

*ARIDON (Nos. 2 & 3, 2022, 177–191)*

## **GRIOT DRAMATIC PERFORMANCE IN URHOBOLAND: FROM IGBESIA/OTOTA TO NIGERIAN STAND-UP COMEDY**

**John Uwa**

### **Abstract**

The history of Nigerian popular theatre and drama is marked by changes and continuities, or by the decline and resurgence of older dramatic forms. And oftentimes, most of the historical dramatic forms that birthed newer art forms in Nigeria either fall under the radar, or are ‘poorly investigated’ when historicising the emergence of Nigerian popular drama. In this essay, I investigate the emergence of Nigerian stand-up comedy from the vantage point of my Urhobo descent and argue that what has emerged as Nigerian stand-up comedy metamorphosed from Urhobo solo dramatic performances known as Igbesia and Otota Oratory performance, and conceptualised as griot performance in this study. To establish my claims, I go back and forth in the history of griot culture and Urhobo solo dramatic performance, relying on an assumption that most successful stand-up comedians in Nigeria are of Urhobo descent. I collected data from informants through interviews and analysed some stand-up performances in comparison to Otota Oratory performance by Chief ‘(Dr)’ Samson Akpomedaye Ofua. The discoveries show that Nigerian stand-up comedy metamorphosed from historical cultural forms of dramatic entertainment in Urhobo into popular street entertainment, yielded to commercialisation of contemporary dramatic forms, and got transformed into a form that can compete for relevance in today’s urban setting.

**Key Words:** Otota, Igbesia, Stand-up Comedy, Griot Culture

### **Introduction**

Live performance is widely practiced in the different parts of Africa and one way of acknowledging its significance is by examining its practice within its environment, realizing that it demands its own intellectual space. In my view, performers joining the discussion as actively as academic critics will provide insight into the what, and how of African oral performance (Susan N. Kiguli 172).

Kiguli’s suggestion above is just a reiteration of the ‘popular’ position of critics of the popular cultural art form in Africa—that African art forms grew out of contexts and artistic ambience

alien to European theories of art; and therefore the evaluation of such cultural art forms must not be limited to European's parameters of art. The corollary is that African scholars and critics should develop a home-grown theoretical framework for the criticism of art forms peculiar to Africa. This is what Susan Kiguli implies by an African "intellectual space" (172). Within the above purview, this essay examines Nigerian Stand-up comedy as an eclectic theatrical form within the corpus of Nigerian popular culture, or popular theatre which thrives on borrowing from older and neglected art forms, and (re)presenting same as new through a process of remediation. In this study, the Urhobo folk art of *Igbesia* and *Otota* will be the focus of discussion. The *Igbesia* and *Otota* performance tradition is comparable to that of griots in West Africa. Nigerian stand-up comedy evolved from these folk dramatic performances of comedy.

An important aspect of Nigerian stand-up comedy that cannot be ignored when trying to develop a methodological framework for the genre is its ability to reinvent older forms as new. Right before us is a form that (re)invents the griot culture through the services of a 'modern griot'. Nigerian Stand-up comedy is a form that has reinvented the griot narrator on a live popular entertainment space, using devices common to literary entertainment - precisely drama. These literary devices like performance, songs, sarcasm, figurative expression, etc. are the quintessential elements required for the transmission of a form that is oral or verbal across time and space. That is, the elements of entertainment aid the transmission and retelling of oral forms across different generations of audiences without losing the essential aspects of the history or story. And since griot performances are embellished with devices common to entertainment art, it becomes a little confusing to extract historical truth from a form that tells history through the vehicle of literature. To this end, we must be reminded that entertainment is only a fraction of the functions of a griot. The griot is also a historian, genealogist, singer, teacher, etc. However, the reference to griot tradition in this study is to situate the form within the genre of drama with a view to locating the continuities and commonalities between Nigerian stand-up comedy and traditional griot performance of the Urhobo people of Delta State, Nigeria.

