Ogori

Culture and People

OVIA-OSESE AND BEYOND

LEAGUE OF OGORI PROFESSORS

Ogori Culture and People: *Ovia-Osese* and Beyond

Ogori Culture and People: *Ovia-Osese* and Beyond

Edited by: Ohioma Ifounu Pogoson

LEAGUE OF OGORI PROFESSORS (LOP)

Published by:
LEAGUE OF OGORI PROFESSORS (LOP)

Printed by:
Symphony Books
No. 5, Lodge Street
Oke-Ado, Ibadan
+2348033859177, +2347055052056
e-mail: symphowonder@yahoo.com

First published 2012

ISBN: 978-978-901-976-2

Cover design and page layout: **Akande Abiodun O.**

Contents

Foreword

At the 2011 *Ovia-Osese* festival, having observed the need to inject some new activities into the yearly cultural event, I led a team of three Professors (Joseph Odama, Alexander Odaibo and myself) to publicly declare that at the 2012 *Ovia-Osese* festival the League of Ogori Professors (LOP) will add an academic and intellectual dimension. This was what led to the inclusion of the first International Symposium on Ogori Culture and People as part of the *Ovia-Osese* Festival, with the view of making it an annual event for scholars, researchers and lovers of culture; so that they can bond with the community celebrations of Ogori-land. Thus the 2012 symposium, and subsequent ones, will expose the knowledge of Ogori culture to many parts of the world.

The annual International Symposium on Ogori Culture and People was therefore organised by the League of Ogori Professors (LOP), in collaboration with the Association of African Universities (AAU) and the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, as a prelude to the 2012 annual *Ovia-Osese* festival. It held on the 20th of April, 2012, and drew participants from Nigeria, South Africa, the United States and Canada. The participants included scholars, researchers, staff of Ministries/Departments of Tourism and Culture, Youth and Community Development Centres and tourists. The main objective of the symposium was to present studies and experiences of unique rural/urban communal festivals as part of the global conversation on cultural renaissance.

This book is a significant and important outcome of the 2012 symposium and it contains selected presentations. The contents range from the history to the linguistic, cultural arts and music of the Ogori people.

Given the array of issues treated in this book, I have no doubt that the publication will be a rich source for researchers of all shades and callings who are interested in cultural studies of communities such as the Ogori people. What makes its reading even more compelling is the indication, as presented in one of the papers, that the Oko language spoken by Ogori people, is threatened with extinction. That should be a source of constant and continuing investigation, just as it should be a source of concern for Ogori people all over the world.

I invite you therefore to have this must-read book in your library or present it as a gift to family and friends.

Thank you.

Olugbemiro Jegede
President of the League of Ogori Professors &
Secretary to the Government of Kogi State

Preface

The Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria, has had a long-standing interest in Ogori, its culture and its people. There is evidence that a book on Ogori, now out of print, sponsored by the Institute, was once in circulation; even though we are still trying to find a copy. Of particular interest to the Institute of African Studies has been the world-renowned and very popular Ogori maiden festival, *Ovia-Osese*. Suffice to say that one of the Institute's early directors, the esteemed Professor (Mrs.) Bolanle Awe, had once personally commented on the festival and its benefits for the much sought after cultural revivalism and renaissance. It is no wonder then that she has consistently supported efforts to sustain and celebrate the annual festival. Over the last years, representations have been sent from the Institute of African Studies to the *Ovia-Osese*. Being that I have had a long standing interest and having participated in the *Ovia-Osese* several times, Professor Isaac Albert, the-then director of the Institute of African Studies, sent me to represent him at the 2012 groundbreaking edition that witnessed the active participation of the League of Ogori Professors.

The 2012 edition marked the beginning of the articulation of an academic aspect to the festival. Accompanying this festival was a one-day international symposium that drew participants and presentations from within and outside Ogori-land. A total of ten papers touching on practically every aspect of Ogori culture were presented. Apart from very incisive and illuminative presentations describing the socio-cultural significance of the festival proper, what also came out strongly has been the importance of Oko, the language spoken in Ogori-land, and its importance in the sustenance and development of the unique culture of the people. The urgent need for the documentation and preservation of the language was the central theme of a paper by no one other than Dr. Joseph Atoyebi who has been studying Oko for several years now and who has propagated the demonstration and usage of the language even outside Ogori-land. Topics ranging from aspects of Ogori music, arts and culture have been dealt with in the illuminating papers of Professors Alfred Adegoke, Zaccheus Apata, and Sunday Enessi Ododo, Dr. Tijani Anabe, Mr. Solomon Aje, Chief Gabriel Olobayo, Dr. Peter Odogbor and Israel Wekpe, Dr. Jacob Awoju Owolabi and Dr. Ayo Adeduntan.

Ogori says that it has the largest number of professors per square kilometer of space in Nigeria and it prides itself with this feat. This publication is meant to add a new academic dimension to the celebration of the festival and to provide material for and afford sons and daughters of Ogori, as well as culture enthusiasts, an opportunity to be able to read about its people, and what has been written by not only its own people but also by others who are studying Ogori and looking at them from the outside. The plan is for new and ongoing research findings to accompany the festival with similar publications from time to time. By so doing, it hopes to sustain the documentation of the culture and keep it in the front "burner" of cultural research in Nigeria.

A depth of gratitude is owed the League of Professors chaired by Professor (Chief) Olugbemiro Jegede, the Ogurefa of Ogori and Secretary to the Kogi State Government, all chiefs and other noble men and women of Ogori-land, the Government of Kogi State for their support and interest in the *Ovia-Osese*, the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan and all Ogori friends and well-wishers.

Ohioma I. Pogoson
Ibadan 2012

1

Becoming Our Own Other: Sex, the Sexual and the New Rites

AYO ADEDUNTAN
Institute of African Studies
University of Ibadan, Ibadan

Introduction

On May 25, 2012, the Yoruba socio-cultural group, Oodua People's Congress (OPC) organized Ọbàtálá festival. Ọbàtálá is a Yoruba deity, and he is often associated with purity, creativity, human formation and deformity. The festival was part of the group's effort to revive the cultural festivals and rites of the Yoruba, many of which are barely extant, or outrightly extinct. In Ìgàngàn, a community in Oyo State of Nigeria, venue of the festival, Ọbàtálá worship subsists, but the present rites organized by OPC was borne out of an ethnic nationalist plan to revive dying indigenous cultural practices among Yoruba people. Some of these practices – worships, festivals, pastimes and so on – have been in abeyance for a long time, some for too long to be recalled by anyone alive. The shape that is given to what is currently rendered as that cultural practice has to depend unavoidably on imagination, wrought in the present. The status of the culture purportedly revived is not totally indigenous as such. It is in this sense that the Ọbàtálá festival has come to incorporate not only a public lecture by an academic but Muslim and Christian prayers as well.

Before the public lecture was delivered that fateful day by Bayo Adekola of the Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan, Muslim clerics, Christian clergy and the *bàbaláwo*[1] were called out to pray. And in the order in which they have been mentioned, one person in each category offered prayers on behalf of

[1] Ifá [Yoruba deity and system of divinity] priests

the community and the organizers of the event. When it came to their turn, one of the *babaláwo* uttered the following *ìbà,*[2] preliminary to the prayer itself:

Ìbà okó t'ó d'oríkodò ti kò ro
Ìbà òbò t'ó d'oríkodò tí kò s'ẹ̀jẹ̀

[Homage to the *penis* that droops, yet drips no water
Homage to the *vagina* that faces down yet drips no blood] (my emphases)

There was a palpable stir as the priest articulated the words *okó* and *òbò*; and many of the people in attendance slightly twisted their faces in a grimace, and one of the Muslim clerics muttered *A'uzu billahi*[3] into the wireless microphone in his hand.

The two "offensive" words, *okó* and *òbò*, are harmless figural indigenous references to male and female manifestations of all spiritual and mundane powers. However, the Christian/Muslim counter-context – entrenched through the two earlier prayers and the audience's familiarity with the *langue* of the two religions – confer wrongly on that indigenous ritual performance the status of profanity.

The event described above reinvokes the complicity of exotic epistemologies in the "othering," erosion and reinvention of culture. This paper reflects on the topic of sexuality as an aspect of cultural education. It compares the explicit representation of sex and the sexual in the performance of indigenous rituals with the 20th century effacement of these aspects. The ultimate intention is to show that the colonialist thesis that pathologized the "African" is not just mistaken and may be alive; it is indeed alive and masquerading as African thesis.

Sex, the Sexual and the African Rites

A definition of the "African" as a cultural category in the colonialist thesis denotes "the libidinous" and "the visceral." This notion, proceeding from the works of early anthropologists, sought to justify the annexation of Africa with

[2] Homage; Yoruba verbal acknowledgements and appeasement of superordinate persons and forces (see Isola, 1976).

[3] Abbreviation for "A'uzu billahi minash shaitanir rajeem" [May Allah protect us from Satan the accursed]

discourse in this context relates to initiation as education, teaching the initiate the complexity of her/his new status.

In puberty rites like the *Ovia-Osese* of the Ogori and *dipo* of the Krobo of Eastern Ghana (Boakye, 2010), the stripping to the waist of the initiates simulates some sort of lack needed to create the awareness of the power they are to assume. Power in this regard is noticeably defined when it is negotiated from a position of powerlessness. Nudity and semi-nudity are seen, in a sense, as mortification preparatory to acquisition of strength. As a realm of power, puberty holds for both the initiate and the society the potential of life and death. Relying obviously on Freud and Turner, James L. Brain (1977) writes on the nature of the "rite of passage between the asexual world of childhood and the sexual world of adulthood" (193):

> This transition is usually seen as dramatic and dangerous in nature, largely because of a human need to establish order and to categorize. Inability to fit any person or thing into cultural categories makes it anomalous, dangerous and, perhaps, polluting. The transition from childhood to adulthood is perceived as being especially important because of human fears about death and sexuality... Human sexuality we fear because of the strength of our erotic urges compared to the fragility of the social structures we have erected to order our lives as humans. Submission to our erotic urges to the full cannot but bring about the destruction of the reality of society we have created. (194)

The point raised by Brain above pertains to the potential and risk that puberty brings: sex and violence, conception and disease, and reproduction and death. Puberty, thus seen as a precarious stage, requires the education of the initiate so that the community can keep chaos at bay. Victor Turner puts this aptly:

> The ordeals and humiliations to which the neophytes are submitted represent partly a destruction of the previous status and partly a tempering of other essences in order to prepare them to cope with their new responsibilities and restrain them in advance from abusing their new privileges (1969: 103).

Having thus isolated puberty as a realm of the uncanny, the community intend the rite as a device of understanding it and teaching its management to the

young. In her description of the *Ovia-Osese*, the puberty rite of the Ogori of Nigeria, Bolanle Awe (2010)[4] reveals that the extensive inquiry – mythical and empirical – and education that constitute the initiation spans one year. Alfred Adegoke (2001) notes that the rite is indeed meant to culminate in a formal training that can stretch up to three years. During this period, lessons are rendered through direct instructions, performance and expedition. Sexuality is made bare through the practiced pedagogy of an older woman. It is through the baring of the sexual that the initiate's innocence become knowledge, and thus they are aware of their precarious position. Baring the sexual was thus aimed at making the initiate a successful wife and family member.

Among the Kaguru of Tanzania, *digubi*, the puberty and marital rite of passage, is sex education:

> At a material level, the focus of the instruction is on menstruation and sexual hygiene, on how to conceal menstrual blood, dispose of sanitary napkins, keep the body clean, etc. ...There are also *digubi* dances at the time of marriage. Here, the *digubi* performances introduce the new bride to the details of the sexual act, and teach her how to behave towards her husband and her in-laws. (van de Walle and Franklin, 1996: 64)

It was essentially for the purpose of education that sex and the sexual were referenced in these rites of passage.

The incursion of Christianity, colonialism and Islam into the African cultural space would later pathologize not only the rites but the idioms through which they were enunciated. This incursion of the new cultural sensibility is sublime and complex in that it mimics the indigenous forms that it intends to deface or efface. Christianity and Islam, for example, would censure not only explicit mention and commentary on the human sexual anatomy, but also the baring of such parts of the body as breasts and navel by the woman as well. It is appropriate to recall that the initiates in many cultures would go bare-breasted at one point or the other during the rites.

The puberty rite was not the only moment when sex and the sexual were signified. In other ritual contexts, such as the supplicatory invocation of the *babalawo* mentioned earlier, and during the performance of *ọfọ*[5] and *oríkì*,[6] similar

[4] Bolanle Awe. Personal communication. July 2010.

[5] Yoruba incantation always meant as part of medication or invocation.

references are also made. In such contexts, the intention is always not erotic, lewd or obscene. Thus, words such as "penis," "vagina," "testicles" and "clitoris" are no more eroticized than "finger," "toe," "elbow," and "fingernails."

In "References to Sex in Yoruba Oral Literature" (1972), Oludare Olajubu conjectures that the musical performance of the obscene in rituals like the *Òkèbàdàn* of the Ibadan Yoruba might have been cathartic in two respects: they assuage hatred and sexual urge. A song like "*Òbò Ìjẹ̀bú/ Bí ìkéèmu* [Ijebu's vagina/ Like a drinking cup]" (154) deflects both the performer's expression of hatred for the referent [Ìjẹ̀bú] into songs as it also defines sexual expression in terms that are not harmful. In other words, raw emotions that could have been expressed in physically and/or sexually violent terms are tempered in ritual performances. While not discounting Olajubu's point on the use of references to sex as a pre-emptive device against culturally unacceptable sexual behaviour, it is also important to note that references to sex and the sexual are not all the time erotic. Using *Òkèbàdàn* as a case study, Olajubu suggests that the ritual performance is intended "to afford a release within harmless channels of the pent-up emotions of some members of the community... One is the restricted sexual emotions that have accumulated in youth. These emotions if let loose can be very harmful the youth because the Yoruba frown on any violation of the virginity of its maidenhood" (154). However, another way that this same performance medium effectively pre-empted unapproved sexual behaviour was through the defamiliarization of sex and the sexual, and not just through a verbal expression that is a harmless analogue of sex. As performance behaviour and song-texts from *Òkèbàdàn* show, sex and sexuality are captured in such grotesque light that they repulse more than they arouse. The imagery of "oily penis," "testicles ground by millstone" and "vagina bones crunched by a dog" (see Adekola and Alamu, 1991: 24-28) portrays the sexual in deliberately objectionable and repulsive light.

Invariably, references to sex and the sexual was a good resource in traditional performance forms designed with a punitive and corrective purpose. A sexual behaviour considered indecent by the society sometimes become the reference point. The performance text in this situation can incorporate a description, often fictive and exaggerated, of the offensive behaviour. In the Udje songs of the Urhobo of Nigeria, there is a "sense of what sex should be. Adultery

[6] Lineage and personal praise, often intoned in poetry.

is condemned in many songs. So also is flirtation by women... Traditional sexual etiquettes are to be respected. Breaking sexual taboos is a constant subject of songs" (Ojaide, 2001: 57). Oro Yeye songs of the Yoruba of Ayede Ekiti in Nigeria addressed the same theme:

> Odoalu girls add amulets to their waist beads,
> Jinginni-jinginni.
> It is the penis that breaks it away.
> With or without [pubic] hair,
> The vaginas of Odoalu are meant for constant copulation.
> Oni is generous with her vagina,
> Only one whose penis is impotent [cannot have intercourse with her]. (Apter, 1998: 790)

Even when the behaviour deplored is not of a sexual nature, the performers sometimes touch upon the referent's sexual anatomy to strengthen the impact of the satire. As in the tradition described by Apter in his work quoted above, the offence in reference might not be sexual in nature, yet the performative iteration of "indecent sex" as an antisocial category further entrenches the awareness of socially constructed sexual boundaries.

In the behavioural attitudes privileged by Christianity and Islam, explicit reference to sex and the sexual is tabooed. The intended end is the same as that of the indigenous society: prevention of sexual behaviour considered indecent. But in the new approach, the simple principle is to obliterate every image, however illusory and mimetic, of the dreaded sexual other. This new order presumes that visual and verbal referencing of hitherto uneroticized zones – breasts, navel, vagina, penis, et cetera – is essentially erotic. E.E. Evans-Pritchard, well-known today for mistaken assumptions than for seminality, writes that "the initiation for the girls" among the Ila-speaking people of Northern Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe) had "dances and songs [that] are grossly obscene... the apparent motif is to excite the passions to the highest pitch" (1929: 313). This new cultural proclivity readily sees libidinal intention in the originary *Ovia-Osese* of the Ogori and the *dipo* rite of the Krobo of Eastern Ghana (Boakye, 2010) in which the initiates were half bare.

Conclusion

In actual fact, in the 20th century performance of the indigenous forms, there is a domineering Christian and Muslim oversight that pathologizes and represses the indigenous order. Van de Walle and Franklin, in their paper cited above, refer to

"the battle that Christian authorities were waging against traditional dances in general, and *digubi* in particular, because of its sexual content" (64). Islam's reaction to such explicit representation of the sexual is particularly hostile anywhere the religion has strong influence. The religion requires of the woman to swathe her entire body in garment. The very simple rationale is that exposure of the woman's body stimulates sexual desire and encourages indecent sexual behaviour. Now, in their various surviving forms, many of the puberty rites have blunted the original sexual contents. The influence of the new religions on them reaches as far as the initiates are themselves adherents of Christianity and Islam. This status has imposed a radical modification of many aspects of the original that explicitly reference sex. One of the immediate implications is that the instructional purpose of the rites that had been dependent on the initiates' understanding of the sexual was upset as the initiates were turned away from themselves.

But the passion to see and understand the self continues to strain rebelliously at the leash. One 21st century manifestation of this passion is the neo-nudist temper that is expressed in popular youth culture in which cleavages of the breasts and buttocks, and navels are shown, but with patent erotic intention. On the contrary, sex and the sexual were invoked in indigenous rites to impress the normative expectation of the cultural structure on the people. Societies in which the ritual performance of this expectation was profound were equally unforgiving of sexually "aberrant" examples such as pre-marital and extra-marital sex.

References

Adegoke, A.A. 2001. Pubertal Development Traditional Support System in Africa: an Overview. *African Journal of Reproductive Health* 5.1: 20-30.

Adekola, O.O. and Alamu, O. 1991. *Òkèbàdà □n*. Ibadan: Kolapo Press

Apter, A. 1998. Discourse and its Disclosures: Yoruba Women and the Sanctity of Abuse. *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 68.1: 68-97.

Boakye, P.A. 2010. *Dipo*: a Rite of Passage among the Krobos of Eastern Region, Ghana. M.Phil Diss. Faculty of Humanities, Social Sciences and Education, University of Tromsø, Norway

Brain, J.L. 1977. Sex, Incest and Death. *Current Anthropology* 18. 2: 191-208.

Evans-Pritchard, E. E. 1929. Collective Expressions of Obscenity in Africa. *The Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland* 59: 311-331

Freud Sigmund. 1962. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. New York: Basic Books.

Kassam, A.1999. Ritual and Classification: A Study of the Booran Oromo Terminal Sacred Grade Rites of Passage. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London* 62. 3: 484-503.

Olajubu, O. 1972. References to Sex in Yoruba Oral Literature. *Journal of American Folklore* 85.336: 152-166.

Prazak, M. 2007. Introducing Alternative Rite of Passage. *Africa Today* 53. 4: 19-40.

Turner, V. 1966. *The Ritual Process*. Ithaca: Cornel U.P.

Van de Wall, E. and Franklin, N. 1996. Sexual Initiation and the Transmission of Reproductive Knowledge. *Health Transition Review* 6: 61-68.

2

Language Documentation and the Preservation of a People's Heritage: Ọkọ-Ogori in Perspective

JOSEPH D. ATOYEBI
Windsor, Ontario, Canada

1. Introduction

The main focus of this paper is to examine the present state of Ọkọ in the light of language endangerment, and to attempt to project into the future to see what fate lies ahead for the language. Ọkọ (ISO-639 code: oks) is a West-Benue Congo language (Williamson and Blench, 2000) spoken in the Ogori/Magongo Local Government Area of Kogi State, north-central Nigeria. Based on the 2005 population census of Nigeria, the population of the Ọkọ-speaking areas is put at 39,252. The geographical coordinates of the Ogori/Magongo area is approximately on the intersection point of longitude 60 13" E and latitude 70 27" N on the map of Nigeria and C.R. Niven's 1925 map of Kabba Province, Northern Nigeria (Osheidu, 1980). The following three very important issues will occupy the centre stage in this paper, namely, the theory of language endangerment, the art of language documentation and how the first two points determine the survival of Ọkọ.

2. Ọkọ: The Language and its Dialects

The appellation Ọkọ itself may be considered an endonym. That is, a name which Ọkọ speakers use to refer to their language. They simply add the agentive suffix *rò* to the root Ọkọ to derive the term "Ọkúrò" (one who is Ọkọ), which is another endonym which the people use to refer to themselves. The question is, is there also an exonym by which outsiders refer to the language? The answer is a resounding yes. The exonym term by which they are known is Ogori, which incidentally is the name of the geographical location or the homeland of Ọkọ speakers. Some scholars like Osheidu (1980), Chumbow (1982a, b) and Wald (1994) made use of the exonym term, i.e. Ogori, to refer to the language.

2.1. The Classification of Ọ̀kọ

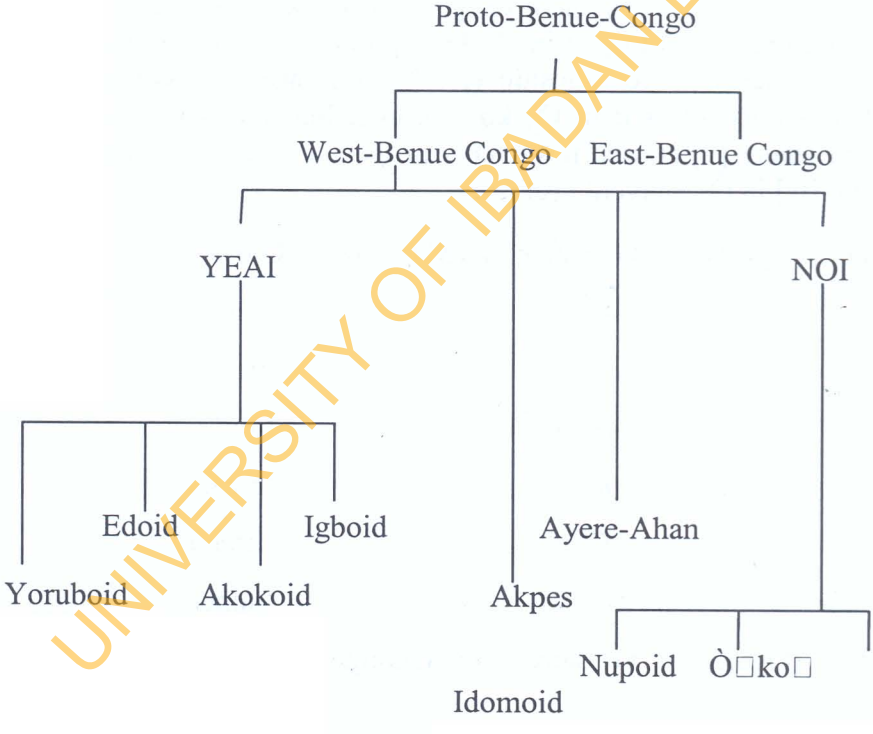
The classification of Ọ̀kọ has been a subject of interest to different categories o people: such as professional linguists, other interested researchers and educate indigenes of the communities where the language is spoken. Scholars, like th renowned Ogori historian Bawa Osheidu (1980:27) describe Ogori (Ọ̀kọ) as a dialect of Idoma, based on some shared lexical similarities in both speech forms Below is a partial replication of Osheidu's comparative list:

Idoma	Gloss	Ogori	Gloss
agan	hoe	*agan*	hoe
awọ	you	*awọ*	you
bobo	piggy ride	*bobo*	piggy ride
ọdagba	elephant	*ẹdagba*	elephant
ẹta	three	*ẹta*	three
ipoto	tender cocoa leaf	*ipoto*	tender cocoa leaf
ẹhama	louse	*ẹsama*	louse
wayẹna!	quite an age!	*wayẹna*?	how do you do?
opie	locust bean spice	*opie*	locust bean spice

However, it must be stated that shared lexical similarities is not enough evidence of linguistic relationship. Some of these items may be accidental or contact-induced, or just a common phenomenon found among most West-Benue Congo languages. For instance, the numeral *ẹta* (three), also found in Osheidu's list, is an a real linguistic feature found across the linguistic belt which also includes Ọ̀kọ. On the other hand, among non-linguists, Ọ̀kọ is probably one of the many dialects of Yoruba. The claim is usually reinforced by the prevalence of Yoruba-sounding names among the Ọ̀kọ people. This claim, like the former, cannot be scientifically justified. Atoyebi (2008) identifies two main sources for this naming tradition: the first source, which is inspired by Adegbija (1994), is as a result of the activities of Yoruba missionaries sent to the community in the late

19th and early 20th centuries. The second source is probably the quest for political relevance. The domineering status of Yoruba, especially as a language of upward social mobility makes it attractive to people from smaller linguistic groups. A very important point worth mentioning is that, even though Ọkọ speakers have Yoruba names as fore and surnames, and even though they speak Yoruba, in terms of the very important parameter in the identification of dialects of a common language known as mutual intelligibility, both Yoruba and Ọkọ are not (to any degree) mutually intelligible. Furthermore, the most reliable and most accurate classification of Ọkọ is the one proposed by Williamson and Blench (2000:31), which shows that Ọkọ is not a dialect of any language, rather it is a full-fledged language.

Figure 1



2.2. The Dialects of Ọkọ

On the number of dialects of Ò□ko□, Williamson (1989) and Gordon (2005) claim that there are three dialects of the language, namely, Ò□ko,□ Ó□sányèn□

and Eni. However, if our judgment is solely based on linguistic evidence, then the three-dialect claim is misleading. There are only two dialects of Ò□ko□: namely, Ò□ko□ proper, which is the variety spoken in Ogori, and Ó□sányè□n, the variety spoken in Magongo. According to Adegbija (1993:154), who until his death in 2004 was both a linguist and an indigene of Ogori, Ò□ko□ and Ó□sányè□n are the same language with a few phonological variations; both are (in Adegbija's words) "perfectly mutually intelligible." Note that Adegbija, in all his publications on Ò□ko□ (1993; 1994; 2001), did not cite Eni as a dialect of Ò□ko□.

The few phonological differences between Ò□ko-Ogori and Ó□sányèn□ are found in a few sound correspondences. First, there are the non-expanded or [–ATR] [□] and [□] which are attested in Ó□sányè□n but not in Ò□ko□ proper. [□] in Ó□sányè□n corresponds to [□] in Ò□ko□ proper, while [□] in Ó□sányè□n corresponds to [□] in Ò□ko□ proper in a strictly monomorphemic [–ATR] vowel harmony relationship (cf. 1). Similarly, the voiced labio-dental fricative [v] is only attested in Ò□ko□ proper, but not in Ó□sányè□n. In the environment where [v] is used in Ò□ko□ proper, it is realized as the labial-velar approximant [w] in Ó□sányèn□ (cf. 2).

(1)	Ò□ko□ (Ogori)	Ó□sányè□n (Magongo)	Gloss
	□ɪ́□̃	*□ɪ̀□̃*	'ear'
	ám□̃	*ám□̃*	'oil'
	□b□b□̃	*□b□b□̃*	'joy'
	□ń □́	*□ń □́*	'meat'
	□ŕ□́	*□ŕ□́*	'friend'
	□d□da	*□d□da*	'father'
(2)	Ò□ko□ (Ogori)	Ó□sányè□n (Magongo)	Gloss
	ívi	*íwí*	'intestine'
	óvia	*ówia*	'maiden (initiate)'
	vá	*wá*	'give'

vé-□à!	*wé-□à!*	'come out!'
□vã□	*□wã□*	'slave'

With regards to Eni, it is spoken only in one of the six political wards into which the Ogori town is divided. Linguistically speaking, there is not the slightest difference in the Ò□ko□ that is spoken by the rest of Ogori and that which is spoken in the Eni ward.

