The Oral Performance in Africa

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Kaalu Igirigiri: an Qhafia Igbo Singer of Tales

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Introduction

AMONG the numerous singers of heroic tales in the formerly warlike Igbo community of Qhafia in the Cross River area of south-eastern Nigeria, by far the most widely-acclaimed virtuoso in the 1970’s was a peasant farmer with a mellow singing voice named Kaalu Igirigiri.¹ A member of the relatively isolated patriclan of Qkon (close to the Cross River itself, in the extreme north-eastern corner of Qhafia), 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 practised by the Qhafia people, seem to be truly representative of the tradition as a whole. This paper is a study of the compositions and performance of this distinguished oral artist.² Based on recordings made in the field between 1971 and 1977, the focal interest of the paper is on the distinctive artistic qualities of Kaalu Igirigiri’s compositions seen in the light of the traditional aesthetic principles enunciated in various tape-recorded interviews, not only by the singer himself, but also by his rivals and some other well-known local connoisseurs.³ The paper also compares the performance of Kaalu Igirigiri with those of his known predecessors, contemporaries and one identified apprentice, and considers the dynamics of the growth of his art over the period during which the recordings were made.

Kaalù Iqirigiri: the man and his art

Kaalu Igirigiri did not insist on the facts of his ancestry and personal upbringing as an important background to the understanding
of his art. He was not one of those singers in the Qhafia bardic tradition who claim to be descended from a long line of master-singers; nor did he—like some others—make any pretences to divine or other supernatural inspiration. 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 paternal forbears as a line of eminent diviners:

This is Kaalu Igirigiri,
Son of my great mother Ogbenyealu—
Woman of the matriclan of Anyanwu Ezhe,
Woman who was the people’s diviner,
Woman of the patriclan of Ibina in Egbenyi Uka,
Daughter of Ezhiukwu Qhom
Woman of the Marshy Lands
(No woman from the Marshy Lands ever goes to live with a friend)—
Great father Kaalu Obası of Nde Awa Ezhema was her elder brother;
And when Agwunsi Obası died,
Tooti Obası became her elder brother,
Kaalu Obası,
He that makes 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.

Beyond this kind of sketchy genealogy, Kaalu Igirigiri said little more in interviews recorded in the field about his personal life, parentage, childhood, etc. Rather, he focused 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-mu-m-ni-n’abu (my fathers-in-song). Among these are three men who are recognized throughout Qhafia 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 Qkon. Kaalu Igirigiri does not go into specific details about the nature of his relationships 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. But inspite 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. Accordingly to Kaalù Ipirigiri:

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 rememberance (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 Kaalù Ipirigiri. 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).8

It would appear from the showing of Kaalù Ipirigiri in various performances that the essential legacy which training under a master-singer bestows on the young practitioner is confidence and authority. Through 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. These include the aesthetic principles of composition in the oral performance, the major heroic tales9 which occur in the repertoire of practically all known singers, and the system of epithet and other formulae which constitute the linguistic core and the mainstay of the structure of the songs.10

Unfortunately, we are not in possession of any extant recordings of the compositions of two of Kaalù Ipirigiri’s known fathers-in-song (Oke Mbe of Asaga and Ibiam Nta of Ọkon). However one version of the Epic of Nne Mbaafo (see Appendix 2, Tale No. 7) by his third father-in-song (Okonkwo Oke of Akaan) has survived
A comparison of this with versions of the same tale by Kaalu Igi'igiri (see, for example, Tales 1A) reveals a lot 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 Mgbaafọ—as will be seen from a comparison of the following extract with the text given in Tales 1A below—is similar to a large extent to Kaalu Igi'igiri’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 Mgbaafọ
She was of Arọ-Oke-Igbo.  
She was of the matriclan of Okwura-Egbu-Enyi  
That Nne Mgbaafọ, she behaved very much like a man  
Her husband had died at Arọ-Oke-Igbo  
And when Nne Mgbaafọ 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 closely resembles that of Kaalu Igi'igiri’s version presented in Tales 1A below, but neither does the lexis nor the vocal presentation as can be perceived on listening to the tape-recordings. 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 Mgbaafọ is presented as a woman who behaved very much like a man. After the death of her first husband, in her native community of Arochukwu, she sets out fully armed and clothed like a male warrior to search for another hus-
band. 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-Úma where she meets and marries a man named Uduma. Uduma had not yet fulfilled his manhood as required by the heroic ethos of his age by winning a human head in battle. But anxious to fend off the shame of living with such a man whom his age-mates would despise as a dishonourable coward (onye-ujo), Nne Mgbaafo cooks a special meal for her husband and urges him to go to a war which had just broken out in Ibibioland. Uduma goes but is slain in 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 in 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 and overpowers a young man whom she finds wandering alone at Usukpam. She chops off his head and 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 not one of the versions of the story of Nne Mgbaafo by Okonkwo Oke to which Kaalu Igirigiri was exposed in the course of his training. He no doubt heard many other versions, and there is no reason why these may not have varied in structure and even content like the versions in his current repertoire (see Azuonye 1983). One of the traditional aesthetic principles of the Ohafia epic song positively encourages and even requires such variations. 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 Emeuwa who goes to battle in Ibibioland of 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 Emeuwa.

