

HARNESSING, MANAGING AND DISSEMINATING IBIBIO ORAL LITERATURE: IMPLICATION FOR THE LIBRARIAN IN THE 21ST CENTURY

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ABSTRACT

One of the main reasons Western critics and anthropologists derided Africa as a cultureless entity was because Africa then lacked means of harnessing, managing and disseminating its culture, to wit oral literature. With the advent of colonialism and exposure to western culture, the African Oral literature was seriously ebbing due to the burgeoning influence of western pop-culture. Due to the highly acknowledged fact that oral literature is indispensable for social, political and economic development, its importance in sustainable national development is being recognised. From the foregoing, there is a serious challenge for the Librarian in the 21st century to fashion out ways of harnessing, managing and disseminating Ibibio oral literature for national development. This paper therefore examined the Ibibio people, the Ibibio oral literary genres and their applications using interview schedules. A total of 46 respondents were chosen for the study and five Local Government Areas randomly selected from the 18 that make up the Ibibio community. The findings were descriptive. Oral literature educates a people by drawing inference in elements of culture, codes of behaviour and exposing them to knowledge of their existence. These inference stems from a totality of life experiences that discuss basic abstract ideas like truth, love, morality and faith to concrete ideas such as duties to humanity and neighbourliness. However, there exists a lacuna in the preservation of these oral literary forms which almost invariably heightens the dearth of oral performances as well as literacy in our society. It further recommended among other things that librarians of the 21st century could encourage both oratory and literacy by collecting, developing, documenting and disseminating these Ibibio literary forms in an attempt to bridge this gap.

Introduction

In Africa, the concept of Oral literature is a familiar one, even though the West insinuated that Africans had no history and culture and used that as a systematic attempt to perpetuate a sense of inferiority in the African. During the late 19th century African scholars came up to emphasize their long existing oral literary performances. Some of those oral renditions included songs, proverbs, folk tales, incantations, dirges, ballads, odes and formed the cultural embodiment of a people created in spoken words to add beauty, aesthetics and value to their existence. The error in the eurocentric criticism is that the West used western parameters in measuring African oral literature which it stigmatised as savagery. Hence African oral literature became bound up within its society, yet it had great socio-cultural, political and religious impact on the people's lives. Oral literature is a composition of beauty and value that people create in spoken words on issues, conditions and phenomenon that affect their existence (Finnegan, 1976). It is particularly designed to explain the worldview of a group of people and to induct and integrate people into the wider society thus becoming an indispensable tool towards checking the moral ills that pervade our society. Politically oral literature explains the serenity that pervaded the African society before the advent of colonialism.

Motivation for the Study

This study is intended to:

- a) Collect and organise Ibibio Oral Literature according to their genres,
- b) Examine Ibibio Oral Literature as a correlate of the Ibibio culture,
- c) Ascertain the implications of this for the modern librarian,
- d) Determine ways of documenting Ibibio Oral Literature.

Statement of the problem

Ibibio Oral literature has been transmitted orally from one generation to another through socialization processes of age grades, peer groups, elders and members of one's immediate community. As a result, there is dearth of documented literature of the Ibibio as it is with many other African tribes, thus creating a serious information gap. This is evidenced in its comparative scarcity in books and the internet, thereby making libraries incapacitated in performing their primary functions of resources acquisition, organisation, preservation and dissemination. It is in lieu of this that librarians, whose roles have changed from just being a depository to generators and managers of information, need to harness, manage and disseminate Ibibio Oral Literature. This study is a step in this direction.

The Ibibios: An Overview

The Ibibio people occupy the south-eastern corner of Nigeria left to Delta, in what is today called Akwa Ibom State. Several historians have made various speculations about the Ibibios belonging to a Cameroon homeland (Noah, 1994; Abasiattai, 1987) as well as middle-Eastern Origin (Umoh-Faithman, 1999). Udo (1983) however categorizes Ibibio to have originated from the central Benue valley from where they migrated and settled in Ibom. The author further postulates that they were defeated at war with the encroaching Aro-Igbo, driven out of "Ibom" now in Arochukwu and the land usurped. From Ibom, the Ibibio clans spread out into various parts of present day Akwa Ibom and southern Cross River States. The Ibibio language has been classified as falling within the Niger-Congo group of languages (Greenberg; 1966).

