

IRON MIXED WITH CLAY: BENIN IN URHOB FOLKTALES

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Abstract

The research into the imaginative creation of the Benin Empire and its dominance of the land and peoples of the lower Niger-Delta by Urhobo storytellers remains a fascinating area of study. The focus of this study is to establish that the view of the might of the Benin Empire and majesty of its rulership are perceived both realistically and romantically. It uses the cultural studies framework to investigate three ways in which Benin influence on the Urhobo people is re-imagined in Urhobo oral narratives. The study uses two Urhobo tales to establish a balance between the realistic and the romantic in the description of Benin influence. The paper discovers that in compositional materials, themes and the performance of the stories, the Benin influence is both overt and covert. The Benin empire is seen as dominant (iron) and at the same time fragile (clay). The essay concludes that the re-imagining of the majestic empire this way in Urhobo tales is to ensure unity and freedom for the fringe states.

Introduction

In Urhobo society, as in many African cultures, the folktale is a story performed at evening time to entertain an audience that is critical. The tale is a fictional narrative and is different from an ordinary story (*ikun*) or myths (*ikun odidi awanre*) and legends (*ikun awanre*). The myth is seen as a “depersonalized dream.”¹ The meaning of this is that both dreams and myths develop from the unconscious and build on fantasy. Also “myth” is regarded by some as a synonym for “story.” In this vein, they see “any narrative of the oral tradition a myth” simply because of the quality of the fanciful.² Though Isidore Okpewho’s idea of the myth is more realistic than Joseph Campbell’s, the idea of the fanciful also relates myth to dream as envisaged by Campbell earlier.

This paper uses Urhobo stories to establish that the influence of Benin on the people of the fringe states was perceived both realistically and imaginatively. In this vein, this study relies on the cultural studies theoretical framework to argue that in compositional materials, themes, and performance of the tales, Benin influence is both overt and covert. Cultural studies encourage the interpretation of a work of art from the perspective of a dominated-class worldview. Charles Bressler asserts that the theory considers writers as having the “desire to be able to articulate their

¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Princeton: Princeton University Press 2014), 237.

² Isidore Okpewho, *Myth in Africa: A Study of Its Aesthetics and Cultural Relevance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983), 69.

feelings, their concerns, and their assumptions about the nature of reality in their particular cultures without being treated as marginal or minor voices...[T]hese writers provide new ways to see and understand the cultural forces at work in society, in literature, and in ourselves.”³ Ziauddin Sardar also explains that the theory of cultural studies seeks to understand how meaning is created, challenged, and tied up with systems of power and control, and produced from the social, political and economic spheres within a particular social formation or conjuncture.⁴

The concept of iron mixed with clay is derived from the story of the dream by King Nebuchadnezzar and its interpretation by Daniel in the Bible.⁵ The verse describes the legs of an image the king saw in the dream as “partly of iron and partly of clay.”⁶ In the interpretation, Daniel explains that “the kingdom will be partly strong and partly fragile.”⁷ This study draws an analogy from this story to explain that the might and majesty of the Benin Empire is seen as simultaneously strong and fragile by the surrounding states. This can be gleaned from such imaginative stories as folktales told by the peoples of the fringe states. The Urhobo people, for example, are one such group. They are egalitarian in nature. Thus, the performance of Urhobo

³ Charles Bressler. *Literary Criticism: An Introduction to Theory and Practice* (New Jersey: Pearson Education Inc., 2003), 199.

⁴ Ziauddin Sardar, *Introducing Cultural Studies* (Cambridge, UK: Icon, 2010).

⁵ Holy Bible, King James Version (Vereeniging, RSA: Christian Art Publishers 2016).

⁶ Daniel 2:33

⁷ Daniel 2:42.

tales attempts to instill in the audience the importance of freedom and the sacrifice needed to enhance their survival when conjuring up the Benin Empire, or Aka as the Urhobo call Benin, the Oba himself, and images of revolutionaries or freedom fighters such as Arhwaran, and despots such as Inarhe and Ogiso.

The ancestral home of the Urhobo people is in Delta Central Senatorial District of Delta State, Nigeria. The Urhobo live in the rainforest area of Western Niger Delta. They are the most populous ethnic group in Delta State. Urhobo language and culture are related to those of the Edoid cultural area and many myths and tales show ancient Benin or Edo influence. For example, in the Urhobo folk imagination, the Benin Empire is a symbol of might and majesty. The Oba's court with its mysterious happenings and squabbles and the roles of such heroes as Arhwaran and villains as Inarhe find expression in Urhobo folk tales. Peter Ekeh, founder of the Urhobo Historical Society, has summarized the relationship between the Urhobo people and the Benin Empire thus:

The overall transformation of Benin affairs from a rural kingdom under the Ogisos to a city-based empire under the Eweka kings had consequences for Urhobo social organization. It was now distinguished from that of Benin in several directions. Urhobo became more or less the residual fragment that embodied the Ogiso tradition from which the Benins were evolving.⁸

⁸ Peter Ekeh, ed. *Studies in Urhobo Culture* (New York: Urhobo Historical Society, 2005) 40.

Several studies on the relationship between the Benin Empire and her neighbors have been undertaken by such scholars as Joseph Sidahome⁹ and Isidore Okpewho,¹⁰ although they approach the issues from different cultural perspectives. For instance, Sidahome studies the stories of the Ishan people and their independence from the Benin Empire, but Okpewho discusses the thematic and aesthetic elements in tales of the Ibo speaking people of the Western Niger Delta. The tales examined deal with inter-group relationships that linked the Ibo to the ancient Benin Empire. Okpewho analyzes the tales told by Charles Simayi of Ubulu-Uno and Okafor Nwambuonwo of Idumuje-Uno from a cultural perspective. He concludes that the origin and status of some of the characters in the tales of the western Niger-Delta are influenced by a Benin worldview. Among the heroic characters who feature in the narratives of these people are Agbogidi, Arhuan and the Oba. The importance of history to the creation of narrative is emphasized when Okpewho states that “one people’s history is another people’s fantasy.”¹¹

The connection of Benin to the tales of the lower Niger Delta people is not limited to those sharing a border with the Benin suburbs. Among the Ijo (Ijaw) people, the influence of Benin culture has also been noted. Consciously or not, there

¹¹ Okpewho, *Once Upon a Kingdom*, 225.

are elements embedded in *The Ozidi Saga* that highlight the intimacy of the relationship between the Ijo people and Benin. *The Ozidi Saga* is an epic story of the Ijo people narrated by Okabou Ojobolo. It is a seven-day performance recorded and translated by J.P. Clark.¹² In pinpointing the mythic and ritual origin of the story, Okpewho traces the names of characters, places and images to the ancient kingdom of Benin. At the end he asks if the characters and places in the epic are really indigenous or influenced by great Benin Empire.¹³

Fortunately, J.P. Clark in his introductory essay on *The Ozidi Saga* has surmised that though two other versions of the Ozidi story he recorded from Afoluwa and Erivini made use of “Ado, the other name for Benin City, the conventional setting of Ijo tales and fables,”¹⁴ it does not prove that the Ozidi Saga has its origin in Benin. According to Clark, “Ado, to the Ijo imagination is the embodiment of all that is distant and mysterious, the empire of improbable happenings that together with the world of spirits help to explain the events of their own life.”¹⁵ As such, Clark cited such names of characters as Ozidi, Oreame, Orea, Temugedege, and

¹² J.P. Clark, *The Ozidi Saga: The Ijo/Izon Text of the Performance by Okabou Ojobolo* (Ibadan: University of Ibadan Press, 1979).

