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Enu-Nyili-Mba: An Episode from the Ameke Okoye An Episode from the Ameke Okoye Epic as Performed by Jeveizu Okaavo of Aguleri

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Chapter 25

Enu-Nyili-Mba: An Episode from the Ameke Okoye Epic

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Introduction

The tale published below is one of the numerous episodes (or encounters) in the epic of Ameke Okoye as performed by the late Jeveizu Okaavo of Okpu Ivite Aguleri in September 1983. Told in its entirety, the narration of this tale can last well over five nights. But Jeveizu performed for only one Igbo week (four days) and stopped, saying that he was tired. It seems to us that a number of things may thus have been omitted in the tale as he told it on that occasion. Be that as it may, what we recorded during our field trip reveals quite a lot about the nature of this epic. In the episode published here, we see how this hero, Ameke Okoye, ascends the "Heavenly City" to bring down the hard-hearted villain, Enu-Nyili-Mba (lit. Sky-that-is-greater-than-people), who hands down a commandment prohibiting everyone on earth from eating, drinking or chewing anything throughout the duration of a seven-week feast he had scheduled to enjoy with his friend, an Ikwerre man called "The Invisible One". The story speaks for itself and it seems to us that, taken together with Ezinando's comments on another version of the same epic from Nando (Chapter 26 below) and other comments in Azuonye (1984, as well as in Chapters 2 and 27 of the present book) and Udechukwu (1984), the reader can glean from it, something of the character of the Anambra Igbo romantic epics.

The transcription of the text follows closely the phonological features of the words of the narrator as actually realized in the oral performance. Thus, there is no division of such forms as bie into be ya (his house) as would be demanded by the current Igbo orthographic conventions. This is so because we feel that in attempting to satisfy the requirements for readability through the rigid application of spelling conventions, the transcription would destroy the euphony and rhythm of the poetic line which we see as our duty to preserve. By the same token, vowel lengthening has been represented fully in the transcription by the reduplication of the lengthened vowels. The
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translation follows closely the syntax of the Igbo and there is no attempt to use a more elevated phraseology than what is actually found in the text. The notes provide further information on aspects of the background of the tale and also of allusions which we think may be inaccessible to the reader.

The Text:

(Three beats of ubom)

Narrator: Ehee-e!
I, Jeveizu Okaavo,
Of Okpu Ivite Aguleri,
I am the one that tells the tale of Ameke Okoye;
I am the one that recounts his story
Inside Nigeria;
I am that very person
That tells the stories of the heroes
Of old.
That is what I am about to get into
And expound.

(Three beats of ubom)

(Song) Uooo, people of Oba-na-Iduu ooo!
Uooo, people of Oba-na-Iduu ooo!
Uooo, people of Oba-na-Iduu ooo!

Let him that is inside not come out again,
For that person that weaves trouble is out!
Let him that is outside go in quickly,
For that person that weaves trouble is out!
Iduu oooo!

(Chant) Hmmmm! Hmmmm! Hmmmm! Hmmmm!
Ooooo! Ooooo! Ooooo! Ooooo!
That day spirits went for the ranking of heroes!
That day Chukwu called for the ranking of heroes, eo!

That day Chukwu called for the ranking of heroes in the square of public gathering!
That day Chukwu called for the ranking of heroes in the square of public gathering
My child, do not go for the ranking of heroes, for there can
be no ranking,
In the square of public gathering!
Didn't Okaavo, the spirit, tell him not to go, and he said he would go for the ranking of heroes in the square of public gathering

30 Didn't Ojaali, the spirit, tell him not to go, and he said he would go for the ranking of heroes in the square of public gathering!

(Pause)

(Chant) We've come, whatever will happen, let it happen;
That was the undoing of Nduba of Ikelionwu, Ikelionwu,
What will happen will happen as it happened to Nduba of Ikelionwu,

35 Was it not Nduba of Ikelionwu that begot Ikelionwu Mbaamali,
Hence Ikelionwu did not know what to do with Mbaamali?
Ikelionwu enacted a law in their land,
Saying that lest the novice should know mpama in Ikelionwu,
If the novice knows the mask, if the novice knows the mask,

40 Much later he will join the masquerade society.
If the novice knows Mbaamali of Ikelionwu,
It means that he has become powerless.
O hero, Mbamali of Ikelionwu, welcome!
Hmm, iyoooo, oooo 0000-m!

