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UDJE POETRY AND THE WELLNESS IDEOLOGY IN URHOBO CULTURE

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Abstract

Ancient Africans understood that serious illness has its roots in an individual's consciousness of anti-social behavior. This crystalized over evolutionary time into the Africa-wide **ancestor spirit anger theory of illness** or its Urhobo equivalent **emuerinvwin belief**. Recent studies reveal this belief to be a holistic health (wellness) doctrine, deployed in the upbringing of individuals to know that anti-social behavior (sin) predisposes the sinner to serious illness. On the other hand, an important preoccupation of Urhobo **udje** poetry is satire of anti-social behavior and elevation of morality. It is proposed here that **udje** poetry contributed to the promotion of holistic health in Urhobo society.

Introduction

Although I saw, from childhood, *udje* performed often in Owahwa, an Ughievwen Community of Urhobo, in Ughelli South Local Government Area of Delta State, Nigeria, my scholarly interest in the subject was triggered late in life. I left Owahwa for *urhie* (diaspora) in pursuit of Western education around 1946 aged about 12. Thereafter, whenever I came home on holidays I saw *udje* song and dance performed at social gatherings by energetic young, and not-so-young, men; I watched with admiration and chagrin as I could not sing and dance with the dexterity of the local lads, no matter how much I tried! The songs were frequently referred to as *Ile ri Kpeha* (Kpeha's songs). So my interest in *udje* grew, initially because of elder brother sentiment: the poet Kpeha Okpako (circ. 1902 – 1952) was my older half-brother. Then in 1974 when I was well into my career as academic pharmacologist at the University of Ibadan, I decided to record Owahwa *udje* songs with the help of the Director of the Institute of African Studies,

Professor Robert Armstrong. While preparations were on, a young postgraduate student turned up in my office one day and introduced himself as Godini Darah from Esaba, a community in Owahwa sub-clan of the same Ughievwen from which I also hailed; andwas at the time, a doctoral student in the English Department. He said his thesis was on *udje* and wondered if he could come with us on the recording trip to Owahwa. I was extremely glad to meet Darah, but also astonished at the idea of *udje* as a subject of doctoral study in English at *the conservative* University of Ibadan where a former professor and head of that department had pronounced that only an English man can teach English! Here we are today, 46 years on from that conversation: G.G. Darah is emeritus professor of English literature with a huge influence in *udje* scholarship. The rest, as they say, is history.

My work as a bio-medical scientist was always influenced by my traditional African upbringing: my book on pharmacology[1]was concerned with the influence of culture on drug action; it is a testimony to the importance of these factors in applied pharmacology that the book is still in print twenty-nine years on; what has turned out to be an important textbook in tropical pharmacology. Since retirement in 1990, I have had time to compare Traditional African Medicine (TAM) beliefs, and Western Medicine (WM) theories.[2]

Theoretical Considerations

The overarching paradigm in WM is the germ theory of disease. For the purpose of this essay, the germ theory can be simplified as follows: disease (sickness) is caused by germs; to cure the sickness, we must use chemicals (drugs) that seek out the germ for selective poisoning and elimination, like a magic bullet, i.e., the drug must poison the germ, but not the ill person's body. This theory is different from African medicine beliefs which are metaphors that encode the African peoples' millennia of experience and fundamental understanding of illness to be emotional distress, which we now know can lower a person's immune activity - the first line of the human body's defence against infection. TAM treatments, be they psychological mechanisms to enforce moral laws, or herbal therapies, are aimed at restoring the ill person's own immune capacity to cure his sickness. So-called

TAM is thus not medicine at all as we understand this to mean in WM above, but a way of life aimed at avoiding illness, a holistic health ideology.

