

## Traversing Cultures: Towards an Interposing World Myth

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### ABSTRACT

*This paper examines the correlation between African, American Indian and Judeo-Christian myths, with the intention of answering the perplexing questions whether there is a possibility of an interposing world myth. The paper also an extension of Alexander Eliot's concept of universality in The Universal World Myths: Heroes, Gods, Trickster, and Others as it emphasizes on the fact that the issue of an interposing world myth should be viewed more within the ambit of the mythic faculty of the Supreme Being at the origin of things than in recurring archetypes, which Eliot christens "eightfold treasures of the world". The work in this vein anchors on the supposition that even though each culture has developed its own myths to answer pressing questions about creation, death, life and man's place in the universe, etc, these myths only prefigure that humanity and the universe are products of a mythic faculty of a supreme being at the origin of things. The paper as well brings into the limelight the precedence of myth over science. The comparisons obtained from the analysis present myths as (warped) vestiges of desired fantasies of the Supreme Being and humanity. The parallels and variations in world myths only help give a better knowledge of the relationship of human life to the mystery of being. The differences, in no way, do not fiddle with the original dream, but facilitate man's comprehension of the complexities in man's relation to earth and the cosmos. These differences explicate how the personal dream of the Supreme Being manifests, is received, re-enacted and transmitted with time and space at varying degrees of intensities. It becomes evident that the drive towards an interposing world myth should be premised on the faculty at creation, for it helps find expression for the repressed longings and fears that humanity is different. We must note that humanity differs in "kind" and not "degree".*

**Keywords:** Myth, personal dream, interposing myth, mythic faculty

### INTRODUCTION

Myths occur in the history of all human traditions and communities, and are fundamental to human culture. People in every culture have developed a stock of myths to answer some of the unanswerable questions in their individual societies. These myths relate events, and state of affairs, sometimes surpassing the ordinary human world. The world as a configuration of meaning and worth does not appear the same manner to all human cultures. There are therefore, almost as many beliefs, as there are human cultures. The American Indians for instance form hundreds of tribes with different beliefs about the world around them. Similarly, the people of Africa belong to hundreds of ethnic groups, and each has its set of beliefs and practices. The Judeo-Christians have their own belief system. Without these beliefs then, their myths cannot function as a charter of social reality, nor can they uphold moral values or motivate human behaviour. Judging from the above, it is my intention in this

paper to examine the correlation between African, American Indian and Judeo-Christian myths, with the intention of answering the perplexing questions whether, there is a possibility of an interposing world myth. The paper also an extension of Alexander Eliot's concept of universality in *The Universal World Myths: Heroes, Gods, Trickster, and Others* as it emphasises on the fact that the issue of an interposing world myth should be viewed more within the ambit of the mythic faculty of the Supreme Being at the origin of things than in recurring archetypes, which Eliot christens "eightfold treasures of the world" viz. "Creators of Nature and Mankind" (60), 'Worlds Above, Below and Within' (87), 'Bringer of Magic and the Art'(106), 'Animals, Monster and Mythic Beast'(135), Lovers and Bearers of Divine Seeds'(167), 'Combat in Heaven and on Earth'(198), 'Distant Quest and Mortal Tests'(231), 'Death and Rebirth'(263)'. The work in this vein anchors on the supposition that even though each culture has developed its own myths to answer pressing questions about creation, death, life and man's place in the universe, etc, these myths only prefigure that humanity and the universe are products of a mythic faculty of a supreme being at the origin of things. The paper as well brings into the limelight the precedence of myth over science.

Many would agree that, in every culture, certain roles are assigned to myths by people. Primarily what strike the outside observer of any culture is the different explanations that myths offer about the world, man and hereafter. Natural, social and cultural facts are also embedded in myths. Many have attempted to comprehend why certain things happen: for example, man has been longing to know his origin and how the earth was created. Today, science is attempting to answer questions, but all answers offered have shortcomings. From all indications, only myths have attempted to provide definite answers (with the evidence embedded in them) to these questions as many a scientist acknowledge and continue to pay tribute to the personal dream of the originator of things. Daniel Rabbi Lapin, for example, in *America's Real War* attests that seminal authors like Charles Darwin had God in mind before embarking on the origin of the species. Lapin further states that even Sir Isaac Newton wrote more about God than mathematics, for at the end of his *Principia Mathematica*, Newton acknowledged God as the brain behind all his glories. Lapin adds:

It is thus no wonder that the overwhelming majority of scientific discoveries were made, either by people who had absorbed the cultural implications of the sentence, or in many famous cases, by men and women who revered that verse as historical fact: 'in the beginning God created heaven and earth'. (158)

This testifies that the world that many attempts to defined from their own viewpoint culminates somewhere in the mythic faculty of a supreme being, yet people continue to distinguish themselves from others for different reasons.