3. A Sociolinguistic Background of the Ò□ko□ Speaking Areas

Ogori is a multilingual community. The people pride themselves in the fact that they are multilingual as they can speak Ọ̀kọ, English, and Yorùbá. Their polyglot ability is even expressed in the community's anthem. The anthem is always sung at every public gathering taking place within the community, especially during the annual *Óvia-Ò□ses□e* □ festival which always attracts tourists and highly-placed government officials to Ogori every April. A text of the song is presented in (3). We note the code-mixing in its rendition (interlinear glossing is provided for only non-English words, while the mentioned languages in the anthem are in bold fonts for emphases).

(3) *Ologori* *wọ̀-a-ga* ***Ọ̀kọ*** *ọ-ga* ***Ìyoba*** *ọ-fọ* ***Oyibo***

One.of.Ogori you-PROG-speak Ọ̀kọ you-speak Yorùbá you-carry English

pile epan na /2x

add on.head RCP

Ọ̀kọ home again, *Eni* again

K'éḅ ẹbẹn kúnini,

with.joy with.love

I shall never forget my home

Ogori a-yọ Eko è-éke- wura

Ogori he-go Lagos he-will-return

As indicated in the anthem, an average 'Ogorian' who resides or who has stayed in the community for a significant number of years, can speak the following languages: Ọ̀kọ (the language of the community), Yorùbá (one of the

three major languages of Nigeria), and English (the official language of Nigeria). However, some Ogorians have a good measure of proficiency in Ebira, a Nupoid language spoken mainly in Okene, a neighbouring community. According to Adegbija (1994), some members of the Oshobane clan are known to be highly proficient in Ebira. This is as a result of inter-marriage between members of the Oshobane clan and Ebira-speaking people. It is also worthy of mention that by reason of intermarriage and economy, some Ogorians have acquired a couple of neighbouring Edoid languages, especially Ò□sọsọ.

4. A People and their Linguistic Heritage

Having introduced the reader to the language known as Ọkọ, the location of its speakers, its dialects and the linguistic situation of the speech community, at this point, we would like to beam the spotlight on the status of Ọkọ in relation to the theory of language endangerment. But first, it is necessary that we start by examining the importance of language in the day-to-day experience of a people. A people's language is their most important heritage. According to Moseley (2010), a people's language reflects their unique world-view, which includes their value systems, philosophy and their cultural experience. Language is therefore the most important vehicle used for the expression of a people's experience. Such experience cuts across culture, tradition, ethnicity, religion, economics, etc. The most important question is what happens if a people happen to lose this all-important heritage? The answer is simple. First, they lose the unique cultural knowledge which has been part and parcel of their language since time immemorial. For instance, imagine describing the *Óvia-Ò□ses□e* □ ceremony without the fixed expressions that are associated with the ceremony. Secondly, they lose their linguistic, ethnic and cultural identity. In other words, they are lost within the crowd. Furthermore, some of the consequences of language loss according to Thomason (2009) are: (i) the world is deprived of a window into the human mind and spirit; (ii) the deprivation of a unique repository of human experience and thought; and (iii) the vanishing of a large part of the people's culture.

5. On the Theory of Language Endangerment

On the theory of language endangerment, that is, the possibility of a language becoming moribund or extinct (language death), the following parameters of

language endangerment are used to determine the status of a language, whether such a language should be considered as endangered or safe:

(i) Number of living speakers: This parameter is very crucial in the determination of endangerment. The number of living speakers of a language will definitely determine whether the language is endangered or not. There are reports of some languages in the world with as few as one or two known living speakers.

(ii) The percentage of youngest generation acquiring fluency in the language: Note that if the percentage of youngest speakers is found among the parent or grand-parent generation, then the language is definitely endangered.

(iii) Domain of use of the language: If the use of a language is restricted to a particular domain, e.g., only at home, then we can consider the language as endangered.

(iv) Language shift: This is usually necessitated by one or more dominant languages in the area. In this context, the speakers of a so-called minority language abandon their own language for a more prestigious one.

(v) Response to domains and media: If a language does not take advantage of available media, or is not compliant with current trends in the dissemination of information, e.g., not being used in radio and television broadcast, such language may be endangered.

(vi) Availability of materials for language education and literacy: If there are little or no materials for teaching and learning a language, the language may be endangered.

(vii) Community members' attitude toward their own language: Having a negative attitude towards one's language could result in language shift. That is, community members see their language as useless and not capable of giving them the needed lift in their quest for upward social mobility.

(viii) Amount and quality of documentation: A language which has not been studied and cannot boast of a grammatical description or a dictionary, which are two important evidence of any documentation activity, such language may be endangered.

(ix) Governmental and institutional language attitudes and policies including official status and use: Some governments may also have a negative

attitude toward so-called minority or lesser-known languages. When th happens, it worsens the language situation, because it is a matter of tin before its speakers abandon it.

6. The UNESCO Classification of Endangered Languages and the Status (Ọkọ

The UNESCO's document (see references) on the degrees of languag endangerment identifies 6 different levels. These are as follows:

i. Safe: A language is considered safe if inter-generational transmission o the language is uninterrupted. That is, the language is spoken by al generations of speakers.

ii. Vulnerable: A language is said to be vulnerable as far as endangerment is concerned if the generation of children who speak the language do it in a restricted domain, usually only at home.

iii. Definitely endangered: A language is believed to be definitely endangered if the children generation no longer learns the language as mother-tongue at home. Note that a child's mother-tongue is not literally the language of his mother, but the prevailing language of his immediate environment.

iv. Severely endangered: A language is so categorized if it is only spoken by the grand-parent's generation, while the parent generation may only understand the language but do not speak it to their children and among themselves.

v. Critically endangered: A language is so categorized if the generation of grand-parents are the only speakers, and even then, they speak it infrequently, and their level of fluency in the language is in doubt.

vi. Extinct: The worst fate that can befall a language, where there are no known living speakers of the language anywhere.

Putting Ọkọ in perspective, we seek to know where the language ranks under the six degrees of language endangerment proposed by UNESCO. Before making any claims as to where to place Ọkọ on the ladder, an incontrovertible fact at this very point in time is that Ọkọ is not safe. The language appears to be

drifting between Vulnerable and Definitely endangered. We will examine the reasons for this claim in the following sub-sections.

6.1 Ọkọ as Vulnerable

We would recall that a language is said to be vulnerable, not because the most important generation of speakers, namely, the children generation do not speak it, but because it is spoken in a restricted domain. This definition aptly captures the situation on ground in the Ọkọ speaking community of Ogori. Three very important domains are identified in the Ogori community which are of primary relevance to any Ogori child. These are: home, education and religion. Children speak Ọkọ only at home. They speak the English language in school. In fact, within the school environment, English is the language of instruction, while Ọkọ is generally prohibited. It carries the label 'vernacular', and children are sometimes reprimanded for violating the 'No-Ọkọ' policy. Parents and guardians are to blame for the general negative attitude towards Ọkọ in its own territory; because the common belief is that fluency in a more prestigious language such as English will ultimately translate into success for their ward in the future. A third domain where Ọkọ has also been relegated is in religious services, especially in the church, as about 95 percent of Ogorians patronize one church or the other in the community. Church services are mostly conducted in English and sometimes in Yoruba. In fact, at the St. Peter's Anglican Church, which is the most famous church in Ogori, they have a particular service which is conducted only in the English language, while a second service is conducted in Yoruba. Note however that in recent times, it is not uncommon to witness church services with a lot of code switching, i.e., English>Yoruba>Ọkọ. A huge setback for Ọkọ in the religion domain is the unavailability of religious texts in the language; for example, Bibles, Hymnals and Litany. It is therefore almost impossible for a celebrant to successfully officiate over a church service in the Ọkọ language.

6.1 Ọkọ as Definitely Endangered

A language is definitely endangered if the children generation no longer learns the language as mother-tongue at home. To put Ọkọ in perspective, the following two pertinent questions need to be asked: first, where is home? The answer to this question should normally be Ogori. But then, the answer to the first question triggers the second question; which is, what percentage of the children generation lives in Ogori? The percentage of the children generation who lives at home in Ogori is very low compared with the percentage which lives in Diaspora. Even

then, the very few who live in Ogori are relentless in their aspiration to relocate to any urban area for economic and educational reasons. An Ọkọ-speaking child who relocates to another speech community will in no time replace Ọkọ with another mother-tongue (MT), that is, the language of his new environment. For instance, an Ọkọ-speaking child who relocates to Ilorin or Ibadan will soon replace Ọkọ with Yoruba as his MT. Without any controversy, this described situation aptly captures the situation on ground in Ogori. This is why Ọkọ also falls under the class of Definitely Endangered languages.

7. The Art of Language Documentation

The prospects of an endangered language such as Ọkọ are not altogether bleak. A relatively new field of Linguistics has been created as a response to the problem of language endangerment. This field is known as Language Documentation. According to Himmelmann (1998), the aim of language documentation is to provide a comprehensive record of the linguistic practices characteristic of a speech community. Furthermore, Austin (2009) posits that, in the process of documenting a language, we take advantage of the advancement of IT to create sound and video recordings, which are integrated with texts and other explanatory and analytical material. A remarkable software used in the field of language documentation which succinctly explains Austin's remarks is the Eudico Linguistic Annotator (ELAN). The screenshot below (plate 1) is taken from an ELAN annotation of a material from Ọkọ, which is a procedural discourse on the brewing of *Eginade* (the local beer). Apart form the video window seen in the screenshot, four other tiers of analytical texts are also included, which are: the orthography tier, the phonetic transcription tier, the interlinear glossing tier and the translation tier.

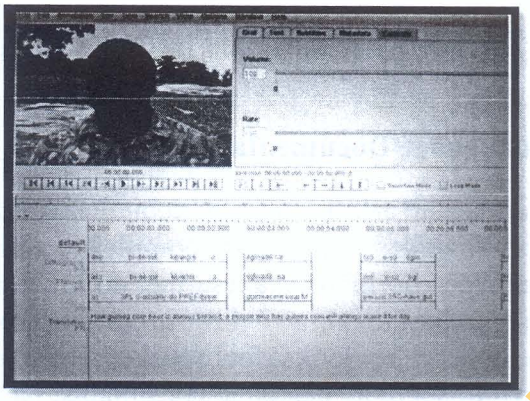


Plate 1: Eudico Linguistic Annotator (ELAN)

When a language is properly documented, that is, with very good video and audio recording, it makes it possible for those with vested interest in the language to create excellent pedagogical materials for the teaching of the language to children, and even adult literacy in the language. When this happens, the enabling environment for language revitalization has been created. For instance ọ, language revitalization is needed; but this cannot happen without the availability of educational materials in the language. The materials themselves will not be available without a comprehensive documentation of the ọ so far, at least in the course of documenting the language, is that we have recorded both spontaneous and elicited discourses in the language. The spontaneous discourses include folktales, procedural discourse, rhymes and praise-chants. All the discourse types were recorded in both video and audio formats using the prescribed guidelines of the trade (i.e., Language Documentation). For instance, in order to ensure high quality audio recording, we ensured that the recording circumstances were right and the equipment were of excellent quality. In terms of equipment we made use of the right microphones which were well-placed, and the recording device itself was a Zoom H4 portable recorder. We also ensured that the settings and level adjustments were right. That is, the sample rate was set at 48Khz, and the resolution at 16-bits. For video recordings, we ensured that we made use of high quality equipment (a *Sony* MiniDV camera placed on a tripod). The camera was adjusted to 16-bits for audio. Through this effort, we have ensured that the ọ can easily be accepted by archiving agencies such as the Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR) and Dokumentation Bedrohter Sprachen (DoBeS). We also loo

community support – educational materials in Ọkọ will be produced from our recordings.

7.1 The Process of Language Documentation

It must first be stated that the art of language documentation like any worthwhile venture is one which involves some very complex activities. The process of documenting a language normally takes the following pattern: first, the documentary linguist embarks on a field trip to the community where the language is spoken, where he looks for speakers of the language who are knowledgeable enough to serve as language consultants. Note the use of the term 'consultants', rather than the traditional term 'informants'. We believe that the former is a more honourable term than the latter. Furthermore, it is also important that one travels to the community rather than look for speakers of the language in some comfort zone. In my own case for instance, at the outset of my project on Ọkọ, I found some speakers of the language in my own comfort zone, i.e., Ilorin. However, rather than take the easy way out, I opted for traveling to the Ọkọ homeland. Some of the advantages of taking a field trip to the community and conducting fieldwork right in the homeland of the language include: having access to an unlimited number of consultants; very easy to crosscheck the accuracy of ones data; the researcher will also have access to some linguistic and cultural nuances which could easily elude him should he attempt to document the language outside of the community; and the most important advantage is that the documentary linguist will be able to build some level of trust between himself and members of the community. In fact, over time, the linguist himself will begin to have the feeling of being part of the community. The list of advantages of endeavouring to work in the language homeland is endless.

The next step after finding knowledgeable language consultants is that the documentary linguist starts to work with the consultants to study the language and its use. For instance with Ọkọ, after first going through the 400 basic word-list and the English-French composite word-list for Africa, which has 1069 items, with my consultants, a pattern in the language was beginning to form. We noticed a clear-cut distinction between nouns and verbs in the language. That is, all nouns including loan words in the language start with a vowel, even if the loan word starts with a consonant in its original language. On the other hand, all verbs start with a consonant. As time went on, it became clearer to us that this rule is

absolute in the language. Note that the documentary linguist has so far made use of the elicitation technique to record words and expressions in the language. Now that he has finally warmed himself into the language, he then moves to the next stage: which is; he starts collecting different types of narrative texts of the language, such as folktales, personal and clan histories (e.g., my recording of the *Ọ̀kpọ̀wọ* praise-chant), important cultural activities (e.g., the famous *Óvia-òsẹsẹ* festival of Ogori), songs and poetry (e.g., my recording of *kpíin-kpíin ekwajìjà*, a famous rhyme in Ọ̀kọ, and *pẹpéẹ́ p ẹ pẹp ú ùlòlò*, a children play-song). The documentary linguist soon begins to transcribe the data phonetically. He then begins to analyze the materials in order to uncover the structure and function of the language. The end product of all the highlighted stages of activities is usually the production of a descriptive grammar of the language or a dictionary. So far for Ọ̀kọ, we have produced the very first descriptive grammar of the language, *A Reference Grammar of Ọ̀kọ*. At this very moment, in collaboration with some of my consultants, we are working towards the compilation of a dictionary of Ọ̀kọ.

7.2 Archiving Ọ̀kọ

The whole effort invested into documenting a language will amount to a waste of time, energy and resources without proper archiving practices. In talking about archiving, we are interested in digital archive for the several reasons; firstly, a digital archive lasts longer. Secondly, the language materials stored in the archive can easily be copied and transmitted without any loss of valuable data. Thirdly, the collected language materials can easily be catalogued and shared with other interested users. A well-run archiving agency will ensure that the deposited materials are in a secure and accessible environment. The archiving agency will also ensure that the community members whose language is deposited in the archive and other interested people are able to access the deposited materials. Also, as earlier mentioned, there is the possibility of creating usable language materials which enhance literacy from the materials deposited in the archive. In terms of what we have done for Ọ̀kọ and what we hope to do in the not-too-distant future, with respect to archiving, is that, so far, we have deposited some Ọ̀kọ language materials in the Leipzig Endangered Languages Archive (LELA), hosted at the Department of Linguistics of the Max Planck Institute for Evolutionary Anthropology in Leipzig, Germany. The deposited materials include audio and texts of several recorded types of spontaneous discourse of the language. These include folktales, procedural discourse and other narrations by native speakers. In the nearest future, I plan to deposit some more Ọ̀kọ materials with the following two archiving agencies: Endangered Languages Archive (ELAR), funded by the Hans Rausing Endangered Languages Project and hosted

at the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), University of London, and Dokumentation BedrohterSprachen (DoBeS), hosted at the Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics in Neimegan, The Netherlands. Both the ELAR and DoBeS archives have the capacity to also handle video files. This provision is currently lacking at LELA.

8. Towards a Dictionary of Ọ̀kọ

We are currently compiling a dictionary of Ọ̀kọ. This project is proposed to be a community one, in which members of the Ọ̀kọ speaking community of Ogori and a couple of linguists are involved. We are currently constructing a database of entries for the dictionary using the Linguistics toolbox program. At the moment, the database consists of about two thousand entries. The proposed dictionary is not going to be just a word and meaning book; rather, each entry will be properly defined. It will contain information such as the standard orthographical representation of an entry, its phonetic form, the alternate form of the word where applicable, the grammatical class of the word and its function, the etymology of the word, including its internal structure, and a sentence or at least a carrier phrase showing how the word is used in a construction. Any other useful linguistic or cultural information about the entry will be included in a note. Below (plate 2) is a screenshot of the toolbox database of the proposed dictionary of Ọ̀kọ.

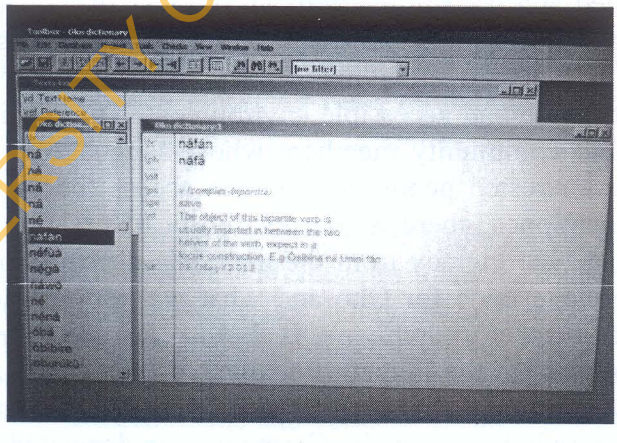


Plate 2: Screenshot of the Toolbox Database of the Proposed Dictionary of Ọ̀kọ

The need for a comprehensive dictionary of Ọ̀kọ cannot be overstressed, especially considering the endangered status of the language. For now, it will suffice to mention a few advantages. First, the proposed dictionary will contain a brief grammatical sketch which will make it a complementary resource material to the already published Reference Grammar. Secondly, the tons of data which we have collected in over eight years of working on the language, which could not be included in the published Reference Grammar, will find relevance in the dictionary. Thirdly, researchers and native speakers of Ọ̀kọ will have an invaluable resource available to them. Furthermore and most importantly, a dictionary will serve as an authentic avenue for documenting rapidly disappearing words and expressions in the language. For instance, words which have been considered as taboo words are usually the first to vanish because of lack of usage. A typical example in Ọ̀kọ is the original word for vagina which is *er□ako□*[1] or *arako□*[2], but has been substituted with a supposed milder expression *èb□ ò□le,□* which actually means 'nakedness'. The original word for 'vagina' is hardly known in the community today. The situation whereby taboo words are rapidly disappearing is a common phenomenon across many African communities. In Yorùbá for example, despite being a native speaker of the language, it was only recently that I accidentally discovered the original word for 'vagina' in the language, which came from a personal conversation with a respected Yoruba linguist. The original word is *ògó*. Most Yorùbá speakers have always known it by the coinage term *òbò*, which was probably derived from the expression *ohun ti a bò*[3] (that which is covered). Without a doubt, the original word is already lost among most Yorùbá speakers. In fact, it is not even included in any known dictionary of Yorùbá. Similarly, we have reasons to suspect that the original word for 'snake' has been completely lost in Ò□ko□. The word which we have today is probably a coinage, i.e., *ép□ én□ ódùdù* or *ép□ én□ ídùdù*. Most likely, the word was formed by combining the word *ép□ én□* (thing) with *òdùdù* (evil). The reason for this action by native speakers can be traced to the superstitious belief surrounding 'snakes' in some African cultures; that is, the fear of encountering one when it is called by its original name. In our years of working on the Ò□ko□ language, we are yet to come across anyone who knows the original word for

---

1 This variation of the word was supplied by the head-hunter of Ogori, Chief Agbabiaka.

2 This variation of the word was supplied by Pa Bakare, an octogenarian who lives in Ogori.

3 A *dàdàkúàda* music most likely song by the late Odolaye Aremu has the following lyrics: *okó l'ó ní a má sùn lé oun, òbò l'ó ní a má bò oun mó□ 'lè.□* 'The penis said one shouldn't lie on it; the vagina said one shouldn't cover it up.'

'snake'. Again, like Ò□ko□, Yorùbá appears to be gradually getting close to replacing *ejò* (snake) with something else. The reason for this suspicion is based on my personal experience as a linguist. I once visited my cousins at their farm settlement in a remote forest of Osun State, Nigeria. One evening while we were having a discussion, the subject changed to talking about snakes. I soon noticed that my cousins were using the expression *okùn-ilè* □(earth-rope) to refer to 'snake'. They tried to avoid calling it by its widely-known name *ejò*. This tradition is gaining traction among farm settlers; and gradually, the same expression may find its way into mainstream Yoruba over time, and may ultimately replace the original word.

9. Conclusion

Someone once argued during one of the discussion sessions of the 2004 edition of the West African Linguistics Conference hosted by the University of Ibadan, Nigeria, that languages will continue to die whether we like it or not, and that there is nothing anyone can do about it. Of course, everyone has a right to his own opinion, however, we are all witnesses to the efforts of conservationists the world over who have rescued many endangered animal species from imminent extinction. Through their commitment, together with governmental and community agencies, the population of these endangered species has increased. Drawing from this experience, all hope is therefore not lost for any moribund language. With a well-planned and executed revitalization programme, a moribund language can bounce back into reckoning as a 'safe' language. But before revitalization, language documentation must first take place; because it will serve as the bedrock for any revitalization effort. In the case of Ò□ko□-Ogori, its speakers appear to be truly committed to the survival of their language. The evidence is seen in the many conscious activities by individuals and the community at large. For instance, the reinvention of the annual *Óvia Ò□se□se□* festival, which now has an academic side to it, focusing on the language and culture of the Ogori people. A notable individual activity is the effort of an Anglican priest in the community who wants to translate the Bible into Ò□ko□. However, the point needs to be emphasized that more still has to be done. First, the negative attitude towards the language must be reversed to a positive one.

Secondly, stakeholders in the survival initiatives of the language must realize that speed is of uttermost importance. The era of delaying the release of a practical orthography of Ò□ko□ is over. The last documented effort before Atoyebi (2010), aimed at designing an orthography for Ò□ko□ was some thirty years ago, when an Ò□ko□ language orthography committee was given the mandate. Unfortunately, the proposed orthography which was later published in Adegbija (1993) did not do well because of lack of literacy in the language, and because the language had not been documented. There was therefore no proper avenue through which the proposed orthography could be experimented. Apart from these two mentioned factors, one other problem with Adegbija's proposed orthography is that it violates an important principle of orthography design, i.e., familiarity. Note that the general idea behind the principle of familiarity is "moving from the known to the unknown". Ò□ko□ speakers have been well-exposed to the Yoruba orthography; therefore, any proposed orthography must draw from their Yoruba experience. Adegbija's (1993) orthography is not one with which Ò□ko□ speakers are familiar. For example, he proposes that Ò□ko□ should be written as Ókó, making use of the acute accent symbol [□] to show vowel contrast, i.e., between /o/ and /□/. The first problem with this proposal is that, universally, the symbol [□] has been associated with pitch quality, i.e., the high tone. This will only lead to more confusion for anyone who wishes to study Ò□ko□. The second problem is that, we must note that Ò□ko□ is a tone language; in fact, tones have lexical and grammatical functions in the language (Atoyebi, 2008; 2010:53). Unfortunately, Adegbija seems not to have given any consideration to this fact in his proposal; because he has already allocated the only widely known slot which tones occupy to the expression of vowel quality. Of course, it is general knowledge that orthographies are a product of convention, that is, it is based on what people agree upon. However true this statement may be, sometimes certain constraints still apply even in a convention.

References

Adegbija, Efurosibina 1993. The Graphicization of a Small-Group Language: A Case of Ókó. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language.* 10(2). 153-173.

Adegbija, Efurosibina. 1994. Survival Stategies of Minority Languages: A Case Study of Ókó (Ogori) in Nigeria. *ITL: Leuven. Review of Applied Linguistics,* 103-104. 19-38.

Adegbija, Efurosibina. 2001. Saving Threatened Languages in Africa: A Case Study of Oko. In Joshua Fishman (ed.), *Can Threatened Languages be Saved?* Clevedon: Multilingual Matters. 284-308.

Akerejola, G.B. 1971. The History of Ogori. Ibadan: *Institute for African Studies, University of Ibadan, Occasional Publications.* Number 22.

Atoyebi, Joseph Dele 2008. Apparent Grammatical Tones in Oko. In Petter Margarida and Ronal Beline Mendes (Eds.), Exploring the African Language Connection in the Americas: Proceedings of the Special World Congress of African Linguistics. Sao Paulo. Pp. 139-152.

Atoyebi, Joseph Dele. 2009. On the Pursuit of Ethnic Identity: A Report on the Language Preservation Efforts of the People of Ogori, Nigeria. *Issues in Intercultural Communication* (Special Issue in memory of Efurosibina E. Adegbija). Nova Science Publishers, Hauppauge, New York. . Vol. 2, Issue 1. Pp. 127-139

Atoyebi, Joseph Dele. 2010. *A Reference Grammar of Oko.* Rüdiger Köppe Verlag, Köln

Austin, Peter 2009. Issues in Language Documentation. Lecture notes: 3L Summer School, SOAS, London. June-July 2009.

Chumbow, Beban S. 1982a. Ogori Vowel Harmony: An Autosegmental Perspective. *Linguistic Analysis*. 10(1). 61-93.

Chumbow, Beban S. 1982b. Contraction and Tone Polarization in Ogori. *The Journal of West African Languages*. xii(1). 1:89-103.

Elugbe, Ben 1980. Ogori. Kropp Dakubu, M. E. (ed.), *West African Language Data Sheets 2.* Legon and Leiden: West African Linguistic Society (WALS); African Studies Centre (ASC).

Jungraithmayr, Herrmann 1973. Eine Wortliste des Ò□ko□, der Sprache von Ogori. *Africana Marburgensia*. 6(2). 58-66.

Himmelmann, Nikolaus P. 1998. Documentary and Descriptive Linguistics. *Linguistics* 36. pp. 161-195. Berlin: de Gruyter.

Moseley, Christopher (Ed.) 2010. *Atlas of the World's Languages in Danger*, 3rd edn. Paris, UNESCO Publishing. Online Version: http://www.unesco.org/culture/en/endangeredlanguages/atlas.

Nathan, David 2009. Archiving and Language Documentation: from discspaceto MySpace. Lecture Notes: 3L Summer School, SOAS, June-July 2009.

Thomason, Sarah G. 2001. *Language Contact: An Introduction*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press.

Wald, Benji 1994. Sub-Saharan Africa. Moseley Christopher et al. (eds.), *Atlas of the World's Languages.* London. Routledge. 289-346.

Williamson, K. 1984. *Practical Orthography in Nigeria*. Ibadan: Heinemann Educational Books.

Williamson, Kay 1989. Niger-Congo Overview. Bendor-Samuel (ed.), *The Niger-Congo Languages.* Lanham: University Press of America. 3-46.

Williamson, Kay and Blench, Roger 2000. Niger-Congo. Heine, Bernd and Nurse, Derek (eds.), *African Languages, An Introduction*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. 11–42.

3

Linguistic Identity and the Challenges of Minority Languages in Nigeria: The Ògòrì Example and the Way Forward

S. A. AJE
Department of Linguistics and Nigerian Languages,
University of Ilọrin, Ilọrin, Kwara State.

Introduction

Ògòrì people have visual difficulty in two related matters about themselves; the question of their genetic origin/affiliation and that of their Ọ̀kọ language. Blurred vision on both is tied to the status of Ògòrì and Ọ̀kọ as a minority community and a minority speech form. They have tried in a number of ways to clear this blurred vision with a degree of varying success. What this paper intends to do is give an alternative set of lenses to either empower the eye or at least, improve the vision.