Some philosophers of science think that science should be differentiated from other forms of beliefs that are not based on empirical data. One such philosopher is Sir Karl Popper[3] who made the important discovery on how this can be done: that a scientific hypothesis should contain enough information, so that if any part of the hypothesis is proved by experience or experiment to be wrong, that hypothesis should stand rejected or falsified; falsifiability, in this view, is the critical criteria for accepting a statement as a scientific hypothesis. In this sense, there is no such thing as the 'truth' in science, only theories that have so far survived attempts at their falsification. By this definition, TAM beliefs (e.g., ancestor spirit anger theory of illness causation)involving spirits whose existence cannot be experientially ascertained are, according to Popper, metaphysical rather than scientific, and are therefore to be characterized as pseudo-sciences. This generalization is the theoretical basis for the rejection and engagement of TAM beliefs by WM as scientific propositions. However, this study argues that this is a false generalization: TAM beliefs are generally grounded on the peoples' experience; they therefore satisfy an essential Popperian requirement for categorization as scientific theories.

A scientific theory evolves from empirical observations made by different scientists over a period of time. The theory is a concise summary of such observations and accepted as valid by the majority of the scientists with expertise in that field. TAM beliefs, too, evolved from the people's experience: the beliefs (e.g., *emuerinvwin* or ancestor spirit anger) that are evoked to explain the occurrence of illness have evolved[4]to control human behaviour. In early small scale human societies, the necessity for individuals to strictly conform to moral behavior, to obey community's moral laws, was an existential imperative for their survival as cohesive social groups that could defend collectively, build together, hunt together, celebrate together, etc., in harmony. In other words, morality was the key concern of such groups; and their accumulated experience was that serious illness and immorality are closely linked.[5]

The *emuerinvwin* belief is anchored on the supernatural ancestors who decide which misdemeanor deserves chastisement with serious illness. This device

enabled the belief to be deployed in the moral acculturation of individuals; the belief is thus more than a theory; it is better understood as a doctrine because it can explain the occurrence of serious illness, which is a function of theory; and, it can be deployed as a behavior control mechanism, to proselytize against immorality: *"in order to avoid serious illness you must avoids in that can anger the ancestors into inflicting illness as chastisement".* This is the basic orientation in the upbringing of individuals in traditional Urhobo society.

There are a number of characteristics of human nature which enabled moral laws to be enforced in pre-literate societies where there were no law enforcement institutions. One such characteristic is called *conscience*, which is a mechanism lodged in the brain, which acts to limit man's natural tendency for antisocial behaviour. Conscience also enables society's moral laws to be inculcated in her members.[6]The presence of this mechanism was essential for the survival of human societies as they are known today. The human nervous system is hard-wired so that its *autonomic* side responds to contemplation of an act which the individual was previously acculturated against, with *emotion* that can be felt or measured, e.g., in lie detectors. The autonomic upheaval is an expression of conscience. University College London psychologist, late Professor Hans Eysenck,[7]thinks that it is the conscience mechanism, not law enforcement institutions, that accounts for the fact that the vast majority of human beings are law-abiding.

Emuerinvwin as Metaphor for Emotional Distress

It is evident that human beings know the power of conscience and exploit it in the way they manage their interpersonal relationships; the *emuerinvwin* belief is sustained by the power of conscience. Divination (*epha-ẹbo*) is an Urhobo diagnostic procedure for uncovering the spiritual underpinning of serious illness, and although divination may suggest that serious illness in an acculturated individual is an affliction by angered ancestors, the people also know from experience that at the heart of the illness is the individual's consciousness of the sin and his conscience gnawing at him. The evidence for this view is this: when divination reveals that ancestor spirit anger (*emuerinvwin*) is a factor in the occurrence of the illness, those who consulted the diviner first go to the ill person to ascertain the facts of the sin (the ill person must confess the sin) before propitiatory sacrifices are offered to the ancestor. It stands to reason that if the

people thought that the sick person is a passive victim of ancestor spirit anger, they would propitiate the angered ancestors first. Analogously, if scientific diagnosis reveals bacteria to be the cause of an illness, the doctor prescribes an antibiotic to cure the illness; he does not first enquire from the patient how he got the infection.

