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The Performances of Kaalu Igirigiri, an Ohafia Igbo Singer of Tales

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The Performances of Kaalu Igirigiri, an Ohafia Igbo Singer of Tales¹

Chukwuma Azuonye

1. Introduction

Among the numerous singers of heroic tales in the formerly warlike Igbo community of Ohafia in the Cross River area of Imo State in southeastern Nigeria, by far the most widely-acclaimed virtuoso in the 1970s was a peasant farmer with a mellow singing voice named Kaalu Igirigiri.² A member of the relatively isolated patriclan of Okon (close to the Cross River itself, in the extreme northeastern corner of Ohafia), Kaalu Igirigiri, who died in 1980 (probably in his early sixties), was, like his predecessors and contemporaries, a non-professional but specialist amateur; he was also a highly articulate connoisseur and critic whose views on the functions and aesthetic principles of the oral epic song as practiced by the Ohafia people seem to be truly representative of the tradition as a whole. This paper is a study of the compositions and performances of this distinguished oral artist. Based on recordings made in the field between 1971 and 1977, it focuses on the distinctive artistic qualities of Kaalu Igirigiri's compositions as seen in the light of traditional aesthetic principles enunciated in various tape-recorded interviews not only by Kaalu himself but also by rival singers and other well-known local connoisseurs. (For further details see Azuonye 1979, Chapter 9, and my forthcoming paper, Azuonye 1990a). The paper also compares the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri with those of his known predecessors, contemporaries, and one identified apprentice; it also considers the dynamics of the growth of his art over the period during which the recordings were made.

2. Kaalu Igirigiri: The Man and His Art

In my field interviews with him, Kaalu Igirigiri did not insist on the facts of his ancestry, parentage, birth, and personal upbringing as an important background to the understanding of his art. He is not one of those singers in the Ohafia bardic tradition who claim to be descended from a long line of master-singers; nor did he—like some others—e.g., Singer D—make any pretences to divine or other supernatural inspiration (see Azuonye 1979: 102-4). The only information we have, from him, about his ancestry is of the kind contained in the following signature in which he invokes his maternal and parternal forebears as belonging to a line of eminent priests:

This is Kaalu Igirigiri,
 Son of my great mother Ogbenyealu—
 Woman of the matriclan of Anyanwu Ezhe,³
 Woman that was the people's diviner,
 Woman of the patriclan of Ibina in Egbenyi Uka,
 Daughter of Ezhiukwu Obom,
 Woman of the Marshy Lands
 (No woman from the Marshy Lands ever goes to live with a friend)—
 Great father Kaalu Obasi of Nde Awa Ezhema was her elder brother;
 And when Agwunsi Obasi died,
 Tooti Obasi became her elder brother,
 Kaalu Obasi,
 He that made sacrifices to Njoku in the middle of the night;
 He was her elder brother,
 And was a high-priest,
 And was a man of the people.

In other recorded interviews about his personal life, Kaalu Igirigiri said little beyond this kind of sketchy genealogy. Rather, he focussed attention on what may be described as his “poetic ancestry,” a bond of genetic relationship of a traditional kind with various master-singers through which he emerged as an accomplished singer. Kaalu Igirigiri refers to the master-singers involved as *nde-m-munaa-abu* (my fathers-in-song).⁴ Among these are three men who are still recognized throughout Ohafia today as belonging to the pedigree of the most accomplished singers in the history of the people's oral epic art. These are: Oke Mbe of Asaga, Okonkwo Oke of Akaanu and Ibiam Nta of Okon. Kaalu Igirigiri does not go into specific details about the nature of his relationship with these men, but he gives a general account of a process of apprenticeship and training which is decidedly informal and inductive rather than formal and institutionalized as in some bardic traditions elsewhere in West Africa.⁵ But in spite of its informality, the training of the singer in the Ohafia Igbo epic tradition is one of the *sine qua non* conditions for general acceptability. According to Kaalu Igirigiri:

If you are a singer and people recognize the fact that your voice is sweet but know that you have not been trained by a person well-versed in the art of historical remembrance (*iku aka*), that is, a person who says what Ohafia people as a whole accept; if you simply lock up yourself in your house singing to please yourself, or even if you go out and sing with others, you will never be credited as singing with the voice of an experienced singer: you will never be able to sing what Ohafia people as a whole will accept. The truth is this: if you are a singer, if your voice is sweet, Ohafia people will tell you, "Go and meet Kaalu Igirigiri. He will teach you songs. Your voice is sweet." When you come to me, I will tell you all those stories which the old masters told me. If you sing these stories as told, Ohafia people as a whole will accept: women will accept, men will accept, everyone. . . . But if you stay in your house singing to please yourself, without any course of training under a master-singer, your songs can never be sweet; you will never be able to sing properly. (Interview, March 1976)⁶

It would appear from the showing of Kaalu Igirigiri in various performances that the essential legacy which training under a master-singer vouchsafes the young practitioner is confidence and authority. Throughout contact with the master, the young practitioner acquires the *mana* by which the community at large was beholden to the master, submitting to the spell of his narrations as if he were an unerring repository of the history and wisdom of the clan. But apart from this more or less external mantle of authority, the apprentice-singer acquires from the master certain essential requirements of the oral epic art, including the aesthetic principles of composition in the oral performance, as well as the plots of the major heroic tales which occur in the repertoires of practically all known singers⁷ and the system of epithet and other formulas which constitute the linguistic core and the mainstay of the structure of the songs. (For a detailed discussion of the traditional and other formulas in the songs, see Azuonye 1979, Chapter 6.)

Unfortunately, we are not in possession of any extant recordings of the compositions of two of Kaalu Igirigiri's known fathers-in-song (Oke Mbe of Asaga and Ibiam Nta of Okon); but one version of the Epic of Nne Mgbaafo (see Appendix 2, Tale No. 7) by his third father-in-song (Okonkwo Oke of Akaanu) has survived in a recording made in 1966 for a Radio Nigeria broadcast from Enugu.⁸ A comparison of this recording with versions of the same tale by Kaalu Igirigiri (see, for example, Appendix 1A) reveals much about the nature of the development of Kaalu's art over the years. One general inference we can make from such a comparison is that what the apprentice learns from his master is not the *lexis* (by which I mean the narrative text comprising a certain unique combination of words and other structural features) but the *praxis* of the oral epic art (by which I mean the conventions and traditional style of the genre). Okonkwo Oke's *Nne Mgbaafo*—as will be seen from a comparison of the following extract with the text given in Appendix 1A below—is similar to Kaalu Igirigiri's version in its clarity of diction and

structure as well as in the directness of its presentation of the heroine and her actions:

A certain woman was called Nne Mgbaafo.
 She was of Aru-Oke-Igbo.⁹
 She was of the matriclan of Okwuru-Egbu-Enyi.
 That Nne Mgbaafo, she behaved very much like a man.
 Her husband had died at Aro-Oke-Igbo.
 And when Nne Mgbaafo finished mourning her husband—
 When she finished mourning her husband, finished mourning her husband,
 She came out to the Ncheghe Ibom market—
 She came out to the Ncheghe Ibom market, bought a matchet and
 sheathed it,
 And she bought a war cap and put it on,
 And she took some money and bought a dane-gun,
 Put a sling on it
 Charged the dane-gun, and took her matchet, sharpened and caught it
 in the air,
 And she said she was going to look for a husband. . . .

As has been observed above, the praxis of this piece bears a very close resemblance to that of Kaalu Igirigiri's version, but its lexis and the vocal presentation are remarkably different. There are even more glaring differences in the content of the two versions, especially in the conception of the heroine and her husband's fate. In Okonkwo Oke's versions, Nne Mgbaafo is presented as a woman who behaves very much like a man. After the death of her first husband, in her native community of Arochukwu, she sets out fully armed in the habits of a male warrior to go search for another husband. She searches in a number of localities, but fails to find a suitable husband in any of them. At last, she arrives at Nde-Ana-m-Ele-m-Ulu-Uma where she meets and marries a man named Uduma. Uduma has not yet *fulfilled* his manhood by winning a human head in battle as required by the heroic ethos of his age. But anxious to fend off the shame of living with a man whose *age-mates* would despise as a dishonorable coward (*onye-ujo*),¹⁰ Nne Mgbaafo cooks a special meal for her husband and urges him to go to a war that had just broken out in Ibibioland. Uduma goes but is slain in a battle. When the news of his death reaches Nne Mgbaafo, she immediately approaches the people of Ama Achara, the patriclan that took the lead in the battle, and they provide her with escorts to the battle-ground where she discovers the beheaded body of her husband amid a heap of slain warriors. She dutifully buries the corpse under a tree and sacrifices a goat on the grave. Three market-weeks after returning from this expedition, Nne Mgbaafo assails, overpowers, and chops off the head of a young man whom she finds wandering alone at Usukpam. She then buries his body in her husband's grave as a fitting sacrifice "to wash his right hand and his left."

Needless to say, this is probably one of the versions of the story to which Kaalu Igirigiri was exposed in the course of his training. He no doubt heard

many other versions as well, and there is no reason why they may not have varied in structure and even content just as the versions in his current repertoire do (see Azuonye 1983). But as an accomplished singer of tales, Kaalu Igirigiri does not repeat the tales received from his fathers-in-song in a parrot-like fashion. He renews and extends the tradition by recreating the old tales through the introduction of new episodes, themes and other elements of plot and style. Indeed, one of the traditional aesthetic principles of the Ohafia epic song positively encourages and even requires such variations (see section 3 below). This feature of the oral performance is as manifest in the song-repertoires of other contemporary singers as in that of Kaalu Igirigiri. But the variations notwithstanding, variant versions of the same tale by the same singer, irrespective of their place and occasion of performance, do exhibit a certain degree of consistency in their essential details. In Kaalu Igirigiri's versions of Nne Mgbaafo, the heroine is consistently represented as a woman of the matriclan of Eleghe Ofoka, born in the patriclan of Asaga (praise-named 'Nde-Awa-Ezhema-Elechi), and married to a man called Ndukwe Emea who goes to battle in Ibibioland on his own volition despite the womanish pleas of his wife that he should not go lest he be killed by the inveterate Ibibio enemy. In the battle, Ndukwe is captured and held prisoner but is released and delivered to Nne Mgbaafo when she boldly confronts the enemy and demands death or the release of her husband. In the end, Nne Mgbaafo returns safely home with Ndukwe Emea.

