

Urhobo Literature in English: A Survey

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Abstract

Literature is generally identified by the language in which it is written or by the people who write it. This paper is a survey of the imaginative literature of Urhobo writers who write in English. It is on the basis of their ethnicity that these writers are seen as Urhobo. As a people, the Urhobo have their unique experiences, worldview, sensibility, folklore, and other specific modes of living that make them an ethnic group. The selected writers will be examined on how they incorporate their Urhobo heritage into their writings. It will be seen that they exhibit their Urhobo-ness in varying degrees and use their respective knowledge of Urhobo in their writings according to their talent and passion for the culture. Thus, consciously or unconsciously, the writers whose works form Urhobo modern literature or literature in English show, in one way or the other, diverse aspects of their Urhobo experience.

Introduction

The concept of ethnic nationality and literature is old. Literature is generally identified by the language in which it is written or by the people who write it. For a long time it was the language in which a literary work was written that identified it. However, postcolonialism and minority assertion of their identities have now made literature to be identified either by the language in which it is written or the people who write and for whom it is written. For instance, a Welsh writing in English is a Welsh writer. The same holds for writers such as W. B. Yeats, Seamus Heaney, and Paul Muldoon whose works are in English but are known as Irish writers. Native Americans write in English but their literature is described as Native American. The same could be said of Africans writing in English, French, and Portuguese but writing African literature. In Nigeria, though they write in English, Chimalum Nwankwo, Obi Nwakanma, Obiwu Iwuanyanwu, and others see themselves as Igbo writers. It is thus on the basis of ethnicity that the writers to be discussed will be seen as Urhobo writers and not because they write in the

Urhobo language. Similarly, the emphasis will be on Urhobo writers who have produced imaginative literature.

Urhobo stands for both the people and their language. The Urhobo people, numbering several million, inhabit the rainforest area of Delta State of Nigeria. Their area comprises about ten local government areas in Delta State. Many Urhobo people also live in the contiguous Bayelsa and Edo States as well as in Rivers, and other states of Nigeria. Mainly an agricultural people, they traditionally produce palm oil, tap rubber trees, farm yams and cassava, and fish. However, in recent times, many live in the urban centres of Warri, Effurun, Sapele, and other cities within and outside Delta State. While the Urhobo customarily practise traditional religion, in recent times many have become Christians and abandoned their traditional ways of worship. The Urhobo people have a very rich folklore that comprises of songs such as *udje*, proverbs, legends, myths, and folktales, among others. The Urhobo are thus a group of people with a specific culture and traditional mores.

Anybody born by an Urhobo parent is an Urhobo. In this discussion of Urhobo authors and their works, J.P. Clark, whose mother is Urhobo, will be taken as an Urhobo writer and his work part of the corpus of Urhobo literature. Isidore Okpewho whose mother is Delta Igbo is an Urhobo by virtue of his father who hailed from Oria, Abraka. Other Urhobo writers include Neville Ukoli, Emmanuel Avwiorokoma, Anthony Biakolo, Tanure Ojaide, Ben Okri, Emevwo Biakolo, Onookome Okome, Hope Eghagha, Benson Omonode, Richard Maduku, Mabel Tobrise Evwierhoma, Peter Omoko, Alex Roy-Omoni, and Emmanuel Esemefade. These are Urhobo writers in the sense that they are Urhobo by birth. They speak Urhobo but a majority of them write in English and it is their writings in English that have established them as writers.

As a people, the Urhobo have their experiences, worldview, sensibility, folklore, and other specific modes of living that make them an ethnic group. These Urhobo writers will be examined on how they incorporate their Urhobo heritage into their writings. It will be seen later that they exhibit their Urhobo-ness in varying degrees. Some of these writers such as J.P. Clark, Isidore Okpewho, and Ben Okri have “two hands” in the sense that one of their parents belongs to a different ethnic group. That double heritage could affect the degree of their deployment of their Urhobo sensibilities in their works. At the same time those whose parents are completely Urhobo also have their degrees of immersion into the Urhobo culture and use their respective knowledge of Urhobo in their writings according to their talent and passion for the culture. Among the writers are those who have strong passion for their Urhobo culture and whose works in English exhibit a strong interface of Urhobo orality and English. In any case, consciously or unconsciously, the writers whose works form Urhobo modern literature or Urhobo literature in English show, in one way or the other, diverse aspects of their Urhobo heritage.