¹³ Isidore Okpewho, “Introduction” in J. P. Clark, *The Ozidi Saga* (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 1991).

¹⁴ J.P. Clark, “Introductory Essay” in *The Ozidi Saga*, (Washington DC: Howard University Press, 2005), xvii.

¹⁵ Clark, “Introductory Essay,” *The Ozidi Saga*, xvii.

Oguren as principally non-Ijo and heavily tilted toward the Benin influence.¹⁶ However, the scholar does not really illustrate the influence of the Benin Empire on the socio-political thinking of the Ijo people of the fringe states.

In addition to names of characters, certain musical instruments used by characters in the tales or by the performers of tales are also traced to Benin in both origin and usage. In this context, Dan Ben-Amos adds to our appreciation of Benin influence on Urhobo folktales. According to Ben-Amos, there are two types of storytelling events in Benin, *ibota* and *okpobhie*. *Ibota* is performed before bed time, but *okpobhie* usually lasts all night, until day break. The performance of *okpobhie* is accompanied by one of two possible musical instruments, the *akpata*, a seven-stringed harp, or the *asalogun*, a thumb piano. The origin of the *akpata* in Benin folktales is linked to the mythical figure, Arhwaran, who appears in most tales in the Western Niger Delta.¹⁷

Ben-Amos goes on to assert that the audience in the Bini tale performance under the influence of the other musical instrument, the *asologun*, is divided into both the physical, people of this world, and the spiritual, beings from the other world. Both audiences, while different and transitory, are part of the same Bini social

¹⁶ J.P. Clark, *Blood on the Tides*. (Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2014), 65.

¹⁷ Dan Ben Amos, *Sweet Words: Storytelling Events in Benin* (Philadelphia: Institute for the Study Human Issues, 1975), 44.

system. Therefore, for storytellers and their instruments, three levels of symbolic meaning can be decoded by the analyst. The social dimension is the position of the artist in the society as one who is dependent on the audience for economic support during the performance. Cognitively, there is a conjuring of awe arising from the binary paralleling of the physical and the supernatural. Expressively, the characters of the tale are people struggling to overthrow the burden placed on them by the overwhelming influence of the Oba, as the world with its disorderliness troubles the helpless narrator.¹⁸ As insightful as is the account by Ben-Amos, it does not relate the instruments to the views of the people on the outskirts of the Kingdom. Also, the works reviewed lack sufficient data on the relationship between the Urhobo people and the majestic Benin Empire. Therefore, this study is justified.

In order to fully articulate the level of the Benin leverage, illustrations are drawn from two Urhobo tales to buttress the thesis that Benin influence on the people of Urhobo is that of “iron mixed with clay.” The first Urhobo tale is *Princess Oyeghe*, performed by Chief Cousin Onofekohwo and his group in Kokori, Ethiope East Local Government Area of Delta State. Though, there are two versions of this tale, the one used here is the version performed for Godini Darah in July 1974 at Kokori. The second tale is titled *Avwebo and Avwierovwe* (The Favored and Unfavored Wives). This tale was also performed for Darah on the 19 August, 1975,

¹⁸ Ben Amos, *Sweet Words*, 54.

at Sapele. It was performed by Mrs. Sarah Abohweyere who hails from Olomu clan (Urhobo) but lived at Forsica Road in Sapele at the time the performance was recorded.

Princess Oyeghe is about Oyeghe, the daughter of an Oba who selects her own suitors and is beguiled and married off to the one-hand-one-leg Goblin who disguised his appearance and then abducts Oyeghe and her brother Omokpufi. Thereafter, the efforts by Princess Oyeghe's brother Omokpufi and their uncle Arhwaran to rescue the kidnapped duo moves the events of the tale between the land of the living and that of spirits.¹⁹ As for the second tale (Avwebo and Avwiorovwe), the plot details the harsh experiences of Avwiorovwe (Unfavored Wife) in an Oba's household. The tale also narrates the symbolic confrontation between conservative and progressive elements of royal society. Through this story, the inability of a royal personage to manage his domestic affairs helps the audience to reflect on the tensions and conflicts common in the ancient Benin courts and palaces.²⁰

In Urhobo arts, Uyovbukerhi identifies four artistic qualities through which the Urhobo people measure excellence. These are *erhuvwu* (beauty), *ehoho*

¹⁹ Onofekohwo, Cousin. "Princess Oyeghe" an Urhobo Folktale. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Kokori, Delta State in 1974 and Translated by Prof. Godini G. Darah) Mimeo

²⁰ Abohweyere, Sarah "Avwebo and Avwiorovwe." *Urhobo Folktale*. Sapele, 1975. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Sapele, Delta State in 1975 and Translated by Henry Unuajohwofia, 2010).

(resemblance), *udididi* (numinosity) and *emienyo* (attunement).²¹ Godini Darah explains that the Urhobo people measure beauty in art through the “eloquence of voice, dexterity of body, and harmony of voice, melody and drums are the essential elements”²² which evaluate excellence in a work of art.²³

Benin and Compositional Materials in Urhobo Folktales

In his work on the Xhosa’s folktales in South Africa, Harold Scheub offers useful insight into the compositional technique of the Xhosa’s tale (*ntsomi*).²⁴ According to Scheub, the materials for the *ntsomi* composition are utilized in accordance with the extemporaneous and provisional nature of the performance. As such, the materials available for the narrator are those external to the performer in time and space, and the devices personal to an artist. Scheub listed the materials external to the narrator as the inherited tradition, the environment of the performer, and the audience. Materials that are personal to the narrator include the repetition of words, use of ideophones, use of images, rhythmic patterns, as well as gestures and mime in characterization.²⁵

²¹ Atiboroko Uyovbukerhi, “Avwerhen: The Concept of Sweetness in Urhobo Aesthetics,” *Nigeria Magazine* 6 (1986): 29-34.

²² Godini Darah, “Urhobo Performance Arts” in *Where Gods and Mortals Meet: Continuity and Renewal in Urhobo Art*, ed. Perkins Foss (New York and Ghent: Museum for African Art and SNOECK Publishers 2004) 116.

²³ Uyovbukerhi, “Avwerhen: The Concept of Sweetness in Urhobo Aesthetics,” 32.

²⁴ Harold Scheub, *The Xhosa Ntsomi* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975), 3.

²⁵ Scheub, *The Xhosa Ntsomi*, 169.

In Urhobo folktales, among the inherited traditions is the use of Benin and its magnificent palace as setting for the stories. Indeed, Benin is the setting of the two tales under consideration. In this regard, the reference to Benin is not restricted to the city itself. Benin also entails all the parts of the empire under the direct influence of the Oba. Therefore, when the narrator of *Avwebo and Avwierovwe* says that “there was a town, a city of an Oba,” she could be referring to Benin in either way. In *Princess Oyeghe*, there is no express reference to Benin; instead, the narrator starts the tale this way:

Narrator: This is the story, the tale of an Oba’s daughter called Oyeghe. The Princess was so beautiful that she rejected all suitors who came for her ... As soon as Oyeghe saw Goblin approaching the palace, she exclaimed in jubilation, “Behold my choice husband”²⁶

From the above, one can infer that the palace is situated in Benin, and Oyeghe as the Princess will also stay in the Benin Palace.

