

CHAPTER 3

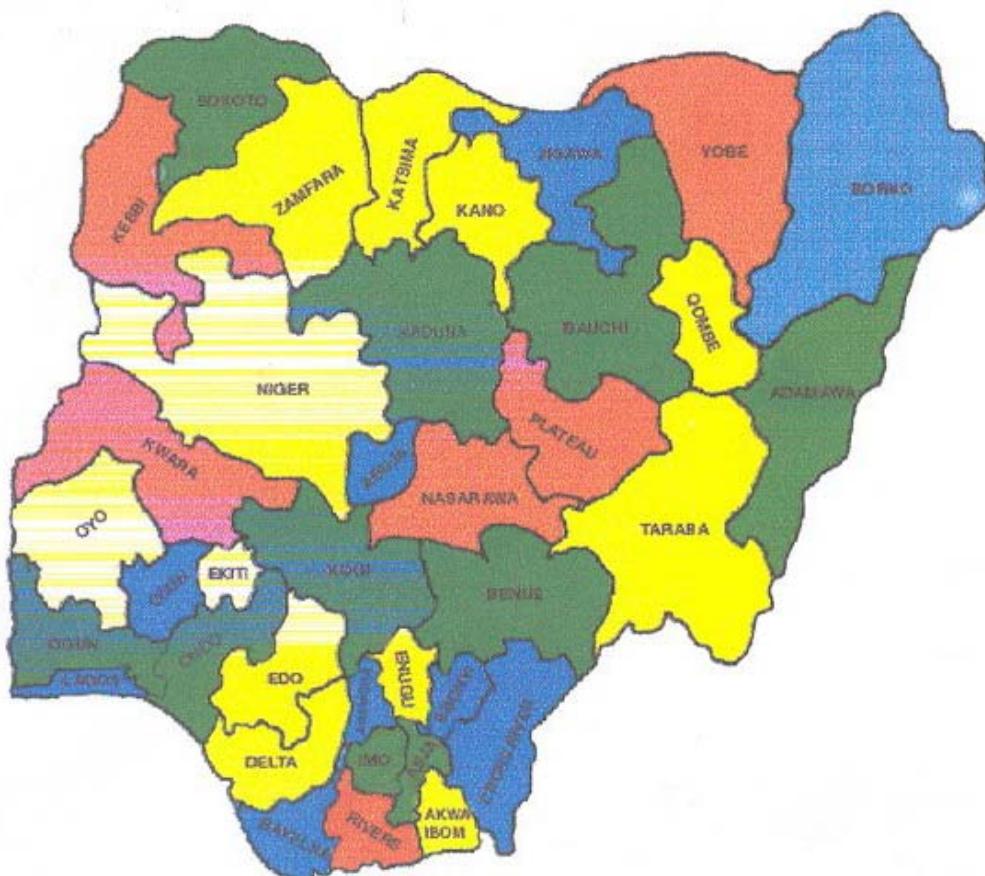
THE OKPE AND HER CULTURE

3. 1 Location and population

It is pertinent to give some ethnographical background of the Okpe, for the reasons that such ethnographical frameworks inform musical philosophy, creativity and practices and would therefore enhance our understanding of Igoru music. The Okpè country is situated at the heart of Delta State of Nigeria within latitude 6° and 5° North and longitude 5° 50' and 6° 25' East (Onigu Otite, 1973: 4). It occupies a large expanse of landmass about 500sq kilometres of mainland, mangrove, swamp and rivers (Otite, 1982: 121). It is politically divided into Okpe and Sapele Local Government Areas of the state. Within the confines of this location, Okpè shares borders with Warri, Uvwie (Effurun), and Agbarho on the Southwest. On the Northeast axis, it has boundary with Oghara, Jesse, Benin and Agbon.

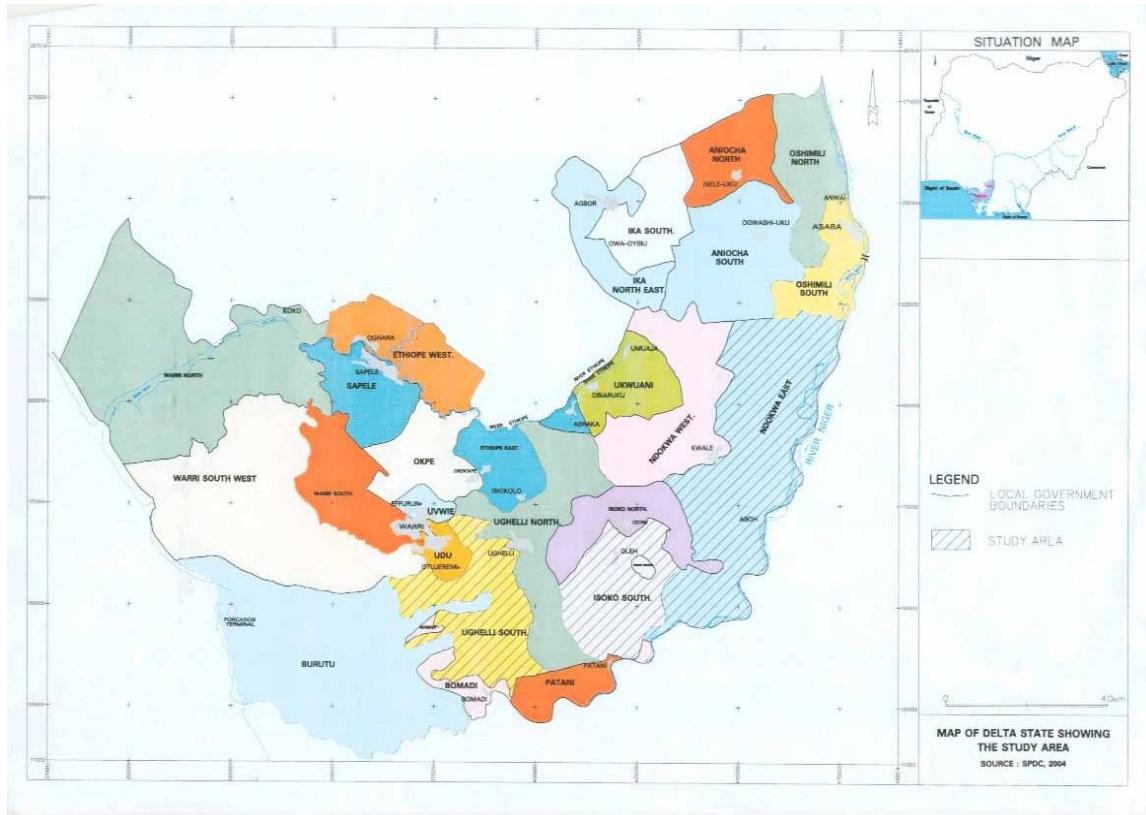
The Urhiapele River, Ethiope River and the Warri River mark its boundaries somewhat. It is one of the 374 ethnic groups in Nigeria (Otite, cited by David Dafinone, 2000: 8 [Internet]). Among the other ethnic groups in Delta State, the Okpe have the largest kingdom and highest population density up to 248, 314 in 1991/1992 census commission report (Onokerhoraye, 1995: 48).

