

URHOBOWORLDVIEW IN POETRY: AN ANALYSIS OF ATIBOROKO UYOVBUKERHI'S WORKS

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Abstract

This paper analyses three poems by Atiboroko Uyovbukerhi's—'Qrhare' (bachelor), 'The market', and 'Ukodo' to explore their reflection of the Urhobo worldview. Through a qualitative analysis, this study examines how these poems capture the complexities of relationships, the transient nature of life, and the importance of communal effort. The findings highlight the poet's nuanced portrayal of Urhobo cultural values and philosophical perspectives, revealing the intricate dynamics of societal expectations, individual aspirations, and communal responsibilities. The market metaphor in 'The Market' serves as a poignant reminder of life's journey, where individuals meet, share experiences, and part ways. The exploration of destiny in 'Qrhare' underscores the Urhobo belief in living to fulfil one's destiny, despite the unpredictable nature of life. 'Ukodo' emphasizes the value of communal effort and contribution, illustrating the Urhobo belief in the strength of unity and cooperation. By examining the poet's use of literary devices like imagery, metaphor, symbolism, simile, and rhetorical questions, this study demonstrates how Uyovbukerhi offers a profound insight into Urhobo worldview, emphasizing the significance of cultural heritage and traditional values

The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of Urhobo literature and culture, shedding light on the Urhobo people's experiences, perspectives, and cultural identity. The study has implications for the appreciation of African worldviews through literature, providing a platform for cultural expression and preservation.

Keywords: Urhobo worldview, cultural values, cultural identity, traditional values, destiny

1.0 Introduction

Urhobo poetry offers a unique perspective with which to examine the cultural and philosophical underpinnings of the Urhobo people. Atiboroko Uyovbuckerhi's works provide a rich tapestry of themes and motifs that reflect the Urhobo worldview, capturing the complexities of relationships, the fleeting nature of life and the importance of communal effort. As a literary form, poetry has long been an integral part of Urhobo cultural expression, serving as a medium for storytelling, social commentary, and cultural preservation (Ojaruega, 2015, Agbegbedia, 2015, Orhero, 2017). Much of Urhobo life is expressed in poetry. Poetry is the index of the mind, the inner man (Obioma, 2004). Poetry is the lifeblood of culture, infusing it with vibrancy and depth. Without it, society would be dull, stark and lifeless. Poetry embodies the essence and beauty of life much like a woman, and conveys thoughts and ideas with precision and elegance. In other words, our ideas, thoughts and feelings are embedded therein with economy.

Uyovbuckerhi's poem, in particular, offer a nuanced portrayal of Urhobo cultural values and philosophical perspectives, revealing the intricate dynamics of societal expectations, individual aspirations, and communal responsibilities. Through the use of poetic devices like imagery, metaphor and symbolism, Uyovbuckerhi masterfully captures the essence of Urhobo culture, highlighting the significance of traditional values, communal effort and cultural heritage

This paper aims to explores three of Uyovbuckerhi's poem – '*Orhare*' (*bachelor*), '*The market*', and '*Ukodo*' – analyzing their depiction of Urhobo cultural values and philosophical perspectives. By examining the poet's use of literary devices and techniques, this study will demonstrate

how Uyovbuckerhi's works offer a profound insight into the Urhobo worldview, emphasizing the importance of cultural identity, communal responsibility, and individual agency.

The study of Urhobo poetry is significant for several reasons. First, it provides a unique perspective on the Urhobo people's experiences, perspective and cultural identity. Second, it highlights the importance of cultural heritage and traditional values in shaping individual and communal identities. Finally, it demonstrates the significance of poetry as a medium for exploring and understanding cultural identity offering a nuanced portrayal of the complexities and dynamics of human experience.

2.0 The Poet: The Late Dr S. Atiboroko Uyovbuckerhi

The late Dr S. Atiboroko Uyovbuckerhi (born 1946) was a renowned Nigerian folklorist, dramatist, poet and scholar of Urhobo descent, hailing from Uwherun in Ughelli North Local Government Area of Delta State. He is best known for his foundational contributions to African theatre, dramatic theory and Urhobo cultural aesthetics. He earned his PhD at the University of Wisconsin and spent his academic career teaching at Nigerian institutions, including the University of Benin and the Rivers State University of Science and Technology, Port Harcourt (Asagbo, 1990). With deep roots in Urhoboland, Dr Uyovbuckerhi possessed intimate knowledge of his people's cultural practices and beliefs. As a student of Urhobo tradition and culture, he drew inspiration from the Urhobo universe, crafting poems that showcased his rich understanding of the culture.

His poetic collection, spanning 1968 to 2012, is compiled in two parts: 'The Bound and the Free' and 'Cotton Bolls in the Wind'. Notably, some of the poems are written in both Urhobo language and English, exemplifying bilingual composition in Nigerian literature. Dr Uyovbuckerhi's thematic interests are diverse, exploring material, metaphysical, philosophical, religious, satirical, romantic, and mystical themes.

Through his works, Dr Uyovbuckerhi captures the African experience, infused with a cosmic vision of life and mystical imagery. His poetry leaves a lasting impact, with profound and complex meanings that linger long after the poems are read.

