



Urhobo Cosmological and Theological Contents of Udu Songs: A Vehicle for Preservation of Tradition and Culture in Nigeria

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Abstract. This research examines Urhobo cosmology and theology as expressed in traditional songs. These songs reveal the intimate connection between cosmology and theology, showing that the two concepts are interrelated; theology often helps to explain aspects of cosmology. Urhobo cosmology encompasses beliefs in Oghene (God), edjo (divinities), ega ese emo (ancestral veneration), the realities of the physical and spiritual worlds, and the relationship between the here and now and the hereafter. Theology, understood as the discourse on God, and cosmology, which represents the total worldview of a people, is clearly articulated in Urhobo traditional songs. The purpose of this study is to investigate Urhobo cosmology and theology as revealed in the songs of Udu traditional musicians. The project focuses on selected songs and analyzes them to highlight the codified and systematic worldview embedded within them. The musicians whose works are examined include Chief Amos Ogute Ottan, Chief Gometi Oyibo, Sir Juju Debala, Mr. Udjabor Okololo, and Don Francis Egbeku Kenairu. These musicians, who were born and nurtured within deeply religious environments, naturally reflect in their songs the cosmological and theological beliefs of the Urhobo people. To achieve this purpose, the study adopts phenomenological, hermeneutical, and participant-observation approaches. These involve pre-field preparations, actual fieldwork, and post-field (desk) analysis. After the field process, the selected songs are examined and interpreted to reveal the underlying cosmology and theology of the Urhobo.

Keywords: Cosmology, Theology, Nigerian culture, Traditional beliefs and Morality.

1. Background to the study

This research is grounded in the study of Urhobo cosmology and theology as revealed through traditional songs. These songs demonstrate the intimate relationship between cosmology and

theology, showing that both concepts are interconnected; theology often aids in the interpretation and explanation of cosmological ideas. According to Metuh (1981), as cited in Emusi (2012), cosmology refers to the complex system of beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, nature, and structure of the universe, as well as the interactions among its beings. It provides a rational explanation of the underlying order that guides human life and the environment. Thus, cosmology represents “the belief system of any group of people” (Emusi, 2012). Understanding the cosmology of a people therefore offers insight into their actions, values, and attitudes toward life factors that distinguish them from other ethnic groups.

The Urhobo people possess a distinct worldview that encompasses the totality of their beliefs and practices, clearly reflected in their cultural, religious, and socio-cultural institutions. Various aspects of this cosmology are expressed in the songs of Udu popular musicians, who are widely regarded as custodians and articulators of morality, traditional history, and communal beliefs. These songs consciously and unconsciously communicate the Urhobo worldview. To a casual listener, it may appear that the musician’s primary aim is simply to earn a living through entertainment; however, a more discerning audience recognizes that the songs embed and transmit the beliefs, values, and practices of the Urhobo people. Thus, traditional songs serve not only to entertain but also to educate, enlighten, and inform.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It is disheartening that early missionaries, as well as some Western scholars, referred to African cultural practices and religious expressions as *paganism*. Even more troubling is the fact that early converts who participated in their cultural festivals were, and in some cases still are, punished or labeled as “half-baked Christians” or mere churchgoers. Such attitudes have

contributed significantly to the decline of Urhobo classical ideas of cosmology and theology, as many African Christians abandoned their indigenous cultural practices in an effort to be perceived as committed Christians.

Consequently, a large portion of the younger generation of Urhobo people has become unfamiliar with their own culture, particularly their traditional songs. This lack of cultural awareness has produced social and psychological effects, resulting in a value system that dismisses Urhobo cultural heritage as “primitive.”

Among the younger generation, there is a growing perception that the value system embedded in Urhobo culture particularly its moral principles, theological insights, and social relationships - is inferior to the so-called “civilized” culture of the Western world. Furthermore, comprehensive research has not been conducted on the anthropological study of Urhobo cosmology and theology, leaving a significant gap in scholarly understanding of these indigenous belief systems.

1.2 Objectives of the Study

The general objective of this research is to investigate the cosmology and theology of the Urhobo as revealed in the songs of Udu popular traditional musicians.

The specific objectives are:

- To examine the text of the songs to highlight the cosmology of the Urhobo;
- To analyze the songs to expose their social-cultural benefits to the society and
- To examine the songs to highlight their educative potentials.

1.3 Significance of Study

This study is of great significance for the reasons below:

- It has enabled the youths to understand the concept of cosmology and theology in Urhobo culture;
- It has also exposed the social-cultural benefits of the traditional songs of the Urhobo;
- It has activated the interest of the people for their traditional music;
- The body of songs are veritable instructional materials for teachers in kindergarten, primary and secondary schools;

- The youth are encouraged to listen to the songs in order to gain knowledge and
- Finally, it has re-kindled the desire to identify with the Urhobo culture.

1.4 Scope of the Study

The study is limited to the traditional songs of selected Udu popular musicians, focusing specifically on the Urhobo concept of the Supreme God, the origin of humanity and a few other aspects of Urhobo socio-cultural life as reflected in their songs.

1.5 Theoretical framework

The study is anchored on the Culture and Identity Theory propounded by Jane Collier and Milt Thomas in 1988. Culture, within the framework of this theory, refers to the values, beliefs, thought patterns, and behaviours learned and shared by a group of people, which serve as markers of identity and enhance their sense of belonging. The theory emphasizes how individuals communicate, construct, and negotiate their cultural group identities and relationships within specific contexts. This theory is relevant to the present study because it focuses on the beliefs and thought patterns of the Urhobo people - elements that distinguish them from other ethnic groups in Nigeria.

2. Relevance of Songs in the Interpretation of Cosmology and Theology

Urhobo cosmology and theology are vividly expressed in traditional and folk songs. These songs serve not merely as entertainment but as a vital medium for the development of the mind, body, and soul. Through folk songs, virtues are commended, and vices are condemned. Udu popular musicians, regarded as articulators of morality, traditional history, and the beliefs of the people, convey the cosmology and theology of the Urhobo in their music.

