

## A Study of Selected Esan Folksongs and Proverbs in Nigeria as a Lead into Their Spirituality

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### Abstract

*No doubt, African indigenous knowledge (AIK) is an umbrella body which accommodates African literary creativity, philosophy, history, politics, music, religion, fine arts and science. In the same sequence, while proverbs are known to be wrapped up in and are spoken of in deep language, music remains a conduit through which by repetitive listening a lot of people are able to grasp their meanings. Among the Esan, Edo State of Nigeria, interlacing singing with apt proverbs is seen as good singing. This mutual coexistence between singing and telling proverbs often creates a singing style which is akin to recitatives. In this paper, we discussed selected song texts and proverbs which boarder on the people's view about God and godliness. In eliciting data for this study, a random sound check of traditional songs and proverbs was done and apt data were sieved from the pool for this study. There is an avalanche of proverbs in Esan traditional society which are connected with diverse issues in their cosmology. In this study, the authors treat certain proverbs which are products of indigenous knowledge and examine their didactic essences in contemporary parlance. To extract data for this study, a mixture of research methods was used which included library search for relevant literature, interaction with the locals, use of interlocutors and interviews within the five local government areas which make up the province. It is reasoned that this work will be a contribution to the growing body of research relating to African indigenous knowledge (AIK) in the education of humanity and that it has much to impact on our society than we yet know.*

**Keywords:** Folksong, proverb, deity; indigenous knowledge.

### Introduction

Without contradiction, much work has been done on Esan in terms of its history of origin, geographical location, economics, agriculture, political structures, religious nature and architecture. In the same vein, there is a growing body of literature by some scholars of Esan extraction on Esan folksongs. These have resulted in stupendous volumes which are accessible in the contributions of Aluede & Braimah (2004), Aluede (2007), Aluede (2008), Aluede (2010), Aluede & Aziegbe (2013), Aluede (2014), Inegbeboh (2016); Aluede & Izibili (2017) to mention a few. Not too long ago, Aluede (2014) stretched his research on Esan folksongs further when he propounded the theories of uni-textuality and ambi-textuality in his insightful article titled: Towards a Theoretical Foregrounding in Textual Analysis of Esan Songs. Very recently, the duo of Aluede and Izibili (2017) examined Esan traditional songs as epistemic windows into Esan philosophy. In its simplistic terms, philosophy is often defined as an academic discipline that seeks truth through reasoning rather than empiricism. The present study rests on contributions of the above-mentioned scholars as a pivot to further interrogate some Esan folksongs and proverbs so as to be able to infer from such an exercise, the people's view of God, guardian angel, other deities and life. As we do this, we will also examine the people's reflections on God, His attributes and relationship with man in their own understanding.

In this work, some folksongs and proverbs are depended on as strands of the people's indigenous knowledge to study their construct. Indigenous knowledge system has for a very long time been the precursor of our contemporary research findings. Indigenous knowledge system (IKS) may be defined as the cumulative body of strategies, practices, techniques, tools, intellectual resources, explanations, beliefs, and values accumulated overtime in a particular locality, without the interference and impositions of external hegemonic forces. Indigenous Knowledge Systems are not confined to the materials sphere, but often interconnected with spiritual and non-material realms of existence (Emeagwali, 2014:1).