As a Senior Lecturer in Drama and Theatre Studies at the University of Benin and the Delta State University, Abraka, Dr Uyovbuckerhi was a pioneer in Afrocentric discourse on African literature.

Dr Uyovbuckerhi contributed significantly to the study of African literature, folklore, and performing arts: 'The Idea of Tragic Form in Nigerian Drama written in English' (1976) – his doctoral dissertation, which serves as a landmark text in the critical study of English Nigerian playwrights and the adaptation of classical tragic forms into African cultural contexts. 'Avwerhen: The Concept of Sweetness in Urhobo Aesthetics' (1986, published in Nigerian Magazine) – an influential essay exploring how the Urhobo people perceive artistic excellence and beauty through their unique cultural lenses (Uyovbuckerhi, 1986). 'The Man Whose Luck Fell Asleep' – an acclaimed dramatic work and folktale adaptation that utilizes the linear narrative patterns of oral tradition, famously analyzed in scholarly journals like *Lore and Language* for its folkloristic approach to African playwriting.

Dr Uyovbuckerhi is most celebrated in African theatrical studies for identifying and defining the **Divine Approach** to the origins of African drama. This theory posits that African drama and sacred theatre such as the *Ohworhu* or *Ekine* plays originated when a mortal was temporarily abducted by a deity or spirit and brought back the secrets, dance steps, and songs of the gods upon returning to the human world (Mark, 2026).

He was also a theologian of Urhobo *Uhanghwa* (muse) in the performing arts, leaving a lasting legacy on Nigerian literature and academia (Uyovbuckerhi, 2003).

3.0 Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research approach, utilizing close reading and thematic analysis to examine the poems. The analysis focuses on identifying and interpreting cultural and philosophical themes, and literary devices present in the poems. The analysis was guided by the following questions:

1. How do the poems reflect Urhobo cultural values and philosophical perspectives?
2. What insights do the poems offer into the Urhobo worldview?
3. How does Uyovbuckerhi's poetic style contribute to the exploration of these themes?

4.0 Data Collection

The poems analysed in this study were selected from the collection of Uyovbuckerhi's poems. The selection of the poems for this study involves identifying poems that reflect Urhobo cultural values and philosophical perspectives, offer insights into the Urhobo worldview and showcase Uyovbuckerhi's poetic style and thematic concerns. The poems were chosen for their rich cultural and philosophical themes, as well as their representation of Uyovbuckerhi's poetic voice. The three select poems for analysis are:

1. **Qrhare** (Bachelor)
2. The Market (Eki na)
3. Ukodo

5.0 Data Presentation

Through '*Qrhare*' (Bachelor), '*The Market*' (Eki na) and '*Ukodo*', Atiboroko Uyovbuckerhi presents a compelling exploration of Urhobo culture and philosophy. These poems illustrate key aspects of Urhobo worldview by reflecting the people's values, beliefs and experiences. A critical evaluation of the poems demonstrates the poet's skilful

representation of Urhobo cultural consciousness, particularly in his treatment of interpersonal relationships, the transience of human existence, and the significance of collective responsibility and communal solidarity. The analysis below presents the select poems and their detailed examination as well as their significance in understanding the Urhobo cultural values and philosophical perspectives.

A, The Poem: 'Qrhare' (Bachelor)

S/N	Urhobo	English
1	Qrhare	Bachelor,
2	Wo brenu (vioja)	Do not bewail yourself,
3	Kidie akpo na pha duado	Because the world is very big.
4	Avwanre rien obo avwanre tare avwanre kerhee	We do not know what we pledged before coming (to the world).
5	Qrhare na	The bachelor,
6	Kpo urhie a guṇṇo igho	Went abroad in search of money,
7	Rṣvwṣ reyṣ aye	With which to marry a wife.
8	Rovwṣ vwṣ igho nu	When he had earned the money,
9	Koghorṣ	He wandered,
10	Nṣ uwevwṣ kpo uwevwṣ	From house to house,
11	Kirṣ ohwo rishoshṣ ṣ ta yan	Like a member of the church of preach about.
12	Qrhare yanyanyan	The bachelor walked and walked.
13	Q mrṣ ṣmṣṣ ṣvuṣvo reyṣṣ	He could not find any girl to marry.
14	Ḃṣvuṣvo	But,
15	Out ṣ erevwṣ rayen	Those whose tongue,
16	Ghworiṣ kirṣ eshawṣ	Slimy on words like okra,
17	Otu ṣ ikobo tamuu	Those without money,
18	Riphorhe vwṣ enu akpo	Who float on top of the world,
19	Kirṣ tetebe	Like water lettuce,
20	Kṣ ayen emetṣ na krṣn	They are the ones the girls cling,

21	Kirẹ iyen rikrora	Like flies clinging a sore,
22	Mivwo roro	When I thought about it,
23	Q da davwẹ mamọ	It pained me very much.
24	Die sorọ?	Why is it so?
25	Die sorọ?	Why is it so?
26	Nẹ ọrovwo erhu	That he who has a hat,
27	Q mrẹ uyovwi	Cannot find a head,
28	Vwo tugheẹ	To put it on.
29	Dẹvure	Long ago,
30	Q rọ mrẹ igho	The one who had no money,
31	Wọ fa imotoo	To pay the fare,
32	Qyen vwẹ owọ wọ yan	Was the one who went by foot.
33	Akpọ wenere	The world has changed.
34	Enena (Asaokephana)	Now,
35	Q ro vwo igho kọyan	The owner of money now walks,
36	Mu otọ ọyaya	Catches empty ground.
37	Qrhare	Bachelor,
38	Wo brenu	Don't bewail yourself,
39	Avwanre riẹn obo avwanre tare avwanre kerhee	We do not know what we pledged before coming (to the world).