## Griot Performance in Nigeria

Oral traditions and culture account for some of the distinct features of African literature, preserved within the corpus of oral literature. Although this claim may be contested, African literary historiography recognises the contributions of verbal aestheticians or oral rhetoricians of cultural histories to the sustenance and development of verbal art in Nigeria (Isidore Okpewho 1-10). Some notable verbal artists also referred to as griots in traditional Nigerian society are the Dan Marayas of Northern Nigeria, the Otimkpus of Eastern Nigeria, the Alarinjos of the West and the Ototas among the Urhobo people of the Niger-Delta (all in Nigeria). In written literature, these custodians of oral tradition also have a fair share of representation. Wole Soyinka succinctly employs their services through the character of “Olohun Iyo” in *Death and the King’s Horseman*. Achebe does a similar thing with his anonymous narrators in his novels based on rural Igbo society. These gifted verbal artists or griots rely heavily on their wit and verbal text to function as the repository of cultural history, entertainers, praise singers, jesters, performing poets, teachers, local Masters of Ceremony (MCs) and storytellers.

Griot practice in traditional Nigerian societies comes in different shades and they depict the rich cultural diversities of Nigeria; however, their distinct art of storytelling and performance is what defines griot culture in this study. It is an art form or practice in which a solo traditional performer, known as a griot, explores cultural history, wit, humour and other local props to tell stories, entertain, narrate history and genealogy, create jokes, sing praises, sanction infractions, anchor ceremonies and other functions before a live audience.

Examples of what is referred to as griot culture in this study abound in Nigeria in the various ethnic and cultural diversities of the country. In the northern part of Nigeria where emirates and the caliphates are well established, court griot performers were part of the royal structure. But as new administrative structures began to evolve, so also did entertainment; this encouraged the griot to evolve outside of the courts; giving rise to independent griots like Dan Maraya and Maman Sharta in northern Nigeria. Among the Yoruba of western Nigeria, the *ewi* poetry performance, the *oriki* (praise singing) and *Alarinjo* masquerades were performance forms that could be classified as griot culture.. Unlike the griot artist who was stationed in courts, the Yoruba

counterparts grew both within and outside the courts. The democratic nature of the Yoruba griot culture made it easy for the practice to metamorphose into different genres of performance art. The *Alarinjo* form, for example, developed into the Yoruba travelling theatre; *ewi* and *oriki* would form part of the plot structure in some modern Nigerian plays written by Yoruba dramatists. Some of the griot figures are Olohun Iyo, the Praise Singer in Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, J.P Clark's narrator, Okabou Ojobolo in *Ozidi Saga*, and Akaraogun, the hunter in D.O Fagunwa's *Ogboju Ode Ninu Igbo Irumale*, There are similar griot images in Femi Osofisan's *Another Raft*, Ola Rotimi's *The God's Arere Not to Blame* and Ahmed Yerima's *Abobaku* These. are plays in which narrators explore the rich rhetorical resources of the griot and traditional performance forms (Kehinde 314-315, Awodiya 70-71, Dasylva, 288, Crow 38, Rasheed 219-220). In this regard, Isidore Okpewho observes us African literary artists have had to rely on, and draw heavily from traditional forms in order to set African literature on a path of "true cultural pride" (75).

As for the Igbo of eastern Nigeria, griot culture did not evolve from the king's court since Igbo society did not develop the kingship system as we find among the Yoruba and Hausa ethnic groups. However, among the Igbo skilful individuals took responsibility as traditional storytellers employing songs and poetry to entertain, teach and preserve history across generations. For example, the 'Igbu Avu' and 'itu afa' are forms of oral epic poetry peculiar to the people of Enugu, Nsukka, Abakaliki, and environs; they are performed by the traditional poets during specific occasions, ceremonies, or festivals. During such occasions, the Igbu Avu poet employs sublime use of language to praise ancestors, narrate great deeds of famous men, praise family lineage and tell stories. Over the years, these forms of performance would take backstage as more contemporary art forms began to emerge. However, their distinct qualities have proven more than sufficient for contemporary writers of literature to create an authentic African genre. In *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God*, for example, we see the 'griotisation' of the narrator by Chinua Achebe, using anonymous narrators we find in a typical African storytelling setting. With the deployment of traditional performance elements in his novels, Achebe not only hybridised the novel form in Africa; he also recreated the novel genre "with materials normally associated with ritual drama" (Dan Izevbaye, 5)

