

Aridon (Nos. 2 & 3, 2022, 1 – 14)

URHOB0 FOLKLORE

Tanure Ojaide

Introduction

Two recent happenings emphasized to me the importance of the folklore of my Urhobo people. A Caucasian scholar at Boston University in the United States of America wrote to ask me the meaning and origin of Ominigbo. I responded that “Ominigbo was the name of the diviner who foretold the sacking of Benin by the British in 1897. In his cryptic divinatory language, he was said to have told the Oba then, Ovoramwen Nogbaisi, that ‘white army ants would swarm and take over Benin’ in a matter of days and would wreak such devastation that would drive the Oba from his throne and away into a strange land’. When asked when that would happen, he told the Oba it would be before noon of the following day. That literal noon came and there were no swarms of white ants around and the Oba ordered Ominigbo to be executed. As soon as the execution was done, the Oba's men saw a column of British soldiers (the white army ants) that Ominigbo rightly prophesied. The burning of Benin and the Oba's exile to and eventual death in Calabar followed. After then, all the *Iha* practitioners to memorialize Ominigbo's name started their divination by invoking his name to have the courage to tell inconvenient truths!” The Boston University professor opined that the Benins might have received the Ominigbo story from the Urhobo. I told him to stop the revisionist idea that Ominigbo was borrowed from the Urhobo, rather the other way around. The Urhobo “Epha” (also spelt “Evwa”) derives from the Benin “Iha” and the Yoruba Ifa. Urhobo and Benin were much closer in those days than now. Only a few living Urhobo still remember the song our grandparents sang:

Se me yan, se me dje	Should I walk or run
se me vwe Oba Uselu	whether I can meet the Oba at Uselu
Se me yan, se me dje	Should I walk or run

se me vwe Oba Uselu	whether I can meet the Oba at Uselu
ukpere oyibomue Oba Aka	the year the British seized the Oba of Benin
imembaroye she uvweri	all his chiefs fell into mourning
Se me yan, se me dje	Should I walk or run
se me vwe Oba Uselu	whether I can meet the Oba at Uselu
Se me yan, se me dje	Should I walk or run
se me vwe Oba Uselu	whether I can meet the Oba at Uselu

This song is part of the Urhobo folklore about the British sacking of Benin in 1897. It was customary for the Oba to visit Uselu before leaving Benin City; hence the response was to get to Uselu to rescue him. At the time this song was composed, a chief was called “member.”

The second happening was when an eminent art historian and artist asked me what I meant by calling Bruce Onobrakpeya “Owena Bruce.” I told him it means “master-artist” from the Benin “Owina” (also spelt “Owena”). There is much in Urhobo heritage that has been passed by word of mouth from generation to generation that needs to be known. That reasoning has propelled me to do this essay on the nature of Urhobo folklore and its importance to the Urhobo people and heritage. It is my aim that this discussion leads to answering the question, “What is Urhobo in me?”

Definitions of Folklore

The various definitions of “folklore” have to do with the following aspects of a people’s heritage: 1. stories/tales, myths, legends, and epics; 2. sayings, proverbs, appellations, praise-names, riddles, and other verbal arts; 3. practices, customs, beliefs, superstitions; 4. traditions of songs, dance and other performances; and 5. indigenous knowledge, material and immaterial heritage. They are all passed from one generation to another by word of mouth. Thus underlying the folklore of an ethnic group is the component being unwritten and passed on by word of mouth. Folklore’s different parts can also be seen as the oral traditions of a people. For Urhobo people, whose language has not gained currency in a written form, the folklore associated with the group becomes even more important for it to be remembered rather than be lost with time. With this wide definition of what consists of folklore, one can see that almost everything that has to do with the Urhobo traditional way of life as a narrative, song, socio-cultural practice, and belief systems can be said to belong to the folklore. The people’s concepts of life, destiny, reincarnation, their relationship with the divine, etc. are integral parts of the folklore.