Analysis of the Poem

(a) Plot/ Subject Matter

The poem narrates the story of a bachelor who travels abroad to earn money to enable him to get married, symbolizing his desire for stability and settlement. Despite accumulating wealth, he faces challenges finding a suitable partner, leading to introspection and frustration. The bachelor observes that those with charming words and those without material achievements seem to effortlessly attract partners, much like flies clustering around sores. This realization pains the bachelor, prompting him to question the irony of his situation, where those with means lack

opportunities while others thrive without them.

The poem highlights the changing dynamics of relationships and societal values, where having resources does not guarantee success. Ultimately, the poet concludes by reiterating the initial advice, encouraging the bachelor not to lament his circumstances, acknowledging the uncertainties of life.

(b) A Brief Analysis of each Stanza

Stanza One (line 1-5): Introduction: The poem introduces the bachelor's plight emphasizing the vastness of the world and uncertainty.

Stanza Two (line 6-14): The Bachelor's Quest: The bachelor travels abroad for financial stability to marry but faces difficulties finding a partner

Stanza Three (line 15-22): Critique of Modern Value: The poem critiques superficiality, materialism, and changing values in relationships.

Stanza Four (line 23-31): Reflection and Lamentation: The poet reflects on the bachelor's struggles, expressing pain and questioning societal norms.

Stanza Five (line 24-39): Social Commentary: The poet comments on how societal expectations and values have shifted.

(c) Language Use (Diction)

- The language of the poem is simple and conversational
- Use of imagery, e.g. 'Riphorhe vwẹ enu akpọ kirẹ tetebe' (lines 18 and 19)
- Use of proverbs and idiomatic expressions, e.g. 'Nẹ ọro vwo erhu, ọ mrẹ uyovwi vwo tughẹ' (= he who has a head

cannot find a hat to put on it, lines 26-28). This is a proverbial expression highlighting the irony of situations where those who have what they need cannot find the right fit while others might. Another idiomatic expression is 'Out rẹ erevwe rayen ghworị kirẹ eshawo' (= those whose tongues glide on words like okra, lines 15 and 16). This phrase uses a vivid metaphor to describe smooth-talking individuals, implying charm and persuasive abilities.

(d) Structure

- The poem is a free verse with irregular stanza lengths.
- It has conversational flows.

(e) Literary/Poetic Devices

- **Metaphor:** (comparing 'tongues' to 'okra' and 'girls' to 'flies, lines, 15 &16; 20 &21)
- **Allusion** ('preachabouts' referring to 'Jehovah's Witnesses', line 11)
- **Simile** ('tongues glide on words like okra' and 'float on top of the world like water lettuce')
- **Rhetorical Questions** (Die sorọ? Die sorọ? lines 24 & 25)
- **Repetition** ('Bachelor, do not bewail yourself', lines 2 &38)
- **Enjambment** (run-on- the line, lines 6&7, 15&16, 20 &21, etc.)

(f) Tone: The tone of the poem is characterized by a reflective and critical tone with undertones of lamentation.

(g) Mood: The mood is marked by a prevailing sense of melancholy, frustration, and pensiveness.

(h) Themes:

1. Theme of Destiny (Urhięwe):

This is the major of the poem. The concept of destiny and its relationship to human experience is a complex and debated topic. Some cultures believe in predestination, where an individual's life path is predetermined before birth. Others argue that destiny is shaped by personal choices and circumstances. The poem begins with an admonition to the bachelor not to worry too much or bewail himself over his inability to get a lady to marry. Perhaps that is his destiny. What is the Urhobo worldview about destiny? As explicated by Darah (2022), in Urhobo theology, paradise is also known as *Urhoro* while the Eternal gatekeeper is *Orhiurhoro*. The Urhobo myth about *Urhoro* is quite elaborate and complex. According to this mythology (Nabofa, 2005), 'every child born into the world first assumes the status of an adult in the spirit world (*Erivwin*). In this form, the person appears before God and consciously chooses the career of life he/she would follow. The choices are arrayed by God who calls on the yet-to-be-born human to select in the exercise of free will or predestination (*otarhe*). The person could choose a long or short span of life, a prosperous or wretched material condition, the manner of dying, the type of marital partner desired, whether or not to get married, either to have fame or infamy, etc. Once these choices are made, they are endorsed by God with *Orhiurhoro* as sole witness and keeper of the register'. The decisions made here are sealed by God and not changeable. However, if a person's destiny is later discovered to be inauspicious and unbearable in life, it can be remedied or

ameliorated through the agency of a fortune teller or a medicine man (*obọepha*). Suffice it to say that it is the issue of predestination that has played out here in the life of the bachelor in the poem.

