

**CREATION MYTHS AND ITS CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE AMONG THE
GBAGYI PEOPLE OF ABUJA, NIGERIA**

BY

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CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this project work was carried out by Gladys Joyfulness ZAKKA (ART2008902) of the Department of Religions, Faculty of Arts, University of Benin, Benin City.

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This research work is solely dedicated to God Almighty for His immeasurable love, grace and mercy bestowed on me during this program. Indeed, I'm grateful to Him.

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ABSTRACT

This study focuses on Creation Myths and its Cultural Significance among the Gbagyi People of Abuja, Nigeria. The Gbagyi people, an indigenous ethnic group in Abuja, have a rich cultural heritage that is deeply rooted in their creation myths. These myths, which have been passed down through generations provide a fascinating insight into the Gbagyi people's understanding of the world and shaping the community's values, traditions and worldview. Explaining the creation of the world, origin of humanity, the roles of gods and goddesses in shaping the universe. These myths served as integral parts of the Gbagyis culture, and often have been used to teach moral lessons, explain natural phenomena, and provide guidance on how to live in harmony with each other and the environment.

The study employs both historical, phenomenological and personal interview. Part of the findings is that the Gbagyi creation myths emphasizes the importance of living in harmony with the environment and taking care of their natural resources but truncated by urbanization and globalization through the neglects if traditional practices that promotes spirituality.

However, the study recommends that there is need to learn from the past and preserve the cultural heritage that reflects the spiritual beliefs and traditional practices of the Gbagyi people.

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CHAPTER ONE

1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1. Background to the Study

Creation myths are stories that seek to explain and give a history of the creation and existence of a particular people in terms of their culture. It is a symbolic narrative of the beginning of the world as understood by a particular community (Long, 2024). It is however safe to say that there is no human race or people who are recognized as part of the human race in the continent of Africa and beyond without Creational Myths and stories behind their creation and existence. These stories have been passed down orally from one generation to another. The term "myth" is popularly used to describe stories that are not objectively true, the identification of a narrative as a myth can be highly controversial. However, scholars have given a more concise definition to the word.

According to Eliade (1973), it is a story that recounts sacred history; it describes an event that occurred in primordial time, the fabled "beginning." Myth educates us about the actions of Supernatural Beings and how reality came to be, particularly the Cosmos. While Honko (2003), defines myth as a story of the gods, a religious account of the beginning of the world, creation, fundamental events, and the exemplary deeds of the gods as a result of which the world, nature, and culture were created together with all of their parts and given their order, which still exists. A myth conveys and validates society's religious beliefs and standards, gives a model of behavior to be emulated, attests

to the efficacy of ritual in achieving its practical goals, and establishes the holiness of the cult. Moreso Losada(2022) defines myth as a functional, symbolic, and thematic account of one or more extraordinary events with a transcendent, sacred, and supernatural referent that, in theory, is not based on historical evidence and alludes to an absolute cosmogony or eschatology, whether individual or collective. On the other hand, Tylor (1971) defines culture as a comprehensive system that includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, conventions, and any other capacities and habits acquired by a person as a member of a society or group. The Cambridge English Dictionary defines culture as "the way of life, especially the general customs and beliefs, of a particular group of people at a particular time."

According to Georg (1971), culture refers to the cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms which have been objectified in the course of history. In the sociological sense, culture can be described as the collective thought, behaviour and material possessions that form a people's way of life which includes their beliefs on creation and traditions. The Gbari or Gbagyi is an ethnic group found predominantly in Central Nigeria with an estimated population of 12 million spread in four states, including Abuja, and located in thirty local government areas. It is also the name of their language. Members of the ethnic group speak two dialects. While speakers of the dialects were loosely called Gwari by both the Hausa Fulani and Europeans during pre-colonial Nigeria they prefer to be known as Gbagyi/Gbari. They live in the Niger, the Federal

Capital Territory - Abuja, and Kaduna State. They are also found in Nasarawa central Nigeria Area. Gbagyi/Gbari is one of the most populated ethnic groups in the middle belt and indigenous in the Federal Capital Territory of Nigeria, Morgan (1984). This means Gbagyi people are the bonafide owners of the Nigerian capital city, Abuja, Chigudu (2008). The majority of the Gbagyi people are adherents of Christianity while the minority are either Muslims or traditional worshippers. Cosmogonic myth refer to the process through which the world is centered and given a definite form within the while of reality. It is a symbolic narrative of the beginning of the world as understood by a particular community. The primordial structure of culture and the expression of the developing forms and styles of cultural life, from which diverse and distinct forms of culture arise, are found in the initial ordering of the world through the cosmogonic myth. Creation myths addresses questions deeply meaningful to the society that shares them, revealing their central worldview and the framework for the self-identity of the culture and individual in a universal context (Long,2005). Though these myths are peculiar to different cultures, they are all tied to keeping the legacy and cultural heritage of a people. Every society has at some time or the other, possessed within itself myths and these myths have culturally influenced their belief system. Most importantly among the Gbagyi people of Abuja, myths have been a crucial part of a their culture, relating to their lifestyle which encompasses their method of worship, mode of dressing, system of belief and heritage. The overall cultural significance of myth on the Gbagyis is that, it has

helped to give life and existence to their culture in a world that tells its existence even with myth. Therefore, the study intends to examine Creation Myths and its Cultural Significance on the Gbagyi People of Abuja.

1.2. Statement of the Problem

The Gbagyi people have a unique creation myth that explains the origin of the world, the creation of humanity, and ad the role of the gods and goddesses in shaping the universe. This myth has been passed down through generations, providing a sense of identity, community and cultural heritage. However, with the increasing influence of modernization, urbanization and globalization, the Gbagyi people are facing significant challenges in preserving their cultural heritage and traditional practices.

1.3 Aim and Objectives of the Study

The aim of this research is to bring to limelight Creation myth among the Gbagyi people as well as stating explicitly its Cultural Implications on them with the following objectives:

1. How do the Gbagyis view creation myths?
2. What are the socio-cultural significance of myths on the Gbgayis?
3. How does creation myth influence the worldview, spiritual belief and cultural values of the Gbagyi/Gbari people?

1.4 Significance of the Study

The study provides an in-depth understanding of the creation myths and cultural practices of the Gbagyi people. It highlights the importance of preserving cultural heritage and traditional practices in the face of modernization and globalization. It contributes to the body of knowledge on cultural significance of creation myths in indigenous communities.

1.5 Scope and Limitation of the Study

The study covers the Gbagyi/Gbari people as an indigenous ethnic group in Abuja, Nigeria. A historical survey ranging from 2015- 2020.

1.6 Research Methodology

The research employs historical, phenomenological and personal interview methods through the use of questionnaire administered to respondents.

1.7 Division of Work

This work is divided into five chapters. Chapter One introduces the topic and gives a highlight of the researcher's intention to the readers in its background to the study. Chapter Two centres on literature review where books written by other authors relating to the researchers are reviewed. In Chapter Three, the researcher focuses on the main study by giving a breakdown of the Gbagyi/Gbari people and the place they occupy as indigenes of Abuja. Chapter

Four focuses on findings from the study. The research is brought to a wrap in Chapter Five with its summary, evaluation, conclusion and recommendations.

1.8 Operational Definition of Terms

The following are definitions of key words in the research:

- **Creation** - It is the act of making or producing something that did not exist before, the act of creating something. Also, it is the bringing into existence of the universe especially when regarded as an act of God.
- **Creation myth** - A symbolic account of the creation of the world/universe in a particular culture; often involving a creator deity. According to Womack (2005), creation myths are symbolic stories describing how the universe and its inhabitants came to be. Creation myths develop through oral traditions and therefore typically have multiple versions.
- **Culture** - According to Tylor (1971), culture is that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.
- **Cultural-significance** - This refers to the effects that a policy, action, event or movement have on a particular culture.
- **Heritage** - This is the tradition, achievements, beliefs, etc; that are part of the history of a group or nation. It is also the legacy of a people, culture and environment inherited from the past.

- **History** - History is inquiry; knowledge acquired by investigation. It is the systematic study and documentation of human past.
- **Indigenes** - Indigenes are people who can trace their roots back to the community who originally settled in a given location
- **Indigenous** - Indigenous (people) are distinct social and cultural groups that share collective ancestral ties to the lands and natural resources where they live, occupy or from which they have been displaced.
- **Myth** - A traditional story which embodies a belief regarding some fact or phenomenon of experience, and in which often the forces of nature and of the soul are personified; a sacred narrative regarding a god, a hero, the origin of the world or of a people, and others. Myths narrates a sacred history, it relates an event that took place in primordial time, the fabled time of the "beginnings" (Eliade, 1973).
- **Origin** - This is the point or place where something begins or is created; the source or cause of something.

CHAPTER TWO

2.0

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter deals with related review of literatures. These are as follows: Conceptual framework, Theoretical framework and Summary of Literatures. The conceptual framework entails the concept of myths, creation myths and the concept of culture. It also focuses on creation myths and cultural practices.