In order to make for a more organised discussion, the different Urhobo writers will be examined under three groups: the older, middle, and younger generations. The term “generation” here has more to do with a time period rather than age classification. Authors like J.P. Clark, Neville Ukoli, Isidore Okpewho, Tanure Ojaide, Anthony Biakolo, and Ben Okri belong to the first group by virtue of being among the earliest published writers of Urhobo origin. The middle group comprises of Emevwo Biakolo, Onookome Okome, Hope Eghagha, Benson Omonode, Richard Maduku, and Mabel Tobrise Ewrierhoma. Budding writers like Alex Roy-Omoni, Peter Omoko, and Emmanuel Esemefafe belong to the third category.

The Older Generation

The writers of this group were among the first set of Urhobo writers to be published and to achieve national and international repute through their writings. Most of them were born in the 1930s and 1940s and experienced Urhobo culture in colonial times and after Nigeria's independence in 1960. They must have experienced the culture in its more pristine state before modernity and globalization started to change the culture in a more rapid way. Some of these writers were privy to having schooled or had been abroad at one time or another. Some of them are Urhobo by maternal affiliations and still show a strong sense of this heritage as can be seen from the contents of their works.

John Pepper Clark-Bekederemo is known as an Ijaw because his father is from that ethnic group. However, he typifies the saying that "two hands a man has," as he is also very familiar with the culture of his Urhobo mothers. He was born in Kiagbodo, his father's hometown, but also grew up in Erhuwaren, an Urhobo village where his mother comes from. He is the first African writer to be appointed Professor of English. He speaks Urhobo fluently. His was the first written research on the rich *Udje* poetic tradition of the Urhobo people. His study of *Udje*, the oral poetic performance tradition of the Urhobo people, was published as far back as 1965 in the *Nigeria Magazine*. This publication clearly attests to his interest in and knowledge of his Urhobo folkloric traditions.

Clark shows a keen sense of observation of his rural environment in some of his poems as is expected of a writer who was nurtured on his rural home turf. "Night Rain" describes the impoverished environment of a peasant family in a Niger Delta rustic setting. One can assume this to be an Urhobo setting because the various images the poet evokes through his description

of a rainy night remind one of what obtains whenever it rains heavily and floods over in the homes of families in a riverine Urhobo village.

J.P. Clark is also a renowned playwright. Many of his plays deal with the existentialist conflict confronting man in the quest for survival. Factors such as fate, the machinations of supernatural elements, and forces of nature all connive to stir up more challenges for most of the protagonists in his plays. Such depictions are refractions of the Urhobo people's philosophical worldviews as the average Urhobo person is caught up in the struggle for survival amidst all odds. This is the playwright's way of artistically weaving the cosmology of his people into his literary art.

A play that best demonstrates Clark's experience of his Urhobo culture and the politics of gender conflict operating within such a patriarchal society is *The Wives Revolt* (1991). The writer's concern for the deplorable condition of the landscape of his mother's people that has been ravaged by extraction of oil and gas for decades and for which the people get a pittance as compensation is ingeniously dramatized in this comedy. The playwright dons the garb of a culture and human rights activist when he fictionally recreates the attendant crises that come with oil exploration in Erhuwaren, which coincidentally is his maternal hometown. He condemns the manipulative tactics used by multinational oil companies in causing disaffection among the people through their dispensation of compensation money. Through the same literary channel, he ranges on the side of women by his projection of the village women's revolt. The women of Erhuwaren are tired of the injustices they suffer at the hands of their male folks who are also unrepentant in their attitude toward these women. They therefore stage a revolt and storm out of their homes and community in angry protest. The women's radical action invariably makes the men review their initial stance. Peace and harmony are restored at the end of the play to show the

need for tolerance and complementarity of male and female sexes if a society is to make positive progress. Other issues that Clark addresses in the play include the underdevelopment of host communities by oil companies, greed and arrogance of men, unfounded superstitious beliefs, and the dangers of female prostitution. All these are invariably tied to the mechanics of everyday living among his maternal Urhobo people.