Later in the course of the tale’s performance, the narrator of *Princess Oyeghe* clears any doubt lingering in the audience’s mind that the palace is located in Benin. In the tale, Arhwaran the Giant is summoned to confront the one-hand-one-leg Goblin who is threatening to kill Oyeghe and her brother who have just escaped from

²⁶ Onofekohwo, Cousin. “Princess Oyeghe” an Urhobo Folktale. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Kokori, Delta State in 1974 and Translated by Prof. Godini G. Darah) Mimeo,1.

Goblin's den. According to the narrator, in the ensuing fight between Arharan and Goblin,

Goblin then unleashed his magical chewing stick. And blew the jets at Arhuanan. To return him to his father in Benin City. Goblin aimed the jets at Arhuanan thus *bi-iiiiiii*. Suddenly, Arhuanan picked a retreating race to Benin. He arrived a day before the British invasion of Benin.²⁷

This quote from the tale reinforces the setting of Benin as the location for the events in the story. The import of this is that “in the matter of setting, the narrator would seem to prefer his story operate in more romantic circumstances than his audience might be inclined to consider.”²⁸

The choice of major characters in the composition of the tales also reveals overwhelming Benin influence. In *Princess Oyeghe*, the major characters are Oyeghe, Oba, Omokpufi, Goblin, and Arhuanan. Among these characters, Arhuanan's origin can be traced to Benin. Once again, this paper has to rely on the ground breaking research by Okpewho on Arhuanan. Okpewho distills Arhuanan's saga this way from the accounts of Egharevba and Ben-Amos that “Aruanran (Arhuanan in the latter; or Arualan in Sidahome, 1964:164-196) is one of the three sons of Oba Ozolua. A towering giant of twenty digits on each limb, he is

²⁷ Onofekohwo, Cousin. “Princess Oyeghe” an Urhobo Folktale. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Kokori, Delta State in 1974 and Translated by Prof. Godini G. Darah) Mimeo, 16-17.

²⁸ Isidore Okpewho, *Blood on the Tides: The Ozidi Saga and Oral Epic Narratology* (Rochester, N.Y.: University of Rochester Press, 2014), 110.

characterized as a being the victim of dim wits and poor judgment that eventually doom him”²⁹

Significantly, Arhuanan’s prowess is cast in different lights in the portrayal of his profile in Benin as opposed to his portrayal in the vassal states. In Benin, Arhuanan is projected negatively as an insurgent fighting to overthrow the dynasty and thereby upset the order of things. However, in the adjoining states partly under Benin influence, he is seen as a “gentle giant of multiple limbs and digits, who constantly puts himself at the service of his father the Oba of Idu (the Igbo name of Edo or Benin) and his fellow citizens”³⁰ It is in the latter’s light that Cousin Onofekewo, the narrator of *Princess Oyeghe*, projected Arhuanan. An instance of this in the tale is reproduced below:

On seeing Arhuanan, the Oba sighed in relief “What a timely return, my kingdom is saved.”

“Tomorrow, the British plan to invade Benin-City.” Calmly Arhuanan asked, “Is that so? Are the invaders not coming in motor vehicles? Tell them they will be welcome.” With his little toe, Arhuanan dug a mighty moat round the city. Whenever you go Benin, look at the deep gorge by the Oba’s rubber plantation. That is the moat with which Arhuanan circled Benin. What a miraculous feat, dear listeners! When the British invaders reached the city gates, they found it impossible to enter the city.³¹

²⁹ Okpewho, *Blood on the Tides*, 63.

³⁰ Okpewo, *Blood on the Tides*, 64.

³¹ Onofekohwo, Cousin. “Princess Oyeghe” an Urhobo Folktale. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Kokori, Delta State in 1974 and Translated by Prof. Godini G. Darah) Mimeo, 17.

In another instance in the tale, Arhwaran's mother complained that her "kitchen is in a dilapidated condition." The next morning, Arhwaran dug a pit to prepare bricks from the laterite sand found abundantly in Benin. According to the narrator, "the red bricks left over were shared by all Benin people. The mud-walled houses so ubiquitous in Benin City were constructed from Arhwaran's walling bricks. When Arhwaran washed his mud-stained hands on the unused heap, it multiplied into termite's anthills we find everywhere"³² The hyperbole deployed by the narrator does not in any way reduce the fame of Arhwaran in the vassal states. Instead it reinforces the realistic and overwhelming influence of Benin and its absurdities on the lives of those at the fringe.

Imaginative Ideas and the Benin Impact

Thematically, these Urhobo folktales also draw inspiration from Benin in the weaving of their motifs into a narrative. For examples, there is the idea of intrigue that runs through the stories. Intrigue in this sense implies the clandestine plot by some characters to undo or subdue another person or group. In *Princess Oyeghe*, the machinations of Goblin are so complex that they are intriguing to the audience.

³² Onofekohwo, Cousin. "Princess Oyeghe" an Urhobo Folktale. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Kokori, Delta State in 1974 and Translated by Prof. Godini G. Darah) Mimeo, 18.

Goblin's ability to disguise himself through the borrowing of human parts is fascinating but also schematic. He borrows a brown skin from Mr. Anthill, a hat from Mr. Capped Anthill, a comely (beautiful) set of legs from Mr. Umbrella Tree, and a set of bright teeth from the dentist. Intrigue is created as Princess Oyeghe is ignorant of Goblin's antics. This trickery sets the stage for the major conflict between a deviant of the human world (Princess Oyeghe who selects her own suitors) and a wicked spirit who is deceptive.

However, in *Avwebo and Avwierovwe*, the intrigue is between humans. The tale is about the unhealthy rivalry among the numerous wives of an Oba in a large, fictional town in the ancient Benin Kingdom. The intrigues engaged in by members of the Oba's household and the consequent schisms end with the triumph of one faction. In Urhobo marital relations, the word "Avwebo" means a favored wife while "Avwierovwe" refers to an unfavored or neglected wife. Therefore, the inability of the Oba to manage his domestic affairs is utilized by the performer to explore the binary clash between conservatism and wickedness versus open-mindedness and kindness.

Avwebo, who is the favorite wife of the Oba but childless, is pitted against Avwierovwe, who has borne a beautiful daughter for the Oba. This causes the shift of Avwierovwe to being favorite wife. But this change does not occur without initiating a complex web of plans and plots. With the help of a slave boy,

Avwierovwe, who has hitherto been relegated to the toilet environment of the palace, dethrones Avwebo as foremost queen. Avwebo's counter-plans with the collaboration of the arch-subversive strategist, Mr. Tortoise, turns an ordinary marital squabble into a palace coup and counter-coup. This is the beauty of the Urhobo folktale performer's ability to mask palace's intrigues as socio-cultural and marital issues.

At this point, it must be noted that Sarah Abohweyere, the performer of *Avwebo and Avwierovwe*, narrated the tale in Sapele, a township. According to Darah who recorded the tale, Sarah is a mother. She is interested in the survival of women in particular, and moral virtue in general. In the mid 1970s when she was recorded, economic hardship was resulting in families' breaking up. The system of polygamy was generating marital conflict. She, therefore, stressed the imperative of unity of the family and equity within the family unit in the face of these odds. There is evidence in the tale that Madam Sarah Abohweyere was conscious of the historical connection between the Urhobo people and the Benin Kingdom in antiquity, such as the legend of origin that the Urhobo people came from Benin. There is also the acknowledgement of the Oba's overlordship of the traditional political dynasties in Urhobo land. She draws freely from this pool of folk knowledge in both her setting of the tale and the issues portrayed.

