

Continuity and Change: Decoding Bruce Onobrakpeya's Conceptualisation of Urhobo Ancestral Worship in Two-Dimensional Forms

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Abstract

The thrust of the paper is to re-examination the conceptualisation of the ancestors' statuettes in two-dimensional art by Bruce Onobrakpeya. Bruce Onobrakpeya being an Urhobo Artist has conceptualised and by extension the art work of ancestral in two dimensional forms, for general acceptance of modern Urhobo adherents. The paper critically evaluates the pre-colonial status of the ancestors and lucidly highlights the pride of place they once enjoyed. It is the contention of this paper to state that despite missionary religions have made a lot of converts among the traditional people, regard is paid to the ancestors. The work is anchored on the Semiotic theory of Eco which says that visual images explained issues as written words. The civilizing tendencies the Christianity has brought to Urhobo land particularly and the globalizing forces, have helped in no small way to pave way for continuity. The paper concludes that the living dead are still being remembered and venerated by the Urhobo through modern ways of worship. The Urhobo adherents who prefer to go to their new place of worship venerate their departed one through remembrance and thanksgiving ceremony

Keywords: *Urhobo Art, Ancestral worship, Bruce Onobrakpeya*

Introduction

“In the beginning it was religion, and in the end it should be all religion. As a matter of fact, men took off from religion, march along with religion and arrive at religion in their daily engagements. (Abe. 2004:3) Arising from the foregoing, traditional arts are used for religious and other ritualistic purposes; either for worship and or to

propitiate the divinities (personal or community). In Urhobo, art performs different functions such as funeral, initiations and festivals. Whatever forms of drawings, paintings, carvings and casting the work of art takes in Urhobo setting; its religious function covers mainly rituals, ancestral worship by the loved ones and worship of deities by the devotees. (Singletary 2002:103-110)

Urhobo is made up of twenty-two socio-political units and they are found in Delta state of Nigeria (Otite 2003:21). According to the 1991 population census, they consist of about over a million people and classified among the ten major ethnic groups in Nigeria. (Otite 2003:22) In Urhobo society as earlier mentioned, art (*Ona*) is inseparable from life. An artist is called *Owena*, the creator of useful things; some artists carve masks and other figurines used in religious and sacred ceremonies. These were the objects found by the early missionary' anthropologists in the shrine that made them to describe the religion with derogative terms such as: animism, idolatry, fetish, pagan, heathen, primitive Jujù and so on. (Nabofa 1994:21) In fact, it was the non-understanding of the traditional African religious symbols and ideas that partly contributed to the ways in which some of the early Western and Arab Scholars, investigating African thought forms looked at the indigenous Africans as having no religion or belief in God. In consonance with the above reason Omijeh says:

Nowhere did early missionaries and Western writers misunderstand African culture and societies as in the rituals and symbolism. (Omijeh 1973:105)

Bruce Onobrakpeya as a young man growing up in Urhobo land was influenced not only by his father, who was a carver but also by various traditional ceremonies. He was exposed to the private and public shrines (*ogwa*) that could be found in every Urhobo village, some of which were filled with wooden sculptures, and sacrificial paraphernalia. Most of these shrines were dedicated to spirits (*edjo*) ancestor and supernatural forces inherent in the forest and the rivers. These powers are potentially both helpful and harmful to man but how they are manipulated depends upon the level of control exercised by the community. (Perkin Foss 1976: 34-37). Some *edjo*,

may be represented with figurative Sculptures, while others with non-representational objects such as stones, shells, lumps of clay or metal however the spirit of the ancestors (*esemo*) are usually anthropomorphized. (Bradbury and Lloyd 157:103). Bruce Onobrakpeya being fascinated by this experience, tried as a visual artist to focus on the images of the ancestral worship of the Urhobo worldview in his quest for credulity.