It should be noted that some authors use the colonial political grouping that put the Okpe together with other Urhobo clans in the former Urhobo Division and discuss its population as such. Some of these authors therefore claim that “the Urhobo people are the 5th largest ethnic group in Nigeria and constitute the largest single ethnic group in Delta State (www.urhobo.org, author's names not in the article), or claim that “In land area, Urhobo is larger than Switzerland (Dafinone, 2000: 3 [Internet]). See maps below:

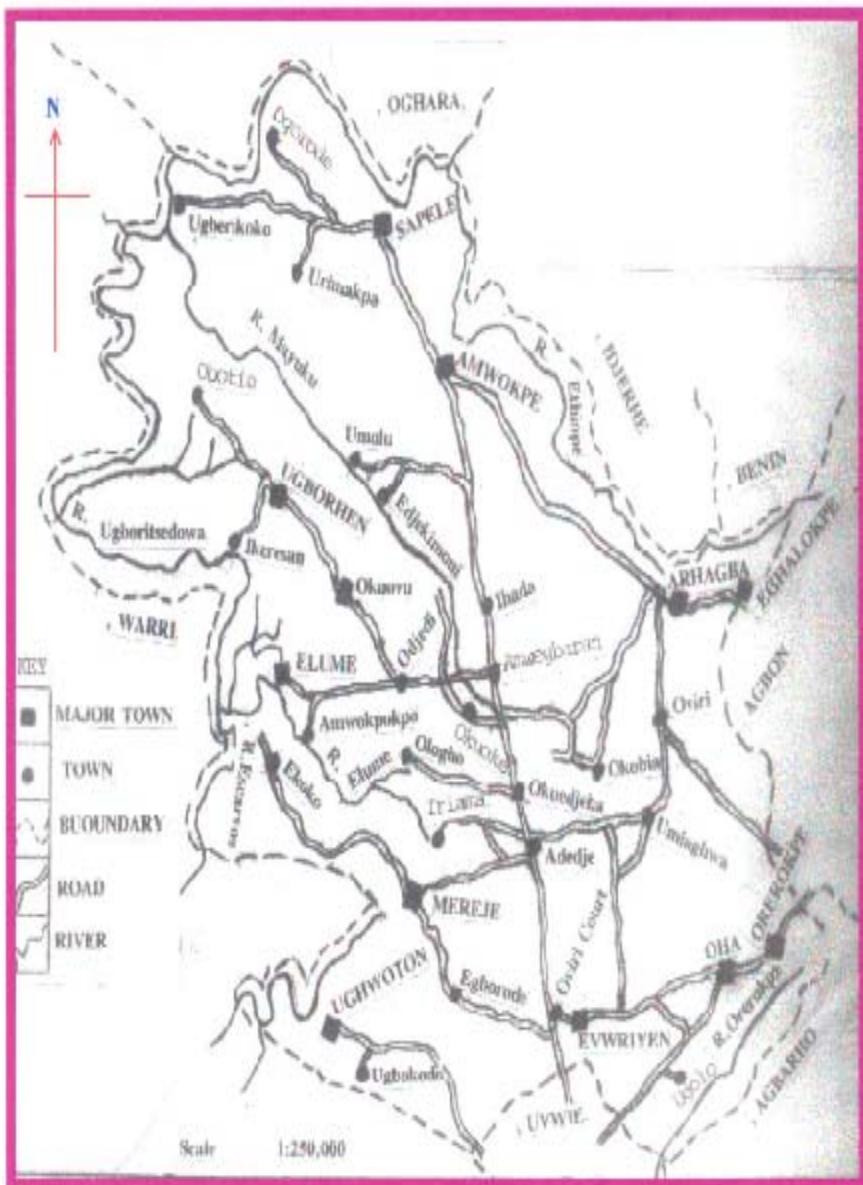


Map 1: The Political Map of Nigeria showing thirty-six states.

University of Pretoria etd, Idamoyibo O I (2006)



Map 2: Map of Delta State showing Local Government Areas



Map 3: Okpeland showing major towns, boundary, roads and rivers.

3. 2 Geographical features

The Okpe terrain is made up of flat and low land with no hills, mountains and rocks. It however consists of mangrove swamp forest around several communities. In the hinterland of Aghalokpe, there exists a savannah belt. The land in Sapele area encompasses a forest reserve that is preserved and controlled by the state government. Apart from the Sapele forest reserve that is strictly under the government's monitoring guard tagged 'Forest Guard' – a paramilitary force, all other forests are accessible to inhabitants for game, farming, timbre and sawing operations. Several rivers and streams link up to each other and flow into major sources such as the three rivers earlier mentioned.