Most recent studies (Essien, 1986; Williamson, 1989; Urua, 2000) have shown that Ibibio falls within the (new) Benue-Congo, Delta-Cross and Lower-Cross group of Languages. The Ibibio worldview lies in holding sacred the ancestral deities, marriage, family and kinship – *Ukot* (In-law), *Iman* (Kinship), *Ayeyin* (Grandchild), (Abasiattai, 1987). To commit a crime against any is to invoke the wrath of the gods on the offender. This is most visibly expressed in Ibibio people's oral literature. The Ibibio language is an important aspect of the Akwa Ibom community not because it is used to communicate literary performances but because it serves as a repository of the cultural norms, values, philosophies, ethos and exploits expressed through literary forms. The Ibibio language, like all human languages is as old as the people themselves. The early Europeans; (Talbot, 1923; Hutchinson, 1858; Jones and Forde, 1950) who visited the South-South zone of Nigeria, asserted that Ibibio speaking people, including Annang, Efik, Eket, Oron, Ibeno and Andoni formed one linguistic unit. In a similar view, Goldie (1863), an earlier lexicographer and linguist, described Ibibio as the parent dialect of Efik, inferring that, Efik is a dialect of Ibibio and that the Efiks are of the Ibibio stock.

Any language such as Ibibio, serves as a symbol of identity, unity, protection communication and an everlasting source of power for a people. It therefore behooves Librarians to fashion ways of harnessing, generating, and disseminating creatively, our rich linguistic and human resources for the growth, development and benefit of mankind.

Research Method

This was a field research which adopted a face-to-face interview method to elicit information from the respondents. This is to say that a descriptive

research method was used for the study. Instrument used to collect data was an interview schedule which sought for the personal data (Name, age, occupation, residence) of the respondents and their responses on the different oral literary genres. Trips were taken to five Local Government Areas randomly selected from the 18 Ibibio speaking Local Government Areas, namely Uyo, Uruan, Itu, Nsit Ibom and Ikono (Two villages in each L.G.A.) These were randomly selected from the 18 Ibibio speaking Local Government Areas for the interview. A total of 46 respondents comprising 34 village heads (men) and 12 women, drawn from the five Local Government Areas mentioned above were randomly selected for the interview. These oral forms as presented by respondents were classified by the interviewees as Ibibio legends, chants proverbs, myths, praise songs, depending on occasions they were presented. These narrations were recorded in audio tapes.

Ibibio Oral Literature in Perspective

The Ibibio are a people rich in culture and oral traditions vis-à-vis oral literature. The taxonomy below is a classification by the authors based on their researches, observations and discussions with others. Ibibio Oral Literature in its original form is broadly classified into three genres namely:

Mme Mb[^]k Nke (Prose Narratives)

Mme Ntang/Ikwo (Poetry/song)

Mme Mbre (Drama)

For the purpose of this research, the authors will only cover the first and second. Though the third genre involves orality, much of what is done is basically drama (body movement) embodying masquerading (*Ekpo*, *Ekong*, *Ekpe*), traditional wrestling (*Mbok*), and puppetry

***Mme Mbuk Nke* (Narratives)**

Ekong Nke (folk tale): This embodies

Nke (proverb)

Mbuk Uko (Epic)

Mbuk Ufiod (legend)

Mbuk Etenyinyin Abasi (myths)

Mbuk awaneke unam (fable)

***Mme Ntang/Ikwo* (Poetry/song)**

***Ntang* (Chanted or Recited poetry)**

Uto (ballad)

Ese (Panegyric or praise poetry)

Ntangha Uduok-ukod (Libation/religious poetry)
Ntangha ukok-idong (Divination poetry)

***Ikwo* (Song)**

Ikwo itie-mkpa (funeral song)
Ikwo itie-ndo (marriage song)
Ikwo itie-uman (child delivery (birth song)
Ikwo Ukama ayin (lullaby)
Ikwo mbre offiong (Moonlight song)
Ikwo itie-ukod (Drinking song)
Ikwo ntok-ayin (children's song)
Ikwo itie (unam) utom (work song)
Ikwo uka /unyong Ekong (War/Victory song)
Ikwo Nke (Folk song)

***Mme Mbuk Nke* (Narratives)**

The peculiarities and personalities of people as well as animals comes through in the prose narratives, all intended to either give a moral lesson or exalt the character discussed. *Mme Mbuk Nke* are elaborate tales involving the condensation of rudimental tales of human adventure in the Ibibio society. They are sub-divided thus: *Ekong Nke* (Folktales), *Nke* (proverbs), *Mbuk Uko* (epic), *Mbuk Ufiok* (legend), *Mbuk Etenyinyin Abasi* (myths), *Mbuk Awanake Unam* (fable). Folktales cover every other narrative but this paper will discuss proverbs and myth to examine their peculiarities.