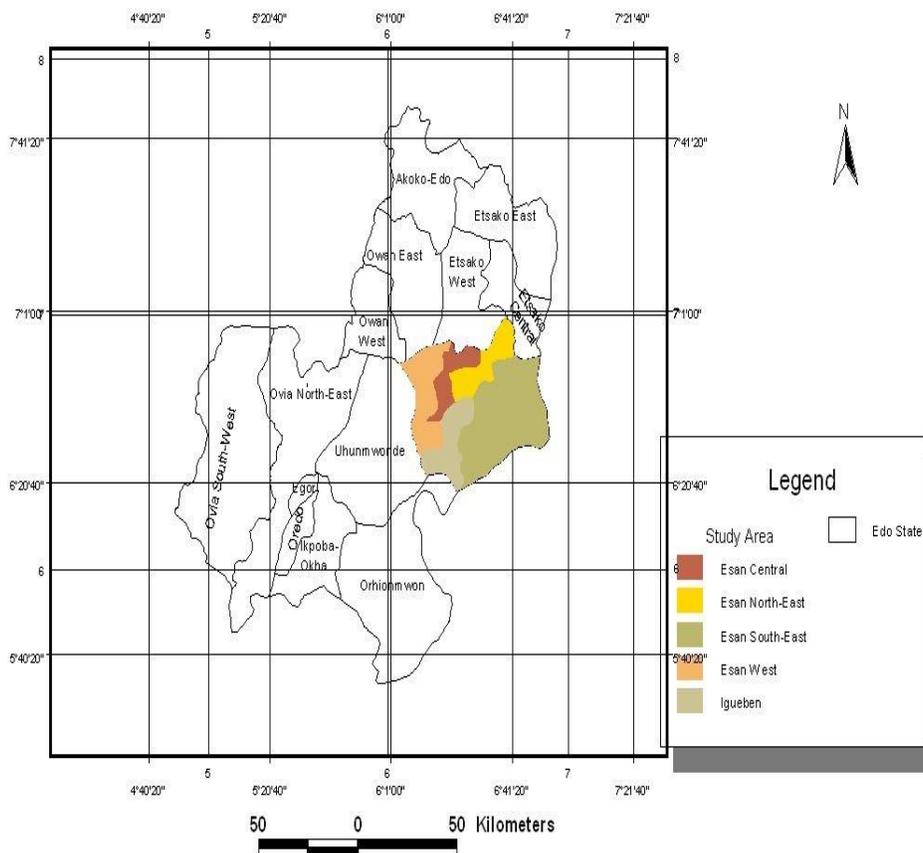
**Materials and Methods**

To generate data for this study, we engaged in a random sound check of traditional songs and proverbs. This was done by attending many traditional marriage and burial ceremonies which hired the services of traditional musicians in the five local government areas which make up Esan. Two towns each were selected in the local government areas. This was made up of the local government headquarters and one other town. These other towns were selected based on their population. In selected towns and local government headquarters, we appointed informants who were constantly notifying us of any major events in their areas. During our spectatorship of such events, data were sieved from the repertoires of the performers. No doubt, every day-to-day conversation among the elderly Esan is replete with an avalanche of proverbs. From the dossier of Esan proverbs randomly collected from the field and from a compilation-an ongoing work, these proverbs were selected and calibrated in line with the thrust of their messages. However, of particular relevance are those bordering on spirituality which is the main thrust of this study.

**Who are the Esan?**

The term Esan has dual meanings. It is nomenclatural for a territory occupied by a people of a land, and is also a language spoken in that locale. Geographically, Esan is bounded by Owan East, Etsako West and Etsako Central in the North, Owan West in the Northwest, Orhionmwon in the South and river Niger by the East. The Esan occupy a landmass of about 2,814 square kilometers (Oseghale, 2019). Owing to its historical origin, the social and political organisation of the people relies greatly on that of Benin (Okpoko, 1993, Okojie 1994; Okoduwa, 1997). From Esan historical reconstruction, the people who occupy the region marked out in the map below are believed to have migrated from Benin Empire at different periods and the first batch of such migrations which happened in 1025 BC actually met some inhabitants at Egbele in Uromi (Ojiefoh, 2002).

**Map of Edo State Showing the Study Area**



### ***Theoretical Framework***

In our search for relevant literature that would provide some theoretical compass for this study, we found the position of Sefa (2014:50) quite instructive when he opined that In working with Indigenous African proverbs we are dealing with the corpus of knowledge which can allow for an understanding of the multiplicity of conceptions of African ‘worldsenses’ and ideas about humanity. Such proverbs constitute knowledge not only for African peoples but knowledge for the global public sphere. The engagement of local proverbs, cultural stories, songs, riddles, folktales, myths and mythologies in what can be called the “pedagogic and instructional acts of Indigenous story telling” as part of the everyday school curriculum [as broadly defined] can help educate young learners to appreciate themselves and to encourage social responsibility, ethics, and community belonging.