It seems quite clear from the enormity of the thematic differences between Kaalu Izigiri’s version and that of his father-in-song, Okonkwó Oke, that, their similarity of style notwithstanding, the sources are different. In my interviews with him, Kaalu Izigiri persistently evaded all attempts to pin down his sources, either because, like Christopher Okigbo in his *Limits* (1962), his versions have been synthesized from so many different sources that it is difficult to pin them down precisely, or because he simply regards his sources as a secret of his art which is not to be given away. But the possibilities are twofold: in a situation in which the singer seems to have listened to many different versions from various fathers-in-song, he may have adopted one father’s manner of telling the tale or created his own tale by the conflation of elements taken from the father’s tales with those borrowed from other singers.

The most likely single source for Kaalu Izigiri’s Nne Mgbaafo is Ogboo Ogwo of Akaanu, a veteran singer who is acknowledged as their father-in-song by two of Kaalu’s leading contemporaries and rivals, Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia and Njoku Mmaju of Uduma Awoke. However, the evidence on which this speculation is based is not very reliable, namely a claim in testimonies recorded by Ogbaa Kaalu and Njoku Mrnaju that their versions of Nne Mgbaafo—which are strikingly similar in content to those of Kaalu Izigiri—are exactly as received from the master. Ohafia singers of tales are prone to exaggerate issues in their testimonies. 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. This is 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 formulae constant in all versions of the tale irrespective of the singer and the occasion and 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 quite clearly 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. This he does by the rejection of some in favour of others, by selective borrowing from masters and contemporaries, and by the conflation of themes, episodes and tale-types. 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 constant remoulding within a set of well-defined traditional aesthetic principles.

The traditional aesthetic principles of the Ohafia Igbo oral epic song, of which Kaalu Idirigiri is one of the leading exponents, cover a wide area. They focus mainly on the necessity for variety and change in the tale-repertoires of individual singers; variety and change in their performance strategies; the value of clarity in the art of composition in the oral performance; 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 1986a); 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 behaviour of individual members of the society. On this 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 accompaniment of martial music 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 affective 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
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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, in the heroic age.

The second principle is related to the first. This may be described as the principle of authenticity. In order to fulfil effectively 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). There is frequent insistence in these testimonies on ife mee eme mgbe ichin (what actually happened in the days of the ancestors). However, 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 between clans and clans, 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, 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 modulation of voice-pitch. Thus Kaalu Iigirigiri, for example, is often rated more highly than his peers because olu ya di uto (his voice is sweet) and O na-akapusa ife anu anu na 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 (üto) to stress the need for singers to build up in the course of their artistic careers a large and varied repertoire 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 Igirigiri and their actual performance will be discussed—both in themselves as they really are and by comparison to the songs and performance of other singers—on the basis of these four principles. It is hoped that this discussion will reveal the warmth and strength of his 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.

**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 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 Tales II below, the variety and range of tales in Kaalu Igirigiri’s repertoire is very high indeed: there are 21 out of 34 distinct tales collected so far (an impressive 63 a), which is far in excess of the range of five other singers whose compositions have also been recorded (see Azuonye 1986b). There is also variety in Kaalu Igirigiri’s repertoire. In fact, he is the only one of the six singers whose compositions include at least one tale from all the major thematic categories into which the 34 tales may be grouped. The details are as follows:

- 2 out of 2 creations myths (Tales II, Nos 1-2);
- 2 out of 2 migration legends (Tales II, Nos 3-4);
- 10 out of 20 heroic legends (Tales II, Nos 5-15);
- 6 out of 8 allegories and fabular tales (Tales II, No. 21). !1).