45 Iduu, I salute you!
Spectators: Welcome!
Narrator: Hmmm.
We've now gone into it.

50 (Chant) That day the hero was preparing for war in heaven;
That day the hero was preparing for war in the house of the sky-dweller, Enu-nyili-mba!
That day the hero was preparing for the house of the house of the sky-dweller, Enu-nyili-mba!
My child, you joker, by which route will you (get to the point from which you will) ascend the stairs?
But the hero said that, come morning, he would mount the stairs.

55 Didn't Ojaali, the spirit, tell him not to go, for there was no
road out there, but he said he could go!
Didn't Okaavo, the spirit, tell him not to go, for there was no road out there, but he said he could go and return!
My child, do not go to the house of the sky-dweller, for it has no road, but he said he would go and return!
The hero said that, come morning, he would ascend the stairs, go and return.
Hmmm! Iyoo ooo, ho-oo-ooo!
60 Let us go to the house of Enu-nyili-amba
The man that lives in heaven.
This is how it went.
Obuora Udechukwu, 14
It's beginning is this:
65 This world began
And people lay about 15 in the world,
That is, all things created by God.
They stayed like that,
Stayed on and on and on.
70 No one knew what planted aku-ubili, aku-ubili planted itself.
  16
People came out one day C
A day ike Sunday C
Sheets of paper from heaven
Came scattering upon the earth,
75 Paper on which something was written.
From above, it scattered on these people's town;
From above, it scattered on these people's town
All over the world.
80 Those who knew how to read, whosoever picked up a sheet,
Gazing at it a while,
He would start to weep,
Saying: What is this
What is it that we (the inhabitants) of the world have done
85 That this man, Enu-nyili-amba, who lives in heaven
Should write us this kind of letter,
If you took the letter to your kinsman who knew how to read,
Gazing at it a while,
He would start to weep.
90 What he wrote in the letter
Was that he said
That is he, Enu-nyili-mba,
That he had fixed a feast for himself
Saying that this feast he had fixed for himself,
95 Where he lived in heaven,
That it was for seven weeks 17 he would hold it,
And this feast he would hold for seven weeks,
That all things truly human abounding on this earth born of
people's breath,
That a commandment he was handing down to everyone that
lived in this world who was a human being conceived and
born, was this:
100 Nobody should drink water;
And nobody should eat food;
And nobody should chew tooth-stick;
And nobody should eat palm nuts.
Until he completed the seven-week feast.
105 But if anyone turned a deaf ear and drank water there on
earth,
That he would see that person from heaven
And he would kill him off.
And if anyone cracked palm kernels kpim and ate
And he observed that person cracking that kernel kpim and
eating,
110 He would kill him off.
That it was not only that person alone he would kill,
That on entering that town,
He would wipe out the entire town from heaven.
And so, Iduu lay in disarray. 18
115 Hunger began to kill people!
Nobody drank water;
Nobody ate food;
Nobody ate nuts;
Nobody ate maize
120 Hunger pressed
And pressed,
And, without exception, all suckling babies still in their mothers' arms,
Death began to kill them.
Did anyone see who to ask what was happening?
Without exception, all suckling babies,
Death began to kill them.
Without exception, all toddling babies,
Death began to kill them.
Killed the young a while, then began to kill adults.
And so it was that Hunger began to kill people.
It is said that Hunger does not kill people, 19
But there it was that hunger began to kill people,
For there was no drinking of water and no eating of nuts.
The world was puzzled.
Nobody was seen to ask him what was happening.
They stayed on and on and on and on.
And so it was that three weeks passed
Since he began his feast
Three weeks since he began to feast
The mouth-tying feast.
Let me name it clearly
For he had tied up our mouths, we earth dwellers.
Then, people came out one day,
On that day that it turned three weeks,
All the heroes in the world, without exception
Said: Tia!
So there is one man who has fixed a feast,
But no one knows what to do
In order to go to the house of that person,
And nobody knows where that person lives,
That he lives in heaven,
And nobody can find the way to his home,
That they, the heroes, abound on this earth,
That they must go and hold a meeting
So as to go and put heads together
To find out what to do, in order to get to the house of the man
That wrote these letters scattered thus.
When this person turned to his kinsman
Asking him, Do you know where the way to his home is?
He would say to him, No!
When that person turned to his kinsman
Asking him, Do you know where the way to his home is?
He would say to him, No!
And so they assembled together, they, the heroes:
Obadiegwu n'Ovia, 20
Ntili, son of Eze Odoodo, the hair on whose nobody were thunderbolts;
Ndum, son of Eze Abo, the one that digs a trench around a town with his feet; 21
Mbamali of Ikelionwu, the one who uses human thigh bone as chewing-stick;
Ojaatu akpo avu na-awu nkú 22
Oranyili, ntú-na-ebu-ukwa-aró 23 the man that lives in the clouds,
He who if approached, jaws are sure to break; 24
All the heroes in the world without exception, gbam, 25
They pulled themselves together,
Pulled themselves together, daa,
Finished pulling themselves together and came out for consultations,
In the village Ameke Okoye,
And they filled the village-square pitim!
Filled the village pitim
Nobody spoke, all remained silent, r000.
They stayed on and on and on,
Then, Obadigwu n'Ovia's bard 26
Put his fingers into his ears, 27
Chanting:
(Chant) O my son, Obadiegwu n'Ovia!
O my son, Ogoogogo n'Ovia!
Obadiegwu
O ro m gwulu igha kelesime, ma anya bu anya 28
O great hero, Obadiegwu n'Ovia,
O marvelous one, Obadiegwu n'Ovia
O great hero, o marvelous one!
O great hero, o marvelous one!