## Urhobo Griot Performance

Among the Urhobo of the Niger-Delta region in Delta State, where Nigerian contemporary stand-up comedy has outstanding stars, there existed a form of solo dramatic entertainment known as *Igbesia*. The *Igbesia*, like their counterparts in other parts of Nigeria, entertain by telling stories, performing as event managers or masters of ceremony (MCs.). They sing, narrate stories and anecdotes, tell jokes, relate history and genealogy, and employ satire, sarcasm and humour to thrill audiences. According to informant sources, this practice predated colonialism and contemporary solo performance, also known as Nigerian stand-up comedy. My sources show that before the arrival of British colonizers and the emergence of contemporary art forms in Nigeria, the *Igbesia* (traditional griots) played important roles in the entertainment culture of Urhobo society as spokesman, mediator, historian, and entertainer. But as Urhobo society experienced modernising influences arising from urbanisation, colonialism, Christianity, technology, and the new urban English language (Pidgin English), the entertainment spaces like festivals, moonlight story sessions, traditional ceremonies, and others began to shrink for the *Igbesia*.. And as this happened, the demand for *Igbesia* art, like most other genres of griot performance, began to drop. Traditional musicians have borrowed the form; the *Otota* or traditional spokesman deploys the rhetorical skills of the griot, and more and more gifted individuals replicate the genre as everyday street popular entertainment; albeit, in Pidgin English. While griots never regained their original positions as they were in traditional society, their roles in contemporary societies as musicians, comedians, performers, poets, dramatists, humourists, and creative writers indicate that there has been no complete break from traditional griot culture. In an interview conducted to have a historical perspective of griot culture in Urhobo land, a participant coded as R1 had the following to say about traditional griot in the light of contemporary popular entertainment:

What we see or have now as entertainment is not different from the kind of entertainment we had in our traditional society while growing up as children. While the language of communication and others may have changed we were entertained just the same way people are entertained in present society. For example, during festivals, a couple of activities are lined up so that audiences don't become bored. One such activity is the performance of *Igbesia* who is invited to entertain within a particular time of the festival

or traditional ceremony. He tells stories, sings praises, and creates humour. This kind of performance is not particularly different from what we see comedians doing in Nigeria today. (Interview with R1, 21 August 2016).

Throughout the investigation of traditional griot practice in this study, it was noticed that the art of storytelling binds all solo dramatic entertainments together. The implication is that storytelling is an integral part of any solo dramatic performance—whether the performer is narrating history or genealogy, sanctioning social mores through sarcasm and satire, singing or poetry rendition. And while the form and medium for disseminating the story may be different—novel, live performance, digital performance, etc., storytelling is at the core of all the genres. Therefore, understanding how the story is told is useful in the exercise of identifying generic forms or how texts are generated from what Karin Barber calls “textual fields” (218). In other words, the way the stories are worked, reworked, transmitted and retransmitted speaks volumes when we come to consider the story as text within the textual fields of textuality. This is what Harold Scheub means when he observes that “stories provide us with the truth; they take the flotsam and jetsam of our lives, and give those shards a sense of narrative, of form, and therefore of verity” (9); Scheub adds that what the historian or storyteller does is to recast, alter and retell the story as new.

Tracing the emergence of contemporary solo dramatic performance from the field of historical verbal performative resources of the griot tradition will enable us to recognise the textual constituents of historical forms within the contemporary. When we subject the popular dramatic forms in Urhoboland to literary criticism, the textual elements of historical traditional dramatic genres that are transformed across space and time may not conform to the Aristotelian conception of organic unity. Notwithstanding, their long history speaks to us of how to appreciate traditional or popular drama in Urhobo; or how textual materials in Urhobo performance space generate their text and travel across space and time as new and distinct entertainment forms.