Most variations in myths, as many accounts proffer, stem from geographical factors, history of migrations, inventions, claims of superiority, faculties of the different messengers, impostors and issues of identity, which are common human phenomena that at times can be recognized even within households. Consequently, these factors to an extent account for the plethora of myths flaunted before humankind. People equally use myths to write back or assert themselves in this vicious world, where the ultimate is survival of the fittest. Others use myths to complete their academic task. For instance, Jenifer McCliton-Temple in *Encyclopedia of American Indian Literature* contends that "Trickster is so central a figure in tribal mythology that it is inevitable that Indian writers would incorporate aspect him into their fiction" (VIII). This domestication process sometimes transforms the original version of

myths to meet up the author's academic task, thereby rendering it different from original versions. This is similar to oral narrative performances whereby the transmission process sometimes distorts the original version due to the artistic ingenuity of performers. Emphasising still on the use of mythology, Patricia Ann Lynch in *African Mythology: A to Z* writes: "human use mythology and ritual to establish a sense of community, identity and understanding of their place in the Universe. These tools maintain the tradition of a culture and reflect what is most important in people's lives"(VII). Alexander Eliot on a similar note in *The Universal Myths: Heroes, Gods and Tricksters and -Others* adds:

...mythology means different things to different investigators. Historians peering into myth find garbled prehistory and migration of tribes. Anthropologists uncover family tangles and tribal imperatives. Psychologists look for archetypes and mental screen and malfunction. Philologists pounce upon clues to the savage root of tongues. (2)

Yet, this infighting and squabbles is unable to give a definite answer to the author of all what they are searching for, since the results, to some extent, are often contradictory.

Eliot considers "... humanity to be one people" (1, 2) no doubt. He adds that, "No matter how bitterly we may war for this or that imagined portion of our spiritual heritage, at its source it's single, primal, an eightfold treasure in the hearts of all men, women and children"(2). This work partially embraces this view, as it strives towards universality, yet, it differs from Eliot's plural form – "the universal myths"-. Eliot's subdivisions of world myths into eightfold treasure, which can be disputed, only come in to whet the appetite of researchers, whose original intention have been to come to terms with a universal world myth. The source of these myths as Eliot acknowledges is single, rather than just projecting the archetypes as treasures for universality, I think he would have completed the task by bring out the mythic faculty as a key factor in defining universality. The eight fold treasures, no doubt, come in to show the parallel within world cultures, which of course, could be coincidental or intentional. Thus, emphasising on a single mythic faculty as the treasure to validate the notion of an interposing world myth (than archetypes) nullifies the probability of a coincidence that might have given birth to the similar structures in world myths. The archetypes, though necessary, come in only to strengthen this vision, but are not an end in themselves, since they do not, to be more subtle, spread across all world cultures with the same potency.

The plethora of myths sometimes stem from the infighting between the Supreme Being at the beginning and his creatures (which can be Gods, spirits, man, environment animals etc), and other factors listed above. The good and the evil creatures are all products of the Supreme Being, who have decided to excel in one of the talents handed to them at creation. The Supreme Being himself appears different to different people because of the disparate names, diverse forms of worship and different shrines attributed to him.

Thus, the rest of the paper is a one to one mapping across different cultures that helps demonstrate the different manifestations of the private myth (dream) of an individual (supreme Being) at creation across culture, generations and geographical space. This private myth does not coincide with that of the society, but was intentionally handed to messengers at creation. This accounts for the similitude that Eliot christens the eight fold treasures. The variations, as the samples below equally demonstrate, also stem from the

artistic ingenuity of different performers. The differences also help address man's immediate needs, different streams of consciousness and personal desires within given cultures. In this vein, and without ignoring previous definitions of myths by critics like Northrop Frye, Joseph Campbell, Sigmund Freud, Mircea Eliade, the paper espouses more Clyde W. Ford's definition of myth in *The Hero within an Africa Face: Mythic Wisdom in Africa* that "myth is a collective dream, dream a personal myth" (16). Here, and as this paper purports, the emphasis is not on collectively, read otherwise as eightfold treasures (see Eliot), but on the dream (personal myth) responsible for the production of things at the origin of things.