He answered him: *kwo-kwo-kwo-kwo*

And said that of all things begotten of the birth groan, hmm, that he was the greatest.

And he said, what are we waiting for

I am the one that shall lead the way and go to the home of the sky-dweller, Enu-nyili-mba.

To set eyes on him.

*Hiiya ya!*

He-e-m, Mbamali of Ikelionwu told him to go and eat shit:
You will lead the way to the home of Enu-nyili-mba

And yet I, Mbamali, am here

Ntili, son of Eze Odoodoo stormed up,
And hurled his arm thus

(*demonstrating with his arms*)

And the wilderness caught fire
For the hair all over his body were thunderbolts.
The wilderness caught fire and started to burn.

He held up his arm thus and they came back.²⁹

He said to them, You will go to the home of Enu-nyili-mba

Without me leading but you leading the way?

Ojaadu, akpu-na-awu-nku, came out,
Sprang about, sprang about,
Sprang about, sprang about,
And said to them-m-mm, This heat everywhere

About how to go to the heavenly city,³⁰

Who is that person that knows the way to the heavenly city?
If anyone really knows the way to the heavenly city,
Let him raise his hand.

In this situation where everyone says he would lead the way.

Everyone that jumps out says he would lead the way,
Let us no longer quarrel over who would lead the way.
The thing is, he who knows what should be done to get to the heavenly city,
Let that person raise his hand;

He himself did not know where it was.
Everyone fell silent *piii.*

They laid about
Went on lying about, went on lying about, went on lying about,
Nnabuluede was under the seat of his friend

His friend, Ameke Okoye,
And after a while, he jumped out into the arena, and moved about,
He, his bard,
And then put his fingers into his ears,
Chanting:

Hmmm! Hmmm! Hmmm!
   Iieee - Iieee - Iieee!
Hmmm! Hmmm! Hmmm!
   Iieee - Iieee - Iieee!
Come morning, Mbaago is battling with tears!

Come afternoon, Mbaago is battling with tears!
When the whole town asks Mbaago why she weeps without stopping,
She replies that her son is preparing to go to war in heaven.
O my child, do not go to war in heaven for there is no road to it
But he says he must go!

The hero says that, come morning, he would mount the stairs!
Weeping broke out Oooooo!
For Nnabuluede was named as saying that the (Ameke) would go to heaven,
That if it was not pleasant, it would be bitter, the way he would go.