Who is Bruce Onobrakpeya

Bruce Onobrakpeya MFR (1) is one of Nigeria's best-documented artists who obviously needs very little introduction in the visual art circle both within and outside the shores of Nigeria. He was born on the 30th August 1932 at Agbarha-Otor, Delta State, Nigeria. He graduated from the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology, (Now Ahmadu Bello University), Zaria in 1962. He also holds a Diploma in Fine Arts (Dip. EA). Moderated by Goldsmiths College, London University and a Post Graduate Arts Teachers' Certificate (ATC). Moderated by Institute of Education, London University. He is a printmaker, painter, teacher and Scholar. He taught art at Western Boy's High School, Benin City, 1953-1956, Ondo Boy's High School, 1957 and St. Gregory's College, Obalende Lagos 1963-1980. He attended the Printmaking workshops under Ru Van Rossen Organised by Ulli Beier in Mbari Artists and Writers Club, Ibadan. 1961; the Mbari Mbayo workshop Oshogbo in 1963. He was Artist-in-Residence at the Department of African Studies Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife 1973, Haystack Mountain School of Art and Crafts, Deer Isle, Maine, USA 1975; Elizabeth City State University, North Carolina, USA 1979, where he was accorded the status of Associate professor. He was also Artist-in-Residence at Institute of African Studies University of Ibadan, 1984; Tacoma Public School, USA 1989; National Gallery of Zimbabwe, Harare, 1992; and MOJA: An African –American Arts Festival, Charleston south Caroline, USA, 1991.

His concept of art changed when he gained admission into the Nigerian College of Arts, Science and Technology Zaria to study Fine Arts. This new environment changed his perception because most of his teachers at the Zaria school were Europeans who imposed academic realism on their students (Onobrakpeya.2005). This

characteristic is reflected in Onbrakpeya's early works, which consisted of figure drawings, still life and landscapes. However, his ideas began to change into experimenting forms in relation to Nigerian folklore, myths and legends following a reaction from the students who challenged the aesthetic imperialism of European (Singlets 2002:)). Over the years, Bruce Onbrakpeya has enjoyed national attention and holds the title of master printmaker. However, he prefers the rubric "experimental artist", since it best describes the breadth of his diverse experimental printmaking techniques and materials

He is an initiator and chairman of the Harmattan Workshop Series, Agbarho- Otor, Delta State, Nigeria which has been running since 1998. He has participated in over 68 exhibitions, in Africa, Asia, Europe and the America, since his one-man Exhibition at Ughelli in 1959. Other exhibitions include the touring of "*Ore Idjubuli*" Exhibition shown at the Nike Gallery, Lekki, Lagos 2012; Department of African studies, University of Ibadan 2012, University of Benin, Ugbowo, Campos, Benin City, 2013 and Jewel of Nomadic Images, Skoto Gallery, New York, 2012 and others. Bruce Onbrakpeya has received over 30 national, and International awards and appointments which includes the MFR (member of the Order of the republic of Niger) 2002. Living Human Treasure award by Federal Government in collaboration with UNESCO 2006 and the SPANFEST Excellence Award-Lifetime Achievement Award in the Art, November 2013 to mention a few.

He is regarded as a living legend; he has devoted his life to his works and today his visual art works are regarded as one of the mainsources of documentation and custodian of Urhobo philosophy, culture and religion. Among the Nigerian painters and master printmakers, Bruce Onbrakpeyais one artist who has successfully synthesised the vitality of Urhobo's great tradition with the convention and style of modernity to form a sort of natural synthesis. He has fused his training in western techniques and materials with his own heritage, cultural experience and an inventiveness that is undeniably African. The results are the creation of paintings and prints of vivid colours, imaginative and magical necessary in a medium that speaks of the past and present to the future in a Language of Urhobo philosophy.

He is the people theologian because his works are based on inspiration, a philosopher explaining the people's concept in visual forms, a historian by documenting their world views, a poet, psychologist and a metaphysician because he reshapes natural forms to express ideas about the universe and tries to express the spiritual realm and the people's thoughts in visual form. He sees himself first and foremost as an Urhobo man, hence all his works are sub-titled in Urhobo language.