Agu (1999), as cited in Emusi (2008), observes that in African societies, all aspects of life—from birth to death—are integrated with music-making. Among the Ibo, for instance, music functions not only as a medium of entertainment and social interaction but also as an essential tool for the development of the mind, body, and soul. Through songs, individuals learn the laws of the land, acquire knowledge of tribal history, and assimilate socially accepted behavioral patterns via music and dance.

As noted earlier, Urhobo cosmology is expressed in songs, which are crucial for interpreting the cosmology and theology of a people. Onyeji (2005), cited in Dick-Duvwarovwo (2017), highlights the role

of folk music in the Igbo community, describing it as a “potent creative art that enables proper socialization, education, entertainment, and integration of the Igbo person into the norms and values of Igbo culture.” He further notes that music functions as a mediator and an agency for promoting order, peace, and unity among the Igbo. Similarly, Odejobi (2014), in her study of Yoruba indigenous folk songs as a tool for moral education among children, emphasizes that folk songs serve to encourage, motivate, and guide children in upholding good morals, with parents particularly mothers playing a key role in transmitting these values through music. Emusi (2016) reinforces this view, asserting that “folk songs serve as a means of relaxation and entertainment, as a vehicle for the transmission of idioms and proverbs, and as a channel through which virtues are commended and vices condemned.”

3. Research Methodology

This study employed the ethnographic method, which combines fieldwork with desk research. The fieldwork was preceded by pre-field activities, involving the collection of relevant materials and information necessary for effective engagement in the field. The ethnographic method is defined as “the gathering of recordings and the first-hand experience of musical life in a particular human culture” (Nettle, 1964).

Ethnography has proven highly effective in cultural research, enabling scholars to correct earlier misconceptions about African conceptions of God and other aspects of traditional belief systems. The method encompasses three phases: pre-field, actual fieldwork, and desk work (also referred to as post-field analysis). Data were obtained from both primary and secondary sources. Primary data consisted of oral interviews guided by a well-structured questionnaire focused on Urhobo cosmology and theology as reflected in the songs of Udu traditional musicians. Secondary data were drawn from both published and unpublished materials relevant to the study.

3.1 Pre-field

The pre-field stage lasted for about four weeks. This phase involved extensive library research on Urhobo beliefs in order to provide the necessary background information for the topic under study. After identifying the communities to be visited, contact was established with the research assistants to determine appropriate dates for the field visits. Materials prepared for the fieldwork included personal effects, financial provisions, a portable tape recorder, notebooks, as well as traditional items such as drinks

and kola nuts, which are essential for facilitating cordial interactions and gaining access to community members.

3.2 Population

The Urhobo occupy nine local government areas in Delta State, and each of these areas has its own traditional popular musicians. This study focused specifically on the traditional popular musicians in Udu Local Government Area, based on the understanding that they share a common culture with other Urhobo communities. Consequently, the cultural information expressed in their songs can be considered representative of what obtains across the wider Urhobo nation. For the purposes of this research, the songs of seven musicians were selected and analyzed.

3.3 Sampling technique

The cluster sampling technique was employed to select the seven musicians used in this study. The selection was based primarily on the thematic content of their songs, particularly as it relates to Urhobo cosmology and theology. The musicians selected for analysis include: Chief Amos Ogute Ottan, Chief Adama, Chief Gometi Oyibo, Sir Juju Debala, Mr. Udjabo Okololo, Chief Prophet Olokpa, and Don Francis Egbeku Kenairu.

3.4 Field work

The field work lasted for four weeks and began with the establishment of rapport with the musicians. During this period, the researchers participated in both their musical and non-musical activities and demonstrated genuine interest in their general well-being. This relationship-building process facilitated trust and encouraged openness during data collection. In the field, data were collected using the participant observation method and the oral interview technique. Participant observation enables the researcher to obtain information from the participants’ own perspectives rather than relying on preconceived assumptions. This was achieved by joining the musicians in their performances and observing their musical practices within their natural settings. Musical events were recorded in their actual contexts, and photographs were taken with the performers to capture the essence of the occasions.

3.5 Oral interview

This section of the study was guided by well-structured questions on Urhobo cosmology and theology, focusing specifically on the Urhobo concept

of God, their understanding of who God is, and the nature of their traditional theological beliefs. A second session was held with the musicians to clarify issues that emerged during the initial inquiry, particularly the meanings of song texts as well as the accurate wording of the performed songs. A selective audio recording of ten songs comprising philosophical and historical pieces was made for detailed analysis.

3.6 Desk work

This stage, also referred to as the post-field work phase, involves the collation and analysis of data gathered from the field. Seven days were devoted to this stage, during which the musical materials collected were subjected to textual analysis using the thematic approach. In this process, the songs were analyzed based on the specific topical issues they addressed.

4. The Concept of Songs in Urhobo Culture

A song is a musical composition rendered with the human voice, either unaccompanied or supported by instrumental accompaniment. Across cultures, songs are created for specific purposes, with styles and themes that reflect social interactions, spiritual beliefs, and modes of communication. They constitute an essential component of a people's culture; therefore, to study the songs of any society is to examine its cultural life. Songs accompany virtually every human activity - social, cultural, religious, and recreational events within the community. They function as vehicles for expressing emotions, transmitting ideas, and conveying depths of passion and meaning that ordinary speech cannot adequately capture.

Traditional songs, also known as folk songs, are musical compositions created by people within a particular geographical and cultural setting for purposes considered meaningful to them. The International Folk Music Council defines folk music as *“the product of a musical tradition that has evolved through the process of oral transmission, shaped by three main factors: continuity, which links the present with the past; variation, which springs from the creative impulses of individuals and groups; and selection by the community, which determines the form in which the music survives”* (Ekwueme, 2001, in Dick-Duvwarovwo, 2017).

According to Emusi (2023), traditional songs represent a communal heritage of society; consequently, all members of the community participate in musical activities that reflect their cultural identity. These songs belong to the common

people, and their texts are grounded in the people's beliefs, worldviews, philosophies, and occupational experiences. Nzewi (1999, in Emusi, 2023) describes traditional music as *“feeling and communal therapy, a humanizing communion, a sharing in human-beingness.”* Thus, Africans do not conceptualize music as an art form existing merely for its own sake; rather, they understand and rationalize it as an integral component of human life, intended to provide essential and supportive functions for social and cultural events in ways considered acceptable within the community (Emusi, 2023).