Almost every culture has creation myths, which deal with how the world came to be, and how the many features of specific cultures originated. Among all other myths, the versions selected for this paper are most significant, and are developed in an effort to explain the origin of the universe, the origin of death, the presence of a Supreme being, Gods and the existence of man within given cultures and environments. Thus, readers should judge the myths cited below as variants of the personal dream of the supreme creator performed by different narrators in different contexts. After all, no two performances can be the same.

Geoffrey Parrinder in *Africa's Three Religions* argues that "The primal myth of most cosmologies the world over is that of creation" (29). It is then obvious that the very first myth to appear was that of creation. All African, American- Indian and Judeo-Christian myths try to explain the origin of the world and men, the mysteries of birth and death, and the activities of mundane beings. In almost all the myths, it is told that there has always been a supreme being who is the originator of everything. In some cultures, some myths try to explain the origin of this Supreme Being. For instance, the creation myth of Khmun tells how the God of wisdom is self-created. Another myth of Khmun says that, a lotus flower arose from the primeval waters, opened and revealed the beautiful child, creator of the world, the infant sun. The Fon people of Dahomey consider the creator deity Mawu-Lisa to have been formed from divine excrement. For many other myths, this Supreme Being was never created. He exists by himself; he is not the creature of any other being, because he is the cause of everything else. However, even though myths explaining the origin of the creator are not widespread, they answer the question that man has failed to answer, since until date, no one is able to trace the genealogy of the very first being behind all creations. Its origin is still a mystery, known only to the world of mythology.

In almost all African myths, the creator is a supreme being. He is the centre of the universe, as Parrinder underlines: "it is God who is Supreme and the central moving force and man submits to Him as the great chief" (42). In many societies, the supremacy of this Being is shown through different names given to Him. For instance, the Tumbuka names of God are 'Mulengi' creator, 'Mwenco', owner of all things, 'Wamtatakuya' eternal. The Ngemba people of Cameroon attribute the following names to God; 'Nwigong' the God of all, 'ngangkomilingni', he who sympathises, 'ngangnangsiburiboshie' the creator of heaven and earth, 'mformbititsim', the king of the whole world. The American-Indian names also show his superiority. For example, the Maidu names 'kodo-yapeu', 'kodo-yanpe', 'kodo-yeponi' give the idea of world creator, creator namer, and world chief. Judeo-Christian mythology has one of the longest list of names attributed to this supreme being, viz, El Eloah (Power) Gen7:1, Elohim (creator, mighty, strong) Jeremaih 31:33, Adonai (Lord)Judges6:15, Yaweh (Lord) Deut.6:4, El Shadai (God almighty)Gen.49:24, El Elyon

(Most high) Deut.29 :19, El Roi (God of Seeing) Gen. 16:13, El Olam (Everlasting God) Psalm 90:1-3 etc. None of these cultures could deny the creator's power, since everything exists because of him as the different accounts record.

In fact, in some myths, the creator is presented as a human being creating man in his image. This idea is recorded in the Judeo-Christians script: "so God created man in His own image, in the image of God, He created him, male and female He created them" (*Genesis 1:27*). In other myths, the work of creation is attributed to other beings. Some American Indians like the Tukano, the Osage and the Brule Sioux, say that it is the sun that is the creator. The Salian say that the creator is an eagle. The inability of man in all these cultures enumerated above to decipher who this Supreme Being is goes a long way to show the shortcoming of science. This contradicts Tito Vignoli in *Myth and Science* which gives precedence to science over myth and notes:

We consider the general process without the limitations of circumstances, places, time, and a thousand accidents--two kinds of faculties which were identical in form, although they had different effects, and produced opposite results. ...while science on the other hand was always enlarging its sphere and dissipating the first mythical form of its conception, until nothing was left but a purely rational idea. When this evolution takes place in peoples and races which are incapable of improvement, or have a limited capacity for advanced civilization, the faculty of myth remains in the ascendant; and as past and present history shows, mythical stagnation and intellectual barrenness may follow, until intellectual development is arrested and even destroyed. If on the other hand the evolution takes place in peoples and races capable of indefinite civilization, myth gradually disappears and science shines forth victoriously. (49)

Contrary to the above excerpt, and considering most scientific discourses (including Darwin's origin of species), it is evident that science stalls where myths begins. This gives the mythic faculty precedence over science, thereby showing the importance of the mythic faculty in defining what life is all about. Attempts by man to introduce variations, even within the world of mythology, only boils down to identity crisis, but in no way can upset the personal dream of the creator at the origin of things.