The place where those great stairs were, was at the horizon,
From where the sun rises.
That was the place from where to go to the home of the sky-dweller, Enu-nyili-mba.
Yes,
Let me spell it out by name.

Spectators: Go on.
Narrator: When they went and went and reached that place,
Where the sun rises from the ground,
Where it rises from the ground
And where the sky touches the ground,

And from where it rises from the ground
It was at that place that Enu-nyili-mba built steps,
Built steps,
With which he climbed up to the heavenly city,
At that point from which the sun rises,

He built steps with which one climbed up to the heavenly city
That place was full of heat.
At that point from which the sun rises, there were many steps
And it was full of heat.
Before steps came to be built C

Wait, until I come to the end of the story C
When I finish telling you everything, I will tell you the origin of steps.
That was how they originated
How men learnt how to put steps in storeyed buildings
Was that time when the hero reached there and he saw it.

(Chant) Hmm eee - oo - oo - hmm
Hmm eee - oo - oo - hmm
Nwoke m, eyoni onwu erike elie mmuo ni, 32
Nwoke m, eyoni onwu erike gwotalali si
Mmadi egunie oku

Eyoni onwu erike elie m gwochali si
Mmadi avunia anya
Eyoni onwu erike elie m gwochali
Si mmadi ekwene n'isi
Eliee ndo ko eli mmuo obi

Hmm Iyoo - ooo - oom
Let those ones wait awhile.
Iduu, I salute you!

Spectators: I yaa! Well done!
Narrator: Eee ... after that cry that was raised -
By every single person that lay in Iduu, because hunger was killing them,
The gathering dispersed.
Obadiegwu n'Ovia took his townsmen and went.
Ndum son of Eze Abo took his townsmen and went.
Ntili son of Eze Ododo took his townsmen and went.
Mbamali of Ikelionwu took his townsmen and went.

As they were on their way home, a big horn sounded in heaven:
(Song) Tom tom, tom tom
       Tom tom, tom tom
       Tom tom, tom tom

Oranyeli son of Udomaga Odo
Oranyeli Odogwu koo
koo koo, koo koo
Koo koo, koo koo
He blew a flourish: kawoo! kawoo! kawoo!

Wonders, brilliance of spirits, brilliance of men
He threw a circle, threw a circle, threw a circle!
If you raised your face, you looked at him and hailed him:
"Ntu na-ebu ukwa aro"
If that person raised his face, he hailed him: "At the mention of his name, one shudders".
If that person raised his face, he hailed him: "He who if he come near jaws are sure to break."

It was gathering and descending
It was gathering and descending
That was the man that lives in the clouds
That was that very thing ....
The path he took to descend then
Was that very thing which once in a while stretches thus....
Hence our people would say that a rainbow appeared in the sky, that was the pathway it made.
I will go on spelling it all out by name which is what you have come for today.

Spectator: Hmm, that is right.

Spectators: (laughter)
Spectator: Aguleri o!
Spectators: Yaa! (Applause)
Narrator: Then each group set out for home,
And they scheduled
That it was a week hence
That they would go to the heavenly city
To the house of Enu-nyili-mba,
To ask him what the matter was,
Why he handed down that great commandment
Saying there should be no eating of food and no drinking or water
So that when the whole world perished, it would be hunger that killed off the people.
Came a week later,
All the heroes without exception, they began to come.
All the heroes without exception, they began to come.
Ndum son of Eze Abo came;
Ojaadu akpulu na-avu nku came;
Ntili son of Eze Odoodo came;
Our hero, Oriaeli Ntu-na-ebu-ukwa-aro came;
Ameke Okoye came;
And that man whose body is full of the thunderbolts came;
The whole congregation of heroes without exception, piti piti piti, all came together
And lay about.
And it was asked "what is it that can be done?"
If it is known what can be done, let it be said.
Obadiegwu n'Ovia stood out
And said that it was him that owned the way,
Said that he should be followed behind,
That it was him that would lead the way and go to where the rising of the sun was,
From where they would go to the heavenly city,
To the house of Enu-nyili-mba,
That it was him that would lead the way, he, Obadiegwu n'Ovia.
Mbamali of Ikelionwu came out and stood behind him
And told him that wherever he put in one floor
He would put his own after him.
Ntili, son of Eze Odoodo queued behind Mbamali.
Spectator: Do, lift up your voice!
Narrator: Ndum, son of Eze Abo, queued behind Mbamali.
All the heroes without exception, *pitim*,
Followed one another behind, *daa*, and stretched far.