In the story of *Avwebo and Avwierovwe*, the impunity displayed by the Oba's palace sets the stage for intense struggle. The narrator says.

The Oba has many wives. When it was time to bring people out, on a market day, whenever they saw a beautiful girl, they would take her to the Oba. Those that went to the market with her would convey the message to the parents at home that, "Oba has taken your daughter". The father and mother would cry and bemoan, "Our child, the Oba has taken her."³³

After months of being deprived of the opportunity to see the Oba, a slave boy took pity on her and disguised her using the clothes of Avwebo, the Oba's favorite. The preparation for this coup is spelled out by the slave boy as follows:

In the evening, the slave boy came to invite her for the Oba. When she got there, the page boy carefully instructed her thus. "As you can see, this camwood where the *Ugbuduku* dress is tied is what Avwebo (favoured wife) uses to entice the Oba to sleep with her. When you get there, use it to cover before you enter the bed. At 4:00a.m when the cock crows, (then there were no clocks), when the cock crows, *ku-ku-ru-ku*, the first crow, rise and sweep the whole house, clean and arrange the furniture. Before you come out, place the dress of Avwebo there and come out." He really gave careful advice. Because the wives were many, the Oba didn't bother to verify the identity of which one he shared bed with her.³⁴

³³ Abohweyere, Sarah "Avwebo and Avwierovwe." *Urhobo Folktale*. Sapele, 1975. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Sapele, Delta State in 1975 and Translated by Henry Unuajohwofia, 2010) Mimeo, 1.

³⁴ Abohweyere, Sarah "Avwebo and Avwierovwe." *Urhobo Folktale*. Sapele, 1975. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Sapele, Delta State in 1975 and Translated by Henry Unuajohwofia, 2010) Mimeo, 4-5.

After this adventure, Avwebo became curious about who went to the Oba. The slave boy refused to divulge the secret. This is characteristic of the petty rivalry in the palaces of great kingdoms. The cabals in power are always curious to get firsthand information about goings-on in the palace in order to forestall any takeover bid.

Later in the story of *Avwebo and Avwierovwe*, the slave boy is able to manipulate events and Avwierovwe gives birth to the first child of the Oba, a girl. At the unveiling of the child, the narrator describes Avwebo's reaction thus:

Avwebo became unconscious where she was “What, this pretty girl is Oba's daughter? So, Avwierovwe gave birth to a child. Then she cannot stay here any longer. I thought she was a mermaid; so, she is a daughter of a human being? She cannot stay in the palace. When others are giving birth to bats and beasts, Avwierovwe gave birth just once, she is the one that delivered a human? There is no space for them here!”³⁵

After this Avwierovwe moved into the palace, for she had been on the fringes of the palace compound. She became pregnant again and gave birth to a boy. Unable to tolerate their displacement, Avwebo, Tortoise, and her cronies plotted to overthrow Avwierovwe, Ubiurumagbe (the Oba's daughter), the slave boy, and the progressives. The coup failed and they (Avwebo and Tortoise) were executed.

Because the stories are fiction, they enable the narrator to simulate the rivalry and conflicts going on in the palace for the Urhobo audience who only hear about

³⁵ Abohweyere, Sarah “Avwebo and Avwierovwe.” *Urhobo Folktale*. Sapele, 1975. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Sapele, Delta State in 1975 and Translated by Henry Unuajohwofia, 2010) Mimeo, 18.

palace coups as rumors. Aesthetically, the conflicts act as the magnetic force that stirs the sensation of the audience between activation, stabilization or depression.³⁶ Still the importance of the symbolic interpretation of the tale is underscored in the words of Ropo Sekoni that these tales “constitute an archeological field in which social contradictions are mined to reflect and refract the antagonism that is inherent in a continual struggle between hegemonic and counter-hegemonic interest.”³⁷

Creative Ingenuity and the Benin Factor

The performance of Urhobo tales is both fascinating and complex. Wanjiku Kabira and Karega Mutahi foreground the labyrinthine nature of the folktale performance when they opine that “contrary to the long-held view that narrators are just repeating the stories they were told, the oral artist is a creative, imaginative and powerful performer.”³⁸ Some of the instruments deployed by Urhobo narrators, such as the *akpata* used by characters in their tales, have their origins in the great Benin Kingdom. Ambrose Ekhosuehi defines the *akpata* (*Akpata-mamwe*) as an “Edo harp, guitar, bow lute instrument with separate string carriers fixed to a resonator. Two or

³⁶ Ropo Sekoni, “The Narrator, Narrative Pattern and Audience Experience of Oral Performance in Africa” in *The Oral Performance in Africa*, ed. I. Okpewho (Ibadan: Spectrum Books Limited, 1990), 143,144.

³⁷ Ropo Sekoni, “The Semiotics of Class and Gender Struggle in Pre-Colonial Narrative Systems” in *Radical Essays in Nigerian Literature*, ed. G. G. Darah (Lagos: Malthouse Press Ltd, 2008), 23.

³⁸ Wanjiku M. Kabira and Karega Mutahi, *Gikuyu Oral Literature* (Nairobi: Heinemann, 1988), 43.

more strings run parallel lie at Oblique angles to the sound table. *Akpata* is sounded by plucking the strings with the fingers or a plectrum, occasionally by bowing and being played with open strings”³⁹ Ben-Amos traces the origin of the *akpata* to the reign of Oba Ewuakpe in the eighteenth century. According to Ben-Amos, people regard the *akpata* as an instrument for psychological therapy.⁴⁰ The famous Arhuanan is also a fan of the instrument.

However, in Urhobo tales, the *akpata* acquires anthropomorphic qualities. In *Princess Oyeghe*, Arhuanan was summoned to battle Goblin by the siblings, Omokpufi and Oyeghe. After devouring a “lorry-load of plantain” and “fifteen giant pots of water,” Arhuanan picked up his sword and in the words of the narrator, “Akpata called onto Arhuanan thus: ‘Hearken to me. Hear me, Adigberen. Hearken to me Adigberen.’ The *akpata* becomes a companion of Arhuanan who sings to boast about his psychological frame of mind. The role of this instrument in the life of Arhuanan can be compared to that of the locks of hair in Samson’s life as recorded in the Bible, Book of Judges.⁴¹ Therefore, at the death of Arhuanan, the *akpata* was banned in the Udo area (Arhuanan’s legendary headquarters). According to Cousin Onofekehwo, the narrator of *Princess Oyeghe*, Arhuanan headed for the River Udo

³⁹ Ekhosuehi, Ambrose, “Akpata Instrument of Edo Culture” (2016) <http://www.edoworld.net>. (Retrieved 16 March, 2019)

⁴⁰ Ben Amos, *Sweet Words*, 110.

