

Get Off The Backs of My Children!

By

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If **izu-okpe**, *the mother of the Okpe people*, could arouse herself from her immortal sleep, she would belch out in the heart-rending manner of the caption above, especially when she observes the way in which *her children*, the Okpe People, are treated with such disrespect and ignominy in contemporary Delta State. Nor would one blame her but sympathize with her plight, especially when they notice the shameful humiliation being meted out by those who claim to be the friends and supporters of the Okpe people; those who publicly announce to be representatives of their interests. Yet these same down trodden, disrespected people, whom Okumagba once labeled, “*the Great Okpe*”, ^{1[1]} actually did have everything going for them at the beginning of their united self consciousness, when they had an **Orodje**, *Esezi I*, rule over them in the 17th.Century. That time was long before the dawn of colonialism in Nigeria, when most of their neighbors were still gripped and divided by parochial, local concerns. What happened to them? How did the Okpe people suddenly find themselves now to be at the bottom of most other groups, acting as their football and laughing stock in the State? They began so well! What explanation can one give to justify why a people with such high potentials for progress, should currently occupy the bottom rung of the ladder of development? This is what this paper will attempt to address; and who can say that **izu-okpe** is wrong after considering all the available facts and details?

One glaring example of Okpe relegation is the determined inclusion of them under the general appellation of Urhobo, without regards to the facts of their history. This is frequently done by glibly acknowledging their enormous geographical size and number on the one hand, and on the other hand, withdrawing that concession by claiming that the Okpe are only one (1), out of the twenty two (22) clans of Urhobo.^{2[2]} Due to this anomalous

Endnotes

1[1] M.P. Okumagba, A Short History of URHOBO (Warri: Kris and Pat Nigeria Ltd.,1979) p.12

2[2] C. E. Osume, The Okpe People (Lagos: Nehemiah Projects International, 2006) pp.47-49. See also Onigu Otite, Autonomy and Dependence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria (Ibadan: Ibadan University Pres, 1972) pp.10-13. Otite, says they are Twenty (20) “Urhobo states” or “social units”.

calculation, the Okpe are frequently considered, quite erroneously, to be just one over twenty-two (i.e. 1/22) of Urhobo in the sharing of amenities.

A cursory glance at two maps adapted from Bradbury's, The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria, shows glaringly how extremely wrong and unjust that assumption is.^{3[3]} **The maps show clearly that Okpe is approximately one third (1/3) of the entire area that Bradbury classified under Urhobo; not one twenty-second (1/22).** However, what are the factors that are probably responsible for Okpe marginalization?

Okpe Potential for Greatness

In this writer's opinion, one of the primary reasons for her present degradation seems to be, *Okpe potential for greatness*. This is not wishful thinking either, that might easily be labeled, '*fairy tale*'. The basis for this assertion is the historical analysis of the pre-colonial, and early colonial eras of the Niger Delta. Otite observes,

"The Okpe were reputed to be the most progressive and best administered group through their native authority. This was probably because they had the best traditions of a 'centralized' government and the will to keep it and make it work. Okpe experience of internal political crises and change and their embrace of achievement and innovation in political matters contributed to the maintenance of their leading position in the locality. Through its exemplary position the Okpe state council secured the real respect of its people and set a good example for the other groups in the whole of the Western Urhobo Council area (emphasis mine)."^{4[4]}

The point Otite is making is quite obvious: by the time the British colonial administrators appeared on the scene, the Okpe were found to be among the best organized people in the area; a fact which endeared them to others as pace setters, and as a real source of pride to her people. The presence of **Udogun Okpe, the twelve administrative regions of the kingdom**, and its array of officers such as: *Ekakuro, Ekalukpokpo, Ilotu and Irijo*, clearly prove the point. The organizational structure of Okpe kingdom was already

M.P. Okumagba, A Short History of URHOBO (Warri: Kris and Pat Nigeria Ltd., 1979) p.3. Okumagba insists that the number is 22 which he identifies as "sub-tribes or clans" of Urhobo.