Urhobo Sacred Religious Carving of Ancestors

The root of Urhobo religion is the absolute dependence of human beings on the supernatural powers, capable of aiding them in time of trouble. The essence of this, makes every Africans but most especially Urhobo to believe that they can commune with their ancestors, who have enhanced powers associated with their newly acquired status and particularly as intermediaries between man and the Supreme Being (Smith. 1960: p.26). This specifically informs the belief in the ancestors and their corresponding relevance. Ancestors are the departed spirits who are honoured as a result of their long-good, spectacular and extra-ordinary lives led on earth and at death are being venerated. Thus, Idowu describes ancestors as:

...the deceased who are truly members of the families on earth; but they are no longer of the same fleshy order as those who are still living in the flesh on earth. They are closely related to this world; but are no longer ordinary mortals. Because they have crossed the borderland between this world and the super sensible world entering and living in the latter, they have become freed from the restrictions imposed by the physical world. They can now come to abide with their fold on earth invisibly, to aid or hinder them to promote prosperity or cause adversity (Idowu. p.184)

Supporting this view, Kwame Gyekye writes:

The ancestors are certain individuals of the past generations of a lineage who are said to have distinguished themselves in many ways, and in particular, to have led virtuous and exemplary lives worthy of emulation by succeeding generations of the lineage. Such individuals are regarded... as moral paragons.(Gyekye.1996. P.162.)

Udo Etuk also opines that the ancestors are revered consequent upon their affairs of their lineage and are believed to have a great deal of influence over their lineage and siblings. They also play a great intermediary role in between the physical and spiritual world (2002: 33). The ancestors are believed to be quite near and present at every occasion, only a thin veil separates them from the living. (ibid). In fact, the ancestors even at death can see, hear, feel and express emotions¹⁰. (Awolalu. 1979:62) Besides, ancestors are able to see and observe what is happening on earth, and they maintain the greatest interest in the affairs of mankind, most especially those of their immediate family. No wonder, Mbiti refers to them as the “living dead” who keep constant and healthy communion with the living. Ancestors have various names from locality to locality. Among the Urhobo they are called Esemu an Oniemo but generally they are referred to as *ewho re Erivwi*. The Yoruba call them “*Baba nla*” or “*Babajide*” (Mbiti. 1992:143), the Igbo call them “*Ndicie*”(Awolalu. 1979:247), the Ewe and Fon refer to them “*Tovodu*”, and the Akan people of Ghana call them “*Nsamanfo*”, or “*Nananom Nsamoanfo*.” (Gyekye. 1996; 163).

There are two categories of Urhobo sacred religious carvings for ancestors namely;. *Oniemo* and *Osemo*. These are carvings in three-dimensional formats representing ancestral cultic objects of worship by the Urhobo.

Of all the spiritual allegiance held sacred by the Urhobo, that relating to the ancestor is most prominent. At every level; individual family, quarters and villages-community, the deceased family members must

receive at regular bases, the honour due to them. The Urhobo see death as a return to the spirit world, which they believe is our ancestral home. They see themselves as strangers on this earth who must return one day to give account of his or her stewardship to the creator. This lyric which is usually sang at the burial ceremony of the dead buttress this believe.

Akpo na ma re le na.

Eki ma re cho, Ma re cho

Or re chonu ko kpo, ko kpo

Meaning

In this world we are living in now

We are all traders

Whoever finish selling, goes home (Ofuafo 2013: 98)

Burial rites are regarded as send-off ceremonies for the dead and must be properly and fully carried out if the soul must return to the spiritual realm. In Urhobo cosmology ancestors consist of the *esemo* (dead fathers) and *ineimo* (dead mothers), who were once living on earth, they know the trail and temptation of their descendants with whom they continue to maintain a link which even death could not sever. This is why in the belief of Urhobo the *esemo* and *iniemo* have the interest of their offspring at heart. They bestow blessing on them and they are regarded as the supreme guardians of morality. They are represented with a single art object, mainly sculpture which is displayed at a conspicuous corner of the room or the *Ogwa for veneration*.

Oniemo signify the cult of the ancestress, in most cases, depending on the community and the family, it is represented by a carving of a woman with a baby either strapped to her back or being breast fed, signifying motherhood, fertility and the relationship between mother and child. This object which is in three dimensional formats is kept in the homes of many Urhobo traditional women. It is sculpted after the death of a woman and venerated during the second burial rites. They are worshipped and honour is given to them. A woman with seven children or more are given special honour. Among the Idjerhe clan or kingdom, there is a special ceremony for them called *Onirode* (great mother), where all women in that category parade the community and they are given gifts and at death, a goat called a *ewe*

ekwu (waist goat) is slaughter and the blood is sprinkled on the floor. This believes is also practice by the Igbo called *Ibu ewe ukwu* and the kalabaris. *Oniemo* represent the goddess of fertility because of its capacity to enhance procreation and fertility and barren women are advised by diviners to have a sculpted *oniemo* and worship it in order to induce procreation. (Ofuafo 2012:23)