⁴¹ Judges 16:19-22. *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* (Patterson, NY: Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 2013)

(Osse River). At the river bank, he jumped into the water clutching his famous shield. Then the Oba issued a royal decree: “Hence forth, it is forbidden to play the *akpata* guitar. It is forbidden to play the *asologun* thumb piano. Whoever plays them will encourage Arhwaran to return.”⁴²

The detailed explanation of the Urhobo folktale narrator, called *ogbosia* in Urhobo language, about happenings in the history of the great Benin Empire foregrounds the thesis of this study that though Urhobo tales are independent of Benin in composition, there is a noticeable Benin influence in the materials for performance cast both in realistic and romantic terms. Though songs in Urhobo stories are not sung in the Benin language, some linguistic elements reflect Benin language. For example, the refrain of *Adigberen* sung by the chorus in the *akpata* song of *Princess Oyeghe* incorporates many Benin linguistic elements. G.G. Darah who translated the story from Urhobo into English translated as “Adigberen” as “Great Warrior.” Unfortunately, Onofekohwo, the actual narrator, passed on before the renewed scholarly interest on the story. So, much cannot be said about the etymology of this word or other cognates with the Edo tongue. These are some of the elements that remain a mystery in their relationship with Benin.

⁴² Onofekohwo, Cousin. “Princess Oyeghe” an Urhobo Folktale. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Kokori, Delta State in 1974 and Translated by Prof. Godini G. Darah) Mimeo, 19.

Conclusion

In drawing to a close, it must be acknowledged that the Urhobo people are republicans in nature. Therefore, in their cosmogonic worldview, the world of the Oba and Benin are regarded as powerful as the world of the spirits and ancestors. This is the “iron” factor. However, God Almighty is presented as the final arbiter. The narrator closed the Princess Oyeghe tale this way:

And Almighty God rambled in complaint. “When I passed here a moment ago, my drinking glass fell off my hands. As I was returning through this way, my kola nuts fell from my hands. What turbulence is troubling Earth? Then Omokpufi started to give evidence. “Hear the tale of our agony Father. Goblin came to earth to marry my sister Oyeghe. Arrived home, he threatened to kill her for food.” Then Almighty God pronounced a judgment. “With effect from this day, let spirits marry amongst themselves. Humans are to marry their own kind.” Thus, God demarcated the two worlds⁴³

This resolution of the conflict reflects the “clay” nature of the Benin Empire. The narrator reminds people that as great and majestic as the Benin Empire is, it is still subject to the power of the Almighty God, a greater force. Symbolically, this part of the narrative reflects the continuous urge of the Urhobo people and all struggling republicans to attain independence. This is because, as Okpewho puts it, “one people’s history is another people’s fantasy.”⁴⁴

⁴³ Onofekohwo, Cousin. “Princess Oyeghe” an Urhobo Folktale. (Tape in possession of Prof. Godini G. Darah recorded by Prof. Godini G. Darah in Kokori, Delta State in 1974 and Translated by Prof. Godini G. Darah) Mimeo, 19-20.

⁴⁴ Okpewho, *Once Upon a Kingdom*, 225.

To summarize, Benin influence in Urhobo folk stories is both evident and enlightening in some of the compositional materials, themes and performance style. This is a double-edged sword in that while Benin influence enables the tale narrator to disambiguate mysterious happenings in the Benin Empire and simplify events into fictitious happenings for the audience, it also inculcates bravery and steadfastness in young listeners to protect Urhobo independence from the Benin Empire and any other colonial authority. This conforms to the words of Modupe Broderick that “besides their primary entertainment value, oral narratives are metaphorical pleas for order.”⁴⁵ As such, Benin influence in Urhobo folktales transcends historical recollection to include both realistic and imaginative elements and the view that the empire is strong in some aspects (iron) and weak (clay) in others. This understanding is necessary for the conscious quest for freedom.

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⁴⁵ Modupe S. Broderick, *The Tori: Structure, Aesthetics and Time in Krio Oral Narratives*, PhD Diss. University of Wisconsin-Madison, 1977, 60.

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APPENDIX

THE TALE OF PRINCESS OYEGHE

Original Performed By:	Cousin Onofekohwo and Group
Place of Performance:	Kokori, Delta state, Nigeria.
Year of Performance:	July 14, 1979.
Time of Performance:	Afternoon.
Duration of Performance:	About 35 Minutes.
Musical Instruments in Use:	Gongs.
Recorded and Translated by:	G. G. Darah

EPISODE I

This is the story, the tale of an Oba's daughter called Princess Oyeghe. The Princess was so beautiful that she rejected all suitors who came for her. For years she continued to discriminate, to discriminate. In those days, there was no barrier between the Human World and that of Spirits (Erivwin). Marriages were contracted among human beings and spirits. Goblin hears of Oyeghe exquisite qualities and goes to Human World to marry her.

News of Oyeghe's exquisite qualities reached the One-Leg-One-Hand Goblin of the Spirits' World and he made up his mind to take her for wife. Before embarking on his mission to the Human World, Goblin borrowed some human parts top disguise himself. He goes to borrow a polished, brown skin from Mr Anthill. Mr. Capped Dwarf Anthill loaned him a hat. Goblin obtained a comely set of legs from Mr. Umbrella Tree and a set of bright teeth from the Tooth-Filer. Thus, dressed gorgeously, he sets out.

Episode 2

As soon as Oyeghe saw Goblin approaching the palace, she exclaimed in jubilation: "Behold my choice husband!" Goblin "Behold, my darling wife!" Astonished, the Oba said: "You must be a very lucky man. Numerous suitors have approached my daughter to marry her but she would not accept any. You hardly set foot in the palace and Oyeghe proclaimed you as husband. What is there to say? I hoped you came with a fat purse for the marriage ceremony? You are aware that money is the soul of business these days. Are you prepared?"

Mr Goblin answered promptly, "I had anticipated these developments and so I came with a full purse."

The bride price was decided and settled in full. Goblin said there was no need for a formal escort of the bride as tradition demands. “Let her get ready immediately and follow me home now”, he demanded.

Just as bride and groom were to set out, Oyeghe’s younger brother, Omokpufi (Master Sore-Infested-Body) returned from fishing hunt. As he settled down to have his meal, he heard voices bidding farewell and safe journey to the couple. Surprised, he rose and asked, “Whom are they bidding farewell to outside?” “My son, you came just in time” said the oba. While you were away, this handsome man came to ask for Oyeghe’s hand in marriage”.

Listeners, remember that when a man goes to a strange land to marry, he gives himself an English name regardless of whether or not he is educated. For Mr. Goblin, his English name was PM. How would his in-laws-to-be grant his request if he bears such a cumbersome and awkward name as One-Leg-One-Hand Goblin?

“PM”, Oyeghe’s brother called, “hold on for a short while for me because I would like to know where you reside. As custom demands, the act of marriage unites two families forever. Whenever my father intends to hold a festival in future, I would like to come to invite you specially”.

With great haste, Yaw-Infested-Body has his bath and rubbed on perfume with strong aroma. He remembered to take along with him a rag for beating off flies from his sores-covered body.

Episode 3

The three of them set out on the return journey. After a long, long trek, the group got to Capped Anthill’s place. He roared in fury, “Think of how long you’ve been away with my hat. Your few strands of wiry hair have not allowed me one moment of sleep since then.” (Narrator’s comment: You know that Goblin’s hair tumbles *kpetu kpetu kpetu* on his head.) In a rage, Mr. Anthill snatched his hat from Goblin’s head and gave him back his snake-like hairs. Seeing Goblin in his horrible looks, Yaw-Infested-Body exclaimed, “What a horrible sight! I can’t close my mouth over this. You girls, who discriminate over choice of husbands, see the reward!”