2. **The Irony of Life:** The poem highlights the irony of life where the bachelor, despite accumulating wealth, struggles to find a suitable partner. Meanwhile, those without material achievements seem to effortlessly attract partners. This irony underscores the disconnect between material success and relationship success, suggesting that life does not always reward those who work hard and accumulate wealth with the things they desire most.
3. **Longing and Frustration:** The bachelor's desire for stability and settlement drives him to travel abroad and earn money for marriage. However, his inability to find a suitable partner despite his wealth leads to feelings of frustration and introspection. This theme captures the emotional turmoil that can arise when one's desires and expectations are not met.
4. **The Changing Dynamics of Relationships and Societal Values:** The poem touches on how societal values have shifted, and having resources no longer guarantees success in relationships. This theme highlights the complexities of modern relationships and how they differ from traditional expectations.
5. **The Uncertainty and Unpredictability of Life:** The poem concludes by encouraging the bachelor not to lament his circumstances, acknowledging the uncertainties of life. This theme emphasizes that life is unpredictable, and outcomes often depend on factors beyond our control. Embracing this Uncertainty can help individuals cope with life's challenges more effectively.

B. The Market (Ekina)

S/N	Urhobo	English
1	None ẹdẹ ekiqvo	Today is a market day.
2	Eki na herhe emọ royen	The market is waiting for children.
3	Ne asa shesheri ve herere kirẹ akpo na	From every place far and wide as the earth,
4	Ayen cha ra de ji ra she	They come to buy and to sell.
5	Etine a cha ra koko emamọ rasher i jovwo	Here the fruit of previous sales will be gathered.
6	Kugbe ekon re ubi ra cha she okeocha	And the seed of future sales planted.
7	Evo ne enu rhe	Some come from up.
8	Evo ne oboto rhe	Some come from down.
9	Evo ne oborhe rhe	Some come from the right.
10	Evo ne obohwerhe rhe	Some come from the left.
11	Evo ne evaonre rhe	Some come from the sunrise.
12	Evo ne esheonre rhe	Some come from the sunset.
13	Evo ne etine rhe	Some come from here.
14	Kugbe efa ne eboboyi rhe	Some come from beyond.
15	Etine obo agbada, oma cha vwa oma	Here at the bridge, body will meet body,
16	Kugbe erhi, erhi	And spirit, spirit.
17	Eki na herhe	The market is waiting.
18	Urhiwe herhe	Destiny is waiting,
19	Ro brorhiẹn eguare ofa re ikpisorho	To preside over another meeting of travellers.
20	Vwe ẹdẹ ovo kpren	For one brief day,
21	Ayen cha yan kugbe	They will walk together,
22	De kugbe, she kugbe	Buy together, sell together,
23	So kugbe, gbeha ji da kugbe	Sing together, sell together,
24	Hwe kugbe ji vie kugbe	Laugh together and cry together,
25	Eguare na hero	The meeting is on.
26	Urhiwe chidia obenu urhe re eki na	Destiny sits at the top of the market tree.
27	Orharhe edo na o riẹnre oma	She is used to the din.
28	O vughe urhuru ejobi, iroro ejobi	She knows every voice, every thought,

29	Aghoghọ ejobi kugbe uvweri ejobi	Every joy and every sorrow.
30	Kugbe asa re ghere kẹ ihwo ejobi siẹrẹ a da hẹriẹ agbada na vrẹ	And where everyone is bound after the bridge is crossed.
31	Oren na vwe vorho roye sikẹrẹ	The sun in his majesty approaches.
32	Anurhoro ela rẹ obo uwewwi royen obukoren	The flaming gates of his western home,
33	Uhoho ogrogro na nu ẹre	The long shadows bow in homage,
34	Je ghoghọ evun esiokẹrẹ rẹ ogidi ason	And rejoice in the approaching dawn of night.
35	A hẹriẹ agbada wanre	The bridge is crossed,
36	Eki na reri	The market is over.
37	Ikpisorho na mwavwe kpobaro kir ẹ isẹghẹ kpo okourhie na	The travellers surge forward like waves headed for the shore.
38	Rọ vọnre vẹ ikpokpẹwẹn rẹ uwewwiejo sansan	Loaded with the burdens of their various missions,
39	Ayen hrare nene egarovi sansan	They scatter in different directions,
40	Kirẹ ibi rẹ iphopho evun odju na	Like cotton bolls in the wind.

Analysis of the Poem

(a) Plot/Subject Matter

The poem explores the vibrant atmosphere of a market day, where people from diverse backgrounds gather to buy, sell, and interact. The market serves as a metaphor for life's journey, where individuals meet, share experiences, and then part ways.

(b) A Brief Analysis of each Stanza

Stanza One (line 1-6): Market Day: It introduces the market's anticipation and the gathering of people.

Stanza Two (line 7-14): Directions: The stanza highlights the diversity of people coming from different directions.

Stanza Three (line 15-19): Market Meeting: This stanza emphasizes the convergence of people and the role of the market in their lives.