2.1. The Concept of Myth

In general, a myth is a story that has its roots in a people's history and is believed to be true. According to Alagoa (1978), they are historical facts that are passed down orally through customs unique to each community. However, in the study of religion, it is crucial to distinguish between myths and stories that are simply untrue (Bolle, 2017). Myths are stories that describe fantastic events without any attempt to prove them, so they are sometimes taken to be stories without any factual basis. The word has become synonymous with falsehood or, at best, misconception. Also, the Encyclopedia Britannica defines myth as a story that has been passed down orally from our ancestors and that explains reality, ideas, and beliefs. It also serves as an explanation of nature and events, including creation, the origin of the world and the history of a people. According to the Cambridge International

Dictionary, it is an ancient story or set of stories, explaining the early history of a group of people or about natural events and facts. According to Erich (1985), myth is a message from ourselves to ourselves, a secret language which us to treat the inner as if an outer event, Bolle, (2017), states that myth is a symbolic story, usually of unknown origin and at least partially traditional, that is closely related to religious belief and claims to relate real-life occurrences. It should not be confused with symbolic places or items (temples, icons) or symbolic behaviour (cult, ritual). Myths are lengthy stories about gods or superhuman creatures who in exceptional situations over an undefined period of time and are believed to exist independently of people's everyday experiences (Bolle, 2017).

Furthermore, a myth is a narrative projection of a given cultural group's sense of its sacred past and its significant relationship with the deeper powers of the surrounding work and universe. It is a protuberance of an aspect of a culture's soul (Leeming, 2004). Myths are a part of our collective living and a force in daily life, not just ancient artifacts. People are constantly revising and creating new myths in order to make sense of chaotic and unpleasant memories and provide meaning to their lives and societies. These life experiences are told in a new way, offering a unique viewpoint on how tradition and memory are constantly rewritten in order to make sense of the

past from the present. Myths are broad symbolic images that contain not only the real world but also the ideal world, the world of hope, in which the tribal group's key objectives are represented. Myths were the first attempts to explain the laws of the universe. According to Karen (2005), myths provide a sense of meaning and value to life, despite the fact that humans are prone to despair. Myth is about the unknown; it is about that for which initially we have no words. Myth therefore looks into the heart of a great silence. The myths gave explicit shape and form to a reality that people sensed intuitively. They told them how the gods behaved, not out of idle curiosity or because these tales were entertaining, but to enable men and women to imitate these powerful beings and experience divinity themselves. It helped people to find their place in the world and their true orientation. We all want to know where we came from, but because our earliest beginnings are lost in the mists of pre-history, we have created myths about our forefathers that are not historical but help to explain current attitudes about our environment, neighbours, and customs. We also want to know where we are heading, therefore we created stories about a posthumous existence. And we wish to explain those wonderful times in which we appear to be transported above our everyday problems. Today, the term 'myth' is commonly used to denote something that is just not true. When we hear stories about gods wandering the earth, dead individuals emerging from

graves, or seas miraculously parting to allow a favoured people to flee from their foes, we dismiss them as unbelievable and manifestly false. In the words of Losev, he asserts that myth is life itself. For a mythical subject, this is a true life with all its hopes and fears, expectations and despair, with all its real everyday life and self-interest. Myth is not an ideal being, but a vital bodily reality. As Losev (2008) emphasizes, myth is not a fiction, fairy tale, but it is a category of our being and consciousness that has its own strict structure and logic. Closely related to myth is mythology. The term mythology means both the study of the mythological narratives themselves and their deep meanings associated with a particular religious tradition. During the early stages of social development, mythology was the only way to understand and interpret natural and social realities. Being the first historical type of worldview, mythology embraced all forms of social consciousness religion, art, science, morals, etc. Mythology can be defined as a body of interconnected myths, or stories, told by a specific cultural group to explain the world consistent with a peoples experience of the world in which they live (Shynkaruk 2018). Myths often originate as sacred narratives that provide supernatural explanations for the origins of the world, as well as for concepts like death, judgment, and the afterlife.

A mythology or belief system often concerns supernatural beings/powers of a culture, provides a rationale for a cultures religion and practices, and reflects how people relate to each other in everyday life. Creation or origin myths explain how the world came to be in its present form, and often position the cultural group telling the myth as the first people or the true people. Such sacred stories, or narratives, concern where a people and the things of their world come from. Myths and mythology express a cultures worldview: that is, a peoples conceptions and assumptions about the place of humankind in nature and the universe (Eliade, 1963).

2.1.1. Types of Myth

- **Creation Myths:** Creation myths explain how the world, humans, and the universe came into existence. These stories often feature gods, primordial beings, or cosmic forces shaping existence. Such myths provide a framework for understanding the origins of life and offer a cultural perspective on existence. An example is the Greek myth. Chaos births Gaia (Earth) and Uranus (Sky), who create other gods and beings. Also, in Hindu creation myth, the cosmic egg (Hiranyagarbha) breaks open, giving rise to Brahma, who creates the world.
- **Cosmogonic Myths:** Cosmogonic myths focus specifically on the creation of celestial bodies or the structure of the cosmos. They often blend

astronomical observations with symbolic narratives. Cosmogonic myths explain celestial phenomena like stars, the sun, and planets while linking them to divine powers. Examples are Ymir, a primordial giant, is killed, and his body forms the earth, sea, and sky; and the sun god Ra emerges from chaos to create the stars and planets in Norse and Egyptian creation myths respectively.

- **Etiological Myths:** These myths provide explanations for specific customs, traditions, or natural phenomena. They often address the "why" questions, offering a narrative behind observed realities. In Maori creation myth, Maui uses his magical fishhook to pull up islands, explaining the geography of New Zealand. Also, Arachne is turned into a spider as punishment for her arrogance, explaining the origin of spiders in respect to Greek creation myth.
- **Hero Myths:** Hero myths narrate the journey of a protagonist who faces trials, receives help from divine beings, and achieves great feats. These stories often reflect societal ideals of bravery, honor, and sacrifice; they also inspire individuals and reinforce cultural values of strength, perseverance, and heroism. As the Mesopotamian creation myth states, Gilgamesh embarks on a quest for immortality but learns to accept human limitations.

- **Apocalyptic Myths:** Apocalyptic myths describe the destruction of the world or a transformative event leading to a new beginning. These myths often carry moral warnings about human behavior or societal decay. A good example of this type of creation myth is the end of Kali Yuga, marked by chaos and destruction, which preceded a new cycle of creation. In addition, Ragnarok, a prophesied battle, leads to the death of gods and the rebirth of the world according to Norse creation myth.
- **Theogonic Myths:** These focus on the origins, relationships, and conflicts among gods. They often establish the divine order and the role of deities in the cosmos. The Babylonian creation myth gives a good example. Marduk defeats Tiamat and establishes order from chaos.
- **Chthonic Myths:** Chthonic myths explore themes of death, the afterlife, and the underworld. They often feature gods or spirits associated with the earth and the dead. A good example is found in Greek creation myth. Hades rules the underworld, and Persephone's seasonal return to Earth explains life and death cycles. Similarly, in Egyptian creation myth, Osiris judges the souls of the dead, offering guidance on the afterlife.
- **Nature Myths:** Nature myths explain the forces of nature, such as seasons, weather, or animal behavior. These stories often attribute natural phenomena to the actions of gods or spirits and connects people with their environment

and explain its mysteries through spiritual narratives. In the Native American creation myth, the Thunderbird creates storms with its powerful wings.

- **Foundation Myths:** Foundation myths describe how a city, nation, or institution came into being. They often tie the origins to divine intervention or heroic deeds. The Roman creation myth tells of Romulus and Remus who were raised by a wolf and later found Rome.
- **Trickster Myths:** Trickster myths center on clever or mischievous figures who break rules, challenge norms, or outwit others. These characters often blur the lines between good and bad. Though these myths are to entertain people, they still impart lessons about adaptability and the consequences. In the African creation myth, Anansi the Spider uses wit to overcome challenges and spread wisdom.
- **Myths of Transformation:** These stories feature characters or objects undergoing significant physical or spiritual change. They often symbolize rebirth, redemption, or punishment. The purpose of this myth is to highlight themes of growth, change, or the power of fate. The Children of Lir are turned into swans as part of a curse according to the Celts.
- **Cultural Myths:** Cultural myths reinforce the traditions, values, and identity of a community. They often depict the origins of moral codes or laws.

This type of myth is important as it preserves cultural values and teach future generations about their heritage. For example in the Chinese culture, the Jade Emperor represents justice and cosmic order.