Song One

Wonderful, marvellous

Wonderful, marvellous

Wonderful my chorus

A curious marriage

Behold a spectacle

An unusual marriage

A strange marriage

A curious marriage

A great spectacle

What a pitiable experience!

The three sojourners resumed that trek; a long, long, long journey indeed. On reaching the abode of Mr. Umbrella Tree, he quickly retrieves his legs and returns Goblin's wooden crutches. With these, Goblin vaulted ahead *phriii jibeee*. Again, Yaw-Infested-Body wondered aloud: "What an adventure!"

SongTwo: "Wonderful Marvellous" is to be repeated.

With incredible speed, the party arrived at Mr. Brown Anthill's residence, and he too, claimed back his smooth brown skin. The party journeyed on and on for a long time. At the Tooth-Filer's workshop, he removed his bright set of teeth, leaving Goblin's mouth toothless except for two huge incisors. In a harsh tone, Goblin commanded Oyeghe and the brother to lead the way. He followed behind with menacing steps. Once more, Yaw-Infested-Body picked up his mournful song. (Repeat song sequence)

Episode 4

Narrator: Hear a marvelous tale

Chorus: A fantastic one

After a short while the party entered the World of Spirits. Goblin said he would first make thanksgiving offering to his personal god and then announce to all the spirits that he has returned safely from the Human World with a he-goat and a she-goat for a communal banquet. He started the rituals. With white chalk, he invoked the name of Yaw-Infested-Body and he answered "Amen" he invoked the name of Oyeghe and she responded "Amen". Lastly, he invoked his own name and answered, "Amen". After the appropriate incantations, Goblin gave Oyeghe her share of the ritual kola nuts. Oyeghe snapped at it and narrowly missed chopping off Goblin's fingers in the process. (Here is the example of a person who eats anything offered them without precaution.) Goblin offered Yaw-Infested-Body his share, but he secretly threw it away. Drink was served to Oyeghe and she almost swallowed the glass along with the content. The ritual drink given to her brother, he also threw it away cleverly.

Episode 5

As soon as the rituals were over, Goblin put his mouth to his ivory trumpet to summon an emergency congress of Spirits.

Song Four

Narrator: Phireren-nnnnnnn, e igricia

E igricia

Igbo jal'igbo

Chorus: E igricia (playing of musical instruments by the chorus commences at this point)

Narrator: Oyen igbo jal'gbo

Chorus: E igricia (refrain continues)
Igbo jal'igbo
Igbo jal'igbo-ooo
Igbo jal'igbo
Igbo jal'igbo
Behold the Spirits heading to the congress
The eyes of Spirits are located behind their heads
Behold their war dance as they trooped to the congress
Igbo jal'igbo
Co-performers well done
My colleagues well done
My dear chorus, respond spiritedly
From episode to episode, that is how a tale is woven
The sound of war drum piercesthe air
The stampede of war dance followed
Followed as the Spirits moved gregariously to the congress
Soon the congress was convened
The congress was fully convened
All seats in the venue was filled
My dear colleagues, bring the song to an enchanting close.

As soon as all delegates were seated, the Speaker of the Spirits opened proceedings “Honourable One-Hand-One-Leg, what made you summon an emergency congress?” To which Goblin responded, “It is not for a trifle matter that I called you here. I made an expedition to the Human World and return with a he-goat and a she-goat for a great feast!” his speech was greeted with a tumult of umarun, umarun, umarun meaning: “It is good, it is good, it is good.

Atwhich point a female Spirit rose up to speak. She was a woman of great wealth-children, money, and expansive plantations. Calmly and confidently she asked: “Is it for the offspring of a hapless mother that Goblin summoned us here? It is forbidden to deprive parents of such precious possession. I shall have no hand in such an abominable affair.” She grabbed her seat and storm out of the congress.

Episode 6

In keeping with the calendar of Spirit's World, the one week fixed for feasting on Oyeghe and the brother came almost instantly. On the morning of the fateful day, it was decided to keep the human captives in someone's custody pending the return of all Spirits from the day's work schedule in the farms. All the animals were assembled for a competitive race to choose the fastest who would have the honour of keeping vigil over Oyeghe and the brother. Miss Duiker, daughter of Emu village, appeared in a colourful sport outfit. She and Miss Antelope are always rivals in any athletic event. When the race was run that day, victory went to Miss Antelope. They handed over the captives to her for safe-keeping.

Episode 7

Thereafter, everyone left for the bush to procure the necessary ingredients for the festival dish. Recall the woman who opposed the plan. She started to fill a huge *uluwere* (the Spirit's name for a huge cooking pot). She filled it with yam slices to prepare pudding with which to feed the community's magical alarm gong. The gong was hung at the entrance of the shrine where Oyeghe and the brother were kept. All you listeners please take note; if you have a child or relative, who shows aptitude for any trade, don't discourage him or her. Unknown to the Oba, his children had mastered all the ritual processes in the palace. All of them, including Oyeghe the female, knew how to play the *ozi* (royal war drum). As soon as all the spirits have left home, Oyeghe took white chalk powder, blew it into the air and prayed: "Oh, my *Erhi* (Guardian Spirit), when one takes a wrong step, one's *Erhi* should lead one back home safely. Direct my footsteps aright to redeem me from this predicament. It was ignorance that made me to undertake this misadventure."

Having prayed, Oyeghe screwed up courage and in a melancholy voice broke out into a song of lament.

Song Five

Narrator: Oh my *Erhi*, come and witness a challenge

Chorus: *Erhi*, come and bear witness

Narrator: Behold the curse of Destiny

Chorus: *Erhi*, behold a challenge

Narrator: Behold an ill-omen Fate

Chorus: Come and bear witness

Narrator: Behold my life is in jeopardy

Chorus: *Erhi*, come and bear witness

Narrator: Guardian angel, come and witness, witness, witness

Chorus: *Erhi*, come and bear witness (the chorus chants the refrain throughout the rest of the song sequence)

Under the spell of excitement of the beautiful song, Antelope challenged Oyeghe.

“Young maiden, what an enchanting voice you have!

If you can add some drum beats as well. My daughter, I will dance to thrill you.”

Oyeghe picked up the drum and balanced it between her thighs.

She started with a gentle tap on it.

“Play on, beautiful maiden”, said Antelope.

“Play on that I can display my dancing skills.”

(At this point, the Narrator plays an imaginary drum with his fingers)

Krikridikredu

Krikridikredu

Krikridikredu

Possessed, Antelope let go all restraint.

She abandoned the duty of keeping watch.

She left the shrine and moved to the open yard outside.

Antelope danced into the highway, leading for Eku town.

She soon left Eku behind, en route to Ubiaruku, her hometown. Chorusing colleagues, well done

Get into the mood of performance

Intoxicated by the dance, Antelope neglected her duty.

The kind woman we met before now took yam pudding

And began to feed it to the magical gong.

One with food in the mouth

Can never put wind to fire. The gong began to devour the pudding thus:

I yamu yamu yamu wonmu

I yamu yamu wonmu-oo

I wonmu wonmu wonmu yonmu

At this point, Oyeghe and the brother

Started to run away, to escape.

Oh my choral companions well done

Silica, hold the refrain well

Goldsmith, don't let the song slip away

Everyone has his profession

It is with the thumb we remove corn seed

Corn seeds are always more than the stalk

So also are kernel crushings more than kernel seeds

Co-performers, I say well done

Thank you for your cooperation

Cousin and his entertainment group

Are performing this story

On this market day of Kokori

A market day is never miscalculated

(At this juncture, the Narrator takes a short break from narrating while the instrumental accompaniment rises in pitch with the refrain line superimposed)

All this while, Antelope was still dancing.