It is important to know the folklore of a people or ethnic group. The different aspects of the folklore help to mold the values and express the character of an individual. Folklore is what one is socio-culturally raised to accept consciously or unconsciously as the norm or way of behaviour of one's society. The folklore of a group is capable of conditioning the individual's response to reality in objective and subjective terms. However, what concerns me in this essay is the function of folklore to the ethnic group that claims it as its heritage. As will be expected, it will not be possible to touch all aspects of Urhobo folklore in this essay.

The Urhobo Environment

The environment is an important part of the Urhobo people and manifests in various folkloric references. One can say that to a large extent we are products of our environments. Once we settle somewhere, we try to make it livable. The Urhobo numbering some five million people today live in water-prone environments. Ranging from the mangroves in Bayelsa State through very riverine areas of Delta State, the Urhobo landscape covers from those mangrove swamps to the rain forest. There are many rivers, streams, and forests in the Urhobo environment.

The environment generates human responses to it and the practices and customs over time become the people's folklore. For this reason, where there are adverse conditions, myths are created to help people to cope with them; if there are evil spirits, something has to be done to counter their evil. Among the Urhobo, there are divinities related to water. The most important are Mami Water, which originated from the coming of Europeans to Africa, and Igbe-Ame, an indigenous religion dedicated to water deities. Priestesses and devotees serve and make sacrifices to the water deities for peaceful and prosperous lives. Humans are bound to encounter problems that they believe that their deities could help them to combat to live peacefully, physically and spiritually.

Other aspects of the environment that the Urhobo folklore carries are the fauna and flora that assume symbolic representation. Also important in the tropical environment are the cosmic aspects of the environment in the forms of sky, sun, moon, and rain. The turtle (often called tortoise) dominates the animals in Urhobo folktales. It is tricky and greedy, deceiving its fellow animals. It also represents the deviant in society; the one that refuses to conform. In this small creature, there is the designation of the "other" that undermines the stability of the community.

Children are taught early to expect this sort of person and prepare for a life in which he or she will face tricksters and saboteurs. In addition to the turtle/tortoise, there are fishes and birds that symbolize the beliefs of the people. There is the small beautiful fish, *erhuvwudjaeorho*. It is a very beautiful fish but does not grow big. The Urhobo use this to explain the law of compensation in nature. The sun represents an impossible height; hence you cannot spit at it. The phenomenon of it raining and being sunny at the same time is explained as a rare period when the gods are having a festival. This underlies the need for rain and sunshine for complementarity and a balanced existence. Folklore thus helps us to understand the environment we live in.

Folklore and Ethnic Identity

People who belong to an ethnic group may have physical similarities. However, it is the material and immaterial culture that condition the character of the individual. In the olden days in Urhobo land, there were face marks that identified what family one belonged to or what town or clan one hailed from. That era of facial mark for identity might have gone but while Urhobo men and women do not look physically the same to one another or to outsiders, there is a certain character of the Urhobo person that the traditions have helped to build.

The most traditional of the Urhobo identity is dressing for men and women. The man's use of wrapper, Victorian shirt, hat, walking stick and occasionally beads stamps him with a cultural identity. Similarly, the woman has her two wrappers, blouse, head-tie as well as ear-rings and necklace and shoes and handbags to match as her ceremonial dress. The folklore of the groom and bride stipulates their respective dresses for those rites of passage. It is significant to note that the materials for Urhobo dresses are foreign, often European and Indian, but the style is remarkably Urhobo.

More accentuating of the Urhobo-ness than dressing are the ontological aspects of the person. This has to do with the physical and spiritual being of the Urhobo. Names are an important aspect of Urhobo folklore. The Urhobo may not have a ritual calendar for the naming ceremony as the Yoruba, for instance, but they pay much attention to the names given to children. Names could be given by the father or mother or elders of the family. In the olden days the names were sentences that encapsulate the philosophy of life expected of the child or the parents' view of life. Such names are: Ogbajiriemu, Onoharigho, Ojaruega, Ochibejivwie, Irorohwo, Emoghware,

Edafiadjeke, Efemuaye, Edafetanure, and so on. In more recent times, with modernity, names are still important but have become shorter: Ufuoma, Ediri, Odafe, Ojite, Efe, etc. Urhobo names have meaning and are the first identifier of a person when introduced.