A Sculptural piece of Oniemo in Ovwu Community, A Sculptural piece of Oniemo in Udu, showcasing a woman breast feedingng her child showcasing a woman with her child strapped to her back

The next picture titled *Aro osemo* (fathers' shrine) is also produced in plastograph and in two dimensional formats. An *Osemo*; (the cult of the ancestors in Urhobo land), is usually represented by a statuette of a stern looking man holding a weep in one hand and a wood or cutlass on the other hand. The *osemo* signify guidance of morality, disciplinarian, family head, and the bread winner of the home. At the dead of the man in the home and during the second burial rite, a sculpture representing the man is made and kept at the corner of the house and venerated. The sculpture is kept in the house of the dead man or with the first son and if the man does not have a son, but only daughters, it is kept with the younger brother's son's house or whose

ever the family assign to take the responsibility of housing the *Osemo*. It is mandatory for every Urhobo family to have an *osemo* in their homes after the death of their father because they believe that the *osemo* has the capacity to enhance family, clan and community solidarity, success in farming, general prosperity, trade and serves as an instrument for settling communal conflicts by those bond by this symbol (Erhuerh. 2005:220).



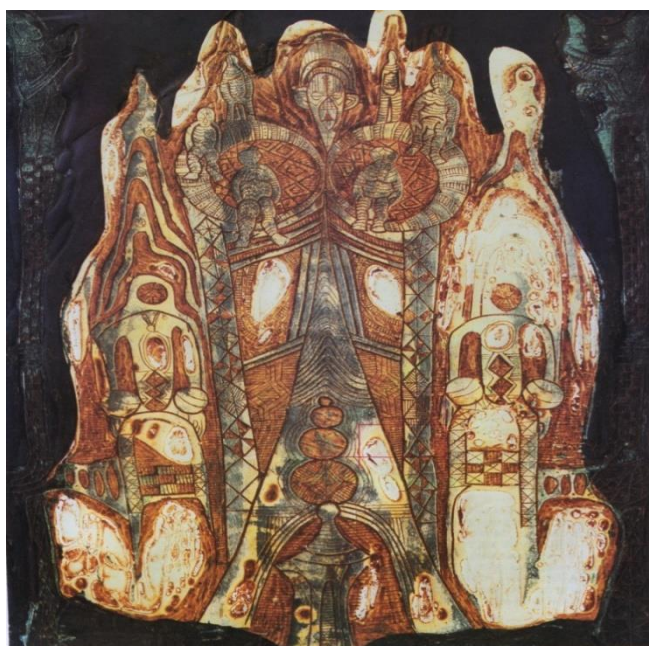


Picture of osemo sculptures. These pictures were taken at a community shrine at Ughelli.

In projecting the cult of ancestors, Bruce Onobrakpeya conceptualises the importance of motherhood in two dimensional formats. This he titled; *Aro oniomo* (mother's shrine). The technique of production is additive plastograph and the picture is a tribute to mothers (Onobrakpeya 1990). According to him, it is a tribute to women in their role of bringing forth children to life, nursing them to adulthood and at the same time providing for the needs of the household within the family system.

The print by Bruce Onobrakpeya is a cluster of an ant hill. The central figure in the print represents the mother and her many responsibilities. In the chest and shoulder, children hang loosely around. On both sides of the main figure are two salver vertical forms crowned with mother and child finials. (see fig. below). The picture, which is in the shape of an ant hill (red earth mountain with many peaks), could be seen as a common feature in forests, bushes or the