The Ethiope River, known for its shoal and crystal nature, runs through Urhiapelle, Ikeresan, and Elume Rivers, to join Ugbokodo-Warri River. A creek breaks off around the Sapele reserved forest and runs through Ugberikoko, Ituru, Ugbibidaka and turns into shallow streams afterwards. Another creek turns off from the Ikeresan River, running through Okpakomedje to Elume River, thereby leaving an enclosed forest island. The Elume River runs through Ologho, Ekoko, Mereje and Ugbokodo Rivers. Some of the streams have waterways dredged to allow floating of timbre from the swamp forests into sawmills, which are often located by the riverbank, particularly in Sapele. The relief shows a promising fertile land further blessed with crude oil. There is a network of tarred and un-tarred roads linking towns and villages within and outside Okpe land. Some Igoru songs make reference to the road network, water spirits and fishing activities, as well as the farm landscape (See chapter six).

3. 3 Climate

The climatic condition of the Okpe land is temperate, being neither extremely cold, nor extremely hot. The dry season and the rainy season are further subdivided into four traditional seasons respectively. The subdivisions of the traditional seasons include the following:

A. The dry seasons

Season	Period	Feature
• <i>Okaka</i>	January-early March	Streams dry and fish ponds are depleted
• <i>Ororo</i>	Late March-early May	Oil palm productivity flourishes
• <i>Oriaren</i>	Late August-early Sept.	Trees denude and bear fresh leaves
• <i>Ohwahwa</i>	December-January	Harmattan wind blows

B. The rainy seasons

Season	Period	Feature
• <i>Ovon</i>	June	Intermittent rain fall
• <i>Ukude</i>	July-mid August	Flood and frog crowing
• <i>Ew�</i>	September	High volume of rain, thunder and lightening
• <i>Oya</i>	October	Some rain and much fishing success

It should be noted that little overlapping occurs in the above subdivisions. Within the first dry season called *okaka* between January and early March, the first rains of the year fall occasionally around mid-February and mid-March. The rains in late March

prepare the next season, *ororo*, and enable oil palm to get ripe for harvest. Towards the end of May, the clouds release some rain fall in preparation for the successive rainy seasons between June and October. It is pertinent to conclude that there is more rain falls than dry season periods in Okpe land. When Igoru musicians make reference to seasons in their songs, they however do not specify which of the subdivisions of rainy or dry season they mean. It could then be understood that any of the dry or rainy seasons apply.

3. 4 History

There is need to argue here that Okpè is a different ethnic group from Urhobo, though many reports and publications have often put them together. Hubbard (1948: 11) argues that ‘Sobo’ is a foreign word, an anglicized form of the name ‘Urhobo’ which in his writing was to be seen as a nonce word used to contrast the Urhobo, Okpè, Isoko, Erohwa and Uvwie whose languages have similarities, to the Ijaw, Itsekiri and Ibo whose languages are different. He explicitly remarks that ‘it must be realized that although the ‘Sobo’ possess many customs in common, yet there is no such thing as the ‘Sobo tribe’ or ‘Sobo nation’. Amaury Talbot (1926: 33) similarly argues that ‘In the same way “Sobo,” which is really an Anglicised form of “Uzobo,” is given in this report to the sub-tribe of Edo, which embraces the two clans of Uzobo and Isoko’.

Apart from the above malapropos of the term ‘Sobo’ to lump these different ethnic groups together, the colonial administration, on its part, added the Okpè to the ‘Sobo Division’ for the sake of administrative convenience. Between 1934 and 1938 when the Okpè wanted to secede, her metropolis, Orerokpe was made the Headquarters of the Western Urhobo Native administration, in order to keep them together. Other reasons for the amalgamation of these ethnic groups include the observation of L. N.

Bowen, a European explorer who remarked that the Okpè were reputed to be the most progressive and best administered group through their native authority, the Orodje (king) of Okpè, and set a good example for the others in the whole of the Western Urhobo Council Area (Otite, 1973: 39). Confirming this political grouping, which clearly indicates that the Okpè and the Urhobo were not originally homogeneous people, Otite writes: ‘Orerokpe the capital of Okpe kingdom, was the headquarters of the Western Urhobo District Council as from 1955 when Okpe kingdom was grouped with twelve other Urhobo polities (Otite, 1982: 132)’.

Chronologically, Yamu Numa (1950) as reported by Otite (1982: 23) speculated that the Okpè migrated from the ancient Egypt to Ile-Ife in 812 B. C; while Orororo (1994: 3) argues that the Okpè further migrated from Ile-Ife in 641 A. D. and arrived her permanent territorial metropolis, Orerokpè in 1170 A. D. According to C. I. Agino (1987: 2), the Egyptian king in the seventh century sent his heir apparent, the progenitor of Okpè away to avoid the cold hands of death during the warfare between Egypt and Israel. The point is however not clear whether the legendary Oduduwa of Ile-Ife was the Egyptian heir or not. But he argues that Obalufon, one of Oduduwa’s sons gave birth to a son after a female child and named him Opè meaning ‘it is (kinds of children are) complete’ in Yoruba language. Born at Igbotakpa near Ile-Ife, Opè later to be spelt Okpè, grew strong and led a contingent from Ile-Ife to Benin.

He later founded a kingdom called Okpè Ikperhé where we have the Isoko people today and migrated further to found Okpè Olomu. It was not clear where exactly Okpè died, but before his death, he had four sons namely Orhue, Orhoro, Evbreke and Esezi. The first son, Orhue, a nimrod, chased game through Ugo across Apelé otherwise known as Ethiope River at Ajaguoyibo, passing through Aghalokpe where he found a plantain, which bore edible fruits, an indication that the land was very fertile. He planted *ohimi*, a live tree there and named the place Orere-mo-kpè later to be shortened Orerokpè, meaning the city of Okpè ('s children). Having returned from

the hunting expedition, he led his brothers and a host of their descendants and followers to inhabit the new settlement, which expanded to what is known today as the Okpè nation. Oral interview at the Orodje's palace, Orerokpe confirms the migration from Egypt through Ile-Ife and Benin, arriving the present location c 1100 A. D. Perkins Foss (2003: 16) remarks that 'Duarte Pacheco Pereira, one of the first explorers to chronicle the coast of the Niger Delta, noted in 1508 that the "subou" occupy the hinterland of the western delta, thus suggesting that at least parts of the country may have been occupied at this early date'. The earlier background above however indicates that the explorer's report only proves that the people had settled in the place, perhaps long before he (the explorer) arrived.