Traditional songs are highly significant because they function as a major means of communication among the people, especially in societies that did not maintain a written tradition. Through these songs, members of the community learn their history, belief systems, and acceptable moral behaviour. Traditional songs also contribute to emotional well-being by helping individuals express, process, and regulate feelings such as joy, sadness, and stress. In addition, they provide a rich medium for cultural and creative expression.

Moreover, traditional songs play an essential role in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage and identity across generations. Many of these songs contain historical narratives expressed through storytelling, thereby safeguarding important cultural events and the collective history of the people for future generations.

5. Udu Popular Musicians

The Udu-speaking people are located between the Okpare Creek and the Warri River in Delta State, Nigeria. Their territory is bounded by the Forcados River to the south, the Warri River to the west, and the Okpare Creek to the east, while the Warri - Ughelli highway marks their northern boundary. The area lies within the tropical rainforest belt and is characterized by numerous watercourses and wetlands.

Udu popular musicians are individuals who primarily earn their livelihood through music making. They are frequently invited to perform at various ceremonies - including marriage rites, funeral ceremonies, and other social gatherings - where their services are required. These musicians are regarded as articulators of morality and custodians of traditional history and cultural beliefs. Their songs, whether consciously or unconsciously, reflect and express the belief system and worldview of the Urhobo people.

Musicians often face the challenge of gathering information about events occurring in their environment and conveying them to the public through performance. Idamoyibo (2006) describes musicians as “overt and secret observers, and silent listeners who continually monitor events unfolding around them.” He further explains that within the context of performance, musicians provide social commentary, educate the public, and entertain simultaneously.

Darah (2005) examines the songs of Urhobo popular musicians primarily from literary and political-economic perspectives. He demonstrates how, historically, songs were employed to correct societal ills, respond to colonial and post-colonial politics, and later shift from satirical compositions to eulogies or praise songs for profit. In Urhobo communities, songs of insult (satire) are performed to publicly shame individuals engaged in dubious behavior, while panegyric songs are used to commend those who lead upright lives. Other categories of songs include work songs, war songs, entertainment songs, and ceremonial songs.

Given the role of musicians in maintaining social decorum, Idamoyibo (ibid) refers to them as “mass communicators.” Musicians are often regarded as the conscience of the society, refusing to accept bribes to falsify information affecting the community. Ovorgbedor (1999, in Idamoyibo) observes that “art does not only prescribe polite ways for saying impolite things, nor provide ways for expressing the inexpressible; music provides license for saying the fearsome and irritant truth.”

Udu popular musicians base their songs on the beliefs and worldview of the Urhobo, emphasizing moral values and the consequences of violating the community’s ethical norms. Their compositions are often highly philosophical, requiring thoughtful reflection from listeners, as they frequently address the transience and vanity of human life.

6. Classification of their Songs

The songs of Udu popular musicians are classified according to *obo-ukiri* (drum beat), *owoton-igbe* (dance step) and according to the content of the songs.

Below are the major classes of Udu traditional songs based on the above:

Udje songs are very vigorous and war-like
Adjuya is less vigorous than *udje* and milder in speed
Fashone a linguistic corruption of fashion is a fusion of *udje* and *adjuya*

Oghwe has a leisurely beat/rhythm
Overen meaning revealed is used for ritual purpose, that is worship of a particular deity known as *edjo-overen*. It induces a trance-like state in the dancer
Opiri songs are associated with ribaldry
Eghavwan is associated with sorrow and heart-rending emotion during interments

Classified according to content fall into the following:

Ile-ekan meaning songs of abuse or satires are used to correct human foibles and whip social dissidents into line through scorching mockery
Ile-iten or innuendos are indirect, implied or polite insults
Ile-ejiri or eulogies are praise songs meant to commend good behaviour as well as to secure favour or gratification from the person being praised or commended
Ile-onyenvwen are social or party songs meant for merriment
Ile-uvweri are dirges or mourning songs

Regardless of their classification, the general purpose of these songs is multifaceted. They provide social entertainment, preserve and transmit cultural values, and correct societal ills. Additionally, they teach social order and proper interpersonal relationships, express the collective consciousness of society regarding the supreme being, and offer encouragement or condolence. These songs also explain social phenomena and the origins of things, caution against the dangers of foreign or negative cultural influences, and showcase the culture of the Udu people to other socio-cultural groups.

7. Process of Song Composition

Regardless of their purpose or audience, Udu songs follow a predictable process of composition. The first stage, **ule-eroro**, involves the composer creating both the melody and the lyrics of the song. The second stage, **efuere-ile**, focuses on editing the song. During this phase, a group of people is invited to listen to the composition and provide critique, which informs any necessary modifications. The third stage, **owoigbe-ule** (the dance step for the song), entails drummers and other percussionists interpreting the rhythm and creating the musical accompaniment. The appropriate dance steps for the song are also determined and learned during this stage. This is followed by a series of rehearsals until perfection is achieved. The final stage is the public performance of the song.

8. The Cosmology and Theology of the Urhobo as highlighted in the Songs of Udu Popular Musicians

The cosmology and theology of the Urhobo are embedded in their traditional songs; a thorough analysis of some of the songs will substantiate the facts

8.1 The Existence of a Supreme God

The Urhobo have long believed in the existence of a supreme being, whom they call **Oghene**. They hold that Oghene has power over all things on earth, and that nothing can exist without Him. This belief explains why the Urhobo consistently seek His guidance in prayer before embarking on any endeavor and attribute all success to His intervention. In the songs of Udu popular musicians, the concept of God as supreme is strongly emphasized. He is frequently depicted as all-powerful, all-knowing, and ever-present, which is why many musicians often invoke His presence during their performances. Below is the opening of a song by Egbeku, in which he used different African names for God to invite His presence:

Oghene woto rhe ukpe nana	God come down this year
Ehe Olorun, Tamara, Allah	oh God
Kephere, kephere me re yo vwo sewo de	I call you with different languages
Wo to rhe ukpe nana	come down this year

From this song it is beyond reasonable doubt that Urhobo relate with the supreme God directly in all things.