Africans, American-Indians and Judeo-Christians have their own myths concerning the origin of man although the concept of creator seemingly differs from culture to culture. In African creation myths, the idea that God used clay or mud in creating man is widespread. The Dinka of southern Sudan say that the first man and woman were made out of clay; the Ewe of Togo hold that God created good people out of good clay, and bad people out of stinking mud. The Efe of great forest in Congo, the Fon of Dahomey, the Nandi of Kenya, the Ngemba of Cameroon, the Shilluk of Sudan and the Bambuti pygmies have also a vivid myth about man's creation out of clay. A Yoruba myth of creation also tells how man was made out of earth, and explains the origin of cripples as a result of the drunkenness of the messenger, Obatala. What is more important in the above Yoruba myth of creation is that, the first created men were not in the same state. There are some who were deformed due to the fault at creation. The differences, as this myth states, result from the weakness of the messengers and not that of the original faculty at creation. On a similar note, the Ngembas of Cameroon equally acclaim in a myth on "The Origin of Inequality in the World". They believe that the different colours, which make the different races in the world originated from the intensity of



the fire in the Supreme Being's oven, at creation, as man was made out of baked clay. The first pieces removed were whitish, yet not strong, and the last pieces got burnt and became black and strong.

Likewise, myths that relate to the use of clay or mud in creation of man are found in many American Indian tribes. The Pima narrates that the creator, 'Earth Maker' took some clay in his hands, mixed it with his own sweat and formed it into two figures, a man and a woman. He breathed life into them and began to walk around. The Blackfoot Indians also say that, the first man was made out of clay. The Silinan of California in their creation myth register how the creator 'eagle god' sent bird to fetch the mud and from that mud, made the first man. The Okanogan myth of creation also records that the creator 'old one' made people out of the balls of mud he took from the earth. The Crow, the Yakima and the Dieguenos in their creation myths also hold that it is from mud that men were created. In Judeo-Christian belief, the situation is not very different. The book of Genesis registers that "Then the Lord God took some soil from the ground and formed a man out of it, he breathed life-giving breath into his nostrils and the man began to live" (Genesis, 2:7).

Even though the idea of the creation of man out of clay or mud is the most widespread, there are also other myths relating the creation of man out of other materials. For instance, some American Indian tribes like the Selish hold that the creator 'Amotken' made first five men out of five hairs from his head. For the Navajo Indian-hunters living in the semi-arid area of Arizona, the creator 'Estsanatlehi' used small pieces of her own skin to create men and women. Other Indian tribes resident in Puget Sound region of Washington say that their creator 'Kwatee' made little balls of dirt and sweat and changed these into people, the first Indians, and created other people from dogs. Another version of the Navajo recounts that the first man and woman were created out of ears. According to them, 'white Body', the creator carried two ears of corn, one yellow, one white, each covered with grains. From the white ear of corn, he made the man and from the yellow ear he made the woman. The Maidu Indians of California say that mankind was made out of wooden images. In the Judeo-Christian creation myth, as earlier stated, the materials used in creation of man and woman also differ. The woman was made out of a rib of a man as the following verses state:

Then the lord God made the man fall into a deep sleep, and while he was sleeping, he took out one of man's ribs and closed up the flesh. He formed a woman out of the rib and brought her to him. (Genesis 2:21-22)

From the above, it is obvious that dust was used in creating man only. For the woman, it was not the case. This makes the Judeo-Christian myth about creation of man to differ from other myths, since in almost every myth concerning the creation of man, there is no such idea of creation of man and woman in different matters. However, some Bible critics argue that if man is dust and the woman is a subset of the whole, then the woman is also dust after all, both shall return to the dust.