This study is therefore based on the theory of African proverbs as repository of African world senses; in them are their weltanschauung; ideas about humanity and didactics. This opinion points to the fact that in African proverbs is wisdom, knowledge, understanding, philosophy and many more features. Thus Avoseh (2012:241) maintained that proverbs are part of educational foundation and are used to gauge the quality of an individual’s education, especially the ability to combine criticality with other life issues, the improper use of proverbs may also be indicative of poor education. It is within this connection that Esan folksongs and proverbs are being interrogated to elicit some of such which dwell on spirituality.

### ***Definition of Folksong / the Nature of Esan Folksong***

According to Collins’ dictionary, a folksong is a song originating among the people of a country or area, passed by oral tradition from one singer or generation to the next, often existing in several versions, and marked generally by simple, modal melody and stanzaic, narrative verse. It adds further that it is a song of which the music and text have been handed down by oral tradition among the common people. Within the ambit of this presentation, Esan folksong could be defined as that song which is associated with the people in terms of text and other musical features, which is oral in nature and therefore passed from generation to generation aurally, whose origin and composers are indeterminable. Such songs are often reflective of the people’s folk lives in that it could tell of the people’s sense of history, spirituality, culture, morality, security, political structure and gender role definitions and other peculiarities.

The need to study folksongs, folklore and folk lives of the African cannot be over stressed. From a given landscape and its associated sonic space, many musical inferences could be drawn and since music is very eclectic in Africa, data which go far beyond music could always most probably be elicited. Without contradiction, the knowledge of all of these will be helpful in the advancement of music studies. Little wonder, Vidal (2012:168), posited that:

The relationship between the verbal and the non-verbal arts is a significant area of investigation. For some time now, the musicologists, linguists and anthropologists have been trying to construct a model that would connect the semiotic, the structural and the semantic aspects of music. The absence of any semantic vocabulary of musical signs has created great impediments in the way of progress. Investigating the relationship between language and music in Africa might throw some light on the problem of meaning in music.

Therefore, it is considered a worthwhile effort to examine Esan folksongs, proverbs and proverbial songs or put differently, songs knitted with proverbs with the belief that this effort would probably further lead us into having a clear view of how music being the vortex of African creativity can help explain other phenomena which are concomitant with it.

In his work on the theoretical foregrounding in textual analysis of Esan song, Aluede (2014) talked of uni-textuality and ambi-textuality songs. In his finding, any song which has a singular focus or theme is uni-textual while that which has two is ambi-textual. This theory is vital to this study as it will give a background or rudimentary knowledge of what will be discussed in due course. We will first examine some songs whose themes border on trusting God even in the face of trials, God as an Ever Present Refuge, God of Justice, the need to avoid treachery, training a child to be virtuous and the incidence of death in the in the life of every mortal. In this segment, we will be giving apt example with six songs out of which three are scored in musical notation alongside with their text translation. The texts of the three are simply provided for discussion and analysis. The reason for this is that chances are that this work may not be for music scholars alone and the musical signs may be somewhat distractive and to also save the soul and the number of pages of this work.

### 1. Trusting God even in the face of trials as an ever-present helper

The song below entreats us to trust the wisdom and love of God even in the face of trials. As an all knowing, omnipotent and omniscience being, he knows why any temptation is permitted to come one's way. Knowing this in the song text below, the singer is encouraged to keep trusting God's powers and authority in the face of human challenges.

#### OSENIMENGA

Text in Esan	Translation
<i>Oseni men ga</i>	The God I am serving
<i>Obha ye bho lo</i>	He has not gone any where
<i>Obha ye bho lo</i>	He has not gone any where
<i>Obha ye bho lo</i>	He has not gone any where
<i>E joye –o ye</i>	He is in his same place

In this song, we could see the singers reaffirming that the God which they serve or worship is ever with them.

### 2. God as an Ever-Present Refuge

Here we present two songs which we have harvested from the field, that talk of God as an ever-present refuge in times of trouble; they are *Akhu men khian* and *Osegue ne ga me*. In the first song, we discern the people's impression of God which is captured thus:

They are pursuing me, I have taken refuge in God. It is only God who owns me that can rescue me in this life. In the second one is *Osegue ne ga me* which means God, protect me round I have not time for trouble, God, protect me round, I have no time for trouble. For ease of translation, the text is presented in its current state. But for congruence, what is being said here is actually that God should surround one protectively or shield one from troubles. No doubt, the people are full of trust for God to be their refuge and shield-a strong and protective hand to be relied upon in times of trouble. Below are the texts of the two songs.