8.2 Creator God

The Urhobo also believe that God created the world and everything within it. He fashioned the land to serve as a home for both humans and animals, and likewise created the hills and mountains as part of His divine design.

There are speculations on how the land and the hills were created, one of which Ogute (1977) narrated in one of his songs titled *Yembra*. Below is an extract:

1. Oto r'Urhobo vwu kpehiovwi-I	Urhobo land has no hills
2. Obo re soro, me cha n'abo dje	the reason, I shall make plain
3. Sosuo jovwo, oke r'awanre	in the beginning, in antiquity
4. Amame oghene vwo ma kpo	God created the world with water only
5. Oghene rhiro no ye cha m'ihwo	God ordained to make man
6. No ye m'ihwo, oy eke meravwe	that He would make man, and thereafter

7. Ihwo ve ravwe k'phori aye ria	man and beast will live on land
8. Ota r'unu, Oghene vwo m'akpo	by word of mouth, God made the world
9. Oghene vw'ota unu vwo f'ekpe	by words of mouth God loaded sand
10. Phi'evu r'oko, idibo biro	into a canoe, his servant paddles Him
11. Ebi'oko r'ekpe na rhi ti Yoroba	He paddle the canoe to Yoruba-land
12. Ekpe na nabo bu vw'evu r'oko	the sand was much in the canoe
13. Oghene ghwe'kpe do phih'ame	God tossed some of the sand into the water
14. Te r'ekpe n ate, tiyi k'ophori	where ever the sand toched turned to land
15. Ekpe ri mui kori kp'ugbenu	handful of the sand forms hills
16. Oghene ghar'ekpe ri ti bini	God kept on apportioning the sand till He get to Bini
17. Oghwereho, no yi kp'Urhobo	and from there He came to Urhobo
18. Ekpe ri cheko egoma rere	His supply of sand was almost gone
19. K'oto re kpe miri h'Urhobo	so He tossed a few handfuls on Urhobo land
20. Oto r'Urhobo ke kpekpe	Urhobo therefore has land
21. Ete r'ukpehiovwi ophruro	but not enough to form hills
22. Besie Oghene vwo t'ebe vwere	by the time God reached Ijaw-land
23. Ibirhe tetan koye chek'oko	all that was left was the muddy dregs
24. Ibirhi na k'oye mriri vwo rh'ayen	these He tossed to them
25. Obe vwere ke poto poto	Ijaw land therefore became marsh land
26. Ete oto re chihi ophru ro	they lack firm soil for walking on

The song above attests to the fact that the Urhobo recognize God as the Creator and possess a structured understanding of the order of creation. According to this worldview, in antiquity, God first created water, which filled the earth, and then formed the land in preparation for the creation of humans and animals. The similarity between this Urhobo cosmology and the Judeo-Christian account of creation as presented in Genesis is striking, leading some to speculate about potential Judeo-Christian influence. However, the worldview expressed by Ogute in the songs is firmly rooted in Urhobo folklore, which predates the advent of Christianity and Western cosmology.

In another song by Ogute titled Michael Ibru (1975), he suggested that God apportions each man his lot in life. An extract:

Ede r'Oghene ma makele-o,	the God created Michael Ibru
Amakashe ovo rh'igborhi me	an angel whispered to me
Ne dene satode	that it was a Saturday
Oghene f'emu phih 'oko r'erhanre	God loaded provision into the canoe

Out nuakpo soso vwo yer'akpo	enough for an entire community to live on
Oke me Malele phi h'ko na	before He created Michael in the boat
N'ode 247ghenev oy eke	intending the following day
Mihwo fa kugbe Makele	to create more people to join Michael
Eki bi'oko na rhi'akpo	before the canoe is paddled to earth
Oghene siobo phr'iruo, okpore	God has finished His work and gone home
Oke vwo rhie, tavwe Oghene	it was on the following day God
Ke karo ho ni none sonde	realized that that day was Sunday
Erhovwo r'ode, ji'Oghene bi ruio	the native day of rest, God does not work
N'ohwo ema phi h'ko na	the one He has created in the boat
Oyevwu hiovwi re	was lucky
Oro yer'akpo jobe mr'uboro	the one who will succeed does not experience evil
Etiyi 247ghenev wo sidibo	God then told His servants
N'ebioko nav e Makele vwo rhie akpo	to paddle the canoe and Michael to earth

This song suggests that God continues to create people and allocate livelihoods to them. Furthermore, the Udu people conceive of existence as occurring on a single, interconnected plane of reality. Humans are believed to be created in a distant part of this plane, within the spirit realm, from where they journey to the earth – the physical realm. Similarly, the return to the spirit realm after death is envisioned as a homeward journey along the same mystical river that connects the unseen world with the visible world.

The Urhobo are conscious that, apart from humans, it is God who created everything else that exist, including darkness, light, the moon and the sun in a clear order. An excerpt from one of Ogute songs titled Siakpere (1977) has it that:

Oghene m'ason, oke be m'uvo	God made the light, and He made the day
Om'oemeravwe, oke be m'ore	He made the moon, and He made the sun
Ovo ye rue, ovo si hw'oma mu	when one is working, the other rests

Thus, God does not only create, but His creation maintains a harmonious order. The Urhobo also believe in the Almightyness of God (omnipotence) as He gives power to everything.

8.3 Time and Space

The Urhobo conceive of spatial reality as existing on three interconnected plains: *Odjuvwu*, the abode of God; *Akpo*, the abode of man, representing the visible

world in its entirety; and *Erivwin*, the abode of the dead and unborn children. In Udu songs, *Erivwin* is portrayed not as a mystical place, but as a physical location, albeit far removed from *Akpo*. The entrance to *Erivwin*, called *Ada-Urhoro* (the Gate of *Urhor*), marks the point beyond which the dead cannot return, except possibly through reincarnation.