Genetic Affiliation of Ògòrì and Ọ̀kọ

Historically, Ògòrì people have tried to foist on themselves a Yorùbá sense by claiming direct descent from Ilé Ifè□, the way all Yorùbás do (Ọ̀shéidu, 1982; Èyíka, 2004). Some have even identified a Prince Akínbìyí as the Ògòrì progenitor (Èyíka, 2004). In support of the Ògòrì and Yorùbá 'saga,' Akóládé (1986) tagged the Ògòrìs as "Ògòrì-Yorùbá" to emphasize the Yorùbáness of Ògòrì. Another attempt at Yorùbánization of Ọ̀kọ may be seen in the attempt to explain the full meaning of Èyísìnayọ̀ as Èyísìnayọ̀mi by my brother, Dr. Amos Ọlágboyè, in his call to address Èyísìnayọ̀ descendants sometime in December 2005. Èyísìnayọ̀mi is a far cry from Aísónì and Emìnéfo, Èyísìnayọ̀'s male siblings and Karabọmè□ and Ìkpòsòloọmọ, the parents of Èyísìnayọ̀, Aísónì and Emìnéfo (Akéréjọlá, 1973). The late Royal Highness, Gabriel Bawa Akéréjọlá, closer to our ancients than the generation of my brother, Dr. Amos Ọlágboyè, had acknowledged that Èyísìnayọ̀ was borrowed from Unè□mè□ (Akéréjọlá, 1973, p. 58). The pro-Yorùbá protagonists easily rest on the oars of Yorùbá names for evidence and support without accounting for the myriads of Ọ̀kọ, Èbìrà, Unè□mè□ and Àkókó-Gbàngìrì names that characterise our people and the

uniqueness of the Ọ̀kọ language and the absence of Yorùbá as a natural language in Ògòrì (Ajé, 2007). In the comparative "word list" done by Akéréjọ́lá (1973, pp. 54-58), there was not a single lexical item in Ọ̀kọ that bore a one-to-one correspondence with Yorùbá. On the other hand, many of the Yorùbá names left behind by the expeditionary Yorùbá who came to Ògòrì are still being borne. Many Yorùbá names have passed on with their bearers; presently Christianity-invoked names are taking over some of these names!

Interesting and defensible as the Yorùbá descent and names may sound, language, the commonest index to a people's identity, and in this case, Yorùbá as a language or even as a dialect, is conspicuously absent as a natural medium of interpersonal communication or interaction in Ògòrì. Every Ògòrìan who has ever spoken Yorùbá in Ògòrì does so through attending primary school in Ògòrì where he or she is taught to read and write Yorùbá. This is not strange: the St. Peter's Anglican Mission is a Yorùbá-oriented mission set up to propagate Christianity using, not Ọ̀kọ, the language of Ògòrì, but Yorùbá. Thus, the Church encouraged the teaching and learning of Yorùbá in the St. Peter's School, Ògòrì, not for the sake of Yorùbá, but as a means of spreading the gospel of Jesus Christ. This was the tendency throughout all Àkókó-Gbàngìrì where different dialects of Benin or È□do are spoken (Akéréjọ́lá, 1973). For every Yorùbá name in Ògòrì, there are several indigenous Ọ̀kọ names for which there are no Yorùbá equivalent (Ajé, 2007). The Ògòrì royal crown was said to be fashioned after the Benin royalty (Ọ̀shéidu 1981), not after that of Ọ̀ọ́ní of Ifè□. Akínbìyí's father (Èyíka 2004), who must have been wearing a beaded crown before Akínbìyí disappeared along the royal corridor at Ilé Ifè□ (Akéréjọ́lá 1973). Akóládé (1986) referred to the Akínbìyí expeditionary team as "Ògòrì-Yorùbá."

It is true that there is a general veering to Yorùbá descent for Ògòrì, but such arguments have not been supported by language, the best index to a people's origin and socio-cultural practices. There is nothing amiss with being a Yorùbá. Ògòrì is like a son who is looking for his unknown father. If somebody should show up as his father, there must be very good reasons for father and son to accept each other. As a linguist, language is one cardinal criterion for accepting the Yorùbá argument. We all know that nobody born and raised in Ògòrì grows up naturally speaking Yorùbá in spite of the preponderance of Yoruba names in Ògòrì. In addition to the discussion above, there are a number of misconceptions about Ògòrì and Ọ̀kọ, the language of Ògòrì. This presentation will very briefly

address them, pose a few questions and close the issue. The misconceptions are as follows:

1. that Ọ̀kọ́ is a language that is hurriedly put together and so it is structurally deficient (Aísónì and Gabriel, 1987);

2. that Ọ̀kọ́ is not a complete language because there is no one-word lexeme to convey everything that the average Ọ̀kọ́-speaker has to say in Ọ̀kọ́ (Èyíka, 2004);

3. that Ọ̀kọ́ is a dialect, and

4. that Ọ̀kọ́ is complicated, consisting of a mixture of linguistic forms (which Ògòrì themselves call è□nà, i.e., "mixed language"), and difficult to analyse (Akéréjọ́lá, 1973, p. 54).

The Pains of Identity of a Minority Language Group

Ògòrì and her Ọ̀kọ́ are a minority in Nigeria and like all minority groups, Ògòrìans have been faced with the problem of identity. We sought to overcome this by conveniently adopting Ògòrì as our geographical natality, language and genetic/ ethnic affiliation. The only reason has been that it is Ògòrì and not Ọ̀kọ́ that was well-known to the outside world. Ọ̀kọ́, which is our identity, was in the shadows. As it is with all minority language groups, geographical location, speech form and tribe are always wrapped up in one name, so it was with Ògòrì whose name and location was Ọ̀kọ́. Ọ̀kọ́ then played a tripartite role as the God-given geographical location, language and people. Oko people refer to themselves as "Ọ̀kúró," that is, "Ọ̀kọ́ òrò," (Ọ̀kọ́ citizen or Ọ̀kọ́ person). Ọ̀kọ́ is the name our neighbours know us by. For example, to the Èbìrà, Ọ̀kọ́ is "Ùku," (place and language) and "ánúku," (Ọ̀kọ́ citizen), to Ọ̀sósọ̀ people, Ọ̀kọ́ as a place and language are covered by the term "Òko" while Ọòko, refers to Ọ̀kọ́ citizen.

Linguistic Status of Ọ̀kọ́

Referring to Ọ̀kọ́ as a language, Akéréjọ́lá (1973, p. 4) describes "Ògòrì language" as "a mixture of Àkókó-Gbàngìrì dialects and corrupt Yorùbá" and used that as a basis to conclude that "there exists some (linguistic and genetic connection between Ògòrì and Yorùbá indirectly via Àkókó-Gbàngìrì stock of Benin."

A study of the linguistics of Ọ̀kọ́ has shown that Ọ̀kọ́ is not a dialect, but a speech form with a full language status, irrespective of the population of its

speakers. The factors that determine the status of a speech community are not demographic. The status of a language and language-relatedness are determined by the degree of mutual intelligibility between them. Aside from intelligibility, which is a linguistic criterion, there are such other factors as socio-cultural practices and beliefs to be considered (Bendor-Samuel, 1982; Crozier and Blench, 1992). If speech forms of different communities are similar and members of one speech community find members of another speech community intelligible, we say that such speech communities speak the same language. If there are variants of the same words and such variants do not interfere with intelligibility, we say that such speech communities are dialects or variants of each other or dialects of the same parent language. It is likely that speakers of such dialects would have a degree of common history, socio-cultural beliefs and practices, including a common-place origin. So far, no known speech community, not especially Yorùbá that Ògòrì supposedly apes, has such degree of mutual intelligibility. The only speech community known to have met the criteria above are the speakers of the Ó□sányè□n dialect of Ọ̀kọ̀ in Mágóngó.

The minority status of Ọ̀kọ̀ made it difficult for linguists to initially classify Ọ̀kọ̀. It is, for example, an isolate among the Àkókó cluster of languages (Hansford and Hansford, 1976). Ọ̀kọ̀ was initially classified as a full-fledged language under Kwa sub-family language group. Oko is currently internationally recognized as a full-fledged language classified as an independent node under Benue-Congo (Crozier and Blench, 1994). By independent node is meant that Ọ̀kọ̀ has no parent language and shares no dialectal status with any other speech form.

Ọ̀kọ̀ is the language and genetic affiliation, or ethnic group or tribe. Ògòrì is where Ọ̀kọ̀ and its speakers are geographically located. Ògòrì is the name you will find on a map of Nigeria.

Language is not a mechanical contraption, or a concatenation of bits and pieces put together through a process of assembling for trial and error and then dismantled for a repeat process until success is attained. The important thing is this, whether it is hurriedly put together, or mixed or incomplete, Ọ̀kọ̀ has served from time immemorial the communicative function or needs of ọ̀kúró. Ọ̀kọ̀ is a full language with defined linguistic structure; it has phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax and the necessary lexicon for meaning relationships. È□nà

can be created from any natural language by its speakers and used strictly by two or more speakers who can decipher the "structure." In Ọkọ, as soon as anybody is speaking in non-intelligible code, the person is passed off as speaking è□nà. By the Ọkọ definition, è□nà is a code used between two or more people for restricted interpersonal communication. Even by Yorùbá definition, è□nà is a restricted code for interpersonal communication. You have to learn the morphology of coding in order to speak è□nà. If Ọkọ is ever seen as mixed, it can only mean that Ọkọ has loaned many words from other languages. The loaning does not change it as a language. It has only enriched its vocabulary, the way English has and is still doing including borrowing even from Háúsá. So, the more Ọkọ is able to loan from neighbouring languages, the better a language it becomes.

A Historiolinguistic View of the Origin of Ògòrì

The historiolinguistic view attempts to provide a historical and linguistic perspective to the question of historical, linguistic and socio-cultural identity of Ọkọ people.

Minority Ògòrì and her language naturally belong to the socio-cultural terrain or the ecological zone of Àkókó-Gbàngìrì where, prior to colonia administration in Nigeria, it was the dominant speech form in the community inspite of it being a linguistic isolate, a non-È□do speaking member of Àkókó-Gbàngìrì (Akéréjọlá, 1973; Àkpáta, 1986; and Ajé, 2007). Studies have shown that Ọkọ and Ògòrì are an Àkókó isolate despite their geo-political terrain (Askaris, 1970; Akéréjọlá, 1973; Jungraithmayr, 1970). Ògòrì and her Ọkọ are not alone in this in Kogí state. We have, for example, Àyère and Ádúgẹ speakers who naturally speak Yorùbá, but with Àyère and Ádúgẹ respectively, as first languages. Àyère and Ádúgẹ speakers do stand in a sharp contrast to the Ọkọ speaker in Ògòrì who must go to school in Ògòrì to learn to speak, read and write Yorùbá. This often leads the non-Ọkọ speaker unfamiliar with the Ògòrì-Ọkọ terrain to believe that the Ọkọ speaker is a natural bilingual in Ọkọ and Yorùbá

The Yorùbá Factor

The historiolinguistic perspective proposes that there were aborigines inhabiting the geo-political expanse occupied by the Ọkọ-speaking people of Àkókó-Gbàngìrì wherever that expanse of land might be located. These aborigines spoke a language known as Ọkọ, and called themselves Ọkuró.

Incidentally, the use of the date 1000 AD as the meaningful date for recorded African history places so much limitation on us that we are hardly sure

of what happened before that time. Àkpáta (1986), for example, used that date as a benchmark for *óviyọ̀sésẹ* in Ògòrì. For example, nobody has any idea of the date of Karabọmè□'s rule (Èyíka, 2004). The earliest recorded historical fact on Ògòrì history is 1865, the year of the flight of the Ògòrì to Òkèjè□bú, (Akéréjọlá, 1973, p. 141). If we take the date 1000 AD as the date for Africa's recorded history, then we will assume that approximate date to coincide to about 1,500 years as the period of expeditionary expansion of the Ọ̀yó Empire, a time to locate the arrival of Akínbìyí and his expeditionary team among the Ọ̀kọ people. This period should correspond well to the expansion of the Ọ̀yó kingdom when it overflowed the entire south-western zone of Nigeria crossing the Niger into the present south-south geo-political zone of Nigeria and westward into Dahomey, Togo and beyond (on the coast of the West African sub-continent) and to the north above the west and east of the confluence of the Niger River. So, when we talk of Yorùbá among the Àkókó-Gbàngìrì via the Benin route, the Ọ̀kọ-speaking people are naturally part of this overflow of the great Ọ̀yó Empire which, like a great river in flood, overran the aborigines of Àkókó-Gbàngìrì communities such as "Ójìràmì, Ọ̀jàh, Ọ̀sósọ̀, Ògùgù, Màkeke, Ìmọ̀ga, Úgbósì, Íkíràn, Ékòh, Sómoríkà, Únọmọ, Oshì, Issásarọ̀, Ìkpèshì, and Ọ̀gbe□" (Akéréjọlá, 1973, pp. 3 and 4). Akínbìyí led the team that overran Ọ̀kọ and Ògòrì. When the Yorùbá team arrived, they came with their names, culture and language. The collapse of the Ọ̀yó kingdom equally saw the departure of the Yorùbá, leaving behind their names, such cultural practices as Ògún worship, such military titles as Bálógun, and the ancient Yorùbá names that characterized our ancient Ògòrì people.

Historiolinguistics does not deny the presence of Yorùbá in Ògòrì; otherwise we will have no explanation for the abundance of Yorùbá names in Ògòrì. On the converse, we cannot be said to have descended from the Yorùbá; otherwise we should not have ancient Ọ̀kọ names that existed along with Yorùbá names. The submission of historiolinguistics is that the Yorùbás came to meet the Ọ̀kọ aborigines in their natural terrain as the Ọ̀yó Empire was expanding and that as the empire collapsed, they left behind aspects of their culture while the ọ̀kúró retained their language.

Language and Interactional Efficiency

The observation that Ọ̀kọ is an incomplete language does not make it any less efficient than any language that may be considered "complete." Akéréjọlá (1973,

p. 54) observes that Ọ̀kọ is a mixture of Àkókó- Gbàngìrì dialects "...a mixture of linguistic forms which Ògòrì themselves call è□nà, mixed language." Aísónì and Gabriel (1987) see Ọ̀kọ as a mechanical contraption that lacked the master touch. They said Ọ̀kọ "is (a) language that is hurriedly put together." Eyíka (2002) feels that Ọ̀kọ is not a complete language because Ọ̀kọ does not have a word for everything under the sun!

A language is as efficient and sufficient as its socio-cultural milieu. The status and efficiency of a language are determined by its ability to meet the communicative needs of its speakers in its natural environment. No single language in the world has all the lexicons it requires to communicate in its immediate natural environment. To be efficient, a language must borrow vocabulary items from other languages to increase and make its own fuller, better, and more efficient for communication. A language as inwardly conservative as Ọ̀kọ will never develop its vocabulary beyond its immediate confines unless it is ready to borrow from other languages. The problem with the stagnant nature of Ọ̀kọ lexicon or vocabulary is that Ọ̀kọ speakers are too purist-oriented to borrow from surrounding speech communities! A non-borrowing language is a lazy language; it becomes famished and faces the possibility of linguisticide, i.e., language death. Ọ̀kọ has no option but to borrow and domesticate the vocabulary of neighbouring languages to be "complete," and grow to meet the demands for today's global ability and desire to communicate. A language that is able to borrow and accommodate non-native words to enrich its own is a growing language, a more "complete" language and a more efficient language. English vocabulary has grown to be what it is today because of its huge capacity to borrow and accommodate words from other languages. English probably has more loan words than any other language in the world. To grow to be "complete", "efficient" and be "slowly and carefully put together" Ọ̀kọ must be prepared to borrow from its linguistic neighbours (Ososọ̀, Èbìrà, Ọ̀kpámerì, Yoruba, Igálà, Núpé and Bàssà Ngẹ), English and any language whatsoever whose lexicon unambiguously assists Ọ̀kọ to express native and foreign concepts, especially in this age of globalisation.

In conclusion, let it be emphasized that a "complete" language is that which enables its speakers to mutually and intelligibly communicate with one another; the words or lexemes that facilitate intelligible communication do not all have to be words from the language in question. In fact, the more any language is able to borrow from other languages, the better it is for the language. Ọ̀kọ, like all human languages, is a complete language and it is encouraged to borrow, adopt and adapt more non-Ọ̀kọ items to enhance her stock of vocabulary.

Orthography as the Way Forward

This paper has emphasised the minority nature of Oko. While this may be true, Ọkọ has acquired a cosmopolitan outlook, having a taste of everything that one would wish for in a speech community: schools to develop the mind (primary and post primary schools, a University Study Centre), a commercial bank, a network of roads, electricity, and a government-owned hospital, all within Ògòrì. Politically, Ògòrì is in partnership with Mágóngò as a Local Government Council.

The Ògòrì/Mágóngò Local Government is an Anglican Diocesan. A community that has a laureate of academics, a think-tank league of professors, monitoring the Ògòrì state of affairs however cannot cry *Uhuru* until it has developed an official and harmonized orthography for mother-tongue literacy in Ògòrì, a project that the Ògòrì Descendants Union (ODU) has been struggling with since 1981 without anything to show for it. We have literature on some of the attempts made at developing the Ọkọ orthography: (Ajé, 1982; Adégbìjà, 1984; Aísónì and Gabriel, 1878; Adégbìjà and Ajé, 1989; Adégbìjà, 1994). Some of these are listed in the references.

The way forward now is for this conference to inaugurate Oko Orthography Committee to develop Oko orthography for Ògòrì, to consolidate God's goodness to Ògòrì in the past one hundred years, in order to facilitate literacy in Oko. The orthography should be ready for inauguration as Ògòrì marks in 2013 one hundred years of Christianity and education in Ògòrì.

Let me assure this conference that as at today, there is much accumulation of literature on the linguistics of Ọkọ that if the committee is inaugurated, Ọkọ orthography can emerge in the shortest time possible. The resources we need to do this are available among Ògòrìans in here and out there.

The following corporate and individual stake-holders may be listed:

1. The Church has to be indigenized linguistically to make Ògòrìans able to read the Bible in Ọkọ, sing church hymns and chant the Psalms in Ọkọ

2. The Institute of Linguistics, Ògòrì, which is doing a beautiful job in Ọkọ linguistics.

3. The Ògòrì/Mágóngò Local Government education department/council.

4. Individuals who have worked on Ọkọ linguistics or have either written *on* or *in* Ọkọ. I know the following should be to be on the list:

- Messrs Aísónì and Gabriel, the first authors to have jointly published *Ògòrì Alphabet* in 1987;
- The Rev. Pastor Ẹbénrubo Okùnólá who has done the Ọkọ version of *St. John's* Gospel of the New Testament of the Bible: *Épẹnpánnòbòrò Akó Ẹjóónú Siye Wọréyánà.*
- Mr. Gideon Èyíka, author of *The Culture and Language of Ògòrì People.*
- Chief Timothy O. Àlàbí who has authored two prose works and a collection of poems in Ọkọ.
- Pastor and Pa. Gabriel Okí Olúfémi, for his age, his proficiency in Ọkọ.
- And all other corporate bodies and individuals who may not be reflected in this stake-holders' list.

Suggested Terms of Reference

- To produce for Ògòrì a prototype Ọkọ orthography which will in the shortest time possible be used to teach literacy in Ọkọ;
- To develop along with it prototype Ọkọ primers and numerals for teaching in primary schools in Ogòrì;
- To revive the non-formal adult literacy classes with Ọkọ as one of the languages to be taught;
- To put in place, through the ODU and the Local Government Education Council, a programme to start preparing teachers to learn Ọkọ to be able to teach it in primary schools in Ògòrì and Ọkọ as one of the subjects to be taught, etc.

The Committee should be headed or chaired by a linguist.

Potentials of Ọkọ Orthography

There is a lot for us as a community to gain from the development of Ọ̀kọ orthography. Basically, it implies that we will in the very near future begin to read and write Ọ̀kọ just as we speak it. Specifically, we will be able to document, in our tongue, our history, past and contemporary, while individuals who are literate in Ọ̀kọ can keep their family history in permanent records in Ọ̀kọ. At the social and cultural levels, we can begin to code all our social entertainment songs such as *è□rè□gbà* songs, *Óvìòyósẹ̀sẹ̀* songs, *áyìgo* dance songs, *éwérè*, *è□jàbi* songs, *íyárẹ̀sè□n* (music by the women-folk), etc.; all can be coded in Ọ̀kọ for posterity.

Orthography will be our collective realisation in a permanent way, an almost one century long yearning for the political recognition of the social, cultural and linguistic distinctiveness that the colonial administration saw in us, and without our asking granted the Ọ̀kọ-speech community a district status in Ìgbìrrà Native Authority in 1918 and which the Federal Government recognized by granting the Ọ̀kọ-speech district a Local Government status in 1991.

We will in turn be seen as assisting the Federal Government in her desire to reduce Nigerian languages to writing and fulfilling Nigeria's millennial goals. We look forward to this Conference ensuring that Ọ̀kọ orthography is commissioned in 2013.

References

Ajé, Solomon Ade 2007. The Historical Setting of Yorùbá in Ògòrì: A Sociolinguistic Perspective. *Alóre*. Vol. 17. pp. 125-132

Aje, S.A. 2010. A Study of Common Lexemes in Ọkọ and Ọsósọ̀. *Ede: A Journal of Linguistics, Language and Culture.*

Akéréjọlá, Bawa Gab. 1973. *The History of Ògòrì.* Occasional Publication No 22. Institute of African Studies. Ìbàdàn-Nigeria: University of Ibadan.

Akéréjọlá, Gabriel Bawa. 1973. *The History of Ògòrì*. Ìbàdàn: Institute of African Studies Occasional Publications, University of Ìbàdàn.

Akóládé, Bernard 1986. *The History of Ògòrì-Yorùbá.*

Àkpáta, Zacchaeus 1986. *Óvia-òsẹsẹ* Óvia Ọ̀sésẹ in Ògòrì: Its Origin, Growth and Development. *Óvia Festival Digest* Proceedings on the First National Seminar on Ògòrì. Óvia Ọ̀sésẹ. Ilọrin. Aísónì Printers. pp. 10-15

Askari, Kpaf 1967. Ògòrì: the Sociology of an Àkókó Village. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University of London.

Bendor-Samuel, John 1982. "Languages." Barbour, Oguntoyinbo (incomplete).

Onyemelukwe and Nwafor (eds.) 1982. *Nigeria in Maps*. London: Hodder and Stoughton. pp. 46-49

Crozier, D. H. and Blench, R. M. (eds.) 1992. *An Index of Nigerian Languages*. Dallas-Texas. Summer Institute of Linguistics Inc.

Èyíka, Gideon B. M. 2004. *The Language and Culture of Ògòrì Peo*ple. Ògòrì-Nigeria: Paul Èyíka Publication.

Jungraithymayr, H. 1970. Eine Worliste Des Ọkọ Spache Von Ògòrì Nigeria. *Small Languages of the Àkókó Area*. 3 Stein. Ìbàdàn.

Ọshéidu, A. B. 1982. *Historical Facts about Ògòrì.* Ilorin-Nigeria: Government Press.

4

Womanhood and *Virgo Intacta*: Form and Aesthetic Reconstruction in *Ovia-Osese* Performance

SUNDAY ENESSI ODODO
Department of Theatre Arts
University of Maiduguri, Maiduguri.

Introduction

In Africa, womanhood is essentially adored and revered. It is adored because of the positive values it projects and revered for its esoteric energy that transcends ordinary comprehension.[1] The significant aspect of these positive values, which is our concern in this paper, is the understanding that the female body, as a procreative centre, is a nurturing receptacle for new life and that it goes through a lot of transformation and pains to gain life. It is for this reason that in most cultures across Africa, steps are taken to engender social control to safeguard this procreative source that is an agency of continuity of the human race. In Nigeria for instance, many examples abound and they come with different names such as 'coming of age', 'rite of passage from teenage to adulthood; from adolescent/girlhood to womanhood,' 'outing ceremony from the fattening room', 'maiden dance', 'coming-to-meet', etc. In Cross River State, *Mbopo* outing ceremony for girls from the fattening room exists, *Ejiji* coming of age ceremony is to be found amongst the Ikwere of River State and the *Igogo* festival of Owo in Ondo State. *Nkpu* ceremony at Awka, *Iria* ceremony of the Kalabari and the Benin's *Iovbode* ceremony are other examples (Negri, 1976:2,17,62-67).

From one culture to another in Nigeria, similar rites exist in different modes. Among the Ebira for instance, there is no elaborate concept of coming-of-age ceremony for adolescents, but the idea is an aesthetic sculptural motif found prevalent in the traditional stools of traditional titleholders, lineage heads and elders in the land (Picton, 1991:40-41, 44). The belief of the Ebira in the sanctity and purity of womanhood and their attitude to promiscuity is expressed in *Isihu*

(rite for growth) or the *Ekehi'sihu* (growth payment; in other words 'virginity fee') which is demanded from a groom who meets his bride a virgin and deflowers her during their wedding ceremony.[2] It is a corporate shame for a family whose daughter failed the virginity test this way and also an embarrassment for the groom. Apart from losing the virginity fees, the added implication is that prospective suitors shall avoid other maidens from this household for fear of similar occurrence, thereby stigmatising and signposting the family and relatives as people of easy virtue and cheap moral values. For these reasons, almost every parent and even the young girls themselves consciously maintain a state of *Virgo Intacta* before marriage, knowing the enormity of the humiliating stigma involved.

The cardinal focus of these various ceremonial practices is to ensure the sanctity, purity and chastity of womanhood, ethics and moral alertness, endurance, courage and thorough grounding in home management, philosophy and worldview of the society before legal betrothal into marriage. Sofola (1987:25) finds equivalence for this African concept of rite of passage in the European debutante rite of passage. She reasons that:

> It is the whole complex within this stage of transition that the Europeans developed into what we now know as formal education from Europe. It should also be observed that its celebrative passing-out ritual is what is performed at convocation ceremonies at the institutions of higher learning today, though with greater celebrative fanfare…(sic).

Unfortunately, it is this formal education that formed the arrowhead of the factors that forced the African concept of rite of passage to yield ground for reformation while some of the ceremonies have been completely eroded. The creative tension that Western civilisation has imposed on the celebrative format of these ceremonies is what this essay examines, using the *Ovia-Osese* of the Ogori in Kogi State, Nigeria.

Origin of *Ovia-Osese*

The people of Ogori observe and celebrate the *Ovia-Osese* maiden dance ritual, a practice that is also prevalent among the Akoko-Edo people who are next-door neighbours to the Ogori. As a language, it is among the three unclassified

languages among the Niger Congo languages (Hansford, Bendor-Samuel and Stanford, 1976: Fig. 5).[3] The land is about five kilometres at the shortest point from the border line between Kogi and Edo States. According to colonial records, the town is located at the intersecting point of longitude $6^0$13E and latitude $7^0$27'N on the map of Nigeria and C.R. Nivea's 1925 map of Kabba province, Northern Nigeria. The town is bounded by Ebiraland (Igbirra division) to the South–West corner (Apata, 1975:1), a land in Kogi State which Ogori was administratively attached until the creation of Ogori-Mangogo Local Government Area in 1993.

Many origin traditions of *Ovia-Osese* exist and therefore locating the actual source has become largely speculative. One origin story has it that the rite of passage ceremony began as a celebrative response of a woman to mark the pronouncement of the oracle confirming her daughter a virgin, earlier thought wayward. Another position is based on the theory that Ogori, as part of Akoko-Gbangiri clan, must have collectively practised *Ovia-Osese* together before their detachment in 1918, as recorded by Akerejola (1973:71). Culture flux arising from neighbourhoods, social relations, trade and dispersals is yet another view, this is linked to similar practices in Owo, Benin and among the Ibibios. Examples of coming-of-age practices in these lands have already been cited above. Ogori scholars have actually placed the origin date at 1927 (Sofola, 1987:25) which probably refers to the modern consciousness of *Ovia-Osese* practice because if actually the people detached from Akoko-Gbangiri clan in 1918, what then happened to *Ovia-Osese* between then and 1927? This is a question beyond this performative discourse, but which historians must resolve.