***Ekong Nke* (Folktale)**

The typical Ibibio community traditionally consisted of farmers, hunters, fishermen, craftsmen, artisans, traders and housewives. Evening therefore had been the most convenient moment for story telling as such moments provided a fantastic time for family re-union after a hard day's work under a tree at the centre of the compound or veranda under the moon light. Noah (1994) asserted that "such evening by a hearth surrounded by thick darkness or under the gaze of airy moon lent poignancy to the sentiments generated by the grotesque images".

Elements of responses are introduced by the audience while the narration is on-going. As the narration progresses, there are echoes of "*Ekong nke-e*" punctuating the body of the tale. This is done to show competence in recounting the adventures while encouraging and maximizing audience participation in the activity, kindling and sustaining the interest of the audience through skillful vocal modulations, expressive gesticulations and enchanting pauses etc. The other four narratives are always incorporated

into the Ibibio folktales. *Ekong Nke*, though a source of entertainment punctuated with dramatised songs and dance, is didactic in function; entertains and teaches behavioural patterns, social grace, moral codes and cultural norms of the society. In order to achieve these functions, trees, rocks, heavenly bodies like sun, stars, natural features like rivers, streams, wind etc. are personified to express the Ibibio people's world view on various issues (Esen, 1982). The lessons at the end of these sessions imply a deep sense of soul purging therapy of the society.

Nke (Proverbs)

Proverbs are wise sayings used to emphasize beliefs and moral values of a people. *Nke* are vital ingredients in conversations in the Ibibio society. It enjoys widespread use amongst the old and young. Among the Ibibios, proverbs embody all forms of expressions with more than one meaning. This reflects the values, worldview and the general culture of the Ibibio people. Ibibio proverbs usage marks out some distinctions in the terminology. For instance, in the *Ekpo* or *Ekpe* cult, proverbs are referred to as *Nsibidi*. It embraces both verbal and non-verbal expressions, which are specially used by and are meaningful to their initiates. Proverbs are a regulatory force in a society as reflected in these:

- < *Ekpo akpa anyen ikpaaha uton* (Beliefs)
- < *Iyib inua asong imen, asong ikokko* (Wisdom)
- < *Eti anwaan aba nte iyak ke afere, etappa ke mfoniso* (Luck)
- < *Etok ayin ayem mfad Abasi ano nnam.* (Repercussion)
- < *Eto isidaha ikpon ikappa akai.* (Teamwork)

Mbuk Etennyin Abasi (Myths)

In writing about myths, Rahner (1973) stated that it is a true and sacred story modelled on examples of gods/goddesses or ancestors which the people must emulate or be brought into by initiation. The author's view is in full agreement with Ibibio traditional religion through which the youths are instructed and initiated into adulthood.

The important function of Ibibio myth is to reveal the exemplary models for all human rites and all significant human activities, diet, marriage, work, birth, education etc. Ibibio myth is always related to the beginning of

“creation” because it tells how something, came into existence or how a pattern of behaviour, an institution, a manner of working were established. It therefore constitutes the paradigm for all meaningful human activities. The perception of human existence and Ibibio world-view in myths means that moral order must be maintained so that men can exist in peace and have abundant life, have moral uprightness and live in peace with gods and men.

Mme Ntang (Chanted or Recited Poetry)

Ntang comprises *Uto* (ballad). *Ese* (panegyric or praise poetry) *Ntangha Uduok-ukod* (libation/religious poetry), *Ntangha Ukok-idiong* (divination poetry). This paper excludes religious and divination poetry as it is mastered and performed by a few believed to belong to a cult.

Uto (ballad)

In English literary tradition, the ballad is a narrative poem consisting of simple stanzas and usually having a recurrent refrain. It is often of folk origin and intended to be sung. It is a popular song of a romantic or sentimental nature. But the Ibibio *Uto* ('ballad') doesn't really have a romantic or sentimental nature, it is not sung but spoken. Perhaps, what the Ibibio 'ballad' shares in common with the English ballad is its folk origin, its subject matter ranges from topical issues or phenomena in the Ibibio cultural milieu and the performer draws some of his inspiration from the culture, tradition, landscape, occupations and modernity and its aftermath.

Ese (Panegyric)

Praise is one of the most applicable and an accessible theme in Ibibio oral poetry as it cuts across all types of recited poetry. It is composed and recited in honour of a great or important person in the Ibibio society. *Ese* is performed at investiture ceremonies, communal festivals in honour of community deities or ancestors and coronation ceremonies. Its distinctive feature is that it is filled with praise names, praise titles and usually gives glory and honour to the subject matter. The refrain to each line of this poem is always “*Ese-o*” or “*Ese-Abas*”, depending on what it extols.