It seems quite clear from the enormity of the thematic differences between Kaalu Igirigiri's version and that of his father-in-song, Okonkwo Oke, that, their similarity of style notwithstanding, the sources are different. In my interviews with Kaalu Igirigiri, he persistently evaded all attempts to identify his sources, either because, like Christopher Okigbo in his *Limits* (1962),¹¹ his versions have been synthesized from so many different sources that it is difficult to name them precisely, or because he regards his sources as a secret of his art. In a situation where the singer seems to have listened to so many different versions from various fathers-in-song, he may have adopted one father's manner of telling the tale, or he may have created his own tale by the conflation of elements taken from the father's tales and those borrowed from other singers.

The most likely single source for Kaalu Igirigiri's Nne Mgbaafo is Ogboo Ogwo¹² of Akaanu, a veteran singer who is acknowledged as a father-in-song by two of Kaalu's leading contemporaries and rivals (Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia and Njoku Mmaaju of Uduma Awoke). However, this speculation is based on rather unreliable evidence, namely a claim in testimonies recorded by Ogbaa Kaalu and Njoku Mmaaju that their versions of Nne Mgbaafo (strikingly similar in content to those of Kaalu Igirigiri) are exactly as received from the master. Ohafia singers of tales are prone to make exaggerated claims in their testimonies, and it is not unlikely that when they say that their versions are

exactly as received from their master, they are merely referring to what I have elsewhere (Azuonye 1983) described as the “heroic essence” of the tale, i.e., the sum of what Bowra (1966: 454) calls the “limiting factors” to the freedom of the oral epic performer to vary his narrative, factors which include “the personality of the hero,” the overall “emotional effect” of his representation, and “the main point of the narrative,” which in the oral performance is usually established by means of an irreducible minimum of particularized and indispensable themes and formulas constant in all versions of the tale irrespective of the singer, the occasion, and the place of performance (see also Section 4 below). The case for a single source for the tales sung by any singer in Ohafia should not be pressed too far even if we grant the possibility. The incontestable evidence before us shows that the training of the Ohafia singer is essentially a process of prolonged exposure to a wide variety of rich and alternative epic materials out of which he forms the tales in his repertoire and their versions by the rejection of some in favor of others, by selective borrowing from masters and contemporaries, and by the conflation of themes, episodes, and tale-types.¹³ The Ohafia singer of tales is not a passive traditor but a creative artist equipped by his training and practice to make a distinctive and original contribution to the living epic tradition. He helps to refine and vitalize the tradition by the constant remoulding of it within a set of well-defined traditional aesthetic principles.

The traditional aesthetic principles of the Ohafia Igbo oral epic song, of which Kaalu Igirigiri is one of the leading exponents, cover a wide ground, but they focus mainly on the necessity for variety and change in the tale-repertoires of individual singers and in their performance strategies, on the values of clarity in the art of composition in the oral performance, on the responsibility of every singer to maintain the heroic essence of the tales (i.e., the “truth” and “reality” of the heroic ethos of the community) and their dynamic socio-psychological functions. I have elsewhere discussed these four principles at length quoting extensively from the recorded testimonies of various singers and local connoisseurs (Azuonye 1979, 349-383 and 1990a), but it may be useful at this stage to outline them briefly.

The first of the four principles may be described as the principle of *functionality*. By this principle, the Ohafia people evaluate the songs purely in terms of their manifest effects on culture and society and on the behavior of individual members of the society. Thus, on one level, this principle refers merely to the practical utility of the songs, especially when performed in association with the well-known dramatic war dance of the people and its martial musical accompaniment as part of the integrated heroic musical whole (*iri-aha*) on various ritual and social occasions (see Azuonye 1979: 65-67). On another level, it refers to the documentary and effective roles of the songs: (a) as a record of the lives and careers of heroic ancestors and of various landmarks in the history of the clan, and (b) as a source of enlightenment and edification,

in response to which contemporary generations draw the inspiration to rise up to the challenges of their own age in the same way as their ancestors are believed to have risen up to the challenges of their own more difficult times: the heroic age.

The second principle is related to the first. This may be described as the principle of *authenticity*. In order to effectively fulfill the dynamic socio-psychological functions assigned to them by tradition, it is important that the content of the songs should be in conformity with the cherished values and beliefs of the society. Thus, various informants in their testimonies describe what they expect to find in the songs as *ezhiokwu* (truth) or *ife mee eme* (what actually happened, i.e., reality). But though there is frequent insistence in these testimonies on *ife mee eme mgbe ichin* (what actually happened in the days of the ancestors), the expectation of most informants is not so much that the songs should be informed by the literal facts of history as that they should reaffirm the traditional ethical and moral values of the heroic society and the network of relationships between individuals and their clans and among clans themselves in the traditional body politic.

The third principle of the songs may be described as the principle of *clarity*. As will be seen in Sections 3 and 4 below, this is perhaps the most important principle so far as the orality of the songs is concerned. Best expressed by the phrase *imezikwa ka o doo anya nke oma* (making sure that what is said is clearly perceptible), this principle applies to various facets of the form, content, language, and vocalization of the songs as realized in the oral performance. It pays particular attention to such indispensable requirements of oral art as audibility and the proper resonance and modulation of voice-pitch. Thus Kaalu Igrigiri, for example, is often rated more highly than his peers because *olu ya di utuo* (his voice is sweet) and *o na-akapusa ife anu anu a nti* (He speaks in such a way that what he says is clearly audible).

The last but by no means the least important of the four principles may be described as the principle of *creative variation*. In invoking this principle, many informants use the word *mgbanwo* (change or variation) and various images of growth (*ùto*) to stress the need for singers to build up in the course of their artistic careers large and varied repertoires of tales (including the traditional heroic tales and new tales of their own making) and to effect pleasing and instructive variations in their renderings of each tale on various occasions of performance.

In what follows, the distinctive artistic qualities of the songs of Kaalu Igrigiri and their actual performances will be discussed both in themselves as they really are and by comparison to the songs and performances of other singers—on the basis of these four principles. It is hoped that the discussion will reveal the warmth and strength of Kaalu's artistic personality, his historical sense, his responsiveness to criticism and his capacity for self-improvement,

qualities which are the basis of his fame throughout Ohafia and even beyond as one of the most outstanding singers of tales in recent times.

3. Variety and Change in Kaalu Igirigiri's Repertoire of Tales

One of the recurrent themes in the recorded testimonies of Kaalu Igirigiri is the variety and change manifest in his personal repertoire of songs:

I make many changes when I sing my songs. I even make changes in the traditional choric songs (abu-okwukwe). But more importantly, I can easily switch from the old heroic songs—the ones inherited from the ancients—to new songs about the events of today. I can sing newly created songs, those which nobody in Ohafia has ever heard before. (Interview, March 1976)

The first part of this testimony refers to the changes in the theme and structure which occur in variant versions of the same tale presented on the same or on different occasions while the second refers to the variety and range of genres of heroic song in his repertoire. As can be gleaned from Appendix II below, the variety and range of tales in Kaalu Igirigiri's repertoire is very high indeed: 21 out of 32 tales collected thus far are distinct, an impressive sixty-three percent, which is far in excess of the range demonstrated by five other singers whose compositions have also been recorded (see Azuonye 1990a). Furthermore, he is the only one of the six singers whose compositions include at least one tale from each of the major thematic categories into which the 32 tales may be grouped. The details are as follows:

2 out of 2 creation myths (Appendix II, Nos 1-2);
2 out of 2 migration legends (Appendix II, Nos 3-4);
11 out of 20 heroic legends (Appendix II, Nos 5-15);
5 out of 8 allegorical and fabular tales (Appendix II, Nos 16-20);
1 out of 1 contemporary historical account (Appendix II, No. 21).

The statistical evidence given here in support of Kaalu Igirigiri's reputation throughout Ohafia as the most versatile singer of recent times is no doubt open to question on the grounds that I credit him "with greater variety of repertoire than the other singers because I have spent more time with him" in the field.¹⁴ It is true that I have spent more time with Kaalu Igirigiri than with four of the other five singers whose compositions and performances I recorded in the field; but this is precisely because of the richness and variety which I found in Kaalu's repertoire after the first three recording sessions. No other singer displayed a similar range after the same number of recording sessions, and none has been able to render as many as the 22 tales that I recorded at one sitting from Kaalu Igirigiri in July 1977. Some of these less versatile singers may, in the future, build up repertoires comparable in range to that of Kaalu Igirigiri, but at present

their repertoires are not only quantitatively inferior; they also lack the rich thematic variety that Kaalu Igirigiri's repertoire exhibits.¹⁵

But whatever may be the range of an individual singer's tale-repertoire, the praxis of the Ohafia Igbo oral epic performance allows for dynamic variation in mode and tenor—a variation that satisfies an important facet of the traditional aesthetic principle of creative variation inasmuch as such variations contribute to the overall emotional effect of the tales themselves. As Singer C (Egwu Kaalu of Asaga) says:

In general, I begin my performances by eulogizing my hosts, after which I proceed to tell them about the lives of their ancestors. (Interview, March 1976)