The statistical evidence given here in support of Kaalu Igirigiri’s
very high rating throughout Ohafia as the most versatile singer of recent times is no doubt open to question, on the ground that I credit him "with greater variety of repertoire than the other singers because I have spent more time with him" in the field. It is indeed true that I have spent more time with Kaalu Igarigiri than with the other four of the five singers, whose compositions and performances I personally recorded in the field; but this is precisely because of the richness and variety which I found in his repertoire after the first three recording sessions. No other singer was able to display a similar range after the same number of recording sessions, and none has so far been able to render as many as the 22 tales which I was able to record at one sitting from Kaalu Igarigiri, in July 1977. It may well be that some of these less versatile singers will in future be able to build up repertoires comparable in range to, or even more impressive than that of Kaalu Igarigiri; but at the moment, their repertoires are not only quantitatively poorer but also lack the rich thematic variety which Kaalu Igarigiri's repertoire exhibits.

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 variations in mode and tenor. These satisfy 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 a testimony:

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

This is a general convention which is clearly evident in the performance of Kaalu Igarigiri. After the initial eulogies, which in the performance of Kaalu Igarigiri often includes eulogistic signatures of the kind quoted on page 43, as well as the praises of the musicians who supply the instrumental accompaniment and of the leading heroes in the traditional pantheon, Kaalu Igarigiri would normally proceed to the narratives themselves, interspersing them with traditional battle songs and other sequences of heroic invocation. The resultant interplay of song, invocation and narratiave, gravitating between the singing, the chanting, the reciting and the speaking modes of vocalization, generally tends to resemble 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 the audience joins. The interplay of song, invocation and narrative in Kaalu Igirigiri's performance is similar to that found in the performances of all other singers recorded so far, except that of Singer F (Njoku Mmaju of Uduma Awoke) in the narrative parts of which there is an additional element—the chorus-man (Onye-nkwechi). As I have pointed out elsewhere (Azuonye 1979: 89-91), 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-discernible way related to the meaning of the narrative themselves. No clear explanation has so far been offered, either by the singer or his critics, as to the exact function of the chorus-man in his performances. However, any suggestion that the chorus-man's words may be distracting—as indeed they would sound to an outsider to the Ohafia oral culture—is firmly denied. It may well be that the Ohafia audiences have developed, through some kind of cultural conditioning, an inner ear which enables them to hear and enjoy the undercurrents of the words of the chorus-man and at the same time to hear and enjoy 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 singing of the chorus-man and that of the lead-singer. In the final analysis, there is one aspect of the chorus-man's performance which even the bemused outsider can enjoy, if he has an ear for the Ohafia dialect of Igbo. This is 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 the witticism and humour to be enjoyed on its own as an item in a mixed programme 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 voices recognized by the hearers as one of the chief means of highlighting specific types of themes. Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia (Singer D) refers to those voices when in a testimony 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: 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 be able to simulate the varied mood of the tales.

The basic voice is the narrative voice, generally in the reciting mode, and it is this 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 Mgbaafọ* on page 45 and portions of the texts in Tales 1.

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 Ipirigiri’s rivals, Ogbaa Kaalu of Abia (Singer D), has in one of his usual detractive criticisms of Kaalu accused him of lacking the virtuosity to exploit the affective value of the 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 Ipirigiri 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 first fired the gun with which the short-armed one of Aliike was killed (see Tales 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 (Tales II, No. 8), not to the version (B1) presented in Tales 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 grossly unfair. In versions B2 and B3 of Amoogu, as well as in three other versions (B4, B5 and B6) of the tale, Kaalu Ipirigiri does indeed make effective use of the elegaic 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 elegaic form of the lyric voice, Kaalu Igirigiri in his performances also makes effective use of two other forms, the apostrophic form (mkpokui) 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-uto) 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 Tales II. Here, a situation of intense desperation arises and the omniscient narrator "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 Tales I.

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 Tales IA 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.

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 con-
cluding remarks in which the moral of the tale is drawn. See, for example, lines 194-196 of Amoogu B1 (Tales IA).