She has forgotten about the captives in her custody.

Suddenly, in a tone betraying fright:

She screams loudly:

Awoooooon-nnnnn

Awoooooon-nnnnn.

I have committed an abomination.

Awoooooon-nnnnnn.

I have broken a pledge.

Antelope lamented that she has betrayed a trust

Because she danced without restraint
And neglected her duty as gatekeeper.
If the community fails to recapture the escapees
She will surely be in serious trouble.
Oh assistants, thank you for your effort
Thank you for a job well done

Episode 8

The gong that had been devouring pudding.
When it finished devouring the pudding
The gong thundered a siren:
Kpo jororo-oooooooooooo
After a meal one must vacate a dining seat.
The gong sent out an alarm that delicious meat was escaping.
One-Hand-One-Leg
Heard the alarm in his banana plantation.
He applied a spring force to his crutches
Phuuuuuuuuuuuu gi.
And landed in the centre of his compound.
He saw the shrine gates opened.
He threw off his wooden crutches
And began to spin in fury.
Recall Oyeghe
And her brother.
Oyeghe complained she was tired of running.
Pleaded they have short rest
In a nearby farmstead.
There they sheltered under cassava leaves.

There they lay prostrate, panting.

Sleep is like death.

Soon, sleep took over them

And they slept off.

Goblin climbed to the top of his crutches

And saw them far off;

Far off in a deadly sleep.

Dear companions, I say well done

Co-performers, thank you for your help

Everything in the world is God's creation

(At this point, the Narrator cautions the chorus to lower the pitch of their instruments)

Agbro-erhe, (the talkative bird found in plantain orchards)

Flew in and perched on the nearby cassava farm

Where Oyeghe and the brother were asleep.

The bird chattered to arouse them up thus:

Vren, vren, vren, vren, (Wake up, wake up, wake up, wake up).

Vren, vren, vren, vren.

Vren, vren, vren, vren,

Any time you this bird chirp so.

Know that it is Oyeghe and brother

It is rousing from deadly sleep.

Narrator:

Dear assistants well done

Choral companions, you are wonderful!

Suddenly, brother and sister sprang up.

They woke from sleep.

Goblin saw them as they rose.

The ritual kola eaten earlier

And the drink taken then
Where offering was being made
Will now have their intended effect.
Every song must come to an end.
Oh, my Guardian angel, come and witness
Companions, thank you for a good job
All Group: My *Erhi* behold a challenge

Episode 9

Narrator: Hear a prodigious tale

Chorus: Fantastic!

Narrator: At this Juncture, Goblin intoned a magical chant thus:

Song Six

Oyeghe, Oyeghe, Oyeghe

Oyeghe, daughter of a king

Chorus: Oyeghe, Oyeghe, Oyeghe

Narrator: Oyeghe drank my drink

Chorus: Oyeghe, Oyeghe, Oyeghe

Narrator: Oyeghe ate my kola

Chorus: Oyeghe, Oyeghe, Oyeghe

Narrator: Oyeghe, retreat, I command you

Chorus: Oyeghe, Oyeghe, Oyeghe

Narrator: Oyeghe, I say retreat

Chorus: Oyeghe, Oyeghe, Oyeghe

Narrator: Oyeghe, I command you, retreat

All Group: Oyeghe, Oyeghe, Oyeghe-eeee

What an encounter

Narrator: As Goblin sang the song, Oyeghe suddenly found herself moving backwards. Then the brother exclaimed: "What! I am a doctor of magic. What temptation is this? Before any danger can

overwhelm both of us, let me show my expertise in magical arts.” So he aimed a counter chant at Goblin

SongSeven

I command you, be rooted

I say be rooted

Goblin, be rooted so that I may escape

Chorus: Be rooted to one spot

Narrator: Goblin be rooted that I may escape

Chorus: I say, be rooted

Narrator: Goblin be rooted that I may escape

Chorus: Remain rooted

Narrator: Remain rooted that I may run away

Chorus: Remain rooted

Narrator: All this while, Goblin was hopping on the same spot.

Chorus: Be rooted, I command you

Narrator: Goblin hopped *chue*, *chue*. He hopped *chue, chue*

Chorus: Be rooted, I command you

Narrator: I say remain transfixed

Be transfixed

Narrator: (grumbling) “What, is it this little song

Chorus: “Be transfixed”

Narrator: “That makes me immobile?”

Chorus: “Be rooted”

Narrator: Beads of hot sweat rolled off Goblin’s body.

Chorus: Be transfixed

Narrator: Goblin remain rooted that I may escape

Chorus: Be transfixed

Narrator: Be transfixed that I may get off

Chorus: Be rooted

Narrator: Goblin hopped, hopped without stop.

Chorus: I command you, be rooted

Narrator: Goblin began to show signs of weariness.

Narrator: I command you, remained rooted

Chorus: I say remain transfixed

Narrator: Companions, chorus the song for me

Chorus: Be transfixed

Narrator: Every song must come to a conclusion

All Group: I command you, be rooted, transfixed, chained!

Narrator: Hear an epic event

Chorus: Grand and fantastic

Narrator: Again, Goblin countered with his magical song. (Repeat Goblin's song above)

Song Eight

Narrator: Behold a gigantic encounter

Chorus: A grand tale indeed!

Narrator: Unconsciously, Oyeghe started to walk backwards again. Then the brother exclaimed in desperation: then the brother exclaimed in desperation: "What predicament is this? How come that excrement finds its way to the region of the beard? What peril can overcome my sister and me when I am a doctor of the magical arts? I must try my utmost effort." Then he intoned a marshal tune thus:

Song 9

There is danger, imminent peril, a great challenge

Tragedy threatens, a big predicament looms

Parrot, go fast across distant seas

Chorus: Danger looms, tragedy is imminent

Narrator: A desperate situation, Parrot sojourn abroad

Chorus: Desperation, great peril
Narrator: Go tell Arhuanan the Giant
Chorus: Danger looms, death summons
Narrator: Tell Arhuanan war has come
Chorus: Grave peril, death is imminent!

Episode 10

Narrator: Listen to a wonderful story

Chorus: Truly fabulous

Narrator: With incredible speed, the Parrot reached her destination at dawn. Giant Arhuanan has just woken up from sleep. He was sweeping his compound with a broom made from the stems of nine palm trees. It was while he was cleaning his compound that he received Parrot's emergency message. Unperturbed, Arhuanan went off to prepare himself a sumptuous breakfast saying, "One does not go to a battle with empty stomach." He skinned a truck-load of plantain and filled fifteen drums with water to drink after the meal. When the plantain was cooked, Arhuanan began to eat stylishly *mien mieren; mien mieren; mien mieren*. Now with a full stomach, he went into his shrine and picked up a sword. Standing at the entrance of the shrine, Arhuanan threw the mighty sword into the air to divine the emergency situation reported by Parrot, "Is it true that there is an imminent battle?" He caught the sword falling with his mouth, swallowed it and pulled it from his anus. Like one stung by a bee, Arhuanan sallied forth, running to the scene of the battle. When he got to the boundary between the World of Humans and that of Spirits, he saw a multitude of armed Spirits racing menacingly after Oyeghe and the brother. Then the *Akpata* (sacred guitar) called unto Arhuanan thus:

Song Ten

Narrator: Hearken to me, hear me, Adigberen (Great Warrior)
Hearken to me, hear me, Adigberen
Whenever you grow shorter, I too grow shorter
Chorus: Oh Adigbere
Narrator: Whenever you grow taller, I too increase in length
Chorus: Oh Adigberen
Narrator: Then Arhuanan joined in the song
Chorus: Oh Adigberen
Narrator: As Giant Arhuanan

Chorus: Oh Adigberen

Narrator: Dressed up to engage the spirits in battle

Chorus: Oh Adigberen

(The chorus continues with the “Oh Adigberen” refrain throughout this Episode and the rest of the story)

Narrator: Ubiesha Etarakpo of Kokori

Was emptying his bowels

In the outskirts of the town.