The Performance Form of *Ovia-Osese*

Ovia-Osese is a rite of passage event designed as an educational bridge that Ogori female adolescents must cross before adulthood. It is a maiden ceremony that openly extols the virtues of womanhood while celebrating the purity, chastity, undefiled, untainted, untouched and unexploited physical and emotional conditions of young girls of marriageable age. The nude display of the essential biological features that can attest to a woman's gynaecological conditions is for communal affirmation and approval without any iota of doubt, and not an "uncivilized display of nudity" as often misconstrued (*Nigerian Herald*, 1974:6). This very act further reinforces in the consciousness of prospective initiates that there is no hiding place and no cutting of corners to transit into adulthood. Hence, the event serves as a vital social check on sexual promiscuity and the abuse of the female body before marriage. It is also a reaffirmation of the collective faith of a

people in a tradition designed to protect the female gender, the veritable source of life, sustenance and race continuity. One-time traditional head of Ogori and a historian, the late Gab Bawa Akerejola, Eminefo III, Ologori of Ogori, captures the essence of *Ovia-Osese* (initially known as Oke festival) and the performance mould this way:

> As for womenfolk, when she attains the age of puberty at 15 to 16 years, her parents signify this by going out to the market and public places with songs and dances, firing of guns and scattering, in Oke festival, of money. This is only the beginning of the festival. She has to undergo several other ceremonies during the year, including the tattoo of the belly, face and back (shoulders), reshaping of her teeth and remaining indoors throughout the year. She could be taken to her husband after undergoing several disciplinary measures during Oke festival. This varies from village to village in Akoko. Parts of these measures are to ascertain whether the would-bride (sic) had yielded to the temptations of young men and therefore been defiled, etc. (Akerejola, 1973:16).

In the same work, Akerejola (1973:32) describes Oke festival as as an event meant for "girls in particular…who attain the age of puberty (14-17 years of age)" who have now "reached the stage of becoming housewives the following one or two years." This claim negates the earlier puberty age put at 15-16, which probably suggests flexibility in the age consideration of those eligible to participate in the initiation rites. Perhaps physical attributes and maturity of mind of the prospective initiates could have been part of the determining factors that sometimes influenced less emphasis on age. However, the overriding import of Akerejola's latter submission is that maidens go into marriage one or two years after performing the rites. This is understandable given the fact that in the olden days, early marriage was in vogue and it was also an extension of the *Ovia* exercise. This can be interpreted to mean that going through the rite of passage is not a licence to sexual abuse before marriage. Unfortunately, the current practice permits girls less than 14 years old with no corresponding physical attributes of womanhood, to undergo the *Ovia-Osese* experience and end up not fully comprehending the essence. It is also now done by proxy with the absence of some of the initiates. Young girls who have committed serious moral and sexual atrocities will certainly find the latter option very attractive. This crucial deviation from the original form is now taken as licence by many parents to initiate their

daughters early enough when their features of womanhood are yet to develop and thus not attractive enough to men who may engage them in sexual temptation. Parents are less concerned about their moral conduct thereafter. This notion has also eroded the value of self-restraint and sexual discipline the *Ovia* concept seeks to engender. For young girls now, the successful performance of *Ovia-Osese* is the attainment of unlimited freedom to vigorously explore the sexual world before wedlock.

Ovia-Osese is not an enactment of history or story but an expression of a people's desire for sane and healthy humanity. Organised purely under the observances of rites and festive conditions, the event is not associated with frivolity and paideia. As a theatre performance, it is not a drama but a festival *as drama*. It is not mimetic or representational of fictional creation. It is an autonomous form of dramatic rendering, which is a "generous combination of high seriousness, religious energy and fun" (Echeruo, 1994:145). This, in our view, is the general nature of African festivals which therefore calls for urgent reappraisals of how African festivals are analysed as drama, forcing parallels between African performance idiom and that of the West. The performance mechanics and the underlining values of African festivals have the capacity to sustain their own uniqueness as theatre pieces. Projecting this uniqueness as part of world theatre culture should engage more scholarly and performative attention rather than trying to lean on Western canons to validate the African theatre.

Taken in its ethnographic past, the performance form of *Ovia-Osese* festival can be structured into three movements:

Movement One: Iviasi

The main performance characters involved in this movement are Iyaodina (chief and head of the female gender in Ogori), her council of female chiefs and opinion leaders, and Asigiri (*Ivia-Isiya* oracle diviner). Iyaodina by her position is the head of a formal school (usually situated in her house) for training young maidens. Parents on behalf of their children apply to this school for admission to undergo the *Ovia-Osese* ritual process. Iyaodina and her council of chiefs consider each application before applicants are either offered or denied admission. Every applicant must be an indigene of Ogori either through paternal or maternal parentage. A key factor in the screening process for eligibility for admission into the Maiden School is the consultation with *Ivia-Isiya*. The

services of Asigiri, the diviner, is engaged to consult the oracle (*Ivia-Isiya*) to determine the following on each candidate:

i. Peep into the destiny of each candidate and reveal what the future holds for her. This process offers opportunity for corrective alteration where critical obstacles are identified which may stand between a candidate and a blissful existence.

ii. To affirm the sexual virtue of each candidate. Anyone not found intact as a virgin was not only disqualified but also punished either by death or banishment from the land. The effect of this negative discovery was not only a reflection of the immoral configuration of the candidate but also unleashed a heap of social stigma on her family. Other candidates that passed the *Ivia-Isiya* test are consequently admitted into the Maiden School, and their parents are expectedly extremely happy, especially their mothers. It is only after this *Ivia-Isiya Virgo Intacta* test that *Iyaodina* enrolls the successful candidates into the school.

However, the possibility that some maidens actually failed the tests in the past and faced either death or banishment is very remote as most of the accounts on *Ovia* are silent on this. It can be inferred therefore that, generally, almost everyone that applied passed the test, with a few exceptions; which further suggests high student enrollment every year (being a communal performance experience). Sofola (1987:27) puts the range of graduates at "50 – 135". Given the present rapid population growth in Nigeria and the leverage of performing the ritual by proxy the figures of graduates must have more than doubled to something like 180 – 300.[4]

It should be stated that *Ivia-Isiya* (Iviysiya) is a distinct performance on its own but integrated with the *Ovia* ritual process. Akerejola (1973:31-37) actually categorised it as one of the festivals celebrated in Ogori. This suggests that some other sub-festivals exist as part of the ritual process that culminates in a grand finale as *Ovia-Osese*. Also, given the fact that the training period before this grand finale took three years, activities involved in the main festival must have therefore been spaced out as distinct performance structures.

Movement Two: *Opa-Obubwe*

This is the camping and training period for the enrolled maidens in the school; it is located in *Iyaodina*'s compound. The training period spanned three *Ukpe* festivals which Akerejola (1973:31) informs is "the beginning of Ogori calender year" (that is three years earlier mentioned).[5] The *Iyaodina*, her chiefs and any other co-opted persons commence the training of the maidens into well-groomed educated women/adults. The training syllabus covered philosophy, vocational knowledge, special career interests like medicine, creative arts, etc., matrimony and love ethics, home economics and management, child-care and motherhood.[6] The grooming period was completed with the making and application of indigenous cosmetics for beautification. These generally included *iburu* (camwood) and *ikokori* (ink for body tattooing: the face, shoulders, stomach and back of an *Ovia* maiden). Other beautification processes and items include the reshaping of the maiden's teeth, the use of the nickel bangles made of ivory and beads (*odolo*, *ebele* and *isu* beads). The *odolo* beads were arranged in wide layers around the loins of the maiden as cover. This appears to be the only form of costume accessories worn at the time. The *ebele* and *isu* were used to decorate the *Ovia*'s hair and styled into the *ogogorogo* type.[7] Actually, "the last three months of the training period was devoted to grooming the maiden for her role in life as a woman, a wife and a mother" (Sofola, 1987:29). It must be added that the training and ritual process of *Ovia-Osese* did not include circumcision or incision. There was no form of virginal mutilation involved.

Movement Three*: Oke*

Activities that would culminate in the passing-out of the graduates were mostly concentrated upon at this stage. These include the teaching of music (lyrics, songs and instrumentation) in which the history, philosophy and worldview of Ogori people are encoded. Also emphasised are dance steps and their meanings, chants and poetry of the community which elevate womanhood.[8] It is from this repertoire that songs, chants and dances were selected for the grand finale (*Oke*). This stage also witnessed series of assignments and tests to evaluate how much the maidens had learnt from the *Ovia* training programme; *Iyaodina* also dished out last-minute instructions regarding the entire programme and post-*Ovia* moral bearing of the candidates; then a technical and dress rehearsal took place a night to the festival proper. This took place at *oyara* (arena), the venue designated for the festival. It was here that all the maidens arrived and engaged in the ritual dance of transition from adolescence to womanhood, in innocence and purity, on the D-day. Sofola (1987:30) captures this ritual high point this way:

> The maidens, in those days, processed semi-nude to display health, beauty of pure womanhood, their adornment in beads, delicate body tattooing, and enhanced skin tone with camwood. Their coiffeur was said to be exquisite. Proud parents and relatives would flutter in utter delight and joy as festivities mounted from the eve of the graduation day to the day after passing-out ceremonies.[9]

Form and Aesthetic Reconstruction

As is the case with the traditions and cultures of many African societies, *Ovia-Osese* is rapidly being divested of its meaning and essence. In its present form, the event emphasizes entertainment more than observances of rites directed toward the sanctity of womanhood. Western civilization, education, technological revolution, and the presence of Christianity and Islam in Ogori-land and their numerous adherents are the often-cited reasons for this rapid decay in the original performance and functional concept of the festival.

We should however remind ourselves that culture is dynamic. It is not static and does not remain fossilized in time. It is perceptive to the currents of change that manifest in the society. To survive and fit into the ever-changing social order, it has to continuously re-invent itself as Wagner (1981:53) posits. Of necessity, culture borrows and appropriates from other cultures that come in contact with it to assume a new form as either a hybrid or a syncretic typology. In this new form, how much of the original values can the culture still transmit? The answer to this crucial question shall become apparent as we consider the form and aesthetic reconstruction in *Ovia-Osese* as foisted on it by culture contacts and modernism.

On a general note, the following conceptual changes have occurred in *Ovia-Osese* in order to accommodate the tension and exigencies of modernism. Age qualification for participation originally put at between 14 and 17 scarcely has any limitation anymore as girls of nine and ladies of 21 are now admitted to participate; the roles of *Asigiri* and *Ivia-Isiya* have been eroded and replaced with fasting and prayers (the *Virgo Intacta* of participants is now questionable); the compulsion of personal participatory presence has been relaxed to accommodate participation by proxy (only names and personal data are required for this purpose); training period gradually reduced from three years to three months and now three days with concentration on songs and dance mainly for the *Oke* at

Oyara (no more dress and technical rehearsals also); *Oyara* is also now restricted to the Town Hall instead of an open arena, thereby constricting the flamboyance and free expressiveness of African performance idiom; the singing and dancing procession of old women from one *Ovia*'s house to the other is now organized according to age groups of mothers (only members of such groups are visited); celebration once handled by local musicians with indigenous instrument is now thrown wide open to incorporate foreign musicians with hi-tech equipment; locally brewed drinks are now overshadowed by modern spirit, liquor and beer like *Gulder, Guinness, Star,* etc.; thanksgiving services on Sunday and on Friday for Christian and Muslim *Ovias* (maidens), respectively, are now organized after the festival (this has also been turned into an avenue of generating money for these places of worship); what was essentially a communal affair now attracts gate takings from audience, participants and spectators alike; certificates of participation are also now issued in place of moral self identity, etc.

On the artistic plane, aesthetic reconstruction is quite obvious in the various processional performances, dance performance design, costume, accessories and make-up, music and songs.

Processional Performances

Iyaresen – On the morning of the eve of *Ovia-Osese* proper, mothers of *Ovias* dance round the town with individual group members singing in honour of the maidens and their parents. A common song that accompanies the processional dance is:

(i) *Ovia ka mase*
Ima soreka
Ovia ka mase ro

Translation
I'm performing my child's *Ovia*
Not somebody else's child
I'm indeed performing my child's *Ovia*.

Thereafter, they retire to the celebrant's home to wine, and din, and also to receive gifts of money.

Eregba – During the evening of the same day the *Ovia*'s parents dance with the father's age group while praise-songs are also rendered in their honour. This event can sometimes last till dawn.

If the maiden happens to be the first offspring of a family, at the dawn of the *Ovia-Osese* day, hunters assemble round the house of such maiden and shoot three times into the air. This is another honorific rite for the girl and her parents.

Oke – For the *Ovia-Osese* proper there is another procession into the *Oyara* (arena) involving all the participating maidens for the ritual dance of transition into adulthood. They file out accompanied by *Iyaodina* and *Okitoroko* players from a structure specifically constructed at the arena to serve as their dressing room and backstage. Before this appearance, the performance form has been reconstructed to accommodate an opening glee by the Ogori Women Association which Sofola (1987:32) refers to as Alumnae Association of *Ovia-Osese* School for Maidens. This inclusion is for pure aesthetic enhancement of the festival. Also, being a very strong organisation in Ogori it is as well that they have a role in the most important ritual process relating to womanhood in the land. Otherwise their relevance in the performance design is not apparent.

Dance Performance Design

The major point of structural and aesthetic reconstruction to note here is the introduction of *Ivia Egben* (maidens' children). These are little girls of about seven to ten years old, whose *Virgo Intacta* is hardly questionable. They usually perform first the ritual dance of chastity at the centre of the arena before the real maidens. This is probably reconstructed to capture the core essence of the event (chastity) which many of the maidens may have lost. It is this reconstruction that clears and cleanses the ritual space of any adverse effect on the defiled maiden-participants. With this, the event is refocused with its original values and authenticity. After the *Ivia Egben* cleansing rite, the maidens now file out to perform the same ritual dance with more vigour and colour. It is a circular dance that emphasizes feminity, grace and elegance.

The dance entertainment performance of the Kogi State Council for Arts and Culture is also a modern inclusion to serve as a teaser to the main

performance. It has no bearing with *Ovia-Osese*, but is essentially introduced to charge the festive environment.

Costume, Accessories and Make-Up

These are areas in which *Ovia-Osese* has witnessed dynamic transformation and aesthetic reconstruction. From mere beads as costume accessories (to cover the genital parts while the maidens' trunks are left bare), exotic fabrics as costume have been introduced. Costuming has moved from semi-nudity to vital concealment. Ogori traditional attires like *esa owuwo* (hand-woven special type of *aso'ke*) are now donned full length from the bust line down beyond the knees, with modern shoes, bags and jewelleries to match. Significant emphasis is still placed on coral beads. Apart from the initial *odolo*, *isu* and *ebele* beads, new forms have been introduced to complement the limited presence of these old types. Some of the new types include *egueyin egbolo, asasa and ofun*. It is possible to conceive the present concealment of female physiognomy as an acceptance of pre-modern deficiencies in culture, but the change is more of cultural reaction to other cultures and widely accepted norms of feminine decency rather than primitiveness.

Make-up has also assumed new dimension. Weaving of the traditional *ogogorogo* hairstyle has largely been replaced with perming, jerry curls, fixing of weave-on, etc. Body toning with camwood and other traditional make-up for body adornment and decoration have been somewhat abandoned for modern cosmetics to enhance their beauty and physical attributes. Only the *ivia egben* (maidens' children) still adorn themselves with *iburu* (camwood), *opereto* and the three original beads. Clothing in the festival has also assumed competitive dimension as parents see this as an opportunity for wealth display. This is one way in which *Ovia-Osese* has become an exhibitionist funfair.

Music and Songs

Music and songs sustain the general performance design of this festival. The ritual import of these is located in the key and sole musical instrument called o*kitoroko*.[10] Played only by women on this occasion; it accompanies the entrance song of the maidens into the performance arena and ceases to accompany other maiden (*Ovia*) songs to be rendered here. No other instrument is played. It seems to be a metaphorical statement on having the event with just God's given natural attributes – the human body in its pure state. *Oke eguru* (Oke songs) are the *Ovia-Osese* songs that actually symbolise the successful completion of the initiation

rites; ushering maidens into womanhood. According to Akerejola (1973:33),"the songs are all pregnant with meaning which are very historical, depicting various stages of development". One of such songs recorded by Sofola (1987:33) reads:

(ii) We have come of age,
We have come of age,
Let all, let all our age-mates,
Get their maiden bodies dressed,
We have come of age;

Put on the black 'IKOKORI' stripes
Put on the red 'IBURU' powder,
Put on, round the waist,
Your 'EBELE' of pride because,
We have come of age;

Can't you hear the 'EWERE RO'
Chanting the praises of our ancestors?
Can't you see mother and father,
Leading the 'IVIA EGBEN' and others,
All hurrying towards 'OYARA' with gladdened hearts?

Can't you see and feel the rising breeze,
Of the great 'OMONEYEN' and the 'AGADA' hills,
Give their utmost and everlasting support?
Our fore-fathers are all awake to the 'OKE'
For we have come of age.

This song essentially manifests the essence of the festival while stating the ritual accessories involved in the performance. Some of the obvious characteristics of *Ovia-Osese* songs are that the songs most times end with "e" sound ("aye", "eeee", "eh") and also often patterned into overlapping call-and-response style, with very short lines. This format makes audience participation in the performance very effective as the

Chorus:	*Awa mo note lofele*
Lead:	*Awa mo note lote*
Chorus:	*Awigi loye roye ro*
Lead:	*Ona mopa mide*
Chorus:	*Ona me lomide*
Lead:	*Asukuru re mi re*
Chorus:	*Aso gbodo re mi remi*
Lead:	*Egberuwa me joke*
Chorus:	*Ogberuwa me joke*
Lead:	*Osibu soke se ma*
Chorus:	*Osibu so gbafa*
Lead:	*Ewuru udi ewure*
Chorus:	*Ewuru asa ewure*

Translation

Lead:	Mother went in search of ornament
	In order to rescue us
	Got stuck at Ogido river
	She could not cross Ogido river
	Kindly release her, goddess of the river
	Show kindness so that we can celebrate.
Chorus:	Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee 2x
Lead:	She wandered and wandered
	She wandered and wandered
	Her mission was to trade and not to steal
	This is the earnest plea of a motherless child
Chorus:	Eeeeeeeeeeeeeeeee 2x
Lead:	Elders intervene to rescue me
Chorus:	Come to my rescue
Lead:	Wise ones, please help me
Chorus:	Please help me
Lead:	Offer me a tuber of yam each
Chorus:	Donate a pot each
Lead:	Offer me a pot each
Chorus:	Give me a tuber of yam each
Lead:	Include food stuff

Chorus:	Include ingredients
Lead:	May the royal staff of the chiefs
Chorus:	And the heads of elders accompany me
Lead:	I am glad I can celebrate
Chorus:	I am excited that I can at last celebrate
Lead:	God be with all maidens
Chorus:	God bless us all
Lead:	May it be well with us all
Chorus:	May it be better for us all.

Song (iii) is a satirical piece directed at girls who were not found worthy to participate in the *Ovia-Osese* on account of moral and social recklessness. It therefore raises general consciousness on the need for moral probity in order to avoid such public ridicule. We apprehend a narrative song in (iv). The story, which is very explicit, underscores the filial bond between mother and daughter; the sacrifices parents make to define a worthy path of livelihood for their children; and of course the plight of an orphan. The rendition of the song itself is emotion-driven and *Oyara* often goes quiet as those who understand the language are compelled to reflect on its pungent message. Music being an embodiment of universal language, even non-Ogorians are equally gripped by its moving solemn tide. The maidens usually join hands in a wide circular formation to sing this song, which also symbolically suggests that both the needy and the haves need one another to pull through the challenges of existence.[11] It should be stated also that new songs are composed annually and added to the repertoire of *Ovia-Osese* songs. Expectedly, most of these new songs yield to the influence of church or Islamic melodies while also embodying religious constructs as if seeking performance validation from these religious bodies. Consider these two examples below:

(v) *Oboro itie, oboro itie*
Ogbona ami ma m'esu deji
Oboro itie.

Translation
Goodness is my portion
Since I don't transact business with Satan
Goodness is my portion.

(vi) *Ekena Iduma sie nemo*

Ena maka gan ye baa?
Ekwintee
Eeee.

Translation

What the Lord has done
With what shall I thank Him?
Except to kneel.

Some of the other musical instruments used during *Ovia-Osese* performance include *osa* (rattle gourd often played with both hands), *opagigigi* (gourds filled with little pebbles), *ogenge* (metal gong). They are played during the festivities and not for the core *Ovia-Osese* performance. They are used, for instance, to accompany the opening glee of the Ogori Women Association, the hunters' dance and sometimes the *Ivia Egben*'s dance before the core ritual dance. Only *Okitoroko* has ritual significance in the ritual dance.

Conclusion: Strains of Change and Continuity

It was Wagner (1981:53) who identified a dialectical tension between convention and invention as the nucleus of cultures. He explains that 'invention' changes things while "convention resolves those changes into a recognizable world". Using this premise Adinoyi-Ojo (1996:379) assesses the African situation and concludes that "the tension is often between rational modernism and traditional beliefs and practices". This tension is of course very present in the performance idea of *Ovia-Osese* which embodies an age-long beliefs in the sanctity of womanhood through which a sane and healthy humanity can be sustained. The form and aesthetic reconstructions already discussed are products of this dialectical tension. However, the Ogori have amply exhibited a genuine sense of tradition in *Ovia-Osese* in their struggle to accommodate and integrate social changes into a "recognizable world". It is this strife for cultural harmony and unique identity that is largely responsible for the continued existence of the performance and the sustenance of some aspects of the performance in its original form. For instance, performance elements that are still extant include the original songs (even though new ones are being introduced), musical instruments, processional dance of the women-folk from one homestead to another, shooting of

guns by hunters in honour of a first-born *Ovia*, the dance structure is still intact and *Iyaodina* remains the chief producer and artistic airector of *Ovia-Osese*.

Inspite of its diluted and modified contents, *Ovia-Osese* remains a cultural symbol that embodies pre-historic idea from which Ogori people continue to chart their moral bearing. That every woman with Ogori blood flowing in her still goes through the ritual experience either physically or by proxy (negligible few?) is a vibrant testimony to a living culture. The people should however be reminded that as the *Ovia-Osese* ritual continues to reinvent itself, drawing from antiquity and the new social order, the end-product must add utilitarian values to the celebrant's world or it becomes a hollow cultural exhibition.

Notes

[1]Picton (1991:94), for instance, records that "the capacity to create life as mothers and to destroy life as witches, in Ebira metaphysical tradition, predicated of womanhood."

[2]A rite of virginity test is performed by arranging a bed with a white bedspread on which the bride and groom make love for the first time. The crowd outside waits patiently for the results – the painful cries of the bride to the ritual process and the eventual public exhibition of the bloodstained bedspread, confirming the breakage of the hymen by the groom. This is applauded. It is to be noted that this ritual is also a covert test of the masculinity of the groom, for an impotent or a man with weak erection cannot go through this ritual successfully. Nowadays, probably because of the dense social transformation that has fostered high level sexual engineering amongst our youths the world over, *Ekehi'sihu* has been eliminated from the list of bridal wealth demanded from suitors and the ritual is no longer performed to avoid wanton negative results that are feared to be the likely output of virginity test in this age. Before this elimination of *Ekehi'sihu*, it was also wide-spread that some maidens who had lost their virginity found an answer to passing the virginity test (the use of potash solution to contract the virgina which makes penetration very difficult to achieve; it ends up in hurting and bleeding when penetrated). A virginity test is now questionable; it is difficult to know who is really a virgin.

[3]The other unclassified ones are *Ukaan* and *Akpes*.

[4]It was difficult getting the current enrolment figure (usually printed in *Ovia-Osese* programme note) because the last *Ovia-Osese* was only marked and not formally celebrated due to the festival date coinciding with a national programme – the General Elections in Nigeria which held between April and May 2003.

[5]The Ogori calendar year starts from the last week of August or the first week in September, as against the familiar worldwide calendar year that starts from January (Akẹrejola, 1973:32)).

and rough wooden staff with cylindrical turning edges. A calabash is tied to the end of the staff. It is played with both hands either standing up or sitting down. Metal rattles/rings are worn on the left hand. The right hand moves up and down the inserted ring in the staff, while the left simultaneously strikes the calabash. *Okitoroko* fits into the class of idiophone musical instruments. As a solo instrument, it functions as a chordophone. Ten people and above participate in the production of *Okitoroko* music. The equipment is not reserved for *Ovia-Osese* alone but can also be used for other social functions like wedding ceremonies, title-taking events, Christian ceremonies, etc. Some of the songs recorded in this paper benefit from Akeju (2002).

[11]Towards the end of the song, the maidens disengage their hands and transit into clapping and stamping of their hands and feet, respectively. At intervals the maidens move into the centre of the circular formation in pairs to exhibit *dance virtuoso*.

References

Adinoyi-Ojo, Onukaba 1996. Playing at the Crossroads: Social Space as Metaphor in Ebira Masked Performances. New York: Unpublished Ph.D Dissertation, Department of Performance Studies, New York University.

Akeju, Grace 2000. Songs, Chants and Music in Ogori *Ovia-Osese* Festival. Unpublished B.A. Thesis. Ilorin: Department of Modern European Languages, University of Ilorin.

Akerejola, Gab Bawa. 1973. *The History of Ogori*, Occasional Publication No. 22, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan.

Apata, Z.O. 1975. The Growth of Christian Missions in Ogori/Mangogo District 1911-1971. Unpublished B.A. Dissertation, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

Echeruo, Michael J.C. 1994. Redefining the Ludic: Mimesis, Expression, and the Festival Mode. Bogue, Ronald and Mihai I. Spariosu (eds.), *The Play of the Self*. pp. 137-156. Albany: State University of New York.

Hansford, K. J. Bendor-Samuel and Stanford, R. 1976. *Studies in Nigerian Languages* No. 5. Accra: An Index of Nigerian Languages.

Negri, Eve de 1976. *Nigerian Body Adornment*. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine.

Nigeria Herald, Saturday July 6, 1974.

Picton, John 1991. On Artifact and Identity at the Niger-Benue Confluence. *African Arts* Special Issue: Memorial to Arnold Rubin, Part II, July, Vol. XXIV, No. 3, pp. 34-49.

Sofola, Zulu. 1987. Reflections on *Ovia-Osese* Festival of Ogori. *Ovia Festival Digest.* Proceedings of the First National Seminar on the Ogori Festival, pp. 24-35.

Wagner, Roy. 1981 *The Invention of Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

5

Ovia-Osese Performance for a Global Audience: Sustaining Ancient Beliefs via Modern Acts – Possibilities and Boundaries

PETER ODOGBOR and ISRAEL MERIOMAME WEKPE
Department of Theatre Arts and Mass Communication,
University of Benin, Benin-City.

Festivals are an interesting phenomenon; a phenomenon which exists in every community. Festivals are an expression of that community's identity. In festivals, people activate their individual efforts to re-live their cultural experiences. These cultural experiences doubly manifest as markers of their origin and their way of life. They extend to include their morals, values and, above all, their unity. Thus, festivals become a site for the performance of cultural cohesion, spiritual upliftment, social integration and the re-invention of their cultural personae. Significantly, in the context of this essay, the idea of festivals is located around the traditional or indigenous; by indigenous, it is assumed that the particular community share a common 'ancestry' or 'origin'. This is also interchangeably expressed as traditional with the addition that the origin is handed down genealogically and probably evoking the mythic or legendary. The overwhelming thought here is to substantiate that festivals (traditional/indigenous) provide opportunities for the individuals in the communities to re-enact certain events which are central to the people's histories and cultures. Thus, the festivals become avenues through which age-long 'original' traditions are reinforced in performance to commemorate and sustain these beliefs.

Indigenous festivals are collectively owned; therefore, the involvement of members of the community is required in the celebrations. The externalisation of the ideals of a particular festival entails certain elements such as drama, music, dance, carnival-like processions, costumes, and allied performance elements.

These act as vehicles through which active participation by the people is encouraged in the collective expression of their culture. These elements also embody the contents which attract, entertain, educate and inform the audience in relation to the festival and the overall culture of the people, and help towards their propagation.