Clearly, the play features many aspects of Urhobo experience. For instance, he uses known names of Urhobo places and people such as Otugievwen, Edjophe, Imode, Eyara, Okoro, Idama, Koko, and Ighodayen, among many others. He touches on the age-long battle of the sexes which has been a revolving source of gender conflict in most Urhobo societies because of their patriarchal nature. However, he also advances his message a step further through the manner in which he resolves the central conflict, thus symbolically suggesting that it was about time his Urhobo people revisited and revised some traditional practices that are not only unfavourable to women as a group but also do not promote societal development in a modern dispensation.

Isidore Okpewho is a renowned scholar of African Oral and Comparative Literature. He is also a novelist. He was born in 1941 at Agbor in former Mid-Western state, now Delta State of Nigeria. His father is Urhobo from Oria, Abraka, while his mother is Igbo-speaking and hails from Asaba, also in Delta state. He established himself as a notable African literary scholar through his various ground-breaking scholarly researches on the nature of African Oral Literature. Okpewho holds the record of being the first African scholar to have established that both epic and myth exist in African literature.

The Last Duty (1976) is his most popular novel and has been translated into French, Russian, Ukrainian, and Lithuanian. The narrative is situated against the backdrop of the thirty-

month old civil war that was fought between the Nigerian Federal troops and the Biafran secessionist army, and which had rippling effects on other ethnic groups and geographical locations within Nigeria. Urhukpe is an Urhobo community and the fictional setting where much of the action of the narrative in the novel takes place. It is a border town which makes it vulnerable to invasion and occupation from both warring armies, thereby creating a lot of tension and suspicions among its people. Other signifying markers to show Okpewho's indebtedness to his paternal heritage are revealed through his use of names borne by Urhobo people like Odibo, Ogheneovo, and Toje. But more importantly, Okpewho focuses on the psychological effects of war on his Urhobo people who though at the fringes of the actions of war, but were nevertheless affected irrevocably by the politics of war. Using the fate of characters such as Aku and Oshevire as test cases, the author dwells on the extremely vulnerable conditions common people, women especially, find themselves at such conflict-ridden periods. Oshevire, Aku's husband, is framed up and incarcerated for pro-rebel activities. His wife, Aku, who is from the neighbouring village, now regarded as an enemy village as a result of the activities of war, is openly ostracized by her husband's people. The desperation of trying to protect herself and her son leads her into secret liaisons with men who take advantage of her present status. The end is a multiple series of tragedies for the major actors.

Through this narrative, Okpewho proffers his own concept of war. According to him, "the tragedy of any civil war..." is that it "takes little notice of the lives of the small people involved in the war, yet has far-reaching effects on their fortunes." Aku's story resonates that of most women who during war are forced to adjust to new conditions of living, including assuming headship of their family in the absence of their male partners. Similarly, Aku's story highlights the exploitation of women in vulnerable positions by rich and influential men such as Chief Toje.

This apparently is in tandem with what obtains in a patriarchal Urhobo society. Okpewho explores the theme of adultery with its tragic consequences in an Urhobo society during a period of conflict, a theme he also addresses in *The Victims*.

The writings of a prolific writer like Tanure Ojaide remain some of the most academically researched areas of literary scholarship in contemporary African literature within and outside the African continent. Ojaide is better known as a scholar-poet as he has to his credit seventeen collections of poetry and seven works of fiction. Tanure Ojaide was born in 1948 in one of the oil-rich communities of Delta State. As a writer who is closely connected to his nativity, one of Ojaide's main preoccupations is with the debacle arising from the on-going exploration and exploitation of oil in the Niger Delta region of Nigeria where he comes from. Hence, his creative writings on the environmental conditions of his homeland, especially in the area of poetry, have earned him several appellations including "poet laureate of the Niger Delta" and "environmental activist." In much of his works, he recalls the Edenic atmosphere of his birthplace with the lush green vegetation and rivers and creeks in the area. He is one writer who through his art has been able to bring to public attention the level of environmental degradation going on in the Niger Delta region and Urhobo land for several decades. By extension, he also reveals the plight of his Urhobo people whose lives and livelihoods have been greatly compromised as a result of the negative consequences of oil exploitation in that region. Much of Ojaide's poetry consistently dwells on the paradox of an oil wealth that is a blessing turned doom, a curse rather than a source of joy for his people and region. Strong strains of lamentation and nostalgic evocation for what was once an idyllic environment, but now greatly damaged, are also found in his poetry. In one of Ojaide's early poems titled "Ughelli" (74) in *Labyrinths of the Delta*, he describes the irony of Ughelli, the foremost Urhobo city, having a power station

