... An understanding of this pattern of evolution may be vital in appreciating the peculiar relationship that exist between the Igbo and the earth (deified in his traditional religion as the Earth/Mother Goddess, *Ala* or *Ani*), a relationship which is reflected in the Igbo concept of culture and tradition as *omenala* or *odinaani*. In addition to this, it seems rather clear that the heroic archetypes that have survived in Igbo oral literature has a whole have their origins in the early struggles mirrored in *akuko-ala*.

The Igbo heroic archetypes have passed through the same process of transformation, found in all cultures, form fully individuated historic personalities to mythical figures. This is part of the process described in von Sydow's (1948:60-88) paradigm for legend-formation: the movement from the memorate to the fabulate stages. At the memorate stage, the hero (founding father, hunter, warrior, wrestler, spokesman of his clan, medicine man, intellectual, politician, etc.) is remembered as a historic personality with an individual identity. But as rumors, gossips and excited accounts of his achievements spread from teller to teller, "features gradually (come) to be added ... which (are) part of the universal scheme... in the subconscious mind" (cf. de Vries, 1963:217), and with the accumulation of such features in the fabulate stage, the individual personality gradually or suddenly disappears leaving only a formulaic image.

The archetypal pattern in Igbo oral narratives discussed above have been synthesized from over one hundred tales, and they seem to belong to different stages of the evolution of heroic legend. Some are at the earliest phase of the memorate stage while others are at the most advanced phase of the fabulate stage. However, it seems that there is no rigid time-scale for the transition from one stage to another. There are old tales, such as the tales of the Ohafia warriors, which merely hover at the brink of the fabulate but remain firmly in the memorate stage while there are many recent tales such as the legends of Azikiwe and the marvelous officers of the Biafran war (Nzeogwu, Archibong, etc.) in which there appear to be no gap at all between the memorate and the fabulate stages.

At this point, we must face the question raised by de Vries
(1963:217) with regard to the projection of the heroic archetype onto the lives of real historical personalities:

In the life of which hero does the pattern first reveal itself in clear form, and how was it then possible that it could assert itself, so to speak, as the obligatory form for the life of a hero?

It seems to me that the elements of the archetypal hero pattern, taken together, constitute a natural, albeit superlative, expression of a complex of emotions provoked by the cause of his people. The admiration, love, gratitude and excited speculations provoked by the actions and fate of the hero might lead to wishful thinking. His folk wishing him well in the gravest moments, generate stories in which the wish is stated affirmatively rather than simply as a wish, thus:

A. I wish he could turn into a bird and fly out of that prison:
B. I think he can turn into a bird ....
C. I heard someone say something about his turning into a bird ......
D. Haven't you heard that he turned into a bird ...
E. Yes, indeed, he turned into a bird .....  

Compounded with superstition and belief in magic, such wishful thinking seems to be the kind of element out of which the heroic archetypes have been formed over the millennia from elementary feelings common to humanity (cf. Lord Raglan's speculations on this matter, in The Hero, 1936:214ff).

The archetypal features of the image of the typical Igbo hero have been emphasized in this paper because this is crucial in clarifying and exercising the socio-psychological reality behind the feeling that the Igbo are "a people without heroes". Our discussion of the significance of the archetypal pattern in Igbo oral narratives shows rather that it is truer to say that, under the pressures of alienation and anomie arising from the British colonization, the Igbo have been forced to accept "alien" and "false" heroes and to transfer to them the entire complex of primordial feelings which properly belong to the heroes of their own culture. Thus, whereas we readily accept and venerate the heroic image of Christ, his apostles and the martyrs and saints of the Christian Church, we are ignorant of the numerous messiahs, apostles, martyrs and saints in our own culture. And whereas we know every detail of the lives of ancient Greek and Roman heroes, we know little or nothing about our own. Nor can
we recognize our own heroes when we are confronted with them. We snub them as imitations or inferiors. We are indeed not a people without heroes. We are rather a people with "forgotten" or "rejected" heroes. And it is to be hoped that in the course of time, and in the light of evidence such as that presented in this paper, we shall reach back again for our "forgotten" and "rejected" heroes, for as Campbell (1959:3-4) says:

Every people has received its own seal and sign of supernatural designation, communicated to its heroes and daily proved in the lives and experience of the folk. And though many who bow with closed eyes in the sanctuaries of their own tradition rationally scrutinize and disqualify the sacraments of others, an honest comparison immediately reveals that all have been built from one fund of mythological motifs - variously selected, organized, interpreted, and ritualized, according to local need, but revered by every people on earth....