The other characteristic of human nature that contributes to moral law compliance is man's tendency to search for perfection and incorruptibleness which they find invariably in supernatural beings who they can trust to adjudicate in matters of moral importance. For the Urhobo, *Erinvwin* (see below) fulfills this role.[8]According to notable German philosopher, Ludwig Feuerbach,[9] those attributes of perfection which human beings project unto the supernatural are the attributes they themselves most wish they could have, but cannot, because of the constraints and realities imposed on them by life's struggles in this world[10]. The supernatural being is thus nothing else than the human being, or rather, human nature purified.

In traditional Urhobo thought, a person who has lived a life of near moral perfection in this imperfect world and exercised moral authority in family and community, is adjudged to have attained a near divine status after death in the *High Erinvwin,* from where he continues to exercise moral authority over his descendants.[11]The fear of chastisement with illness by supernatural ancestors is a potent deterrence instrument against sin in the acculturated individual in Urhobo culture, and this is enshrined in the *emuerivwin* belief.

Udje Poetry, Morality and Wellness

This explanation is necessary because in Urhobo world view, serious life-threatening illness is a moral issue and *emuerinvwin* is a concept linking illness to immorality. Since *udje* poetry upholds morality and ethics in its satire, this art form is thus more than of aesthetic significance. It plays an important role in reinforcing the Urhobo holistic health philosophy, at least in those Urhobo clan/kingdoms (Udu and Ughievwen) where *udje* poetry has been conserved for centuries.

Udje poets tackle important social issues in poetry with such aesthetic power that ordinary people are compelled to sit up and think about such matters in ways that they did not previously. In that way *udje* poetry served the moral/ethical wellbeing of Urhobo society. Kpeha and other Owahwa *udje* poets refer frequently to *Orẹ,*

the great Urhobo festival of remembrance of the ancestors and *Erinvwin*, the abode of the ancestors**.** At *Orẹ*, Urhobo pay homage to their ancestors, the custodians of moral law; *Erinvwin* is the abode of the ancestors who enforce the moral laws. The effects of the traditional annual *Orẹ*festivals and homage to *Erinvwin* were to continuously remind individuals of society's rules of behaviour, to avoid immorality liable to cause social disharmony, emotional distress and serious illness.

Erinvwin

Let us consider *erinvwin*: this is the abode of what scholars of African religion call the 'living dead'; the person is dead to us but he/she is alive, disembodied but existing in *erinvwin*. So, to the Urhobo, the inhabitants of *erinvwin* are not ghosts or spirits but people as they were when they were alive. For instance, when offering libation to the ancestors at *Orẹ*, Urhobo address the ancestors by the name he/she was known by when he was alive, not his spirit (*erhi)*; they do not say, for instance, "the *erhi (*spirit*)* of Migun, we offer you this libation"; rather, Migun is named as if he was alive. In the works of the Urhobo-born visual artist, Professor Bruce Onobrakpeya, there are numerous ones which depict *ihwo re rinvwin* (people in *erinvwin*), *emete re rinvwin* (maidens in *erinvwin*) and *odede re rinvwin* (high priests in *erinvwin*) suggesting that *erinvwin* inhabitants are just like people as we have them in real life. I never thought of *erinvwin* as other than a space occupied by an amorphous, undifferentiated groups of the 'living dead' until I reflected on these lines from Kpeha's long narrative poem titled "Kpọlọdjẹ"[12] which in rough translation go something like this:

> "*Erinvwin* is large
> *Erinvwin* is perplexing
> A person has died
> We say bury him in the house, but
> After *Orẹ,*we say drive *erinvwin* home
> Where are you driving them to?"

The poet's comment contains much that is hidden to the uninitiated in Urhobo culture; it refers to the practice in Owahwa, for example, whereby all *erinvwin* are ritually called into the community to partake of the libations offered to them at

Orẹ; but after *Orẹ* there is a reverse ritual driving out of *erinvwin* from the community. What is not usually explained, but which the poet is drawing attention to, is that not all dead persons are buried in the house: those who died young, of dangerous diseases (e.g., small pox), those who were insane or known to be criminals, are buried in the bush. Such *erinvwin* must be expelled from the community after *Ore*. This category of *erinvwin* are of doubtful moral integrity, and having not exercised moral authority while they were alive, their ability to intercede for good on behalf of the descendants is questionable. On the other hand, those who exercised moral authority while they were alive, had wives and children, were community leaders and were buried in their own homes, are trusted and called upon frequently in prayers to intercede on behalf of the descendants. This category of *Erinvwin* stay put in the community; they are not the ones expelled after *Orẹ* festivals; we owe this insight to the poet's rhetoric question.