According to Echekwube, reincarnation is a spiritual experience in which the essence or spark of the deceased's ego transmits certain qualities to their descendants - a phenomenon reminiscent of the mysterious transfer of attributes observed in biblical narratives. In Juju and Udjabor's song titled "*Tugba*", the singers recount the story of a man named *Tugba* who, after death, finds himself in *Erivwin*. Nostalgic for his family left behind in *Akpo*, he pleads with *Orhi Urhor*, the guardian of *Erivwin*'s entrance, to allow him a brief return. However, his request is denied. This narrative parallels the parable of the Rich Man and Lazarus (Luke 16:19 - 31), emphasizing that once the departed enters the realm of the dead, a return to the living world is impossible. Despite this separation, the deceased are believed to engage in adventurous activities, including commercial undertakings, in certain isolated parts of *Akpo*, such as deep forests. In another Juju and Udjabor's song titled '*Benwa*', a hunter named *Benwa* went on a hunting expedition into a deep forest. An excerpt:

Eghwea omuomuo'sho	it is in evil forest
Erivwin ya ch'eki	the dead engages in commerce
Di ye <i>erivwin</i> rhi'eki re	the dead have come to market
Benwa be rie he	Benwa did not know
Ovw rue'vu r'oye	when he entered the place
Aziza hia ghwiwe ho	Aziza met him
Aziza sere vue, ko war'idjere	Aziza called him, and called his praise name

In Urhobo cosmology, *Aziza* is a spirit (*Edjo*) whose presence is always accompanied by a whirlwind. When an *Aziza* calls a man by his praise name, it signifies that the individual is courageous and outstanding. This belief underscores the Urhobo perception that *Erivwin* is situated in remote locations within the physical plain of existence.

Like many African societies, the Urhobo reckon time using the sun and the moon. As noted earlier, they observe a four-day week: *Edewor*, *Ediruo*, *Edure*, and *Edebi*, with seven such weeks constituting a month, totaling twenty-eight days to correspond with the phases of the moon. The period from the appearance of the new moon (*Omeravwen Phru Re*) to its waning (*Omeravwen pa le pa gha*) completes the lunar cycle. Consequently, the Urhobo year comprises thirteen months. Unlike the solar calendar, the Urhobo do not reckon a year based on the sun's 365-day revolution;

rather, they mark time by the daily rising and setting of the sun.

In Urhobo cosmology, the sun and the moon are children of God whom He assigned to their respective duty posts-in the day and at night. The choice of the time of duty deriving from the nature of each of the children. In Ogute song titles ‘*Sefia*’, he says:

Ore v’omeravwe	sun and moon
Ayen ive k’emo r’oghene-o	they are both sons of God
K’ayen ne suvwe’ uvie	the two struggled for kingship
Ohwo r’avwode r’oye su’akpo na	the one whose name will be used in ruling earth
Oghene s’aye chiria	God called the two of them
Oke r’ihwo vwo r’ayen	and assign each of them to people
Na ye hw’ive kpo’rhavwirhi-o	that the two of them should undergo a test before midday
Ribesie oren vw’ovi	the people assigned to the sun had all died
Ihwo r’oren ghwurere	while those assigned to the moon were all alive when they arrived home
J’omeravwen v’oro ye gbe hero	God called the sun and the moon
Ayen vwo t’uwevwi	and asked after the people he had given to them
Oghene s’oren v’omeravwe	the sun said his were bad people that they all died
Nihwo roye vwo ravwa kemavo	that none of them survived
Oren n’ihwo na rharhe	the moon accounted for his own
Ne r’oye je k’ighwu	God nodded and spoke
N’oye v’ogbe t’uwevwi-i	the name of the sun cannot be used in ruling the world
Omeravwe vw’eroye kpa oto	the sun’s duty will be to dry tapioca as well as kernels
Oghene mi phiuhiovwi	clothes that are hung out to dry, let the sun dry them
Na savwe ode r’oren su’akpona-ha	this is the assigned duty of the sun
Ebo oye aghare te we	the moon was assigned kingship
Wo ghwiphiniya wo ke ghwe’bi-o	when a woman is pregnant the pregnancy would be reckoned using the moon
Emua ra fonrhe vw’otan	even the year
Oren wo ye weyena	would be reckoned using the moon
Ona ye be avwe ghari te we	

The Urhobo perceive **seasons** in terms of agricultural cycles and climatic patterns. They recognize two main seasons: the dry season (*Oke-Uvo*) and the rainy season (*Oke-Isio*). The onset of the rainy season is traditionally marked by, or coincides with, the flowering of a plant called *Djedjekevuwudu*, as referenced in Sir Juju and Udjabor’s song *Koputi* (1975).

Djedjekevuwudu, it is djedjekevuwudu

oghwere vwo koka r’oghwe a farmer uses to identify the onset of rainy season
 Orhie orovwe vw’ogo it is an alien found in the farmland

The second line, “*Orhie Orovwe Vw’ogo*,” refers to the plant *Djedjekevuwudu*. It is likened to a woman who naturally belongs to her biological family but is married into another family. While one would expect the plant to grow by riverbanks, it inexplicably thrives in farmlands far from the rivers. Its placement in the farmland is purposeful: it serves as a natural indicator to farmers of the imminent onset of the rainy season.

8.4 Predestination/Reincarnation

It is the belief of the Urhobo that before birth, the soul of the unborn child in *erivwin* (spirit world) chooses its lot in life. This he does by going to *urhoro* (the gateway to life on one hand, and the entrance to *erivwin* on the other hand). Interwoven with this is the belief in reincarnation. As stated earlier, reincarnation is the mysterious transfer of a spark of the ego of the deceased to his progeny. The dirge ‘okete’ in Udu captures this aspect of Urhobo cosmology:

Okete, okete, okete, okete	okete, okete, okete, okete
Oko r’gho hepha kay’arua	the vessel with wealth is the one you board
Oko r’emo hepha, kay’arua	the vessel with children is the one you board
okete	okete