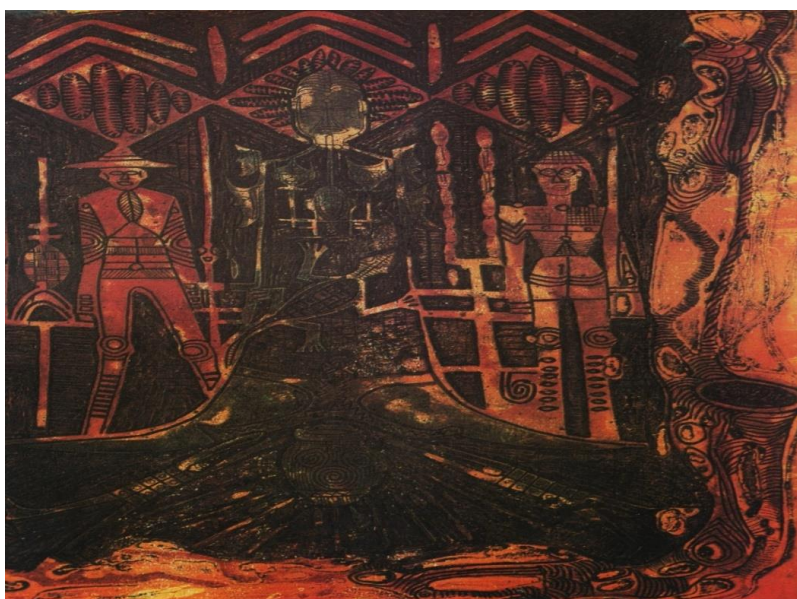
water-side. Bruce explained that ant hills have interesting sculpture forms especially when they have become old or slightly eroded by rain. If an ant hill is still active, that if the ants still live in it, one can always find layers of earth growing around the old one thereby forming contrasting earth hues new texture and shapes (Singletary 2002). According to Prof Nabofa, the Urhobo woman is seen as an ant hill because of her ability to bring forth children. They frown seriously at any woman who could not bear a child. She is described as *Oshare* (a man), *oreda* (witch); *O vwo omo re vwo keda gbara vwo be gbe*. (She has mortgage her children at the coven). She is treated as a leper and she is not accorded a proper burial right because she has no one to carry out her name (Nabofa. 2009). She doesnot have an *Oniemo* sculpture.



Aro Oniemo (mother's Shrine). Blue base. Plastograph. 61cmx45.8cm.1972.

In Bruce's encapsulation, *Osemo* is presented as a huge man with two diminutive men at his sides to represent the authority of the father as a moral and social being. The picture is a tribute to fathers

who are represented by the central image. Its heads organised and protect, while object and other figures attached to its body, denote further responsibilities, particularly in the extended family system. Cowries in the picture show the father as the main wage owner or one who co-ordinates the economic and social activities of the home. The first of the two faces show him as a wise counsellor, and second, as a disciplinarian who also set the tone of good morals by his own behaviour (Ofuafo. 2013:96)



Aro Osemo (father's Shrine) by Bruce Onobrakpeya. Plastograph. 61cmx47.7cm. 1972.

According to Bruce Onobrakpeya, Having taken care of the central image, I further developed the picture to include figurines at the bottom section and organic forms of plants, fishes, and insects at the top. These elements help to complete and balance the shrine structure of the composition. The beauty of traditional shrines which have inspired many of my prints comes from

the assembles of many objects of different colours and shape, sometimes arranged at different levels. Shrines are nearly always seen from the front (Onobrakpeya 1984 and Read Pruitt S. 1999:69 ff).

These two artworks explain the Urhobo concept of the cult of the ancestors, while the Aro Oniemo depicts the supremacy of a mother by using the ant hills analogy which issynonymous with the Igbo calling their female children or daughters *Nneka* (mother is supreme) and Urhobo call their female children, *Ivie*(coral beads) and *Oro*(gold) to show their supremacy . The male shrine shows the functions of the ancestors as being the power to bless, protect and also as guardians of morality, since they once lived with the living. They are also the ones who ensure that the solidarity of the family unit is not jeopardised by any of their children. Hence the elders, who are the immediate successors of the ancestors, scowl upon insubordination and recalcitrance. The ancestors are quick to punish any disobedient member of the family by inflicting them with mysterious illness such as swollen stomach, or swollen feet, back pain and loss of consciousness. When such happens the Urhobo would say: *erivwin mu ro, to buo woruru* (the ancestors have dealt with you, confess your sins) or *oremu erivvin jo fa*,(he has offended the ancestors, confess). In case of disputes or conflicts among two brothers or communities, thesculpture of the *osemo* is brought in to settle the issues by swearing at the cult. During marriage the girl is made to kneel at the *ogwa* of her *osemo*, and the eldest member of the family would evoke the spirit of the ancestors and asking them to release her spiritually and physically because she now belongs to another family. When she gets to her husband's house, she is also taken before the family *ogwa* and the *esemo* is called upon to accommodate her as new member of the family both physically and spiritually. From then on, she is under the guide and guardianship of the husband's *sesemo*. Hence the Urhobo would say: *erivvin ose omote sa muo*.(the ancestors a father can't punish her married daughter). Moreover, the acts of incest, adultery, and theft (brigandage), especially where a member of the family invites outsider to break into the house of his kinsmen and acts of witchcraft

and wizardry are punishable by the ancestors who now reside in Eriwin, from where they act as guide and guardians to their loved ones here on earth.