Stanza Four (line 20-24): The Role of Destiny: The poet introduces destiny as a presiding figure, overseeing the activities of the market.

Stanza Five (line 25-31): Market Activities: The poet describes the joy, laughter, and shared experiences of the market day.

Stanza Six (line 32-40): End of Market Day: This last stanza marks the conclusion of the market day and the dispersal of people.

(c) Language Use (Diction)

The language is rich, vivid and evocative, e.g. Metaphor (e.g. 'market tree'), personification (e.g. 'Destiny sits at the top of the market tree; destiny is waiting'), and imagery (e.g. ' The flaming gates of his western home...'), etc.

(d) Structure

The poem consists of six stanzas, each with a distinct focus. The structure is free verse, allowing for fluid and dynamic exploration of the theme of the market.

(e) Literary/Poetic Devices

These devices enhance the poem's imagery, and overall impact, adding depth to the narrative. Below are the literary/poetic devices employed in the poem:

- **Metaphor:** 'Market' as a symbol of life's journey.
- **Personification:** 'Destiny' and 'the sun' are personified (lines 26 & 31).
- **Imagery:** There are vivid descriptions of the market and its activities.
- **Simile:** 'The travelers surge forward like waves headed for the shore' (line 37); 'like cotton bolls in the wind' (line 40).

- **Enjambment:** Instances of enjambment abound in the poem. By enjambment, we mean the continuation of a sentence or phrase into the next line without punctuation, creating a sense of flow and continuity.
- **Symbolism:** The 'bridge' (lines 30 & 35) represents transition or passage
- **Repetition:** The phrase 'some come' is repeated (line 7-14)

(f) **Tone:** The tone is reflective (= the poem reflects on the end of the market day, symbolizing life's journey and its fleeting nature), celebratory (= the poem celebrates the market's energy, diversity and human connections. It highlights joyful moments and shared experiences, laughter, and togetherness), and contemplative (= the poem's pace and language encourage contemplation on life's meaning and purpose).

(g) **Mood:** The mood is lively, vibrant and nostalgic, captivating the essence of market day experiences

(h) **Themes:** We have the following themes in the poem:

1. **Community:** The market represents a space for social interaction, bonding connection and shared experiences. The market thrives on the diversity of its patrons, each bringing their unique stories, traditions and perspectives. This melting pot of cultures and backgrounds fosters a sense of community that transcends individual differences. In this same way, life's journey is enriched by the connections we make with others. The market reminds us that unity in diversity is not just a concept but a lived experience, where every interaction adds depth and meaning to our existence.

2. **Transition and Impermanence:** The 'bridge' in the poem symbolizes the transitions we undergo in life – each step forward represents a new phase, filled with its own challenges and opportunities. The market day, with its clear beginning and end, mirrors the transient nature of life itself. Just as the market bustles with activity only to quiet down at the end of the day, life is marked by its own rhythms of birth, growth, decay and renewal. This theme invites reflection on the impermanence of all things and the importance of cherishing each moment.
3. **Destiny and Purpose:** The idea that 'Destiny' oversees human experiences suggests a guiding force that shapes our journeys. In the market, each vendor has a purpose – whether it is to sell, to buy, or simply to connect with others. This purpose is intertwined with their destiny, guiding them towards fulfilling roles that contribute to the larger fabric of the market. Similarly, in life, understanding and fulfilling one's purpose can lead to a sense of fulfillment and direction. The poem encourages us to seek out our destinies and embrace the roles we are meant to play, recognizing that our actions are part of a larger narrative.

The above themes, woven through the imagery of the market, offer a poignant reflection on the human experience, emphasizing the importance of connection, the inevitability of change, and the pursuit of one's purpose.

The Urhobo Worldview of the Poem

The Urhobo worldview, as reflected in the poem 'The Market' (Ekina), offers a rich and balanced understanding of life, death and the human experience. Here are some key aspects of this worldview:

Life as a Market

The market serves as a metaphor for the transient nature of human existence. Just as people gather at the market to buy, sell and interact before departing, human life is marked by its own beginning and end. This perspective encourages individuals to make the most of their time, fostering connections and pursuing their purposes.

Destiny and Purpose

The concept of destiny plays a central role in the Urhobo worldview. It suggests that each person has a predetermined path and purpose which he or she is expected to fulfil. The idea of an omniscient creator underscores the belief that there is a higher power aware of each individual's journey and ultimate fate. This understanding can inspire individuals to live purposefully and in alignment with their destiny.

Afterlife and Spirituality

The poem's imagery of 'Destiny' sitting at the top of the market tree implies a system of accountability and judgement. This suggests that actions in life have consequences beyond the physical realm. The transformation from life to death is not seen as an end but rather a continuation of the individual's journey. This perspective emphasizes the spiritual significance of life and the importance of living in a way that honours one's destiny and the divine. Nabofa's (2005) conception of destiny in Urhobo thought provides a theological framework for reading the theme of *Qatarhe* in the poem. Nabofa argues that for the Urhobo, destiny is not rigid fatalism but is tied to the dual nature of man as *erhi* and

ugboma – soul/spirit and body, with *erhi* being the bearer of one's allotted portion of good or evil before birth. He stresses that while *otarhe* is pre-ordained, it remains negotiable through ritual, sacrifice, prayer, and moral conduct, allowing individuals to 'improve' or 're-negotiate' a bad destiny. This view aligns with Nabofa's broader claim that Urhobo religion seeks harmony between the mundane and spiritual's spheres, and that knowing one's destiny is a religious act aimed at avoiding 'doom' and living in alignment with the divine. Thus, the poem's treatment of destiny can be read not as passive resignation, but as a negotiation between pre-determined fate and human agency, a tension that Nabofa identifies as central to Urhobo cosmology.