Folkloric Education

Urhobo folklore has fashioned a comprehensive traditional education system to cater for the needs of the young. In pre-colonial times, there were no formal schools as we have today. However, at the end of the day's work, the elders brought young ones together by the fireside for folktales, myths, legends, folksongs, proverbs, riddles, tongue-twisters, and other narrative and verbal forms. The elders used myths, also called etiological tales, to make the children understand their environment. There are explanations of why the sky is so high. In one of such tales, Osonobrughe (God) was tired of being hit by pestles of women pounding yam and so had to withdraw from the reach or disturbances of humans!

My Grandma Amreghe told me why men and women always quarrel but cannot live without each other. Here's the summary of that tale. God first created Man and gave him the entire world to enjoy. After some time, Man told God that he would be happier if God gave him a companion with whom to share his happiness. God told him He would give him what he wanted. Fortunately, the materials he used in creating Man still remained and so He created a beautiful woman and gave to Man as his companion. Man was so excited. However, within minutes, as they were going home, Man was telling Woman where to pass to show that he knew things and Woman did not know anything. This irritated Woman who felt she had enough sense to know what to do and not do. At home, they soon began to quarrel over Man's domination and Woman's exasperation at being treated as a child. Somehow that night they did "something" which gave them a lot of pleasure. But not long after that, their quarreling began again. Man bemoaned: "When I was alone, I had peace. Now that Woman has come to my life, there is no peace. I want back my peace!" and he stormed out to tell God that he did not want Woman again. Of course, with equanimity, God told him, "You asked for a companion and I gave you one. If you don't want her, I can take her back." God has power to make and unmake and so took Woman back. As soon as there was no Woman, Man felt incomplete. The least noise startled him. At night, remembering what they did the previous night, he was restless and could barely sleep. Before

daybreak, he rushed back to plead to God to give him “my Woman, my love, my partner.” God gave her back to him but the same quarrel and lamentation continued. On the seventh day, God told both of them: “Go and settle your problems. I am leaving you to an impossible height. In future, you can’t talk with me directly but I will know what you have in your heart!” Then Man and Woman realized they were on their own. And that’s why man and woman are always quarreling but cannot live without each other!

This myth teaches young ones, male or female, not to expect flawless partners. It means partners have to accept each other’s flaws. Partners are not expected to run to their parents whenever they have problems but should try to sort things out for themselves. This story told to young ones is meant to help them when they are of marriageable age to be accommodating of the imperfections of their partners. They have their marriage counsellors in their myths. This very tale also explains why the sky is so high.

Folklore in the forms of proverbs and riddles offers opportunity for intellectual education in traditional society. Proverbs are words of wisdom out of long-observed realities and often out of experience. Since many Urhobo proverbs are still used in daily speech and communication, I do not want to dwell much on the subject here beyond a few examples. Our Urhobo elders say that when the music changes, the dance steps must also change. The small drum has its voice as does the big drum. This one means that even in an egalitarian society, the interest of the community takes precedence over the individual’s. Other proverbs one hears in common usage include: Obo ushurhe ru kohwo, oye e vwo muo kpavwe igabo (It is for the axe’s importance that it is carried on the shoulder) and o chekemerha e vwo sue aye rhe orhare, one okrino (It is only a few days to bringing his wife and the bachelor complains it is taking too long). Proverbs and riddles help to bring out the quick wit in speakers. To be a skilled orator in Urhobo land, one has to master the use of proverbs.

Ethnic Values

The folklore of a people helps to create the values that govern them. Here, I will examine three aspects of the folklore that help the Urhobo to establish values they hold dear: the udje oral poetic performance tradition, the turtle/tortoise (ogbein) trickster tales, and the Iphri deity. I am using these only as samples of the folkloric traditions that create values.