Another distinction is this: the ceremonial libation for the *erinvwin* of high integrity is placed at the ancestors' altar by the presiding elder, using his right hand; whereas the offering for the *erinvwin* destined for expulsion from the community after *Orẹ* is thrown out by the presiding elder with his left hand, accompanied by the descendants' calls: "you,*erinvwin*, having partaken of the festivities, must leave the community, you must leave the people in peace; go back to where you came from, don't hang around to cause trouble".[13]Thus, *erinvwin* is thought of as consisting of two domains - the High and Low domains respectively. The High *Erinvwin* constitutes the seat of Urhobo morality, the Supreme Court in Urhobo moral judgment, where the fate of anyone with the sin of *emuerinvwin* is decided.

In a recent publication[14], I elaborated on the concept of *emuerinvwin* as an Urhobo belief that links serious illness to bad behaviour; *emuerinvwin* is a behaviour control mechanism that influences Urhobo moral conduct. It is a doctrinal compass that enables individuals to live a life with minimum inter-personal conflict and emotional distress thereby promoting harmony and holistic health (compare with the Indian traditional healing method called *Ayurveda).*[15] The insight that *erinvwin* must be conceived of as consisting of two domains was provoked by Kpeha's question, "where are you driving *erinvwin* to?" A less complex mind than the poet's might have put the question more directly, "which *erinvwin* are you driving out"?

The poet's remark on the immensity of *erinvwin* is intriguing also; in Urhobo thought *erinvwin* is a vast space with unlimited information storage capacity where the disembodied ancestors from the beginning of humanity, the gods and spirits of those unborn, have held the secrets of Urhobo culture and moral values from the beginning of time. Access to this world of spiritual data which the people occasionally need to solve complex problems (e.g., to find the spiritual underpinning of serious life-threatening illness) is through the esoteric practice called divination (*epha*) and the specialists are the diviners(*ẹbo-epha*).In general, divination involves throwing down a set of 2-sided objects (e.g., kola nut lobes, cowrie shells, etc., and reading the information from the pattern, i.e., open or closed side up) in which the objects lie. Michael Nabofa and Ben Elugbe of the University of Ibadan[16]have done an important study of the Urhobo divination practice that uses half shells made from the seeds of the tree called *agbragha;* the shells are tied in strings of 4 per string. The diviner throws 2 of these strings and by "reading" which of the shells lie concave or convex up, he can discern the spiritual message.

There is a striking similarity between this dominant practice and the operative mechanism of the modern technology-driven World Wide Web which holds unlimited mass of information which can be accessed by the modern computer with its basic binary language of **01010010 (*open-closed-open..*)**. The computer expert has replaced the diviner, but the scenario of a spatial domain with unlimited data storage capacity accessible only by an esoteric devise, has been with man from the beginning of time.

Orẹ: Festival of Remembrance

The other institution frequently referred to in *udje* poetry and which is concerned with the moral integrity of society is the great Urhobo annual festival of remembrance of the ancestors called *Orẹ*. This festival took place in about the middle of August throughout the Ughievwen Clan/Kingdom. The main religious event was *iwe ẹgọ,* i.e., symbolic offering of food and drinks to the ancestors. Each household tried to spruce up its surroundings in preparation for *Orẹ* – the mud huts were re-plastered, new clothes and, as much food as possible were procured in expectation of returning relatives from *urhie*(diaspora) and for the entertainment of guests.