#### i. AKHUMENKHIAN

Text in Esan	Translation
<i>Akhu men khian</i>	They are pursuing me
<i>Inegbe no se meo</i>	I have taken refuge in God
<i>Ose no nyanmhen</i>	It is only God who owns me
<i>Ole ha hi mhin me</i>	that can rescue me
<i>Bhonagbonna</i>	in this life

#### ii. OSEGUENEGAMEN

Text in Esan	Translation
<i>Osegue ne ga me</i>	God protect me round
<i>I bhamian hue mon –o</i>	I have not time for trouble
<i>Osegue ne ga me</i>	God protect me round
<i>Ibhamian hue mon-o</i>	I have no time for trouble

### 3. The God of Justice

While discussing this song text below elsewhere, Aluede (2014:60) held that:

In most Esan towns, farm roads are not wide. They can best accommodate motor bikes in that they are narrow, may be between three to four feet wide. Of truth, the roads will not permit fire wood to be carried sideways and even long woods sometimes will need to be cut to moderate sizes because the roads are snaky. Esan song texts are dotted with proverbs and aphorisms. ... The farm road as used in this context is God, other deities, one's guardian angel and divine forces. It means that these forces will not allow the wrong thing to be done, will not allow the poor to be crushed, will not allow injustice to take place.

A study of this song text below leads us to the idea of ambi-textuality. Given a simple look, the theme of the song could be cursorily seen as an ode to the farm road but on a second examination, we will get to the figurative depiction of God as the farm road who hates injustice. Literate and literarily dextrous in their own rights, these traditional composers are skilled and very knowledgeable in the creative play with words.

**UJIEDUGBO**

Text in Esan	Translation
Obhaja It does not	
Mue 'ran 'wuuwe	allow wood to be carried sideway
Ujiedu 'gbo	The farm road
Ujiedu 'gbo	The farm road
Obhaja It does not	
Mue 'ran 'wuuwe	allow wood to be carried sideways
Ujiedu 'gbo	The farm road

**4. The need to avoid treachery**

The Holy Bible is replete with the precept of love right from the Old Testament in Leviticus 19: 13-18 into the new one from Mathew 22: 37-39 to Romans 13:10. This can be seen in the book of Love thy neighbour as you are often commonly intoned by Christians to check irregular or treacherous conducts among believers. Similarly, in Esan traditional society, emphasis is also on love and goodwill towards each other, hence the song Obhiaba. Obhiaba as song addresses an individual who colludes with others against his own brother. It says “in spite of your affection for providing me food and drinks, for setting others against me, may you be overwhelmed by infirmities” such abusive words are not hauled on relatives without cause (Aluede, 2010).

**Obhiaba**

O bhia ba 'wea re re me da 'wea re re me da o bhia ba -

o o bhi o me wea re re me le wea re re me le o bhi o

o ru ki da si 'khon len me bhe gbe e mia men ha ma e bhu ruo

**Obhiaba****Text in Esan Translation**

Obhi aba 'wea re re men da	My brother even if you've given me to drink
Wea re re men da obhiaba	Even if you've given me drink, my brother
Obhiowe a re re men le	My brother even if you've fed me
Wea re re men le obhi o men	Even if you've fed me, my brother
Onuki da siokhonlen me bhegbe	For setting forces against me
Emianmen ha maenbhu 'nuo	May infirmities cover your mouth

**5. The need for a virtuous child**

A good child is expected to be truthful and virtuous. Such a child's yes should be yes and no should also be no. A good child is not expected to be involved in any egregious or shameful act which will be difficult to own up at any point in time. However, when a child deviates from the path of rectitude into shameful acts, the tendency to wilfully swear in an effort to claim innocence exists. According to Aluede (2010), in Esan such a person is termed *Ovinhenle*- given a straight translation; it means one who has eaten his curse. In this culture, this conduct of swearing to innocence when indeed the person under oath is guilty of the offence depicts high degree or measure of wickedness, unrepentant resolve and deceitfulness. And these vices are not expected of a good child.