Udje, an oral poetic performance tradition, started in the Ughievwen and Udu clans of Urhobo in the nineteenth century after the end of the slave-raiding period. With time the tradition spread to other areas including Arhavwarien, Egwu, Okparabe, Olomu, and Uwherun clans. By the 1940s and 50s “other parts of Urhobo such as Uvwie (Effurun) and Agbon (especially Okpara and Ovu) sought the services of renowned composers, singers, and dancers such as Oloya of Iwhrekan and Memerume of Edjophe to teach them to compose and perform their own udje songs” (Ojaide 2009: 6). The satiric songs attack, among others, debtors, thieves, adulterers, prostitutes, lazy folks, dirty habits, and traitors. Thus, “[m]any udje songs are aimed at correction and determent from violating values, virtues, and ethos that ensure the cohesive nature of society. This is because the Urhobo people traditionally believe that an individual’s transgression could trigger divine repercussions that would adversely affect the entire community. It is the responsibility of the community to curb individual excesses and transgressions” (Ojaide 2009: 17). Three examples will suffice on this. Ijiriemu, a married woman, hawks sex to young men in town. In another song, Okpoto is called “ogbunegbuewhare” (a sex maniac) from whom women flee. Other songs attack people who steal. Udje songs are meant to ridicule deviants in the society to bring them to conform in the Foucauldian sense for the harmony of society. The Urhobo patriarchy exercises power to punish deviants in the society by encouraging the battle of songs that udje represents.

Tortoise stories are many in Urhobo land. The *ogbein*, also called *oresẹ* (the one in a shell), *alauke* (the hunchbacked one), and *oroghwuwevwinya* (the one that moves in a portable home) is a trickster and one that destabilizes order in society. The tortoise stories show the degree to which elements of society could be unreliable, untrustworthy, disloyal, and greedy, among many negative features. The tortoise is the villain in Urhobo tales. Thus, it is the antithesis of the virtuous. It is with the tortoise story that the young ones are taught to be selfless, magnanimous, and considerate of others. To the Urhobo, I am because we are. There used to be communal ways of assisting folks to build houses or clear farms through *ifo*, a reciprocal arrangement of helping one another. The folklore thus creates a villain that acts against the good things and nobody wants to be a tortoise whose wisdom is narrow-minded and destructive to the cohesive nature of the communal society.

A third folkloric icon that helps to establish Urhobo values is the Iphri deity. Iphri (also spelt Ivwri) is the warrior spirit of the Urhobo people. Represented by a half-beast, half-human figure, Iphri is the investment of the fighting spirit into the people's pantheon. It originated from the time of intra- and inter-ethnic fights during the slave-raiding period. The helpless people without weapons, especially guns, had to consecrate the image with godhead to save them. Invested with the spirit of Iphri, the people invoked this divine power to "roast" their enemies for them. Iphri thus has to do with vengeance and restitution. During the slave raids, those with the spirit of Iphri went into the field "unseen" to rescue their captured kinsfolks. With the fighting spirit of Iphri, the devotees could not be captured by the slave raiders. Urhobo land was a major area for slave-raiding expeditions during the period. The Urhobo children named Odivwri might have exhibited a fighting spirit in their childhood. Many outsiders feel that Urhobo are aggressive and in fact many Urhobo men want to be seen as tough, which in a way is exhibiting the fighting spirit of Iphri. If many Urhobo embrace a revolutionary streak or show radicalism, this could be seen as emanating from Iphri, the god of resistance, vengeance, toughness, and restitution.