This dirge by Sir Juju and Udjabor, in the album ‘*Oteyerin*’ released in 1974, urges the departed soul to make the right choice in its second coming. In other words, when the soul reincarnates, it must select the correct *Otarhe* (destiny) by entering the right “boat.” *Orhiurhoro*, the keeper of the gate, plays a crucial role in this process, presenting the soul of the unborn child with three options: children, wealth, and long life. The soul may choose one or two, but not all three. Whatever is chosen becomes the soul’s destiny its self-allotted portion in life. Only the rare and courageous soul is believed to obtain all three blessings. This belief is vividly expressed in Sir Juju and Udjabor’s album ‘*Idia*’, particularly in the track titled ‘*Mary*’. *Otarhe* (Predestination) is so powerful that it is difficult to alter by artifice or charm, hence Sir Juju and Udjabor in the album ‘*Ota-ovo*’ (1976) declared;
 Arie tacha jovwo, ese ki suvw’ohwo

In other words, a person must predestine themselves correctly before they can be saved or healed. Should an individual die prematurely, before the expiration of their predestined time, *Orhiurhoro*, the keeper of the gate, asks the departed soul why they returned before their allotted time. Such a soul is not welcomed into the fold of the ancestors; instead, it wanders the earth,

seeking vengeance. This belief is depicted in Sir Juju and Udjabor's song 'Avwokuruo', where Avwokuruo's mother, who was brutally murdered, is asked by Orhiurhoro: "Edewe je gba, diemu soro wo vwo fuo rhe" (Your allotted time is not yet up; why did you come back so soon?).

8.5 Urhobo Socio-Cultural life/Morality

The Urhobo place a high premium on morality, particularly in matters relating to sex. Adultery by a woman is strongly condemned and considered *emuerivwi*, a forbidden act or taboo. A woman who commits adultery and conceals it from her husband and his family elders risks not only social sanctions but also the wrath of *erivwin* (the ancestors), which may endanger her life and that of her children. Interestingly, a man who attempts to conceal his wife's adultery also incurs the displeasure of *erivwin*. However, the sparing of the adulterous man by *erivwin* does not imply societal condonation of his behavior; rather, the man is viewed with disdain and scorn. He may be required to pay *osaje* (damages) for his sexual transgression and, in some cases, may face *eghwe* (beating), *evwosuo* (ostracism), or *edjephrorere* (banishment).

Among the Urhobo, adultery is not limited to sexual intercourse, though that is the primary act. A man who hugs a married woman without her husband's consent, touches her in a suggestive manner, or holds her hand in a way that implies affection or intimacy is considered guilty of adultery. If the woman fails to report such acts to her husband, she is also regarded as guilty. Likewise, a man who makes amorous advances toward a married woman commits adultery if she does not inform her husband about the attempt.

In Ogute song, *arue rhie che miovw'akpo* (western civilization will corrupt the world). The bard sang:

Akpo r'ahwanre	in the olden days
emu'obo r'aje yora-a	you do not hold a woman's hand at will
Eya r'okena,	women of today
aye vw'obo fay'ikebe	when you playfully slap their buttocks
Ja ye be kpa h'ota	they do not protest
K'ehwe aye rh'oma hwe	instead they laugh
Diona k'ikobi r'vworho-o	so this is a communal farm
Ogwan aye g'esemo	an ancestral hall where the
fathers are worshipped	
Ja be ghwe eche ho bevwede	that never has a door
Ov'ete ra guono I'gho ba	there should be a limit for
the desire for money	
Urhobo, avwa rhi'erho	Urhobo, open wide your
eare	ears
Ete ole vwe r'fe te	granted that the yam beetle
loves yam	

Ole r'she vw'evu r'oghwa	yam tubers that are sold in the stall
Sa vwa mr'ofe	have you seen a yam beetle
R'oda mu'aye	perched on them?

Although a linguistic analysis of the songs is beyond the scope of this study, the beauty and aptness of Ogute's metaphors cannot escape the attentive ear or observant eye. For instance, an adulterous woman is compared to a communal farm or an ancestral hall - both open to public access. Ogute also observes an erosion of the high moral standards of traditional Urhobo society, attributing it to the influence of Western cultural values and a money-driven economy. The bard cautions that the acculturating influence of Westernization should have limits; after all, even the yam beetle, which relishes the taste of yams, avoids the yams set aside for sale. Similarly, men with amorous intentions are urged to leave married women alone.

Apart from adultery, the Urhobo frown at stealing, embezzlement of family funds and poisoning of one's neighbour with witchcraft. Juju in his song, *Esekairoro* (1986) cautions:

Erovw'ene r'ihw'ohiare vw'Urhobo	there are four things that can kill a man in Urhobo
Oghene ye sia'e phroma, ye wo tore	if God removes them from you, you will live long
Wodu'aje r'ohwo-o, oy'ovo	do not have sex with another man's wife, that is one
Wo ch'igho r'ohwo-o, oy'ive	do not steal, that is two
Wo rie igho r'uwevwi-o, oy'erha	do not embezzle family funds, that is three
Wo d'orhan hw'or'ive we-e, oy'ene	do not kill your neighbour with sorcery, that is four

The Urhobo insist on descent dressing particularly for married women. Traditionally, an Urhobo woman in the public wears a blouse and two wrappers (*otehu gb'ifitemo*); the upper cloth doubles as a strap for her baby if she has one. Usually, a married woman is not expected to wear gown, but if she wants it must reach her ankles. Short skirts are frowned at, a point which Ogute re-echoes in his song 'Sefia' (1975). The relevant portion is:

Enajiria avwa vverhe-e	Nigeria, do not sleep
Emete n ache rhiaro baphi ho	the girls are getting civilized to the point of nudity
Akpo r'edevure, eke gano konabo she toto	in the past, when a gown is sown, it to the ankles
A vwo t'akpo r'aruerhie	in the present time of civilization
Eke gano k'ehiovwi k'oda mue	when a gown is sown, it is very short
Aye ya ehobo rhue	when the wearer bends down
Obuko k'oro'hwofa	her back side belongs to another
Arue rhie na ghwemu hi abo-o	civilization will cause a lot of havoc

In the past and even now among some traditional men, a woman during her menstrual flow is considered 'unclean' as a consequence of which she is not allowed to cook for her husband. The increasing violation of this restriction, according to Ogute in his song 'Udu bridge' is responsible for increase mortality among the men folk. He puts it thus:

Aje afen cher'emu k'oy'aria women in menstruation cook,
and we eat
Urhirhi ya s'ohwo keghwe ughu when an ant stings us,
we die
Ihwo r'ahwaren mr'emu tio na-a the men of old did not
experience this

While such taboo as a woman cooking for her husband during her monthly flow is no longer considered a taboo by the majority, there are other taboos which are still strictly observed. These include incest-sex between close relations. Oguted noted this in his song 'Ughede' (1975):

Ame r'ese ame r'ighweri vw'boku the water called potash
water in the sea
Jabesa vwo cher'ughweri is not used in making potash
K'ughwankan r'oghw'oma ho rather it is used in making
salt
Abi vw'oni r'ohwo ru'aje-e you cannot marry your own
mother

In other words, just as potash water (sea water) is not used in making potash, it is impossible to turn one's own mother into one's wife-it is a taboo, s forbidden thing.