This general convention is clearly evident in the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri. After the initial eulogies, which in the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri may include signatures of the kind quoted in section 2 above as well as the praises of the musicians who supply the instrumental accompaniment and of the leading heroes in the traditional pantheon, Kaalu Igirigiri usually proceeds to the narratives themselves, interspersing them with traditional battle songs and other sequences of heroic invocation. Oscillating among the singing, the chanting, the reciting and the speaking modes of vocalization, the resultant interplay of song, invocation, and narrative resembles an oratorio—drama with music and voices but without scenery and action. While the narratives and the invocations are solo recitatives or chants, the battle songs are lyrical choruses in which members of the audience join. The interplay of song, invocation, and narrative in Kaalu Igirigiri's performance is similar to that found in the performances of all other singers so far, except that of Singer F (Njoku Mmaaju of Uduma Awoke) in the narrative parts of whose performances there is an additional element—the chorus-man (Onye-nkwechi). As I have pointed out elsewhere (Azuonye 1979), the chorus-man is a kind of co-vocalist who sits beside the main-singer repeating a series of words and praises which, though figurative and often witty in themselves, are in no clearly discernable way related to the meaning of the narratives. No clear explanation has so far been offered either by the singer or by his critics with regard to the exact function of the chorus-man in his performances, but any suggestion that the chorus-man's words may be distracting—as indeed they would sound to someone from outside the Ohafia oral culture—is firmly denied. It may well be that Ohafia audiences have developed, through cultural conditioning, an inner ear that enables them to hear and enjoy the undercurrents of the words of the chorus-man while at the same time hearing and enjoying the main currents of the lead-singer's performance. On the other hand, it may be that the listeners are not really interested in the words at all but in the polyphony created by the combination of the chorus-man's singing and that of the lead-singer. But there is one aspect of the chorus-man's performance that even

the bemused outsider can enjoy, if he has an ear for the Ohafia dialect of Igbo. This occurs when there is a major pause in the sequence of story-telling—as is often the case—and the voice of the chorus-man surfaces with its witticism and humor to be enjoyed by itself as an item in a mixed program of verbal artistry.

Whether or not the singer employs the services of a chorus-man, he will normally make use in his performances of four distinct voices¹⁶ recognized by the hearers as one of the chief means for highlighting specific types of themes. Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia (Singer D) refers to those voices when he criticizes one of Kaalu Igirigiri's known sons-in-song, Echeme Ugwu of Ebem (Singer E), for singing in a monotonously harsh voice (*Olu ya ada ikike ikike*, "His voice sounds too monotonously harsh"). The principle of creative variation demands among other virtues that the singer's voice should be sufficiently flexible to simulate the varied moods of the tales.

The basic voice is the narrative voice, generally in the reciting mode, and it is the voice that carries the momentum of the tale. It is the voice of the omniscient narrator speaking of a third person (the hero) without addressing the audience directly. See, for example, the extract from Okonkwo Oke's *Nne Mgbaafo* in section 1 above and the non-indented portions of the texts in Appendix I below.

The narrative voice is interspersed by the lyric, the invocative and the oratorical voices. The first of these—the lyric voice—is usually in the singing mode and functions in the narratives as a medium for the representation of the emotional states of various characters. One of Kaalu Igirigiri's rivals, Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia (Singer D), has in one of his usually detractive criticisms of Kaalu accused him of lacking the virtuosity to exploit the affective value of lyric voice at points of intense emotional distress in his narratives. This virtue, Ogbaa Kaalu claims for himself:

There are many things which we spell out clearly by name which Kaalu Igirigiri does not put into his songs. Thus he fails to represent things as they really are. He cuts everything up into small unrelated bits. But, when we, on our part, sing, we explain to you quite clearly how everything happened, from the beginning to the end. . . . He cuts up everything into small bits. . . . There is a person whose story he tells—I mean Amoogu, the person that fired the gun with which the short-armed-one of Aliike was killed (see Appendix II, No. 3). If you are told how this really happened, from its beginning to the end, tears will roll down from your eyes. But he compresses it far too much. The pathetic cry of Amoogu's mother, he did not cry it properly. . . . But when we, on our part sing it, we put in the lament of that woman when her son failed to return. There is a way in which one can simulate that lament and tears will roll down from your eyes. (Interview, March 1976)

This is a response to versions B2 and B3 of the Epic of Amoogu (Appendix II, No. 8) not to the version (B1) presented in Appendix I below, a version in

which the lyric voice is clearly evident in the indented portions of the text (lines 147-157). But even so, the criticism is manifestly unfair. In versions B2 and B3 of *Amoogu*, as well as in three other versions (B4, B5, and B6) of the tale, Kaalu Igirigiri does indeed make effective use of the elegiac form of the lyric voice (*akwa*) to dramatize the grief of *Amoogu*'s mother when the news of his assassination at the hands of jealous comrades-in-arms reaches her.

Apart from the elegiac form of the lyric voice, Kaalu Igirigiri in his performances also makes effective use of two other forms, the apostrophic form (*nkpoku*) in which an impassioned appeal is addressed to the hero as if he were standing directly before the narrator, and the rhapsodic form (*abu-obi-utuo*) in which the successful and overjoyed hero expresses his sense of total well-being and happiness with himself and with the world. An example of the apostrophic form of the lyric voice will be found in lines 93-103 of the version of *Amoogu* in Appendix II below. Here, a situation of intense desperation arises and the omniscient narrator, as it were, "jumps the gun," apostrophizing the yet undiscovered hero to come forward and fulfil his destined messianic role. An example of the rhapsodic form occurs at the end of the version of *Nne Mgbaafo* in Appendix IA.

The third voice of the narratives is the invocative voice. This is the voice of the traditional praise-chanter addressing a second person in an attitude of veneration. Passages in which this occurs are generally in the form of hero-lists with associative epithets linking the heroes presented with particular ancestors and clans. The version of *Amoogu* in Appendix IB below contains two variants of this form. The first (lines 1-9) identifies the hero and links him with a number of other illustrious ancestral heroes, while the second (lines 38-63) enumerates the leading warriors of the clan in a situation of crisis leading up to the climax of the unfolding drama. The implications of these and similar hero-lists in the representation of heroic reality and in enhancing the emotional impact of the narratives on the hearers will be further discussed in sections 4 and 5 below.

The fourth voice of the narratives is the oratorical voice of the singer as teacher, moralist, explainer, and revealer of secrets. Passages featuring this voice generally appear on the surface to be in the speaking mode, but this is largely due to their conversational tone and the fact that in them the singer addresses his hearers directly in his own personal voice rather than in the fictional voices of the other types of passages. Kaalu Igirigiri makes little use of the oratorical voice in the main body of his narratives; in his compositions, this voice is almost always confined to introductory statements which do not form an integral part of the tale or to concluding remarks in which the moral of the tale is drawn. See, for example, lines 194-196 of *Amoogu BI* (Appendix IB).

Apart from its role as a device for delineating aspects of the themes of the narratives, the interplay of emotion-toned rhetorical voices in the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri and other Ohafia singers is one of the features of their

art which their listeners enjoy for its own sake much as the interplay of modes is enjoyed for its own sake in the classical European oratorio. Local connoisseurs in Ohafia are not always specific about this in their testimonies, but quite often, when pressed to account for their high-rating of Kaalu Igirigiri, they refer to the variety of voices which he is capable of assuming with such an inimitable virtuosity in his performances.

Let us now proceed to examine the internal patterns of variations which occur in the individual singer's renderings of particular tales on different occasions as exemplified by the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri. A comparative examination of the available versions of any tale in the repertoire of Kaalu Igirigiri will show that such variations are not just a matter of language and structure—which is to be expected in view of the fact that there is no single correct version of any tale and thus no memorization of texts in any kind of fixed form. The variations often affect content, sometimes quite drastically. The events which make up a story might be varied, and so too might be the scenes of action, the characters involved, and their doings and utterances. To return to the epic of Nne Mgbaafo, a tale already dealt with briefly above (section 2), we find the following thematic variations in the five versions available to us: B1, B2, B3, B4, and B5. First, in the two earliest versions (B1 and B2) which are otherwise almost identical, there are a number of significant variations in some of the key details. In B1, the battle is set at a place called Ikbe Mmaku (in Igbo territory), while in B2 it is set at a place called Nnong (in Ibibio land). Ikbe Mmaku is reintroduced in the later versions—B3, B4, and B5—not as enemy territory but as a friendly Igbo territory where the heroine is able to stop over and secure armed escorts for her perilous adventure into Nnong Ibibio land. How are we to account for these significant changes in the location of the key event in the tale? Are we to regard them as errors and inconsistencies of the kind to which oral performers all over the world are well-known to be prone, or are we to admit them as evidence of purposive change leading towards greater refinement and authenticity?

It is of course quite possible, as I have suggested elsewhere (Azuonye 1983), that the location of the battle in Igbo territory (Ikbe Mmaku), in version B1, might be an error of performance which the singer has been able to correct in version B2 by relocating the event in a more likely venue, the territory of the traditional enemy of the Ohafia, the Ibibio. But what about the reintroduction of Igbe Mmaku as the heroine's last stopover before arriving at the enemy Ibibio camp, a detail lacking in versions B1 and B2 alike? It is quite possible that this detail may have been borrowed from versions of the Nne Mgbaafo legend by rival singers. It occurs, for instance, in one version recorded in 1977 from Njoku Mmaju of Uduma Awoke (Singer F). But there is also the probability that it has been added in response to criticism such as that by Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia (Singer D). Besides, Kaalu Igirigiri's portrayal of Nne Mgbaafo gains in realism by this addition: "The picture of the heroine escorted by four

(or eight) armed men to her destination is much more credible than the more sensational picture of her marching alone into the enemy territory. This added realism does not run counter to the heroic essence of the Nne Mgbaafo legend: it merely eliminates extreme sensationalism without obliterating the heroic image of Nne Mgbaafo as a fearless woman who boldly confronts the inveterate Ibibio enemy demanding death or the restoration of her spouse" (Azuonye 1983).