3[3] Osume, The Okpe People, pp.53 & 54. See also R. E. Bradbury, The Benin Kingdom and the Edo-Speaking Peoples of South-Western Nigeria (London: International African Institutes, 1970) p.165a.

4[4] Otite, Autonomy and Dependence: The Urhobo Kingdom of Okpe in Modern Nigeria, p. 89.

obvious by the time of Okpe unification during the pre-colonial era of *Anovbha's* administration. Otite opines several times that **“the Okpe council maintained its reputation for being the most progressive and best administered council area in Warri Province.”**^{5[5]}

If the kingdom was as organized and well administered as history appears to assert, why was this *potential for greatness* not harnessed for the advantage of the Okpe? Why did it, instead, become a source of the people's marginalization? Why did it become their bane?

Assimilating Smaller Groups under an Urhobo Umbrella

The answer lies probably in what Otite calls *‘an obstacle to an all-Urhobo unity’*. He writes,

“It should be noted, however, that it was not until October 1, 1938, that the name, ‘Sobo’ or ‘Subou’ was changed officially to Urhobo as the appropriate and desired name for the twenty social units... Their separate assertiveness is probably regarded, in many respects, as an obstacle to an all-Urhobo unity particularly vis-à-vis neighbouring Bini or Itsekiri and other apparently more united large ethnic groups in the new state. The formation of the Urhobo Progressive Union in the 1930s was therefore hardly a surprising attempt to over-shadow smaller societal separateness with comparatively wider all-Urhobo cultural macro-symbolism (emphasis mine).”^{6[6]}

Since *separate, individual assertiveness of each social unit, including the Okpe*, was considered to be *an obstacle to an all-Urhobo unity*, the Urhobo Progressive Union (UPU) mounted vigorous efforts to discourage any such *‘individual assertiveness’*. They accomplished that by ensuring that smaller groups seeking their ‘smaller societal separateness’ *were overshadowed* within the *‘wider all-Urhobo cultural macro-symbolism’*. The modus operandi of the UPU advocates was a deliberate programme of assimilation. In other words, since, for example, asserting Okpe solidarity was detrimental to an all out Urhobo emphasis, it must therefore be either **swallowed up**, or squelched. They adopted the first option and currently appear to be succeeding in swallowing up Okpe under the general Urhobo appellation.

^{5[5]} *Ibid*, pp. 88, 89,92, & 98.

^{6[6]} *Ibid*, pp11-12

A recent article in the Punch Newspaper, proves the above point succinctly: Mr. Sola Adebayo quotes the Ijaw National Congress (INC) as saying, “*Mr. President should reach out to the accredited leaders of the region and dialogue with them. All of us are aware that INC is the umbrella body for the Ijaw, **Urhobo Progressive Union for the Urhobo**, and Isoko Development Union for the Isoko, etc...(emphasis mine)*”^{7[7]}

As far as Mr. Sola Adebayo was concerned, Okpe had no other recognized representative except the Urhobo Progressive Union. That is, the interests of the Okpe are subsumed under the Urhobo umbrella. In other words, Okpe has no separate existence. Might this be the reason why the **Okpe Union** appears to be incognito in contemporary Delta and National matters? While the representatives of other ethnic groups appear to be quite vocal, active, and truly representative of their groups, one hardly hears of an opinion expressed by, or reads about the activities of, the **Okpe Union** especially vis-à-vis national issues that affect the Okpe at large. Her silence is rather ‘deafening!’ “What then is the rationale for the **Okpe Union**?” One is forced to ask. Has it outlived its usefulness after it fought gallantly for the installation and recognition of Eṣeṣi 11?

Otite makes the following pertinent point that the (Okpe) “*Union was certainly the most influential single organ in securing the appointment and participation of the king in the government of the kingdom.*”^{8[8]} If that is the case, what happened to Okpe Union’s early dynamic role and leadership? Or does the Union truly believe that the Okpe are now indeed swallowed up by the Urhobo, which therefore makes her continuous existence practically useless because she is currently a mere relic of her past glory?