355 Our hero, Ameke Okoye, rose up.
Elite, son of Mmalive, rose from their own town and began
to come,
Came on *daa* and queued up.
Hoa!
Our hero Ameke Okoye stood up.

360 Got into the house,
Called his friend, Nnabuluede, he answered him, and he told
him to go to the house of those that tap palmwine in the
king's house,
So as to tell them to bring him four *agbaja* pots
With which to drink water.

365 Before going to the heavenly city they were now preparing
for.
Nnabuluede jumped to the king's house,
Those that tapped wine there carried four *agbaja* pots, came
and placed them in the middle of that square in which they
were.
They lifted them to their mouths, drank round
And put aside the pots.

370 That one that was Mbaago jumped out
Into the square
In the nude
And sat down,
Dragging herself round and round in one place,

375 Put her fingers into her ears
And wept
And wept
Wept and wept and wept.
Then Nnabuluede crept in,

380 Put his fingers into the hero's ears:
(Song) *Come morning, Mbaago is battling with tears;*
*Come afternoon, Mbaago is battling with tears;*
*Come night, Mbaago is battling with tears;*
Let the people ask Mbaago why she is weeping for
her child, weeping without stopping,
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385 She said that her child was preparing to go to war in heaven;
My child, do not go to war in heaven for there is no road
there,
But he said that he would go and return;
The hero said that come morning he would ascend the stairs!
Didn't Okaavo the spirit ask him not to go, and he said that
he would go,
390 That he would go and return
Didn't Ojaali the spirit ask him not to go, and he said that
he would go,
That he would go and come out.
Hmm - iyoooo - oooo!
Obadiegwu n'Ovia took off.
395 And said that they were going on a tough trip,
Going to the heavenly city.
Every one of them pitim took off, heading for the heavenly
city.
They trekked trrrrrrr and night fell.
They trekked all night and dawn came.
400 They trekked and trekked for one week, gbam.
It was not a road that they were going on,
For they did not find a road to heavenly city
You do hear me say that they did not find a road.
It was for one week that they trekked, day and night,
405 But they did not find how they would get to horizon,
From where the sun rises,
They did not find how they would get to horizon,
From where the sun rises,
They did not see how they would get there.
They trekked far into the afternoon of that day
Trekked far into the night of that day.
410 It turned out that it was a week the day before when they
set out on the journey.
But they did not find ....
When they pushed their trek in the wilderness
The place would look like where a Caterpillar had gone
through.
They aimed at the horizon with their hands,
415 Indicating how they would act to get to the heavenly city. When they had trekked awhile, Obadiegwu n'Ovia eulogized and said that he was ending his trek, And that he and his supporter would go back. They asked him "what is the matter?" He stood aside, and said that those who wanted to go should continue,

420 That he was going back. He and his supporter, set for home. If you saw all the heroes who said that they would go to the house of Enu-nyili-mba So as to ask him why he made such a commandment, They all reversed to go home.

425 Our hero then threw his feet on the ground. They did not see what could be done. His friend, Ojaadu akpulu na-avu-nku, Hailed him, his friend Odi-ike-di-Igbo-egwu He answered him, eeh!

430 He hailed him akata-isi-ebuo He answered him, eeh! He hailed him Akpala-ewu-si-udo He answered him, eeh! He hailed him He-who-does-not-heed-mother-or-father He answered him that that of mother and father... as for what another person said, that it was into the bush that he threw such, And said to him have you any problem? He told him that he had a problem? Behold that all those they were traveling with to the heavenly city, Had all gone home.

435 They should go home. That was the problem he had. He then said to him "If you would not go to the heavenly city, you may go home". For that very journey he was set on if it was not pleasant it would be bitter. Ojaadu told him that he had heard
His friend, Okaavo the spirit hailed him Odi-ike-di-Igbo-egwu,
He answered him, hii!
He said to him "what are you thinking about?"
This journey we heard about concerning the condition on earth,
For which we came from the land of spirits
So that we would go with you on this journey
It seems that we should go back now
So that we would not be stranded on the way
He said to him "if you want to go home, go home"
For he would reach the heavenly city.