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 performance of Kaalu Igitirigiri 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 Western 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 Igitirigiri, they refer to the variety of voices which he is capable of assuming with such inimitable virtuosity in his performances.

Let us now proceed to examine the internal patterns of variation which occur in the individual singer’s renderings of particular tales on different occasions as exemplified by the performance of Kaalu Igitirigiri. A comparative examination of the available versions of any tale in the repertoire of Kaalu Igitirigiri will show that such variations are not just a matter of language and structure. This 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, 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 Igbe Mmaku (in Igbo territory) while in B2 it is set at a place called Nnong (in Ibibio land). Igbe 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 and secure armed escorts for her perilous adventures 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?
Chukwuma Azuonye

It is of course quite possible, as I have suggested elsewhere (Azuonye 1983), that the location of the battle in Igbo territory (Igbe Mmakụ), 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 Qhafia, the Ibibio. But what about the reintroduction of Igbe Mmakụ 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 Mgbaarfo legend by rival singers. It occurs for instance in one version recorded in 1977 from Njokụ Mmajụ 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) quoted elsewhere in this paper (page 53 above), and I think that Kaalu Igregiri’s portrayal of Nne Mgbaarfo gains in realism by this addition: “The picture of the heroine escorted to her destination by four (or eight) armed men 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 Mgbaarfo legend: it merely eliminates extreme sensationalism without obliterating the heroic image of Nne Mgbaarfo 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 Igregiri, is that they are editorial means of correcting past performance errors and of creating more refined versions towards the satisfaction of the traditional aesthetic principle of authenticity, a principle which demands among other things “truthfulness” and “reality” in the portrayal 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 of the particular occasion, such as the ethnic composition of the audience. Thirdly and most importantly, thematic changes serve the purposes of clarity.

Thematic changes of the kind which make for enhanced clarity in the performance of the Qhafia singers involve either the deletion or compression of themes on the one hand, or the addition or expan-
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sion of themes on the other. In response to the jibes of some of his critics, Kaalu Idiriri has over the years opted for the pursuit of clarity through the addition and expansion of his basic themes. Consequently he has composed less and less short, highly compressed, ballad-like lays of the kind which I recorded in 1971 and 1972 (see Tales I for example). In apparent response to criticism such as that of Ogbaa Kaalu 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 Idiriri has in his more recent compositions exhibited a tendency towards elaboration. This is despite the fact that in 1976, when Ogbaa Kaalu’s comments were played back to him, he dismissed them with arrogant self-confidence as the rantings of a jealous rival. But the new tendency in the style of Kaalu Idiriri offends the sensibilities of singer-critics like Egwu Kaalu of Asaga (Singer C) for whom the “essential details” added to pad out the narratives are “extraneous” to the realistic style of historical song:

He (Kaalu Idiriri) 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 (Kaalu Idiriri 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 emanates. Kaalu Idiriri’s narrative is generally herocentric in structure, with all actions, situations and locations organized in such a way as to point directly towards the revelation of the hero. The hero may be revealed by direct-pointing at the beginning of the tale (as in the examples presented in Tales 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, Kaalu Idiriri in his performances indulges in variations of different kinds which ensure that, even if he is called upon to render the same tale two or more times on the
same spot within the same space of time, 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) within the space of one hour. In these, Kaalu Igirigiri was able to exploit 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 formulae which constitute the mainstay of the language of the songs.

“Logistics”, which for Christopher Okigbo “is what poetry is”, is indeed a fitting metaphor to describe the performance strategy of Kaalu Igirigiri. In its relation with strategy and tactics in the arts 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”. In performances witnessed and recorded in the field, we get the impression that 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 responses preferred by himself. The effect of his mastery can be observed in the emotions of pleasure written largely on the faces of his listeners, and in their comments. Of course, few listeners can fail to applaud a singer who can offer so much variety in any performance from 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 at a single performance in 1977). With such a rich and varied repertoire, Kaalu Igirigiri can indeed go on for a long time in any performance, without 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 will then 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 narrow in their repertoire of tales. One such singer is Echeme Ugwu of Ebem (Singer D), a son-in-song of Kaalu Igirigiri himself:

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

By contrast, Kaalu I girigiri is the matchless virtuoso who can range over the whole of Nigeria. Says Kaalu Ikpo of O űk o:

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).