Another convincing proof of UPU efforts to assimilate groups like the Okpe under the Urhobo umbrella was contained in the minutes of the ‘**Proceedings of the Annual General Council meeting of UPU**’ in December, 1962. At that UPU Council meeting, agenda (i) was devoted to discussing, “**Attitudes of Okpe People**”, concerning their lack of active participation in the Urhobo Progressive Union. Speaker after speaker narrated their several encounters with the Okpe on the subject. The Principal

^{7[7]} Sola Adebayo, Warri, “Congress faults parley between Obasanjo, N’Delta leaders”, The Punch, Lagos, Thursday April 13, 2006. Note also recent releases of Urhobo musical CD’s, e.g. ‘Abo Abo’: all Urhobo are lumped together with the words, “Urhobo ve Isoko, wẹ kumie iye, iye! ...”

^{8[8]} Otite, Autonomy and Dependence, p.92. & pp.94-95

Secretary to the Council even reported how he had contacted both the 'Orodje and the Okpe Union' to explain the lukewarm attitudes of the Okpe towards the UPU; the latter responded promptly by denying the allegations. **The Orodje buttressed his response by giving a fat donation of £500 to the UPU.** The significance of that meeting was the resolve of the UPU to ensure that even groups like the Okpe were assimilated by the wider Urhobo.^{9[9]}

Okpe Solidarity Attracted Jealousy and Hostility from the Urhobo

As the Okpe were more organized, it seemed that the Urhobo became more nervous because emphasizing Okpe oneness distracted from the ideals of Urhobo unity. The resultant Urhobo hostility became quite evident when the Okpe decided to crown their **Orodje** (King), Eṣezi 11, on January 1, 1945. This singular event aroused the jealousy and antagonism of the other members of the Western Urhobo native administrative council. Otite observes that,

“Another and probably more serious aspect of the membership of the Western Urhobo native administration was connected with Okpe king, whose installation was officially noted rather than recognized by the colonial government in 1948. That year *was one of great disunity and jealousy among the groups comprising the Western Urhobo native administration area...the installation of the Okpe king provoked the revival of the Oghara kingship and the inauguration of Agbon kingship in the 1950s. The installation in 1945 of the king of Okpe should, therefore, be seen not in isolation but as part of a wave of demand for kingship in Warri (now Delta) Province during the colonial era (emphasis mine).*”^{10[10]}

The above excerpt speaks for itself. The installation of **Eṣezi 11, the Orodje of Okpe**, intensified the hostility of the Urhobo. It aroused their jealousy and sparked off incessant demands for the installation and recognition of their own kingship stools. Their opposition was very real because even the Senior Resident of Warri Province, Mr. R.L. Bowen, alluded to it with the following words:

“Some of the other clans of the Western Urhobo Native Administration *began to get suspicious that, if Ukpe elected an Oroje, they would then claim to*

^{9[9]} “Minutes of the Proceedings of the Annual General Council of Urhobo Progressive Union”, MP/MX8. National Archives, Ibadan, December, 1962.

^{10[10]} Otite, Autonomy and Dependence, pp. 100-101

have the senior man who should always be President of the Council,... At the same time the other clans were informed that, when they get their Executive Council, the President of such would go in rotation from clan to clan (emphasis mine).”¹¹[11]

It seemed that the Urhobo members of Western Urhobo native administration were only pacified after they had received assurances from the Senior Resident of the Province that the Presidency of the local administrative council would rotate from one group to the other. Mr. Bowen also insisted that the Orodje of Okpe would not assume the permanent Presidency of the native administrative council.