The first observation that may be made on the value of the thematic changes in variant versions of the songs of Kaalu Igirigiri is that they are editorial means of correcting past performance errors and of creating more refined versions to satisfy the traditional aesthetic principle of authenticity, a principle which demands, among other things, "truthfulness" and "reality" in the portraiture of the hero. Secondly, thematic variations enable the singer to draw different morals or to pursue different interpretations of the significance of the hero's life on different occasions of performance, especially in response to the demands created by the ethnic composition of the audience. Thirdly and most importantly, thematic changes serve the purposes of clarity.

Thematic changes of the kind that make for enhanced clarity in the performance of the Ohafia singers involve either the deletion and compression of themes or the addition and expansion of themes. In response to the jibes of some of his critics, Kaalu Igirigiri, before his death in 1980 opted for the pursuit of clarity through the addition and expansion of his basic themes. As a consequence, he ceased to compose short, highly compressed, ballad-like lays of the kind I recorded in 1971 and 1972 (see Appendix 1A). In apparent response to the criticism that he cuts up everything into small unrelated bits and that "he does not seem to have the ability to sing in such a way that it will be quite clear to you . . . from what he actually puts into the songs" where the beginning and the end of the tales fall, Kaalu Igirigiri, in his last recorded compositions (1977), exhibited a tendency toward elaboration, even though he dismissed Ogbaa Kaalu's comments, when they were played back to him in 1976, as the rantings of a jealous rival. However, the new tendency in the style of Kaalu Igirigiri offends the sensibilities of singer-critics like Egwu Kaalu of Asaga (Singer C), for whom the so-called "essential details" added to the narratives are "extraneous" and detract from the realistic style of historical song:

He (Kaaluu Igirigiri) is a better singer than myself. He is a better singer than myself. But you must understand that what we are dealing with is 'history.' The thing about 'history' is that in recounting it, you must do so in a straightforward manner. The problem with these people (Kaaluu Igirigiri and Echeme Ugwu) is that when they sing, they bring in extraneous elements which do not contribute to this straightforward manner of representing reality. (Interview, March 1976)

It is however less in the thematic than in the structural-linguistic variations in the versions of the Ohafia Igbo epic tales that the pleasure of

novelty which they convey emanates. Kaalu Igirigiri's narrative is generally herocentric (see Kunene 1971 and Azuonye 1979: 293) in structure, with all actions, situations, and locations organized in such a way as to reveal the character of the hero. The hero may be revealed by direct-pointing at the beginning of the tale (as in the examples presented in Appendix I below) or by climactic foregrounding, when a series of events are presented in such a way as to build up to a climax at which point the hero emerges to save the situation. Within these two basic traditional narration schemata (described in detail in Azuonye 1979: 291-297), Kaalu Igirigiri indulges in variations which ensure that, even if he is called upon to render the same tale two or more times on the same spot within a short period, he will render it differently each time. Thus, in 1972, two versions of Amoogu were recorded on the same spot (Pastor Maduekwe's compound in Asaga)¹⁷ within a space of one hour. In these performances, Kaalu Igirigiri exploited variants of the two basic narration schemata: the direct pointing schema in version B2 and the schema involving climactic foregrounding in version B3. Similarly, four other versions of the same tale recorded before and after these two versions exhibit structural variations involving one variant or the other of the two basic schemata as well as variations on the epithet and other formulas which constitute the mainstay of the language of the songs.

"Logistics" (which for Christopher Okigbo "is what poetry is"—see his *Labyrinths* 1971: 3), is indeed a fitting metaphor to describe the performance strategy of Kaalu Igirigiri. In its relation to strategy and tactics in the art of war, logistics is the "art of so moving and disposing troops or ships or aircraft as to impose on the enemy the place and time and conditions for fighting preferred by oneself."¹⁸ In performances witnessed and recorded in the field, Kaalu Igirigiri has mastered the art of moving and disposing the traditional materials of his compositions in such a way as to impose on his audiences the responses that are preferred by himself. The effect of this mastery can be observed in various performances in the emotions of pleasure writ large on the faces, and in the asides, of his hearers. Of course, few listeners can fail to applaud a singer who offers so much variety and so rich a repertoire as that commanded by Kaalu Igirigiri. Between 1971 and 1977, his heroic epic fare grew from 5 tales (recorded in 1971) to 22 tales (recorded in a single performance in 1977). With such a rich and varied repertoire, Kaalu Igirigiri can proceed for a long time in any performance without ever repeating himself. Thus, we are told by Ukaoha Agwunsi of Okon (one of his musical accompanists):

Once he has finished singing about any particular hero, he will not mention that hero again in the same performance. Other tales then will be told, all in a completely different voice. (Interview, March 1976)

The trouble with other singers, says Ukaoha Agwunsi, is that they are either too parochial or too narrow in the range of their tale-repertoires. One such

singer is Echeme Ugwu of Ebem (Singer D), a son-in-song of Kaalu Igirigiri himself:

He only eulogizes his kinsmen since he knows nothing about heroes that lived in all other clans. He is still a mere apprentice (Interview, March 1976).

By contrast, Kaalu Igirigiri is the matchless virtuoso who can range over even the whole of Nigeria. Says Kaalu Ikpo of Okon:

He can range over the whole of Nigeria, and when he sings, he will make sure that he calls this person, calls that person and calls that other person. He does not stick to one person. (Interview, March 1976)

One of Kaalu Igirigiri's musical accompanists, Kaalu Ikpo is probably referring to *Ogu Mmekota Naijiria* ('The War of Nigerian Unity'), a new addition to the Ohafia heroic corpus often cited by my informants in the field as evidence of Kaalu's originality (see Azuonye 1986b). Here are the opening lines of this verse chronicle:

The time when Nigeria was one
When Nigeria was one
We had our armed forces
We had them together
We did not have them separately
That was when Okpara was in power
That was when Awolowo was in power
And a host of others
In the course of their governance, all of them,
Zik said to them:
"Why is it that I do not wield sovereign power?
My present post is so very low!
Was I not the one that brought nationhood from England and gave to you
Before you knew what it meant?"
In the course of time
He invited the armed forces
And resigned that post of his to them
They (the armed forces) summoned the Sardauna of Sokoto
"Will you not also resign your post?"
But he said he would not
That his father was a ruler, his mother was a ruler
And so they killed him. . . .

In a fairly long list of villains and heroes that follows, other northern Nigerian leaders display the same kind of bigotry and are killed while all southern (mainly Igbo) leaders, including the late Professor Kaalu Ezera of Asaga Ohafia, prove to be more judicious and are spared. Tendentious and often chauvinistic in stating the Igbo case in the Nigerian civil war as well as Ohafia's local pride as one of the few areas of Igbo land not devastated by the war, Kaalu Igirigiri's *Ogu Mmekota Naijiria* is essentially an artistic transmutation of the mode of

the oral epic song into a journalistic medium for the expression of ethnic sentiments in the separatist politics of the day.

4. Clarity and Essence in the Tales of Kaalu Igirigiri

In spite of the variations clearly manifest in different versions of his tales as rendered on the same or different occasions, Kaalu Igirigiri insists in an interview that there is no difference between any version and another:

I don't sing my songs at Okon in a way different from that in which I sing them at Ebem. The thing I sing at Okon is what I sing at Asaga. It is what I sing at Ebem. . . . That is why Ohafia people all agree that I am the best of all their singers. (Interview, March 1976)

In a similar vein, Egwu Kaalu of Asaga (Singer C) declares:

Nothing extraneous is added to the songs (i.e. in different performances). By that I mean that it is exactly what I sang in 1972 that I will sing today (1977). (Interview, July 1977)

There is always in the minds of singers of tales and their hearers in practically all epic traditions an impression of something that remains stable in spite of all thematic and structural changes—something that transcends the lexis of the oral performance—which accounts for assertions such as the above, or Kaalu Igirigiri's retort (*O kwahu ife olu ohu*, "It is exactly the same thing") when I drew his attention in the field to some serious inconsistencies and even outright contradictions in variant versions of one of his tales. The attempt to understand this stable element has, over the years, been one of the major concerns of scholarship in the field of oral performance (see, for example, Bowra 1966: 454; Finnegan 1977: 76-83; Innes 1973 and 1974; Lord 1968: 26-30; Nagler 1974: 199; and Okpewho 1979: 160). I have in a recent study (Azuonye 1983) described this stable element as manifested in the Ohafia Igbo oral epics as the "heroic essence" of each tale:

In every performance, the *heroic essence* is conveyed by a unique selection and combination of an optimum range of formulas and themes from the traditional repertoire which best define the hero of the tale. Once this optimum selection of formulas and themes is present in any version of a tale, the audience will be satisfied that there has been no deviation from the legend and that the tale they have heard that day is the same one which they may have heard on several occasions in the past, irrespective of who the singer may be, of any changes in language or structure, and of the presence or absence of various elaborative or incidental themes and motifs in the version. (Azuonye 1983: 335-336)

A comparison of seven versions of Nne Mgbaafo by four different singers (four of which are by Kaalu Igirigiri) revealed a total of 54 different themes in all

the versions taken together. But only 11 of those were found to be common to all the seven versions. These themes

constitute the optimum selection of particularized themes needed to present the heroic essence of the legend of Nne Mgbaafo . . . so long as this optimum selection of essential themes is present in any version of the epic . . . it is bound to register the same impression on the minds of the listeners. . . . (Azuonye 1983: 336)

Despite the detractive criticism of his rivals, Kaalu Igirigiri has shown himself in his recorded compositions to be the master of the logistics of presenting the heroic essence of his tales with utmost clarity. He does so not only by strict adherence to the irreducible minimum of essential and particularized themes which best define the hero but also quite often by concentrating on certain major themes such as the trial of heroes in Amoogu BI (Appendix IB: lines 38-120). This stylized scene in which a long list of established heroes try and fail in turn to produce the potent weapon needed to destroy their great adversary—the Aliike dwarf—is the focal interest of all of Kaalu Igirigiri's version of the Amoogu legend because it embodies the heroic essence of the tale, revealing the hero as the unknown warrior who at a desperate moment saves the face of his people by accomplishing a task which no one else could accomplish. The theme, developed by the technique of climactic hero-enumeration (incorporating the praises of the heroes themselves and of their clans) is one of the features of style inherited by the Ohafia oral epic songs from the ritual invocations which with the traditional battle songs of the heroic age constitute their principal precursors (see Azuonye 1979: Chapter 2). Kaalu Igirigiri is one of the modern singers of tales in Ohafia who has recognized and effectively exploited the possibilities of developing similar themes for other compositions by the technique of climactic hero-enumeration (see, for example, *Ogu Mmekota Naijiria*, page 31 above).