2.2. Creation Myths

A creation myth is a narrative that describes the original ordering of the universe (Womack, 2005). Merriam-Webster's Encyclopedia describes creation myths as symbolic stories that explain the origin of the world, shaped by the beliefs of a specific tradition and community. These myths are essential for understanding the value of the world, guiding humanity's place in the universe, and forming the foundational structures of life and culture. Leeming (2010) argues that creation myths reveal how everything began and are fundamental to all cultures. These myths serve as primary narratives through which people connect to their collective beliefs about creation. They use metaphors to express a cultures understanding of identity and humanity's place in the world. The word Cosmogony is from the Greek words, *κοσμος*- kosmos, meaning 'order', and *Γένεσις* - genesis, meaning 'birth'. A culture's cosmogony, or creation narrative, shows its view of the universe's origins. Individuals want to grasp their personal heritage, while cultures attempt to comprehend their collective origins. As a result, almost every society has created its own genesis story (Leeming, 2004). These myths use symbolic storytelling to explain the

unknown, frequently explaining the origins of sacred rites, places, and artifacts that are significant to the community. Aside from explaining scientific events, creation myths and other myths provide important insights into a society's core. These myths express a community's sense of identity, reflecting how they see themselves in the greater cosmic context. In essence, creation myths act as symbolic blueprints for a society's values, practices, and worldview. This template is mirrored in many parts of their culture. This blueprint is represented in many areas of their society, such as ceremonies, legendary heroes, ethics, and creative and architectural representations. While creation myths represent the specific values and concerns of each society, comparative examination shows universal themes and archetypes. Beneath the surface of several creation stories is a shared, collective narrative: the turning of chaos into order, or nothing into life. This core story is a worldwide topic that represents the eternal conflict between disorder and creation. Finally, this tale is humanity's only shared story, a common thread that runs across cultures and time.

2.2.1. Biblical Story of Creation

The Genesis creation narrative, found in the Book of Genesis, consists of two distinct accounts from different sources. The Genesis creation narrative refers to the two accounts of creation in the Book of Genesis, which is part

of the Hebrew Bible and Christian Old Testament. These accounts are central to both Judaism and Christianity, providing theological and symbolic explanations for the origins of the world and humanity (David & Margaret Leeming, 2004). The first account, in Genesis 1:1–2:3, comes from the Priestly source (P), which is generally dated to the 6th century BCE. It describes creation as occurring in six days, with God resting on the seventh. Humans, male and female, are created together in God's image, and the narrative emphasizes order and divine majesty (Coogan & Chapman, 2018).

The second account, in Genesis 2:4–25, is attributed to the Yahwist source (J), which dates to the 10th century BCE (Collins, 2018). It presents God as more hands-on, forming man from the dust of the ground and breathing life into him. This version focuses on human relationships, particularly between Adam and Eve, and introduces themes of choice and imperfection in the Garden of Eden. The author of the story in Genesis 2:4 to 3:24 is known to scholars as "J". That is because J referred to the creator as Yahweh ("YHVH" in ancient Hebrew, or "Jahweh" in the German native to many scholars of the Bible, or ultimately "Jehovah" in modern usage).

On the day Yahweh created the heavens and the earth, the land was dry and barren until a mist rose from the ground and watered it. Yahweh then formed a man from the dust of the earth, breathing life into him, and the

man became alive. Yahweh also created a garden in a place called Eden, where He placed all kinds of fruit-bearing trees, including the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. A river flowed out of Eden to water the garden, and from there it split into four rivers that extended to the four corners of the world. Yahweh placed the man in the garden, instructing him to tend it and eat from any tree except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Seeing that the man should not be alone, Yahweh decided to create a suitable helper for him. He formed the beasts of the field and the birds of the air, and the man gave each a name. However, none were a suitable helper. So, Yahweh caused the man to fall into a deep sleep, took one of his ribs, and fashioned it into a woman. The man was named Adam, and the woman was called Eve.

In the garden, there was a snake that convinced the woman she could eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil without dying, claiming it would give her Yahweh's knowledge of good and evil. The woman ate the fruit and gave some to the man as well. For the first time, they became aware of their nakedness and felt ashamed, so they made aprons to cover themselves. When they heard Yahweh in the garden, they hid, but Yahweh called out to them and asked why they were hiding. The man explained they had hidden because they were scantily clothed. Yahweh then

asked how they knew to feel shame over their nudity and if they had eaten from the forbidden tree. The man admitted the woman had given him the fruit, and when Yahweh questioned the woman, she said the snake had deceived her into eating it.

Yahweh said to the snake, "Because of what you have done, you are cursed more than all the animals. You will crawl on your belly in the dust, and you will be struck by the offspring of this woman." To the woman, Yahweh said, "You will experience great pain in childbirth, but you will still desire to bear children, and your husband will rule over you." Lastly, to the man, Yahweh said, "Because of your actions, the ground is cursed, and you will never again eat from the tree. You will toil to grow plants and fields, eating bread until you die and return to the dust from which you were made." Yahweh then said, "This man has become like us, knowing good and evil. Now he may try to take from the tree of life and live forever." So, Yahweh made garments for the man and woman and sent them out of the Garden of Eden. He placed a winged creature, part human and part lion, at the entrance to the garden to guard it and prevent them from re-entering.

2.3. Concept of Culture

According to Tylor (1971), culture is a complex and multifaceted concept that refers to the collective social behaviors, customs, institutions, values, beliefs,

knowledge, and material traits that define a specific group or society. It includes both tangible elements like art, architecture, and technology, as well as intangible aspects such as language, religion, norms, ethics, and worldviews. Culture shapes the identities of individuals and communities, guiding how people interact with each other and their environment. While society refers to the group of people living together in an organized community, culture encompasses the shared beliefs, practices, and values that bind them. The concept of culture, as proposed by Tylor focuses on the broad spectrum of human intellectual and social development, emphasizing that culture is learned, shared, and transmitted through social interaction. Culture acts as a guiding force that influences our lifestyle, thinking, and behavior. In contrast, society refers to a particular group of people living within a defined geographical region. Culture includes the customs, values, and traditions handed down across generations, shaping our identity and guiding how we interact with the world around us.

In addition, Kleinman (1995) describes culture as a complex system of knowledge, behaviors, and traditions that are developed and passed on through social interactions. This system includes a range of elements such as practices and skills, ideas, concepts, mental frameworks, symbols, values, norms, institutions, social structures, goals, guiding principles, rules, regulations, artifacts,

material objects, and changes to the physical environment. These components create a dynamic and complex cultural system that shapes the behavior and influences both individual and collective identities. Edward Tylor's influential definition of culture, established in 1971, continues to shape anthropological thought. Tylor defined culture as the full range of human expression, which includes knowledge, beliefs, artistic expression, moral principles, laws, , and acquired skills and habits. On the other hand, Scott (2014) underscores that culture is fundamentally separate from biological inheritance. While biological inheritance refers to the transmission of genetic traits from one generation to the next, culture encompasses the beliefs, practices, values, norms, languages, and customs that are socially learned and passed down within a society. Unlike biological inheritance, which is governed by genetic factors, culture is shaped by human interactions and shared experiences, and it can evolve and change over time. This distinction highlights the role of social learning in human development and the adaptability of cultural systems. This statement emphasizes the idea that culture is not something individuals are born with but is learned through the process of enculturation. It underscores how people absorb the practices, values, and beliefs of their society, which serve as frameworks for understanding and responding to life's challenges. Culture acts as a guide to help individuals adapt to their environment, providing tools for survival, social

interaction, and meaning-making. The notion that culture is adaptive reinforces the idea that it evolves over time, shaped by human needs and societal conditions. Through enculturation, individuals not only learn how to function within their culture but also contribute to its continuity and transformation. Culture is categorized into its material and non-material components. Material culture refers to the tangible objects created by humans to aid in survival, while non-material culture encompasses the norms and values of a society. While material culture is concrete, taking the form of artifacts and crafts, non-material culture is abstract yet deeply influences the lives of people within a culture. Beliefs about right and wrong, as well as norms and taboos, are examples of non-material culture. Based on the above, it is clear that culture is shared, as it includes valued beliefs and practices that are collectively held by a group, lineage, or religious community, among others. Additionally, culture is dynamic because it is constantly evolving. It is not a static entity (Gabriel, 2015). Moreso, Antia (2005) explains that culture is not rigid or unchanging; it is continuously altered and influenced by human interactions and the integration of elements from other cultures, a process referred to as assimilation. Etuk (2002) also noted that cultures are dynamic and constantly evolving. In fact, culture must change; a culture that resists change and remains stagnant cannot be considered a living culture.

2.3.1. Types of Culture

Drew, (2023) identified seventeen (17) types of culture among which includes the following:

1. Material Culture

Material culture encompasses the physical manifestations of a culture, including objects, artifacts, artworks, and structures. According to Hodder (2012), material culture consists of "the objects, structures, and spaces that people make and use in their social lives."

Characteristics of Material Culture

Material culture serves multiple purposes:

- Functional role: Objects are created to fulfill practical needs.
- Reflection of values and practices: Material culture reflects and shapes the values, customs, and traditions of a society.
- Insights into people's lives: Material culture provides a window into the daily lives, beliefs, and experiences of individuals within a culture.
- Technological and artistic achievements: Material culture showcases a society's technological advancements, artistic expression, and innovative spirit.

Examples of Material Culture

Examples of material culture include:

- Household items (furniture, utensils, etc.)
- Clothing and textiles
- Paintings, sculptures, and other artworks
- Architectural structures (buildings, monuments, etc.)
- Tools and machinery

As noted by Drew (2024), material culture offers a tangible connection to the past, present, and future of a society, providing valuable insights into human experiences and achievements.