Even during the discussion concerning the lukewarm attitude of the Okpe towards the UPU, the then Deputy President-General of the Union, Chief Odiete, defended the Okpe by maintaining that,

“Okpe people *were aggrieved because they felt that their fellow Urhobo stood in their way in their fight for a separate administrative unit or Division.*” Chief Odiete recalled how *the Okpe Union sent out circular letters to all Okpe people instructing them not to fraternize* with the other Urhobos. **The circular letters, he said, had since been rescinded (emphasis mine).**”¹²[12]

Chief Odiete did not mince words: **the Urhobo were blocking the moves of Okpe towards self-determination.** In response to that, the Okpe Union immediately swung to action; they soon backed down, however; but why? Was it because the Union was spineless? Or was it because of the usual Okpe magnanimity and peace loving attitude? Or may be because of ignorance, or the general apathy of the people at large, not truly knowing the significance of certain important actions?

The Isoko, on the other hand, were not so. They were equally as organized as the Okpe Union that was founded on May 16, 1930. An Isoko Union with the caption of “**Okpe Progressive Union**” was founded in 1938, long after Okpe Union came into existence. That time was approximately

¹¹[11] R.L. Bowen, Senior Resident, Warri Province, Ukpe Urhobo Clan, Western Urhobo Native Administration, W.P. 486, (i.e. WP216/1) National Archives, Ibadan, 23/11/44. Also see Otite, Autonomy and Dependence, p.93.

¹²[12] Chief Odiete’s Remarks at the “Proceedings of the Annual General Council of UPU”. December, 1962, MP/MX8. National Archives, Ibadan.

three years after the Founding of the UPU, on June 5, 1935. 13[13] But unlike Okpe Union, the Isoko were determined to extricate themselves from the general Urhobo appellation. They resolutely refused to be swallowed up by the Urhobo. They courageously maintained their separate identity and adamantly rejected the Urhobo label. They eventually succeeded through the instrumentality and dynamism of the Isoko Union; why not the Okpe?

The Attitudes of the British Colonial Overseers

The point is already broached that the colonial administrators also contributed somewhat to Okpe marginalization. According to Mr. Bowen, the Senior Resident of Warri Province,

*“This clan (the Okpe) started an agitation to appoint an Oroje {or King} about three years ago (i.e. from 1944)... There is little doubt that this was to ape the resuscitation of the title of the Olu. They were informed by His Honour that this was a matter for themselves and that **if they came to an agreement Government would consider their representations but if not, Government would have nothing to do with it...** Finally after continuous bickering and petitions, His Excellency approved the Odogun Council being told that, **as they failed to come to an agreement for so long, Government was no longer interested in the matter** and would not recognize an Oroje even if now appointed. At the same time **the other clans were informed that, when they get their Executive Council, the President of such would go in rotation from clan to clan** (emphasis mine).”14[14]*

Mr. Bowen’s communication has three important features: The first was that the British were initially interested in gratifying the wishes of the Okpe. **The second, pivotal issue was that the Okpe were chronically divided, and for a long time, were unable to decide on a candidate for the title of Orodje.** The third and final aspect of his comments *concerned the unfortunate decision which set the stage for Okpe relegation:* that no matter what, the Okpe would be accorded a similar standing as one of the six groups that made up Western Urhobo.

13[13] Osume, The Okpe People, p.121. See also Rules and Regulations of the OKPE PROGRESSIVE UNION (Suru-Lere: Awoyo-Olu Press, 1947- National Archives, Ibadan) pp. 1-15.

14[14] R. L. Bowen, Senior Resident, Warri Province, Ukpe Urhobo Clan: Western Urhobo Native Administration, W.P. 486 (Original in W.P.216/1). National Archives, Ibadan, 23/11/44. See also Otite, Autonomy and Dependence, pp. 93-94.

The decision of the British colonial overseers was quite arbitrary because neither **the superior population of the Okpe, nor their much larger geographical size was considered** in the policy. Mr. Bowen's comments also portrayed the general British bias: they believed that the agitation for the Orodje of Okpe was to 'ape' the Itsekiri who had succeeded in resuscitating *'the title of Olu'* in 1936. Otite counters that the actual reason was partially, 'snobbery', because the Okpe did not want to be considered inferior. Secondly, *that kingship with a sound administrative set up had long been part and parcel of Okpe kingdom*, at least much earlier than 1936. The later regimes of Odorume and Anovbha amply demonstrate the point. Otite discusses at length the struggles of the Okpe People, through their indefatigable Union at the time, to secure the coronation and recognition of Eşezi 11; despite the insulting apathy and ambivalence of the British administrators. Otite believes that the British proceeded '*on the side of caution*' because they were more concerned about maintaining a household peace within the six Urhobo '*native authority components of Western Urhobo*,' 15[15] than be influenced by issues of fairness or equity.