The arrow head of *Orẹ* festival in Ughievwen is the clan goddess, *Ọgbaurhie*, literarily meaning 'the strong one of the rivers'. For many centuries or millennia, before European education, imperial conquest and religious conversions, the men and women who governed Ughievwen were those distinguished in the affairs of their respective communities to hold titles in the four *Ọgbaurhie* Orders: *Adẹ*, (with ceremonial and judicial functions), *IgbunOtọr*/*IgbunEshovwin* (law enforcement and defence) and *Ẹbo* (medicine, culture and history). The longest serving title holder, *Ọbo* (*OdedeẸbo*) or *Adẹ* (*OdedeAdẹ*), was virtually the head of Ughievwen governance. The *Ọbo* Order was open to men and women of proven moral integrity.

It was during *Orẹ* that *udje* poets unveiled new compositions in, to use Darah's terminology, "the battles of songs".[17]Of the many new songs unveiled in any one year, only few gained sufficient traction to be remembered afterwards; even very long narrative songs such as Kpeha's "Noruayẹ"(20 mins or more of uninterrupted singing) or "Kpọlọdjẹ", were remembered and performed decades afterwards from memory. The successful *udje* song captured an essence of Urhobo culture, it nailed the issues of the day! That is why old classical *udje* that can be recalled by the community is an important source of raw material for the study of Urhobo history and culture.

Orẹ was also the occasion when *emetẹyanvwọn,* the Ughievwen-wide celebration of young maiden's rites of passage, including female circumcision and beauty pageantry of bare-breasted maidens took place; this was when families displayed their iconic heir loom splendor. These activities are referred to in *udje*. In Kpeha's *Noruayẹ,* for instance, Ishaka, Noruayẹ's daughter, mourns her father's tragic death bitterly; what pained her most, she laments, was that her father would not be there to provide the wherewithal for her eagerly anticipated ceremony, the most glorious in every young woman's life in Ughievwen.

Noruayẹ is a beautifully constructed narrative, poetry and drama by the Owahwa community; it is the story of the tragic death of an Oginibo paragon. In it, the poet subjects important Urhobo strongly-held beliefs to critical scrutiny; for example, did Noruayẹ die at faraway *urhie* of witchcraft fired at him from Oginibo or from an older brother who stood to benefit from inheriting his wealth (*emu r' uku*), or was Noruayẹ's greed in hasty pursuit of riches the cause of his demise?

> "*Evwẹrẹ mue edjọ he uto; ne e phorho urhie e ki bi hwan; Inoruayẹ nẹ ọyẹn serẹn, me v' edjọ re Evwẹrẹ ria oghẹrẹn ọvọ.*
>
> Izon people placed a taboo fetish on a rivulet; Let them cleanse the rivulet before we enter. Noruayẹ refused, saying "Izon and I have nothing in common" (meaning their curse cannot harm him)

is how the poet describes the event. As Noruayẹ enters the forbidden area, he collapses and dies. Impatience and arrogance are implicitly blamed for Noruayẹ's untimely tragic death. Bad behaviour is incompatible with wellbeing.

In *udje* poetry, no anti-social behaviour is too trivial for a lampooning satire: is it the proud rich man riding his bicycle to show off and asking the poor to keep the road clear for him? To such pride the *udje* poet replies that no one can have everything: go and ask the rich man:

> *Se oyibo r'o vw' akpo neje na, ovwẹ ọlakpa ra ajẹ?*
>
> Does the white man who owns the whole world have a woman police?

Shakawe's immodesty is lampooned in the strongest terms when it turns out she had sold herself as a prostitute[18]. What of Osolo? [19] who returns from *urhie* (the Diaspora) after a long sojourn, empty handed about whom the poet has this to say:

> *Ohwo r' o kp'urhie oj'emu ẹghwa cha, alama kọyen o brẹ, nẹ e rhie ebo r'okpa ha! Osolo, ona ro yovwin wẹ manẹ, e erhie bo e okpa re*
>
> He who returns from *urhie* empty handed quips cleverly that there is "no bag opening"[20]on return from *okpa urhie*; Osolo! If you did well there, there would have been *okpa* bag opening.