2. Non-Material Culture

Non-material culture encompasses the intangible aspects of a culture, including ideas, norms, values, and beliefs. As defined by Geertz (1973), non-material culture consists of:

- Symbols: Representations of ideas, concepts, and values
- Meanings: Interpretations and significance assigned to symbols and experiences
- Beliefs: Assumptions and convictions about the world and its workings
- Values: Principles and standards that guide behavior and decision-making
- Geertz's definition highlights the importance of these intangible elements in shaping social behavior and influencing individual identity.

Characteristics of Non-Material Culture

Non-material culture:

- Shapes social behavior: Influences how individuals interact with each other and their environment.
- Is transmitted through socialization: Passed down from one generation to the next through social interactions and learning.
- Forms the basis of identity: Plays a crucial role in shaping an individual's sense of self and belonging.

Examples of Non-Material Culture

- Religious beliefs and practices
- Attitudes towards gender and social roles
- Institutions like family, marriage, and education
- Social norms and expectations
- Values and principles that guide behavior

3. Corporate Culture

Corporate culture encompasses the values, practices, and underlying assumptions that define an organization's identity. As Deal (1982) aptly put it, "the way things are done around here."

Influencers of Corporate Culture

Corporate culture is shaped by:

- Organization's structure: The way the organization is designed and managed.
- History: The organization's past experiences, successes, and challenges.
- Leadership: The values, vision, and management style of the organization's leaders.
- Industry: The norms, trends, and expectations of the industry in which the organization operates.

Impact of Corporate Culture

Corporate culture has a significant impact on:

- Employee motivation and productivity: A positive culture can boost employee engagement and performance.
- Organization's success: A strong, well-defined culture can contribute to an organization's overall success and competitiveness.
- External perception: Corporate culture influences how outsiders, such as customers, investors, and the general public, perceive the organization.

4. Popular Culture

Popular culture refers to the prevailing values, practices, and artistic expressions within a society at a given time. According to Bennett (1999), it encompasses "the forms of culture that are widely produced and consumed in

a society." Due to its mass appeal, popular culture is often synonymous with mass culture.

Characteristics of Popular Culture

- Mass media influence: Popular culture heavily relies on mass media, such as television, film, and social media.
- Pervasive presence: It permeates everyday life, shaping attitudes and influencing behaviors.
- Inclusive representation: Popular culture often portrays an idealized version of society, implying equal opportunities and harmony among people.

Examples of Popular Culture

- Film and television
- Sports and entertainment
- Music and dance
- Fashion and trends

Ideal culture serves as a benchmark for evaluating a society's actual values and practices. It provides a direction for societal efforts, guiding individuals and communities toward their aspirations.

5. Folk Culture

Folk culture encompasses the unique traditions, customs, and practices of a small, homogeneous community, often located in rural areas. According to Revill (2014), folk culture is characterized by:

- Local roots: Deeply connected to a specific geographic location.
- Tradition and continuity: Strong emphasis on preserving historical customs and practices.
- Sense of place and belonging: Community members share a strong sense of identity and connection to their surroundings.
- Features of Folk Culture
- Oral transmission: Folk culture is often passed down through oral traditions, such as storytelling and songs.
- Small-scale and localized: Unlike popular culture, folk culture is specific to a small community and is not widely commercialized.
- Emphasis on tradition: Folk culture places a strong emphasis on preserving traditional practices and customs.

Examples of Folk Culture

- Mythology and folklore
- Traditional farming practices

- Local music and dance
- Handicrafts and artisanal skills

Global Culture

Global culture encompasses the values, practices, and cultural products that extend beyond local boundaries and are shared globally. This phenomenon has emerged as a result of globalization, which has fostered increased interconnectedness around the world.

Drivers of Global Culture

- International travel: The movement of people across borders has facilitated cultural exchange.
- Popular media: Global media outlets have disseminated cultural content worldwide.
- Modern technology: The internet and other digital platforms have accelerated cultural globalization.

Characteristics of Global Culture

- Shared values and practices: Global culture encompasses common values, customs, and practices that transcend local cultures.
- Link to colonialism: Global culture reflects the power dynamics and cultural exchange that occurred during colonialism.

- Cultural homogenization: The spread of global culture has led to the erosion of local cultures and the adoption of homogeneous cultural practices.

Implications of Global Culture

- Increased interconnectedness: Global culture has facilitated the exchange of ideas, values, and practices across borders.
- Cultural diversity: While global culture has led to cultural homogenization, it has also created opportunities for cultural diversity and exchange.

7. Subculture

A subculture is a smaller group within a larger culture, distinguished by its unique values, practices, and beliefs. Although subcultures may borrow from the parent culture, they often modify or distort these elements to create their own distinct identity.

Characteristics of Subcultures

- Distinct values and practices: Subcultures develop their own norms, customs, and traditions.
- Blocked aspirations: Subcultures often emerge as a response to unfulfilled aspirations or ambiguous social positions.
- Sense of community: Subcultures provide a sense of belonging and connection for individuals who feel excluded from the parent culture.

- Challenge to parent culture: Subcultures often question and challenge the values and norms of the parent culture.

Examples of Subcultures

- Hip-hop culture
- Punk rock culture
- Skinhead culture
- Goth culture
- LGBTQ+ culture

As noted by Scott (2014), subcultures play a significant role in providing a sense of identity and community for individuals who feel marginalized or excluded from mainstream culture. However, these categories are not mutually exclusive, and many aspects of culture can overlap or blend together. Other types of culture include: counterculture, youth culture, high culture, low culture, national culture, cyberculture, consumer culture, dominant culture, ideal culture and real culture.

2.4. Creation Myths and Cultural Practices

Creation myths often serve as the foundation for many cultural practices, linking a society's rituals, traditions, and beliefs to their understanding of how the world and humanity came into existence. These myths provide a shared

origin story that informs a community's identity and behavior. Below are examples of how creation myths influence cultural practices:

1. Hindu Creation Myth and Rituals

In Hindu cosmology, Lopez (2002), states that creation begins with the cosmic egg (Hiranyagarbha), from which Brahma emerges to create the universe. The cycle of creation, preservation, and destruction is governed by Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva. The cultural practices of the Hindus include:

- Puja (Worship): Rituals honoring Brahma, Vishnu, and Shiva reflect their roles in creation, preservation, and destruction.
- Yagnas (Sacrificial Fires): These symbolize cosmic creation and are believed to sustain the order of the universe.
- Holi Festival: Celebrates creation and renewal through symbolic rituals of fire and color.

2. Greek Creation Myth and Religious Practices

The Greek creation story begins with Chaos, leading to Gaia (Earth), Uranus (Sky), and their offspring, including the Titans and Olympian gods. Greek religious practices include temple worship, festivals such as Olympic games and offerings to Gaia. Temples dedicated to Olympian gods like Zeus and Hera reflect their central roles in creation myths. Events like the Olympic Games honor Zeus, the ruler of the gods, connecting human accomplishments

to divine origins. Also, early agricultural societies offered sacrifices to Gaia, recognizing her as the mother of all life.

3. Egyptian Creation Myth and Death Rituals

According to Wilkinson (2003), the Egyptian mythology, Atum creates the world from primordial waters (Nun) and gives life to other gods like Shu (Air) and Tefnut (Moisture). These gods form the natural and moral order. Their cultural practices are:

- **Mummification:** This reflects the belief that life arises from and returns to the primordial waters. Preservation of the body ensures continuity in the afterlife.
- **Pharaoh Worship:** Pharaohs were seen as the earthly embodiment of Atum or Ra, and rituals affirmed their divine authority.
- **Temple Ceremonies:** Priests reenacted the creation story to maintain cosmic order.

4. Yoruba Creation Myth (Nigeria)

According to Yoruba tradition, the supreme god Olodumare sent the orisha (deity) Obatala to create the world. Equipped with a bag of sand, a chicken, and a palm nut, Obatala formed land over the waters. He also shaped humans from clay but became intoxicated, leading to imperfections. The Yoruba cultural practices includes veneration of Orisha. Rituals and festivals honor

Obatala as the creator and patron of creativity, wisdom, and purity. Also, clay figurines are used in rituals, reflecting the myth of human creation from earth. In addition, the city of Ife is considered the spiritual center of creation and hosts pilgrimages and festivals (Falola & Childs, 2004).

5. Akan Creation Myth (Ghana)

Mbiti (1990), explains that in the Akan mythology, the sky god Nyame created the world, but humanity's hubris led to a separation between heaven and earth. Efforts to reconnect include rituals and spiritual practices. Rituals involving pouring libations to Nyame and other spirits symbolize an attempt to maintain a connection with the divine. Myths of Nyame and Anansi (the trickster) are shared during communal gatherings, teaching moral lessons about humility and respect. Ceremonial music reflects the connection between the physical and spiritual realms.