The concession given to the other members of the Western Urhobo administrative council really amounted to the relegation of the Okpe; because it denied them their legitimate entitlement as, by far the largest and more organized group, in the native administrative council. This meant that the Okpe were marginalized to just one (1) out of six members (1/6). Is there any wonder then that the UPU would later extend the unfair calculation to embrace what they considered to be the twenty-two (22) clans of Urhobo? **This rather unjust and oppressive reasoning or 'mathematics' really amounted to a relegation of the Okpe people to just one (1) out of twenty-two (1/22) clans of Urhobo.** Thus, the Okpe became effectively marginalized!

The Attitude of Some Recent Writers

The attention of this writer was drawn recently to a controversy that was created by several others who arrogated to themselves a presumed authority and knowledge to write the history of Okpe people. What that really amounted to was the attempt of some Urhobo intelligentsia to provide the intellectual, academic rationality for Okpe marginalization.

15[15] *Ibid*, pp.92-98.

One such spurious argument, that stood out clearly, was contained in the article of Mr. Wilson Ometan, titled, *“The Origin of Okpe Ethnic Group Controversy”*. He accused the proponents of a separate identity for the Okpe, ‘*of intellectual laziness*’, because they insist that the history of the Okpe commenced approximately in the 16th.Century A.D. This section will focus primarily on Mr. Ometan’s article that appeared recently in ‘Okpe Forum’.16[16]

There are few commendable points in Mr. Ometan’s article. For instance, one cannot agree with him more when he wrote that *“The ethics of scholarship dictates that; you should not try to make others irrelevant in the process of making yourself relevant, otherwise, the result is the reverse.”* This writer says, ‘bravo!’ to that observation.

However, one needs to state at this juncture that when a person asserts that history began for a particular group of people at a certain point in time, one is not saying that such individuals have no prior existence or ancestry. It is common knowledge that humanity originated from one source. What is being claimed is that **such a group became conscious of their genealogical descent from a common progenitor or ancestor at a certain time in history**; rather like the rise of nationalism in Europe in the 15th.Century A.D. To say that the history of the Okpe can be traced to Benin, **one is saying that the identifiable history of the Okpe, in the sense that one can reasonably trace their genealogical line from a common parentage, that is, from Igboze to Okpe to The Four Quarters (i.e. Orhue, Orhoro, Evbreke, & Esezzi), a type of general Okpe consciousness, is traceable to Benin.**17[17] One is certainly not saying that the people have no prior existence or ancestry at all because before that time, **the Okpe existed in the LOINS OF THE QBAS** of Benin. To deny that is tantamount to saying that the Okpe are not part of the human race; a totally untenable position.18[18]

Mr. Ometan was also right in stating that Haremhab, *not Horemhobo*, “was a general in the ancient Egyptian army”, and that he was the last ruler

16[16] Wilson Ometan, “The Origin of Okpe Ethnic Group Controversy” *Okpe Forum*, Feb. 26, 2006.

17[17] Osume, *The Okpe People*, pp.80-94.