Kaalu Ikpo, who is one of Kaalu I girigiri’s musical accompanists is probably here 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 1986). Here are the opening lines of this verse chronicle:

That 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 O kpara was in power
That was when Zik was in power
That was when Awo lowo 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 that 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 Pro-
fessor Kaalu Ezera of Ebem 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 Mmeka*ota 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.

**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 one 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 mind of singers of tales and their listeners, in practically all epic traditions, the impression of something that remains stable in spite of all thematic and structural changes, something that transcends the lexis of the oral performance. This 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 the nature of this stable element has been, over the years, one of the major concerns of scholarship in the field of oral performance (see, for example, Bowra 1966: 454; Finnegian 1977: 76-83; Innes 1973 and 1974: 30; 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 for-
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formulae and themes from the traditional repertoire which best define the hero of the tale. Once this optimum selection of formulae 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 Mgbaafọ by four different singers (four of which are by Kaalu Igarigiri) revealed a total of 54 different themes in all the versions taken together. But only 2 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 Mgbaafọ . . . 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 Igarigiri has shown himself in his recorded compositions to be the master of the logistics of presenting the heroic essence of his tales with the 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 (Tales IA: lines 38-120). This stylized scene 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 Igarigiri’s versions 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 contemporary singers of tales in Ohafia who have recognized and effectively exploited the possibilities of developing similar themes for other compositions by the technique of climatic hero-enumeration (see, for example, *Ogu Mmekọta Naijiria*, on page 61).

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 (1980: 247) 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.” This clarity of narrative form which is evident in the texts presented below in Tales I is matched in the internal dynamics of the narratives by a clarity of structure arising mainly from stylistic repetition and parallelism.²⁵

There are probably three main types of repetition in the compositions of Kaalu Igirigiri—formulaic, lyrical and mimetic. 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 Bl: Tales IA) or which in the course of the narration restates a recurrent theme, e.g., in cases of climactic hero-enumeration (*Amoogu Bl*: 36-120), the lines which focus on the problem before the heroes are enumerated. Lyrical repetition is of the kind found in song-passages of the tales (see Tales I) which in the course of the narrative is used to convey an emotional state. For example, when Nne Mgbaafọ arrives at the enemy Ibibio camp and demands to see her husband, the flabbergasted enemy brings Ndukwe Emeuwa out of prison and questions him. The insistent and excited tone of this questioning is reflected in the repetition of the line: Tales IA, lines 34-35. Finally, mimetic repetition dramatically re-echoes the intensity or duration of an action, as in lines 166-122 of *Amoogu Bl* (Tales IA) 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 syntactic 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 singer’s 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 most 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:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{Di ya wu ezhi di} & \quad \text{Her husband was a good husband} \\
O wu ezhi di ya lu o & \quad \text{It was a good husband she was married to} \\
\end{align*}
\]

\[(Nne Mgbaafo B1: \text{The heroine speaking to enemy Ibibio about her husband})\]

By the omission of verbs, pronouns, nouns or whole phrases, as in \textit{Nne Mgbaafo 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 \textit{Nne Mgbaafo B2} (lines 42-44):

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{He said, “You have bound my feet with ropes,} \\
\text{May you unbind me that I may go and see if she is indeed my wife,} \\
\text{Unbind me that I may go and see if she is indeed my wife!”} \\
\end{align*}
\]

Writing on what they describe as “the spare, uncluttered language of our épic, 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.\textsuperscript{26}

Egwu Kaalu of Asaga (Singer C) speaks in much the same vein when in the following testimony he deprecates “the excessive use of proverbs” (\textit{itukari ilu}) describing it as \textit{ife oduo} (something extraneous), the consequence of which may be the production of “a different type of poetry” (\textit{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 Igregiri come through with striking poignancy. See, for example, \textit{Amoo\ogu BI} (Tales IA) 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 10-13).

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 singer’s voice. A barman at Ebem describes Kaalu Igregiri’s voice as “sounding \textit{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, which Ogbaa Kaalu of Abja (Singer D) has described as sounding “monotonously harsh” and which another informant compares to “the chirping of crickets”. Kaalu Igregiri’s voice, of which he is justly proud and
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boastful, 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 Ipirigiri’s type of voice and indeed to any proficient bard in the oral tradition, it seems specially appropriate to Kaalu’s voice, a voice so richly flexible that it is able to intone with ease the various voices of the tales—lyric, invocative, oratorical and narrative—in their proper modulations. But apart from its sonority, beauty and flexibility, Kaalu Ipirigiri’s voice possesses the most highly valued quality expected of the voice of an oral artist, namely audibility and clarity. Thus, in ranking him above his rivals, Kaalu Ipirigiri’s musical accompanists—Ukaoha Agwuni and Kaalu Ikpo, 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).