For the Urhobo, those who wish to live a fulfilled life must avoid breaking taboos. A fulfilled life is one in which a man has children, wealth and long life. Ogute in his song 'Siakpere' (1977) opines:

Ohwo r'orhi'akpo vw'emo when a man comes to
this world, he has children
Okibi vw'igho, oke ton vw'akpo na he has money, and
he lives long
Ekuakua r'akpo eyere ogbare he has lived a fulfilled life

One reason the Urhobo respect those who lived a fulfilled life is that they are conscious of the uncertainty of life inspite of their belief in *otarhe* (predestination). They also acknowledge that man and his lot are subject to chance and vagaries; hence a man who has children, wealth and attains old age is seen as a victor who has survived the vicissitudes of life. This uncertainty in life is echoed in Ogute's song 'Ughu miovwakpo' (1977)

Abe mr'oba r'akpo na-a no one sees the end of life
Akpona hero avow vwi'ohwo the world existed before
we were born
Oje hero avow ghwi hiara and remains when we die
and depart

Eter'eyeri ba kona rie or'ohwo what you achieve before
death is your lot

The Urhobo abhor greed and wickedness. The greedy are often compared to the millipede who, as the legend goes desire many legs so he could out-run others. He got his many legs only to discover that they impeded rather than sped up his progress (Ogute in Sefia, 1975). As for the wicked, they should be abandoned to their fate; as Ogute advises in his song, 'Ughede' (1975):

Ovwa gb'arodovwe r'oruimuemu-a do not show kindness
to the wicked person
O'ro ru'ese r'oruimuemu one who shows kindness to the
wicked
Ko hoh'ese r'adjalakpo is like who has pity on a lion
Adjalakpo r'omue ufi vwe vu'aghwa a lion ensnared I
the bush
Eravwen r'orh'adjalakpo phr'ufi the animal that set the
lion free
Adjalakpo re ri'oma ghwere the lion turn around and kill it

The end of a wicked person is always associated with a painful and humiliating ailment such as swollen foot an uncontrollable passing out of stool and urine. This the Urhobo belief is divine retribution for wickedness (Ogute in 'ughumiovw'akpo 1977)

Another aspect of Urhobo socio-cultural life is marriage. Co-habitation is frowned upon. A man who co-habits with a woman regardless of the duration of their relationship or the number of children they have together is not accorded the status of an in-law. Should the woman's parents die, he cannot pay the customary condolence visit (ogo-esho) until he has paid the bride price. As Egbeku advises in his song *Okioto*:

Avwa dj'oma r'ese r'emete oma vwo vw'erha'e
"One should present himself formally to the parents of the girl he is courting, so that they will be pleased with him."

In the past, the Urhobo had elaborate rites of passage for women who attained marriageable age. These rites were enshrined in the *emete yavwon* (female circumcision) festival. A woman who did not undergo these rites was jeered at by the initiates. Today, due to the influence of the church and other modernizing factors, the observance of the *emete yavwon* festival is no longer widespread a fact that Ogute laments in his song *Ughu miovw'akpo*.

8.6 Death

Finally, death is regarded with dread, particularly by those who have not attained old age. One reason for this is that the Urhobo do not believe in resurrection. Juju in 'Brata' (1973) says:

Ohwo r'oghwo phru bi vre the dead do not resurrect
Do, aru tere this is a certainty

Not only is it certain that there is in resurrection, it is also certain that everyone will die at one time or the other. Juju in 'Kwaghwomare (1972) says;

Die d'urhe wo dje gbale what tree will you hug for
 protection
Wo vwo mr'arho ri bevwe to have everlasting life
Ohwo r'akpo vwo je ghwo to keep you from dying

Death is seen as a terminator of life, ambition and all of man's business in life. It always causes sorrow. Prophet, an Udu singer, in his song 'Aka' says:

Ughwu r'ohwe Aziza the death of Azaza
Lerhe edjo aghwa eje mu'oma ho re makes all the forest
 divinities to be sorrowful.

In other words, we are sad when we encounter the dead because we recognize that one day it will be our turn. The Urhobo believe that the soul of the dead departs in a vessel (a canoe, boat or ship) which sails on a mystical river that interconnects *akpo* (life) with *erivwin* (the abode of the dead). The occurrence of the vessel and the river as the means and the route respectively of getting from *akpo* to *erivwin* is a recurrent theme in Urhobo mythology. In Prophet Song titles 'Gegede' (1975) the singer says;

Imere se phrure once a steamer (ship) blows its horns,
Obi hr'uko-o it does not look back.

The reference here is the departure of the soul or spirit. It is believed that at death, the soul enters into a vessel which carries it to *erivwin*. The soul according to the belief is summoned to take leave of the body by the sound of a mystical drum which only the dying person hears. Juju song 'Kwaghwomare' referred to earlier says:

Okwa erivwin kwor'igede the drummer of erivwin has
 sounded the drum
Orhi mue nivwe he has come for my mother
Omuro yara re and taken her away
Oma niruvwe I'm filled with dread

Death for the people is a dreadful experience. That is why Juju said in his song 'Oviri' (1975)

Ole r'arodovwe song of sorrow
Ra vwo vie akpo kir'eki mourning life like a market
Uyovwi rovwe-e I am terrified

From this brief survey, it is apparent that although Urhobo cosmology and theology are not codified, they are non-the-less real in the lives and perception of the people: they are enshrined in their socio-cultural practices, shape their actions, frame their mind set and to a significant degree. Urhobo cosmology and theology are audible in the songs of the Urhobo.