that supplies light to the rest of the country but is left in perpetual darkness. The poet's themes persistently focus on the issues of exploitation, tyranny, and official complicity even as he makes a strong case for the revitalization of his impoverished region and people.

Tanure Ojaide now lives in and continues to write mostly from the United States of America, yet he maintains close connections with his traditional Urhobo cultural heritage as shown in much of his poetry. The poet himself has in several oral interviews and critical essays focusing on his art made references to his indebtedness to the rich reservoir of his Urhobo traditional folklore and culture. Funso Ayejina classifies this aspect of Ojaide's style of writing as an "Alter-Native tradition" which basically signifies "the return to roots" as Ojaide "uses traditional forms to achieve poetic vitality, intensity and relevance." A detailed examination of Ojaide's writings shows it is deeply steeped in Urhobo folklore which his upbringing and later study and research in *Udje* poetic performance tradition have brought about. It is quite easy to interpret the subtext of the Urhobo folkloric content found in Ojaide's poetry which includes his use of folksongs, folktales, legends, myths, *Udje* tradition, proverbs, riddles, worldview, philosophy, and other folkloric tropes of Urhobo culture. In other words, as part of the originality of his poetic oeuvre, Tanure Ojaide taps deeply into the cosmology, ontology, and epistemology embedded in the folklore of his people.

It will be observed that there is a growing sophistication in the use of Urhobo folklore in his poetry collections. From a sampling of some of his poems, it is apparent that Tanure Ojaide uses orature to establish not only a cultural identity for his work but also organize style and form to effectively express his themes. In doing so, the poet also succeeds in exposing to the present generation and readers an idea of their traditional heritage and how it can be used to express current and enduring thoughts and feelings. Within Ojaide's poetry, contemporary issues are

sometimes reconstructed through similar episodes and events found in past Urhobo traditional oral history and folkloric heritage. This art of imagining back provides the writer with the opportunity of using Urhobo symbols, images, and techniques, as well as themes at a more public and post-colonial level. Ojaide infuses his poetic writings with references to his people's mythical and historical characters that have parallels with contemporary events. Mythical figures such as Ogiso, Ogidigbo, Aminogbe, Arhuan, and Uvo have their modern-day equivalents in many of Ojaide's poems. Hence, one notices that within his poetry, whenever he examines some of the nefarious activities of some modern African leaders, he invariably finds their parallels in the character of traditional rulers of the past.

Anthony Biakolo is a novelist whose work is published in French. His novel, *Wonderful Child* (1993), examines themes that are connected to socio-cultural events in contemporary Urhobo land. In it he examines the twin concepts of absence of children and a couple's delay in having children in a marital relationship. The Urhobo culture is known for placing premium on children as a means of continuing a family's lineage. Therefore any perceived delay in the realisation of this ability is bound to bring conflict into a marital relationship. Similarly, the plot of this novel is tied to the Urhobo people's role in the palm oil trade in which they were major participants. In treating these themes, Biakolo also employs proverbs whose thought processes have their roots in the Urhobo tradition.

Ben Okri is undoubtedly one of the most acclaimed writers of African literature. He was born on March 15, 1959 in Minna to an Urhobo father and a mother who was partly Igbo. His family moved to London when he was two years old where he spent his early childhood years. Within the space of fifteen years (1980-1990), Okri had published a total of eight works of imaginative literature. Okri is reluctant to accept the categorization of magical realism for his

works as he insists that he is preoccupied with the task of examining the different facets of reality as they obtain in the world or tradition within which he grew up. In his own words, Okri affirms “I’m fascinated by the mysterious element that runs through our lives. Everyone is looking out of the world through their emotion and history. Nobody has an absolute reality.” (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ben_Okri).