2.5. Theoretical Framework

Several theories have been proposed to explain the origins, purposes, and structures of creation myths. These theories come from various disciplines, including anthropology, psychology, sociology, and comparative mythology. Below are some prominent theories on creation myths:

- **Structuralism:** Structuralist theory suggests that myths are structured around binary oppositions (e.g., chaos/order, light/dark, life/death). These oppositions reflect the basic way humans organize their thoughts and experiences. Creation myths are seen as cultural tools for resolving or mediating these binary oppositions, thus helping societies make sense of their world. For example, the contrast between chaos and order in myths like the Enuma Elish (Babylonian myth), where the god Marduk defeats the chaos goddess Tiamat to bring order to the universe (Levi-Strauss, 1963).
- **Functionalism:** Functionalism, as proposed by Malinowski (1988), holds that myths serve practical and societal functions, such as explaining natural phenomena, legitimizing societal norms, and reinforcing social cohesion. According to this theory, myths help individuals and communities cope with the world, addressing existential questions and providing moral and social guidance. Myths like the Greek creation myth explain the origins of gods and the world, establishing divine authority that justifies social structures.
- **Psychoanalytic Theory:** Freud (1961) and Jung (1964), both applied psychoanalytic theory to understand the psychological underpinnings of myths, viewing them as expressions of deep-seated human desires, anxieties, and unconscious processes. To them, myths reflect repressed desires and unresolved conflicts, particularly those related to family dynamics (e.g., the

Oedipus complex). Jung suggested that myths stem from the collective unconscious and contain archetypes (universal symbols) that represent common psychological themes. Creation myths express deep psychological truths about human nature, including existential concerns, fears of death, and the desire for control over the unknown. An example is the Babylonian creation myth in which the universe is formed from the body of a defeated primordial being (like Ymir in Norse myth) can be seen as symbolizing psychological processes of destruction and renewal.

- **Comparative Mythology:** Campbell's theory of the Monomyth or "Hero's Journey" posits that all myths, including creation myths, share common elements or a universal narrative structure. According to Campbell (2008), creation myths typically revolve around the journey of a hero or a god who transforms the world. Creation myths across cultures follow a similar pattern of birth, struggle, death, and renewal, and often include the hero's return or a divine revelation of cosmic order. A good example is the Hindu creation myths, particularly the story of Vishnu's cosmic act of creation, follow Campbell's monomyth structure, as Vishnu's divine intervention brings order from chaos.
- **Evolutionary and Sociological Theories:** Evolutionary theorists like Tylor (1971) and Frazer (1982), argue that creation myths evolve alongside

human societies, reflecting stages in the development of human belief systems from animism to polytheism to monotheism. Creation myths reflect a society's understanding of the world and its place within it. Early myths may be animistic or polytheistic, while later myths may evolve into monotheistic or scientific worldviews. The transition from Greek polytheistic myths to Judeo-Christian creation stories, where the latter's focus on a single, omnipotent God reflects more advanced philosophical or theological thought, is a good example of this theory.

- **The Science and Myth Perspective:** Some scholars, particularly those influenced by modern science, see creation myths as symbolic representations of early humans' attempts to explain the origins of the universe in a pre-scientific context. Creation myths can be seen as an early form of cosmology, aimed at explaining the unexplainable. Myths serve as the primitive precursor to modern scientific explanations like the Big Bang Theory or evolutionary biology. They offer symbolic, poetic accounts of the origins of the world and human existence. The Big Bang Theory and creation myths like Genesis both attempt to explain how the universe came into being, but from different epistemological perspectives one based on scientific evidence, the other on symbolic or religious narratives.

- **The Mythopoetic or Literary Theory:** This theory focuses on the literary and artistic qualities of creation myths. It suggests that myths are not just explanations of the world, but expressions of human imagination, creativity, and culture. They may serve as stories that help people understand themselves and their place in the world. In essence, myths serve an artistic and poetic function, using symbolic language, imagery, and storytelling to communicate complex ideas about existence. The Pangu myth from Chinese mythology, where the giant Pangu creates the world from a cosmic egg, is often interpreted not just as a literal origin story but as an artistic exploration of themes like birth, separation, and the emergence of order from chaos.
- **Sociocultural Theory:** This theory focuses on how myths reflect and reinforce social structures, rituals, and cultural norms. Creation myths may serve to legitimize the social order, establish hierarchies, and justify rituals. According to Turner (1989) and Douglas (1970), myths and rituals are intertwined, and creation myths often emphasize themes of purity, order, and societal roles. They help bind communities together through shared beliefs and practices. The African creation myths of the Dogon people, which emphasize the roles of specific deities in the creation of life, reflect the

importance of societal roles, rituals, and cosmology within the Dogon culture.

In conclusion, these theories offer a range of perspectives on why and how creation myths are formed and function within cultures. Some emphasize the psychological or emotional needs fulfilled by these myths, others focus on their social or structural roles, while still others see them as primitive attempts at cosmology or symbolic representations of universal human experiences. Collectively, these theories show that creation myths serve as crucial cultural artifacts that reveal much about the human condition, societal values, and the evolution of human thought.

2.6. Summary of Reviewed Literature

The literature review covers the concept of myths, creation myths, culture and the significance of creation myths on cultural practices. Creation myths are an integral part of human culture, providing insights into the worldview, values and beliefs of a society. These myths are foundational narratives that explain the origins of the world, humanity, and the cosmos. They are found in nearly every culture and serve as a way to explore questions about existence, purpose, and the divine. The concept of myth has been examined as defined by scholars such as Leeming, Kees Bolle, Eliade Mircea and others. Myths have been classified into different types ranging from creation myths to cultural

myths. Also, the Biblical story of creation was examined as an example of creation myth, giving an overview on how the world was created and how humans came into existence as narrated in the Hebrew Bible. More so, the concept of culture has been carefully explored, listing its types to include material, non- material, corporate, popular, folk cultures, etc.

Lastly, the relationship existing between creation myth and cultural practices has been looked at, stating the influence of creation myth on cultural practices.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THE GBAGYIS AND CREATION MYTHS

3.1. Origin of the Gbagyi People

Thurley's 1981 report highlights the presence of over a dozen ethnic groups in Abuja Province, though his classifications are sometimes inconsistent or arbitrary. Despite this, several groups can be distinguished based on their unique sociocultural identities. Among these, the Gbagyi, Koro, Arago, Ganagana, and Hausa stand out as the most significant in terms of population and political influence. The Gbagyi and Koro are particularly notable as some of the region's earliest settlers, a point also supported by Morgan's 1984 research. In 1900, just before the British conquest of the region, the power struggle primarily involved the ruling elites of the Hausa, Fulani, Gbagyi, and Koro communities (Kirk and Ryan, 1975). These conflicts were heavily influenced by the dynamics of nearby regions and the ability of dominant factions within these groups to assert military strength. Additionally, the influx of immigrants into the Abuja region was closely tied to its economic potential. Thurley (1981) suggests that the Gbagyi migrated from Borno to the Abuja region due to conflicts with the Kanuri. Some also interpret the Gbagyi's knowledge of lapis lazuli as evidence of an Egyptian origin. The issue of

Gbagyi origins is further complicated by the linguistic connection between the Nupe and Gbagyi languages, as well as the Koro, whose history appears closely tied to Wukari and the Kwarafara Empire (Cadman, 1973). Traditional accounts suggest that the Gbagyi and Koro were the earliest settlers in the Abuja region (Shekwo, 1986), particularly in areas such as Diko, Ushafa, Gerki, and Zuba in the central and northern parts. In the case of the Kare district, settlements are believed to date back to the 15th century. This excerpt highlights an important historical and cultural narrative about Abuja, Nigeria's Federal Capital Territory, and its indigenous inhabitants, the Gbagyi (or Gwari) people. The relocation of Nigeria's capital to Abuja in 1986 was a significant political decision, aimed at fostering national unity by situating the capital in a central, "neutral" location. However, the designation of Abuja as a "no-man's land" often overlooks or minimizes the existence and rights of the Gbagyi people, who were the original inhabitants of the region, (Byanyiko, 1979).

According to Adamu (2007), the Gbagyi people have a rich cultural heritage and a deep connection to the land that predated Abuja's establishment as the nation's capital. The process of carving out Abuja and the subsequent displacement of the Gbagyi people remains a critical issue, reflecting broader themes of urbanization, indignity, and land rights in Nigeria. Adaobi's assertion underscores the complexity of Abuja's history, calling attention to the nuanced

realities of those whose lives and histories were affected by this national project (Onyeakagbu, 2024). This account sheds light on the often-overlooked impact of the establishment of Abuja on its original inhabitants, the Gbagyi people. The 8,000 square kilometers of land that became the Federal Capital Territory (FCT)—home to key national institutions like the Presidential Villa and the National Assembly—was not an empty, unclaimed "no-man's land" but the ancestral home of the Gbagyi people. The process of acquiring this land involved the forced displacement of the Gbagyi community by the military government, who sought to create a neutral capital for Nigeria. While promises of compensation and resettlement were made, the hurried nature of the displacement often meant that these commitments were inadequately fulfilled or delayed, leaving many Gbagyi people marginalized and struggling to reclaim their rights. This history underscores the tension between national development and the rights of indigenous communities, highlighting the need for a more inclusive and equitable approach to such large-scale projects. It also serves as a reminder of the human cost of progress and the importance of honoring the heritage and dignity of those whose lives are disrupted in the process. The government significantly underestimated the population of Gbagyi people living in the area when planning the Federal Capital Territory. As a result, while some displaced families were provided housing, many others were left in transit

or settlement camps for extended periods. Compensation plans were poorly executed, leaving many without adequate redress for their losses. Decades later, the Gbagyi people continue to feel marginalized, believing the government has deprived them of their ancestral lands and cultural heritage. This lingering sense of injustice underscores the long-term impacts of the relocation and the need to address the grievances of displaced communities (Thomas, 1989).