Osolo is metaphor for failure in *urhie*: Urhobo expect those who go to *urhie* to be successful there, to come back to Urhobo land with the wherewithal to do what they could not have done without going abroad. Those, like Osolo, who come back poor, are subjects for *udje* satire; often they hand the *udje* poet even more potent satirical weapon by boasting about how wonderful life in *urhie* was. Because of

shame from failure to achieve, and the fear of stinging *udje* satire, many Urhobo in different parts of the world give up the idea of returning home to Urhobo land.

Udje poetry is well noted for its tough criticism of anti-social behavior; but its failure to acknowledge success of individuals, to inspire people to greater achievements has been criticized and held accountable for the death of the art form in Urhobo land. Often, it is after a popular and admired person has died that *udje* poets sing him/her, not to praise the paragon's achievements, but to rub salt into the wound of the relatives' loss and pain.[21]

Udje Poetry also Acknowledges Noble Human Values

But this does not mean that *udje* poetry did not celebrate human virtues of love, compassion, loyalty, dignity. *Udje* poetry elevated these virtues as can be seen in Kpeha's two long narrative poems cited above which are lamentations of the untimely tragic deaths, respectively, of Noruayẹ and Kpọlọdjẹ, mourned by those who loved them: Akpotayobore's devotion and love for her son, Noruayẹ, and all the plans she made for when he would come home and build a mansion, bring tears to the eyes of the soft-hearted.

Udje poets were concerned with big philosophical issues of life and death, not surprising because people in pre-science cultures were terrified of death, understandably; they did not have the technology to diagnose the causes of serious illness, nor did they have the treatment options now available to us. In fact,*udje* poetry is a feast of nuggets of philosophical reflections on death as shown in these excerpts:

- *Ughwu vẹ ovwẹrhẹn kẹ ivwioni re evun.*
  Death and Sleep are siblings from the same womb. ("Kpọlọdjẹ")
- *Me djẹ oshọ re ughwu, simi vrẹn rẹ mi kpo Ilama, Mi vwo ti Ilama, ughwu shokoro vwọ hi ibara.*
  I was afraid of death, so I ran to Lama. When I got to Lama, death was squatting on the veranda. ("Noruayẹ")
- *Me djẹ oshọ re ibiabọ, me reh' agada vwo br' oma, Ibiabo djekpo, omora kọyẹn hwevwe.*

> I feared the gorilla, so I cut myself with cutlass. The gorilla[22]ran away, but the wound killed me. ("Noruayẹ")

An *udje* poet would frequently, for no obvious reason, take a detour from the theme of his satire to make an enigmatic but usually a beautiful remark which, as in the example below from the song "Toborisẹ"[23] reveals how closely the poet observes nature:

> *Kirẹ ọrhẹ, ọ rẹ hẹ uphoron rẹ omoko vwọ kanrẹ okọ phrun;*
> *O ghiona re eghuvwen; ona re eghuvwun bẹrẹn ghiẹ.*
>
> Like the plantain, which used the parrot's feather to build a canoe, it mastered the art for the front, but failed the art of the seat (the back*).*

I find the biology in this song composition fascinating: the plantain (leaves and flower stamen), parrot's feather and the dugout canoe, are similar in shape. The poet is telling us that the plantain, in wanting to build its canoe, modelled it wrongly on the parrot's feather; so, although he got the front right, he failed to master how to build the crucial structure of a canoe, namely, *eghuvwen,* where the canoeist sits to control the direction of the boat. The poet is demonstrating an enquiring scientific insight on the immutability of species – the plantain cannot correct this error which is what identifies it as species!

In the same song "Toborisẹ", the poet makes this remark:

> *Ọ bẹn rẹn gangan, eranvwẹn rẹ otọ vwọ phẹ kuẹ o r'eshovwin o, kẹ ẹdẹ fa.*
>
> It is impossible for the animal on the ground to urinate on the one above it.

This is clearly an expression of awareness of the scientific phenomenon in physics called *gravity.* These are examples of how science defines, characterizes, packages into theory what so-called pre-science humans already knew from experience. I have discussed this problem more extensively elsewhere[24]. It is the erroneous assumption by scientists that science was invented by the scientific method that inhibited the engagement of African beliefs as worthy subjects for scientific interrogation.