By their strict adherence to the heroic essence, Kaalu Igirigiri's compositions—be they compressed or elaborate—represent models of that clarity of form which Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia (Singer D) and Egwu Kaalu of Asaga (Singer C) have both described by the same phrase, *ikowakwahu zhia isi ruo ali* (clearly explaining everything from the beginning to the end); they also reflect what Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike have described as the efficiency of “structure and logistics” which is so highly “valued in orature, for it takes one through the climax without tedious or unnecessary diversions” (1980: 247). This clarity of narrative form is evident in the texts presented below in Appendix 1, and is matched in the internal dynamics of the narratives by a clarity of structure arising mainly from stylistic repetition and parallelism.¹⁹

There are probably three main types of repetition in the compositions of Kaalu Igirigiri, namely formulaic, lyrical, and mimetic repetition. Formulaic repetition is the kind of repetition which focuses attention on the hero or the

subject matter of the tale at the beginning of the tale (e.g., lines 2-3 of *Amoogu B1*: Appendix 1B) or which in the course of the narration restates a recurrent theme, e.g., in cases of climactic hero-enumeration (*Amoogu B1*: 36-120), the lines which focus on the problem before the heroes enumerated. Lyrical repetition is of the kind found in the song-passages (see Appendix 1: 96-103) that are used to convey emotional states in the tales. For example, when Nne Mgbafo arrives at the enemy Ibibio camp and demands to see her husband, the flabbergasted enemy bring Ndukwe Emea out of the prison and question him. The insistent and excited tone of this questioning is reflected in the repetition of the same line (Appendix 1A: lines 34-35). Finally, mimetic repetition dramatically re-echoes the intensity or duration of an action, as in lines 116-122 of *Amoogu B1* (Appendix 1B), or in the climactic hero-lists.

Parallelism—semantic or structural—adds variety and even complexity to the basic roles of repetition through the serial or paradigmatic patterning of lines using identical or completely different forms to express the same meanings, or lines possessing the same or identical grammatical or phonological structures but expressing different meanings. Structural parallelism is extensive in the narratives and its grammatical forms are self-evident especially in the noun-adjective collocations with which the various hero-lists are replete. Much more closely bound up with the singers' obsession with clarity of expression are the equally numerous cases of semantic parallelism. There are cases of (a) synonymous parallelism, involving the identity of meaning between parallel lines, (b) antithetical parallelism based on contrast and balance, (c) complementary parallelism based on complementation, and (d) synthetic or cumulative parallelism based on the enlargement of an idea by the presentation of additional varied or related elements. Kaalu Igirigiri is mostly efficient in the use of synonymous parallelism for thematic clarity. In the example available in his recorded compositions, he creates variety, emphasis and rhetorical balance by means of significant changes in the second parallel line. He is fond of anastrophic patterns, such as the following, created by the rephrasing of the second parallel line:

Di ya wu ezhi di	Her husband was a good husband
O wu ezhi di ya lu	It was a good husband she was married to

(*Nne Mgbafo B1*: The heroine speaking to the enemy Ibibio about her husband)

By the omission of verbs, pronouns, nouns, or whole phrases, as in *Nne Mgbafo B1* (lines 8-9), he commonly prunes the second of two parallel lines making the theme terse and emphatic. He may create the same effect through a change in grammatical mood, as in the change from the optative to the imperative mood in the following lines from *Nne Mgbafo B2* (lines 42-44):

He said, "You have bound my feet with ropes,
May you unbind me that I may go and see if she is indeed my wife,
Unbind me that I may go and see if she is indeed my wife!

Writing on what they describe as “the spare, uncluttered language of our epics, folktales, and court chronicles” and the way in which “their control of their matter displays an almost ruthless exclusion of convoluted, jargon-laden chaff,” Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike (1980: 246-247) have outlined features of language which hold good for what my informants in Ohafia demand that the language of their oral epic songs should be:

Orature, being auditory, places high value on lucidity, normal syntax and precise and apt imagery. Language or image that is not vivid, precise, or compels the listener to puzzle it out, interrupts his attention, and makes him lose parts of the telling.²⁰

Egwu Kaalu of Asaga (Singer C) speaks in much the same vein when he deplures “the excessive use of proverbs” (*itiikari ilu*, describing it as *ife oduo* [something extraneous], the consequence of which may be the production of “a different type of poetry” (*abu oduo*) from that intended by the bard:

If a person repeatedly employs proverbs, it can only be said that he is creating another kind of poetry, because if you want to sing a song in a straightforward manner about the actual deeds of a particular person—if you really want to articulate the facts clearly, from the beginning to the end—you don’t need to put extraneous things into it. (Interview, March 1976)

Because of his ruthless avoidance of decorative phraseology, including a strict control on even the use of heroic epithets outside the invocative portions of his songs, the few instances of the use of proverbs or tropes by Kaalu Igirigiri come through with striking poignancy. See, for example, *Amoogu B1* (Appendix 1B) in which the main theme of the tale—the difficulty of killing the Aliike dwarf—is introduced metaphorically with reference to the difficulty of catching a wild cow wandering about in the forest (lines 10-15).

Naturally, in the oral performance, a great deal of attention is paid by the hearers to the quality of the singer’s voice. An inaudible or raucous voice is as bad as an illegible script. Not surprisingly, many attempts by critics and appreciators alike to rank one singer against the other, include comments on the quality of the singers’ voices. A barman in Ebem describes Kaalu Igirigiri’s voice as “sounding *gam gam* like a bell” and maintains in his testimony that Kaalu’s voice is the best kind of voice for the singing of oral epic songs. It is not as flat as that of his son-in-song (Echeme Ugwu of Ebem) which Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia (Singer D) has described as sounding “monotonously harsh” and which another informant compares to “the chirping of crickets.” Kaalu Igirigiri’s voice, of which he is justly proud, is a clear, mellow tenor which has won him such professional praise-names as *Olu nkwa* (musical voice), *Olu ogele* (Gong-like voice), *Okooko turu nkwa yiri olu* (Parrot that built a musical instrument and wears it in his throat), *Okooko nkam nka* (Parrot, the talkative artist), *Oji olu ekwu nnu* (he that buys salt with his voice) and many others.

Although the metaphor *Okooko* (Parrot) might apply to other singers with Kaalu Igirigiri's type of voice and indeed to any proficient bard in the oral tradition, it seems especially appropriate to Kaalu's voice, a voice so richly flexible that it is able to intone with ease the various voices of the tales—lyrical, invocative, oratorical, and narrative—in their proper modulations. But apart from its sonority, beauty, and flexibility, Kaalu Igirigiri's voice possesses the most highly valued quality of an oral artist, namely audibility and clarity. Thus, in ranking him above his rivals, Kaalu Igirigiri's musical accompanists—Ukaoha Agwunsi and Kaalu Ikpo, both of Okon—stress the fact that he speaks in such a way that “what he says is clearly audible” (*O na-akapusa ife anu anu a nti*).

5. Kaalu Igirigiri and the Functions of the Oral Epic Song in Ohafia

Kaalu Igirigiri is not only a gifted oral artist but a committed traditionalist deeply concerned with the continuity of the dynamic socio-psychological functions of the oral epic song in Ohafia. While recognizing the complete differentiation of the songs as a poetic genre, he nonetheless remained attached to the traditional conception of them as an integral part of the larger complex of heroic music (*iri-aha*), which includes the well-known dramatic war dance of the Ohafia people. For him, therefore, the songs—as part of this larger complex—are first and foremost a dynamic vehicle for the communication of the myths behind the heroic rituals of the society. Above all, they allow one to stress the vital relationships between contemporary achievements in education, commerce, politics, and other walks of life with the achievements, battles, and head-hunting raids of the ancestral heroes. Kaalu Igirigiri's position is succinctly encapsulated in the words of his rival, Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia (Singer D):

Today, head-hunting is out of fashion. But if you grow rich or become highly educated, especially if you go to the white man's land and return with your car and immense knowledge, we would naturally come and perform for you . . . for things of this kind are the only form of head-hunting that exists in our present-day culture. (Interview, March 1976)

Under the pressure of rapid social change, the songs are becoming a popular form of entertainment, increasingly divorced from its traditional soil and performed for small and large audiences within and outside Ohafia, including those reached by radio and television performances.²¹ The consequence of this tendency, in the performance of many modernist singers, is the gradual transformation of the heroic tradition through the assimilation of alien influences. We find, for example, the biblical creation myth (including the creation of Woman from Man's rib) infused into Njoku Mmaju's version of *Ife Meenu Chineke Kwere Ana-Egbu Anu*, “Why God Ordained the Hunting of