Mme Ikwo (Songs)

Songs are among the oldest forms of classical arts with traditions that date back several centuries. All types of songs in Ibibio are performed according to time and occasion. Ibibio songs have developed within a complex interaction between people of tribes within the state. These two different tribes' (Annang and Oron) song traditions are fundamentally similar but differ in nomenclature and the way they are performed. *Ikwo* is based upon two pillars, '*Uyo*' which is the melodic form and the '*Mbinge*' the rhythmic form.

The 'Uyo' is Ibibio's natural and most unique contribution to music. It attempts to evoke the interaction of man's emotions during the day or night' *Mbinge* is imbued with emotion and the spirit of improvisation; it also contains a scientific approach occasioned by the contributions of inspired artists like Sam Akpabot and Rex Williams.

***Ikwo Nke* (Folk songs)**

This song is performed during festivals or folk tale renditions for general entertainment. One of the ways to experience the diversity of the Ibibio culture and tradition is through its folk songs. Ibibio folk songs (*Ikwo Nke*) are usually accompanied with dance which is a response to the sweet concord of the song played. Thus Akpabot (1994) views folk music and dance to be interrelated because dance is a response to a melody or rhythmic beat. Folk music in this context therefore embraces Ibibio folk songs, folk musical instruments and dance, even though the later may not be given serious consideration as they are just responses to oral commands from melodic beat.

The Ibibio folk song can be described as a simple rendition, but behind its simplicity lies both profundity of conception and a directness of expression that are of great artistic value. In Ibibio folk songs, the effect of the overwhelming buoyancy of the spirit and the eloquent, effortless ease with which the song is expressed is what stands out. Almost every Ibibio speaking village has its own folk songs performed on every possible occasion such as the birth of a child, to celebrate the arrival of seasons, weddings and festivals.

Harnessing, Managing and Disseminating Ibibio Oral Literature

The Ibibio people developed ways of preserving and transmitting their history and culture in verbal forms from the period of settlement in their present abodes and these oral testimonies have lingered to this day in the peoples' memories and activities. This is subsequently expressed in folktales, poetry, legends, myths and proverbs. The custodians of these oral literary performances are title holders, the aged, professional bards and professionals who acquire this talent by vocation. It is therefore pertinent that this reserved knowledge be made accessible to the Ibibios and other tribes to foster continuity in these oral practices.

Ibibio Oral Literature is stored in the memory of a people, collection and actual documentation of these oral sources are time-consuming, onerous, and expensive. Therefore, Librarians are often faced with the challenge of getting raw information from the Ibibio custodians of these oral forms.

Librarians could create a congenial environment where members of the Ibibio community can meet to debate on issues that cut across different subject matters. Their comments and suggestions will of course be embellished with these oral forms and information so collected could be edited and stored in CDs, Videos or DVDs.

Libraries could liaise with library schools to collect, document and edit these oral forms, print and store in databases and the internet and make them available to researchers, students, indigenes and non-indigenes, since Information and Communication Technology (ICT) comprise equipment, networked infrastructure and the associated knowledge and skills for creating, manipulating, transferring and using information and knowledge (Tiamiyu and Aina, 2008). The provision of these ICT infrastructures such as computers, internet, digital cameras, camcorders CD-ROM will facilitate the effective management of these oral information sources and actual dissemination to a larger number of users both within and outside the country.

Implication for the Librarian in the 21st Century

Information for all by year 2015 will be actualised only when needed information by every facet of the society is available in multiple formats for the information user of any origin. Since oral literature is a rich source of information on the socio-cultural, political and religious make-up of a people, the librarian of the 21st century is faced with varied challenges; which include first of all capturing and sourcing for where these information is being scattered about from their custodians, documenting and disseminating same. He also needs to facilitate and provide infrastructure, provide skilled support services and training of staff in information access, storage and retrieval.

The task is enormous yet imminent. Therefore librarians must therefore brace up to the challenges of mounting strategies to extract such oral information as individuals, groups and professionals are not willing to divulge what they may term "their cultural backing". Such strategies may include talk shows, involving traditional title holders, cultural debates to elderly members of the Ibibio community, and open field documentaries. By so doing, they can create awareness on the importance of oral literature to the immediate members of the Ibibio community, Ibibio people in diaspora, non Ibibio indigenes and the generality of the Nigerian public.

Librarians could serve as a bridge between the past, and the future by providing access to oral literary performances in whatever format. By so doing they serve as custodians of cultural information and help national development by making an average Ibibio child realise that there are certain oral forms which shaped the activities of his forebears and progenitors and which he has to strictly adhere to.