Folklore as History

Without writing as we know it today, it is the folklore that presents us the version of our history that we know. Some versions of Urhobo oral history say that many groups came from as far away as Yemen through Egypt via Borno and Ife to Aka, the eponymous immediate origin of the Urhobo people. Many groups might have cohabited in Aka before they dispersed to Esan, Afenmai, Urhobo, Epiye, Ogba, and other parts of today's Edo, Delta, Bayelsa, and Rivers States. The writer has presented in poetic form a version of the Urhobo migration from Aka in *Labyrinths of the Delta*. It is not coincidence that there are Ewu and Okpe in both Edo and Delta States. The chieftaincy traditions of most Urhobo clans/kingdoms came from the Benin one. Up to the 1950s, to become Ovie in Urhobo land, the contestants for kingship had to go to Benin to seek the blessing of the Oba of Benin to have validation at home. Usually only men of wealth and mystical power contested and they had to bribe the Oba's chiefs. There is the narrative that when an Urhobo king died, his head was taken to Benin and whoever wanted to succeed him had to pinpoint the very skull among many others. The contestant that bribed the Oba's chiefs the most

was shown the right skull and if he pointed at it, he was blessed by the Oba and had to rejoice home with his party. In extreme cases, whoever failed did not return home. This is part of Urhobo kingship folklore. On Aka origin, there is no doubt that Urhobo is an Edoid language. A keen Urhobo ear will understand many words in Benin, Esan and Afenmai languages/dialects. Many place names in Urhobo do not make any meaning except in Benin. The writer's Agbon has meaning in Benin—home. A name as Ojaide or Oyaide could be a corruption of the Benin for a parent who was taunted for not having a male child on time and when he at last had one exclaimed: “I have been saved from suffering!” Folklore preserves our history on Urhobo macro and micro levels.

Let us look at four other examples of how folklore accounts for our history. There is the myth of Arhwaran who was said to be a general who revolted against Ogiso, a very tyrannical ruler of Benin. Ogiso is the Benin tyrant that justifies Urhobo migration from Aka to the present location. There are stories that he selected Urhobo for wanton sacrifice to ward off evil from befalling him. Different groups of Urhobo had to escape at different times from being used for sacrifice. Arhwaran, a giant, had to cross the Ologbo River then wider than it is now. According to the legend, he was pursued by the Oba's loyal forces and he had to mystically jump across the river. At Ugbenu, he stopped to build a house for his mother out of the mud from the moats he had helped to dig around Benin; hence the village that grew up is literally a hill. Arhwaran would flee from the Oba's military commanders and the trail of his flight into safety is the “ato” (heath) that we see between Aghalokpe and Okpara Water Side and on the Eku-Kokori Road. Arhwaran's relationship to the Oba, the Ologbo River, Ugbenu, and “ato” across Urhobo is the stuff that folklore has handed to us on the origin of things in Urhobo land.

Two Aka-related folkloric tales relate to Adakaji of Avwraka (Abraka) and Saduwa of Okpara. Adakaji was the appellation of the late Ovie of Abraka. Urhobo kings have appellations you call them as also the Benin monarch with Ukuakpolokpolo. At Effurun-Otor, it is Ogbimi and in Agbon it is Ogurimerime. In any case, Adakaji derives from the efforts of the Avwraka (also Abraka) people to keep Benin rogue princes/chiefs in check from encroaching into their land. Often in Benin history, some ambitious princes and chiefs left Benin territory to install themselves as royalties in other lands. Abraka and Benin share common borders and the Ethiope River separates the lands. As a mark of pride of maintaining the territorial integrity of Abraka, the Ovie

took the appellation of Adakaji in stopping the mighty Benin Kingdom from encroaching on his land.

Growing up in Okpara or any of its villages in the 1950s, one was bound to hear of Saduwa. He was said to be a very powerful chief who exercised authority he appropriated. In other words, Saduwa did not get his power or authority from Okpara traditions. He was so powerful that his rivals saw an avenue to insult him: “Ta rhe ta kpo, Saduwa or’Aka” (For all he considers himself, Saduwa is an alien). It is told in Okpara that when he heard this in a song by the maidens, he ordered all of them to parade naked before him. Nobody dared disobey him because of the awe he carried. At the appointed time of day, all the young marriageable girls had to parade naked before him. He wanted to humiliate those who had insulted him. From that day, it was not just the girls but the adults who felt he had gone too far; hence “Ta rhe ta kpo, Saduwa or’Aka” is still a common saying in not only Okpara but all over Urhobo. It designates that despite the power wielded by the person, he or she is still a usurper and not authorized.