To that extent, the *Igbesia* griot performance can be analysed as a performance whose style combines both epic and comic narratives as a result of its wide assemblage of cultural materials drawn from the rich resources of everyday life, epochal events—war, conflict, resolution, trade etc. and other cultural practices such as ritual, festival, marriage. To that extent, the *Igbesia* solo

dramatic entertainment could be said to have been constructed from a syncretic and impressive combination of performance genres like songs, melodrama, storytelling, praise-singing, chants, masked dancing, ritual festival and local minstrel.

The collection of textual materials from a wide range of cultural resources into a single genre is what Barber refers to as “assemblage” (214-216); and in turn, this collection or assemblage promotes the emergence of newer text (Cavallo and Chartier, 39) and the art of doing so situates the griot as a moving encyclopaedia of cultural history. This was before the advent of the print medium when the griot was relied upon to narrate history using certain dramatic devices like performance and humour to both teach and entertain. When the griot is in a performance mood, he is capable of taking from history, popular events, songs to embellish the same with elements of drama with the main intent of entertaining. In such a situation, he tells history through the art of entertainment; and in doing so, he not only reminds us of the relationship between history and literature but also shows the differences between both. The audiences are not just reminded of historical events, they are entertained while listening to history

A good example of how audiences can relate to historical events through the art of storytelling and performance is the Udo festival of Ekpan people in Uvwie Local Government Area of Delta State. Uvwie is one of the 24 kingdoms making up the Urhobo nation of Delta State, Nigeria. Uvwie kingdom has grown to become an ‘oil city’ hosting oil companies and modern-day businesses like shipping, construction, and commerce. However, before the advent of western education, colonialism, urbanisation, and commercialisation, the Uvwie people, like their other Urhobo ‘kinsmen’ were predominantly agrarian and ‘republican’; and with patrilineage socio-cultural setting where women played ‘subordinate’ roles as partners. This socio-cultural outlook is reflected in some of the oral poetry of the Uvwie. During the Udo festival, some performances by masquerades and dance troupes are staged. But of importance in this study is the rendition of satirical, praise, and epic poetry by some traditional skilled poets during the festival. The satirical poetry of Uvwie people rendered during Udo festival shows that the Uvwie people are able and willing to censure aspects of their society that are below expected standard; the artists do this by using ridicule, irony, parody, melodrama, caricature, or other methods, with the intent of entertaining and inspiring social reform. One such rendition is rendered below:

**Original Rendition**

Ona ne kineboyo

Ona ne kinebo

Ona ne kineboyo

Ona ne kinebo

Ona ne kinebo ay ay ay

Ay ay oshara kwale leya o

Ona ne kinebo

**Transcribed Version**

This is unbelievable o!

This is unbelievable

This is unbelievable yo!

This is unbelievable

This is unbelievable ay! ay! ay!

Ay! ay! a man has taken abode in his  
wife's house o! This is unbelievable

(Repeated again and again until the poet moves to the next poem)

To appreciate the above poetic rendition, a little background of the Urhobo society in which the poem is set is helpful. In the society in which the Udo performance was set, it was not considered respectable or proper for men to move in, as husbands, and take abode in apartments built by their wives, or move into his in-law's apartment. This is because the patriarchal setting assigns to the men the responsibility of providing accommodation for wives. This arrangement appears to be one way of preserving the man's ego in a predominantly patriarchal society. So when a scenario of a man moving in with his wife presents itself, it is considered taboo and the man is perceived as lazy or losing what makes him a man. In an interview with an indigene of Ekpan where the poem is set, my informant shed some light on the background to this kind of poetry:

I will just give a little background to the song before I go on to render how the song is sung. You know that in African society, it is the man that is the authority of the house. It is not the place of a man to leave his house for a woman's house; it is the woman who must come to the man's [after marriage I presume]. This is meant to state the authority of the man over the woman in an African society... [The participant then renders the above poem]. The song is just a satirical song mocking men who are thought to be irresponsible who leave their family and pack to a woman's place to live in when it should be the other way round. (Interview with R2, 26<sup>th</sup> July 2019).