Libraries could collect Ibibio oral literature, create a database and make it accessible to researchers nationally and internationally. This will invariably educate and guide policy makers and government on the need to incorporate Ibibio oral literature into the school curriculum and the need to use it for appropriate policy making to enhance sustainable national development. By doing the above, the body of existing African oral literature existing will be enriched, thereby advertising the effectiveness of Librarians in promoting researches in African studies. Information managers should liaise with story-tellers and traditional custodians of this information by giving them incentives and a sense of relevance to get these rich resources from them to enrich the literary local content and encourage oratory and literacy in our community.

Librarians could digitise all forms of Ibibio oral literary forms through the use of modern ICT facilities so as to share, exchange, educate and preserve the indigenous Ibibio cultures. By so doing, librarians must apply strict IT mechanisms to check mate and control the rights and illicit access to and misuse of such oral literary forms to prevent copyright infringement. These challenging but invaluable responsibilities requires a lot of funds, so Librarians need to solicit for funds from government and non-governmental organisations, like UNESCO, UNICEF, World Bank and other relevant bodies that may be willing to assist.

Documentation of Ibibio Oral Literature Interviews

Documenting Oral Literature is a difficult task as the givers of this oral information do not copyright the work. Okoro (2010) posited that "the peculiar nature of oral archives makes it difficult for libraries to document the knowledge". The author further asserted that "the Nigerian Copyright Act (1992) vests in an author who has been granted copyright, the right to control his work. This is slightly different from researchers who are concerned only with ideas of people. However, principal participants i.e. chief sources of information, must be accorded credit for their contributions as stated in the Anglo American Cataloguing Rule 21.25A thus:

If a report is essentially confined to the words of the person(s) interviewed or of the participants in an exchange (other than the reporter), enter under the principal participant, participant named first in the chief source of information of the item being catalogued, or title as instructed in 21.6. Make an added entry under the heading for the reporter if he or she is named prominently in the item.

Example 1 Sample Data from Respondents in the Field

Title:	Discussion on Ibibio Oral Literature
Interviewee:	Chief (Hon.) Udo Henry Akpabio
Age:	67
Occupation:	Retired Civil Servant (Deputy Registrar)
Place of Interview:	Uyo
Duration:	60 mins
Year:	2011

The above can be documented using AACR2 above as follows:
Discussion on Ibibio Oral Literature between Chief (Hon.) U. H. Akpabio
and Dr. Emem Udofia ... / reported verbatim by ImaObong Etim

Main entry under the heading for Akpabio as above
Added entries under the heading for Udofia and Etim.

CALL NO.	AKPABIO, Udo Henry Uyo: Udomet. - Audio C. D., 2011. 1 audio C. D. (ca.60 mins.): 17/8 ips.
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In Ibibio
1. Ibibio Oral literature 2. Udofia,
Emem Paul 3. Etim, Ima Obong Aniefiok

Example 2: Sample Data from Respondents in the Field

Title: Talk on Ibibio Ballad
Interviewee: Obong Edet Umoh
Age: 70
Occupation: Ode Writer/ Poet
Place of Interview: Uyo
Duration: 60 minutes
Year: 2011

For works reported in the interviewer's words, rule 21.25b states thus:

If a report is to a considerable extent in the words of the reporter, enter under the heading for the reporter. Make added entries under the headings for the other person(s) involved if they are named in the chief source of information and there are not more than three. If there are more than three such persons named in the chief source of information, make an added entry under the one named first.

Here, the reporter (s) can be said to be the producer (s) and can claim credit for authorship as the report is made in their own words. From the above sample data from the field in example 2, the rule can be applied as follows:

Talks with Edet Udoh / by Emem P. Udofo

Main entry under the heading for Udofo

Added entry under the heading for Udoh.

CALL	UDOFIA, Emem Paul
NO.	Uyo: Udomet :- Audio C. D., 2011. 1 audio C. D. (ca.60 mins.): 17/8 ips.

In Ibibio

1. Ibibio Ballad 2. Udoh, Edet 3. Title

Conclusion

The library in recent times has transformed from just being a depository of information to a distributor of information thus creating awareness on the need to integrate Ibibio Oral Literature into the school curriculum to heighten the developmental process in Akwa Ibom State and Nigeria as a whole. Librarians could therefore solicit help from decision-makers, Local, State and National governments to actualise these goals. This in turn will make the rural dwellers and custodians of these oral literary forms as well as professional bards appreciate their art and see the need to co-operate with librarians to enrich and document same.

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