18[18] See Leon J. Wood, *A Survey of ISRAEL’S HISTORY*. Revised by David O’Brien, (Zondervan: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1986), pp.13-19. See also John D. Currid, *Ancient Egypt and the Old Testament* (Baker Books: Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1997), pp.17-49; and Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), pp.13-55.

of the 18th.Dynasty of Egypt. Haremhab's years were 1333 to 1306 B.C. He was also right in identifying Akhenaten as one of the Pharaohs of the same 18th.Dynasty. In fact, Akhenaten's years were 1364-1347 B.C. He was actually Amenophis IV who changed his name to Akhenaten in honor of the cult he vigorously imposed on the Egyptians. John Bright says about that:

“Amenophis IV (Akhenaten) and the Aten Heresy. The hero – or villain— of the story was Amenophis IV (ca. 1364-1347), son of Amenophis III by his queen Teye. This young king was a proponent of the cult of Aten (the Solar Disk), whom he declared to be the sole god and in whose honor he changed his name to Akhenaten (the Splendor of Aten).”19[19]

Akhenaten's religious revolution did not last long in Egypt. It was immediately supplanted after his death. For, **“his son-in-law, Tut-ankh-aten (ca.1347-1338)”**, who succeeded him, soon **“changed his name to Tut-ankh-amun and moved the royal residence from Akhetaten to Memphis.”** Nothing was mentioned about Akhenaten, leading an Exodus from Egypt. However, Akhenaten's religious heresy experienced a crushing, final blow, administered by the last ruler of the 18th.Dynasty, **“general Haremhab (ca.1333-1306)”**, who led the way in restoring the past glories of Egypt.**20[20]**

When Mr. Ometan, however, proceeded to then assert that *“the first Exodus was led by Akhenaten (Moses, an Itsekiri)”*, and that *‘Haremhab's, (not Horemhobo's), first name was Orone (Aaron)’* he lost this writer completely. His historical picture is quite distorted and skewed because the records show that Aaron and Moses were brothers and colleagues. They both antedated Akhenaten and Haremhab by more than a century. For instance, Leon Wood has the following to say concerning the birth of Moses:

“In time another measure was instituted to curtail this growth (i.e. growth in Hebrew population): all male children were ordered to be killed. This order was not given by the Hyksos, however, but one of the Eighteen Dynasty. This follows from the fact that Moses was born while the order was in effect. Since Moses was eighty years old at the time of Exodus (1446B.C.), his birth date may be figured as c. 1526 B.C., during the reign of Thutmose I (1539-1514), the third ruler of that dynasty (emphasis mine).”21[21]

19[19] John Bright, A History of Israel (London: SCM Press Ltd., Fifth impression, 1979) , p.108.

20[20] Ibid. p. 110. See also J. Kenneth Kuntz, THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT ISRAEL: An Introduction to Old Testament Literature. History and Thought (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1974) pp.86-88.

21[21] Leon Wood, A Survey of ISRAEL'S HISTORY, p.92.

The excerpt suggests that the birth of Moses occurred about 1526/1527 B.C.; a time period that is considerably earlier than that of Akhenaten. This further implies that the princess, or Pharaoh's daughter, that retrieved Moses from the river was Princess Hatshepsut, who eventually became the Queen of Thutmose 11 (1514-1504). This was in fact confirmed by Leon Wood and others.²²[22] If Moses, a younger brother of Aaron, was born about 1526 or 1527 B.C., then Aaron was most likely even a few years earlier still than 1526. Akhenaten's years were shown above to be 1364 to 1347 B.C., and those of Haremhab were 1333 to 1306 B.C.; this clearly indicates that both brothers, Moses and Aaron, preceded Akhenaten and Haremhab by more than one hundred years (100), judging from their accredited dates above.

The point being established here is that both brothers, Moses and Aaron, departed the scene of human history long before Akhenaten and Haremhab appeared on the stage. For instance, the records show that Moses died at the age of 120 years; whereas Moses' brother, Aaron, died even a short while earlier. A simple mathematical calculation bears this out succinctly. If one subtracts the first year of Akhenaten's reign 1364 B.C. from the year of Moses' birth, 1527 B.C., the difference is 163 years. And if Moses died after 120 years, it shows that he was dead by about 43 years before Akhenaten even appeared on the scene of history. The discrepancies in the years of Aaron and Haremhab are even much greater because Aaron was not only a few years older than Moses, he actually died shortly before Moses. Furthermore, Haremhab's years were about 13 years after Akhenaten's reign. This means that Aaron and Moses were dead by at least 74 years before Haremhab even became a historical figure.