In the myth of the Fulani of Mali, it is told that man was shaped from five elements:

At the beginning there was a huge drop of milk. Then Doondari came and he created the stone. Then the stone created iron; and iron created fire; and fire created water; and water created air. Then Doondari descended the second time. And he took the five elements and he shaped them into man [...] Doondari

descended for the third time, and he came as Gueno, the eternal one, and Gueno defeated death. (Qtd. *The Origin of Life and Death: African Creation Myths*, 3-4)

Man, as the above excerpt states, was created from the already existing things.

However, there are other myths that give to man a more natural origin. For instance, the Baronga of Mozambique holds that the first people came out of the Redlands or swamps near the Nkomati, 'Cow River'. The Zulu and the Thonga also say that a reed exploded and men emerged. An Ashanti myth says that one Monday night, a worm made a hole up through the ground and from it emerged seven men, some women, a leopard and a dog. A Pygmy story relates that the first man and woman emerged from a tree. In the same vein, the Herero of South- West Africa share a similar opinion. The idea that man emerged from ground, trees, or elsewhere is not frequent in American Indian myths. But the Achomawi, a tribe of Californian Indians believe that their creator originally emerged from a small cloud and Coyote who assisted him emerged from a land mist. The factors that account for these variations are environmental, thereby projecting the dream of man within his environment.

It is noteworthy that the emergence of man from other places is not found in Judeo-Christian myth. It is this view that Leo Rosten underlines in *Religions of America*:

Man is created in the image and likeness of his divine Father-Mother, as the first chapter of Genesis makes clear. Man is object and evidence of mind's infinite care for its creation. (146)

J. S Mbiti in a similar vein in *Introduction to African Religions* admits that "It is generally acknowledged that God is the originator of man even if the exact methods of creating man may differ according to myths of different peoples" (32).

From the above view, man was made by direct creative acts of God. Scientists who support the evolution myth of the twentieth century accept that man originated from an ape. But this cannot give a total explanation of his origin because the genealogy of the Ape is mythic in itself.. In "Myth in Ngemba: A Semiotic Study", Divine Che Neba opines that

The creator of man and his environment remain mythic despite attempts by scientists (including Heraclitus and Darwin) to trace man's origin to an ape. Even if we accept the thesis that men developed from an ape, other questions will arise on the origin of apes. This question remains perplexing even in the face of globalisation, wherein, science is attempting to answer all questions. If the world of science claims that the ape developed from an atom, the next assignment to scientists will be the origin of the atoms. (142)

Whatever matter from which man may have been developed must have had its origin. Every matter that exists has its origin. After all, matter is anything that has weight and occupies space. This brings us to the conclusion that, there must have been an originator of all matters, which man cannot scientifically explain. And without this supernatural force, the world could not have been in existence. Here, the major concern is that of belief and metaphorical truth, and not scientific proofs. In order words, that of metaphysics and not physics.

From this premise, it is evident that the numerous accounts from different backgrounds point to one thing, the mysterious origin of man, which cannot be scientifically explained, but can be metaphorically and metaphysically proven. Also, man's relation with the originator remains a question of belief. Here, belief is linked to faith. Apostle Paul in his letter to the

Hebrews defined faith as: "... the substance of the things hoped for, and the evidence of things not seen"( Heb.11:1). Some of the evidences of what most myths account are in our different environments while others manifest spiritually. The ones hoped for are those that are within the spiritual realm. These points to the fact that the origin of things, man and the Superior Being is a matter that is embedded in the mythic faculty, paving the way for an interposing world myth. All cultures culminate to this point, and the question of nomenclature as indicated above remains geographical, linguistic, historical and cultural. The duality or multiplicity in naming is orchestrated by individual egos for racial, identity and superiority reasons. Richard Erdoes and Alfonso Ortiz in *American Indian Myths and Legends* opine that

... Cultures overlap and influence each other, not only when people of different tribes live in adjacent territory, but even when they encounter each other through migration or trade over long distances. (XIX)

It is then obvious that myths migrate as people. When people migrate, they bring into the new area some elements of their myths, which sometime are given new names or are reduced to folktales. This is the reason why the details in the creation of man vary, though they still share some elements, and originate from a single source