## Ghomon

Gho mon gho mon gho mon - gho mon gho mon gho mon -

9  
gho mon gho mon gho mon - o mo na vin hen le o i yo so ria e

**Ghomon****Text in Esan****Translation**

<i>Ghoomon</i>	Look at a child
<i>Ghoomon</i>	Look at a child
<i>Ghoomon-o</i>	Oh look at a child
<i>Ghoomon</i>	Look at a child
<i>Ghoomon</i>	Look at a child
<i>Ghoomon-o</i>	Oh look at a child
<i>Omon no vin hen le</i>	A child who swears wilfully
<i>Oiyo so 'ria e</i>	is no one's own

**Definition of Proverb and the Place of Esan Proverbs in Conversations**

Collins' dictionary defines a proverb as a short, memorable, and often highly condensed saying embodying, especially with bold imagery, some commonplace, fact or experience a short, traditional saying that expresses some obvious truth or familiar experience; adage; maxim. In the opinion of Mokitimi (1997:vii), Africa is rich in variety of ways, including natural resources, manpower and culture. Within the framework of culture there is a wide range of heritage including religion, music, dance, art, architecture and oral literature. In the realm of oral literature we find the immensely rich world of stories, fables, recitations, songs, poetry and proverbs....

Speaking further, he says that many proverbs are catalysts of knowledge, wisdom, philosophy, ethics and morals. They provoke further reflection and call for deeper thinking (Mokitimi, 1997:viii). The nature of African proverbs as presented by Mokitimi (1997) is in tandem with the position proverbs occupy in day-to-day conversation, public speeches, oratory and rhetorics in Esan. Within sacred to secular or spiritual to mundane circles, Esan people have appropriate proverbs suitable for discussions at specific gatherings. They serve many roles during discussions and some of them are: to aid brevity, buttress points, cap conversations with age-old wisdom, display mastery of the language and versatility in indigenous knowledge systems. This paper is not just intended to document a few Esan proverbs but to interrogate how these supposedly primordial people have encapsulated their refined thoughts and knowledge in a coded system as a reference point in the forming, training and rehabilitation of its citizens.

In an effort at searching for the humanness in the humanities, we will restrict our discussions to proverbs which revolve around spirituality under five headings and they are: The Superiority of God, God as an Ever-Present Provider, God as a Strict Lord, the Nature of Life and the nature of Death.

**1. The Superiority of God**

Three proverbs have been carefully selected which point to the superiority of God, they are:

1. *Ebeko 'khun no Osenobuaoiribho* Nothing is greater than God

2. *Osenobuaokpalenokpa la okhokhobhe 'ken* It is only God who can know whether the incubated egg will bring forth a hen or cock.

3. *Osenobua ole re egbo no oria de* It is God who gives a mortal reason to boast

In Esan, God is often hailed and addressed as the one and only great king, who was not created but created all that has been, the all in all, He that constantly does without asking for gratis in return, He that does good and boasts not of His kindness and a great and tireless provider. It is within this cusp that the people have proverbs which posit that:

Nothing is greater than God, it is only God who can know whether the incubated egg will bring forth a hen or cock and that it is God who gives a mortal reason to boast.

These three proverbs point to the superiority of God- firstly as the ultimate, secondly as the most intelligent being who knows what is unknown to mortals and the only one who can do for mortals what they cannot do for themselves, hence in doing great favour for someone, He provides them the reason to stand above peers to recount personal exploit which would have been practically impossible but for God.

## 2. An Ever-Present Provider

Omijeh (1998:265) observed that

Spread throughout West Africa is the belief in the existence on an individual's spiritual counterpart, his guardian angel. The Bini and some other Edo-speaking people like the Ishan (Esan) call it *ehi*, the *Urhoboemena*. It is *Tamuno* among the Ijo, *moyin* among the Tallensi of Northern Ghana, *Ikejiamong* the Yoruba and *chi* among the Igbo.