There is no denying an emerging trend in the celebration of certain festivals in Nigeria. This trend is etched in the tablets of commercialism; in other words, there is a tendency for the commodification/merchandizing of the festivals in order to globalize them. Another extension presents the festival as a commodity for a global audience since there is an underlining business philosophy to encourage '*glocal*' (global-local participation). What this implies is an innate tendency to fund the festivals in order to make them sustainable and viable. Now the sustainability and viability of that indigenous festival for a global audience may rest on the patronage of businesses and vendors.

In the light of the above, this trend calls for attention, especially as it may infringe on the cultural legacy of the festivals. There is no doubt that this phenomenon has inherent advantages. Thus, it is the concern of this paper to appropriate the *Ovia-Osese* festival since it has some of the variants of these 'fears'. This essay interrogates the *Ovia-Osese* festival against the seeming possibilities and boundaries of this emerging practise vis-à-vis the preservation of genuine cultural ideas through the adoption of multi-disciplinary approaches that will not compromise the 'original' festival essence.

An appreciation of the *Ovia-Osese* finds relevance in understanding the place where the festival happens: Ogori. E.S. Osiako remarks that the people of Ogori have their ancestral home in Ogori city which is in Ogori/Magongo local government area of Kogi State, Nigeria. The Ogori have three major quarters – Oshobane, Eni and Okesi – and each of the quarters is made up of clans or compound quarters; this was following the people's final descent in 1886 from Agada (one of the three hills which encompass Ogori-land; the others being Omoneyen and Odibo). Remarkably, there are some clans which reside in Ogori and Mangongo who do not belong to any particular identifiable quarters, and since the 1940's additional quarters have been created as an outcome of population growth and development. These are: Udiba, Ileteyin, Aiyetoro, Ekema or Aiyenoni, Otamunrun or Yidi and Akpaju quarters. Osiako emphasizes that the

people of Ogori practised solely their traditional religion prior to the inroads of external religions such as Islam and Christianity. This involved the worship of over twenty nature gods, *Omoneyen* being the chief god. These gods were situated within geographical locations by which they are called. Though many of them were worshipped by specific members/families in the community, only a few were worshipped by the general Ogori populace.

Apart from specific sacrificial items required in the ritual worship of these gods, certain taboos were observed and a violation of any of these carried grave consequences such as death. In addition, the gods had certain features or attributes which they are associated with and certain days were set aside for their worship. With the exception of *Otare Ogbiyogben*, a god noted for demanding that twin new-borns, still-births and their mothers, witches and wizards and criminals be killed in its enclave, the other gods showed some degree of benevolence toward the people.

Osiako's position enables us to reconcile that the Ogori people have a vibrant tradition which was dynamic to changes but one that retains its uniqueness. One of such is the *Ovia-Osese*. The *Ovia-Osese,* though specifically a celebration of womanhood, stands as a communal celebration and, indeed, a potent recollection of the people's identity. It can be emphasized that the Ogori provides a sacred space for the performance of the *Ovia-Osese*. The performance not only aggregates embracing nuances of the performative dance, music, narrative, mimeses, etc., it is also a reinforcement of traditional ethos. What we find in the *Ovia-Osese* is the glorification of maidens and, subsequently, women within a cultural space. In addition, there is a salient upliftment of an engendered space side by side a sacred space. We can therefore approximate *Ovia-Osese* as a traditional and socio-religious festival latently ritualized within the confines of indigineity but navigating the rigors of competing modernities - Christianity, Islam and media globalisation.

The *Ovia-Osese* narrative as a performance begins in this manner: The festival basically is in three segments or sections which may be regarded as a pre-festival, festival and post-festival events. Although this event took a period of several months in the past, its current performance, especially after its resuscitation in a christianized community, now take a period of about a week. Prior to the grand finale which occurs on the second Saturday after Easter of every year. Pre-festival events are held during the initial days of the festival week (first day). Usually, the pre-festival includes: general cleaning of surroundings

(homes and the entire community), entertaining of age grades or age groups by celebrants' families, visitation by celebrants' families to their ancestral homes which usually involves dance and music procession with other members of the age grades to which the celebrant's mother belongs. The period of preparation also offers opportunity for initiates (maidens) and their fore-runners called *ibusike* (about 8-10 years old) to engage themselves in a rehearsal of *Ovia* songs and dances. In addition, there is in recent times a beauty pageantry during the pre-festival period. On the day before the grand-finale, the initiates make hair-dos in the *Ovia* style, and go to the civic centre to dress up and put finishing touches to everything before members of the audience arrive.

On the final day of the event which is regarded as the actual festival day, events at the civic centre starts with an opening prayer and the Ogori anthem. Procession by age groups or age grades, and by other invited cultural groups follow. After the processions, age grades and groups take turns performing songs and dances before the high table of dignitaries. The audience are seated around the performance space. The main event begins with a dance by the *ibisuke*. They move from the civic building to the performance space to perform before the audience. The performance by the *ivia* (maiden) is the same with that of the *ibusike*. The *ivia* procession comes after the *ibusike* have performed. The *Iyaodina* (custodian of the maiden) is one of the dignitaries at the high table. At the end of the *Ovia*'s dance, which marks the grand finale, prizes are given to the best dressed *ivia,* and other categories. During the grand finale, individuals who have made outstanding contributions to the Ogori community are brought to the fore. The presence of MTN, one of the main promoters of the *Ovia-Osese* festival is all-pervading. In fact, the MTN colour is conspicuous during the festival on such items as the beads/dresses (skirts) of the *ibisuke* and elderly individuals. Collaboration is seen in the appearances of neighbouring groups or troupes from other communities as well as troupes from other states, such as the Kwara State Art Council. MTN uses this opportunity to promote and sell its products. They engage in raffle draws where tickets are given to get their products. Rice and other gifts are also given out.

After the event at the *oyara,* people return home to clean up. Christians and Muslims go to church on Sunday and mosques on Friday, respectively, to give thanks as a post-festival event. The celebrant's families thank the people who supported them during the festival.

In recent times, the event has blossomed from an 'obscure' position to become a prominent festival within the Nigerian cultural scope. This prominence marks it as a global brand for the people of Ogori. The participation of various business concerns, both multi-national and local, has obviously transformed the festival to an appropriate global one. There is no denying that the festival congregates the Ogoris at home and abroad, and it, unquestionably, attracts tourists. All of these see the festival as a platform of performing the Ogori identity; these global audiences may however not necessarily be present within the immediate location of performance space but they are found within virtual space – social networking sites. Inasmuch as this paper attempts a critical appraisal of the festival for a globalized audience, it also suggests boldly how the overwhelming philosophy behind the original intention of the *Ovia-Osese* can be magnifiably retained. The festival strongly encourages that a maiden must be a virgin to participate in this rite of passage. For the globalized audience, this virtue of upholding chastity before marriage undoubtedly reinforces the performance of identity. Now a hiccup may arise of a participatory business concern or group that does not align with this uniqueness of the *Ovia-Osese*. In other words, there are ethical considerations that the organizers need to articulate and present to prospective 'sponsors'. We can add here that foreign food by vendors may undermine the local cuisine associated with the Ogoris. What may suffice here and be necessarily appropriate is for vendors to creatively generate recipes that can be domesticated to satiate taste buds. The implication of this resonate that food as performance becomes another spatial for performing Ogori identity. Competing modernity no doubt enables rather than undermine the festival's essence. This competing modernity is captured in one word 'globalization'.

Thomas Friedman offers:

> The globalization system [...] has one overarching feature – integration. The world has become an increasingly interwoven place, and today, whether you are a company or a country, your treats and opportunities increasingly derives from who you are connected to. This globalization system is also characterized by a single word: the web [...]
>
> The driving idea behind globalization is free market capitalism – the more you open your economy to free trade and competition, the more efficient and flourishing your economy will be; globalization means the spread of free market capitalism to virtually every country in the world.

> Globalization has its own defining technology – computerization, miniaturization, digitization, satellite communications, fibre optic, and the internet – which reinforces its defining perspective of integration. Once a country makes a leap into the system of globalization, its elites begin to internalize this perspective of integration, and always try to locate themselves in a global context.
>
> Today, more than ever, the traditional boundaries between politics, culture, technology, finance, national security and ecology are disappearing. You often cannot explain the whole without reference to them all.
>
> I believe that this new system of globalization, in which walls between countries, markets, and disciplines are increasingly being blown away, constitutes a fundamentally new state of affairs.(8-10, 20, 23)

Friedman's elaborate offering above latently presents globalization as blurring boundaries that is capable of disconnecting the culture of a particular community. The term culture carries a huge variety of meaning. For our purpose here, a community's culture consists of beliefs, preferences and behaviour of its members, along with the mechanism that links these traits to one another. These traits give the community a unique identity that distinguishes it from other communities. This identity is subject to change, for a culture is a living organism. Through their interaction and reaction to external influences, the members of a community transform their behaviour and, ultimately, the underlying beliefs and preferences. By the thoughts adopted here, or expressed here, such changes amount to a cultural change; a change that may be good or bad, negative or positive, advantageous or disadvantageous. This may be triggered by an inbuilt mechanism or detonated by external concerns. The benefit here may be for pleasure, entertainment, education or business. These benefits may now tamper with the outlook of these cultural goods; in this case, the *Ovia-Osese*. The *Ovia-Osese*, as a cultural good, is modified for a global audience and fears may be anticipated. Fears galvanized by globalization and the need to (re)present *Ovia-Osese* in a glocal flavour.

It becomes relevant to draw the thought of Amartya Sen:

> Threats to older native cultures in the globalizing world of today are to a considerable extent, inescapable. It is not easy to solve the problem by stopping globalization of trade and commerce, since the forces of economic exchange and division of labour are hard to resist in an interacting world. [...] The challenging task is to get the benefits of globalization on a more shared basis. While that primarily economic question need not detain us here... there is a related question in the field of culture, to wit, how to increase the real option- the substantive freedoms- that people have, by providing support for cultural traditions that they may want to preserve. This cannot but be an important concern in any development effort that brings about radical changes in the ways of living of people. (53)

The *Ovia-Osese* being a cultural brand happening in a globalized environment and embracing variables from without the culture should, as a matter of urgency, properly capture and articulate its uniqueness in such a way that these variables do not disfigure its aesthetical quality. Needless to add here that because the festival is a performance and expression of culture, it has vehemently appropriated these nuances which border on the performative. In this regard, we mean dance, music, mimeses, costume, etc. We therefore reconcile that the external variables should not overwhelm the core expressive quality that these elements of performance uphold in the festival. It is obvious that the festival is substantially grounded by these elements, but more importantly, they explain better the underlying essence of the festival: that is all attention via the application of these elements must tell the virtue of virginity and graciously appreciate the joys of womanhood so that when music is made it must reflect overwhelmingly these essences. The songs and dance must align with general thought, ditto the costume and makeup. A few thoughts should suffice here:

- Costume and Make-Up

Instead of the motley of colours of the *aso-oke* fabric tied by the maidens, two or so of these colours should be adopted and sold to celebrants beforehand. Specific numbers and individuals who should adorn these separate colours should be pre-determined. In the same vein, there should be uniformity in the style of the hair-do worn by the maidens.

- Dance Choreography

Adequate rehearsal is needed for the maidens to master the dance steps. Most importantly, the movements should be well choreographed with the assistance of an expert dance choreographer.

- Music

Music and dance go hand in hand especially in a traditional African setting. Since music provides the rhythmic stimuli to which dance responds, there should be adequate practice to synchronise the sonic and kinaesthetic elements. In addition, participants should be given adequate tutelage on the *Ovia* songs and the sequence of their presentation. A feeling of ensemble should be engendered in the maidens. As much as is practicable, two-part surging should be developed to enhance the harmonics of singing. There is, therefore, the need to involve a formally trained music specialist who will collaborate with the indigenous handlers/ trainers.

We must however elaborate on some other aspects which are imperative because of the incidence of best practices and global security:

- Technical Support/ Audio- Visual

Audibility and visibility are very key factors in the performance, whether live or recorded. For instance, use should be made of multiple lavaliere and omnidirectional microphones to collect the sounds of singing, speaking and instrumentation, especially the *ogitoroko*. Therefore, the singing and other vocal renditions during the grand finale should be technically aided in order to accord them clarity and audibility through the use of dedicated amplification system. Further, the sitting and standing arrangements should be such that does not obscure other people's view of the action in the performance arena. There should also be a multi-camera approach to video recording of important events, during the celebrations, which are intended for global consumption to give them professional touch.

In connection with this therefore, the recording should be consciously pre-planned, where efficient and adequate technical and human resources are

deployed. Post-production activity is also very necessary, especially with regards to packaging the recordings for consumption by a globalized audience. High quality cameras and DVDs should be used.

- Safety, Security and Crowd Control

From being a communal celebration solely patronised by members of the immediate community, *Ovia-Osese* festival has grown over the years to become a global event. The upsurge in the number of participants in the annual event requires that adequate and effective measures be taken to guarantee the safety of lives and property. At the homes of celebrant families, in the churches and mosques and during the final events at the civic centre, acts which compromise safety and security should be avoided. For instance, the use of generating sets in the event of electrical power outage should be handled with caution; the sets are to be kept at a safe distance away from houses to avoid carbon monoxide poisoning.

There should be a team which ensure that everyone coming to the civic centre is screened. Measures should be taken to control crowd at the time of entering and leaving, especially during the grand finale. In the civic centre, spectators, especially those who are standing should be discouraged from leaving their position with a view to catching a spectacle at the performance area. Most importantly is the dire need to put camera-men under control. It has been proven over the years that once it was time for the *Ivia* to perform, individuals with cameras (photographic and video) usually surged into the performance area, often obscuring the views of spectators who are sitting or standing and makes filming of the events difficult for professionals. This poses safety and security challenges. In the event of an accident, is there an adequate and functional ambulance to take the victim(s) to hospital? Are there adequate and functional facilities and personnel at the hospital? If there is a fire out-break, are there fire-fighting facility and personnel? If there are security cases, are security personnel on ground to deal with them efficiently and professionally?

It is interesting to submit that the presentation of the festival to a global audience is commendable but should creatively and strongly appropriate the indigenous attributes of the Ogori to substantiate its cultural essence and the overall impetus of the *Ovia-Osese.*

References

Friedman, Thomas L. *The Lexus and the Olive Tree*. New York: Anchor, 2000. Print.

Osiako, E. S. *Traditional History of Ogori in a Socio-Anthropologial Setting*. Abuja: Petra Digital, 2003. Print.

Sen, Amartya. How Does Culture Matter? *Culture and Public Action*. Vijayendra Rao and Michael Walton (eds.). Delhi: Orient Longman, 2004. 37-58.

6

Indigeneity and Eclecticism in Ogori *Ovia-Osese* Festival

O.I. POGOSON
Institute of African Studies,
University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

A.T. ANABE
Department of Fine and Applied Arts,
Federal College of Education, Okene, Kogi State.

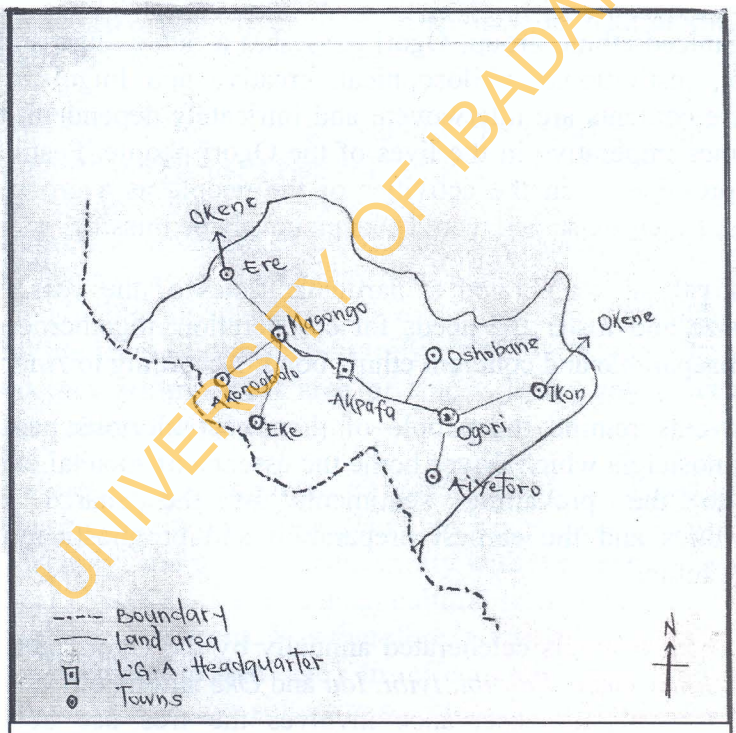


Fig I: Ogori/Magongo L.G.A
Courtesy: Ogori/Magongo Area Council

Introduction

Ogori is one of the notable towns in the Central Senatorial District of Kogi State. Ogoriland is located in the southwest of the confluence of the rivers Niger and Benue. Its topography is of light open woodland characterized by frequent rocky hills upon which villages were traditionally sited for protection in times of feuds and wars. Ogori shares boundaries with Ebiraland to the south-west in Kogi State and Lampese to the north in Edo state. It is the headquarters of the Ogori Magongo Local Government Council. (See map in Fig. 1)

Ogoriland comprises one local government council, Ogori/Magongo, which is one ward with a total population of 39,807 (according to the 2009 census). The mode, nature of settlement and subsequent dispersion are attributed to constant inter-ethnic squabbles and wars, and the hunting of games. These necessitated the contemporary permanent location of Ogoriland.

As an organized ethnic group, Ogori possesses a rich culture and cultural heritage, material, institutional, philosophical, creative and linguistic aspects. Since these culture contents are interwoven, and intricately dependent, the place of festivals becomes imperative in the lives of the Ogori people. Festivals of all types are given prominence in the activities of the people as a group, without which a vital part of their existence would conspicuously be missing.

Ogori festivals are celebrated at particular times of the year. They are meant to emphasize and foster the needs for co-operation, togetherness, and to maintain a tight inseparable and coherent ethnic bond. According to Anabe:

> Festival events remind the people of the sweet glorious past, a great feeling of nostalgia which drives home the essence of societal existence in relation to the prevailing sentiments of the shared collective responsibilities and the earnest preparation and prognostication of the immediate future[1].

The traditional festivals celeberated annually by the Ogori include: *Igila ofifi, Ekonmorire, Ema, Ukpe, Edidibi, Iyibi, Idu* and *Oke* among others. *Igila ofifi* is an age-grade festival. Its observance involves the free use of canes on opponent's body. *Ekonmorire* is an annual festival also for age-grade. It marks the transition stage of adolescent male to adulthood. It is, therefore, celebrated as

initiation of boys into adulthood. It is the male version of *Ovia-Osese* but with less stringent measures to defaulting initiates. *Ema* is the Ogori masquerade festival. Its celebration glaringly excludes women's participation. The women-folk are not permitted to see the masquerades and so have to remain indoors while the festival lasts. *Ukpe* is a festival that marks the beginning of the Ogori new year. This starts in August and ends in July. The *Ukpe* festival is followed by the *Ovia-Osese* which is the initiation of girls and maidens (Plates 1 – 3) into womanhood. However, the chain of festivities ends with *Idu*, the new yam festival.

From the above list of cultural festivals, the *Ovia-Osese* festival finds itself firmly fixed and dependable among Ogori festivals. Hussain asserts that:

> In order to provide a means of sustaining life, some people accorded values to some phenomena believed to possess natural powers. They believe that the phenomena can liberate them from uncertainties that characterize their lives, and these include natural disasters, epidemic, death, the fear of the unknown...[2]

This paper is designed to establish the Ogori concept of *Ovia-Osese* in order to espouse the people's rich culture and cultural heritage. This is imperative in the face of the compelling influences of diverse external stimuli such as the overwhelming consequences of the incursions of Islam, Christianity and Western education. The culture of any society does not exist in isolation; it is not static but dynamic and highly unanticipated; therefore the extent to which these festivals are affected, at the level of reformation, refinement, reorganization, regeneration and decay, becomes an important area of study. This paper serves as an authentic cultural document of the Ogori.

Traditionally, Ogori *Ovia-Osese* is a festival organized for the initiation of young girls or maidens, known as *Ivia,* into womanhood. The festival symbolizes chastity, virginity, and purity in conformity with the laws and social norms of the Ogori. Ogori *Ovia-Osese* is an annual cultural festival that is observed two weeks after the Easter celebrations. It is therefore, a festival for girls who are nubile and have attained marriageable age. In effect, the occasion presents a golden opportunity for prospective suitors to select their life-partners.

Ovia-Osese dates back to ancient times, and the exact origin of the festival is still unknown but it is generally believed to be as old as the Ogori people[3].

Initially, its ceremonies lasted for over nine (9) months. But nowadays, *Ovia-Osese* ceremonies last for seven (7) days.

The Traditions of the Origin of *Ovia-Osese*

According to Askari, *Ovia-Osese* began basically as a family affair, that later spread because of its wide acceptability by Ogori families. The tradition recounts that a worried woman was forced by circumstances beyond her control to consult an oracle, as rumour had it that her only daughter was wayward. The oracle pronounced the daughter innocent, chaste and thus confirmed her virginity.

"Consequently, the woman went back to town singing, dancing and telling the 'whole world' that, her daughter had been vindicated and proven innocent. The woman later arranged a grand party to mark the occasion" [6]

Another version of the traditional origin of *Ovia-Osese* is hinged on the belief that the festival is a borrowed culture from either Owo or Benin[7]. (a similar festival, known as *Igogo*, is widely practiced in Benin and Owo) and that such similarities could only have happened as a result of cultural diffusion.

Apata, in his own accounts of the origin of *Ovia-Osese,* has it that *"Ovia-Osese* is traceable to the immediate ecological zone of Ogori and Akoko-Gbangiri." He notes that the Ogori in the past had consistently identified themselves with the people of Akoko-Gbangiri. In fact, he remembers traditional claims that Ogori belongs to Akoko-Gbangiri. The Ogori people indeed have many things in common with Akoko-Gbangiri, ranging from face and body marks to festivals, marriage customs and mode of life. When Ogori was detached from Akoko-Gbangiri in 1918, the council of elders of Akoko-Gbangiri petitioned the District Officer, imploring his assistance "towards the possibility of solving the problem of the return of our traditional brothers in the north to Akoko District in Kukuruku Division," adding that "ever before the advent of the British government, we were a people of one stock in every aspect." [8]

On the whole, the plausibility of the above traditions of the origin of the Ogori *Ovia-Osese* as authentic historical sources becomes difficult due largely to the inadequacies arising from individual informant's probable intrinsic manipulation to suit social and political ends.

Cultural Significance of *Ovia-Osese*

Ovia-Osese is embraced by the Ogori because it instills moral self-discipline and responsibility to preserve and protect chastity and purity among the female population. The acts of being nurtured in home management and health-care have made parents more responsible by consciously bringing up maidens to meet societal expectations.

Also, the festival engenders in maidens a sense of superiority over others especially their female counterparts in neighbouring communities who do not have such social mechanism over them.

Ovia-Osese is a period when mothers show off and display their chaste maidens. Parents, at this time, are proud of their children in that they (the maidens) have not disappointed them and their families. That they (the parents) have been able to train and properly groom the maidens in accordance with the customs and traditions of the people.

Ovia-Osese is a unifying factor and a living reminder of the culture of the people. This is because Ogori people at home and outside converge in Ogori to witness *Ovia-Osese* every year. Consequently, Ogori indigenes' interaction and relationships are strengthened since the festival is a cultural cord of unity that binds the people. Nowadays, Ogori indigenes all over the world eagerly look forward to the *Ovia-Osese* festival.

The festival helps to preserve and protect the people's language, particularly Ogori poetry, through *Ovia-Osese* songs that are performed and chanted annually. It concretizes the people's language in the minds of those living at home and enlivens the minds of those outside.

The high moral standard anchored on indigenous cultural values among spinsters in particular, and the Ogori community in general, is maintained by the institution of *Ovia-Osese*. This brings into sharp focus the female-folk and their place in the society. By celebrating purity, chastity and cleanliness, womanhood, the vehicle for procreation, is purified to enhance human worth.

Above all, *Ovia-Osese* is a manifestation of the meeting point of culture, religion, custom and tradition. And in recent times, it epitomizes religious

tolerance through the mobilization and coming together of Islam and Christianity in *Ovia-Osese* activities. Today, Islam and Christianity now play defined roles in the festival. Thanksgiving ceremonies in mosques and churches are now regular components of the festival.

Preparations for *Ovia-Osese*

As soon as a female child is born to a family, preparations for the child's *Ovia-Osese* commence in earnest. Parents particularly the mother, set to work in guiding and guarding in order to maintain and retain chastity and purity of the child from infancy to the last days of *Ovia-Osese*. The child's dressing habit, friends and company she keeps, social endeavours and general mannerisms and conduct, are watched and checked regularly, thus putting her in line with Ogori morality codes and ethical values.

The care and administration of maidens is a tedious job for parents. Physical guidance and gestures to checkmate antisocial behaviour and habits go along with constant prompting based on unending counselling. In effect, parents are kept on their toes over the years till *Ovia-Osese* ceremonies and festival are over. Parents heave a sigh of relief when the child passes through *Ovia-Osese* unscathed. It is instructive to note that in an African society, the singular act of bearing a child brings joy to all, but in Ogoriland the birth of a child, especially a female, entails mixed feelings of joy and heightened anxiety because of the enormous social expectation for raising the child.

Nowadays, the *Ovia-Osese* festival is often preceded by elaborate preparations in form of constant rehearsal of songs, music and dance, fashioning out appropriate costumes and props. As soon as the *Ovia-Osese* celebration ends, the preparations for the next one start immediately. The parents especially would have noted areas of their strengths and weaknesses. They would now set about making quick amends so that by the next *Ovia-Osese*, they would come out stronger and better. Indeed, parents and relations of would-be *Ovia,* maiden, engage in elaborate preparations of grooming maidens in household chores, weaving, child-care, care of self and good conduct.

Relations and well-wishers are duly informed by parents of their child's impending *Ovia-Osese*. Such information allows this group of people to get set and be aware of their responsibilities in terms of support in kind and cash. The

age-mates, friends and well-wishers of the maiden readily agree on what to wear on that day. They levy themselves for that purpose. They also provide sweets, chewing gum, soft drinks, biscuits, etc., for entertainment; these are distributed to the maiden's visitors in her house.

On Friday, the eve of *Ovia-Osese*, food and *ade* (locally brewed wine) are in abundance for visitors to the maiden's family home. Mothers and members of their age groups perform *Igaro esan* dance round the town. In the evening, the *eregba* club accompanied by music dance to the maiden's father's house in solidarity. Sometimes, depending on the social status of the maiden's parents, other professional musicians are invited to well-organized night parties[4].

Ovia-Osese Performance

The grand *finale* of *Ovia-Osese* is usually on a Saturday. This is the *Ovia-Osese* proper. A well-positioned praise-singer continuously chants the family praise-names. The maiden (Plate 3) wakes up amidst showering of gifts from parents, relations, friends and well-wishers. She receives lots of cash and material gifts. Around noon, the maiden is accompanied by her parents to the *Oyara*, the official arena for the festival. Nowadays the *Ivia*, maidens (Plate 2), assemble at the first floor of the civic centre. They go down to the arena in group singing the *Oke eguru eh eh eh eh eh eee*... "holding hands and swaying from left to right, right to left in that order. At the centre of the arena, the maidens form a circle, moving round amidst music and dance."

Accompanied in a dance by their mothers, immediately after the *Oke* song and dance, the maidens (Plate 2) move from the arena. After the *Oke* songs and dance at the civic centre has been completed, people go to the homes of individual maidens for merriment. Large quantities of food and drinks are shared out among family members, with the extended gesture of hand of fellowship to neighbours in an atmosphere of peace, joy and merriment.

Thanksgiving services are held in mosques on Friday and in churches on Sunday after *Ovia-Osese*. This practice is justified by Awolumate who asserts that:

> Thanksgiving at the end of *Ovia-Osese* festivals is hence justified that our young girls have come of age as maidens initiated into womanhood since they have been duly guided to happy married instruction. The thanksgiving is a token of appreciation of the mercy and goodness of God to human beings[5].