3.2. Geographical Location and Occupation of the Gbagyis

3.2.1. Geographical Location of the Gbagyi people

The Gbagyi, also known as Gwari or Gbari, are a peaceful, agricultural, and artistic people who speak Nupoid languages. They primarily reside in Nigeria's North-Central region, particularly in Niger, Kaduna, and the Federal Capital Territory, as well as in parts of Nasarawa and Kogi. The Gbagyi are the largest indigenous ethnic group in the Federal Capital Territory, with farming being their main occupation.

According to oral tradition, the first Gbagyi settler was a hunter who ventured into Paikokun land, a dense forest in Abuja. Paikokun, named after the mountain where this first settler lived, holds significance in their history. Initially, the Gbagyi people preferred living on mountaintops, as they believed these elevated locations offered greater safety than the plains. However, with the influence of Western civilization, most Gbagyi communities eventually moved to the plains. Today, the Gbagyi people can be found in various areas across Nigeria's Middle Belt (Central) region. The Gbagyi people reside in the western parts of Abuja, southern Niger State, Chikun Local Government Area (with its headquarters at Kujama) in Kaduna State, as well as in Nassarawa State (Shekwo, 1984). Prominent Gbagyi towns include Minna, Karu, Kuta, Kwakuti, Kwali, Gawu, Yelwa, Toto, Araba, Nakuse, Rubochi, Abaji, Geku,

Gadabuje, Majaga, Gussoro (Gusolo), Gwada (Gbada), Guni, Fuka, Galkogo, Maikunle, Manta, Ushafa (Wushapa), Bisi, Bwari (Bwaya), Suleja, Shiroro (Shilolo), Beji, Diko, Alawa, Erena, Paiko/Paigo Lanbata, Zugba, Nuku, Gbogo, and Farin Doki.

Several theories attempt to explain the scattered settlements and migration of the Gbagyi people. Some historians suggest that the Gbagyi were displaced from their original settlements during the Fulani Jihad, while others, particularly local historians, attribute their migration to the search for fertile farmland (Chigudu, 2008). Gbagyi settlements vary in size, with smaller settlements often found in areas where farming dominates, ensuring sufficient land is available for agricultural activities. The relocation of the Gbagyi people during the development of Abuja as Nigeria's federal capital highlights significant social, cultural, and historical impacts. As the largest ethnic group in the area, the Gbagyi faced the loss of ancestral lands, which carried both spiritual and cultural significance. Notable landmarks, like Zuma Rock, served as key symbols in their heritage. Describing their homeland as a "no-man's land" erased the historical connection of the Gbagyi to the territory and disregarded their deep-rooted presence. The displacement led to profound challenges, including forced adjustments to new government-provided environments. While some families received housing, others endured extended stays in transitional or

settlement camps, highlighting the struggles associated with relocation policies. The situation reflects broader themes of development-induced displacement, where modernization efforts clash with indigenous rights, traditions, and livelihoods.

3.2.2. Occupation of the Gbagyis

The Gbagyi people are primarily farmers but are also skilled in wood fetching, pottery, and blacksmithing. They are particularly renowned for their visual arts, especially pottery. Other artistic practices among the Gbagyi include sculpture, iron smelting, and domestic crafts (Onyeakagbu, 2024). A notable example of their excellence in pottery is Ladi Kwali, also known as Ladi Dosei Kwali (c. 1925–1984), a celebrated Nigerian potter, ceramicist, and educator, (Awa, 2020).

Ladi Kwali was born in the village of Kwali, located in the Gwari region of Northern Nigeria, where pottery was a traditional craft practiced predominantly by women (Vincetelli, 2000). She learned the art of pottery as a child under the guidance of her aunt, using the traditional coiling method. Ladi Kwali created large pots, including water jars, cooking pots, bowls, and flasks, by shaping coils of clay and beating the surfaces from the inside with a flat wooden paddle.

Her pottery featured intricate incised designs, combining geometric patterns with stylized depictions of animals such as scorpions, lizards, crocodiles, chameleons, snakes, birds, and fish (Cardew, 1972). Known for the elegance of their form and decoration, her pots earned her widespread recognition as a talented and renowned potter within the region (Thompson, 2007). Some of her works were even acquired by the Emir of Abuja, Alhaji Suleiman Barau, reflecting the high esteem in which her craftsmanship was held.

3.3. Religious and Socio-Political Life of the Gbagyi/Gbari People

3.3.1. Religious Life of the Gbgayis

In the traditional religion of the Gbagyi people, some believe in a supreme God called Shekwoi, who existed before their ancestors. However, they also dedicate themselves to appeasing other deities, such as Maigiro. Their primary indigenous religion, Knunu, is believed to offer protection from evil forces within the community. The Gbagyi people traditionally practiced their indigenous religion, which involved offering sacrifices of fowl and beer to a sacred tree associated with the Knunu. However, with the advent of westernization, Islam gained prominence following the Fulani jihad, while Christianity was introduced by the Sudan Interior Mission, locally known as the Evangelical Church of Africa (Ajayi, 1981). The Gbagyi were more inclined to embrace Islam because it shared similarities with their traditional beliefs, such as devotion, the use of amulets, and polygamy, which made it easier to integrate compared to Christianity (Onyeakagbu, 2024).

The Gbagyi people's religious practices emphasize deep reverence for their gods and ancestors, highlighting their spiritual connection with both realms. Central to their traditional worship, referred to as "*A'shna*", is the belief that ancestors who have transitioned to the ancestral plane continue to influence the lives of their descendants. This connection necessitates offerings and worship to

receive blessings, protection, and strength. At the pinnacle of their spiritual hierarchy is Shekwo, regarded as the supreme Creator and Lord over all things, reflecting the Gbagyi people's acknowledgment of a sovereign, all-encompassing deity (Paul, 2024). This reverence for Shekwo and the ancestors demonstrates a harmonious blend of ancestral veneration and belief in a singular, overarching divine authority, which is a cornerstone of Gbagyi spirituality. However, over time, significant religious shifts have occurred, with the majority now identifying as Christians. The rapid spread of Christianity among the Gbagyi can be largely attributed to missionary efforts. The Sudan Interior Mission (later known as the Evangelical Church of West Africa, now Evangelical Church Winning All - ECWA) played a critical role in introducing and propagating Christianity. Similarly, the Baptist missionaries from southwestern Nigeria contributed to the Christian influence in Gbagyi communities (Shekwo, 1984). Despite Christianity's prominence, there remains a notable subset of Gbagyi adherents practicing Islam, reflecting broader religious pluralism in Nigeria. Additionally, some Gbagyi individuals continue to observe their indigenous traditional religion, preserving cultural and spiritual practices that have been passed down through generations.

Islam first made its appearance among the Gbagyi people in the 18th-19th centuries, primarily as a result of the Fula jihads, which had a significant

influence across northern Nigeria. However, widespread conversions to Islam among the Gbagyi did not occur until the colonial and post-colonial periods. During this time, socio-political changes, trade interactions, and the increasing influence of Islamic culture contributed to a growing acceptance of Islam among subsets of the Gbagyi population. This gradual adoption of Islam reflected broader patterns of religious transformation in the region, where Islam expanded alongside Christianity and indigenous traditions. The religious life of the Gbagyi people is closely connected to the veneration of deities and the worship of Shekwo, their supreme being. A key aspect of their belief system is *A'ko*, an ancestor within Gbagyi families or clans who, during their lifetime, was endowed by Shekwo with remarkable abilities and virtues. These include exceptional wisdom and understanding, success in agriculture, healing abilities, fertility, physical stature, strength in warfare, and great wealth. By honoring *A'ko*, the Gbagyi people celebrate their ancestral heritage and maintain a spiritual link to Shekwo, whom they regard as the ultimate source of these blessings. This tradition of ancestral veneration remains significant in Gbagyi culture, even as external influences like Christianity and Islam have gained ground within the community. When they pass away and ascend to heaven, it is believed that their spirits inhabit the hills and rivers surrounding villages. The spirits dwelling in the hills are known as "*A'ko 'pe*," while those residing

in the rivers are called "*A'ko o'dna*." One such spirit is Sauri, an *A'ko o'dna* (Rosendall, 1998).