C. Ukodo

S/N	Urhobo	English
1	Eriyin avwanre de koko kugbe	So we gathered together,
2	Koko ekuakwæmu avwanre	Assembled our food items,
3	Ji phi ipotu re ukodo na phiyo en ehorona	And put the ukodo pot on the boil.
4	Evo toro eranvwe	Some contributed meat,
5	Evo reye ene rhe	Some brought yams,
6	Evo jarhgho irhibo kugbe ughweraka	Some donated pepper and salt,
7	Evo reye ofigbo romeyovwi rhe	Some brought the choicest palm oil,
8	Evo reye egen resan kugbe iruvwe sansan	Some brought rare spices and su condiments,
9	Ukodo na to ewwie phie	The ukodo is beginning to be done.
10	Ameri o ne eranvwe na	The juices from the meat,
11	Kugbe uviemu nae riruvwerhe r lokugbe	And the essences of the spices commin
12	Rere o ghrhe phia ghwohwo	To give off a sweet aroma,
13	Muro sheri wvaphopho urhioke	Carried far and wide on therning breeze,
14	Inuwen ejobi nyarhe na	All nostrils have perceived the smell.
15	Ayen banyan kugbe ravvwerayen	They are salivating and licking tongues.

16	Ivun rayen dje vwe iphięrophio	Their stomachs are gurgling in expectation.
17	Ęķęvuovo ohwo re o toro cha ree	But the person who did not contribute will not eat.
18	Rhitķe na evo herķ vę qmerhuru grogro	Yet there are some with long throats,
19	Ewena řę phię ipho rayen phiyķ ukodo řę ihwoefa chereri	Expert in gorging themselves on the ukodo cooked by others.
20	Ęķęvuovo igbori vwe aroghķ rere ihwoefa wķ ghęřę evun rayen vķn	But inexperienced in contributing so that others may fill their bellies.
21	Diabķvo kirę obo ayen komobķ ghęřę ķ rayen	Even as they themselves have filled theirs
22	Ukodo na ķ řę avwanre ejobi	The ukodo belongs to us all,
23	Kirobo řę ķrķę řę ķgbķ ode na đia avwanre ejobi	Just as the plantain grove belongs to us all.
24	O re fo nę avwanre ejobi ghare vwe owian kugbe orķķ na?	Must not all then, share in the labour and the harvest?
25	Ewerin na řę o rorori nę ķken rķye ķę ķriķre bęđębęđę	The monkey who thinks his lot is forever eating,
26	Vwķke ibabu na ķ rķye ķę owianowian	While the baboon is forever working,
27	Ofori ķ nabķ yono obo a đķę kpata	Had better learn to run fast.
28	Fokeridie ķđę re che mu oji na	Because the day the thief is caught,
29	Ĕđę yena ķriķre na te obare	That day the fig-fall ends.
30	Ĕķe avwanre wķ rhķvwe nę e chere ukodo na	When we agreed to cook the ukodo,
31	Avwanre tare nę ihwo ejobi phi ķrķnvwķn phiyķ evun řę ipotu na	We said that everybody should put something in the pot.
32	Ęķęvuovo kohwokohwo řę ķ reyķre jo phi ķrķnvwķn phiyķ evun rķyee	But any person who takes without putting something in,
33	Ĕghęņę řę akķķ na kugbe ķ řę aphopho na	Gods of the earth and of the air,
34	Ĕghęņę řę ķren na kugbe ķ řę ame vę gba na	Gods of the sun and of the mighty waters,
35	E ję obo řę ķ rere te ķķķ evun	May he never digest what he eats

Analysis of the Poem

(a) Plot/ Subject Matter

The poem explores the theme of communal effort, contribution, and sharing through the metaphor of cooking a traditional Urhobo dish, 'Ukodo' (=a type of spiced food prepared with either meat or fish and yam or plantain together; a kind of porridge without oil). It emphasizes the importance of collective participation and fair contribution in achieving a common goal, highlighting the consequences for those who do not contribute but expect to eat.

(b) A Brief Analysis of each Stanza

Stanza One (line 1-8): Gathering and Preparation: The poem begins with the community coming together to prepare 'Ukodo', each contributing different ingredients. This stanza sets the scene for communal effort.

Stanza Two (line 9-17): The Ukodo is Ready: The 'Ukodo' is cooked, and the aroma spreads tempting everyone. This stanza highlights the anticipation and desire for communal meal.

Stanza Three (line 18-24): Contribution and Expectation: The poem emphasizes that those who did not contribute should not expect to eat. It contrasts those who contribute and those who do not, but still want to benefit.