The fourth example I want to give here on folklore as history is the case of Esezi I of Okpe at Orerokpe. The story has passed from generation to generation by word of mouth on Esezi’s curse. According to the oral history, Esezi as Orodje became so tyrannical that his chiefs hatched a plot to eliminate him. It was a plot that needed the support of his favourite queen. An open ceremony was scheduled and overnight the plotters who were from among his trusted chiefs dug a deep pit. They planned to cover the pit and lure him to fall into it. As soon as he fell in, they would pour boiling palm oil over him. On the day of the execution of the plot, he did not want to go out but his favourite wife/queen coaxed him to attend. It is recounted that when he saw his chiefs on one side and he was to cross the mat covering the pit, he hesitated and wanted to turn back but the favourite queen again used a fan to chant his praises. The chants moved him and as soon as he stepped forward, he fell into the pit. The sign was given for the boiling oil to be poured over him. As he struggled in the throes of death, he saw the betrayal in those he trusted and cursed the town that it would not develop for the suffering and death they meted on him. Where this happened is called the Adane-Okpe, a grove near the Okpe Local Government Council at Orerokpe today. This myth is used to explain the lack of appreciable development in Orerokpe which has been an administrative headquarters for so many decades and still remains undeveloped. The Esezi example of history is a reminder of traditional and political leaders to

hold their offices for the benefit of those they are supposed to rule or represent in the people's political and cultural history.

Customs/Culture

Culture is generally explained as the way of life of a people. It constitutes the customs or mores of the people. In fact, it is the determining mark of a people who form an ethnic group. The language of a people is their most binding feature as it is their medium of communication as a group. According to B. L. Whorf and Edward Sapir, language carries the values and wisdom of its people. The Urhobo language and its sayings help to define the Urhobo identity. In their sayings, one can glean the Urhobo way of life. The elderly person has a deep mind (Okpakokodeevu), since (s)he does not need to expose everything (s)he knows. At the same time, "Omiraagua niso re okpariphi" means that people should think of their carriage in whatever they do. There is "Okohwoake" to underlie reciprocity. People say "Ekue eta kufia, obevuikpora." In other words, when asked to forget about an evil done to one, it does not mean the hurt itself is forgotten.

Two Urhobo sayings disturb me when I hear them used. One is (in English) who shares food and leaves bones for himself or herself? This statement portrays the lack of a selfless side to the Urhobo person. There are many Urhobo who could be in positions of sharing and leave to themselves the "bone." One could see the involvement of Urhobo people in corruption when they amass to themselves what should be distributed to others. Can an Urhobo be a selfless leader? I believe this statement shows the tendency in humans to cater for themselves before others. Another disturbing saying, a rhetorical question, underlies envy: "Who will wish his rival's goat to have twin births and his only a single birth?" (Ono guonore ne evwe evevwe oriveroye vwie emo ive je oroye vwie ovo?) Much as Urhobo language is threatened, it is still spoken by many people and it is important the language moves with the times. People should learn to be gracious rather than be selfish.

Many other customs have to do with marriage—the bride-price paying ceremony and the major traditional marriage event. In recent decades, Urhobo people have appropriated Yoruba and Itsekiri "Introduction" which used to be simple "aramre ego" of three to five of the young man's family going to tell the future father-in-law their intention to marry his daughter. In any case, there is a way bride-price is paid all over Urhobo and outside. There is a list given to the future

son-in-law to buy things for the future bride, her mother, father, and other family relations. The list includes the following: dowry; Father's walking stick, hat, and wrapper/cloth; Mother's wrapper, blouse, head-tie, and ighor'ugbererhare; oyavwe (often waived today); Ichogho; Family women (Eghweya)— bags of salt and cash; Family youths (ighele); Family men (Esharer'ekru)— amreka and cash; Male and female siblings of wife; Maternal family—cash and drinks; Oghwo-ewwri soup; 6 wrappers, 4 head-ties, coral beads for the bride; bottle of Schnapps; and a basin of yams.