Spectator: Do, lift your voice; or else if you drink, we shall look for a drink and give you.
Narrator: Listen attentively!
Spectator: He does lift his voice
Narrator: All heroes without exception went gbam

It turned out that they had all gone.
Our hero then stood up, and hailed his friend, Nnabuluede,
He answered him, eeh!
He told him that he should say something, so that they would know the way
to go to the heavenly city
To the house of Enu-nyili-mba

This very journey they had come out on, that he had told you that if it was not pleasant it would be bitter
How they would go to the heavenly city.
Nnabuluede then fired him on from below.
And so they began to run,
And they ran for three weeks

On reaching the place where they sky touched the earth, from where the run rises,
He took his hands and placed them on it
He had run for three weeks in the wilderness,
On reaching that place from where the sun rises, from where one goes
to the heavenly city, (he) took his hands and placed
on it ....
And so it was that there were steps, there;
And so it was that there was nothing that could be done
about the heat
    with which the sun rises.
So he stood C
_Daa_, there, sat down.
They rested _daa_, finished resting.

475 Nnabuluede began to spur him on,
Spurred him up, spurred him down,
Spurred him down, spurred him up
Spurred him up, spurred him down,
Spurred him on, spurred him on, spurred him on

480 He then stood up, took his feet and placed them
On top of the stairs with which to ascend to the heavenly
city
And go to the house of Enu-nyili-mba.
And so it was that there was a lot of heat on it, alas!
For the sun had now risen and gone past -

485 But there was a lot of heat on it, alas!
_Hi'a!_
Nnabuluede hailed him, "My friend!" He answered him.
And he said to him, "What shall be done, now?"
He said to him, "I did tell you

490 That if it is not pleasant it will be bitter",
Told him to speak in a loud voice.
Nnabuluede's voice began to resonate.
Then he began to run,
Then he began to run,

495 Then he began to run,
Those steps that must be climbed to reach the sky-dweller
numbered three scores.
Then he began to run.
With only one lap of running, he covered three tens of them
_C_
That is ten and twenty _C_

500 And set his feet on top of the stairs,
And as he swayed his body around,
Smoke issued from his body;
And as he swayed his body around,
Smoke issued from his body.

The next spate of running saw him right on top, gbam,
Right at the house of Enu-nyili-mba,
Came in,
And it happened that there was a square in the heavenly city,
That in heaven, there was a square at the house of Enu-nyili-mba, that day.

Just as he jumped into the heavenly city,
He alighted straight on the courtyard of the house of Enu-nyili-mba.
It happened that an Ikwele man called Avuanya, who had come to
Enu-nyili-mba for the feast
Which lasted seven weeks,
Was sitting inside his house.

Our hero, Ameke Okoye, on falling, filled up that square, pitim.
O yes, I will not tell it to make it pleasant,
Because every part of his feet, without exception, had been blistered with heat
As he climbed the steps of the great stairs.
Then he called him, "Enu-nyili-mba".

He stared at him.
He called him, "Enu-nyili-mba".
He stared at him.
He said to him, "Was it not you that gave these orders,
That for the feast you would hold for seven weeks,
There should be no cracking of kernels,
And there should be no drinking of water?"
He told him that it was him that gave the orders.
He told him, "Do you know that the stick with which a millipede is removed
goes with the millipede?
I have come to your house".