Stanza Four (line 25-29): Consequences of not Contributing: The poem warns those who think they can benefit without contributing, using metaphors and proverbs to illustrate the imbalance and consequences.

Stanza Five (line 30-35): The Agreement and Warning: The final stanza reiterates the agreement to contribute and the

consequences for those who do not, invoking divine retribution for non-contributors.

(c) Language Use (Diction)

- The language is simple and accessible (= easy to understand).
- Use of metaphors, e.g. 'The ukodo belongs to us all' (line 22)
- Use of imagery, e.g. 'The juices from the meat' (line 10) / 'And the essences of the spices commingle' (line 11). The diction in 'ukodo' is rich in culturally significant imagery that reinforces the poem's central concern with Urhobo identity, heritage and communal values. The lexical choices evoke vivid sensory and cultural images associated with the preparation and consumption of ukodo. These images transcend the literal act of cooking and eating to symbolize unity, hospitality, family cohesion, and the continuity of cultural tradition across generations. Furthermore, the poet's choice of culturally loaded expressions creates authenticity and immerses the reader in the Urhobo worldview. The images stimulate the reader's visual, sensory, and emotional imagination, thereby making the poem more engaging and memorable. By connecting everyday culinary practices with broader cultural views, the imagery underscores the significance of preserving indigenous customs in the face of social and cultural change. Consequently, the diction not only beautifies the poem but also deepens its thematic message and enhances its emotional impact on the reader.

- Use of proverbs, e.g. 'The monkey who thinks his lot is forever eating' (line 25). This is a metaphor that suggests someone who believes they can reap benefits without putting in effort or contributing their share. The metaphor implies that this individual is mistaken in their assumption, as the natural order requires balance and reciprocity. The contrast with 'The baboon is forever working' highlights the unfair expectation of benefiting without contributing.

(d) Structure

The poem has a rhythmic structure, with each stanza contributing to the overall message. The use of short sentences and direct language adds to the poem's impact.

(e) Literary/Poetic Devices

- **Metaphor** (comparing communal effort to cooking ukodo, e.g. 'The ukodo belongs to us all' (comparing communal effort to a shared dish). 'Those with long throats' (comparing people to animals, highlighting their greed).
- **Imagery**, e.g. 'The juices from the meat' and 'And the essences of the spices commingle' (describing the cooking process), 'Carried far and wide on the morning breeze' (evoking the spread of the aroma)
- **Allusion** (to divine retribution), e.g. 'gods of the earth and of the air/ gods of the sun and of the mighty waters/ may he never digest what he takes' (line 33-35, invoking divine consequences for non-contributors).

- **Hyperbole**, e.g. 'All nostrils have perceived the smell' (line 14)

(f) Tone

The tone of the poem is both communal and advisory as well as warning and cautionary, providing a balanced perspective that guides and alerts the reader.

(g) Mood

The mood of the poem oscillates between anticipatory delight when describing the aroma of ukodo, reflective nostalgia when discussing communal values, and cautionary seriousness when warning against those who do not contribute to the community.

(h) Themes: The themes woven throughout the poem reflect the Urhobo worldview, emphasizing the importance of collective effort, fairness and unity. Let us consider the themes of the poem:

1. Communal Effort and Contribution

The poem underscores the significance of everyone contributing their part in achieving a common goal. In the context of cooking 'Ukodo', every ingredient and every effort is crucial for the dish to be complete and tasty. This mirrors the Urhobo belief in communal labour and shared responsibilities, where everyone plays a role in the well-being of the community. It highlights that communal success is a collective achievement, not an individual endeavour.

2. Fairness and Reciprocity

The theme of fairness and reciprocity is central to the Urhobo worldview. The poem warns against individuals who expect to benefit from communal efforts without contributing their share. This reflects the principle of give-and-take that is deeply ingrained in Urhobo culture. Fairness ensures that relationships within the community are balanced and sustainable, fostering trust and cooperation among its members.

3. Consequences of Non-contribution

The poem cautions against the expectation of benefits without effort, suggesting that there are consequences for those who do not contribute. This theme aligns with the Urhobo proverbial wisdom that emphasizes accountability and responsibility within the community. It serves as a reminder that communal living requires mutual support and shared responsibilities, and those who shirk their duties may face social or communal repercussions.

4. Importance of Collective Participation

The poem celebrates the value of working together towards a shared objective. In Urhobo culture, collective participation is seen as a strength that not only ensures the success of communal projects but also strengthens bonds within the community. The preparation and the sharing of 'Ukodo' symbolize the joy and fulfilment that come from communal efforts and shared achievements.

5. Unity and Togetherness

The Urhobo slogan 'Urhobo!' 'Ọvuqvo!' meaning 'Urhobo is one or united', encapsulates the essence of unity and togetherness that the poem promotes. The poem reflects the belief that unity is not just a state of being but a source of strength and resilience. Through the metaphor of 'Ukodo', the poem illustrates how diverse ingredients come together to create something nourishing and delightful, much like how diverse individuals come together to form a strong and vibrant community.