The supreme authority in the Okpe political system is the Orodje (king). The Orodje and his Chiefs constitute the Udogu Okpe (Okpe Supreme Council). When major decisions are to be taken and decrees are to be promulgated, the Orodje and his Chiefs meet with community representatives at a forum known as Okpe Assembly. Being a culture without written tradition, no chronicles exist on the early periods in Okpè until European influences surfaced. The reign of Ekperhi, one of the descendants of Esezi, was the first to be recorded by the British government and was gazette Esezi I. His reign between 1450 and 1480 attracted much attention because he was a despot, autocrat, dictator, and powerful tyrant, for which he was assassinated by his subjects. According to oral accounts, his *Ilotu* (*olotu*, singular), messengers on his instructions used to climb to the top of coconut trees to beat *Ozu* (a big mother drum) and announce his summons and decrees so that no one could claim ignorance. He often asked communities to present powerful representatives to break iron bars before him in order to examine the strength of his army. He decreed death sentences on those who failed the exercise.

He once invited the Okokporo Division (communities) to present a representative for this exercise and the candidate was able to break the iron bar, for which the Division is christened *Osia* (Gorilla) to this day. Some oral sources claim that this great feat was performed successfully by aid of traditional medicine or spiritual powers

possessed by the Okokporo. Other oral accounts claim that one of the king's attendants who lived in the palace hailed from Okokporo and attempted to save his people by secretly sawing the iron bar and covering it with grease before the event. Oral tradition states further that the king often invited a group of people according to community quarters or Divisions and decreed that they should tie a rope on a palm tree at its top and pull it toward themselves to fell it. Many died in this process, and these led to the assassination of the king.

The theme of song 3 (page A1 – 4), in this study, suggests a warning to the Okpè on the plan to assassinate the king. Sadly enough the Okpè public did not take heed to the warning of the Igoru musicians. They assassinated the king, Esezi I (Ekperhi) and darkness fell upon the land for long. According to oral accounts, the king had some strange feelings by which his clairvoyance informed him that an evil was in place against him. But the omen was not as specific in his discernment as to what would happen to him. When he arrived at the scene of the Okpè assembly where the evil plan was to be executed against him, he attempted to withdraw because of the strange feelings. But his second in command, the then *Unu* (misrepresented as *Otota*) of Okpè (the chief who was the spokesman of the king and the Okpè) persuaded him to chairman the meeting. And as he attempted to take up his seat, he fell into the pit where the tragedy finally took place (hot oil was poured on him in the pit). As soon as he fell into the pit, he knew his end had come, and he cursed the Okpè people that they would never have a king after him.

It is believed that traditional rulers are ordained and honoured by God. The sanction of the king upon the Okpè at the time of his assassination became a curse that had serious effects on the land for a very long time. The period of interregnum between his death and succession was extremely long that the Okpè felt ashamed for their inability to crown another king, particularly as their Itsekiri neighbours scorned them for not having a king during the period. Although the Okpè came together to confess and ask forgiveness from God, performed some rituals to enable them crown

another king in the 1940s, the effects of the curse from Esezi I are still felt in the royal institution till this day. Esezi II (Mebitaghan, popularly known as Osakpa) was successfully crowned in 1945. He died in March 26, 1966 and until December 30, 1972 Orhoro I could not be crowned (another six years of interregnum).

In the present era, Orhoro I died in May 2004 and elections for the succession to the throne was conducted in January 2005. According to the election results, Gen, Felix Mujakperuo and Air vice Marshall Frank Adjobena had a tie in the votes, and the chairman of the electoral committee, as a result, cast his vote to decide the winner. By this approach Gen. Mujakperuo emerged winner, while his opponent disputes the results, attempting to take the matter to court. All efforts made by Okpe leaders to appease Adjobena, appealing that he should accept the results to ensure peaceful transition have not succeeded to the time of this writing and therefore no king has been crowned. No one is certain how many years of interregnum it would take the Okpe again to crown another king. Igoru musicians composed several songs depicting the extremely long interregnum and the scorning from the Itsekiri, as well as the lamentation of the death of Esezi I and the joy of his succession after another six-year interregnum (See chapter six).

3. 5 Okpe language phoneme

The Okpe speak a common language known as Okpe. It is tonal with homonyms distinguished by the speech intonations. Communication and social relationships among the Okpe are usually expressed in the Okpe language. Augusta Omamoh has developed a more scientific orthography for the language which over 90% of the literate Okpe population cannot read and understand. This study therefore, adopts the common orthography. Though, Idolor (2001: 8) says Okpe language uses only thirty-eight letters, this research has identified sixty-two alphabetical forms which are discussed under the following philology. The Okpe language phoneme is presented below with English words that suggest proper pronunciation. Each vowel, consonant or diphthong is given an English word to aid non-Okpe readers' pronunciation.