While there is insistence on bride-price paying, the traditional wedding is often monetized in recent decades as many of the marriages take place in church or at court registries. Marriage and all it involves are very integral to Urhobo customs as parents want their daughters in particular to be treated in marriage with respect.

Circumcision of boys still continues. Many are circumcised as babies in hospital and the circumcision blade/razor of *orhere* is gone because of health concerns. Our girls used to be circumcised in elaborate festivals in the Ughievwen and Udu parts of Urhobo when “*opha*” meant so much. The parents prepared their daughters for the outing ceremony and took pride in having daughters well decorated and looking good in their camwood. However, this tradition has almost disappeared with the female circumcision itself for modern medical concerns about the negative repercussions of circumcising a female. Urhobo culture is not static and evolves with the times.

Chieftaincy titles are important in Urhobo land. There are installations of chiefs which place on them traditional responsibilities. There are different types of chiefs in Urhobo and Okpe, Ughelli, Ogor, and Agbon, among others, have elaborate chieftaincy installations and paraphernalia. In recent years with two rival kings in some clans the chieftaincy titles are not as respected as in the olden days. Besides, some ovies might not vet potential chiefs before conferring on them their titles

The rites of the dead are important among Urhobo customs. When elders die, there are dirges chanted. There are certain ceremonies to be performed before the deceased is expected to join the ancestors. Once the rites are performed, the deceased elderly person is successfully initiated into the ancestral world. The dead are not dead but guide and guard the living. For this reason, those living worship them and have altars built for their service. There are the *ese emo*

(father figures) and *ini emo* (mother figures) who are served foods as sacrifice especially during yearly festivals in many parts of Urhobo land.

Conclusion

Folklore embraces all the unwritten heritage of a people or ethnic group. Urhobo folklore is all-embracing of the beliefs, customs, practices, and the language resources. The folklore gives identity to the individual and the group in what it provides. It amplifies the Urhobo-ness that the land and its resources as well as the people's occupation and practices avail to nourish the people physically and spiritually.

The folklore of a people encompasses almost everything about them. Thus, this essay has attempted to touch so much that makes Urhobo land what it is and the people who they are. At the same time, from the changes taking place with time, there is the urgency to record or put in writing to preserve the ways of life we have known. Modernity and globalization will not leave Urhobo life untouched but will do all their best to change. Urhobo as a culture is not static but ever evolving and it is important to know at whatever new stage how we have been before then.

I started this essay with two non-Urhobo people (a Caucasian American and a Yoruba-American) asking me questions about aspects of the Urhobo experience that Urhobo people need to know to explain to others. It is my hope that I have touched enough aspects of the Urhobo experience that the folklore carries that it will not be difficult to tell others what they need to know about us. There is so much Urhobo in me that I carry consciously and unconsciously. Urhobo is diverse within as there are sub-nationalities as of Okpe and Uvwie whose dialects are not comprehensible to other mainstream Urhobo people. However, geography, history, and folkloric experiences have bound the people as one.

Works Cited

Darah, G. G. *Battles of Songs: Udje Tradition of the Urhobo*. Lagos: Malthouse, 2005.

Ojaide, Tanure. *Theorizing African Oral Poetic Performance and Aesthetics: Udje Songs of the Urhobo People*. Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2009.

Ojaide, Tanure. *Labyrinths of the Delta*. Greenfield, NY: Greenfield Review Press, 1986.

Ojaide, Tanure. *Poetry, Performance, and Art: Udje Dance Songs of the Urhobo People*. Durham, NC: Carolina Academic Press, 2003.

Otite, Onigu (ed). *The Urhobo People*. Ibadan: Heinemann, 1983.

Sapir, Edward. *Selected Writings in Language, Culture, and Personality*. Berkeley: U. of California Press, 1949.

Whorf, B. L. *Language, Thought, and Reality*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1956.