Kaalu Ipirigiri and the functions of the oral epic song in Ohafia

Kaalu Ipirigiri 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 has 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, for stressing 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 of old. Kaalu Ipirigiri’s position is succinctly summed up as follows 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 increasingly becoming a popular form of entertainment, farther and farther divorced from their traditional soil and performed for small and large audiences within and outside Ohafia, on radio and television. The consequence of this, in the performance of many a modernist singer, 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-Egbo Anu, "Why God Ordained the Hunting of Wild Animals" (Kaalu Ibirigiri's Tale No. 1). Purist that he is, Kaalu Ibirigiri is opposed to this kind of assimilation which he regards as contamination. His version of the tale is thus 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 invoking the principles of natural selection but those of divine ordinance. Even his chronicle of the events of the Nigerian Civil War (Tale No. 21) culminates, as we have earlier observed, in a chauvinistic assertion of the myth of Ohafia's uniqueness in Igbo culture and history. For Kaalu Ibirigiri this kind of assertion, directed at constantly reminding the Ohafia people themselves of their common origins and of the grandeur of their past and the greatness of their ancestors, is 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 will 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
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Kaalu 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 patricians in Ohafia and those of the particular patrician in which he happens to be performing. He may even add a few extra credit lines to the heroes of the host patrician, 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 the heroes in all Ohafia patricians 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 Kaalu Igirigiri is able to create the illusion of *mkpozu* in his hero-lists. For most of his hearers, Kaalu 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 in 1976, for instance, some appreciators who had earlier interpreted the *Nne Ache Ugo* fable (Tales No. 16) as a parable (*itu*) 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 a 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 over 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)²⁸, touches on aspects of the people’s existence as a cor-
porate group. He not only "awakens the spirit" of the young and "inspires in them that old bravery", he also enlightens them about their past traditions of self-sacrificing heroism "which bind all Ohafia people together", which mark them out from other Igbo people", and which call for the continued pursuit for excellence in contemporary endeavour for the glory of the community at large.  

**TALES I**

**NNE MGBAAFO BI (1971)**

Mgbaafọ!  
Woman of Nde-Awa-Ezhiema-Elechi!  
Her husband went to war —  
He went to the war of Igbe Mmakụ;  
And so her husband went to the war of Igbe Mmakụ.  
Three market weeks passed, but her husband did not return —  
Her husband did not return.  
Mgbaafọ followed her husband, went searching for her husband, came to the Igbe Mmakụ warfront.  

10 **Ndukwé Emeuwa was her husband’s name.**  
His name was Ndukwe Emeuwa, that husband of hers.  
She went mbeleze mbelege and came to Isiugwu.  
The people asked Mgbaafọ, "Where are you coming from?"  
She said she was searching for her husband —  
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 may be sleeping.  
She went past their ogo.  
She went mbeleze mbelege and came to Atang.  

20 The people asked Mgbaafọ "Where are you coming from?"  
She said she was searching for her good husband, Ndukwe:  
He had gone to the war of Igbe Mmakụ 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,  
And she would dare whoever killed her husband to kill her too.  
She went mbeleze mbelege and at last arrived at the Igbe Mmakụ people, they questioned her, "What are you called. Igbe Mmakụ people, they questioned her, "What are you called?"  
She said that she was called Mgbaafọ.  
"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?"  
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 Igbe 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-Ezema-Elechi.

50 Nwata nwaanji achọwa di ya 32 
Yaa di!
Nwata nwaanji achọwa di ya 
Ya iya!
Mgbaafo, o chọwa di ya 
Ya di!
Nwata nwaanji achọwa di ya 
Ya iya!
......
Mgbaafo, o chọwa di ya 
Ya aha di!