Some of the Rules and Regulations of *Ovia-Osese*

Few rules and regulations guide the *Ivia*, maidens, for a successful conduct of *Ovia-Osese*. Some of the rules were:

1. The *Ivia-Isiya*, the oracle, must be consulted to prove a maiden's chastity.
2. An *Ovia*, maiden, should be a virgin, if not, she must die.
3. Maidens must dance naked at *Oke*, the market place.
4. *Ovia-Osese* should not be performed by proxy.
5. Ages fourteen (14) to twenty one (21) should perform *Ovia-Osese*.
6. *Ivia* maidens, must be groomed by *Iyaodina* for three consecutive months.
7. *Iyaodina* must present the maidens along with her lieutenant, *Onyente,* for *Oke* songs and dance on *Ovia-Osese* day.

Today, some of these rules and regulations are being relegated as a result of contending contemporary external stimuli. Consequently, some of the rules are either deliberately expunged or relaxed. For example, maidens (Plates 2 and 3) no longer consult the oracles to prove their chastity in order to take part in the *Ovia-Osese*. They no longer dance semi-nude in the town square with only beads covering the essential parts leaving the breasts exposed as shown in Plate 1. Instead, maidens now cover their hips, breasts and necks as shown in Plates 2 and 3 with heavy layers of expensive beads, especially *isu* (coral beads). They cover their torsos and breasts with *aso-ofi*, handwoven clothes (Plate 3). Similarly decorated with beads are the maidens' elaborate *ogogoro*go hairdo (Plates 1 – 3), completing their outfit. The role of grooming the maidens originally was that of the *Iyaodina*; it is now done by the maidens' mothers.

Indigenous Ogori *Ovia-Osese*

As earlier pointed out, *Ovia-Osese* is a rite of passage for teenage girls (Plates 1 – 3) who have attained the age of puberty preparatory for marriage. It is the final stage of a series of ceremonies, rites and celebrations connected to the mass

initiation of young girls into womanhood. Of the three stages of the rites of passage, *Ovia-Osese* is the last and concluding ceremony.

The girls received an intensive three months' grooming and training at the *Iyaodina's* court. *Iyaodina* (Plate 4) was the female chieftain who was the deputy of the Ologori; she was in charge of women affairs. The woman groomed the maidens (Plates 1 and 2) in domestic chores, body care and good manners (recreation occurs at regular intervals). Here, singing and dancing would be the girls' pastime for three months. It was also a fattening period for the maidens. They equally learnt cooking, washing, playing of female musical instruments and general discipline.

Oke was the first of such rites to be celebrated. In compliance with *opepepan*, the town crier's announcement, arrangements were made for *Oke*. On *Oke* day, groups of qualified girls (Plates 1 and 2) assembled on an open field (this was the meeting point of the kindred or clan, *osin oyara*). They were accompanied by younger girls and older women. The village women orchestra played melodious songs rendered by the sonorous voices of the girl initiates. Later, the groups from the various clans assembled at *Oyara Okeka,* the town square, with music and dance which echoed far and wide.

Iburu, camwood, *ikokori*, black cosmetics, and *Isu*, expensive coral beads, are spread thickly on the maidens' waists and necks with fascinating *ogogorogo* hairdo (Plates 1 – 3) to match. Each maiden (Plate 3) is dressed to reflect the wealth and status of her family. This is a practice that is still prevalent among the Ogori.

At about the third month, the second stage *Opa-obubwe* comes up. The maidens (Plates 1 and 2) accompanied by *Iyaodina* (Plate 4) and *Onyete,* her assistant, went to the market place. At the market place, prayers are said for the girls to find good husbands and to have good married lives, and then their feet are ceremonially cleansed by wetting them with local guinea-corn wine, *eginade.* Several dance groups such as *Oke*, *Eregba* and *Okitoroko* performed.

The third stage is *Ovia-Osese*. This is when the maidens (Plates 1 and 2) are presented to the public. They are ushered into the market-place by *Iyaodina* (Plate 4) and her assistant, *Onyete*. The maidens (Plates 1 and 2) sang and danced. The indigenous *Ovia*, maiden (Plate 3), is bedecked with *ebele* and *isu* beads on the waists (Plate 6) leaving their breast bare. Her neck is similarly decorated with either the blue *ebele* or the red *isu* beads. Red *isu*, coral beads, are however considered more expensive than blue *ebele* beads. The maidens' *ogogorogo*

hairdos are similarly decorated with beaded crowns (Plate 5), reflective of their parents' status.

The *Onyara Okeka*, the market-place, was the *Oke*, arena, for *Ovia-Osese* in the past. The arena attracted a large turn-out of spectators from far and near. This was the rallying point for the maidens (Plates 1 and 2) to parade themselves to the admiration of parents, relations, friends, well-wishers and suitors.

Eclecticism in Ogori *Ovia-Osese*

The 21st century *Ovia-Osese* has undergone a lot of transformation right from its inception to date. Borrowed ideas and practices, principally due to the advent of Islam, Christianity and Western education, have gradually permeated the much-revered tradition of the Ogori people. According to Edahson:

> In any human society... there is usually very distinct traditional arts and culture independent of those other societies, and peculiar to that society. As time progresses these arts and culture may be dropped from the original practice, some innovation may be introduced into it to change its mode of practice or observance under the guise of modernization. Some foreign cultures and ways may eventually adulterate the traditional arts and culture, and the citizens are thus enculturated.[8]

Initially, *Ovia-Osese* started as a family affair and was celebrated on a family basis. It is now a joint communal cultural activity of the Ogori. *Ovia-Osese,* therefore, forms an integral part of Ogori culture and cultural heritage, passed on from generation to generation. Consequently, it is a basis for social and political transformation of the Ogori to effect growth and development.

To determine the purity, chastity and virginity of would-be maiden initiates (Plate 3), *Ivia Isiya*, the oracle, is no longer consulted as was the case in the past. In essence, no verification as to whether or not the maiden is a virgin is carried out to qualify for participation in the festival. The two main religions of the Ogori people, Islam and Christianity, strongly condemn and disapprove consultation of oracles. Such practice, according to the religions, is heathen and paganistic. Apata tenders that:

The early church condemned unreservedly these festivals, which were described as 'pagan'. The church adherents were strictly forbidden from taking part in the festivals. As regards *Ovia-Osese*, the church roundly condemned the killing of the young girls who had been found wanting[9].

In the distant past, *Ivia*, the maidens, went about in complete nudity (Plate 1) irrespective of their ages. Nowadays, *Ivia* perform the *Ovia-Osese* ceremony dressed in beads neatly arranged around their waists with *aso-ofi*, handwoven cloth (as shown in Plate 3), tied round the chest region to cover the breasts. The neck and hairdo, known as *Ogogorogo*, are similarly decorated with expensive *isu*, coral beads. The maiden's ankles are also decorated with *iyeye* seedlings which make jingling sounds as the maidens walk.

Again, the three stages of *Oke, Iyaodina* court and *Ovia-Osese* of the past that spanned a period of six months have been phased out. *Ovia-Osese* and its attendant ceremonies are now only a one-week affair. In essence, the first and second stages of the indigenous rites of passage have been phased out. The second stage which concerned a three-month grooming of the maidens has been replaced by parents and relatives assisting in teaching the maidens. It is now the parents' responsibility to groom and train the maidens in cooking, washing, child-care and other household chores. These are combined with discipline and female comportment.

Nowadays, parents register maidens with ministers in churches. In effect, registration of maidens in the churches has replaced the initial first stage of indigenous *Ovia-Osese*. Also, thanksgiving is offered by Muslims on Friday in mosques and by Christians in churches on Sunday, days preceding the Saturday grand *finale* of *Ovia-Osese*. Also, maidens (Plates 2 and 3) only attend a well-arranged one week rehearsal at the Ogori civic centre as against the former three-month stay at *Iyaodina*'s court. Sports, such as footaball matches, volleyball and athletics are remarkable features of contemporary *Ovia-Osese*. Sport competitions and athletics are organized among the streets and quarters on knock-out basis as part of activities to mark *Ovia-Osese*. Trophies and cash are often donated for the competitive sports as rewards for winners.

Recently, a beauty competition has been added to the *Ovia-Osese* festival finale. Secondary school girls avail themselves of the opportunity to actively participate in the beauty contest. Four girls are registered for the competition. The winner at the grand *finale* on the Thursday of *Ovia-Osese* week is crowned "Miss

Ovia-Osese". The reigning "Miss *Ovia-Osese"* sits with the dignitaries at the high table on *Ovia-Osese* day.

Traditionally, *Ovia-Osese* was a ceremony for virgins (Plates 1 – 3) between the ages of 14 and 21. Nowadays, there are three categories of maidens at *Ovia-Osese*: the traditionalists, the semi-traditionalists and the educated elites. The first group is the traditionalists who are still strongly attached to the core values of the society. Girls in this group maintain their chastity before, during and after *Ovia-Osese* ceremonies. They eventually lose their virginity only to their husbands.

As for the second group, the girls have some respect for tradition. Hence, they remain chaste till the conclusion of *Ovia-Osese*. The girls intentionally or otherwise lose their chastity before marriage. Girls in this category are more in number than those in the first group.

Female educated elites is the third category. Due to the growing influence of Western education, girls in this group are detached from and do not uphold the customary conventions of the Ogori community. In effect, they may have lost their virginity long before the *Ovia-Osese* festival. Since they are not pregnant, and there is no more consultation of the oracle, the unchaste girls can easily go through *Ovia-Osese* undetected and unhindered. The number of girls in this third group is far higher than either the first or the second.

However, the dynamism in Ogori *Ovia-Osese* is an attribute to cultural diffusion, a clear index and manifestation of a living, developing culture that is susceptible to changes occasioned through travels, and the political and social relations of the Ogori with their neighours. On the whole, about 10% of *Ivia*, maidens, maintain in its entirety the indigenous customary convention of chastity. Slightly over 90% of *Ivia* maidens have been affected by the influence of external stimuli one way or the other.

Conclusion

As one of the numerous festivals in Ogoriland, *Ovia-Osese* by its concept is particularly meant to celebrate the coming of age of maidens into womanhood. The festival, is no doubt, a significant part of the culture of the Ogori. It has thus

established Ogori and thrown it into limelight as one of the notable cultures in Nigeria.

As a stabilizing, unifying factor, *Ovia-Osese* remains the only traditional mechanism to guide, guard and give a sense of morality and chastity based on observable purity. In a rapidly decadent society, *Ovia-Osese,* in no mean dimension, tries to reverse, revamp and restore good and enduring public morality and conduct. The purpose, functions, aims and objectives of *Ovia-Osese* are noble, invigorating and progressive, as it upholds the cultural values of Ogori-land. Since *Ovia-Osese* is dynamic, it is therefore susceptible to the contending contemporary external stimuli. Consequently, a lot of innovations have greatly influenced *Ovia-Osese* festival. Thus, the festival has been reduced drastically to mere entertainment with seemingly uncontrollable, unchecked chastity and morality among *Ivia* (maidens).

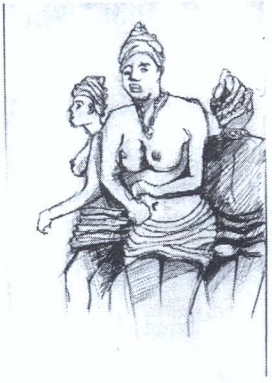


Plate 1: Indigenous Ivia (Maidens) (An artist's impression)

Plate 2: Ivia (Maidens) of the late 20th Century (An artist's impression)

Plate 3: 21st Century Ovia (Maiden) (An artist's impression)

Plate 4: *Iyaodina* in Full regalia (An artist's impression)

Plate 5: An *Ovia* (Maiden), with a beaded crown
Courtesy: Ogori Descendants Union, 2008. P. 13.

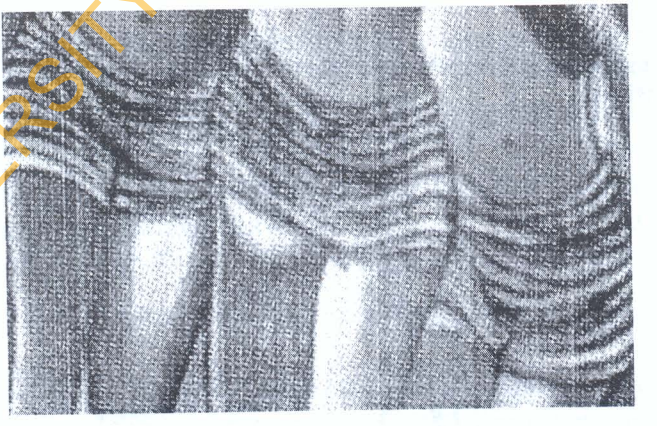


Plate 6: *Ebele* and *Isu* Waist Beads
Courtesy: Ogori Descendants Union, 2008. P. 26.

Notes and References

1. Anabe, A.T. 1994. *Echeane Festival: Indigeneity and Eclecticism in Ebira Art Tradition*. M. A. Dissertation. Institute of African Studies. University of Ibadan. pp. *xi* +212

2. Hussain, I. 1991. *The Culture of Egbura/Ebira (Ebira).* Lokoja: Olowu Printers and Stationers.

3. Akande, P.P. 50 years old, personal communication on the 19th of March, 2012, in his office at the School of Art, Design and Printing, Fine Arts Department, Kogi State Polytechnic, Lokoja.

4. Ibrahim, Sikirat S. (Mrs.) 42 years old, personal communication in Mr. Ibrahim's Office at the Federal College of Education, Okene, on the 2nd of April, 2012.

5. Awolumate, J.O. 2007. The Bible's View-Point of Ogori *Ovia-Osese* Festival: A Justification for Thanksgiving. *Souvenir.* Ogori Descendant Union. p. 21

6. Askari, K. 1968. Ogori, the Sociology of an Akoko Village. Ph.D. Thesis. Oxford University. pp. 99-102.

7. Apata, Z.O. 2007. Historic and Socio-Cultural Relevance of *Ovia-Osese* in Modern Nigeria. *Souvenir,* Ogori Descendants Union. p. 25.

8. Edahson, O. 1981. The Impact of Bida Imperialism on Akoko Gbangiri. B.A. Dissertation. University of Ilorin. p. 15.

9. Apata, Z.O. 2007. Historic and Socio-Cultural Relevance of *Ovia-Osese* in Modern Nigeria. *Souvenir*, Ogori Descent Ilorin. p. 27.

10. Olobayo, S. (Miss) 20 years old, personal communication at her No.26 Iyetoro Street Residence Ogori, on the 2nd of April, 2012.

7

Ovia-Osese: The Journey so Far

Z.O. APATA
Kogi State University.

Prelude

The present research effort is to document the transformative phases of *Ovia-Osese* in Ogori from the beginning to date. If there is any festival well remembered in Ogori today, it is the *Ovia-Osese*, which is a maiden festival involving girls who have attained marriageable age. The occasion presents opportunity for the prospective suitors to choose their life partners. The questions that will continue to agitate the minds of scholars are: What is the origin of *Ovia-Osese*? What factors favoured its transformation? What makes it so significant in the cultural history of Ogori? This paper will shed light on these questions.

From the Beginning

In the main, the question of its origin in history has remained largely speculative. Dr. Krapf Askari, an eminent sociologist, has suggested that *Ovia-Osese* began basically as a family affair, which later spread, as it was widely adopted by other Ogori families[3].

According to this notable sociologist, a worried woman was forced to consult *Ivia Isiya* (oracle) as the rumour went round that her daughter was wayward. However, the oracle gave lie to the rumour by confirming the girl's virginity.

This disclosure gladdened the heart of the woman. Accordingly, she arranged a grand festival to mark the occasion.[4] Askari's finding should be taken with a grain of salt. In the first place, the simple fact that the un-named woman

was deeply worried about the moral standing of her daughter demonstrates that Ogori Society attached importance to the chastity of a girl before marriage. By implication therefore, it can be rightly assumed that the tradition of *Ovia-Osese* pre-dated the woman's action. One logical conclusion that one can derive from Askari's assertion is that the woman added a new dimension to an existing tradition, by taking the trouble to stage an elaborate festival to rejoice over her daughter's proven chastity.

Another school of thought posits that *Ovia-Osese* is a borrowed phenomenon from Benin or Owo[5]. This assertion was further buttressed by the view that a similar festival, known as *Igogo,* is widely practised in these areas. This idea of cultural borrowing is lopsided and cannot stand the test of time. It is loaded with the inferiority/superiority cultural complex. What is simply implied by this claim is that Ogori, being a small-scale community should naturally borrow from mega-states like Benin and Owo. The crucial question is, Could Benin or Owo not borrow the idea from Ogori? A note of warning must be sounded here. The warning is that a small community today does not necessarily mean it had been so in past; Ogori could have been much bigger than it is today[6].

There is no doubt that there are similarities in some cultural antiquity, marriage customs, among others, between Ogori and Benin. For instance, the Ekundayo Panel that investigated chieftaincy matters in Kwara State in 1978, when Ogori was then part of the state, was positive on the issue that the ancient beaded crown worn by the Ologori of Ogori was similar to that worn by the Oba of Benin[7]. Furthermore,the *Ogoloko*, which is sacred and highly revered in Ogori, has been described as the "Scion of a nation..., the spiritual bondage (and) a vital linking chain of history,[8]" which signifies their "ancestors' courage in war and peace than migratory " marauding campaign of the dim past, the hospitality which the Benins gave them in the course of the campaign of the migration[9].These relics probably demonstrate the political and cultural relations of the people of Ogori and Benin in ancient times.

It is the contention of the present writer that the origin of *Ovia-Osese* is traceable to the immediate ecological zone of Ogori and Akoko-Gbangiri. The Ogori people in the past had consistently identified themselves with the people of Akoko-Gbangiri. In fact, remembered traditions claim that Ogori belong to Akoko-Gbangiri.[10] J. A. Ley Greaves, the Resident of Kabba Province, for instance, grouped Ogori under "Bangari"(Gbangiri family)[11]. The Ogori have many things in common with Akoko-Gbangiri, ranging from tribal marks to festivals, marriage customs and modes of life." Indeed when Ogori was detached from Akoko-Gbangiri in 1918, the council of elders of Akoko petitioned the District Officer imploring his assistance "towards the possibility of solving the problem of the return of our traditional brothers from the North to Akoko District in Kukuruku Division," adding that ever before the advent of the British government we were a people of one stock in every respect."[12]

The origin of *Ovia-Osese* throws more light on the origin of Ogori itself and calls for a critical appraisal of the former assertion that the people migrated from Ile-Ife. I have treated this aspect in depth in other works.[13] In a nutshell, the *Ovia-Osese* is an ancient festival and it is as old as Ogori itself.

The initial pattern of *Ovia-Osese*

The early mode of *Ovia-Osese* observance was largely dictated by the organizational structure of Ogori.

Ogori as we know it today is structurally different from Ogori of the past. Before 1700, Ogori was a conglomeration of eight autonomous communities.[14] Another known community with this type of socio-cultural group was Ayere.[15] Each autonomous group was under an elder known as *Otaro* or *Osiako*. These elders or *ekekaro* wielded immense power and influence. The Ologori was more or less a *primus-inter-pares*. Under this arrangement, *Ovia-Osese* was conducted and celebrated separately by each autonomous group, though the festival was observed the same day. Each autonomous group had its own *Iyaodina*, who was the traditional chief female in charge of *Ovia-Osese*. In other words, there were in the past eight principal *Iyaodinas*. The socio-political arrangement favoured the growth of *Ovia-Osese* in the sense that each group tried to out–do the other, thereby keeping the festival alive.

The Era of Instability and the Aftermath

Ovia-Osese suffered some serious reverses in the period between 1770 and 1897. During this period, two celebrated Ologori reigned, namely Ologori Odeyon and Uboro Eminefo I. Odeyon reigned in the 1770s[16]. Like Shaka the Zulu of East Africa[17],Odeyon attempted to bring together the autonomous communities under one umbrella. He tried to achieve this objective through coercion rather than persuasion and other peaceful means. As a result, Odeyon has been described in the traditional history of Ogori as wicked, ruthless and a bloodthirsty monster. This assessment is definitely not fair. Nevertheless, in his effort to unite the people, he ended up widening the gap between them. Indeed some of the communities were deserted and the people vowed not to return as long as Odeyon was the ruler. Under this atmosphere, *Ovia-Osese* was constantly disrupted. His successor, Eminefo I was brought up and trained in the court of Odeyon. Like Odeyon, he was ruthless, but shrewd and more tactful. Unfortunately, he came to the throne at the time when the Nupe invaded Ogori and its environs. The invasion known as Ogun Tapa (or Ajinomoh)[18] adversely affected the *Ovia-Osese* in many respects. In the first place, the military activities of the Nupe forces forced Eminefo I and his people to flee to Oke-Ijebu, in c.1862, where they remained until 1879[19].Worse still, while at Oke–Ijebu, a seven-year war (1872-1879) broke out between Ogori and Mangogo. Many factors caused the war, but the most important is the fact that Eminefo I viewed the Mangogo ruler with suspicion and seriously implicated him in the Nupe invasion of Ogori. Given this unstable situation, it was near impossible to conduct *Ovia-Osese* and other festivals in Ogori for the better part of the 19th century. However, after the death of Eminefo in 1879, the Ogori people, under Ikpemida Aisoni, returned to Ogori. Aisoni was essentially a man of peace. Under him, the people were united and the various groups unified. He also concluded a peace treaty with Bajemito,the ruler of Mangogo in 1890. Following the return of peace to the land, and having successfully united the people, an era of peace and progress was ushered in. It is not an understatement to assert that under Ikpemida Aisoni, the *Ovia-Osese* attained its peak. An overall *Iyaodina* (or *Iyaodina*-General) replaced the various

Iyaodinas. The festival now wore a national look. It was jointly celebrated and the celebrants met at *oyara okeka* (a big open space). Friends, relatives and well-wishers from near and far came to witness the occasion.

Changes and Continuity

Apart from factors earlier mentioned, the growth and development of *Ovia-Osese* was also seriously hampered by other factors such as Christianity, western education and modernization. Of these, the coming of Christianity had far reaching consequences on *Ovia-Osese* in particular and other festivals in general. The first church, St. Peter Anglican Church, was established in 1911.[20]

It must be stated here that Ogori was a land of many festivals, the greatest of which was *Ukpe,* which marked the beginning of the Ogori new year. This was followed by *Oke* and the chain of festivals was terminated with *Idu* (new yam festival). The early church condemned unreservedly these festivals which were described as "pagan". Church adherents were strictly forbidden from taking part in the festivals. As regards *Ovia-Osese*, the church soundly condemned the killing of young girls who were found wanting. The act of consulting the oracle before the commencement of the festival also came under the church's hammer.[21]

The fierce attack of the church drove the *Ovia-Osese* into limbo. Ironically, the church which nearly killed *Ovia-Osese* was the first to revive and revitalise it. Indeed, but for the church, *Ovia-Osese* would have been a forgotten tradition. The church suddenly woke up in the 1930s to the realization that *Ovia-Osese* was the pivot and shaper of public morality. The church came to realise that the central message of *Ovia-Osese* was not in conflict with the tenets of the Bible[22]. This key message is summarized in the Ogori adage which goes thus: *"A beautiful and chaste woman is the complete workmanship of God, the true glory of the angels, and the rare miracle of the earth.*[23]

Indeed, today *Ovia-Osese* is a nearly wholly Christianized festival. The involvement of the church inevitably led to many changes. It was purged of all "pagan" practices. The central role played by the *Ivia Isiya* (oracle) was removed. The stiff penalties meted out to wayward girls were either terminated or considerably relaxed.

Ovia-Osese as Tourist Attraction

Under Nigeria's military regime *Ovia-Osese* as a festival entered another phase. The government made a spirited effort to upgrade the festival as a tourist attraction. This effort was sustained when civilians came to power. The involvement of government has raised the status of *Ovia-Osese*. As a result, it has become not only a national but an international phenomenon as well. *Ovia-Osese* audience cut across ethnic barriers. Vistors, far and near, troop into Ogori during the annual *Ovia-Osese* festival. As a result of the growing status of *Ovia-Osese*, it has become increasingly commercialized.

Conclusion

Ovia-Osese which before 1700 was observed, more or less as a localised festival, had a national outlook in 1880s, especially during the reign of Ologori Ikpemida Aisoni. In the post-independent Nigeria, especially in the 1970s, *Ovia-Osese* was launched into national and international limelight. The festival survived the storms and vicissitudes of the Christian missions and the changing society. It is one Ogori festival that remains standing and waxing stronger each day and each year. It is the most celebrated festival in Ogoriland today. More than any other festival, *Ovia-Osese* has pulled Ogori out of her relative obscurity and placed her on a national and stage.

It is not out of place to say today that Ogori is synonymous with *Ovia-Osese* and vice-versa. However, re-aligning *Ovia-Osese* with tourism portends grave danger which, if not checked, may threaten the very existence of the festival.

References

1. Apata, Z. O. 1985. Administrative Changes and Reorganisation in Old Kabba Province of Northern Nigeria 1897 -1939. Unpublished PhD Thesis, University of Ife, Ile-Ife.

2. Apata, Z. O. 1989. The Development of Christian Missions 1900-1960: The Case of Ogori/Mangogo. *Journal of Arabic and Religious Studies,* Vol. 5. pp 35-41

3. Askari, K. 1968. Ogori: the Sociology of an Akoko Village. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Oxford University. pp 99-102

4. Ibid.

5. Osheidu, B. 1978. *Historical Facts on Ogori.* Ilorin p. 33

6. Apata, Z. O. 1978. Boundary Delimitation and the Merger of Ogori/Mangogo with Igbirra Division 1918-1966: A Study of Problem of Changing Political and Cultural Identity. Unpublished M. A. Thesis. University of Ibadan, Ibadan.

7. Report of the Kwara State Chieftaincy Declaration, Review and Grading Panel, Sept. 1978, volume 11, p.36

8. CHI/77, Divisional officer, Okene, Ogori village and hamlet heads appointment.

9. Akerejola, Gab Bawa 1973. *The History of Ogori.* University of Ibadan, Institute of African Studies.p.10

10. Temple, O. 1965. Notes on Tribes, Provinces, Emirates and States of Northern Provinces of Nigeria (Frank Cass 1965). pp10 -30

11. Edahson, J. O. 1981. The Impact of Bida Imperialism in *Akoko-Gbangiri.* Unpublished B. A. Dissertation. University of Ilorin, Ilorin. p.15

12. National Archives Ibadan (NAI) K1117.Transfer of Ogori/Mangogo into Kukuruku Division 1948. See also *West African Pilot,* 7th Sept.,1948.

13. Apata, Z. O. 1974. History of Ogori: Reassessment. *Students' Association Publication*, Dec. 1974, p.6

14. Apata, Z. O. 1975. The Growth of Christian Missions in Ogori/Mangogo, 1911-1971. A Comparative Study of C.M.S/R.C.M. Unpublished B.A. Dissertation. Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria. p.65

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid.

17. Furneary, Rupert. 1963. *The Zulu War*. London.

18. Apata, Z. O. 1999. The Nupe/Ilorin Conquests and the Spread of Jihad to Southern Nigeria in the 19th Century: An Appraisal. *Hamdard Islamicus Journal*. (Incomplete).

19. National Archives Kaduna (NAK) Loko Prof 34, History and Customs of Ogori and Mangogo by R. Holgate.

20. Ibid.

21. Apata, Z. O. The Growth of Christians Missions. Op.Cited

22. Ibid.

8

Ogori Indigenous Education: An Examination of its Metaphysics, Philosophy, Purpose, and Learning Strategies

B. S. AKANDE

Introduction

Very often when the issue of indigenous education is mentioned in any setting, discussants tend to wonder if there was actually an indigenous African education. They often examine education in Africa through the Western concept of education. Yet it is clear that the Western concept of education only leads to the swift conclusion that there was no credible education that is truly African in philosophy, purpose or achievement. And in the desperate search for an African education several discussants resort to and accept general issues of training, apprenticeship and mentoring as education in Africa. They understand indigenous African education as a simplistic process of socialization, involving the preparation for domestic chores, work and adult life. This is okay, but indigenous African education went deeper than that. It developed to the stage that it sustained civilizations, empires and a unique path to technological achievement quite different from the Eastern or Western version. To understand African indigenous education, it is necessary to appreciate the fact that it differed from its Western counterpart in its metaphysics, philosophy, and purpose. For instance, while western education sought to conquer the physical environment, African indigenous education lived in harmony with it. Similarly, while western science used the scientific method to unearth the cause of a disease, African medicine-men consorted with nature to unearth the secrets of any ailment. For instance, Ogunniyi (1988), in a study on malaria, found that while African scientists were concerned with why some people and not others were afflicted with malaria, their Western counterparts searched for the causative agent of the disease. Although both were working to prevent malaria in the future, their cultural orientation to the investigation differed. Furthermore, while foreign education was global,

indigenous education was specific to the culture, location and ecology of the tribe (Akande and Alao, 2012). For these reasons, in order to understand African indigenous education, one must start from way back in history and focus on an ethnic group that is fairly rural, homogenous and relatively unpolluted by the overwhelming '*Oyinbo*' influence in Africa. One must examine the tradition, culture and even the people's understanding of the self and the Supreme Being, for after all, every form of education starts in some form of metaphysics.