Besides the myths of creation of man, there are other myths recounting the creation of other things such as the earth, sky, animals, and plants. Others place creation of things before that of man and vice versa. In other African societies, some myths record that the Supreme Being first created the earth or the earth and the sky at the same time, before he thought about the creation of people. Myths that acclaim this idea are narrated amongst the Nandis, the Fons, the Vugusus, the Efes, and some Pygmy tribes. For instance, the Nandis say that 'Asis' first created the world and divided it into two: the sky went upwards and the earth stayed. Later, he created the male child and girl child from some of the earth. Then, he went up to the sky, and when he came back, the man and the girl had children. Another version says that, the Supreme Being first created the sky and the earth and then fire, water and thunder with lightning. After these four elements, he created first four living beings on earth: Man, elephant, snake and cow. And he proceeded with the creation of trees on hills and grass in the valley. He made the sun and the moon and people with living souls. The Fon people also hold that the universe was set before any other creation. As Arthur Cotterell in *A Dictionary of World Mythology* remarks,

According to tradition, Mawu- Lisa set the universe in order before she-he made vegetation, animals, and men. They celebrate this in a four-day week, the first day of which is believed to be when Mawu-Lisa established the universal order and when she-he created man from water and clay. On the second day the earth was made habitable for men. On third day man received sight, the gift of speech and understanding of the world about him. On the fourth and last day of creation, Mawu-Lisa presented man with technology. (237)

Unlike the biblical account in which the creation was done in six days, the Fons believe that it was done in four days.

According to the Vugusu people, God first created heavenly universe with the sun, moon, stars and clouds. He then created the earth, rivers, waters, plants followed by man and animals. The Kono of East Guinea says that the sky God 'Alatangana' began by creating



solid land in the muddy sea. He decorated these lands greenery and trees. In some Egyptian tribes, it is told that 'Khnemu', the potter god created the universe, made the cosmic egg from the mud of the Nile, and shaped man on his potter's wheel. In many African myths, it is evident that earth and heaven were created first by a supreme High God. In *African Religions and Philosophy*, Mbiti notes:

Over the whole of Africa, creation is the most widely acknowledged work of God. This concept is expressed through saying that God created all things. Through giving him the name of creator (or Moulder, or Maker) and through addressing Him in prayer and invocations as the creator. (39)

The creation of everything is attributed to God or to the supernatural force which is named differently according world cultures or different religious cults. Although there is no general agreement as to the order in which creation was accomplished, it is generally believed that the creation of the world beyond man's understanding preceded that of earth, and that in relation to other thing, the creation of man is placed towards or at the end of God's original work of creation. As many of the aforementioned myths posit, the universe was first created, and the creation of man and that of other things came later, with the purpose of inhabiting it. In relation to the order of creation, Mbiti in *Introduction to African Religions* adds:

The creation of man took place generally at the end of the creation of other things. This indicates that people believe that man was the completion or perfection of God's work of creation, since nothing else better than man was created afterwards. (78-9)

For Judeo-Christians God's exercise is in twofold: first, by using His own hands in creating man and woman, and second, by using his own words in creating other things. The idea of creating by using words is also held by the Crow Indians, but to them, the creator used his words in creating animals only. For other creatures, he used his own hands. It is believed that the Old Man Coyote pronounced several names of animals, and as soon as he mentioned one, that animal came into existence. For instance, the ducks are believed to have existed before Old Man Coyote started his work of creation. A Tswana myth also states that, the world was not created and was always there.

Other people such as the Zaramo of Tanzania are not sure whether a Supreme Being created the sky and the earth or whether they were there already. They are still doubtful about their creation. According to Judeo-Christians, only God in his trinity existed in the beginning. And as he created the earth and the heaven, he himself created all other beings living on them. On the contrary, in some American Indian myths, it is told that the creator was helped in the work of creation. For instance, the Chibcha say that the creator 'Chimjigagwa' having made large black birds which carried light over the mountain, left the rest of creation to others. The Iroquois myth also recalls that after the creator - 'Hahgwehdiyu' created the sky, placed the sun, moon and stars, he left the work of creation to his twin brother. The Tukano believe that the creator 'Page Abe' created the earth, placed on it animals, plants and men but in this work, he was aided by a semi-divine being 'Pamuri-Mahse' The latter brought down the earth and many dangerous beasts, including the large snakes of the river. In the creation myth of the Pomo-Indians, it is narrated that the creator in making the world, called his elder brother for assistance. It is then evident that, for some people, the work of creation is attributed to a supreme being and his messenger. T.N.O Quarcoopome's idea in *West African*

*Traditional Religions* differs from the above mentioned. He writes that ‘God is one, the only God of the universe: God is one, the only one God. He alone created the world’ (27.)