S/N	Vowel	Okpe	meaning	example in English
1	a	<i>Atan</i>	chewing stick	as in at
2	e	<i>Eti</i>	pig	as in eight
3	ɛ	<i>Ero</i>	eye	as in led
4	i	<i>Iroro</i>	wisdom	as in did
5	o	<i>Ololo</i>	bottle	as in oath
6	ø	<i>Qdafe</i>	affluent	as in on
7	u	<i>Udu</i>	chest	as in do

Diphthong:	Okpe	meaning	English
1.	ai	<i>Ekaigèn</i>	a drum type
2.	ia	<i>Ofian</i>	lie
3.	ie	<i>Rie</i>	go home
4.	ié	<i>Uvbié</i>	birth
5.	io	<i>Isiorin</i>	five
6.	io	<i>Irhiòke</i>	morning
7.	oa	<i>Qroa</i>	it goes deep
8.	œ	<i>Qmøerhe</i>	young child
9.	ua	<i>Qduado</i>	big
10.	ue	<i>Uruemu</i>	behaviour
11.	ue	<i>Iruen</i>	play
12.	ui	<i>Izuigede</i>	mother drum
13.	uo	<i>Iruo</i>	job

The following single consonants sound ordinarily as they do in English.

Consonant	Okpé example	meaning
1. B	<i>Bo</i>	crow
2. D	<i>Da</i>	drink
3. F	<i>Fa</i>	flog

4.	G	<i>Ga</i>	serve
5.	H	<i>Ha</i>	take
6.	J	<i>Jo</i>	lock
7.	K	<i>Ko</i>	sew
8.	L	<i>Lo</i>	shine
9.	M	<i>Mo</i>	come
10.	N	<i>Ni</i>	look

11.	P	<i>Pe</i>	cluster
12.	R	<i>Rø</i>	swallow
13.	S	<i>Se</i>	call
14.	T	<i>Ta</i>	say
15.	V	<i>Ve</i>	promise
16.	W	<i>Wø</i>	bath
17.	Y	<i>Ya</i>	write
18.	Z	<i>Zø</i>	run

Double consonant: Note that *vb* and *vw* are used interchangeably. In this study however, the *vb* is adopted.

Consonants		Okpe example	meaning	
1.	<i>Br</i>	-	<i>Bru</i>	cut
2.	<i>Ch</i>	-	<i>Chø</i>	smile
3.	<i>Dj</i>	-	<i>Djø</i>	choose
4.	<i>Fr</i>	-	<i>Fro</i>	argue
5.	<i>Gb</i>	-	<i>gba</i>	tie
6.	<i>Gh</i>	-	<i>gha</i>	cross
7.	<i>Hr</i>	-	<i>hra</i>	scatter
8.	<i>Hw</i>	-	<i>hwa</i>	pay
9.	<i>Kp</i>	-	<i>kpo</i>	control

10.	<i>Kr</i>	-	<i>Krun</i>	coil (around)
11.	<i>Kw</i>	-	<i>kwẹ</i>	quiet
12.	<i>Mw</i>	-	<i>mwa</i>	push
13.	<i>Ny</i>	-	<i>nya</i>	walk
14.	<i>Ph</i>	-	<i>pho</i>	jump
15.	<i>Rh</i>	-	<i>rhe</i>	sell
16.	<i>Sh</i>	-	<i>shẹ</i>	pill off
17.	<i>vb</i> (or <i>vw</i>)		<i>vba</i> or <i>vwa</i>	meet

Triple and Quadruple Consonants:		Okpe Example	meaning
1.	<i>Gbr</i>	-	<i>Agbraran</i>
2.	<i>Ghr</i>	-	<i>Eghren</i>
3.	<i>Ghwr</i>	-	<i>Ghwroro</i>
4.	<i>Hwr</i>	-	<i>Ehwro</i>
5.	<i>Kpr</i>	-	<i>Kpro</i>
6.	<i>Phr</i>	-	<i>Ephrun</i>
7.	<i>vbr</i> or <i>vwr</i>	-	<i>Evbro</i> or <i>Evwro</i>
			kola nut

3.6 Religion

Prior to the advent of colonialism and missionary activities in Nigeria, the Okpè believed in the existence of the Supreme Being Osolobrughwé often abbreviated Osoghwé (God). They also refer to God as Edion, believing that the God of heaven rules in the affairs of human beings. Okpe Council Halls of meeting in each community are therefore named after Edion (e. g. Aghwélé Edion – Edion Hall).

Evidence of this is found in song 4; page A1 – 5 where the composer beseeches Edion (God) to protect members of the community. The Okpè believe also in other Deities some of whom are discussed as follows. Oral tradition holds that some Deities live in the rivers, creeks and streams. Among them are Oloku (Merman), Ogberaghaghé otherwise known as Mamiwota (Mermaid), Ogikporo (goddess of music) and Unukodo (god of depth). Oloku and Ogberaghaghé are often referred to as connubial partners in the rivers.

Ogikporo, which literally means, “it only plays but harmless”, is a goddess who appears in the form of a stream mallard (wild duck) called Oko that leads a school of fish, shoal of snake and other water animals in a processional music jamboree through a stream lane. Fishermen, at night put off their light, strike trees and give

loud ovation to stop the procession from heading towards them. Unukodo is a deity found at Deghele Elume. He has a deceptive hole of great depth like a crystal shoal and whoever slipped into it was lost. As reaction in the bid to secure the peace of his domain, he pulled and bound together the oil-search pipes sunk in the swamp by an oil company in 1974 and used wild mighty cocks to pursue an old man from the forest in 1985. Some of these deities are represented as spirit-manifests in festivals, but are given different names in the events. The single common name they are called is Eho. The Igoru composer of song 76, page A1 – 143, draws allusion from these beliefs and proverbially remarked that the water deities return home (to the waters) when dry season comes (see chapter six).