9. Summary

This research is based on Urhobo cosmology and theology as revealed in the traditional songs of Udu popular musicians. These songs reflect the beliefs and worldview of the Urhobo people. According to Metuh (1981) in Emusi (2012), cosmology is the complex of beliefs and attitudes concerning the origin, nature, and structure of the universe and the interaction of its beings. It provides a rational explanation of the order that guides human life and the environment. In other words, "cosmology is the belief system of any group of people" (Emusi, 2012). It is disheartening that many in the new generation of the Urhobo are unacquainted with their own culture, particularly traditional songs. This lack of cultural knowledge has manifested socially and psychologically in a value system that dismisses Urhobo culture as 'primitive'. Furthermore, exhaustive research has not been conducted on the anthropological study of Urhobo cosmology and theology.

The general objective of this study is to investigate the cosmology and theology of the Urhobo as revealed in the songs of Udu popular traditional musicians. This research is significant because it enables the youth to understand the concepts of cosmology and theology in Urhobo culture and highlights the socio-cultural benefits of traditional Urhobo songs. The study is based on the Culture and Identity theory as propounded by Jane Collier and Milt Thomas in 1988. Culture is understood as the values, beliefs, thought patterns, and behaviours learned and shared by a group of people, which serve as an identity for that group and enhance their sense of belonging.

Cosmology, on the other hand, is the science or theory of the universe as an ordered whole and the general laws that govern it. In a broader sense, as used in this study, cosmology refers to the perception of the world or universe that is, how a person or a group of people perceive the world. It also encompasses how different cultures and individuals understand the earth, their place in it, and the meaning of existence.

Theology refers primarily to the interpretation of the doctrine of God; however, modern theology extends to the study of various religions and the relationship between religion and human needs.

The Urhobo occupy nine local government areas in Delta State, each of which has traditional popular musicians. This study focused on the traditional popular musicians in the Udu local government area, as they share a similar culture, allowing the information from their songs to be generalized to other

Urhobo communities. Seven musicians were selected for the study using the cluster sampling technique, based on the content of their songs. The musicians included Chief Amos Ogute Ottan, Chief Adama, Chief Gometi Oyibo, Sir Juju Debala, Mr. Udjabo Okololo, Chief Prophet Olokpa, and Don Francis Egbeku Kenairu.

The fieldwork lasted for four weeks, during which the researchers actively participated in both the musical and non-musical activities of the musicians, while also showing interest in their general well-being. Data were collected using the participant observation method and oral interviews.

Post-fieldwork involved the collation and analysis of the data collected. The musical materials were subjected to textual analysis using the thematic approach, with the songs analyzed according to the topical issues they addressed.

A song is a musical composition performed with the human voice, with or without instrumental accompaniment. Across cultures, songs are composed for specific purposes, with styles and themes that reflect social interactions, spiritual beliefs, and modes of communication. Songs are an integral part of a people's culture; therefore, studying the songs of a society provides insights into its cultural worldview.

Udu popular musicians are primarily those who earn their living from music. They are often invited to perform at ceremonies ranging from marriages to funerals, as well as at other social gatherings where their services are required. They are recognized as articulators of morality, custodians of traditional history, and transmitters of the beliefs of the people. Their songs, whether consciously or unconsciously, express the worldview and cultural ethos of the Urhobo.

The cosmology and theology of the Urhobo are embedded in their traditional songs. A careful analysis of selected songs demonstrates their belief in a supreme God who created the heavens, the earth, and all that exists within them. The Urhobo reckon time according to the phases of the moon, resulting in a year comprising thirteen lunar months. Seasons are understood in relation to agricultural cycles and climatic patterns, while their week consists of four days.

Moreover, the Urhobo conceive of spatial dimensions across three planes of reality: *Odjuvwu*, the abode of God; *Akpo*, the abode of man, representing the visible world in its entirety; and *Erivwin*, the abode of the dead and the unborn children. Finally, from the analysis of the song texts, the Urhobo demonstrate a

belief in predestination, which predisposes each individual to their allotted lot in life.

10. Conclusion

The research demonstrates that the Urhobo possess a clearly defined cosmology and theology. They have a well-articulated concept of God as the creator of the world and a clear understanding of the order of creation. Beyond acknowledging God's creative power, they believe that He determines the individual lot or destiny of each person, reflecting their view of God as all-powerful. Importantly, these beliefs are embedded and transmitted through the songs of Udu traditional popular musicians.

11. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are proposed to improve the composition, appreciation, and understanding of Urhobo traditional music:

Urhobo cultural organizations, such as the Urhobo Progress Union, should encourage traditional singers and musicians to engage in digital recording and accompany their songs with captivating visuals. This approach will enhance accessibility and arouse the interest of the youth in Urhobo songs.

Churches in Urhobo-speaking areas should consider integrating Urhobo traditional songs into their liturgical programmes. This will not only preserve cultural heritage but also expose congregants to indigenous cosmological and theological concepts.

Departments of Music in higher institutions should regularly organize seminars and workshops that highlight the cultural richness of Urhobo traditional music. Such programmes will correct misconceptions and foster a deeper understanding of Urhobo cosmology and theology.

This study should serve as a stimulus for further research on the influence of Judeo-Christian thought on the Urhobo worldview. Researchers are encouraged to explore the intersections of indigenous and imported religious concepts in Urhobo society.

12. Contribution to knowledge

This research has made the following contributions to knowledge:

- It has stimulated and activated the interest of the Urhobo people in their traditional music,

- encouraging a renewed appreciation of their cultural heritage.
- The findings provide a valuable instructional resource for teachers in primary, secondary, and kindergarten schools, aiding the integration of indigenous knowledge into the curriculum.
- It has encouraged the youth to engage with and listen to their traditional songs, fostering cultural awareness and enabling them to gain knowledge about Urhobo cosmology, theology, and values.

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