As far as myths on the origin of death are concerned, man also seems to be at the centre of this separation. According to these myths it is man who caused death to come into the world. In the beginning, people lived eternally. A Bakongo myth says that Nzambi, the creator had forbidden the first man and woman to bury the dead. ‘if the baby dies, do not bury it, but cover the body under layers of firewood. After three days he will revive. The baby died the next day, so the parents buried it under the firewood, but after a time, it started smelling, so they buried it in the earth. Nzambi came back and said: ‘You will have other children but they will all die and none will revive after that.’ According to the Lotuko, a sudanese people, a family quarrel was the cue for death’s entry into the world once a child died and the distraught mother implored the supreme deity Ajok to restore it to life. The supreme deity did so but the father of the child was displeased. He scolded his wife and killed the child. Then Ajok said: “You cried, and asked to have the child restored to life, but never will I do so again”. Hereafter, death became permanent among the Lotukos. For the Bushman, destruction and death were sent to the earth by Kaang, the creator deity because of man’s disobedience. In Uganda, it is told that an immortal, Kintu was in the habit of visiting Katonda, the Supreme deity in order to submit reports of his work on earth. These meetings took place on a hill. One day, Katonda told the king not to visit him again; he also entrusted Kintu with a sack, from which the latter was not to part, and which no one else was allowed to touch. Under the influence of strong drinks, Kintu forgot the instructions, went to the hill and left his sack there. Wrathful Katonda deprived Kintu of his immortality and sent sickness and death to Uganda. From the above myths, the origin of death is attributed to man’s disobedience to the supreme deity.

Other myths blamed the woman to have been the cause of death. For instance, the Barundi, Ngemba and the Banyarwanda have a similar myth blaming the woman as being the cause of eternal death. The Barundi myth relates that Imana ( God) was chasing death away with his hands but death ran into a woman and promised that if she hid him, he would help all her family. The woman opened her mouth and death jumped inside, and when God came up, she said, she had not seen death. But God saw all and knew what had happened, and said, in future, death will destroy them all.

Similarly, the Banyarwanda believe that, in the beginning *Imana* (God) hunted death and ordered men to remain indoors so that his quarry should not find a hiding place. When an old woman went out her banana grove, death asked her protection and was allowed to hide under her skirt. Imana in order to punish them decided then that death should stay with men. There is another version which blames woman too. This relates that there was a family consisting of a husband, wife and mother-in-law. The wife hated the mother-in-law and felt a relief when the latter died and was buried. Three days after the funeral, she visited the grave and found that it was full of cracks, as if the dead woman was about to emerge. Return with a heavy pestle, she pounded down the earth and shouted ‘stay dead.’ On the following days, the same incident was repeated, but thereafter, the wife discovered no cracks. The strength of the deceased was exhausted. Although this delighted the woman, her actions restrained the possibility for mankind to resuscitate. A Bafut myth amongst the Ngembas of Cameroon relates the origin of mystery of death to the wrangle between death and a woman. After

hitting the head of death with a mortar pestle, death decided henceforth to visit man without signalling. Once more, disobedience is at the centre of the origin of the mystery of the death.

The Bamun myth holds that Njinyi ‘He who is everywhere’, had created men healthy and strong. He was therefore unable to understand that many of them suddenly became cold and stiff, and asked if it was he who caused this. Death replied that men themselves have expressed the desire to die, and declared that he could demonstrate this trust. While Njinyi concealed himself behind a banana hedge, Death sat down by the wayside. The first person to come along was an old slave, who bewailed his lot and said ‘Oh, the dead are lucky! If only I had never been born!’, suddenly, he fell down dead. The next to come that way was an old woman. As soon as she complained about the troubles of life, she sank down lifeless to the ground. Death then said to Njinyi: ‘Do you see how they call me?’ Njinyi went away grieved, since his creatures did call upon death.