The Okpè also believe that some deities live in the woods, hence sacrifices are offered at the foot of certain trees. Okrobogboghwe, (one-armed one-legged being) also known as Ahwobisi lives in trees like Ahwobisi and Idjodjo. He kills all other

trees around the tree it inhabits, except *Uwara*. Ẹdjokpa is a deity believed to inhabit the most productive palm tree in any Okpè community. Once a palm tree has been identified as the most productive, normally at the outskirts close to a major road, it becomes known by the name of the deity (Ẹdjokpa). It is then regarded as the mother of all other palm trees in the community. Seasonally, it is dressed in white and red cloth from top to bottom and a dog is offered to it as sacrifice, with music and spirit-manifest performances. It is worshipped during Ẹdjokpa festival when men in the community are barred from harvesting oil palm for about three weeks. Once the festival is declared, a bumper harvest is expected. Each community in Okpe has a live tree often referred to as *otore amwa*, representing the God or deity of the village or town, where sacrifices of worship are offered annually. The composer of song 79, page A1 – 145, draws experience from the relationship between Ahwobisi (the deity in the tree) and *Uwara* (specie of small tree with red liquid substance). In the same song, the composer makes reference to the relationship between the water deities (*Eho ame*) and human beings in Okpè. He/she philosophically adopts these experiences proverbially in the composition. These have been discussed in chapter six.

Other deities whose abodes are not known are often represented by carved images placed in shrines. Ẹgba is a war God whose shrine is in Ikeresan. In those days, it made loud cries to inform the community of impending danger during warfare. Through the chief priest, it informs and directs on how they should advance, encamp, attack and the kind of medicine to use so as to be impervious to bullets and arrows and be invisible to enemies. Others like Adjugen, Umogun, Abasiumo, etc, are vengeance deities who maintain peace and defend truth in the community. When they kill offenders, all the deceased's properties are taken to their shrines; otherwise, they continue to kill members of the culprit's family. Another form of deity representation appears like medicine wrapped into a mat and hung over and across the road at the outskirts (entrance) of the community. This is called Egbe, believed to keep peace, stop any evil from making entry, and render the powers of enemies

ineffective as they go through it into the community. The composer of song 62, page A1 – 105, makes reference to Egbe as a deity worshipped by sex workers, from whom children were sought.

The Okpè operate a four-day week system, one of which is regarded as the sacred day for worship, sacrifice and festivals. The four days of the Okpè week are as follows:

Day	Activity	Market
Ędèghwọ – sacred day	Worship	1 st day markets
Asueghwọnọ	Search for commodities	2 nd day markets
Ęderhérhẹ	Further gathering of wares	3 rd day markets
Ędebi or Ędileyi	Preparation for sales	4 th day markets

The first day is clearly understood as the sacred day for worship, while the second day literally means the night of searching. That is, the day traders go to farms, towns and villages to harvest or purchase products at wholesale level. The third day literally means the middle day of the week and further gathering of commodities and wares continues. The fourth day literally means traders' day. Traders tidy up and package their commodities and wares ready for the 1st market of the week. Markets in all Okpè Divisional Headquarters (*Otore Amwa*) hold on the first day of the week. One of the early worship groups the spread around Okpè towns and villages was known as *evéhérhẹ, ovumeni* or *bidaka*. The composer of song 4; page A1 – 5, remarks ironically that members would go out to preach on Ędebi, the day preceding the sacred day of worship (See chapter six for details).

3. 6 Economy

Okpeland is blessed with species of cash crops such as palms, cherry, orange, mango and mahogany. Others include rubber, kola nut and cocoa. Major food crops cultivated in the land include cassava, plantain, cocoyam, maize, yam, pepper, melon, vegetable among other farm products. The land is further blessed with crude oil. The people produce *Amivi* (local body cream) and *Oza* (soap) which they sell and use at home. Individuals have large rubber plantations, which they either tap or hire out. Tapers sell the rubber produce to merchants in forms of rubber lumps and sheets. The merchants in turn sell to the factories where the products are refined. Few people engaged in cocoa production, while others are involved in crafts. Those who engage in cocoa farming harvest and dry the seeds for sale. Craftsmen weave *ugen*, *akęde*, *ikidęn*, *aharę* (fishing tackles), *okalokpo* (basket), *atęte* (local tray), *ophorho* (garri filter), *ere*, *odjiko*, *abiba* (Variant mats) and *aga* (chair) for sale.

They also carve images, mortars and pestles, and produce musical instruments for sale. Some dwellers in the riverine areas engage in pottery making. Other men and their wives go on *Idjede* (fishing expedition) for weeks or months. A number of fishermen combine this with hunting. They return with dried fish and meat for sale and family consumption. Both small and large scale fishers use either of the above fishing tackles and *eriri* (nets) to catch fishes and experiences of these expeditions are philosophically adopted in Igoru compositions. Songs 44, page A1 – 72 and 55, page A1 – 90 for instance make use of these experiences. The composer of the former says once fish nets get ruffled they become un-amendable, while the latter says the curse of the fish cages (*igen*) cannot kill the beer. These philosophical thoughts have been given detailed interpretations against the background of these fishing experiences in chapter six.

Trade and business ventures are essential parts of the Okpè. Many people trade in the local products while others trade in imported commodities and spare parts. Several workers have taken advantage of the forests and swampy mangroves, making supplies of timber to the African Timber and Ply-wood (A T & P) industry and numerous sawmills in Sapele and environ. Many others have also gained employment in government and private sectors. There are those who practice traditional medicine as a major occupation. The Okpè abhor begging and frown at the attitude, so even the handicapped struggle to be independent, requiring little support. The composer of song 56, page A1 – 91, captures the dividends of the subsistence farming that exists in the culture, remarking that there may be a year one did not farm, but there cannot be found a year one did not eat.

2. 7 Dynamism of social harmony

The Okpe believe much in good neighbourliness and community life. Successful sons are encouraged to build their houses within or around the plots of land wherein their fathers lived. This is to enable them and their nucleus families share experiences, at extended family level. Whenever a man receives visitors, he sends invitation to all the adults in his neighbourhood to join him in giving the visitors rousing reception. He waits a while for them to come in before presenting drinks, Kola nuts and money to his guest. Each invitee supports the presentation with some amount of money.