In the preliminary pages of this article, we mentioned that Esan is a spinoff of Benin. Consequently, it may be verbose to restate that *Ehi* in Bini is just the same in pronunciation and its perceived attributes in Esan. On the nature of *Ehi* in Bini, Omijeh (1998:269) said:

'*Ehi* shares many attributes of God himself, being God's own spiritual agent, so that it can be taken as a part, or a divine spark, of God. *Ehi* also shares some attributes of man himself, interchanging in each incarnation'. This observation is of some significance in this work; *Ehi* in Esan is interpreted as one's guardian angel or spiritual double. This of course explains why in Esan Catholic Catechism, angel is translated as *Ehi*. This view is to us verisimilitude in that it goes beyond this straight jacket definition. There is a measure of ambivalence in the proper interpretation of the Esan term, *Ehi*. Although translated to mean an angel or one's spiritual double, the concept and meaning of *Ehi* at some points is stretched to mean God. This explains why today in Esan, we find certain names as stated below that have *Ehi* as God and some of such examples are:

*Ehizojie* –It is God who chooses a king

*Ehitale* –It is God who says so

*Ehizele*- God made it possible

*Ehimantie* –If God does not call

*Ehiaghe*-God is all I look up to

If *Ehi* is only viewed as one's guardian angel or spiritual double, it would then appear somewhat meaningless and irrational to say, *Ehizojie* means it is one's guardian angel who chooses a king or that *Ehizele* means, one's spiritual double makes all things possible. It is in this latter context of viewing *Ehi* as God that we will be examining the two proverbs below.

1. *Ehikoeran no one monuze*. It is God that gathers wood for someone without an axe

2. *Ehikhui 'khien ne elaennoimoukperumun*. It is God that drives flies for the tailless animal.

In Esan, these proverbs point to the fact that our God is a great provider who fends for the needy. This is captured in the creative ambience of the needy being depicted as a tailless animal and someone in search of firewood that has no axe. In this culture, the major implement required to harvest firewood is the axe and to go in search of firewood without it is unthinkable. Although, without the axe dead branches of trees can be harvester, with the axe, one splits wood from fallen trees or fallen trees and their stumps. However, with God's abiding love, the needful is always provided even in the light of seeming unpreparedness.

## 3. The Perceived Strictness of God

As it is with the flexible treatment of *Ehi* is *Ebo* which is a deity, *Uwa-ebo* is the house of a deity or shrine. However, for ease of reference *Uwa-ebo* could simply be referred to as *ebo*. This is mostly so because in the shrine dwells the symbol which is representative of a given deity. To the Esan, God (*Osenobua*) superintends over all human activities and *Ebo* though a lesser authority in comparison with God also shares some of his features. In most Esan songs, *Osenobua* is simply abbreviated as *Ose* which is God and this form of abbreviation may not be by accident.

While researching into the etymology of the word *Osenobua*, we were told it actually means *Ose no obo ua* which means God the native doctor of fortune. This may not in any way be surprising in that in Esan traditional religion, while *Osenobua* is at the climax, zenith or apogee in the hierarchy, below him are the gods or deities like *Olokun*, *Idigun*, *Azenu*, *Ukpugento* mention a few. These deities are believed to bless, heal, protect and curse offenders. God is also believed to be the one who brought into existence the native doctor. Thus, he is often referred to as *Orere no re obo re bha* 'gbon-the bringer who brought the native doctor into the earth. Consequently, while in some parlances *ebo* may be commonly interpreted as a deity, it is also partly seen as God.

1. *Ebo ha fugbe, ilumunki son ole bhuunun* When a shrine is too calm, weed will overtake its abode.
2. *Ebo no guanaaranoimieebhi* The deity which needs blood does not accept palm oil as an alternative.
3. *Ebonoigbo 'riaaimuofonlen* A deity that does not kill is never dreaded.