Wild Animals" (Kaalū Igirigiri's Tale No. 1). The purist that he is, Kaalū Igirigiri is opposed to this kind of assimilation, which he regards as contamination. His version of the tale is confined to the authentic and indigenous lineaments of the original myth in which a folk variant of the evolutionist doctrine of the survival of the fittest is justified not by alluding to the principles of natural selection but by invoking those of divine ordinance. Even his chronicle of the events of the Nigerian Civil War (Tale No. 21) culminates, as we have already observed, in a chauvinistic assertion of the myth of Ohafia's uniqueness in Igbo culture and history. For Kaalū Igirigiri, this kind of assertion is directed at reminding the Ohafia people of their common origins, of the grandeur of their past, and of the greatness of their ancestors; it is, in fact, the inalienable function of the oral epic singer:

Take Ohafia as a whole, I can tell you all about our origins—about the place from which we migrated to this land. None of my rivals knows anything about these things. No one else in Ohafia but myself knows anything about these things. This compound of ours, I can tell you all about its founding father. About other people's compounds, I can tell you all about their founding fathers. When I go to Amaekpu, I can tell them all about their founding fathers. None of my rivals knows anything about these things. As you well know, Amaekpu is not my hometown, but I know everything that prevails there. Asaga, I know everything about their founding fathers, and I know everything that prevails there, everything conceivable that prevails there. That is what we call *iku-aka*—knowledge of the ancestors: knowledge of the ancestors of Asaga, knowledge of the ancestors of Akaanu, knowledge of the ancestors of Uduma. . . . My rivals know nothing of such things. (Interview, March 1976)

Kaalū Igirigiri displays his "knowledge of the ancestors" through climactic hero-lists of the kind to which attention has been drawn earlier in this paper. In his hero-enumerations, he always manages to create the illusion of *mkpozu* (complete invocation, i.e., of having called everybody) simply by listing the heroes of the most important patrilineal clans in Ohafia and those of the particular patrilineal clan in which he happens to be performing. He may even add a few extra credit lines to the heroes of the host patrilineal clan, especially if the version of the tale in the making happens to involve a hero born in that clan. Less competent singers would spend several minutes trying to list all heroes in all Ohafia patrilineal clans and end up missing important points of the narrative without realizing the illusion of *mkpozu*.

Needless to say, the audience is hardly ever aware of the trick by which Kaalū Igirigiri is able to create the illusion of *mkpozu* in his hero-lists. For most of his hearers, Kaalū is the repository of the truth of "what actually happened in the heroic past" (*Ife mee eme mgbe ichin*) and even his wildest fancies are often accepted as "reality." In one of my interviewing sessions, for instance, some appreciators, who had earlier interpreted the *Nne Acho Ugo* fable (Tale

No. 16) as a parable (*ilu*), quickly abandoned their interpretation on hearing Kaalu Igirigiri's assertion that the heroine actually lived at Elu, Ohafia's traditional citadel:

Nne Acho Ugo . . . behaved very much like what we call *nkita-iyi* (River-dog). *Nkita-iyi* lives in water. It isn't human. It isn't fish, this *nkita-iyi*. It isn't beast, this *nkita-iyi*. it isn't a type of fish. It isn't a beast. It has the tail of a mudskipper. It has beard—mammalian hair. It lives in water and also lives on land. When it gives birth, this *nkita-iyi*, she can beget a beast of the forest. Quite often when fishes see its tail, they gather round it thinking it is one of their kind. But it eats fish . . . it isn't fish and isn't beast . . . so Nne Acho Ugo was. . . . She was human as well as bird.

The excited credulity with which the local audience accepted as truth this bizarre description of what is essentially one of the fabulous beasts of universal legend demonstrates the mesmeric power of Kaalu Igirigiri's hold on his audience.

The Ohafia Igbo singer of tales exemplified by Kaalu Igirigiri is essentially a kind of *magus* in the cultural situation in which history, *akuko-ali* (stories of the land—see Azuonye 1972: 110-115), touches on aspects of the people's existence as a corporate group. He not only "awakens the spirit" of the young and "inspires in them the old bravery," he also enlightens them about their past traditions of self-sacrificing heroism—traditions that "bind all Ohafia people together," "mark them out from other Igbo people," and call for the continued pursuit of excellence in contemporary endeavours for the glory of the community at large (see Azuonye 1972: 351-355).

6. Conclusion

Oral performers are original and individual artists who operate within the conventions of a particular literary tradition. The widely held assumption that oral artists never articulate their aesthetic orientation in clearly-defined terms or that they operate purely in the unconscious realm is not borne out by our study of the performances of Kaalu Igirigiri. As exemplified by him, the oral artist is guided by aesthetic principles that he is capable of defining. His training is a process of imbibing these principles, and his practice is an ongoing, developmental process of applying these principles in changing contexts or situations.

Oral culture is by no means transfixed either in time or space. It evolves in a high and moving tension. It is nurtured by the acts of men like Kaalu Igirigiri, who constantly remold received ideas and thereby create new structures of the imagination. To fully understand oral art, therefore, we must abandon the idea that oral artists are anonymous, faceless traditors, part of the undifferentiated folk whose utterances derive from the communal unconscious. We must pay more attention to the performances of individual artists

like Kaalu Igirigiri, and in doing so, we must attempt to relate their works to their backgrounds, influences, aesthetic orientation, and the criticism to which they are subjected.

APPENDIX 1A: NNE MGBAAFO B1 (1971)

- Mgbaafo!
 Woman of Nde-Awa-Ezhiema-Elechi!
 Her husband went to war —
 He went to the war of Ikpe Mmaku:
 5 And so her husband went to the war of Ikpe Mmaku.
 Three market weeks passed, but her husband did not return—
 Her husband did not return.
 Mgbaafo followed her husband, went searching for
 her husband, came to the Ikpe Mmaku warfront.
 10 Ndukwe Emea was her husband's name.
 His name was Ndukwe Emea, that husband of hers.
 She went *mbelege mbelege*²² and came to Isiugwu.
 The people asked Mgbaafo, "Where are you coming from?"
 She said she was searching for her husband —
 15 Her husband was a good husband.
 It was a good husband she was married to.
 If she did not find her husband, she would rather sleep wherever her
 husband might be sleeping.
 She went passed their *ogo*.²³
 She went *mbelege mbelege* and came to Atan.
 20 The people asked Mgbaafo, "Where are you coming from?"
 She said she was searching for her good husband, Ndukwe:
 He had gone to the war of Ikpe Mmaku and had not returned;
 Only if she found her husband there would she ever return;
 If she did not find her husband, she would rather sleep
 25 And she would dare whoever killed her husband to kill her too.
 She went *mbelege mbelege* and at last arrived at the Ikpe Mmaku warfront,
 reached.
 Ikpe Mmaku people, they questioned her, "What are you called?"
 She said that she was called Mgbaafo.
 "And your husband, what is he called?"
 30 She said that he was called Ndukwe Emeuwa.
 That place where they put away Ndukwe Emeuwa,
 Where they hid away Ndukwe Emeuwa,
 They went and called Ndukwe:
 "Who are you married to?"

- 35 "Who are you married to?"
 "What is your wife called?"
 He said that she was called Mgbaafo.
 "And you, what are you called?"
 He said that he was called Ndukwe.
- 40 "Your wife has come searching for you!"
 "Come out now and go meet your wife!"
 Those people, our good friends,
 The Ikpe Mmaku people said that that woman should not be killed.
 "She is truly full of valour!"
- 45 "She has come searching for her husband all the way from their *ogo* —
 "She has come searching for her husband all the way from their *ogo* —
 "Let her not be killed!"
 And so they took her husband and gave to Mgbaafo,
 Mgbaafo took her husband and brought him safely back to Nde-Awa-
 Azema-Elechi.
- 50 Nwata nwaami achowa di ya,²⁴
 Yaa di!
 Nwata nwaami achowa di ya,
 Ya iya!
 Mgbaafo, O chowa di ya,
 Ya di!
 Nwata nwaami achowa di ya,
 Ya iya!
 Mgbaafo, O chowa di ya,
 Ya aha di!
- 55 O chowa di ya,
 A aha di!
 O chowa di ya,
 Ya aha di! . . .

APPENDIX IB: AMOOGU BI (1971)

*Odududu ndudu*²⁵

Wardrum, without whose leadership there is fear on the way!
 Wardrum, without whose leadership there is fear on the way!
 Great spirit, Uduma Olugu!
 Great spirit, Okali, husband of my great mother, Aru!
 Great spirit that dwells in the water at Nde-a-Awa-Ezhiema-Elechi!
 Great spirit, Umezurike of Ebiri-Ezhi-Akuma!
 Great spirit, Agwu Obasi of Ekidi Nde Ofoali!
 Great spirit, Kaalu Ikpo of Ugwu-Naka-Oke-Igbemini!

- 10 We have dragged a cow by the rope and tethered it at Nde-Awa-Ezhiema-Elechi,
The cow will no longer stray into the forest.
Who will go and catch the cow that has strayed into the forest?
Who will go and catch the cow that has strayed into the forest?
Okoro, medicine-man of Ezhi Abaaba, was the one that brought the charm-breaker.
- 15 Ohafia people, they were set to go to war;
Ohafia people, they were set to go to war:
They were set to go to 'Liike, they were going to fight all the way at 'Liike.
A short-armed dwarf prevented the defeat of 'Liike,
A short-armed dwarf prevented the defeat of 'Liike.
- 20 The short-armed dwarf that prevented the defeat of 'Liike,
His proper name was 'Miiko.
On the first day of the encounter, the short-armed one came and stood before a trench,
And when Ohafia warriors charged to chase them (the 'Liike) back,
He routed them and packed their chopped-up parts in long-baskets.
- 25 It went on until one night,
Ohafia war chiefs gathered together at Ebiri Ezhi Akuma:
"What shall we do to kill the short-armed-dwarf of 'Liike?"
They went and summoned Okoro Mkpi.
He lived at Ibinaji of Egbenyi Uka.
- 30 He was a medicine-man of Ezhi Abaaba.
They asked Okoro Mkpi:
"What shall we do to conquer 'Liike?"
The short-armed-dwarf prevents the defeat of 'Liike!"
He told them to get into a nest of soldier-ants:
"There is a nest of soldier-ants on the way.
- 35 Go and place this charm on the way.
Who among you can sit in the nest of soldier-ants and charge guns, so the short-armed dwarf of 'Liike can be killed —
Twelve guns in all!"
My great father Akwu of Abia Eteete agreed.
He said he would sit in the nest of soldier-ants and charge the guns, so the short-armed dwarf might be killed.
- 40 My great father Iro Agbo of Okpo Ntighiri . . .
He said he would sit in the nest of soldier-ants and charge the guns, so the short-armed dwarf of 'Liike might be killed.
My great father Iro Agbo Ntighiri . . .
My great father Awa Afaka of Udegbe-Ezhi-Anunu,
He said he would sit in the nest of soldier-ants and charge the guns, so the short-armed dwarf of 'Liike might be killed.