When a young lady is marriageable or betrothed, she is circumcised and allocated to a room for a period of two to three months. During this time, young girls in the neighbourhood voluntarily, though with due permission from their parents, leave their homes to live with the *Opha* (circumcised lady) as *ikopha* (attendants). The *opha* and *ikopha* dress in decorated attires and apply *ohwarha* or *ukpamara* red substance from can wood on their bodies. The attendants run errands as well as assist her and her mother both at home and in the farm throughout the period. Many neighbours

come to visit the maid from time to time. Customarily, young and old people of both sexes converge at her room to provide entertainment through folk tales and concomitant songs for some hours every night till the period is over. E. A Wilkie (www.stclements.edu) writes about this tradition as follows:

The case of the Okpe of Delta State who perform FGM [female genital mutilation] as a rite of passage can be cited to illustrate the procedure. "When an Okpe young female is age 12 and above, she could be circumcised if the parents [feel] she is matured enough at puberty and are financially alright. The celebrant in this case may be age 16 and 21 with or without her prior knowledge of the operation, though she would not object to it when the circumcisor eventually arrived because she believed it was time for her. The victims' atimes (inverted comma in original) may be younger or older. And atimes pregnant for five month to six or seven months – a time during which pregnant women can be circumcised as tradition demands... The circumcised during this period ranging from one to three months is made special items exclusive to her only and sometimes the husband. She has a special beaded crown and clothes dyed with canwood (Ukpama) and laced with cowries and "pennies". Young ones known as "Ukohwa" minister to the celebrant (Ovhwa). The body of the celebrant (Ovhwa) would be rubbed with canwood – ukpama that gives her a "red appearance, which marks her as the one undergoing the rite..."

See the plate illustrating this tradition below:

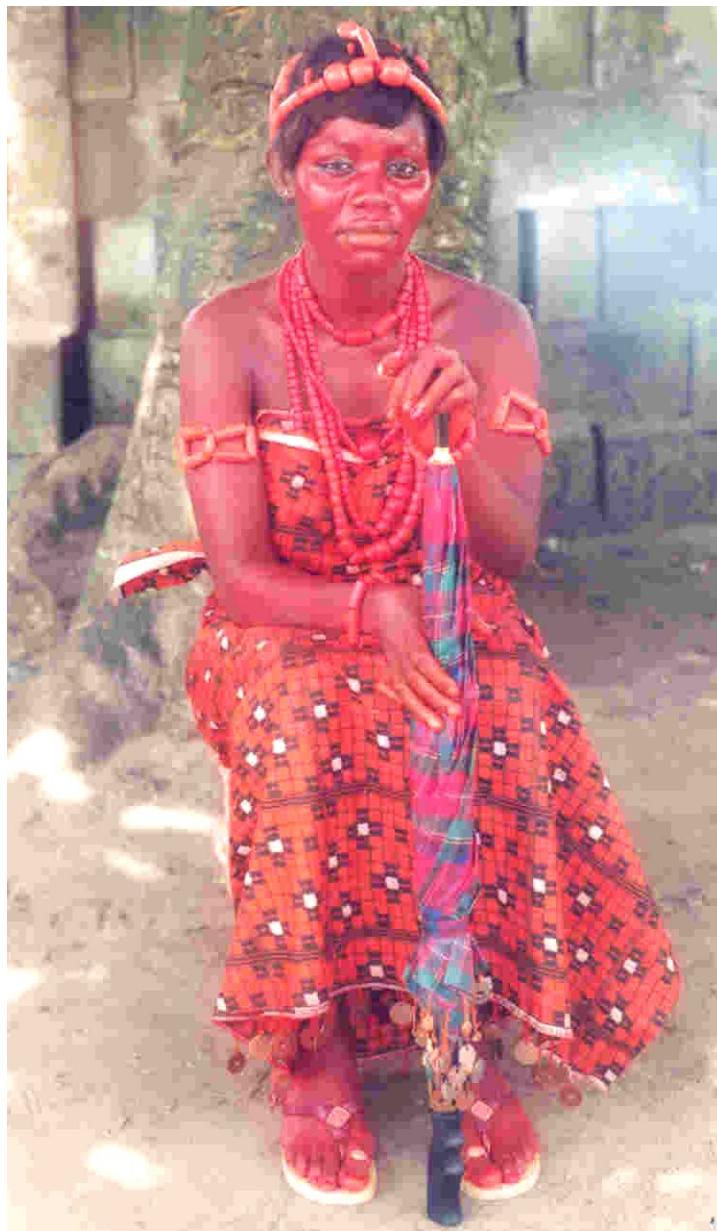


Plate 3 – 1: Photograph of opha (circumcised lady)

Burial ceremony is a great forum for social relationships in Okpe. In fact, the people see it as the greatest solidarity force that brings many from far and near. People who would not even come home for festivals might come to a burial ceremony, especially when death occurs in their families. Family and community members from different locations use this forum to introduce themselves and their young ones to one

another and also exchange addresses. Old friends and play mates who have lost contact for a long time often form a circle in re-union while the burial ceremony is in progress. All family members pay certain amount of money in order to assist the bereaved children, in some ways, to make the obsequies successful. Individuals also associate with the bereaved in cash and in moral support. The women folk often fetch a heap of firewood and sometimes contribute food stuff such as garri to assist the bereaved.



Plate 3 – 2: Cross section of old friends and relations at burial ceremony

Okpe tradition encourages teamwork a great deal. On the whole, five kinds of teamwork, which include free will, considered invitation, exchange, paid labour and community labour exist. If someone is gravely sick or bereaved, relations, neighbours, friends, guild or religious members could decide on their own volition to

work as a team in the person's farm. This can also be done to honour deserving members of the community. Special invitation could also be given to a group of people who then may come together to work in one's farm. The beneficiary, in this case, gives a particular date to all the people he/she has invited to enable them form a team and work collectively in the farm. Another approach to teamwork is that people who practice the same kind of farming (cropping or palm oil production) may agree to work in one's farm so that they go to each team member's farm on appointed dates to reciprocate. Groups of people are also employed to work in one's farm for a day and are paid according to negotiation. Another instance of teamwork occurs when all members of a given community come to clean the town, fell trees, build bridges or town hall.