According to S. U. Eriwo:

It is deemed that the living dead have power to punish the nefarious men because the Urhobo believe that once a man passes from the earth plane to the nether plane he is imbued with supernatural power – powers not only of blessing, preserving and sustaining the family in a whole and healthy state but also of plucking away the nefarious in his prime of youth (Eriwo 2005: 152-158)

This belief in the powers of the ancestor is not common to the Urhobo alone. In all West African the belief is so real. Awolalu and Dopamu speaking of the Yoruba culture say :

While here on earth the ancestors were the custodian and guardian of morality in the society. They set the norm of conduct, which the society most follow as given, to them by their own ancestor (Awolalu and Dopamu. 1979: 14)

The Sculptural piece for the cult of ancestor varies from place to place. But however, all over Urhobo land, the first son of the family venerates the *esomo* while the *oniemo* is by the first daughter. On broader level such as village and community group, a single, massive piece of figurative sculpture, often *janifirm*, stands as a solitary testament to a founder (Perkin Foss 2005:41). This status is called a '*eshe*' a term which informants have described as an allusion to *esemore akare* or "ancestors-in-carved-from". Single ancestral images (*eshe*) appear in many of central and southern Urhobo-land such as Eghwu, Ogor, Ughelli, Agbarho, Okpe and Idjerhe (Singletary 2002: 124). The concept of ancestral art is so strong among the Urhobo that Perkin Foss observed that:

The particular types of sites chosen for Urhobo art-for- ancestor present an exception to the Urhobo productivity for privacy for works of art. Indeed these pieces are so positioned to offer maximum exposure. The eshe figure is usually placed at the front –centre of a meeting hall (ogwa-rode) and in many cases will be so design as to have two faces, one inward toward the meeting chamber and the other outward toward the public area outside. (Perkin Foss 2005:41-53)

This is true because although Bruce Onobrakpeya's conceptualisation of the ancestry are not worship, the Urhobo in diaspora were able to relate with the work and appreciate them as representational of their religious belief. They explained that patronising Bruce's artworks and attend his exhibitions apart from the aesthetics and cultural reasons remind them of their tradition back home and serves as interface between traditional religion and culture (Ofuafo 2013:96). On the other hand, art patron buys his work for aesthetic reason because Bruce Onobrakpeya's works conformed to modern standards.

The Predicament of the Ancestors in face of Modernity

Before the coming of the foreign religions into Urhobo land, it is true that ancestors who are the spirits of the departed were remembered and honoured with great celebration. They participate in virtually all that is taking place in their immediate families in particular and the communities in general. They gained high and spiritual status endowed with powers, which the living do not possess and they are being remembered by their subjects. They are the custodian of Morality and disciple in the family and the community at large. It is an obvious fact that the ancestors were authoritarian during their lifetime. But with the coming of the missionaries and the planting of Christianity over Urhobo land, their roles changed or even seized to exist. The missionaries who had to work through the chiefs and others, forcefully convert their subjects. Some of the head

chiefs were known to have been tyrannical rulers who led morally unworthy lives. However, the Urhobo converted Christians have to transfer the worship of their ancestors from traditional ritual to remembrance service in church, through thanksgiving and praying for the souls of their departed loved ones. They also hold party by communing with the dead, communicating and fellowshiping with the living. Meanwhile, the ancestors are still referred to as “moral epitomes” in which case, they are custodians of public and traditional morality in their community. However, it is no longer true today that they are still virtuous. They are morally bankrupt as a result of the fact that some moral problems such as stealing, incest, sorcery, witchcraft, killings, maiming, disobedience, adultery, false oath, hatred and lots of others have assumed dangerous and unprecedented dimensions. These moral problems which supposed to attract sanctions by the ancestors are allowed to soar and remained unchecked. They are now being referred to the law court.