Urhobo Worldview Reflected in 'Ukodo'

The poem 'Ukodo' reflects a worldview that prioritizes community, cooperation, and mutual support. It embodies the Urhobo philosophy of life, which sees individual well-being as intricately linked to the well-being of the community. The themes of communal effort, fairness, consequences of non-contribution, collective participation, and unity underscore the importance of living in harmony and working together for the common good.

In Urhobo worldview, 'Ukodo' is not just a dish but a symbol of communal life, where every ingredient represents a member of the community, each contributing uniquely to the collective good. The poem serves as a reminder of the values that have held the Urhobo people together, emphasizing the importance of unity, shared responsibilities, and mutual support in achieving common goals and fostering a strong, resilient community.

6.0 Discussion of Findings

The analysis of Uyovbuckerhi's poems, 'Qrhare' (Bachelor), 'The Market' (Eki na), and 'Ukodo', reveals a profound reflection of the Urhobo worldview, capturing the complexities of relationships, the fleeting nature of life, and the importance of communal efforts. The findings of this study are discussed below in relation to the research questions that guided the analysis.

1. Reflection of Urhobo Cultural Values and Philosophical Perspectives

The poems reflect Urhobo cultural values and philosophical perspectives in several ways. 'Qrhare' highlights the societal expectations and responsibilities associated with marriage and adulthood, underscoring the importance of social roles in Urhobo culture. Moreover, 'Qrhare' touches on the concept of destiny and its relationship to human existence, suggesting that individuals have unique paths to follow, and sometimes, despite efforts, certain outcomes may be part of one's destiny. The poet's admonition to the bachelor not to worry excessively about his marital status, as it might be his destiny, reflects the Urhobo belief that every individual should live to fulfil his or her destiny. However, the irony of life, where those with means may not achieve certain goals while others do, underscores the complexities of destiny and human existence in Urhobo philosophy.

'The Market' captures the vibrant and dynamic nature of Urhobo markets, not just as economic hubs but as spaces for social interaction and community bonding. Notably, 'The Market' also serves as a metaphor for life's journey, where individuals meet, share experiences, and then part ways. This reflects the Urhobo philosophical perspective that views the

world as a marketplace, where people come to 'buy' and 'sell' their experiences, skills, and relationships, and ultimately return to their eternal homes, much like how one returns home after a day at the market. This metaphor extends to human experience of birth, life, and death, emphasizing the transient nature of life. The poem 'Ukodo' emphasizes the value of communal effort and contribution, illustrating the Urhobo belief in the strength of unity and cooperation.

2. Insight into the Urhobo Worldview

The poems offer valuable insights into the Urhobo worldview, particularly in how they portray relationships, life's transient nature, and communal living. 'Orhare' provides insight into the Urhobo perspective on destiny, highlighting the acceptance and resilience needed when faced with life's challenges and unexpected outcomes. 'The Market' and 'Ukodo' further illustrate the importance of community and interpersonal relationships in Urhobo society, emphasizing collective participation and cooperation. 'The Market' as a metaphor also highlights the Urhobo perspective on life's journey, where interactions and experiences are temporary, yet meaningful. These insights suggest that the Urhobo worldview places a high value on community, cooperation, and social harmony while also acknowledging the fleeting nature of human existence and the role of destiny.

3. Contribution of Uyovbuckerhi's Poetic Style

Uyovbuckerhi's poetic style significantly contributes to the exploration of these themes. His use of vivid imageries and metaphors and other literary devices bring the Urhobo cultural context to life, making the poems accessible and engaging. 'The Market' as a metaphor, in particular, is a powerful tool for

conveying the complexities and transient nature of life. The simplicity and directness of his language allow the themes to shine through clearly while the cultural references and allusions add depth and richness to the poems. Uyovbuckerhi's style effectively bridges the gap between traditional Urhobo values and contemporary poetic expression, making the Urhobo worldview accessible to a wider audience.

7.0 Conclusion

This study concludes that Atiboroko Uyovbuckerhi's poems, '*Qrhare*', 'The Market', and 'Ukodo', are not only a celebration of Urhobo culture but also a profound exploration of the Urhobo worldview. Overall, Uyovbuckerhi's poems provide a profound reflection on essential dimensions of the Urhobo worldview, emphasizing the dynamics of human relationships, the ephemeral nature of life, the necessity of collective endeavour, and the role of destiny in human existence. The market metaphor in 'The Market' serves as a poignant reminder of the transient nature of life, where individuals come together, share experiences, and eventually part ways. The exploration of destiny in '*Qrhare*' underscores the Urhobo belief in living to fulfil one's destiny despite the unpredictable nature of life. The study highlights the significance of poetry as a medium for expressing and preserving cultural values and philosophical perspectives, and Uyovbuckerhi's works stand as a testament to the power of poetry to capture the essence of a people's world view. The findings of this study contribute to a deeper understanding of Urhobo culture and its value, as reflected in literary works. They also underscore the importance of exploring African worldviews through literature, providing a platform for cultural expression and preservation. Future studies could further explore the intercession of culture, philosophy, and literature in Urhobo and other African contexts, contributing to a richer understanding of African worldviews and their expression in literary works.

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