Without any intention of generating gender prejudice, even if it is suggested, the above reference is basically to explore the historical context and situation which informed the poem; it illustrates how events generate poems, and how the storyteller or griot interprets the poem, through narrative techniques and passes it on through space and time. More interesting is the point that when the tale of this song is told as a story by the griot, it takes more time to do so. The griot elaborates the song from a historical perspective, detailing the other aspects of the narrative—place, time and name, etc. that are not present in the song. He does this by using different narrative techniques, performance, melodrama, monologue and common language as the occasion demands.

This was basically how the *Igbesia/Oroegboesia* (Uvwie dialect) or traditional griot performed his art in traditional Urhobo society; but as the Urhobo went through the process of urbanisation and traditional festivals gave way to modern ceremonies and entertainment, the *Igbesia* art declined, giving way to newer forms of solo performance and entertainment like the ‘reformed’ *Otota*, *Idibia* and a popular entertainment form in Warri urban area known as “wording”. The ‘reformed’ *Otota* (spokesman or orator), for example, started performing as commercial, local entertainer from the 1950s, the *Idibia* became a traditional solo verbal entertainer from the 1960s, and “wording” —a street entertainment using the *Igbesia* template emerged in various parts of Urhobo urban clusters of Warri, Effurun and Sapele from the 1970s; they utilised what linguists refer to as ‘Warri’ variant of Pidgin English.

An important phase in the transformation of the *Igbesia* practice is the reinvention of the *Otota* oratory tradition by Chief ‘(Dr)’ Samson Akpomedaye Ofua around 1956 into a purely commercial product. The *Otota* is a spokesman or an orator who performs or represents a family in functions like marriages, coronation, parties and meetings; his duty is to mediate or keep the function lively, through verbal entertainment and oratory skills rendered in Urhobo language. Originally each family was expected to have a member skilled in oratory to perform this role. However, not all families and groups had this privilege; but where there is no orator in the family, it could engage individuals outside the family to perform such roles. It was from this practice that Chief (Dr) S.A Ofua developed modern-day Urhobo oratorical

arts as a business outfit to meet the demands of families and groups requiring the services. Ofua did not only commercialise the form; he would go on to train others in the profession in the same way Ali Baba and Opa Williams combined to groom and provide a platform for modern-day Nigerian Stand-up comedians.

With his educational background, Ofua saw the need to reinvent the *Otota* practice to meet the demands of the emerging Urhobo urban communities in Nigeria. One remarkable element added to the new form of solo entertainment at the time was the introduction or a blend of the English language with the Urhobo language in a manner that was poetic and enchanting. The performance by Ofua usually employed English language, Urhobo language and song to teach, entertain, praise and criticise some aspects of social life. Like the traditional griot, the *Otata* is an expert in history which he usually weaves into the stories and anecdotes he renders during performance.

Apart from his use of Pidgin English, Gordons is one contemporary stand-up comedian of Urhobo extraction who has not really departed from the oratory method developed by Ofua. Although Gordons may not be aware of the similitude of his performance to Ofua's, the archetypal coincidence between both is remarkable. Below is a transcription of Ofua's performance showing a blend of Urhobo language, English language and music. A transcript of Gordons' comedy performance is compared with that of Ofua to see the similarities and difference between both.

#### **Excerpts from Ofua's "Okada Rider"**

... I am Chief Dr Akpomedaye Ofua  
The Kokakoka and Merit Award winner...  
The Urhobo orators' referee [goes on and on introducing himself with a linguistic blend of Urhobo and English, and renders same in pure Urhobo language]  
... When Partisan Politicians are worried about the next election  
Good leaders are worried about the next generation [continue with highfalutin language--what we call "big big English"]

Since okada riding has become ... a profession due to mass unemployment  
Emanating from the maladministration of the privileged opportunists  
Who are supposed to be achievers, we have lost too many lives in the process...  
...I am inspired to deliver this holy message to all okada riders...  
**Chorus:** Okadaman ride safely so that you can return home safely [renders chorus in Urhobo language; and chorus continues at the background by his choral voices]  
Slow and steady wins the race

Chorus...

Snail will surely get to its destination  
[Rendered in Pidgin English]

Chorus...

Do you want to die doing 'balance-and-take'? [Rendered in Pidgin English]

Chorus...