What is clear from the above facts is that the type of historiography that juxtaposes people who are not only well over a century apart, but whose years of actual existence are truly separated by upwards of 40 years, is extremely suspect and questionable from every rule of empiricism. Moses cannot possibly be the same person as Akhenaten nor is Aaron the same person as Haremhab.

Besides, Akhenaten and Haremhab might not have been contemporaries the way Moses and Aaron were because they did not

²²[22] *Ibid*, pp.93-95. See also Gleason L. Archer, *A Survey Of Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994) p.236. Archer writes, "During the reign of Thutmose I, then, Moses was born (about 1527), and received from the princes who adopted him (perhaps Hatshepsut) the name Moses 'son of the water,' Egyptian; 'drawing out'.

succeed each other as rulers of Egypt. Thirteen years separated both their rules. Moses and Aaron, on the other hand, as two blood brothers, were only separated by a few years. So, calling Akhenaten, *Moses*, whom he further labeled, ‘*Itsekiri*’, has no historical support whatever. It is the sort of historiography one can easily label as ‘*fiction*’ or ‘*fable*’. By what empirical data or justification did our amiable colleague arrive at concluding that ***Akhenaten*** was on the one hand, *Moses and* on the other hand, also an *Itsekiri*? Or by what canons of historiography did he conclude that Haremhab, whom Egyptologists confirmed to have died as an Egyptian ruler of the 14th. Century B.C, *was also the Jew, Aaron, the older brother of Moses, who existed well over one hundred years earlier, and who actually died some seventy-four years before Haremhab appeared in history?* **The point is already made that Akhenaten did not lead any Exodus from Egypt. In fact, Egyptian records show that he was a Pharaoh of the 18th. Dynasty; and that he died as such in the 14th. Century B.C.**²³[23]

Mr. Ometan further asserted that,

“Okpe and Uvwie People are of a common origin & is **evident of their single Ancestry (Abram)** but not of Horemhobo who had no male child. To be frank; ***Abram had two Children/Patriarchs Esau (Urhobo, Aka, Akka) and Jacob (Yoruba, Uyakoba)*** ...Today, Esau is still blackmailed to be Eshu. Jacob on the other hand ***evolved from Uyakoba who had 16 children with Reuben (Benin) the eldest (1st.) while Joseph (Itsekiri, Children of Heth, Het, in the Bible) the 8th...*** ***The Benin made themselves renegades by invading Egypt seen as the time of the Hyksos. In fact, the Hyksos are the Ogisos*** (emphasis mine)”.

Is one supposed to take the above excerpt seriously as a scholarly presentation of historical data? Or is one to consider it as a joke? I hope the latter might be the case! He claimed that Abram (or *Abraham*) was the single ancestor of Okpe and Uvwie. Again one wonders what the factual, empirical basis were for making such sensational claims. From all available historical records, these claims are *fictional*; not *scientific*.

However, if the table of nations in Genesis chapter ten is the supposed basis for the assumptions, then the caution of Biblical scholars should be heeded here. Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible maintains that,

²³[23] See John Bright, *A History of Israel* , pp.118-120; and also J. Kenneth Kuntz, *THE PEOPLE OF ANCIENT ISRAEL: An Introduction to Old Testament Literature, History and Thought* , pp.86-91.

“This chapter (i.e. Genesis Chapter ten) shows the origin of nations; and yet perhaps there is no nation but that of the Jews that can be confident from which of these seventy fountains... it derives its streams. Through the want of early records, the mixtures of people, the revolutions of nations, and distance of time, **the knowledge of the lineal descent of the present inhabitants of the earth is lost** (emphasis mine).”²⁴[24]