However, it is on account of his literary techniques/style rather than his themes that he distinguishes himself as an African, nay Urhobo writer. Faithful to his natal origins, he ensures that the names of his characters, especially the protagonists, are recognisable Urhobo names. Hence we have Jeffia, Omovo, Azaro and others. *The Famished Road* (1991) is his most important work and won for him the 1991 Booker Prize for Fiction. This novel provides the reader a better understanding of African folklore in general and the Urhobo worldview on the spirit-child. In fact, Okri admits to being influenced by the oral traditions of his people and the story-telling penchant of his mother while growing up. His fusion of magical realism and African oral traditions imbues the work with a unique narrative style.

The Middle Generation

The second group of Urhobo writers, the middle group, is made up of Emevwo Biakolo, Onookome Okome, Hope Eghagha, Benson Omonode, Richard Maduku, and Mabel Tobrise Evwierhoma. As stated earlier, this grouping is not just by age but more of the time the writers started publishing. Unlike the earlier older group with each of them with a large body of work, the writers of the second group have each two or three publications and they seem not to have the national and international critical attention of the older Urhobo writers. However, they reflect a diminishing trend in the literary profession of Urhobo educated men and women. It appears these

writers are not paying as much attention to their creative works and are pursuing more scholarly work or other careers in which they want to establish themselves. What follows is a cursory register, so to say, of these Urhobo writers who have published works in English that make use of their Urhobo background to express their individual visions of life and humanity.

Born in 1957, Emevwo Biakolo, who hails from Urhiephron in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, attended the University of Ibadan where he received his doctorate degree. His two major poetry publications are *Ravages and Solaces* (1994) and *Strides of the Night* (1995). Currently at the Pan-Atlantic University in Lagos, he spent many years in Botswana where he edited an anthology of Botswana poetry.

Onookome Okome also attended the University of Ibadan. Currently at the University of Alberta at Edmonton in Canada, he is getting better known for his scholarly work on Nigerian films than his creative works. His two poetry publications are *Pendants* (Kraft Books, 1993) and *The Mammiwata Poems* (University of Calabar Press, 1999). The poems in *Pendants* anchored in the poet's native Urhobo culture are the most impressive. The use of Urhobo myths as of the "mamiwata" and Ogiso gives a solidity which is reinforced by the sense of place of the Niger Delta. The evocation of the poet's childhood by the Ethiopie River in Sapele is compelling. In that section of the collection, the poet shows concern for the suffering poor and disadvantaged in society, especially as he observes them in the cities of Sapele and Lagos. The poet uses the Ogiso myth to condemn the tyranny of Nigeria's contemporary military leaders. Okome also explores the Urhobo variant of the water mermaid (also called mammy water/mammiwata) in his second collection. Okome's water mermaid has the backdrop of Urhobo folklore. This goddess is beautiful and legendary for her gifts; hence she is served by many adherents. Thus, like in Urhobo folklore, the mermaid is beautiful and this becomes a metaphor for women who are

beautiful and carry the aura of this divinity. Also, “mammywata” is the goddess of wealth that resides in the sea or water. Okome explores the Urhobo belief that the water goddess brings her wealth from the sea/ocean to bless her adherents or favourites. One has to see how the Urhobo people interpret the colonial phenomenon of European ships coming with luxuries to berth in Urhobo ports as of Okwagbe, Okpari, Sapele, and Warri for distribution and sale. The point is that, to Okome, the Urhobo worship the mysterious goddess of the sea who is imbued with the virtues of beauty and generosity.