A fall does not kill a lizard, but it impacts its health... [Rendered in Urhobo]

Chorus

A word is enough for the wise, passengers take note... Chorus....

### **Excerpts from Gordons comedy clinic**

God, I greet you... Singing in Urhobo language, English language and Pidgin English respectively]

May I have your attention quickly?

because I don't understand my condition... [Rendered in Pidgin English]

I have no clear cut understanding of what the rudiments,

Both physical and political analysis of what ministry instructor is directing...

[Speaking highfalutin language intended to create humour or amuse the audiences]

[Musical instrumental continues at the background]

Permit me to welcome you on board Gordons comedy clinic...

...My name is Gordons, they call me the Comedy Belusconi0

A.K.A Solid Money, CEO Belusconi Records

And just newly ordained Bishop of the **Osusu** ministry...

*(Gordons Comedy Clinic ward 3)*

From the above excerpts of Ofua's performance, we notice an eclectic style – borrowing from the rich resource of Urhobo poetic rendition, parables, music, and storytelling techniques to relate with social challenges of the day. Ofua deploys artistic resources of repetition, sarcasm, satire, humour and other devices common to literature. Ofua acknowledges the linguistic challenges of contemporary society by mixing Pidgin English, Standard English and Urhobo languages. Without any doubt, this innovation or the redefinition of Urhobo *otota* practice makes the performance accessible to audiences without Urhobo linguistic background. As this happens, the ground is fertilised for Nigerian stand-up comedy—another eclectic form to borrow from the rich resources of Urhobo oratory performance—conceptualised as *otota*. By the same token, a closer examination of Gordons' (a popular Nigerian stand-up comedian and an Urhobo by ethnicity) comedy performance on audio CD points to the continuities and discontinuities between Nigerian stand-up comedy and Urhobo verbal performance. The excerpt from one of Gordons' performances illuminates a striking similarity between Gordon's presentation and that of Ofua, even though they belong to different genres and generations of performance art. Gordon interjects his verbal performance with music which bears a mixture of Urhobo language, Standard English and Pidgin English. And like Ofua, and indeed, Urhobo oratory performance art, we notice Gordons' characteristic deployment of highfalutin language intended to generate humour and laughter. However, the main difference between both artists lies in the overarching linguistic medium of both performances. The Ofua technique is mainly Urhobo-driven, and the one by Gordons is Pidgin English-driven, reflecting various responses to the pressure of communication in the society. And while Gordons may not acknowledge the borrowing, we can safely say that there is some sort of 'unconscious' borrowing from the Urhobo oratory performance art.

It is important to add that the *otota* practices are of two strands; the first is the non-commercial form which we have in every family and royal courts as spokesmen mediating in meetings. This strand is very traditional to the Urhobo people. The second is the commercialised form which was developed and popularised by Chief Ofua, and sustained by Chief Raphael Okejevwa, popularly known as Achonachor. The second strand is

commercially driven and practised as a profession by individuals who are skilled in local oration and can explore the entertainment aspect of the for. One is solely commercial and the other is not; however, the non-commercial *otota* still enjoys special preference when cash for welcoming visitors is shared. There is a specific amount of money that each *otota* is entitled to. But for the commercialised form, the *otota* is paid for his services. This was the same role popular entertainment in Warri, known as “wording”, played before it went commercial. Usually, a talented individual is invited to take the centre stage in birthday parties and other social gatherings for the sole aim of entertaining the guests. What became Nigerian stand-up comedy is a series of metamorphosis, transformation, and adaptation of forms in line with the social reality of each period. When the *igbesia* form declined, local oratory performance was reinvented by Ofua; when the *Odibia* or *Idibia* that thrived on Urhobo language could not serve the linguistic demands of the new cosmopolitan environment which is dependent on Pidgin English as its lingua franca, it ‘stagnated’, allowing ‘wording’ to evolve; these processes metamorphosed into Nigerian stand-up comedy.