No traditional belief was too sacrosanct from the critical scrutiny of *udje* poets, which debunks the falsehood[25]where the idea is put forward and discussed at length, that African cultures are a closed predicament; i.e., the people do not question their beliefs and hence cannot reason outside the confines of their beliefs, whereas in the West, people question scientific theories. This idea goes back to early sociologists, such as Emile Durkheim, and Oxford anthropologist Edward Evans-Pritchard, famous for his study of witchcraft among the Southern Sudanese tribe, Azande[26]; Professor Evans-Pritchard writes that the Azande were brilliant in discussing the witchcraft belief and how it works, but not in discussing issues in which the idioms of their belief did not apply. The general idea is that the Africans' pattern of thought is conditioned by their religious beliefs, and since these beliefs are irrational as religious beliefs tend to be (not scientific), rationality was not the approach to the understanding of African thought patterns. This idea has been debunked by African philosophers such as Wiredu and Sogolo[27]. African cultures are not closed predicaments nor are Africans impervious to new ideas; on the contrary, the evidence before our eyes is that sub-Saharan Africans are among the most open-minded people in the world; witness their ease of conversion to other religions!

The significance of the *Orẹ* festival context for *Udje* poetry has been described. It was a festival season that inspired intellectual inquiry and creativity. It is regrettable that *Orẹ* and its attendant institutions have virtually died out, mostly because men and women of traditional culture have passed on and adherents of new faiths, now in large numbers and power, consider homage to ancestors to be fetish worship and incompatible with the new religions. This is lamented in *udje* poetry[28]

Oyibo mio vwin eki re emueje k' emu iphonvwẹn!

Europeans have spoilt the market, nothing is sacred anymore!

What we have lost by abandoning this important aspect of Urhobo culture cannot be quantified. No nation can live with dignity and respect from other nations for as long as it denigrates its culture and its past: all over Africa, ethnic nationalities are reviving annual festivals in renewed interest in African renaissance; tribal festivals are of interest to other Africans as well as other nations of the world who want to

learn about Africa's past from the African perspective. Festivals are a treasure trove of cultural history and are very dramatic ways of telling the world Africa's stories. It is in this context that I hope Urhobo should see the value of their festivals and shrines and revive scholarly and public interest in them.

Conclusion

In this essay, I have touched on aspects of Urhobo *udje* poetry that reinforced and complemented the essentials of *emuerinvwin* belief***;*** *emuerinvwin* belief is primarily incest taboo, whose violation was believed to anger the ancestors to inflict illness on the sinner; but a broader view of *emuerinvwin,* as anti-social behaviour (sin) against kin, was expressed in recent discussions among Urhobo intellectuals[29]. Also, in some instances, the idea of kin itself, which was restricted to blood relations in the incest taboo context, has broadened, so that 'kin' may (especially in the Diaspora, *ubu urhie*) include townsman, tribesman or even countryman, which may explain the unusual kindred spirit sensibilities among Urhobos in the Diaspora. Thus *emuerinvwin* which can now be described in general terms as a psychological moral behavior control mechanism, goes deep in Urhobo society in its effect on moral behaviour, even in today's *milieu* that is dominated by faiths in foreign religions.

In the acculturated person, knowledge of hidden sin troubles the mind (*ẹwẹn kpokpo*), resulting in emotional distress and serious illness; thus an illness associated with *emuerinvwin* is caused, not by *erinvwin* ancestor spirits zapping the victim like a virus, bacterium or cancer, but by a sustained emotional distress experienced by the victim. Anchoring the belief on the supernatural ancestors enabled it to be deployed in the upbringing of individuals against anti-social behaviour. Urhobo *udje* poetry with its characteristic tendency to sting antisocial behaviour and elevate morality, effectively synergized with the *emuerinvwin* doctrine in contributing to social harmony and wellness in Urhobo society.