In point of fact, the ancestors are today blind to the endless challenge we face in the society. Looking at the role of ancestors, it is certain that much power has been given to them, as such we expect much from them. Today, the opposite is the case, because our lives are dependent on multifarious variables. These variables are both endogenous and exogenous in nature. It is endogenous in the sense that the problems we cause for ourselves, emanating from the family or head of the family cannot be handled by the ancestors. The fact is that the ancestors cannot provide for all our material well-being. Similarly, exogenous problems, emanating from bad leadership, harsh economic reforms, political uprisings, social crises, among others, cannot be solved by the ancestors. Even when the so-called living are caught in the intractable web of these problems, they go scot-free without sanction from the “moral paragon”.

In African religious belief, the ancestors are consulted through the oracle before any function is performed. Their roles are limited to their families and communities. Lately, human beings have taken over the position of the ancestors, they no longer consult the oracle so as to know the mind and choice of the ancestors concerning certain issues affecting the community. For instance, money is freely used in many communities to determine the next king or in obtaining

chieftaincy title, of which the kingmakers are supposed to speak the minds of ancestors. Where are the ancestors? If they are still the “living-dead”, it means they are crying for justice, reinstatement and restoration. One would be compelled to agree with Kofi Awoonor that:

The gods are crying, my father's gods are crying for a burial... for a final ritual... but they should build the fallen shrines have joined the dawn marchers singing their way towards Gethsemane...the gods cried, shedding clayey tears on calico; the drink offering had dried up in the harmattan and the fetish priest is dressing up for the Easter service. (Kofi. 2003:.312)

The foregoing reveals that the ancestors are handicapped, and men have taken over their position hence they are screaming for a burial consequent upon their abandonment. Gyekye posits that there is no real justification for unrelenting strictness to all features of the received culture and heritage. The ancestors do not expect their offering to make changes in their legacy for times change (Gyekye.1996:186). Judging from the magnitude and multifarious problems in the post-colonial period of the African society, the place of the ancestors cannot be justified.

Conclusion

Having extensively explored the Urhobo ancestral icons, their qualifications, functions, social and religious significances, coupled with their dilemma and Bruce Onbrakpeya rendition in two-dimensional forms, it is appropriate to maintain that the ancestors still occupy their hitherto pride of place. The current paradigms of the ancestors as well as their achievements indicate that they must be remembered, praised and celebrated, although, they cannot enjoy the same powerful position and influence they once enjoyed, they are still venerated in form of remembrance and memorial service It is contended that ancestor worship is fundamentally a form of idolatry and contrary to the teachings of the Bible and is therefore does not

articulate with Christian theology. The Urhobo Christians however had metamorphosed with their ancestor into the new faith and still call upon them in time of need and success. To this end, I disagreed with Kwame Gyekye views cited by Ofuafo on the roles of ancestors in contemporary African society when he asserts that:

...But we must not expect them to bestow favour on their descendants. The post-colonial problems of African clearly show that the ancestors cannot be helpful. The greatest reverence we, the descendants of the ancestors, can show to them is to let them rest in peace. (Ofuafo 2013: 99)

The faith in ancestors continued to be practised by the Urhobo as well as many African Christians. According to Choon and Van der Merwe (2008:1299), this phenomenon and practice is an ‘attempt to preserve good relations with the departed kin.’ The practice and the involvement in ancestral rituals should be seen as religiously motivated and continuation of the traditional Urhobo belief system. I wish to conclude with Mtetwa (1996:23) which further states that ‘the use of Western theological and anthropological categories in articulating African belief system and philosophies has to discontinue, precisely for their capacity to distort and confuse the people. Therefore, the ancestors should be made to perpetually rest in peace but not forgotten.

Note

Most of the information contained in this work were obtained from Bruce Onobrakpeya himself during my Ph.D field work and others were obtained from different citation by scholars. Bruce Obameyoma Onobrakpeya, 84, is a Nigerian print maker, painter and sculptor. At the Nigerian College of Art, Science and Technology, now the Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Onobrakpeya was, in the 1950s, trained in the western tradition of representational art. At the same time, he began to experiment with forms in relation to Nigerian folklore, myths and legends. Much of his work uses stylistic elements and compositions derived from traditional African sculpture and decorative arts.

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