That very person that is an mgbadike, it is him that has
come to your house,
For the stick with which a millipede is removed goes with
the millipede.
The world will now get to know you,
To know what gave you the power to give the orders that
there should be
no eating of food
For seven weeks
540 For which hunger is killing people on earth!
(Chant)Hmm-eee! hmm-ee! hmm-ee!
   On that day the hero was preparing for war
in heaven,
   My child, you joker, by which road will you
get to the great stairs,
   But the hero said, be it sweet or bitter, he
must ascend the stairs and return!
545 Nothing else happened, only that he aimed a blow
And gave it to Enu-nyili-mba, hmm, ka-tim.
Enu-nyili-mba stood aside and gazed at him
The Ikwele man that had come to feast with Enu-nyili-mba,
Withdrew his head *nelem* and entered his car, for home,
550 Saying that he had seen a python that would swallow an
antelope.
Enu-nyili-mba asked him, told him: "What is this?"
He said to him, "Was it not you that gave the orders
That you would feast for seven weeks,
But that people should not drink water,
555 And that there should be no cracking of kernels,
And that there should be not eating of food,
Because of which hunger has been killing people in the
world!" -
Then aimed another knock *nee*, and gave to him, *tim*!
That was the second one.
560 On hitting him the third time, *tim*!
He carried him up, *bagbom*! carried him and placed him on
his shoulder
And told Nnabuluede, "Hurry, it's time for us to go home."
Nnabuluede stood by him.
The way they ran on top of the steps thus:

Gbelegbele, gbelegbele, gbelegbele!
Gbelegbele, Gbelegbele, gbelegbele!

Descending right down to the earth, *jem*
Set feet on earth, *jem* -
He balanced him well on his shoulder

And told his friend, Nnabuluede;
"Can you see how this man has built the means by which to go to his home?
Look at it carefully,
In the event of our return to the earth;
Look at it carefully and see how it is C

The way to go to heaven."

He then carried that man
And came right to their town, *gbam*,
And slumped him on the square of their town,
Straightaway, the town-crier took up his *ubom*: 38

(Chant) O Iduu, the hero has returned!
O Iduu, the hero has returned!
O Iduu, the hero has returned!
O Iduu, the hero has returned!

People surged, *lizeem*.
What was then done?
That man was killed off C
The man that gave those orders.

*Spectators*: Hmm?

*Narrator*: O, he was killed off!
It was from there that stairs in storeyed houses originated.
Er, Obuora Udechukwu,
It was from that very place
That that feast

About which that man gave the commandment C
The Hausas are still in this tying-of-mouts. 39
Year in. year out.
They are still in this tying-of-mouts,
Do you people follow what I am saying C

The tying-of-mouts in Abakpa, 40
For Abakpa people tie their mouths.
AN EPISODE FROM THE AMEKE OKOYE EPIC 387

Enu-nyili-mba (it was that) gave that order C
The Hausas are still there, in that tying-of-months
(Loud laughter and applause)

605 A Spectator: Aguleri oo!
Narrator: Our people, welcome all!
Spectators: welcome!
Narrator: let us leave it on the ground,

610 Let us leave it on the ground.

1. **Ubom** a large metal gong.
2. **Odogwu** here translated as "hero", also refers generally to any daring person or man of achievement.
3. **Oba-na-Iduu**: The possible meanings of this are discussed in Azuonye (1984, 1990, and 1995) and Udechukwu (1984). But, generally speaking, it seems to refer specifically to the ancient Benin or Edo kingdom (Iduu) and its kings (Oba), and metaphorically to the mythical kingdom ruled by a powerful and overbearing monarch; the setting of romantic adventures in which the lowborn hero, symbolizing the democratic ethos usually triumphs over the mighty forces of the Oba (see also Okpewho's comments on this, Chapter 22 of the present book).
4. **Eriko okwu**: The allusion here is unclear. Iriko okwu could mean "weaving trouble" or "weaving words". However the former seems to fit better into this particular context.
5. **Igbu oke ndi odogwu**, here translated as "the ranking of heroes", is suggestive of the trial of the heroes in order to settle once and for all, claims among them over the supremacy of one over all the others.
6. **Ojaali**: It is not quite whether this refers to Ojaadii, the hero of another epic. The narrator, Jeveizu Okaavo, says it does not. But the name appears in a number of variant forms, e.g. Ojaadu which seems to uphold Jeveizu's position.
7. **Mpama**: Suggestive of a foolish animal. Its use in this line is thus somewhat puzzling.
8. **Ima mmanwụ** (knowing a mask) means initiation into a masking cult. But here, it appears that the narrator is merely playing on the idea, for he seems to be referring to the recognition by a non-initiate (ogbodu) of various types of masks.
9. The meaning of this line is not clear in the sense that there is no apparent link between the non-initiate's knowledge of Mbamali and his becoming powerless. It is also quite possible that this is a formulaic verse, the meaning of which may not even be clear to the narrator.
10. See note 3 above. But here Iduu does not refer to a geographical locale or a mythical world but to the audience of the narrative, a formula which helps to intensify the emotional involvement of the spectators in the drama of the tale.
11. **Enu**: Lit. "above", but here translated as "heaven" because of the mythical implications of its use in this tale as the home of the Enu-nyili-mba: See Note 12 below.
12. **Enu-nyili-mba** The name of the hero's chief adversary is difficult to gloss. A
transliteration of the name will yield the form, "Top impossible for
town/people/country/humans", which conjures up an image of formidable being that
lives above (in heaven) and makes life difficult for people on earth.