55 O chọwa di ya 
ya aha di!
Q chọwa di ya 
Ya aha di!.....

TALES IA

AMOOGU BI (1971)

Odududu ndu/ufu! 33

Wardrum, without whose leadership there is fear on the way!
Wardrum, without whose leadership there is fear on the way!
Great spirit, Uduma Olugutu.
Great spirit, Qkalij husband of my great mother, 
Arul!
Great spirit that dwells in the water at Nde-a-Awa-Ezhiema-Elechi!
Great spirit Umezurike of Ebiri-Ezhi-Akuma!
Great spirit Agwu Qbasj of Ekidi Nde Qfoali!
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 Ababa, was the one that brought the charm-breaker.

15
(. . . . .).
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 Ababa.
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 Abja 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 the nest of soldier-ants and charge the guns, so the short-
armed dwarf of 'Liike might be killed.
My great father Igbon Awa!
My great father Igbon Awa,
Who is of Nde-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.
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My great father Mkpawe son of Imaga Odo,
He was a person of Ugwu Naka Oke Igbemini,
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 Igwe Oto 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 Okpe 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 Ukiwe,
60 Man of Agalado Odo Ukiwe—
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 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 soldiers-ants bit him a little, but the guns he could not charge.
He trembled off.

70 They went and called Akwu, man of Abia Abia Eteete.
Two guns were given to him, but the guns he could not charge.
He also trembled off.

Guns were given to Kamalu Ngwo, son of Agalado Odo Ukiwe.
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 them 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 them to Nkata Ogbuanu, Nkata Ogbuanu,
Man of Igbe Mmaku,
85 Son of great mother ( . . ) of Ndibe Oqwara,
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,
Let us go home!"
Amoogu o, Amoogu o, je!
Amoogu o, son of great mother Ori Ukpo.
Son of great mother Orieji Ukpo,
Son of great mother Orieji Ukpo.

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 of Okpu-Uma-Ofu-Agbala! ....

He asked to be given the guns.

"We should all go home if I try and fail!
Ohaafia warriors, give me the guns!"
But they questioned him: "Of what patrician are you?"
And he said that he was a native of Amuma.
"Let the guns be given to him."

And so the warriors of Ohaafia Uduma Ezhiema, they took the guns and gave
He was a man of Okpu-Uma-Ofu-Abala.
He took two guns and entered.
(...)

And so two guns were given to Amoogu.

He charged this one, and charged that one.
The ants stung his laps in their hundreds.
The ants stung his laps in their 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.

Mbu Ologho took one gun from him.
And they went and killed Mkpsi Ebulebu, the short-armed dwarf of 'Liike.
The evil genius in the nest of soldier-ants.
They hacked him mercilessly and packed his body in a basket,
And so they killed great father Omiko.

After all these,
Ohaafia 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,

All without exception.
When they returned to their camp —
When at last 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

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.

If we do not kill him, he shall become the leading hero of Ohaafia."
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 ọbu. 34

145 His mother, great mother Ori Ukpo —
My great mother Ori Ukpo wept:
Amoogu, son of Ọloghọ Ikpo,
Were you killed with a matchet or a gun?
Be it with a matchet or a gun,

150 O my son, jo!
O my son, je!
Were you killed with a matchet or a gun?
O my son, iyeje!
Iyee-je!

155 O Amoogu, iyeje!
Amoogu, O come to me, iye!
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 Ọloghọ Ikpo, dwelt beside a silk-cotton tree.
Kites came from that silk-cotton tree and preyed upon her chickens,
Hawks came from that 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 Iremo Ọkpụrụkpụ.
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 Iremo Ọkpụrụkpụ 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 continued on 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 hold it up with their hands.
but they were shaken by the wine.
Shaken by the wine, all without exception,
Shaken by the wine.

(. . . .)

185 As they tried to hold 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,
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.

TALES II
KAALU IGIRIGIRI'S REPETTOIRE OF TALES, COLLECTED *1971-77

A. Creation Myths

B. Migration Legends
3. *Ibe Ohafia bia.* Legend of the migration of the founding fathers of Ohafia from Benin through Ido (on the Niger) and Ibeku (near Umualia) to their present homeland. 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 was ravaging 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. She 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).
9. *Ogbaka Okorile.* Legend of a famous Ohafia dancer of the Ekpe dance killed...
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10. *Egbele.* Legend of a thrice-bereaved mother whose joyful song (on the victorious return of her last born 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).


13. *Kaalu Ezè Nwa Mgbo.* Legend of a 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 conceives 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. *Ihògbò.* Legend of an acrobatic dancer able to dance the Okerenkwá heroic dance while climbing up a tree. Two versions: (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. *Agwù Akpù.* Fable of the spirit doctor who is said to have introduced the use of the lizard as a sacrificial animal. One version: B1 (1977).