References

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2. Okpako, D.T. (2015), *Science Interrogating Belief: Bridging the Old and New Traditions in African Traditional Medicine*. Ibadan: BookBuilders. Editions Africa.
3. Popper, K. (1975) *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, 8th Impression, London: Hutchinson. p. 312

4. I use this word frequently in referring to so-called pre-science ideas. These came into being through a long process of trial and selection, comparable to Darwin's selection of the characteristics that best suited a particular species for survival in its ecology.

5. See my essay "*Emuerinvwin*: An Urhobo Belief that Links Serious Illness to Bad Behavior" in www.urhobo waado. org.

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8. See Okpako, D. T. (2015), *Science Interrogating Belief* for a full description.

9. See Morris, B. (1995). *Anthropological Studies of Religion, An Introductory Text*. Cambridge: Cambridge University. pp. 20 – 21

10. When I read this, I was reminded of the profanity that my father Kokpako Chere (circ. 1862 - 1960) uttered often "that *erinvwin* is people" which I now understand as meaning that what the people ascribe as *erinvwin* morals are the peoples' moral laws assigned to *erinvwin* for impartial enforcement.

11. This categorization of ancestors is widespread among human populations (see examples from different parts of the world in *Science Interrogating Belief*, (op. cit)

12. Okpako, D. T. (2011) *Kpeha's Song: Ethics and Culture in Urhobo Udje Poetry*. Ibadan: BookBuilders. Editions Africa. p. 106.

13. I personally observed this as a youngster; my father, Kokpako Chere (circ. 1862 -1960) presided over this ceremony as the oldest Djebru descendant for many years.

14. Okpako, D.T. (2019) *WELLNESS*: *Urhobo Emuerinvwin, An African Holistic Health Ideology*. Ibadan: BookBuilders. Editions Africa.

15. Obeyesekere, G. (1977). *The Theory of Psychological Medicine in the Ayurveda Tradition, Culture, Medicine and Psychiatry(1).* Part of the problem we have with trying to understand what so-called Traditional African Medicine (TAM) boils down to is that the colonial pioneers of WM thought what they saw traditional African healers practising in Africa was "medicine", a primitive form of WM, inferior to WM, but not fundamentally

different from it. This mindset which still permeates the thinking of the African medical elite prevented the sort of serious inquiry which now shows TAM to be a holistic health ideology, not a theory of disease, which is what WM is. India, though colonized for 300 years, did not have this problem as the philosophy of their indigenous health care system, *Ayurveda*, had been set out thousands of years earlier in Sanskrit. The British imperialists respected what was set out in ancient texts.

16. Nabofa, M. Y. &Elugbe, B. O. (2005) "*Epha*, An Urhobo System of Divination and its Esoteric Language", in P. Ekeh, ed., *Studies in Urhobo Culture*, Lagos: Urhobo Historical Society.

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

18. Okpako, D.T. (2011) *Kpeha's Song*. p.141

19. Ibid., p. 171

20. *Erhi ebo*, refers to the practice whereby a man returning from *Urhie* packs a special bag containing presents for the people at home. This is commonly dried choice fish for those coming home from fishing; but those returning from oil palm work (*okpa*) can bag other forms of gift. Osolo is making excuse because he failed in *urhie*.

21. See Kpọlọdjẹ, p. 106, and Noruayẹ, p.124 in Okpako, D.T. *Kpeha's Song*.

22. This poetic imagination comes from the Urhobo myth that the gorilla, a vegetarian primate, runs away when it sees blood

23. Okpako, D.T. *Kpeha's Song*, ibid., p. 136

24. Okpako, D. T. (2019), *WELLNESS*: *Urhobo Emuerinvwin, An African Indigenous Holistic Health Ideology*, Ibadan: BookBuilders.Edition Africa

25. Horton, R. (1997)*Patterns of Thought in Africa and the West*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

26. Pritchard, E. E. (1937) *Witchcraft, Oracles and Magic Among the Azande*, London: Oxford University Press, p.338

27. Sogolo, G. (1993) *Foundations of African Philosophy – A Definitive Analysis of Conceptual Issues in African Thought*. Ibadan, Ibadan University Press.

28. See "Ekueivie" in Okpako, D.T. *Kpeha's Song*, p. 92