Africans, according to Ellen (1992), do not speak of education as a process or institution separate from everything else in life. In fact, the term education is a Western concept that does not speak to the traditional African reality in which the entire community is continuously engaged in learning and teaching. For these reasons then, this work endeavours to highlight the life and education of the Ogori people of Kogi State, Nigeria. The paper exposes their metaphysics, philosophy and society. It also illustrates their learning tasks and experiences, and shows the methods or strategies for implementing these learning issues.

Education

Since the time of creation, man accumulated wisdom, technology and acceptable behaviour. These knowledge, skills and attitudes were usually passed to upcoming generation for use. But before each generation passes what it took from an older generation to a younger one; it usually adds its own ideas and technology which it had discovered and which it considers relevant (Akande and Daniel, 2011). Education then is thought of as the transmission of values and the accumulated knowledge of the society. It is a societal instrument for the expansion of human culture (Suzuki, 2006) and the improvement of humanity. It is based on this premise that this work examines education among the Ogoris of yore.

Ogori Metaphysics as Basis For Their Education

The Ogori people had never seen knowledge as compartmentalized. For them, wisdom, culture, nature and, indeed, the world of the spirits and people were intricately woven. The most important issue was to survive. They had to survive the unpredictable seasons upon which agricultural yields depended. They had to survive marginal food supply and they also had to try to survive ailments and

death which, according to them, came as a 'mighty foreboding wind' to carry people away to the ancestral world.

The Ogori saw an interrelatedness in all things; they accepted that human beings have consciousness, but so too do other phenomena in their world. For instance, rivers, springs, hills, forests, etc., have some form of consciousness and were capable of certain activities. Several of these physical features in the environment also exhibited gender-based characteristics. *Omoneyen* (a hill), for instance, was said to possess a male human character with dual personality (benevolence and malevolence). He exhibited the personalities, dignity and patience of a successful man. Once in a while, however, he visited his fiery anger upon the community if he felt abandoned, or decided the community was negligent of his needs in some form. *Omoneyen* dominated the spiritual and physical landscape of Ogori with his imposing presence overlooking the major approaches into Ogori. The people thus relied on him for surveillance and protection. *Ememe* (a spring), on the other hand, exhibited feminine characteristics. She was reputed to be very rich and generous to women (especially widows) who lacked the capacity to cater for their children. She would however not tolerate lies, broken promises, slovenliness or untidiness. The Ogoris related with these (*Omoneyen, Ememe,* etc.) as if they were actually human beings because they saw the world as one integrated reality.

The Ogoris lived in and accepted a conscious world that was populated by the spirits of their ancestors as well as those of animals, plants, hills, winds, springs and rivers. Because of this belief, they were concerned with maintaining harmony and balance in their environment. Their actions in relation to these things were strictly guided by taboos and enforced by certain deities or persons of similar reverence. These persons, '*utugbunros*', '*babalawos*', *shamans*, *marabous,* etc., had the gift and ability to communicate with nature and the spirit beings that inhabited the hills, springs, forest, rivers and winds. From these the *utugbunros* gathered knowledge, medical skills and procedures for doing things which they passed to their initiates and sometimes to other people in the community.

Though the Ogori metaphysical world understood and recognized a plethora of deities, it however accepted the notion of a Supreme Being, *Osibina,* who created the heavens, the earth and everything inbetween. They did not however see Him as a judge of any sort. That responsibility was delegated to the small gods who reported to Him. He, however, resided in the 'ancestral home' and ultimately decided who was born, or who died and was replaced by whom. In

Ogori, reincarnation was an accepted fact. Life cycles did not begin or end at one's birth or death, but continued beyond these points. The following diagram shows the continuity in life cycles in the Ogori belief system.

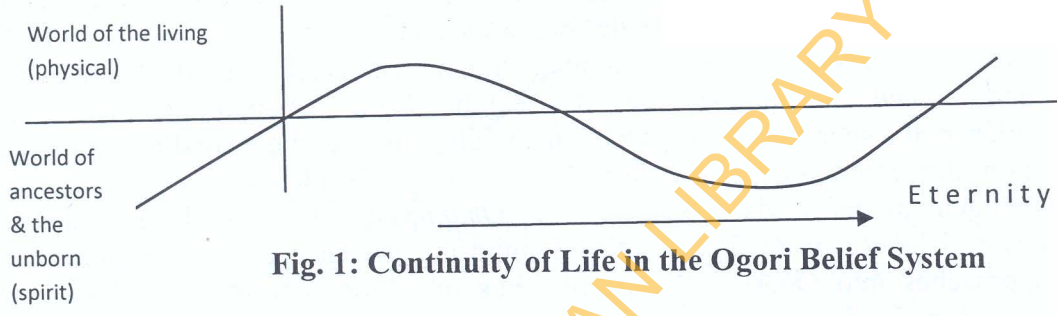


Fig. 1: Continuity of Life in the Ogori Belief System

In this belief system (fig 1), there was no heaven or hell, just a void populated by spirit beings who had the capacity to influence (intercede, interfere) in the world of the living.

Thus, there is a vertical relationship between the Supreme God at the apex followed by spirit beings and then human beings. Fig 2a illustrates this:

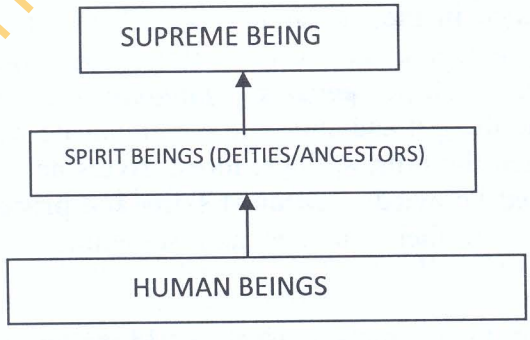


Fig 2a: Hierarchy of Authority in the Ogori Metaphysical World

Fig. 2a shows that man was at the bottom of the scheme of life followed by spirit beings and then the Supreme Being at the top. This relationship and authority was transferred to the human world where the parent or community chief holds an unquestionable influence over the child. And just as human beings or deities must surrender their independence to the Supreme Being, so too must the youth surrender their independence to the parent or community for the safety, harmonious existence and well-being of everyone.

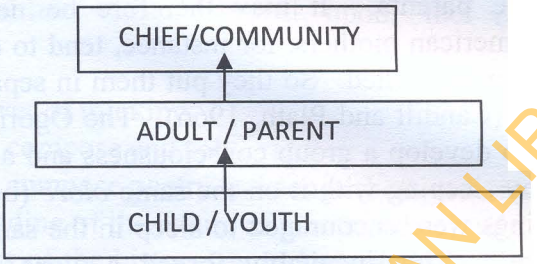


Fig. 2b: Hierarchy of Authority in the Physical World

From the above (figs. 2a and 2b), it becomes clear that any society or education system based on the foregoing metaphysical belief system would certainly be authoritarian, and accept nature (natural events and features) as partners in the physical world and thus endeavour to live in accord with it. A major part of Ogori education was the study and understanding of natural events and the physical features in their surroundings. There was a common interest, dependency and survival bond with nature.

Philosophy and Purpose of Education

To really appreciate the kind of education prevalent in the Ogori of antiquity, there is a need to examine the philosophy of the people at that time. And the questions to ask are: What kind of society did the Ogori people build? How? Why?

Parents (especially mothers) are the most significant agents of socialization and education within any society (Abolarin, 2010). Thus in the study of the philosophy of the education of Ogori, it is appropriate to study the expectations of mothers for their children. Early child education takes many forms, depending on the belief of the parents. So what did mothers in Ogori want for their children? What kind of society did they want their children to inherit?

But more important is how they went about preparing children for such future society. The following section will attend to these questions.

Desirable Contents and Learning Experiences in Ogori Education

Learning issues and experiences vary from one society to the other, depending on their belief system and extant technology. To get these learning tasks, it is necessary to examine the nature of early child socialization and its initial relationship with the parents. It may therefore be necessary to do some comparison here. American mothers, for instance, tend to expect their infants to be independent and strong-willed. So they put them in separate beds, sometimes even separate rooms (Candill and Plath, 1966). The Ogori mother, on the other hand, endeavoured to develop a group consciousness and a strong bond between her and the infant by sleeping with it on the same *olore* (bed). Similarly, as the child grew up, siblings were encouraged to sleep in the same room and possibly on the same 'olore'. This inevitably forged a close bond between them, eventually leading to a commonality of ideas and close-knit society. This issue of togetherness was further enhanced by parents who often advised their children to be like and act like other children. In Ogori, children must conform to a general norm and value system. Team work and cooperation was the emphasis. Individual differences, independence of thought and non-conformity in the child were scarcely tolerated. One may say education in Ogori (of old) bordered on indoctrination. From the above, it is clear that mothers in Ogori expected early mastery of the skills of self-control, compliance with adult authority and social courtesy, while mothers in the U. S. desire early acquisition of skills of individual action, standing up for one's own rights and other forms of verbal assertions (Suzuki, 2000).

From the foregoing it is evident that the kind of children, Ogori parent raised, as well as the society they found themselves was one that was closely-knit and communal in nature. The next issue to examine is the Ogori concept of the good child. Every society endeavours to develop the good child for on such depend the future of the society.

Generally, the good child in Ogori would be one who:

fostered harmonious human relationships;

- knew his/her place in the society and was socially conscious of his/her responsibility;
- deferred to his/her parents, elders and persons of authority;
- understood safety issues and was safety-conscious; and
- appreciated, respected and upheld traditional institutions and the belief system of the community.

Although individual differences and undue inquisitiveness into the 'whys' and 'why-nots' of tradition were frowned upon, the Ogori people however encouraged:

- a strong power of thinking;
- an ability to compose and solve riddles;
- an ability to compose poetry and songs (both critical and congratulatory);
- an understanding of the nature of plants and animals;
- an awareness of the history, genealogy, and the governance system of the people; and
- a knowledge of diplomacy.

In addition to the above, the child must be:

- physically strong;
- good on the farm and in some vocation;
- knowledgeable in the construction of traditional housing; and
- smart, fast and cunning enough to outwit common game animals used for food.

In summary, the good child in Ogori would be one who was obedient, compliant, cooperative, energetic, prompt, honest, knowledgeable, clear in thought and communication, responsible for his own actions and those of his siblings. The good child was a team player. The Ogori educational system was designed to build a closely-knit society that was communal in nature.

Strategies for Teaching and Learning in Ogori (making of the good child)

In Ogori indigenous education, the individual was viewed as a whole person with intellectual, spiritual, emotional and physical dimensions. Although highly interwoven, each of these personality areas was addressed in the process of growth and learning. But while Western education saw each of these characteristics separately, education in Ogori of antiquity made no such distinction. This is because education was woven into the fabric of life as

demonstrated in festivals, traditions, economic life or religious activities. There was no distinction between religious and secular thoughts or values. There were also no distinct learning periods or instructors; therefore, children learn from any interesting adult, process or place as they grew up. The reality in Ogori was that the entire community continuously engaged in teaching and learning. This implies that in most cases both boys and girls were educated to undertake a multitude of tasks or occupations that required related skills (Akande and Alao, 2012).

Everyone was expected to be an all-rounder. He must know how to build a hut, cultivate a farm, tend a few domestic animals and show adequate knowledge in the efficacy of local crops/herbs for food and medicine. The method used in the teaching and learning of the above were mostly through observation, demonstration and practice. Sports and games also contributed to the learning process.

Learning in Ogori even in the days long gone was gender sensitive as a woman was expected to learn to work as a gardener, housewife and cook, besides being a care-giver and nurse for her children. Though she may also learn through games and sports, her specific games types were designed to enhance her feminine roles and responsibilities.

Although, education in Ogori was never scheduled in any form or made age-related, there was a certain kind of education that was organized. In fact, it had a sort of formality that approximated the present school system. This is the training given to girls as they approached puberty. In this case, the girls had to register with *Iyaodina* (a female chief) who was in charge of such training. At a particular time of the year, such girls were taken to a secluded place and given instructions on hygiene, child-care, husband care, cookery and other domestic chores. It is only after this education that the girls were qualified to get married (Akande, 1997). A slight variation of this was available for boys. At puberty, they formed age groups. And at a specific time of the year, usually when farming activities were at low ebb, they gathered themselves and took to the forest for several days. During this period, they were attended to only once in a while by visiting specialist adult instructors. The purpose of this seclusion was for them to acquire certain adult skills and prove their readiness to take on manly duties. For instance, they must learn to live and work together, they must learn the history,

songs and folktales peculiar to the tribe. Skills, patience, cunning and agility required, for instance, to catch a live hare or partridge must be learnt too. Generally, they learnt to defend the community, survive the elements and appreciate nature.

The above method, however, came up only once in the life-time of an individual. More regular learning took place in everyday activities such as;

- participation in ceremonies
- rituals
- recitation/poetry
- word games/tongue twisters
- dance/music/songs
-
-

-sports
-story telling/folktales
- farming / soil study
- puzzles/proverbs
- domestic chores
apprenticeship/mentoring
-construction (roads, housing, drainage)

African indigenous education, according to Adeyemi and Adeyinka (2002) culminated in the learning of the influence of both malevolent and benevolent spirits and purification rites. Individuals were taught the value of propitiating the spirits to avert such disasters as sickness, death and pestilence. Such knowledge was often thought to be necessary for good harvest, communal survival and prosperity. In Ogori this knowledge was often the privilege of a select few who often doubled as the custodians of individual wellbeing and the communal health of the community.

It is necessary to discuss some of the methods of teaching and learning listed above as their usage in antiquity may differ from current practice.

Story-telling is one of the most important strategies for teaching and learning in Ogori. In fact, it has endured to this day. It is therefore necessary to sketch a little further how it was used as an instrument for teaching and correction. First of all, it was considered an important part of socialization and social development. It was a strong pedagogic instrument for developing the affective domain (morality) of children. Most of the stories or folktales were carefully selected and goal-directed and could be administered through counseling sessions on identified delinquents or maladaptive children. Several of these folktales were age-appropriate and graded from very simple and straight-forward stories about greed, stealing and stubbornness (meant for very young children), to stories that encouraged respect for elders, community life, societal norms and

adventure (meant for teenagers). Finally, there were stories of wisdom, diplomacy, dilemma, career choices and metaphysics (meant for young adults). Whatever the purpose, story-telling in Ogori was designed to lead the individual towards the concept of the good child, the conformist, the patriotic citizen and one who would not only cherish the Ogori culture but also uphold and transmit it . It was the belief of the Ogoris that what goes into the child's mind and imagination is important in shaping his conduct.

Songs/music were also used to teach, admonish and even rebuke erring members of the community. An erring adult, for instance, is soon called to order publicly for his maladjustment through songs that may seem innocuous to the uninitiated or inattentive listener, but carry a well-aimed punch directed at the criminal mind or non-conformist. It may also be used to criticize leadership and governance. The most popular song used for this is the 'eregba' song. This is a male dominated music/dance and is suitable for any type of ceremony or festival. The preferred song/music for women is called 'iyaresen'. Both served the same satirical purpose.

Learning in Ogori also took place through games. One of the most popular indoor games in Ogori was the 'eba'. This game is truly African in popularity and spread. It is, according to Farum-Badley (2012), a member of the family of pit and pebble strategy games that originated in the Sudan over 3600 years ago when accountants and engineers of the ancient Kush Civilization of the Upper Nile used counters on a tablet with depressions to carry out mathematical calculations. It is played in most West African countries. It was even exported with slaves to the Americas. It has been argued that the game probably played an important role in shaping the personality of the communities that used it for entertainment. Farum-Badley (2012) confirms that some of the sharp evaluation skills for which older Barbadians were known can be attributed to their use of the game. The *eba* game is played with forty-eight (48) *eba* (seeds) in a rectangular *opare* (board). The typical *eba* board is fashioned roughly out of a mahogany piece of wood. It has twelve (12) *ubos* (pits, receptacles or houses) arranged in six (6) pairs along the length of the board. The players sit with the board crossways between them. At the start of the game, four (4) seeds are placed in each *ubo*. The objective of the game is to capture a majority of the 48 seeds. *Eba* can be introduced purely as a game of chance to very young children, and even at this level, it has subtle educational value in encouraging the child to count and

concentrate. He progressively also learns the concept of one-to-one correspondence as he drops one seed into each of the sequence of consecutive holes. Soon he learns simple sums in order to evaluate options and keep score. According to Farum-Badley (2012) who studied the Bajan (Caribean) version of *eba* called *Barbados-warri*, as the child advances in the discovery of the game he begins to see the strategic importance of planning and the discipline involved in the actual implementation of long-term strategies, thus appreciating the importance of foresight, correct timing and an awareness of cause and effect. The game is also interesting and may have been used in Ogori for its educational and entertainment purposes.

A close examination of the three methods of teaching and learning just highlighted above reveals that they were all forms of entertainment. The implication of this is that educational issues are couched in entertainment formats to make them more interesting and participatory. This is one strategy of teaching that modern education may copy from the Ogori tradition.

Another learning situation which was not so entertaining is that occasioned by death and burial. Burial in Ogori comes in two forms. The burial of the physical body and later that of the spirit. The physical burial ends on the second day after the body has been consigned to the earth. On this day the living relatives of the deceased come together to commiserate with each other and trace the genealogy of the dead backwards in four different directions through the grandparents. The genealogy is recounted orally and it affords the living relations the opportunity to obtain information on how they are related or descended from one another. This oral narration/education allows individuals the opportunity to demonstrate their kinship and pedigree publicly. This way the average Ogori can trace his ancestry quite easily.

Implications For Modern Education

Fafunwa and Aisiku (1982) posit that no study of the history of education in Africa is complete or meaningful without adequate knowledge of the tradition of indigenous education system prevalent in Africa prior to the introduction of Islam and Christianity. For therein lies the real nature of African thought patterns and education which sustained the rise and fall of great armies, empires and civilizations. Indigenous education in Ogori of antiquity, for instance, was designed to help people live in accord with nature. It was based on the sharing and transmission of knowledge from person to person, and even from deity to person. Their education was also specific and relevant to the culture, ecology and

survival needs of the individual and his tribe. The culture and nature-mediated technology was developed in agreement with and consequence of the environment. The purpose was to enhance a sustainable level of self sufficiency and renewability of resources.

This attitude can be replicated in the modern school environment where students learn in cooperation with each other instead of in competition with each other. They must be taught to respect nature and to harvest its resources with care and concern for the environment so that it can replenish itself. The forest, savannah, water bodies and so on should be the modern classroom. The curriculum should also be made not just learner-friendly but also nature-friendly. Furthermore, modern education must provide an ecology-sensitive curriculum at the basic level of the school system. Its purpose would be to offer a nature connected education which would encourage a way of thinking and living that values the peace, health and well-being of all of nature as a guiding principle. This kind of curriculum will promote communion with nature and begin to foster development and conservation of natural resources in a direction that will enhance tourism.

The Western system of education was designed to exploit and overcome nature. Its education thus created a civilization that is wasteful, extravagant and destructive. The result is that resources are being depleted by the day until the inevitability of scarcity and global warming came upon us. Children are taxed heavily through examinations to study issues they may never use in their life. This is contrary to the mode of learning in the Ogori of yore which was stress free and full of excitement. It was also self-paced and useful to the learner. And as Fafunwa (1974) observes, functionalism was the building principle of this (African) education. Its aim was making the individual useful to himself and his community, through the acquisition of vocational and physical skills along with intellectual development.

The Ogori people readily took to monotheism (belief in one God) and the accompanying saints and prophets because they already had a strong belief in a Supreme Being who was assisted by small divinities and ancestral spirits. Olagboye (2002) places this very clearly when he said that Ogori people are highly religious. They were, to every man, traditionalists in their religion before the advent of the colonialists. Now, traditional religion has given way to

Christianity and Islam. This, however, has not taken away their love for the more endearing traditional modes of teaching children, for as Atoyebi (2010) surmises, though the people of Ogori are predominantly Christians, they did not discard the *Ovia-Osese* tradition for their new-found faith. They see the festival as an extension of some of the teachings on moral rectitude as entrenched in the Christian or Islamic faith. The implication of this is clear; there can be a synergy between old and new ways of doing things.

Inspite of the beauty and desirability of the Ogori education system, it may be difficult to go back to it for this may be tantamount to re-inventing the wheel. The current fad in Nigeria is the call for the use of any of the 'major' Nigerian languages in schools. This call has been strident and consistent though uncoordinated. However, this author does not see the feasibility of instructing Ogori children in any language other than their own. For instructing the average Ogori child in any Nigerian language other than his own is just as bad as instructing him in English language, for it is just as 'foreign'. After all, teaching the Ogoris in Yoruba, Hausa or Ibo is equally an imposition of the culture of those people who own the language. The Ogoris are skillful in picking up languages effortlessly. Atoyebi (2010) confirms this when he opined that the Oko-speaking communities of Ogori and Magongo are multilingual. This observation is because the people speak several languages, some of which are Yoruba, Ebira, Ekpe, Hausa, English, etc. This is enough for them to get along in Nigeria. The effort to study mathematics, Basic Science, or technical drawing in any language other than English will be distracting.

Conclusion

Education in Ogori of antiquity was neither separated from the process of living nor seen as isolated from the understanding of the self and nature. It was an intricate knowledge of culture and nature-determined technology. Consequently, people picked up learning issues everyday according to their placement, desires, interests and pace. Eventually, however, societal expectations of the good child were met by most citizens.

Such expectations were usually met through various learning tasks implemented through strategies in religion, ceremonies and puberty rites of passage. Learning was exciting, entertaining and lifelong. Modern education will do well to emulate some of these qualities of education of old Ogori.

Finally, if we are to better understand the earth that sustains us, as Ogori people once did, we need to accept and develop an integrated re-education

process that values our inherent sensory system of communication and intelligence with nature. And the time for it is now as our health and survival as a specie depend on it.

References

Abolarin, E. E. 2010. *Essentials of Developmental Psychology: A Foundation for Teaching.* Abuja: Petra.

Adegoke, A. A. 2003. *Adolescents in Africa.* Ibadan. Hadassah Publishing Company.

Adeyemi, M. B. and Adeyinka, A. A. 2002. Some Key Issues in African Traditional Education. *McGill Journal of Education.* Spring 2002

Akande, B. S. 1997. *Traditional Marriage Institution Among Ogori/Magongo People of Kogi State, Nigeria.* Ilorin. Nathadex.

Akande, B. S. and Alao, R. A. 2012. Indigenous Education in Africa: An Examination of its Content and Methodology. *Okene Journal of Education.* 4(1) 50 - 56

Akande, B. S. and Daniel, F. 2011. *Strategies for Studying and Passing Examinations.* Ibadan: Safmos Publishers.

Alanu, O. 1997. Yoruba Traditional Folklore: Their Contribution to Child Education. *Zaria Journal of Education Studies*. 2(19) 62 – 67

Atoyebi, J. D. 2010. *A Reference Grammar of Oko.* Kohn: Rudiger Koppe Verlag.

Caudill, A. and Plath, D. 1966. Who Sleeps By Whom? Parent-Child Involvement in Japanese Families. *Psychiatry* 29, 344 – 366

Ellen, T. 1992. Indigenous African Education as a Means of Understanding the Fullness of Life: Amara Traditional Education. *Journal of Black Studies. 23(1) 7 - 26*

Fafunwa, A. B. 1974. *History of Education in Nigeria*. London: George Allen and Unwin.

Fafunwa, A. Babs and Aisiku, J.U. 1982. *Education in Africa: A Comparative Survey*. London: George Allen and Unwin. p.9

Farum-Badley, W. L. 2012. Barbados-Warri: the Bajan Way. Retrieved 30/3/12 from Barbadosphotogallery.com/warri/warrigame.html

Oguniyi, M. 1988. Adapting Western Science to Traditional African Culture. *International Journal of Science Education,* 10(1) 1 -9

Okeowo, A. O. 2011. The Didactism in the *Alo* Genre for Character Development and Behaviour Modification. An Inaugural Lecture delivered in the Federal College of Education, Okene 20/6/2011

Olagboye, A. A. 2002. *St Peter's School and Ogori in History.* Ibadan: Kemsio Educational Consultants.

Sanali, L. 1999. Community as a Classroom: Dilemmas of Valuing African Indigenous Literacy in Education. Cynthia Szymanski Sunal (1999), *Schooling in Sub-Saharan African Contemporary Issues and Future Concerns.* New York: Garland Publishing.

Suzuki, M. J. 2000. Child-Rearing and Educational Practices in the United States and Japan: Comparative Perspective. *Hyogo University of Teacher Education Journal* 20(1) 177 – 186

Zulu, I. M. 2006. Critical Indigenous African Education and Knowledge. *Journal of Pan African Studies* 1(3) March 2006

9

Cultural Resources and Youth Empowerment in Africa

ALFRED A. ADEGOKE
Department of Counsellor Education,
University of Ilorin, Ilorin.

Introduction and Background

Africa's youth constitute up to 40% of her population. They constitute the largest segment of Africa's population. They are a formidable creative force that can be harnessed for her socio-economic development; they are Africa's foremost social capital requiring priority investment. Africa's youth, however, have been faced with a myriad of problems. They have been used as cannon fodder in times of war; they suffer poverty and deprivations, and many are denied education, information and skill development opportunities. Political instability reflected in the growing number of civil wars and conflicts is having a devastating impact on youth population. International children's charities say that there are 300,000 children fighting in 36 wars worldwide and Africa has the highest number with 120,000 child soldiers (Kopoka, 1999). Entire societies are exploding and those who are suffering most are the youth. HIV/AIDS, compounded by sexually transmitted diseases, has not spared Africa's young people either. Girls and young women especially bear the brunt of HIV infections and suffer from rape, unwanted pregnancies, early marriages and harmful traditional practices such as female genital mutilation and obstetric fistula which further worsen the unfortunate condition in which thousands of female youth find themselves (UNFPA, 2006).

At the start of the process of developing the African Youth Charter, a research on the Status of the African Youth was commissioned by the African Union Commission (AUC) with the support of the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA). This research shows that: gross enrolment ratio into tertiary institutions in sub-Saharan Africa is 3.6 percent and compares poorly with other regions; public expenditure on higher education has declined steadily since the 1980s and remains chronically under-funded; 60.7 million young people in Africa

are living on less than US $1 a day ; the situation of youth unemployment in Africa varies across the continent, from 35 percent in Morocco to 70 percent of 18-35 year olds in South Africa; an estimated three quarters of the 12 million young people between ages 15-24 who are living with HIV/AIDS live in sub-Saharan Africa; half of the 300,000 child soldiers in the world are in Africa and most of these young people have been forcibly recruited; young girls are subjected to sexual violence; and African youth have limited space to participate in decision-making and governance. This research evidence formed the basis for the urgent development of a charter that will provide member states, including those without functional youth policies, with a framework for youth development programming at the national level (Dabesaki Mac-Ikemenjima, 2006).