According to legend, Sauri was a master of fishing and all river-related activities during his lifetime. He was an exceptional swimmer who once dove to the river's deepest depths to retrieve a fallen axe. On one occasion, a canoe capsized, and he immediately dove into the river just in time, making sure all seven passengers grabbed onto his arms as he swam them safely to shore. During every fishing expedition, his net always yielded the largest and most impressive catch. At one particular fishing festival, Sauri waded into the river and remained there for nearly half the day. When he finally emerged, he was completely dry, emitting smoke, and holding a calabash filled with steaming *tuwo* and *kuku* soup. When he died, he was buried in the river, where it is believed he transformed into a massive fish. Today, his village is known as *Kasnaya*, located in Chikun Local Government Area of Kaduna State, with his shrine situated on the riverbank of the *Kasnaya* River. The offerings required at his shrine include a hen, two large tubers of yam, and a corn cob. Additionally, the first fish caught during any fishing expedition is returned to the river to avoid "eating" Sauri. The gods of the hills, *A'ko 'pe*, are honored and revered for granting blessings and breakthroughs in farming and livestock,

protection from enemies and warfare, as well as ensuring fertility and abundant rainfall (Shallom, 2024).

3.3.2. Socio-Political Life of the Gbagyi/Gbari People

Historically, the Gbagyi/Gbari follow a patrilineal kinship system, with the lowest level of authority found within the extended family compound, led by the oldest male. As a patriarchal community, the *Osu* (king) holds the highest authority in a Gbagyi/Gbari settlement, supported by a group of elders who are responsible for maintaining peace in the land (Shekwo, 1986).

Furthermore, the Gbagyi's familiarity with the lapis lazuli stone has led some to suggest a possible Egyptian origin. The question of the Gbagyi's origins is further complicated by the recognized linguistic affinity between the Gbagyi and Nupe languages. Additionally, the Koro, whose history appears closely intertwined with that of the Gbagyi, claim a connection to Wukari and the Kwarafara empire (Cadman, 1973).

3.4. The Gbagyi/Gbari Creation Myth

The Gbagyi creation myth is attributed to the Gbagyi people, an ethnic group largely found in Nigeria. It is an essential component of Gbagyi cultural legacy, passed down through generations via oral tradition. The Gbagyi creation myth is a traditional mythology about the origins of the planet, mankind, and the natural environment.

According to Gbagyi mythology, the world was created by a supreme being named "Shekwoi" or "Shekwoyi". Shekwoi is depicted as a powerful and benevolent deity who created the world and all living things. Shekwoi formed the earth from a lump of clay and created the sky, sun, moon, and stars. The Gbagyi myth tells the story of how Shekwoi created the first humans. According to the myth, Shekwoi created the first man and woman from clay and brought them to life. The first humans were said to have lived in harmony with Shekwoi and the natural world (Anthony, 1984). Shekwo is believed to reside in heaven, far above the clouds in the sky. According to Gbagyi mythology, Shekwo once lived on earth, where he appeared as a giant to humans. His incredible powers allowed him to create the earth. After completing his creation, Shekwo ascended to heaven, where he watches over all things and blesses his devoted followers. However, Shekwo's adversary, Guzhe, who embodies evil and darkness, seeks to undermine Shekwo's benevolent work. Guzhe's influence and interference pose a threat to the harmony and balance that Shekwo established on earth. Shekwo then sends his minions, servant-gods to live among the people and administer justice and blessings. They also interfere in human errors which became too frequent and wars were regular among the people, all attributed to Guzhe. These are called "*A'ko*" (Shallom, 2024).

3.5. The Role of Myths in Gbagyi Culture

Myths in Gbagyi culture offer valuable insights into the cultural and spiritual beliefs of the Gbagyi people. They play a crucial role in preserving and transmitting cultural values, traditions, and history across generations.

Functions of Myths in Gbagyi Culture

- **Explanation of Natural Phenomena:** Gbagyi myths offer explanations for natural occurrences, including the creation of the world, the sun, moon, and stars.
- **Origin of Humans and Ancestors:** Myths describe the beginnings of humanity and the Gbagyi people's ancestors, offering a sense of identity and a link to their cultural heritage.
- **Moral Lessons and Teachings:** Gbagyi myths impart moral lessons and principles, emphasizing values like respect, honesty, and diligence.
- **Cultural Preservation:** Myths play a crucial role in maintaining Gbagyi cultural traditions, customs, and practices, guaranteeing their transmission across generations.
- **Social Control:** Myths can function as a form of social control, strengthening social norms and expectations, and offering repercussions for behavior that deviates from the norm.

- Entertainment and Storytelling: Gbagyi myths offer entertainment and storytelling, enabling people to engage with the vibrant cultural heritage of their community.
- Sense of Identity: Myths give the Gbagyi people a sense of identity and a connection to their heritage, helping them understand their role in the world.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE OF MYTH ON THE GBAGYI PEOPLE

4.1 Data Presentation and Analysis

This chapter focuses on the implications of creation myth on the Gbagyis. It contains data collected using frequency and sample percentage. It goes further to state the cultural implications of creation myth on the Gbagyi's language, marriage, customs/traditions and concept of the hereafter life. The data collected were analyzed using frequency count and sample percentage.

4.1.1 Research question 1: How do the Gbagyi people view creation myth?

Table 1: The Gbagyi's view of creation myth

S/N	VARIABLES	GENDER								FREQ
		Male				Female				
		30 45 Yes No	- - - -	45 60 Yes No	- - - -	30 45 Yes No	- - - -	45 60 Yes No	- - - -	
1	Do the Gbagyi consider creation myth as fundamental part of their cultural identity?	45	75	70	50	15	105	33	87	120
2	Is the creation myth of Shekwoi broadly accepted by the Gbagyi people?	68	52	18	102	79	41	82	38	120
3	Do the Gbagyi people hold creation myth as holding spiritual	12	108	81	39	35	85	79	41	120

	importance?									
4	Is the creation myth an integral part of the Gbagyi education?	30	90	22	98	68	52	28	92	120
	Total	155	325	191	289	197	283	222	258	
	Percentage	44.8%	52.9%	55.2%	47.1%	47.2%	52.3%	53.2%	47.7%	

Source: Fieldwork 2024

The table above shows that 44.8% and 47.2% of the respondents on both genders that falls into the age bracket of 30-45, gave a positive response on their perception of creation myth. Whereas, 52.9% and 52.3% of the respondents on both genders under the same age bracket gave a negative response on their perception of creation myth. On the other hand, 55.2% and 53.2% of the respondents, both male and female gave a positive response under ages 45-60, while 47.1% (male) and 47.7% (female) gave negative responses on their perception of creation myth.

4.1.2 Research Question 2: What are the socio-cultural significance of creation myth on the Gbagyis?

Table 2: The socio-cultural significance of myths on the Gbagyi people.

S/N	VARIABLES	GENDER				FREQ
		Male		Female		
		30 -	45 -	30 -	45 -	
		45	60	45	60	
		Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	
		No	No	No	No	

1	Does the Gbagyi creation myth influence their understanding on the origin of the world?	66	54	81	39	11	109	33	87	120
2	Does the creation myth shape the Gbagyi people's belief about the afterlife?	18	102	70	50	35	85	49	71	120
3	Does the creation myth shape the Gbagyi's attitudes toward nature and the environment?	78	42	65	55	58	62	46	74	120
4	Is the myth employed to give explanation on the existence of supernatural beings?	35	85	25	95	91	29	10	110	120
	Total	197	283	241	239	195	285	138	342	
	Percentage	45.0%	54.2%	55.0%	45.8%	58.6%	45.5%	41.4%	54.5%	

Source: Fieldwork 2024

The table above shows that 45.0% and 58.6% of the respondents on both genders that falls into the age bracket of 30-45, gave a positive response on the socio-cultural significance of creation myths on the Gbagyi people. Whereas, 54.2% and 45.5% of the respondents on both genders under the same age bracket gave a negative response. On the other hand, 55.0% and 41.4% of the respondents, both male and female gave a positive response under ages 45-60, while 45.8%(male) and 54.5% (female) gave negative responses on the socio-cultural significance of creation myths.

4.1.3 Research question 3 : How does creation myth influence the worldview, spiritual beliefs and cultural values of the Gbagyi people?

Table 3: The influence of creation myth on the worldview, spiritual beliefs and cultural values of the Gbagyi people.

S/N	VARIABLES	GENDER								FREQ
		Male				Female				
		30 45 Yes No	- - - -	45 60 Yes No	- - - -	30 45 Yes No	- - - -	45 60 Yes No	- - - -	
1	Does the Gbagyi creation myth influence their understanding on the origin of the world?	32	88	22	98	83	37	33	87	120
2	Does the creation myth shape the Gbagyi people's belief about the afterlife?	23	97	24	96	36	84	93	27	120
3	Does the creation myth shape the Gbagyis' attitude towards nature and environment?	66	54	28	92	42	78	23	97	120
4	Is the myth used to explain the existence of supernatural beings?	65	55	71	49	81	39	24	96	120
	Total	186	294	145	335	242	238	173	307	
	Percentage	56.2 %	46.7%	43.8 %	53.3%	58. 3%	43.7%	41.7%	56.3%	

Source: Fieldwork 2024

The table above shows that 56.2% and 58.3% of the respondents on both genders that falls into the age bracket of 30-45, gave a positive response on the influence of creation myth on the Gbgayi's worldview. Whereas, 46.7% and 43.7% of the respondents on both genders under the same age bracket gave a negative response. On the other hand, 43.8% and 41.7% of the respondents,

both male and female gave a positive response under ages 45-60, while 53.3% (male) and 56.3%(female) gave negative responses on the influence of creation myth on the Gbagyi's worldview, spiritual beliefs and cultural values.