- 45 My great father Mbu Ologho of Ibinaji-Egbenyi-Uka,
Said he would sit in a nest of soldier-ants and charge the guns, so the
short-armed dwarf of 'Liike might be killed.
My great father Igbun Awa!
My great father Igbun Awa.
Who is of Nde-Awa-Ezhiema-Elechi,
- 50 He said he would sit in the nest of soldier-ants and charge the guns, so
the short-armed dwarf of 'Liike might be killed.
My great father Mkpawe son of Imaga Odo,
He was a person of Ugwu-Naka-Oke-Igbe-mini,
He agreed and said he would sit in the nest of soldier-ants and charge the
guns, so the short-armed dwarf of 'Liike might be killed.
Oke Ikwan Iyam Otutu of Ebiri,
- 55 Man of Ebiri-Ezhi-Akuma,
He said he would sit in the nest of soldier-ants and charge the guns, so
the short-armed dwarf of 'Liike might be killed.
My great father Iro Agbo Okpo Ntighiri
Said he would sit in the nest of soldier-ants and charge the guns, so the
short-armed dwarf of 'Liike might be killed.
Kamalu son of Ngwo who was of Agalado-Odo-Ukiiwe,
- 60 Man of Agalado-Odo-Ukiiwe —
People-that-run-in-herds-like-sheep —
He said he would sit in the nest of soldier-ants and charge the guns, so
the short-armed dwarf of 'Liike might be killed.
And so they set out for war, on an *Eke*²⁶ day which was a farming day.
When they reached the outskirts of 'Liike,
- 65 They gave the guns to Mbu Ologho,
Man of Ibinaji of Egbenyi Uka.
He got into the nest of soldier-ants.
The soldier-ants bit him a little, but the guns he could not charge.
He trembled off.
- 70 They went and called Akwu, man of Abia Eteete.
Two guns were given to him, but the guns he could not charge.
He also trembled off.
Guns were given to Kamalu a Ngwo, son of Agalado-Odo-Ukiiwe.
He tried and tried to charge the guns, but the guns he could not charge.
- 75 Stung by the soldier-ants, he also trembled off.
The guns he could not charge.
They then gave to Nkuma Obiagu, man of Ekidi-Nde-Ofoali.
He also trembled off, the guns he could not charge.
Mkpawe Imaga Odo, man of Ugwu-Naka-Igbemini was then given:
- 80 "You go and charge the guns,"
But the guns he could not charge.

- He also trembled off.
 They then went and gave to Nkata Ogbuanu, Nkata Ogbuanu,
 Man of Igbe Mmaku,
 85 Son of great mother (. . .) of Ndiibe Okwara,
 Wizard of guns for whom the gun is a plaything.
 He also trembled off.
 The guns he could not charge.
 Ohafia warriors, our-little-blameless-ones,
 90 Everyone of them,
 The guns they could not charge.
 And so they said:
 "Let us go home.
 Let us go home, we cannot charge the guns.
 Let us go home,
 95 Let us go home!"
 Amoogu o, Amoogu o, je!
 Amoogu o, son of great mother Ori Ukpo.
 Son of great mother Orijeji Ukpo,
 Son of great mother Orijeji Ukpo.
 100 He is a man of Amuma,
 He is a man of the Etum-Olumba age-set,
 He is a man of Irema Okpurukpu,
 He is a man of Okpu-Uma-Ofu-Agbala! . . .
 He asked to be given the guns.
 105 "We should all go home if I try and fail!
 Ohafia warriors, give me the guns!"
 But they questioned him: "Of what patriclan are you?"
 And he said that he was a native of Amuma.
 "Let the guns be given to him."
 110 And so the warriors of Ohafia Uduma Ezhiema, they took the guns and
 gave to Amoogu son of Ologho Ikpo.
 He was a man of Okpu-Uma-Ofu-Agbala.
 He took two guns and entered;
 He took two guns and entered;
 And so two guns were given to Amoogu.
 115 He charged this one, and charged that one.
 The ants stung his laps in four hundreds
 The ants stung his laps in four hundreds.
 And so he got into the nest of soldier-ants and charged this one, charged
 that one.
 Great father Awa Afaka took one gun from him.
 120 Mbu Ologho took one gun from him.
 And they went and killed Mkpisi Ebulebu, the short-armed dwarf of 'Liike.

- The evil genuis in the nest of soldier-ants.
 They hacked him mercilessly and packed his body in a basket.
 And so they killed great father Omiiko
- 125 After all these,
 Ohafia warriors, all without exception,
 They swooped upon those Ishiagu people, makers-of-pots-and-what-not,
 And they unleashed a massacre upon them,
 And they burnt down their houses,
- 130 All without exception.
 When they returned to their camp,
 Great father Mbu Ologho asked: "Who was it that charged the guns?"
 Amoogu said: "I am the one that charged the guns
- 135 With which we went and killed the 'Liike general."
 They said that they would give him a nice little present.
 And they conspired among themselves:
 "Let us kill Amoogu!"
 "We should kill Amoogu!"
- 140 "If we do not kill him, he shall become the leading hero of Ohafia!"
 And so they lured Amoogu to a solitary corner and killed him,
 And they gave his chopped-off head to Amuma warriors,
 And they took it home
 And hung it in their *obu*
- 145 His mother, great mother Ori Ukpo —
 My great mother Ori Ukpo wept:
 Amoogu, son of Ologho Ikpo,
 Were you killed with a matchet or a gun?
 Be it with a matchet or a gun,
- 150 O my son, *je*!
 O my son, *je*!
 Were you killed with a matchet or a gun?
 O my son, *ieje*!
Iyeee-je!
- 155 O Amoogu, *ieje*!
 Amoogu, O come to me, *ie*!
Iyeejee-i!
- His mother, Amoogu,
 She dwelt beside a silk-cotton tree,
- 160 She dwelt beside a silk-cotton tree.
 The mother of Amoogu, son of Ologho Ikpo, dwelt beside a silk-cotton tree.
 Kites came from the silk-cotton tree and preyed upon her chickens,
 Hawks came from the silk-cotton tree and preyed upon her chickens.
 She said, "O, if my son were alive,

- 165 He would have shot these kites away —
 He was a wizard-of-guns-for-whom-the-gun-was-a-plaything.
 His age-mates were at watch and heard this.
 They summoned everybody in Amuma, all without exception, men of
 Irema Okpurukpu.
 They gave two cases of wine,
 170 And said to them, "We plead with you, let this silk-
 cotton tree be felled.
 That the chickens of my great mother Ori Ukpo may thrive.
 That man we killed is the cause of her great grief.
 He was of our age-set,
 He was of our age-set.
 175 Irema Okpurukpu all agreed.
 They began felling the silk-cotton tree,
 They began felling the silk-cotton tree, all of them without exception.
 They went on felling the tree and went into the second day.
 When it got to the third day, they drank palmwine to their fill.
 180 And as the tree began to fall, they said they would catch it up with their
 hands, but they were shaken by the wine.
 Shaken by the wine, all without exception,
 Shaken by the wine;
 Shaken by the wine;
 185 As they tried to catch up that silk-cotton tree with their hands, the
 silk-cotton tree killed four hundred of them.
 And so four hundred men got lost in their clan.
 They went to a diviner.
 My great mother Aja Ekeke thus divined
 And told them: "Whatever it was that made you people agree to kill
 Amoogu,
 190 It was the spirit of Amoogu that pushed that silk-cotton tree to crush you
 people!"
 That is why Amuma is still so thinly populated.
 It is the wrath of the spirit of Amoogu, son of Ologho Ikpo.

APPENDIX II: KAALU IGIRIGIRI'S REPERTOIRE OF TALES, COLLECTED 1971-77

A. Creation Myths

1. *Ife Meenu Ana-egbu Anu*. Myth of the origin of hunting. Two versions: B1 (1971) and B2 (1977).
2. *Ife Meenu Iwa na-egbu Ewu*. Myth on the reason why goats die when they eat cassava. Two versions: B1 (1976) and B2 (1977).

B. Migration Legends

3. *Ibe Ohafia zhia bia*. Legend of the migration of the founding fathers of Ohafia from Benin through Idon (possibly Adoni on the Niger) and Ibeku (near Umuahia) to their present homeland. Two versions: B1 (1976) and B2 (1977).
4. *Ebulu Ijeoma*. Legend of the foundation of Aro-Ndi-Izuogu by an Aro trader, Ebulu Ijeoma. Two versions: B1 (1976) and B2 (1977).