13. Onye evio: easy-going person, one that does not give the impression of being
serious; a habitual joker.

14. Obuora Udechukwu=Obiora Udechukwu: One of the spectators, co-editor of the
present text.

15. Wusali: this word ordinarily refers to inanimate objects lying about. It is used here
to underline the helplessness of the people.

16. The meaning of this line is unclear; but aku-ubili is a species of the palm tree
which provides materials for the beams of houses in villages.

17. Izu (Week) refers to the four-day Igbo market week Okpukpukpu. Oye (or Orie),
Avo (or Afo, or Ahwo), and Nkwo.

18. Ghasaziali: almost synonymous with wusali (Note 15 above), but suggests lying
about in a scattered manner. It thus adds the idea of confusion to the image of the
people's helplessness.

19. The Anambra area is a fertile, riverain area, well-provided with food (from
farming and fishing). In normal circumstances, there is always enough to eat. This
may be an oblique reference to this fact.

20. Obadiegwu na Ovia. Ovia means forest; but there is a town known as Noovia which
is quite close to Aguleri. It is not quite clear therefore whether the reference here is to
this town or simply to the forest. The allusion is thus left throughout untranslated.

21. This translation is conjectural.

22. The transcription of this epithet is conjectural; it has therefore been left
untranslated throughout.

23. As in Note 22 above.

24. Ekwudele-agba-awari: Could also be translated as "If one so much as mentions his
name in talking, that person's jaw will disintegrate". See another variant of the epithet
in line 304, below, O-kwudebe-agba-awari.

25. Gbam: all ideophones of this kind in the text here been retained in their Igbo
forms.

26. Onye abu (lit. praise chanter, poet or bard). Like the heroes of epic narratives
elsewhere in West Africa, the heroes of this and other Anambra Igbo epics have their
personal bards. Cp. the heroes' griot in the Mandinka epics of Senegal, Gambia and
Mali.

27. Tili aka nye na ntì: blocking the ears with the fingers induces one to speak or sing
at a higher pitch than normal. Traditional bards are said to use this to achieve greater
audibility and vocal projection in their performances in the absence of microphones.

28. As in Note 22, above.

29. In other words, the thunderbolts that had escaped from his body to set the forest on
fire came back to their pores as hair.

30. This translation is based on the gloss of Enu in Note 11 above and the description
of Enu-nyili-mba's domain in the text.

31. Nnabulude (Fox) is the hero's animal helper and bard; but though his behavior in
the text sometimes reflects the habits of the fox, he is so personified that he hardly
comes across as an animal.
32. The transcription of this and all subsequent lines in this chant is purely conjectural; the whole chant has therefore been left untranslated.

33. Odi-ike-di-Igbo-egwu: Could be translated into "strong one whose strength amazes the world, or, more specifically, the Igbo world", but there are other possibilities, hence the epithet has been left untranslated.

34. Akata-isi-ebuo: an approximate translation of this could be "At the mention of whose name one shudders, with one's head appearing to swell with fright."

35. As in Note 22 above.

36. Avuanya: Lit. which the eye cannot see, in other words, the invisible one.

37. Mgbadike: a type of Igbo mask representing a powerful and ferocious spirit or the lion on account of which it is always held on a leash.

38. Both the transcription and translation of this line are conjectural.


40. Abakpa: Hausa Muslim quarters in some Igbo towns.
THE HERO IN IGBO LIFE AND LITERATURE

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