The Commentary expresses the general consensus of Old Testament scholarship that one should exercise extreme caution in making the type of sensational identifications found in Mr. Ometan’s article. However, one that is frequently proposed suggests that **Egypt** descended from *Mizraim*, whereas **Ethiopia or the rest of Africa** possibly descended from *Cush* or *Put*, the sons of *Ham*.²⁵[25] As for **Abraham**, the progenitor of the Jews, the consensus of opinion is that he descended from Shem, the father of the *Semites*.²⁶[26] Thus, saying that Abraham, a Semite, is the ancestor of Okpe and Uvwie, who descended from Ham, is erroneous and confusing, to say the least. The same thing can be said about calling **Esau**, *Urhobo*; identifying **Jacob** with *Yoruba*; or affirming categorically that **Reuben** is *Benin*. It is equally a clear case of confused historiography to assert confidently that the 18th.century **Hyksos** (1730 to 1570 B.C.), the Asiatic rulers of ancient Egypt for more than a century, are the same people as the *Ogisos* (about 900 to 1200 A.D.) of the early Benin kingdom of Igodomigodo.²⁷[27] Furthermore, the patriarch, Jacob, had 13 children; *not 16*, as suggested by the same excerpt being examined.

Finally, on a lighter, linguistic note, Mr. Ometan seemed to suggest that the ‘similarity’ of culture or dialect, “*shows that the Bini, Urhobo main stream, Okpe and Uvwie People are of a common origin*”. This comment is very sweeping, and general, so much so that the sense, meaning, or linguistic parameters for the expression, “*common origin*” is vague and subject to different interpretations. How should one understand the term? Is it in the sense that both the **Egyptians** and the **Okpe** are of “*common origin*”,

²⁴[24] Matthew Henry’s Commentary on the Whole Bible, Edited by Leslie F. Church. Basingstoke Hants, England: Marshall Morgan & Scott, 1960) pp.23-24.

²⁵[25] David Tuesday Adamo, Africa and the Africans in the Old Testament (Bethesda, MD: Christian University Press, 1998) pp. 23-37.

²⁶[26] Ibid. See also Andrew E. Hill and John H. Walton, A Survey of the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan; Second Edition, 2000) pp.63-71.

²⁷[27] Osume, The Okpe People, pp.73-76.

because they descended from Ham, one of the sons of Noah or what? Would that make one to say that the Okpe are therefore, Egyptians, or vice versa?

However, many contemporary linguists hold to a contrary view that the similarity of languages is not a sufficient ground for insisting that ethnic groups should be lumped together into one, nor could one base such arguments on the correspondence of cultures. It is an established conclusion that if a careful comparative study of lexico-statistical percentages of one language are compared to those of another related language, and the result falls below 80%, then both languages clearly belong to different ethnicities. For instance, the study of the lexico-statistical percentages of Isoko in relation to Agbarho yielded 74%, whereas Isoko compared to Ughienvben yielded 72%. Similarly, a comparative study of the lexico-statistical percentages of Okpe was conducted in relation to both Agbarho and Ughienvben. In both instances, the result was 70%.²⁸[28]

What the above studies show clearly is that since Isoko in relation to Agbarho is 74% and in relation to Ughienvben is 72%, Isoko is clearly a different language from Urhobo; because the comparative studies of their lexico-statistical percentages falls below 80%. Of course it is already common knowledge that the Isoko have succeeded in establishing their point and have since extricated themselves from the shoestrings of the Urhobo. The above study also **demonstrates that if Isoko is not Urhobo, then Okpe is even less likely to be so tagged.** This is because the result of the comparative study of the lexico-statistical percentages of Okpe in relation to both Agbarho and Ughienvben, that yielded the result of 70% in both instances, is even lower than those of Isoko in relation to the two languages compared. So, if Isoko is not Urhobo, then it is definitely reasonable and logical to conclude that the Okpe are **most certainly NOT.**

The above mentioned facts speak for themselves. One would therefore counsel with our erudite colleague to always check the accuracy of his sources before pontificating, the way he did, about the progenitors of the Okpe people. It is hoped also that all true lovers of fairness and justice will read this article objectively and join the discussion on the side of the Okpe cause so that like their Isoko counterpart, the Okpe can finally achieve their separate identity in Delta State of Nigeria.

²⁸[28] *Ibid.*,p.46.