By accident, Ubiesha walked into the battle zone.

There Ubiesha witnessed Arhuanan’s war dance.

And when Ubiesha got back home,

He gathered poles and built a temple

At Urhievwurie section of Kokori.

When he completed the temple,

Ubiesha went to Kokori market to buy white chalk

And a fan made from animal skin.

By next morning, he started to perform the new ritual dance.

Whilst he did this, Kokori people jeered at him, saying:

“What type of strange dance is this?”

Ubiesha took note of the insulting remarks.

The songs Arhuanan sang to do battle,

Ubiesha inherited them.

This was the origin of the Igbe Religious Movement.

Whenever you grow shorter, I too grow shorter

Whenever you grow shorter, I too grow shorter

I say this was how Ubiesha healing movement began.

Whenever he performed the ritual dance,

He would take brief rest after a performance sequence
And make offering of white chalk powder (*orhen*).
Soon, news of Ubiesha healing powers reached Benin people.
Whoever had festering sores came for treatment.
Those with leprosy also came for cure.
With chalk powder only as medicine,
Life-threatening leprosy were healed in seven days.
In seven days, big sores were healed completely.
A religious movement developed from this practice.
A religious movement was Arhwaran's gift to Ubiesha.
Ubiesha acquired great fame through this inheritance.
Ubiesha lived long and died.
But his religious movement became a universal one.
The initial disparaging remarks
Kokori people used to scandalize him
Made Ubiesha to pronounce a curse before he died:
"Whoever will succeed me will be a foreigner
My mantle will fall on Igugu of Ugono
He will swear loyalty to me
Another disciple will be Agege of Orhomuru community
He too shall pledge loyalty to me
Yet another disciple will be Omotigbe
She shall acknowledge my supremacy
At Aboh, Johnny shall be the leader
He too shall pay tribute to me
At Oghwe, Adjanugha will be a disciple
He too shall be my faithful heir

That is the moat with which Arhuanan circled Benin.

What a miraculous feat, dear listeners!

When the British invaders reached the city gates,

They found it impossible to enter the city.

On one occasion, Arhuanan's mother complained:

“People regales me with tales of my son's prowess.

Yet I have not benefited from it.

I have no farm to sow my yam seedlings.”

Next morning, Arhuanan reacted to this insinuation.

He took a machet

And went to clear a farm for yams.

The space he cleared, all Benin farmers could not fill it with yams.

The unused portion, Arhuanan marked it with a curse.

The Oroghoro wilderness (on Eku-Sapele Road) is the unused portion.

Also, the wilderness of Samagidi near Kokori is part of the cleared farm.

Every wilderness where trees don't flourish

Is part of the farmstead Arhuanan made for his mother.

Is part of the farm that was not cultivated for shortage of yam seedlings.

On yet another occasion, Arhuanan's mother complained:

“My kitchen is in a dilapidated condition.”

Provoked by this insinuation, Arhuanan next morning,

Dug a pit to prepare walling bricks.

With these, Arhuanan mended his mother's kitchen.

The red bricks left over were shared by all Benin people.

The mud-walled buildings so common in Benin City,

Were built from Arhuanan's walling brick.

When Arhuanan washed his mud-stained hands on the unused heaps,

It multiplied in to termites' anthills we find everywhere.

There is yet another epic feat, oh listeners.

When Arhuanan, under the spell of the magical chewing stick

Was racing to Benin from the war front,

The earth moved by the impact of his giant feet

Resulted in the steep hill at Ugbenu-Ologbo (Koko junction).

That hill was formed by earth moved by Arhuanan's gigantic feet.

Episode 12

Frightened of Arhuanan's heroic deeds, the king complained:

"Arhuanan fame is spreading at a dangerous speed.

Whenever he becomes angry with my regime,

He will surely sack the entire city."

And so the king deceived him to leave the city:

"My son, I am your father

Prepare yourself to leave the city

Go and found your own kingdom.

There we will bring you annual tributes.

I will pass a royal tribute for my subjects to bring you tributes."

Arhuanan said: "I accept your command.

I cannot disobey my father's orders."

He took his gigantic sword and shield

And set into the unknown.

He headed for the River Udo (Osse River)

At the river bank, Arhuanan jumped into the river

Clutching his famous shield.

Then the King issued a royal decree:

“Henceforth, it is forbidden to play the Akpata guitar.

It is forbidden to play the Asologun (thumb piano).

Whoever plays them will encourage Arhuanan to return.”

Till this day, no one knows how Arhuanan died.

Whoever doubts me, whoever thinks I’m not speaking the truth,

Let the person go to River Udo

Where Arhuanan disappeared.

Arhuanan did not die.

He is under the water till this day.

Episode 13

And Almighty God rumbled in fury:

“When I passed here a moment ago,

My drinking glass fell off my hands.

As I was returning through this way,

My kola nuts fell from my hands.

What turbulence is troubling the earth?”

Then Sore-Infested-Body stepped out to give evidence:

“Hear the tale of our agony Father.

Goblin came to earth to marry my sister Princess Oyeghe.

Arrived home he threatened to kill her for food.”

Then Almighty God pronounced a judgment:

“With effect from this day,

Let Spirits marry amongst themselves

And Humans are to marry their own kind.”

Thus God demarcated the two worlds.

Every performance event must come to an end

This is the end of the tale

Here the story comes to a conclusion

EPILOQUE

Narrator: Cousin and his group
Performed this tale in Kokori town
I, Cousin of Urhuogba quarters
Silica, one of the chorus, is of Eduagbon section
Ekpukadje is of Urhuogba too
Steer the song to a close, dear companions
My dear young friend from Ughievwen district
Who came visiting today
It is for him we performed this tale
We did it for him that his life may prosper
May he father children and own great wealth
May neither of these gifts be absent from our life
My dear assistants, I say well done
Listeners who are seated
May your life increase a hundredfold
A life aborted midstream, may we avoid such fate
May the journey of life ever advance to greater heights
Now the song must come to a close
Here we bring the performance to a conclusion

All Groups: Adigberen-nnnnnnnnnn-ooooooooo
What a fantastic spectacle!

Narrator: I – iiiiiiiii Hip – hip – hip

Iron Mixed with Clay: Benin in Urhobo Folktales

Chorus: Iye – eeeeeee Hurray

Narrator: I – iiiiiiiii Hip – hip – hip

Chorus: Iye – eeeeeee Hurray

Narrator: I – iiiiiiiii Hip – hip – hip

Chorus: Iye – eeeeeee Hurray