#### 4. The Nature of life

In Esan language, *Ielen* means life and the opposite of life is death, *Uu*. On the nature of life and living, we are told that the difference between life and living is that life is the state that follows birth and precedes death; the state of being alive and living is the state of being alive ([https:// wikidiff.com. life/ living](https://wikidiff.com.life/living)). In the opinion of Ilogo (1983:109), the philosophy behind the people's concern about life and death is that all the visible world and the invisible world beyond, the divine and the human, the past and the present, the living and the dead- all form a harmonious entity. Death is one of the dissonances of life disturbing this entity, but because the dead themselves belong to this harmonious entity all that is necessary is to ensure that the balance of life's harmony is not upset when one member of the group is transformed through death to another level of existence. It is this understanding that has encouraged the need to discuss in this paper life and death which immediately follows in the next segment. There is no life without death and life is the beginning and precursor of death. In Esan culture, we find proverbs which talk of life, its nature and challenges in life. One may wonder why life's experiences are captured very bluntly in proverbs for public consumption. To them, early detection or recognition of what life is and what to expect helps every mortal to cope in times of palatable or unpalatable encounters as one journeys in life's pathways.

Probing into some of Esan proverbs themed around life leads us into the philosophical construct of the people. This is palpable when the three selected proverbs here are analysed. First among them is that life can never be mastered. No one, irrespective of academic or financial attainments has that power to determine the course of his or her own life. For example, as a young university don, it will be an exercise in futility to think that your projection about when you will be a professor or what the sexes of your children, if had naturally, will be. Neither is it possible to know early in time who will die first between you and your spouse. This point takes us to the second proverb which says: One is never tired of life or one is never tired of life's struggles. For example, when spouses, friends, siblings, family children bring in disappointment, and when timelines are not met and when one's life's struggles end in total fiasco, one should never be tired of life. In Esanland, to take one's life is an abomination and when such an act happens, the land is believed to be polluted and the victim by such an action has brought his or her family to public opprobrium. Consequently, everyone is encouraged to press on in live for no matter how rough it may be, at times life may smile again at them. This is what is captured in the third proverb when it is said that "it is with different canes that life's trials whips mortals". This partly explains why one should not feel sad if one's efforts are not yielding good fruits yet for whoever has this may also not have that...put differently, no one has it all. Every mortal has challenges and life's challenges are for us to deal with as much as we can. Below are the Esan text and translation of the selected proverbs.

1. *Ai guiielenfo* Life can never be mastered
2. *Egbiielen -i 'khe* One is never tired of life or one is never tired of life's struggles
- 3 *Ukpokpokeke* It is with different canes  
*oleemonagbon re gbori* that life's trials whips mortals

#### 5. The Nature of Death

It is a generally accepted view irrespective of one's religious and cultural convictions that death is the end of life. The issue of every mortal's final journey and their exact destination is usually of grave importance and botheration to everyone irrespective of age, sex, nationality, religious or educational backgrounds. This has led to quite a corpus of presentations on whether religious and cultural beliefs help people face the inescapability of death and one's preparedness if and when it occurs. Although, an inevitable reality in the lives of everyone, majority of people all seem to wish that it never comes their ways. This thought is foisted in our subconscious minds probably because there is no time table or roster, as the messenger of death calls home arbitrarily the infant, young adult and the aged unannounced. While examining death, its significance and origin, Nabofa (1998:297) succinctly maintained that:

Man has not come to life forever. *Erhi* (spirit) must go back home, that is, to its original home which is in *Eriabin* (heaven or land of the dead). It has just come to *Akpo* (life) as a sojourner, but not as a permanent dweller on earth. When it has fulfilled the task which it set for itself during the process of predestination, it must return to where it really belongs.

The opinion above is similar to those of the Esan people which is our main focus. While discussing Esan cosmology and its effects on the social behaviour of the people, Alli (2011:25-26) opined that Death in Esan is regarded as a transition from one state of existence to another. It is the last of the rites of passage that a person has to go through on earth (others being birth, puberty, marriage).

This view is further stretched by the duo, Airoboman, &Osagie, (2016:1), when they posited that:

Death is the cessation of life. It is transition into a spirit world. It is mostly conceived as something bad, a monster, and its occurrence causes grills, anxiety, chill and fear in people. Death is an irreversible phenomenon, an irreversible cessation of life.