Hope Eghagha has published several collections of poems that consciously or unconsciously show the writer’s absorption of his Urhobo heritage. For long at the University of Lagos, he is currently a commissioner for higher education in Delta State. Probably it is his early concern about the conditions of existence and governance in his country as gleaned from the thematic focus of his poetry that informed his foray into politics. An evaluation of his works reveals he acts as the mouthpiece of his people through his poetry. Critics have likened his poems to the traditional Udje song poetry because of its satirical slant. Consequently, much of his poetry is known to condemn the nefarious activities of all types of leaders, including among his Urhobo people, and the effects on his people and home land. For example, in his collection, *Rhythms of The Last Testament*, the poem “The Last Lover” examines the politics of oil as it concerns and affects his Urhobo people. The thrust of his criticism is aimed at insensitive military rulers who in connivance with foreign oil multi-nationals deprive the people of the oil-rich Niger Delta region and by extension the Urhobo people, from benefitting from their oil wealth. His direct mention of Jesse, an Urhobo community whose inhabitants suffered a tragic pipeline explosion in 1998 as a result of the neglect of oil facilities in the area, is an example of historical allusion in Eghagha’s poetry. Similarly, in “The Song: The Colour of my Earth” he

bemoans the wasteful spending of the oil wealth by rich politicians and military rulers who at the same time employed criminal methods of oppressing and suppressing the people. “The Aftermath” in *The Governor’s Lodge and Other Poems* (2004) examines the activities of foreigners who come to extract oil and the drastic aftermath or consequences on the people. In summary, Eghagha’s poems scoff at the scourge of bad and irresponsible leadership as it affects his people of the Niger-Delta region. The poet also relies in some parts on the stylistic techniques of oral traditions in his use of symbolism and imagery in underscoring his messages.

Benson Omonode’s novel, *Try Another Leg*, derives from an Urhobo advice to men or women who are in a marriage or other forms of close relationships but are unable to have children together. After a period of over six years or so, there is generally unease in the families of the couple and, if medicinal or spiritual solutions are not found to enable the couple to have children, dissolution of the marriage is recommended so that each partner “can try another leg.” In other words, each partner should try another sex partner to test their fertility. This recommendation arises from the fact that to avoid being judgmental as to whether the man or woman is responsible for the fertility problem, they should prove themselves with new partners. This practice was prevalent among the Urhobo people even in traditional times and attests to the length at which the people were willing to go in order to encourage pro-creation. In many real-life cases, when each “tries another leg,” there are positive results in either the woman conceiving or the man having children from a different marriage relationship. Omonode thus centres his work on Urhobo worldview and sensibility.

Richard Maduku retired from the Nigerian Army as a captain. His two novels are *Just Another Soldier* (2009) and *Arigo Again!* (2006). It is interesting to note that though published later, *Just Another Soldier* was written much earlier in the 1980s but only got published much

later. While the first novel is set on the Nigerian Civil War experience, Maduku's second novel carries Urhobo background, worldview, and sensibility as it affects the upbringing of an orphan child. The character of Arigo, the protagonist, typifies the restive and rascally nature of the average Urhobo child who is involved in one escapade or another. However, the author's ultimate message as gleaned from the way the Urhobo culture operates is that an orphan, though irascible child cannot be abandoned by its relative no matter the circumstances involved.

Mabel Tobrise-Evwierhoma's poetry attacks patriarchy and affirms a feminist stance. Her best known collection of poems is *Out of Hiding* (2001). She deals unabashedly with themes of womanhood that female writers often shy away from. Her recent collection is *A Song as I am & Other Poems* (2005). It is significant to note that her Urhobo background has affected her response to the wider Nigerian patriarchal society and humanity.

The second group of writers may not have attracted national or international acclaim but they continue inscribing the Urhobo worldview and landscape into contemporary literary discourse.

The New Generation

As mentioned earlier, there is an emergent group of young Urhobo writers whose works might not have gained much prominence in the literary world as the preceding two generations. However, they deserve mentioning however briefly that might be. Listing or mentioning them here not only shows the current state of contemporary Urhobo literature (an almost moribund enterprise), but also helps to bring them to public attention.