4.1.4 Discussion of Findings

Table 1 shows that 44.8% and 47.2% of the respondents on both genders that falls into the age bracket of 30-45, gave a positive response on their perception of creation myth. Whereas, 52.9% and 52.3% of the respondents on both genders under the same age bracket gave a negative response on their perception of creation myth. On the other hand, 55.2% and 53.2% of the respondents, both male and female gave a positive response under ages 45-60, while 47.1% (male) and 47.7% (female) gave negative responses on their perception of creation myth.

Table 2 shows that 45.0% and 58.6% of the respondents on both genders that falls into the age bracket of 30-45, gave a positive response on the socio-cultural significance of creation myths on the Gbagyi people. Whereas, 54.2% and 45.5% of the respondents on both genders under the same age bracket gave a negative response. On the other hand, 55.0% and 41.4% of the respondents, both male and female gave a positive response under ages 45-60, while 45.8%(male) and 54.5% (female) gave negative responses on the socio-cultural significance of creation myths.

Table 3 shows that 56.2% and 58.3% of the respondents on both genders that falls into the age bracket of 30-45, gave a positive response on the influence of creation myth on the Gbgyai's worldview. Whereas, 46.7% and 43.7% of the respondents on both genders under the same age bracket gave a negative response. On the other hand, 43.8% and 41.7% of the respondents, both male and female gave a positive response under ages 45-60, while 53.3% (male) and 56.3%(female) gave negative responses on the influence of creation myth on the Gbgyai's worldview, spiritual beliefs and cultural values.

4.2 The Cultural Significance of Creation Myth on the Gbgyai people

4.2.1 Language

The Gbgyai people's creation myth significantly influences their language, worldview, and cultural identity. Like many African traditions, this myth involves gods, ancestral spirits, and nature, emphasizing the deep connection between humans, the divine, and the environment. This is reflected in their language too. The creation myth explains the origins of life and the universe, fostering a strong spiritual bond in Gbgyai culture. Words and phrases in their language often represent sacred and divine elements, reinforcing a worldview where the divine and earthly realms are intertwined. The creation myth teaches about human responsibilities, the relationship with the divine, and the

consequences of defying nature's rules. Language used to describe creation is often a tool for conveying ethical lessons, influencing how the Gbagyi communicate about morality, family roles, and social structures.

Moreso, language plays a central role in Gbagyi rituals, particularly those tied to the creation myth. Songs, chants, and prayers preserve the myth and pass it on to future generations, ensuring that the culture and cosmology remain vital. Gbagyi names often reflect connections to the creation myth or divine figures, carrying significant meaning. These names are believed to link individuals to the cosmic order and their place in the world.

In summary, the Gbagyi creation myth shapes their language by influencing their understanding of the world, ethics, and their relationship with nature, reinforcing cultural and spiritual beliefs through linguistic expressions.

4.2.2 Marriage

The Gbagyi people, have a creation myth that deeply influences their cultural understanding of marriage. This myth often involves a spiritual and cosmological relationship between humans, nature, and deities, shaping how marriage is viewed in their society. Marriage in Gbagyi culture is seen as a spiritual bond, not just a social contract. The creation myth emphasizes the need for ancestral approval, with rituals often conducted to seek blessings for the couple's union and fertility. The creation myth underscores the importance of

balance, which is mirrored in the marital relationship. A successful marriage is seen as one where both partners work in harmony, just as the universe's balance is maintained. Disruptions in the marriage, such as conflict, may require spiritual intervention. The myth shapes the understanding of gender roles within marriage. Men and women are seen as complementary, with each having specific responsibilities in the family. Men typically provide and protect, while women nurture and maintain the home.

Also, the myth stresses the continuation of the family lineage. Marriage is seen as incomplete without children, who are important for honoring ancestors and continuing the family line. Procreation is considered a vital cultural and spiritual responsibility.

In summary, the Gbagyi creation myth significantly shapes their concept of marriage, making it a spiritual and culturally important institution. It influences marital roles, behaviors, and expectations, all rooted in beliefs about ancestors, cosmic balance, and the importance of family lineage.

4.2.3 Customs/Traditions

Creation myths have a profound impact on the customs and traditions of the Gbagyi people, shaping various aspects of their social, cultural, spiritual, and practical lives. These myths strengthen kinship bonds, foster unity, and guide social behavior, ensuring harmony within the community. Culturally, they

inspire rituals, ceremonies, and artistic expressions, while spiritually, they shape beliefs about the divine, ancestors, and the natural order. On a practical level, creation myths influence agricultural practices, food customs, and methods of conflict resolution, keeping these narratives relevant to everyday life. In essence, Gbagyi creation myths are more than stories they are a cornerstone of identity and tradition, preserving the community's heritage while shaping their way of life and values. Their enduring influence reflects their integral role in connecting the past, present, and future of the Gbagyi people.

4.2.4 Funeral/Hereafter Life

The Gbagyi people have rich cultural traditions that deeply influence their beliefs about life, death, and the afterlife. The Gbagyi believe in a supreme being and Creator God called Shekwoi, who is considered the creator of the universe and everything within it. This belief underscores the sanctity of life and the importance of returning to the creator after death. Also, ancestral gods known as *A'ko* in Gbagyi traditions play a significant role. These are often ancestors who, during their lifetimes, were blessed with outstanding abilities and virtues. After death, they are believed to reside in natural elements like hills and rivers, and are revered through traditional worship practices called *A'shna*. This ancestral reverence influences funeral practices, ensuring that the deceased are honored appropriately to join the ancestral realm.

Moreso, the concept of Knunu encompasses the totality of Gbagyi life, worldview, and identity, including their rites of passage and rituals. Funeral rites are an essential aspect of Knunu, emphasizing the community's role in ensuring the deceased's proper transition to the afterlife.

4.3 Challenges posed by creation myth on the Gbagyi's culture and religious life

The creation myth of the Gbagyi people, like many other indigenous groups, plays a significant role in shaping their cultural and religious life. However, it also poses some challenges.

According to Ajayi (1988), the introduction and spread of Christianity and Islam among the Gbagyi have created tensions between traditional beliefs rooted in their creation myth and the doctrines of these global religions. Conversion often requires abandoning traditional practices, leading to cultural erosion. Anyanwu (2009), states that the younger generations may struggle to reconcile the traditional creation myth with modern education and scientific explanations about the origins of humanity and the universe, leading to a loss of interest or belief in these myths.

Also, Adamu (2007) added that the Gbagyi creation myth serves as a unifying narrative for the community. When this myth is questioned or dismissed, it can weaken cultural cohesion and shared identity. Moreso, in

broader Nigerian society, traditional myths like that of the Gbagyi are often dismissed as "primitive" or "superstitious," which can marginalize the Gbagyi people and their worldview. As Gbagyi people adopt elements of other religions, there is often a blending (syncretism) of traditional and foreign beliefs. This can dilute the original meaning and significance of their creation myth, (Ushe, 2015).

Furthermore, Ikechukwu (2012) asserts that creation myth is often passed down through oral storytelling. With the decline of oral traditions and the rise of literacy and technology, the transmission of this myth is at risk. Among the Gbagyi themselves, there may be debates about the interpretation and relevance of their creation myth, especially in communities exposed to different cultural influences, (Anyanwu, 2009). Addressing these challenges involves efforts to document, preserve, and promote Gbagyi cultural heritage while finding ways to harmonize traditional beliefs with modern influences.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 EVALUATION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1 Evaluation

This research was carried out to generally explain creation myth and its cultural significance on the Gbagyi people of Abuja, Nigeria. Specifically, the research was conducted on the Gbagyi people in order to bring to light the Gbagyi's creation myth and to also state the significance it has on them. The data concerning the Gbagyi people, their perception of creation myth as well as the significance of their creation myths, were gathered and analyzed using frequency count and sample percentage. The results showed that questions concerning the people's creation myth had a higher percentage of positive response from the respondents under age 45-60 as seen in table one (55.2% and 53.2%) respectively. Also, 56.2% and 58.3% of the respondents under age 30-45, had a higher percentage of positive responses on the influence of creation myth on the Gbagyi's worldview, spiritual and cultural worldviews.

5.2 Conclusion

The study reveals the challenges facing the preservation and transmission of Gbagyi creation myth and cultural practices, including the influence of modernization, urbanization and globalization. This implies that creation myth of

the Gbagyi people are an integral part of cultural practices and traditions, influencing their daily lives, social norms and values.

It further suggests strategies for preserving and promoting the Gbagyi's creation myths and cultural practices, including education, community engagement and cultural festivals.

5.3 Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations were made:

1. Establish a cultural center that promotes the preservation and transmission of Gbagyi creation myth and cultural practices.
2. Community should develop cultural educational programs that promote the preservation and transmission of cultural practices.
3. Ministry of information and culture should educate communities on the importance of preserving cultural heritage.

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