According to a Dinka story, men died because, if they all lived, there would be no room for them on earth. At first, God promised that men would return fifteen days after death, but they objected that, if they did, there would be no room for agriculture and houses. What is surprising in these stories is that, it is partly man who expressed the desire for eternal death. Nonetheless, other myths depict the helplessness of man, as far as the origin of death is concerned. In this vein, Parrinder notes that most African myths records that death is unnatural and was not found among men in the beginning of the world. Animals like the Holawaka bird( among the Galla of Ethiopia), frog among Ekois and Ngembas) hare (among the Hottentots) and the dog and chameleon in set-ups are responsible for humanity’s present situation. It is on this note that Robert Allen in “Animal and African Folklore” concludes that

The protagonist or auxiliary of cosmogonic myths are often animals. In some such account, animal or animal-like beings trod the earth before human did, and it was they who established the first parameters of social life as human would come to know it.(6)

Other myths explained the origin of different races. In the Shilluk myth, it is told that God used the fertile black clay of the Nile banks in creating black people, white loam in creating the white men and brownish earth in creating Arabs. For them, the existence of different races was due to the fact that God used matters of different colours when creating people. Some stories of North Africa record that, during the voyage of the Ark, Noah commended his sons to abstain from intercourse with their wives. Sem and Japheth obeyed, but Ham was so full of ardent love for his wife that he embraced her in the middle of the darkest night during the rainstorm. For this disobedience, God made him black and his sons as well. In Judeo-Christian belief system, this myth explains the origin of the black race. Moreover, in the myth found in *Genesis* accounting for the breakup of the original unity of the human race and its dispersal into different nations, speaking different tongues, there is a hint that the original race also may have broken up into many different races. In relation to this, Eugene H. Merrill in *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament* opines that

...perhaps the beginnings of the races may also be found here, for it was God’s purpose to render man incapable of cohesion, the separation of men into races would compound the difficulties inherent in the confounding of languages. As a result of both, mankind would be up against physical and sociological obstacles

the like of which he never before experienced and which he would never be able to completely overcome no matter how hard he might try. (65)

Merrill's view in the above excerpt is that, in the story of the Tower of Babel, there is an idea that God may have punished people not only by giving them different tongues but also different races to break their unity. A Ngemba myth too, has it that after creating men, God gave different gifts to them. To one group he gave strength and to the other he gave intelligence. Thus the myth concludes: "... He said, to you the weak, you will depend on the strength of the stronger group. And to you the strong, you will depend on the intelligence of the weak. That is why there is inequality in the world today. (Qtd 'Myth in Ngemba: A Semiotic Study', 436-438)

The above comparisons present myths as (warped) vestiges of desired fantasies of the Supreme Being and humanity. The myths listed above acknowledge the creator of the world as supreme, mysterious and the brain behind all creations. Others differ by showing that in some cases messengers were assigned to execute certain tasks in the process of realising the original dream. The parallels and variations only help give a better knowledge of the relationship of human life to the mystery of being. The differences, in no way, do not fiddle with the original dream, but facilitate man's comprehension of the complexities in man's relation to earth and the cosmos. These differences explicate how the personal dream of the Supreme Being manifests, is received, re-enacted and transmitted with time and space at varying degrees of intensities. Considering the nature of the mythic faculty (a mode of knowledge rooted in silence and intuitive insight) of the creator and the artistic ingenuity of man and other characters assigned roles in most myths, the performance and transmission process of myths could not, in any way, have been the same, in all places and circumstances. If we submit at this stage that the parallels are handed down motifs of the creator's personal dream, which help validate the retentive memory of humankind, then, the differences only come in to expose the gaps in our memories or project man's ambitions to compete with man, and/or with the supreme creator. Consequently, El-sayed El- Aswad in "Nature of the Creator: Motif A" relating to the mythic faculty of the creator notes: "the creator often integrates opposites and contraries into one unity..." (3). This minimizes even the warped vestiges of desired fantasies of humanity in attempting to redefine himself out of the creator's dream. It becomes evident that the drive towards an interposing world myth should be premised on the faculty at creation, for it helps find expression for the repressed longings and fears that humanity is different. We must note that humanity differs in "kind" and not "degree". The mythic faculty at creation, places humanity at the same "Degree", but gives room for "Kind" to be cultivated, and I must add, and not exaggerated. It is this exaggeration that makes the world look so disparate.

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