Peter Omoko ranks as one of the promising young Urhobo writers on the scene today. He exhibits a keen sense of his traditional heritage as demonstrated by his deep knowledge of the

Udje tradition. His first published work, a play titled *Battle of Pleasure*(2009), is modelled on the Urhobo tradition of oral poetic performance. Omoko is able to put in modern dramatic form the traditional genre for which his people are very well known. Worthy of note is the poetic language of his characters as demanded by the rich Urhobo Udje tradition which also thrives on the dexterous use of words. He has also just recently (2013) published a new play titled *Uloho*.

Alex Roy-Omoni is currently a lecturer at Delta State University, Abraka. He has to his credit published two plays, *Morontonu* and *The Ugly Ones* which both dwell on themes of domestic and social injustices. *Morontonu* recreates one of the popular preoccupations of traditional African kingship: the intrigues and manipulation involved in the succession of an heir to the throne. *The Ugly Ones* is a satiric piece reminiscence of the Udje tradition in its attack on contemporary political leadership.

Emmanuel Esemefafe is a graduate of Delta State University Abraka and currently works at the Federal University of Petroleum Resources, Effurun. His debut novel, *Edore Goes to School*, is set in Urhobo and, as the title makes clear, deals with Urhobo characters and the schooling experience of the contemporary Urhobo youth using the adventures of the fictional character, Edore, as an example.

Conclusion

The writers mentioned and whose literary works have been discussed above have produced a body of work that can be called modern Urhobo literature as different from traditional Urhobo literature. They have written mainly in English, the official language of Nigeria; although one writer, Anthony Biakolo, has written in French with the work later translated into English. The works of these writers cover all the literary genres of fiction, poetry,

and drama. These works are also postcolonial as they emanate from the experience of the Urhobo people that involves Western education which has enabled them to sometimes write in English, French, and their own Urhobo. Literature itself has changed the Urhobo experience into a modern one. With their writings these Urhobo writers show a cultural resistance by allowing their socio-cultural background to inform their works. They thus display a cultural identity in their Urhobo-ness- that is recourse to Urhobo traditional art and oral aesthetics in their writings.

These writers have been able to inscribe the Urhobo experience not only into Nigerian or African literature but also into world literature. By using Urhobo names and characters, setting works on the Urhobo landscape and using the fauna and flora as tropes, as well as the folklore and history of the people, there is no doubt that Urhobo has been inserted into contemporary literary discourse, especially one expressed in a foreign or adopted language. However, subsumed the Urhobo folklore may be to the foreign reader, there is abundance of it in the works of writers such as J.P. Clark, Ben Okri, Isidore Okpewho, and Tanure Ojaide, among others. Urhobo sons and daughters have been able to use the advantages of their nativity in self-expression that has resulted in wonderful creative works.

Having said that much, it is only pertinent to point out the following observations called up in the course of this research. There appears to be a diminishing of Urhobo young people who are interested in the writing career. As mentioned in the discussion, the older group appears to have made the maximum impact with their writings. It is not that the middle and newer groups are too close to the older ones, in time but they have scanty production of works. One has to wonder why there appears to be a far greater interest among, for instance, the Yoruba and Igbo young men and women in writing, than there appears to be among Urhobo youths. More worrisome is the deafening silence of female voices. Again, this development does not tell well

of members of this gender from this ethnic extraction in the light of the fact that their contemporaries from other ethnic groups are creating enviable records on national and international scenes. Maybe, it could be that the older writers should try to consciously mentor Urhobo youths to take to such serious and rewarding forms of writing. Perhaps a socio-cultural organization like the Urhobo Progress Union should make efforts to impress on the youths the need for them to revitalize the culture through writing.

Modern Urhobo literature, mainly in English, is flourishing and is there for readers, students, and scholars to consume. There should be promotion of the writing as well as the criticism to expose the works to the Nigerian, albeit African, public. The writers have succeeded in inscribing Urhobo into a variety of contemporary literary discourses—Nigerian, African, postcolonial, or world literatures. It is amazing and rewarding that the Urhobo culture, experience, and worldview have provided writers the backdrop to exercise their writing craft. Finally, the Urhobo culture, society, history, experience, worldview, sensibility, landscape, and other aspects of Urhobo-ness provide the writers with enough in materials to fashion their themes, techniques, and vision according to their individual talents and interests.

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