Alli (2011), Airoboman, &Osagie, (2016), are not alone in their thinking. No doubt in spoken words, folksongs and proverbs, Esan people believe generally that coming into the world and being alive is like going to the market to either trade or to shop for some groceries after which the trader or shopper goes back home (dies). They also know death to be the end of every human endeavour on earth. In this culture, they have quite a plethora of proverbs connected to death. But we would like to discuss two sets which allude to death as the end of life and its supremacy. First of all, let us look at death from the lens of two Esan proverbs as an abrupt end to all human strivings:

1. *Akpobe ha gbeefen* When a trap kills a rat  
*Oki gbifienfien no riobhuunu* it kills the sound in its mouth.
2. *Uu I gbeke* Death does not kill in isolation  
*Uu ha gbooria* When death strikes  
*Oki gbeemaman no so le* It kills every plan of the victim.
3. *Uuriaemin-a* Death spoils all things.

When death strikes, it strikes mortals and their plans, death can neither be pacified nor approached to tarry awhile. All these ideas are sandwiched into the folksong below which also serves as an example of a song that is laced with proverbs.

## A1 miuu guina

Lyrics by:

Music by:  
arranged by:

Voice

A i mi uu gui na a i mi uu gui na a i mi  
4 uu gui na me re gui i ne ra meo a i mi uu gui na me re gui - i  
8 no khuo meo u u ha so 'ria 'gbe ji men va e oi ye ri bho e mon uu ka  
12 ka gbe 'ka ka gbe e mon uuo e gbe na mo loa re yo a hi mon me gbe re  
16 yo

**Text in Esan Translation**

*A i mi uuguina* One cannot find death to pacify  
*A i mi uuguina* One cannot find death to pacify  
*A i mi uuguina* One cannot find death to pacify  
*Me re guini ne meo* I would have pacified for my mother  
*A i mi uuguina* One cannot find death to pacify  
*Me re gui no 'khuomeo* I would have pacified for my wife  
*Uu ha so 'ria 'gbe* When death comes  
*Ji men vaeoi ye ribho* there is no excuses  
*E monuukakagbe,* matters relating to death are too critical  
*O kakagbe monuuotoo* critical are its matter  
*E gbenamonlon- a re yo* It is with one's body that one goes  
*Ahimon me gbe re yo* No one borrows another body to go

Although an old folksong, it enjoyed a form of renaissance in the hands of Christy Ogbah, a notable Esan minstrel from Ugboha in Edo State of Nigeria in the early seventies. The song is a dirge and it captures in great depth the temperament of death. In the song, we are acquainted with the fact that: If it was possible to find death to pacify, I would have pacified for my mother, my wife etc. When death comes, there are no excuses, matters relating to death are too critical, too critical are its matter. It is with one's body that one goes. No one borrows another body to go to the land of the dead. On the supremacy of death, we present a set of three apt proverbs and they are:

**Text in Esan English translation**

1. *UubhalenOjie* Death knows no king.
2. *Uubhalenukiidumunoi 'bun* Death does not know a scanty village to spare
3. *Uuha vaeaiyoabha se mio obo* When death comes, one cannot say one is not yet ready.

For the sake of emphasis, we would like to repeat these proverbs in English in a flowing single sentence: Death knows no king, death does not know a scanty village to spare and when death comes, one cannot say one is not yet ready. No doubt, no one has authority over death and when it occurs indeed every endeavour and intention of any mortal is decapitated.

**Conclusion**

In this work, we examined some selected Esan folksongs and proverbs of the Esan people of Edo State of Nigeria. Before dwelling on the main study, we considered it fit and proper to describe the locale of this study by trying by first of all describing the historical origin and location of the Esan people that we are to study their musical and other related practices to music. In the course of our investigation, it was revealed that although proverbs do stand on their own, Esan folksongs are also laced with proverbs and this makes it possible to refer to some of such songs as proverbial songs. Some Esan folksongs and proverbs were discussed under five headings each. These songs and proverbs were extracted from a compilation of data collected from the field investigation which spans over three years. From this study, we come into a good grasp of Esan people's impressions of spirituality in songs and proverbs. To us in this era of globalisation, it is reasoned that in-depth research into African indigenous knowledge systems could be a great contribution in the enhancement of education and humanity. As a people whose over sixty percent population are non-literates in the Western sense, there is the tendency to believe that their imaginative and creative ingenuity may be impinged upon and this is not the case! Their choice of words in song composition and proverbs show a high degree of craftsmanship worth studying and emulating. As we indulge in such studies, we will be contributing to our indigenous knowledge which has much to impact on our society than we yet know.

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