October 2005 marked the tenth anniversary of the World Programme of Action for Youth, adopted by the General Assembly in 1995. It is an observance that has served to refocus member states' commitment to achieving goals established in ten priority areas as set out in resolution 50/81. Specific commitments were made in the areas of youth concerns and needs in education, employment, hunger and poverty, health, environment, drug abuse, juvenile delinquency, leisure-time activities, gender equality, and participation in decision making. This youth development agenda was expanded in 2003 to take account of emerging development challenges facing the youth; in response, the General Assembly adopted resolution 58/133, which endorsed the five additional priority areas of globalization, information and communication technology (ICT), HIV/AIDS, youth and armed conflict, and inter-generational relations. African leaders and Africans in general must take the lead in ensuring that young people in the continent of Africa shake off the historic injustices imposed on her through slavery, colonization, and depletion of natural resources by developing a strong sense of self-determination.

African Culture

According to Ngugi (1972) culture in its broadest sense is a way of life fashioned by people in their collective endeavour to live and to come to terms with their total environment. It is the sum of their art, their science and all their social institutions, including their system of beliefs and rituals. This process leads to the creation of a body of material and spiritual values which endow a society with unique ethos. Such values are often expressed through people's songs, dances,

folklore, drawing, sculpture, rites and ceremonies. Over the years these varieties of artistic activity have come to symbolize the meaning of the word 'culture'.

Culture is a very broad and deep component of life and cannot be exhausted easily. It includes artistic creations like songs, dances, folklore, drawing, sculpture, rites, ceremonies and drama. All of these aspects of culture have been used by African indigenous societies to guide young people to deal effectively with their socio-psychological and economic needs.

There is strong evidence that aspects of African culture can be used as a tool to empower today's young people. Indigenous African societies have been known to make use of artistic creations, community rites and ceremonies for stimulating young people to acquire positive social and psychological attributes. Africa cannot afford to ignore the younger segment of its population. One option open to the continent is to look inwards with the sole purpose of re-discovering the strengths that exist within the traditional African society as it relates to meeting the basic developmental needs of youth in Africa.

There are cultural, philosophical and religious systems that constitute a base for the values and beliefs relevant towards assisting a child through the transition to adulthood. Most African societies have a set of child-rearing beliefs and practices that are derived from traditional culture and based on consensus within the culture about what is natural, normal and necessary in raising the child to adulthood (Adegoke, 2001). Sub-Saharan Africa has long been classified as being at the traditional end of the modernization continuum (Evans, 1994). However, the invasions of modern-style concepts and changes in economic conditions, social organizations and family structure are reshaping and, in some instances, even replacing traditional child-rearing beliefs and practices. Industrialization, separation and compartmentalization which are the hallmarks of modernization have largely disrupted the cohesion of many traditional African societies. Technology and industrialization have given us many gifts but they have also taken a lot from us. The result is that school dropout, unemployment, violence and drug abuse are emerging forcefully among the young people of Africa as elsewhere. It is also true that most of the prescriptions available in literature on how to deal with the problems of adolescent development are Western in origin, non-African and, therefore, may be inappropriate for many African countries with third world characteristics.

Puberty Rites as Cultural Resource for Youth Empowerment

Contemporary anthropologists have identified rites of passage as a functional group process designed to structure and bring meaning to the various transitional stages of human life. Rites of passage are the ceremonies and rituals that not only celebrate the individual and honour their growth, but also provide the essential context and energetic "boost" from one phase of life to the next. It is a ritual event that marks a person's progress from one status to another. They are often ceremonies surrounding events such as milestones within puberty, and coming of age. Rites of passage in many cultures in Africa are used to mark the socially recognized transition to sexual maturity. These transitional stages occur whether we acknowledge them or not. It is vital that we recognize, embrace and celebrate these periods as important tools to reposition and empower young people in their lives so that growth and maturation reflect life lived fully in health, hope, happiness, harmony and humor.

There have been a number of studies on puberty rites, their meaning and function. They serve to ritualize and clearly demarcate changes in the status of individuals within cultures, provide cultural definitions for individuals that represent ongoing irreversible changes in their lives, and also define cultural expectations for individuals (Vizdom, 1976). Others considered them a cultural means of resolving sex identity conflicts induced in early childhood (Whiting, 1981). There are indications in literature that these rites tend to occur in middle-level societies (Schlegel and Barry, 1980).

There is perhaps no universally-accepted definition of adolescence. In most societies of the world the onset of adolescence is closely synchronized with the biological changes of puberty. But the time when adolescence ends and adult status begins is usually socially-constructed and, therefore, differs widely among cultures. Most African societies traditionally have their own social institutions that recognize the period of adolescence. These institutions train, prepare and initiate male and female adolescents into adulthood. Every member of the indigenous African community takes the responsibility of socializing its young ones. In like manner, all others share a problem affecting any member of the community. Thus, the concept of being one's brother's keeper is built into each community, and all members of the community see themselves as one people with one culture, one identity and one destiny. As a result, many African communities

have ceremonial rites that are arranged to support the adolescent in their transition to adulthood.

In a study of the Kikuyu community in Kenya (Whortman and Whiting, 1987), the enormous educational, social, moral and religious value of the initiation rites among the Kikuyu people was pointed out. The Kikuyu youth were not only initiated into the adult status of womanhood, but also into the age-set of maidens and bachelors. By means of a sacred ceremony called *Ngweko,* the parental generation transferred to the youth the responsibility of regulating premarital sex and initiating the process of making selection, with peers as a major source of mutual support and regulation in this process. The *Ngweko* has been described as a viable solution to the problem of pre-marital sex and mate selection in middle level societies, especially those who have been maidens and bachelors for a long time. This can be a veritable tool in the prevention of the spread of the HIV virus. Similar practices have been reported for other societies in Africa, particularly in East and South Africa.

Another example of puberty rites in Africa is the *Ovia-Osese* festival of the Ogori people in Nigeria. Ogori is a small town in Kogi State of Nigeria. Kogi State is located in the transition zone between the southern rain forest and the northern Savannah; its location is also a confluence of cultures of northern and southern regions of Nigeria. The festival has, in recent years, become a crowd-pulling event and a tourist attraction. *Ovia-Osese* is a maiden festival aimed at initiating maidens into womanhood preparatory to marriage *(Ovia* means bride). The origin, growth and development of the festival are long and windy. Many scholars believe that the festival is as old as the Ogori people themselves (Askari, 1968; Apata, 1986). *Ovia-Osese* is the climax of several activities such as fattening, traditional education and training. Traditionally, *Ovia-Osese* evolved from a simple rite of passage that is meant to be an initiation ceremony of young teenagers to adulthood in a formal training school that lasted one to three years for both sexes; boys had theirs known as *Igifofi* festival (Sofola,1986).

As a result of social and economic changes and the influence of Western civilization, many of these institutions are breaking down across Africa. The *Ovia-Osese* festival, for example, has undergone a lot of changes from what it used to be. It is now virtually a three-day affair, rather than the three long years that it used to cover. Similarly, the *Ngweko,* following the advent of Western type of schooling, has effectively replaced the age-set system as the institutional framework for mate selection by providing social contacts and defining marriageability (by quantifying performance and qualification, and structuring

access to socio-economic opportunity). In the traditional Kikuyu society, a fecund girl had close contact with young men other than her brothers only at the *Ngweko* dance, which were highly supervised by peers. A contemporary girl in her late teens who is still attending school has close contact with her male classmates with no explicit instructions as to how to behave toward them (Worthman and Whiting, 1987).

The Ijaw language in the Niger Delta area of Nigeria specifies a number of life stages, none of which, however, corresponds directly to the English usage of the word adolescence. However; with the introduction of western-style schooling, and an expected delay in the age of marriage, the possibility of a prolonged period between puberty and marriage is now being defined as the period of adolescence in the life stages of the new generation of Ijaw people. In the past, among the Ijaw, one was either a child or an adult. To be an adult was determined by the attainment of adult roles associated with marriage. For females, adulthood could arrive as soon as they were capable of bearing children, because at approximately the same period they had already learned the necessary skills for maintaining a household. Males married later because they required more time to acquire the physical maturity to perform their occupations and earn sufficient money to support a household.

Traditionally, the stage of *"kalapesi/ereso"* was considered to be of "young adulthood." For boys, participating in communal rituals and supplying the manpower at communal works signified attaining this stage. Males at this stage, for example, are called upon to dig graves, and females to cook for visitors during funerals. At other times when a boy successfully cuts down his first bunch of palm fruit this is an indication that he has attained "young adulthood". Although this stage, unlike with other tribes in Africa, did not take place in special schools or initiation camps. Though entry or exit from it was not marked by serious rituals, it was, nevertheless, a period of training, learning, apprenticeship and preparation for future roles and responsibilities. For most women, entry into "young adulthood" coincides fairly closely with the onset of menarche and with marriage. The beginning of menstruation was not recognized with ritual but most girls got married either before or immediately after its onset. Data on mothers of current generation of adolescents among the Ijaws in Anajiri indicate that the average age at marriage in the 1920s, 1930s and 1940s was 15 years, approximately the same as the age for the onset of menses or

slightly earlier. The average age at the birth of their first child was 16.5 years in the 1920s and 17.5 years in the 1930s and 1940s (Holes and Leiss, 1989). To ensure an appropriate match, marriage was arranged by the parents or by senior members of the couple's lineage, often long before the girl reached puberty.

From the examples outlined above, it is very clear that traditional adolescent rites of passage in Africa are designed to provide a cultural framework for dictating roles and responsibilities of adulthood that will benefit the individual and the sponsoring community. They also serve as effective ways of instilling in young people not only knowledge and skills but also the values and motivation needed to foster healthy adult roles. It should also be seen as one of the strengths of the traditional African societies that should be revived and reformed in places where they have existed as part of the ways to support and empower Africa's young people.

Extended Family Systems as a Cultural Resource for Youth Empowerment

Before formal education was widespread in various parts of Africa, there existed traditional ways of child rearing and patterns of interaction between parents and their children, which were well-known to all the community. Clear-cut roles, obligations, rights, expectations and sanctions were prescribed. Whatever the merits or demerits of such child rearing practices, the parents and their children knew undoubtedly, the "correct forms". The traditional system of child rearing and family life promotes strong bonds of loyalty between family members, and the child grows into adulthood with a strong feeling of security. Co-operation and mutual help are inculcated from infancy and extended family members are confident that help, support and protection will always be forthcoming from other members of the family whenever it is needed. The child thus develops an apparently healthy and secure personality that is protected from the rough and tumble of deprivation and wants (Durojaiye, 1976).

With the advent of formal education and the influence of western cultures, the traditional parent-child relationships and child rearing practices in Africa have been subtly overthrown. The context of child-care has been, until recently, rather stable with adequate resources to support the traditional way of life. However, the invasion of modern-style concepts and changes in economic conditions, social organization and family structure are reshaping, and in some instances, even replacing the traditional child rearing beliefs and practices (Evans, 1994; Colleta and Balachander, 1996)). Parents are generally very busy striving to maintain their economic status. They have very little time for socializing with their

children. When out of school the children are mostly in the company of house-helps and family drivers. This to a large extent has led to a disconnection between parents and their wards. Though well-endowed with material needs, children of middle and upper class families can be socially excluded if their personal development is not supported and guided by their parents or significant others.

The delocalization of rural communities, a process whereby old village-based economies have become incorporated into and made dependent upon modern national and international economies, is now common-place. The increasing vulnerability of women and children in this process is well-documented (Kilbride and Kilbride, 1990). This process is made worse by current issues like the HIV/AIDS; and other issues surrounding poverty in Africa have had serious impact on the extended family systems.

It would be premature, however, to predict the demise of the extended family system. It is a coping mechanism of infinite versatility, the organic and integral response of the ordinary African people. It is a socio-cultural phenomenon that finds expression in mutual solicitousness about the welfare of one another; a quasi-communal approach to the supervision and the correction of younger ones, and a kind of social insurance that works. Perhaps nowhere in the world is the family as cohesive as it is in Africa (Lambo, 1983; Adegoke, 2001). African nations must find ways of engaging the extended family systems in providing psychological support and life-skills training and in promoting healthy youth development on the African continent.

Despite the apparent onslaught on the extended family systems demonstrated in the rapid industrialization and urbanization of major towns in most parts of Africa, there is evidence emerging from the continent that the extended family system remains the most dependable unit for most people to fall back on in times of adversity (Lambo, 1983; Adegoke, 2001). The extended family and kinship systems represent the essence of everyday social fabric of poor Africans. The very strength of extended family systems and other indigenous institutions in places like Ethiopia, Somalia, Angola, Mozambique, South Africa, Nigeria and other countries, under one form of acute stress or the other, clearly show that the basic organic unit of African society continues to be vibrant. This represents a formidable platform for the well-being of African youth. All over the continent, vigorous examples of resilient traditional and cultural institutions still

abound. Research has shown that young adolescents flourish when they have a family life that is characterized by warmth, support and sustained interest in their lives. Such family atmosphere can provide powerful protection against the risk of a young person's engaging in unhealthy or anti-social practices or becoming depressed and alienated.

In addition, a fundamental transformation of the education of young people is urgently required on the African continent. One of the major instruments of development and change is perceived to be education. Most African leaders have accepted the axiom that education is the basic component in nation building and, thus, the foundation from which the economic progress of Africa will spring. Most of them have in the past made genuine efforts in this direction. However, political instability and poor management of scarce resources by many leaders on the continent, resulting in dwindling resources, have constituted a great hindrance in providing sound education for majority of the people (Adegoke, 2001). As a result, most African nations are unable to pay adequate attention to the education of their youth. Most public school teachers are poorly remunerated, resulting in low motivation for quality job performance. Most of the teacher education programmes available do not incorporate courses on adolescent/youth development, designed to treat the adolescent/youth transition as a distinct phase requiring special understanding of the changes that young people undergo.

Conclusions

Africans face a number of challenges when it comes to acquiring Western civilization and formal education. We have been systematically socialized into an educational system that is inherently opposed to our true progress as a people, a system that promotes European hegemony and lack of equal access and desegregation. We have been inculcated into a system that gives no credence to our values and traditions as a people. In the African tradition set forth by our ancestors, the goal of education was to prepare individuals to play the role of advancing the community and, by extension, the society. As Africans in the 21st century, this proclamation must continue to play important role as we move toward creating an enabling environment for our youth to reach their true potential.

The educational system as currently constructed creates challenges as it relates to what we as a people should be seeking to gain from education. Educational institutions, and all those involved in policy making in Africa, have the awesome responsibility of ensuring, among other things, that traditional

institutions that serve as coping mechanisms, particularly for the younger generation, are not allowed to die. This is particularly important as we face new challenges in this millennium. Clearly, it must be understood by all that the younger generation is the great strength of any nation or people, its most important asset and the representatives of its future. While it is true that the schools cannot completely fill where the families fail to provide the necessary atmosphere that provides protection against the risk of a young person engaging in unhealthy or antisocial practices, efforts must be geared towards creating a more conducive school atmosphere for Africa's children. This can be done by integrating the spirit of the traditional support systems highlighted in this paper with formal schooling, revolutionizing the public school system to meet the needs and realities of Africans, revisiting traditional ways of knowing and adapting same to fit our present reality as African people. The school should be a place where close, trusting relationships with adults and peers create a climate for students' personal growth and intellectual development. Opportunities for teachers to develop sustained personal relationships with students, essential to teaching them well, must be provided in schools.

The pressing issues militating against youth empowerment, which includes that of education, unemployment, unintended pregnancies, violence and drug abuse and HIV/AIDS, are emerging forcefully among young people in Africa as elsewhere. A successful approach to these problems will require a multi-disciplinary/multi-sectoral approach. Youth, with all its dramatic, social, cognitive and psychological changes, need to identify with a sense of peoplehood to enjoy a shared social identity which can be satisfied through the traditional support systems suggested in this paper. The essential requirement for ensuring youth development and empowerment can be met through the joint effort of a number of pivotal institutions, namely, the family, the traditional institutions and the school. These can shape the experiences of youth in Africa in a positive direction. It is hoped that some of the issues raised in this paper will provoke further discussion on the relationship between African culture and youth empowerment.

References

Adegoke, A.A. 2001. Pubertal Development and Traditional Support Systems in Africa: An Overview. *African Journal of Reproductive Health*, 5(1), (20 – 30).

Adegoke, A. A . 1992. Relationships Between Parental Socio-Economic Status, Sex and Initial Pubertal Problems Among School-Going Adolescents in Nigeria. *Journal of Adoleccence,* 15: 323—326

Askari, K. 1968. Ogori: The Sociology of an Akoko Village. Unpublished Ph.D Thesis. Oxford University.

Apata, 0. 1986. *Ovia-Osese* in Ogori: Its Origin, Growth and Developments. *Ovia Festival Digest,* (Proceedings of the First National Seminar on *Ovia-Osese* Festival).

Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development Concluding Report. Great Transitions Preparing Adolescents For a New Century, 1996.

Durojaiye, M. O. A. 1976. *A New Introduction to Educational Psychology.* London: Evans Brothers Limited..

Evans, J. L. 1994. Child Rearing Practices and Beliefs in Sub-Sahara: Report. Workshop held in Windhoek, Namibia.

Holes, M. and Leiss, P. E. 1989. Becoming a Nigerian in Ijaw Society. J. W. M. Whiting (Ed.) *Adolescents in a Changing World.* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press.

Kopoka, P.A. 1999. The Political Economy of Youth Marginalisation. Being a paper presented at a Colloquim on Understanding Exclusion, Creating Value: African Youth in a Global Era, Cape Town, South Africa.

Kilbride, P. I. and Kilbride, C. J. 1990. *Changing Family Life in East Africa: Women and Children.* Pennsylvanian State University Press.

Lambo, D. 1983. *The Africans.* New York: Vintage Books.

Muchira, L. M. 2001. African Culture as a Medium of Empowering Kenyan Youth in Nairobi Province, Kenya. International Development Conference, Rotorua, New Zealand.

Ruble, D.N. and Brooks-Gunn, J. 1982. The Experience of Menarche. *Child Development:*53:1557—1566.

Vizedom, M. 1976. Rites and Relationships: Rites of Passage and Contemporary Anthropology. V. C. Brickley and W. Schraxnm (eds.) *Cross-Cultural Studies Series* Vol. 4, Beverly Hills, CA Sage,.

Whiting, J.W.M. 1981. Aging and Becoming an Elder: a Cross-Cultural Comparism. J. G. March (ed.) *Aging.* New York: Academic Press.

Schlegel, A. and Barry, H. 1980. The Evolutionary Significance of Adolescent Initiation Ceremonies. *American Ethnologist*, 7: 696-715.

Worthman, C.M. and Whiting, J.W. 1987. Social Change in Adolescent Sexual Behaviour: Mate Selection, Premarital Pregnancy Rates in a Kikuyu Community. *Ethos* 15: 145-165.

Sofola, Zulu 1986. Reflections on *Ovia-Osese* Festival of Ogori. *Ovia Festival Digest* (Proceedings of the First National Seminar on *Ovia-Osese* festival).

10

RESEARCH NOTES

The Influence of Traditional Music on the Culture of a People: The Case of *Eregba* Music on Ogori Culture

G.E. OLOBAYO

Eregba music is the music whose melodious and philosphical songs summons every Okuro (the people of Ogori), young or old, male or female for a communal free dance.

Eregba music is an indigenous music which is only a century old now though it originated from *Ejabi* music which is as old as Ogori itself. It is a veritable heritage of the people. It is considered mysterious and peculiar to the people in that its replication outside Ogori-Magongo seems impossible. It seems also that *Oko* is cut for *Eregba* and vice versa. Like Aramaic or Hebrew to the Holy Bible, so is *Oko* to *Eregba*. For a full meaning and understanding of *Eregba* songs, *Oko* vocabulary is the medium by which *Eregba* music can satisfactorily be interpreted. Some *Eregba* music songs are full of ironies, insults and idioms which are too difficult for non-Okuro to comprehend.

Eregba music is an invention which has come to revitalize *Oko* and has tremendous influence on the culture and tradition of the Ogori-Mangongo people in many ways.

1. *Eregba* Music: The Watch-Dog of Communal Moral

Eregba music songs are mostly of praise, expensive jokes, satire, abuse and ridicule. The *Eregbaro* (the name for those who compose *Eregba* music songs) take advantage of their vast knowledge of idiomatic expressions to launch rhetoric attacks on miscreants and evildoers within the community, exposing their hidden nefarious activities. The *Eregbaro* compose songs which can expose the misdeeds of these evil men and women. Owing to their vast historical knowledge of the community, their songs can refer to someone's grandfather who, during his life-time, had committed an evil act. This would be brought to light and subjected to

ridicule and insults. The man whose grandfather has been insulted may not even know that the song is relevant to his family, perhaps until days later. Nobody in the community is spared. Such situation becomes a warning to the society, everybody, man or woman, old or young, has to learn to behave well. There is no way of seeking redress if you have been tacitly attacked or ridiculed. You just have to bear it uncomplainingly. Thus *Eregba* plays the role of a watchdog on the morality of Ogori-Magongo people. There is scarcely any wrong done within Ogori-Magongo that will not come to the knowledge of the *Eregbaro*. Unless you go to appease them, your case will be in the open on the next *Eregba* music night. This is why Ogori people maintain a high moral standard and good behaviour wherever they are; they have high level integrity and honesty. This trait can be attributted to the role of *Eregba* music on the moulding of the culture of Ogomago (Ogori and Magongo shortened to Ogomago).

2. *Eregba* Music: A Ground For Training the Memory

In a typical *Eregba* music night; the *Eregbaro* is capable of composing up to 100 new songs between the hours of 9p.m. and 9a.m. Apart from the *ejamaa* (an *Eregba* music group), other non-*ejamaro* as well as the *Ejamaro* start repeating the *Eregba* songs of the previous night and by so doing almost all the night Eragba songs are soon in circulation and every interested person in the town learns to sing them. This is certainly a training ground for the memory. A schooling Ogori boy going to fetch wood or do some work at a near-by farm, for example, sings many songs on his way to and fro, singing both the old and new; thus this helps in building up the oral literature of Ogori people. Also, the simultaneous thinking embedded in the *Eregbaro* stimulates the brain for greater performance; for while the drumming is going along with the singing, dancing and clapping of hands, meaningful and melodious new songs are being composed by the *Eregbaro* on the spot amidst noisy atmosphere, an awkward situation for the brain to cope with. Yet the *Eregbaro* are able to cope easily.

This could be one of the factors responsible for Ogori students' high performance in the various institutions they attend, for they have learned from this source of superb concentration.

As observed, the enthusiasm attached to *Eregba* at the beginning of the last century is no longer there. *Eregba* is definitely on the downward trend. If it

has played this vital role of memory training of Ogori youths why then should it be allowed to filter away? As a matter of fact there is a clear difference between the current performance in school of Ogori youth when compared with that of one or two generations ago. We can assert therefore that our culture through *Eregba* music has a definite and positive influence on Ogori educational development and progress.

3. *Eregba* Music Revamps Oko Language

Oko is the language spoken by both the people of Ogori and Magongo. It is a difficulut language. The tribes sorrounding these two communities find it very hard to speak it fluently; even when they are born and bred there, the way they speak the language betrays them as resident foreigners. There are some words in the language that are just too difficult for them to pronounce. In fact, there are some Oko words which are real tongue-twisters. Such words are sometimes avoided when speaking. Oko language seems to have limited vocabulary in prose yet it is very rich in verse. However, with the coming of *Eregba* music as part of Ogori tradition, new vocabularies begin to appear in the language. This is why whenever an *Eregba* music is going to hold, Okuro, from all works of life, flock to the venue to listen and to learn new words and expressions from the new songs that will be composed by the *Eregbaro*.

Unfortunately, elderly *Eregbaro* who have command of the language are leaving the scene and Oko language seems to be on a reverse journey. Present-day *Eregbaro* do not seem to have the calibre of those before them. Their knowledge of Oko is shallow, so their songs are sterile and lack new words and expressions. *Eregba* music is no longer fulfilling or playing its former role of revamping Oko language. Unless something is done to save *Eregba* music, its death is imminent and so is the role it plays in the culture of Okuro.

4. *Eregba* Music: A Rallying Point

Eregba music, indegenous to Ogori has also become the national Music of Ogori people. Wherever and whenever *Eregba* is on, Okuro of whatever status would be itching to go and be partakers and not just spectators.

It was in the 40s that the Ogori anthem was composed, viz:-

Ologori wa g Oko, o gi Yobo 2ice
Of oyibo pile yepa naa

Oko home again
Eni home again 2ice

Keben keben
I shall never forget my home 2ice
Ogoray Eko eke wuraa

The spirit of *Eregba* music binds all Okuro together. When the national anthem was composed in the late 1940s, it was patriotically and automatically embraced by all Okuro as our own and it is sung with all respect and dignity. The anthem makes reference to the level of literacy of the-then reigning Ologori who could speak Yoruba, and then sum it up in English. It then turns to highlight the two major components of Ogori (Oko i.e. *Onu* and *Eni*) that their settlement here in Ogori is being resuscitated, and with gladness Ogorians will not forget Ogori their home even if they reside in *Eko* (Lagos) they would certainly come back.

Eregba music has become a source of information and motivation. Traditionally it is not difficult to summon Okoro for communal labour and while working, they encourage themselves by singing appropriate *Eregba* songs. For many decades now, the Ogori community have embarked on communal projects: road construction, maternity clinic, community college, apart from helping one another on farm work and house building. So, without realizing it, *Eregba* music has produced the rallying spirit which tends to hold the people together for communal activity.

I do not believe that we can say that the same obtains today, for as at the present time the dignity of *Eregba* music has scaled down; the drumming has changed as well as the dancing.

Until positive and concerted action is taken toward the revival of *Eregba* music, we are liable to lose this veritable heritage. It is an outstanding challenge to all Okuro to rise and save *Eregba* from extinction.

It was in the 40s that the Ogori anthem was composed, viz:-

Ologori wa g Oko, o gi Yobo 2ice
Of oyibo pile yepa naa

Oko home again
Eni home again 2ice

Keben keben
I shall never forget my home 2ice
Ogoray Eko eke wuraa

The spirit of *Eregba* music binds all Okuro together. When the national anthem was composed in the late 1940s, it was patriotically and automatically embraced by all Okuro as our own and it is sung with all respect and dignity. The anthem makes reference to the level of literacy of the-then reigning Ologori who could speak Yoruba, and then sum it up in English. It then turns to highlight the two major components of Ogori (Oko i.e. *Onu* and *Eni*) that their settlement here in Ogori is being resuscitated, and with gladness Ogorians will not forget Ogori their home even if they reside in *Eko* (Lagos) they would certainly come back.

Eregba music has become a source of information and motivation. Traditionally it is not difficult to summon Okoro for communal labour and while working, they encourage themselves by singing appropriate *Eregba* songs. For many decades now, the Ogori community have embarked on communal projects: road construction, maternity clinic, community college, apart from helping one another on farm work and house building. So, without realizing it, *Eregba* music has produced the rallying spirit which tends to hold the people together for communal activity.

I do not believe that we can say that the same obtains today, for as at the present time the dignity of *Eregba* music has scaled down; the drumming has changed as well as the dancing.

Until positive and concerted action is taken toward the revival of *Eregba* music, we are liable to lose this veritable heritage. It is an outstanding challenge to all Okuro to rise and save *Eregba* from extinction.

INDEX

INDEX

INDEX

INDEX

Ogori Culture and People: Ovia-Osese and Beyond is the outcome of the one-day international symposium that followed the 2012 edition of the *Ovia-Osese* festival. The book is a compilation of some of the papers on the history, language, arts, music and culture of the Ogori people.

Most Africans have rites and ceremonies to mark the transition from one stage of life to the other. For instance, the rite of birth and childhood introduces a child to the corporate community and the rite of childhood into adulthood is one in which a child is initiated from passive to active membership in the community. These initiation rites are not only symbolic, but they may also involve elaborate physical drama, in which the music, arts, fashion, oration, etc., of a culture are paraded.

Ovia-Osese is a demonstration of one of the typical, traditional, colourful and thrilling rites among the Ogori people of Nigeria; it is a rite of passage in which adolescent girls are initiated into womanhood.

This book tells the story of a culture (*Ovia-Osese*) that was almost annihilated by the Church, but was later resuscitated with greater glamour by the same body that brought it to near-extinction. This book is a must-read for lovers of language, history, performance and art; be they plebeian or noble in taste.