There is evidence that griot performance culture has a way of retaining its relevance by responding to transformation and linguistic situations offered by modernity and the mass media technology. In the selected recordings of live performances, the comedians, especially Gordons and I-Go-Die make jokes with very serious national issues, ranging from politics, religion, sexuality, ethnicity, culture to other subjects. They often use phrases like, “I just dey joke” (I am just joking), “I no dey joke” (I am not joking) and “Una think say I dey joke?” (Do you think I am joking?). The comedians appear to be trivialising serious issues to evoke laughter; they adopt this technique as a disguise to dialogue with the powers-that-be in politics. Nigerian stand-up comedians have demonstrated versatile ways to respond to the dynamics of urban society; this promotes patronage through the production and consumption of popular culture.

### **Conclusion: The Stand-Up Comedian as a Modern Griot**

As a genre that thrives on ‘oral/verbal text’ like griot performance, Nigerian Stand-up comedy exhibits the aesthetic features and theatrical nuances like language, character,

characterization, stage, performance, parody, melodrama, humour, and audience participation. With all of these inherent theatrical elements literary critics and historiographers should pay attention to the tradition of Nigerian stand-up comedy. One productive way to do this is to investigate how Nigerian stand-up comedy recreates some of the characteristics of older, folk dramatic forms. This paper has attempted a comparative assessment of Urhobo folk oratorical art of *otota* and *ogbosia* and the emerging tradition of professional comedians with roots in Urhobo culture. Our findings illuminate the point that by establishing a narrator/audience dynamics through the anecdotes of history (past and present) and deploying other popular cultural materials, the comedian “griotises” himself as an entertainer and a custodian of societal mores who is aware of the need to be “socially and politically responsible to the community” (Ervin 93). In other words, if we place the art of the Nigerian stand-up comedian on a timeline and evaluate his narrative ingenuity, the stand-up comedian can be described as a ‘modern griot’.

### Works Cited

- Awodiya, M. *The Drama of Femi Osofisan: A Critical Perspective*. Ibadan: Kraft Books Ltd, 1995
- Barber, Karin. *The Anthropology of Text, Persons, and Publics: Oral and Written Culture in African and Beyond*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Bouchard, J.W. “Portrait of a Contemporary Griot: Orality in the Films and Novels of Ousmane Sembène”. *Journal of African Literature*. **Vol? No. Year???**
- Cavallo Guglielmo and Chartier, Roger. *Histoire de la Lecture dans le monde accidentel*. Paris: Seuil, 1997
- Crow, Brian. “Tradition as Theme & Form in Three Nigerian Dramatists”, *ARIEL*: 31: 3, 2000, 29-51
- Dasylva, Ademola. *Studies in Drama*. Ibadan: Stirling-Horden, 2004.
- Dixon, Melvin. “The Black Writer’s Use of Memory.” *History and Memory in African-American Culture*. Ed. Genevieve Fabre, Robert O’Meally. New York: Oxford UP, 1994. Print.
- Ervin, Hazel Arnett. *The Handbook of African American Literature*. University Press of Florida, 2004. Print.
- Izevbaye, Dan. “Arrow of God and the Re-Reading of Event, Image and Text”. *Okike, An African Journal of New Writing*. No. 52. 01Nov. 2014. Pg. 1-17 ??????
- Kehinde A. “Indigenous Traditions and Modern African Writers” in Ajayi, S. A (ed) *African Culture and Civilization*, Ibadan: Atlantis Books and Ibadan Cultural Studies Group, 2005, pp. 301-324

- Kiguli, Susan N., Performer-critics in oral performance in African societies, *Kunapipi*, Vol. 34(1), 2012.
- Komone Godwin (Gordons). *Gordon Comedy Clinic*. Ward 3 Audio CD 2013
- Ofua, Akpomedaye. "Okada Rider". YouTube
- Okpewho, Isidore. Ed. "Introduction: The Study of Performance", *The Oral Performance in Africa*. Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2003.
- Rasheed, Abiodun M. The Drama and Theatre of Wole Soyinka, *An Encyclopedia of the Arts*, Vol. 11 (3): 2006, 216-229
- R1.One-On-One-Interview, 21 August 2016
- R2 One-On-One Interview, 26 July, 2019
- Scheub, Harold. *Story*. Wisconsin: The University of Wisconsin Press. 1998