C. *Heroic Legends*

5. *Elibe Aja*. Legend of the fearless Ohafia hunter who kills a leopardess harrying Aro country and later dies in an attempt to kill a bush-hog that ravages farms at Amuru. Four versions: B1 (1972), B2-B3 (1976), and B4 (1977). B3 does not contain the episode in which the hero's death is reported.
6. *Inyan Olugu*. Legend of a brave woman who kills four men during a raid on palm trees in the enemy territory and gives their chopped off heads to her cowardly husband to take home as his own accolade of prowess in single combat as required by the heroic code of the day. Five versions: B1 (1971), B2 (1972), B3-B4 (1976), and B5 (1977).
7. *Nne Mgbaafo*. Legend of the valiant and loving wife who goes into enemy Ibibio territory to search for her lost husband. See Appendix 1A above. Five versions: B1 (1971), B2 (1972), B3-B4 (1976), and B5 (1977).
8. *Amoogu*. Legend of a little known warrior whose powers of endurance enable the Ohafia to overcome their great adversary, the short-armed dwarf of Aliike. See Appendix IIA above. Six versions: B1 (1971), B2-B3 (1972), B4-B5 (1976), and B6 (1977).
9. *Ogbaka Okorie*. Legend of a famous Ohafia dancer of the *Ekpe* dance killed with his knees shattered with a gun by jealous rivals in a neighboring clan. Four versions: B1 (1971), B2 (1972), B3 (1976), and B4 (1977).
10. *Egbele*. Legend of a thrice-bereaved mother whose joyful song (on the victorious return of her lastborn whom she had tried in vain to shield from the wars) is believed to be the origin of the Ohafia war songs. Four versions: B1 (1972), B2-B3 (1976), and B4 (1977).
11. *Ijeoma Ebulu*. Legend of a prosperous Ohafia merchant killed and robbed of all his wealth by his greedy wife and her relatives. One version: B1 (1977).
12. *Egbe Nri Adighi*. Legend of Inyima Kaalu, a famous hunter whose newborn baby is killed by an unloaded gun which fires itself. Two versions: B1 (1976) and B2 (1977).
13. *Kaalu Eze Nwa Mgbo*. Legend of the great wrestler cursed by the gods with infertility until the day his back touched the ground in a wrestling contest. One version: B1 (1977).

14. *Ucha Aruodo*. Legend of a woman who begets an only child (a girl) in her old age and has a hard time fending for her. Three versions: B1 (1971), B2 (1972), and B3 (1977). No version was recorded in 1976, but then the heroine's name was assigned to the mother of the hero of tale No.10.
 15. *Ikwogho*. Legend of a great warrior who collapses and dies at the end of a long race to and from a distant warfront from which he brings home good news of the performance of Ohafia warriors. Two versions: B1 (1976) and B2 (1977).
- D. *Allegorical and Fabular Tales*
16. *Nne Acho Ugo*. Fable of five birds who boast among themselves what great things they would do for their mother, on the day of her death, to give her a befitting burial. But when their mother dies none of them shows up. Four versions: B1 (1972), B2-B3 (1976) and B4 (1977).
 17. *Agwu Akpu*. Fable of the spirit doctor who is said to have introduced the use of the lizard as a sacrificial animal. One version: B1 (1977).
 18. *Akpala*. Aetiological animal fable purporting to account for the origin of the dancing habits of the sunbird (akpala). One version: B1 (1977).
 19. *Nkelu*. Aetiological animal fable purporting to account for the origin of the bluebird, Nkelu's habit of shaking its head while sipping water from the stream. One version: B1 (1977).
 20. *Nkakwu*. Aetiological animal fable purporting to account for the origin of the bush mouse, Nkakwu's awful smell. One version: B1 (1977).
- E. *Chronicle of Contemporary Events*
21. *Ogu Mmekota Naijiria*. Kaalu Igirigiri's original account of "the war of Nigerian Unity," from the *coup d'état* of January 15, 1966 to the end of the Biafran War of Secession, in January 1970. Three versions: B1-B4 (1976) and B5 (1977).

NOTES

¹ An original version of this paper was presented at the Sixth Ibadan Annual African Literature Conference on the Oral Performance in Africa (University of Ibadan, July 27—August 1, 1981). I am grateful to many participants at the conference, especially Professor Isidore Okpewho, Dr. Kofi Agovi, and Chief Oludare Olajubu, whose comments and criticism both inside and outside the conference hall have guided me in my revision.

² Kaalu Igirigiri is one of the six singers of tales whose compositions and performances form the basis of my study of the Ohafia Igbo Oral Epic tradition (Azuonye 1979). The other singers are Okonkwo Oke of Akaanu, Egwu Kaalu of Asaga, Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia, Echeme Ugwu of Ebem, and Njoku Mmaju of Uduma Awoke. It should be noted that the spelling of all personal and place names is in accordance with the principles of the 1961 official Igbo orthography. Thus, in preference for such popular forms as Kalu, Akanu, and Eze, I have used Kaalu, Akaanu, and Ezhe, reflecting the facts of vowel reduplication, palatalization, etc in the Ohafia dialect.

³ Although Ohafia is a double-descent society, matrilineal relations are much more highly stressed than patrilineal ones: "Not only is the Ohafia matrilineage the main property-owning and inheriting group, it is also the only exogamous group; the patrilineage is non-exogamous and not the main property-owning or property-inheriting group" (Nsugbe 1974: 121). This and other psychological factors discussed in Nsugbe may be the basis of the stronger attachment displayed here by Kaalu Igrigiri to his matriline than to his patriline.

⁴ Literally, "those from whom I learnt how to sing." This is a rendition pressed by some educated Ohafia indigenes whose opinions I have sought. What I, myself, can hear from the tapes is *nde-mu-m-ni-n'abu* (lit. "those-that-gave-birth-to-me-in-singing").

⁵ For example, the Mandinka bardic tradition (see Innes 1974: 2-7).

⁶ This and other testimonies from the Ohafia singers and their critics and appreciators are given in free English translation. The original Igbo will appear parallel to the English translations in an Appendix to my forthcoming collection, *The Songs of Kaalu Igrigiri: Compositions of an Ohafia Igbo Singer of Tales*.

⁷ Among these are Tales Nos. 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10, in Appendix II.

⁸ I am grateful to Mr. and Mrs. Emele for making this recording available to me from their private collection in London (1976).

⁹ *Aro-Oke-Igbo*. (Aro, supreme Igbo) is the patronymic praise-name of the people of Aro Chukwu, south of Ohafia.

¹⁰ See Azuonye 1979: 32-34, for a detailed description of the humiliations suffered by the *ujo* as opposed to the honors heaped on the *ufiem* (honorable warriors) in the Ohafia heroic society.

¹¹ On the composition of this sequence, Okigbo says in an interview, "my *Limits* . . . was influenced by everybody and everything. . . . It is surprising how many lines of the *Limits* I am not sure are mine and yet do not know whose lines they were originally" (*Transition* 11 July-August 1962, p.2).

¹² No recordings of the performances of Ogboogwu appear to have survived, except perhaps in the archives of Radio Nigeria (Enugu).

¹³ Compare with the process of "selective borrowing" in the Mandinka heroic tradition: Innes 1973: 118.

¹⁴ The question was first raised at the conference by Chief Oludare Olajubu and again by Professor Isidore Okpewho (the quote is from Professor Isidore Okpewho in a letter dated October 17, 1981).

¹⁵ The details are as follows: Singer A, 6% (2 out of 34 tales); Singer C, 9% (3 tales); Singer D, 12% (4 tales, in spite of his boast in several interviews about the richness and variety of his repertoire); Singer E, 21% (7 tales); and Singer F, 33% (11 tales).

¹⁶ The "voices" here are conterminous with the "passages" discussed in Azuonye 1979 (Chapter 2) and are comparable to the "modes" of performance discussed in Innes (1974) and Johnson (1980) with reference to the Mandinka epic.

¹⁷ The late Presbyterian pastor, Ukiwe Maduekwe, in whose house I recorded most of the songs of Kaalu Igrigiri listed in Appendix II.

¹⁸ *The Concise Oxford Dictionary*, 5th edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1975.

¹⁹ See Azuonye 1979: 242-271 for a detailed discussion of various forms of stylistic repetition and parallelism in the songs.

²⁰ I cannot, however, agree with the troika that "these qualities which are mandatory in the auditory medium, should be insisted upon in the written" (Chinweizu, Jemie, and Madubuike, 1980: 247).

²¹ Both singers E and F have produced long-playing records.

²² The ideophone *mbelege mbelege* (which is of frequent occurrence in the performance of Kaalu Igirigiri) has no specific lexical value. Its meaning depends on the context in which it occurs. In this particular context, it may be properly taken to imply “steadily and fearlessly on.”

²³ *Ogo* means “village square”, but it is also used (as in the present context) metonymically to refer to the village or clan for whose members it serves as a central meeting-place.

²⁴ This song repeats the phrase “A young woman is searching for her husband” with the heroine’s name (Mgbaafo) being occasionally used in place of “a young woman” in a couple of lines. The refrain is a lyrical interjective expressive of joyful emotion.

²⁵ *Odududu ndufu* is one of the many untranslatable epithets in the songs. One possible literal rendition is “He that leads (*du*) leading (*du*) leading (*du*) leading astray (*ndufu*)”. The epithet thus describes, as was suggested to me in the field, an inimitable war leader who can lead his men to dangerous places from which he can easily return unharmed while others, less valiant, get lost. No translation can effectively convey these and other connotations of the epithet. The deeper connotations of the epithet are today all but lost to many listeners and even performers to whom the phrase is simply a verbal expression of sheer psychic energy at a point when the performers seem to be completely under the power of music. This feeling arises from some of the other deeper connotations of the phrase. There is for instance a *du-du* sound in the two parts of the epithet which appears to foreshadow phono-aesthetically the performance of the war drum (*ikoro*) in the couplet that follows. It is unfortunate that the epithets cannot be easily translated because much of the emotional effects upon local audiences depends upon them. In this sense, translations are essentially useless except as an aid to the non-speaker of the language (or dialect), one who merely wants to follow the main outlines of the tales.

²⁶ *Eke* is the first of the traditional Igbo four-day market week—Eke, Orie, Afo, Nkwo.

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