2. 8 Okpe musical culture

The Okpe have a musical culture that is highly functional in all spheres of life. Several songs are performed during traditional worship, festivals and burials. *Egboto-uhuerimi* ensemble comprises married women who perform in burial ceremonies. The women according to custom must be younger than the deceased in age. The ensemble, which may have up to thirty-five members, makes use of *ekpeti* (a short piece of plank or box) and *abo* (pair of bamboo clappers) as accompanying instruments. All performers play, sing and dance around the *orimi* (corpse) and, or *agberen* (effigy) while on a catafalque. The women perform for about five consecutive nights in the room where the deceased is buried, before the final rites are performed. Their songs comment generally and freely on the socio-economic circumstances of the deceased, his children and relations and the passing away. In-laws have special roles to play in burial ceremonies. It behoves them to dig and cover the grave at the time of interment and they perform these rites with some songs that accompany them.

In Ighwruesa Division, when the oldest man in any of the three communities, Ugbokodo, Ughwot^{on} and Jeddo dies, the communities take turns daily to perform

music dance in a procession through the streets of the deceased's town. *Esakpegodi* (2nd great grand children) of the deceased also have certain rites to perform during the burial and this requires a musical procession. The mother of the senior *esakpegodi* leads the procession to the funeral venue and throws pinches on ground *orhen* (kaolin chalk) on the crowd to wish them long life. Since the procession goes a long distance, two or more lead singers appear in the group to exchange the duty of leading solos among them. As a custom, the *esakpegodi* and their mother(s) usually do not sing, but dance. In other events such as when a young lady is circumcised, *isaleke* dance is performed to celebrate the beginning of the puberty rite. Folklore songs (*ijoro osia*) are also performed during this rite and at other times when folktales are narrated in family gathering.

Ijoro owian (work songs) are performed to accompany persons who are working. Work songs are contextual to the type of work they accompany. For fish pond depletion, the songs depict the stages of the work and the behaviour of team members. At the first stage, the songs appeal to the deity of the stream to allow the waters to be depleted from the pond, so that the team's efforts would not be fruitless. Other songs in this stage spur team members to work hard. Songs of the second stage are performed when the pond is almost depleted. The themes remind members of the team not to be greedy at the time to catch the fishes. Songs of the third stage are performed when it is time to share the fishes. The themes provide warning that members should not fight over the sharing. The fourth stage is normally marked by songs of derision which often remark that just a little cart fish (*orhuəren*) separated relations. This is often performed if dispute arises from the sharing. Several other work songs are performed while working in the crop or oil palm farms.

Ema music is performed as a traditional rite to celebrate the affluence, greatness and royalty of distinguished titled men. The performance takes place in Chieftaincy ceremonies (burial or title taking) only. The dance is vigorous, involving the swinging and pulling of one's arms towards oneself. The movement of the arms indicates that

ema dancers wish to be rich by pulling wealth to themselves. The *ema* ensemble comprises three *ekaigèn* (double edged conical membrane drums with aesthetic pointed sticks around the edges), *inawòri* (metal flute) which is no longer in use, *òkro* (animal horn) and *ekperè* (Elephant tusk). *Iphri*, one of the oldest traditional music of the Okpe, is a slow dirge performed at the burial of warriors, heroes, elders and successful men. As the name implies, *iphri* means persistence in doing something; therefore, the performance goes on for several hours making commentaries on death. The philosophy of its performance is contrasted to that of *ema*, in that it signifies the chasing away of evil or misfortune. The ensemble comprises about six members only, and the instruments used are *ekpeti* (piece of plank), *abò* (Clappers), *agogo* (bells), *ozi* or *ozu* (mother drum) and *òmigede* (baby drum). *Uroredjò* music is another dirge typology performed by skilled mourners. It is solemn and performed accapella. The music recounts the good deeds of the deceased during his life time.

Ighòpha is a traditional music typology which developed out of Igoru music. It is a narrative, accompanied by *ukiri* (short cylindrical drum) and, or *isorogun* (thumb piano) and *abò* (hand clapping). It is highly educative and is thus performed for commercial purposes in burial and other ceremonies (see chapter four for further detail). *Ikpeba*, also known as *payan* is a traditional music typology often performed by in-laws and community members for entertainment at burial ceremonies. It is accompanied by *òmigede* (baby drum), *izuigede* (mother drum), *abèṣe* (three-legged drum), *agogo* (bells) and *agba* (goblet shaped drum). *Ekugbokpè* and *Bidaka* cultural dance troupes are stylized traditional music typologies performed for commercial purposes. They are large groups that sprang up in the 1970s and 1980s in Sapele. They use many drums, *agogo* (bells) and *igede-ame* (water drums: a set of transverse calabashes in a box containing water). It should be noted that the earlier *bidaka* dance was performed in *evéhérhé* traditional worship and this other *bidaka* dance is non-religious.

Maiden dances in Okpè include *igbegbe-egboto*, *ijurhi*, *akamaghwẹ*, *odjoboro*, and *udje*. They are performed according to age grades. *Kokoma* and sharp-sharp are highlife popular typologies which came in vogue in the late 1960s. They were modeled after the highlife that E. T. Mensah from Ghana introduced to Nigeria in the late 1950s. It should be noted however that sharp-sharp was introduced by an Okpè who sojourned in Ghana. The two typologies were performed in burials and concert halls and their themes focused on sexuality, married life, changing circumstances in life and so forth. Okpè disco is the most recent neo-traditional music typology in Okpè. It began in the late 1970s with the first band established at Ibada Elume by Ọfọkpélé Ogorode in 1978. The music is accompanied by *ikisé* (maracas), a set of graduated *agogo* (bells), two *isorogun* (thumb piano), two sets of conical drums, mouth organ and electric piano with amplification gadgets. The themes focus on issues of common interest, narrating experiences and educating, entertaining and eulogizing deserving members of the public.