E. Chronicle of Contemporary Events

NOTES

1. Kaalu Igirigiri is one of the six singers of tales whose compositions and performances form the basis of my study of the ÒhaỌja Igbo oral epic tradition in my doctoral thesis (Azuonye 1979). The others are Okonkwọ Oke of Alaanu, Egwu Kaalu of Asaga, Qgbaa Kaalu of Abja, Echeme Ugwu of Ebem, and Njọkụ Mmaụ of Uduma Awoke. In referring to variant versions of the same tales by these singers, I use the following alphabet codes: “A” for Okonkwọ Oke (d. 1966), whose recordings I obtained through an ÒhaỌja indigene in London, “B” for Kaalu Igirigiri (d. 1980) and “C”, “D”, “E” and “F” respectively for the others, in the chronological order in which I first met them. For the variant versions of the same tales by each singer, the relevant alphabet code is coupled with numeral codes (e.g. B1, B2, B3, etc) as in Tales II and in the main body of the paper. Throughout the paper, I use the term “oral epic song” as defined in Wilgus 1959, Bodker 1965 and Lord 1968, i.e. oral narrative verse which is heroic in matter and manner but of brief compass.

2. This is a modified version of the paper 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 Olujubu, whose comments and criticism both inside and outside the conference hall have guided me in my revision.

3. For further details see Azuonye 1979 (Chapter 9) and my more recent paper (Azuonye 1986a).

4. e.g. Singer D. See Azuonye 1979: 102-4.

5. Although Òhaọja is a double-descent society, matrilineal relations are much more highly stressed than patrilineal ones: “Not only is the Òhaọja 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 Igirigiri to his matriclan than to his patriclan.


7. e.g. the Mandinka bardic tradition (see Innes, 1974: 2-7).

8. This and other testimonies from the Òhaọja 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 Song of Kaalu Igirigiri: Compositions of an Òhaọja Igbo Singer of Tales.

9. Among these are tales Nos. 1, 3, 6, 7, 8, 10 in Tales II.
For a detailed discussion of the traditional and other formulae in the songs, see Azuonye 1979 (Chapter 6) and 1986b.

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

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

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

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 Conference Questionnaire”). Transition, 11 (July - August 1962): p. 2.

No recording of the performances of Ogboo Ogwo appears to have survived, except perhaps in the archives of Radio Nigeria (Enugu).

Cp. the process of “selective borrowing” in the Mandinka heroic tradition: Innes 1973: 118.

The question was first raised at the conference by Chief Oludare Olajubu and again by Professor Isidore Okpewho (the quote is from Okpewho, in one of his editorial letters dated October 17, 1981, in connection with the present volume).

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

The “voices” here are co-terminous 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.

See Kunene 1971 and Azuonye 1979: 293.

These narration schemata are described in detail in Azuonye 1979: 291-297.

The retired Presbyterian pastor O. Ukiwe Maduekwe in whose house I recorded most of the songs of Kaalu Igingiri listed in Appendix II.


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

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

Both singers E and F have produced some long playing records.

See Azuonye 1979. pp. 110-115

Ibid: 351-355

The ideophone mbelege mbelege (which is of frequent occurrence in the performance of Kaalu Igingiri) 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’’
31. *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.

32. 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 interjection expressive of joyful emotion.

33. *Odududu ndufu* is one of the many untranslatable epithets in the songs. Rendered literally, it says "He that leads (Odu) leading (du) leading astray (ndufu)". But it really describes 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. There is for instance a du-du sound in the two parts of the epithet which appears to foreshadow phonetically the performance to the war drum (*ikoro*) in the couplet that follows. It is indeed unfortunate that the epithets on which so much of the emotional effect of the songs on their intended local audiences depend cannot easily be translated. In this sense, translations are essentially useless except as an aid to the non-speaker of the language (or dialect) who merely wants to follow the main outline of the tales. See Innes' contribution to this volume for a more detailed discussion of the problem of the untranslatable formula in another West African heroic tradition.

34. An *Obu* is a type of hall of local heroes found in each Ohafia village. It usually features wooden images of the leading ancestral heroes of the locality and battle trophies (including the skulls of slain enemies).

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