

Ethics in Ritual Dramatic Satirical 'Kperembhu' Festival Songs among the Obikabia / Umuokenya Ovom Community in Obingwa-Abia State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The relevance of verbal art or oral literature in solving human and societal problems is not limited to pre-literate societies. It is still relevant in contemporary societies everywhere as generations after generations and community members continue to sustain and promote some aspects of their cultural oral literature to deal with their social problems and protect their ethical and moral values. This paper examines the ethical and ritual dramatic satirical songs of the Ngwa-Igbo communities which special focus on the Kperembhu ethical ritual dramatic satirical songs, sung and performed by women and men of the Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom community in Obingwa Local Government Area of Abia State, Nigeria. The ethical ritual dramatic satirical songs studied and analyzed in this paper are those sung and performed during the Kperembhucultural festival, a festival indigenously so named by the people, which is organized and celebrated to satirize observed vices within the community and remind members of the community that the Kperembhu spirit is watching them and their actions. The songs analyzed here were collected by the authors through participant observation and oral interviews. Findings from this study show that the songs strongly attack what the Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom community regards as vices. Also

embedded within the lyrics of the songs are correctional measures that act as deterrent for potential culprits. Through this creative means, the community maintains a delicate balance between the general good of the members of community and the Kperembhu spirit whose norms of ethics must be upheld. The continuous use of the ethical and ritual dramatic satirical songs by members of the community also contributes to the inter-generational transfer of the songs which in turn enhances a continuous and robust use of the Igbo language in oral performance.

Keywords: ethos, satire, ritual, songs, oral, performance, drama,

Introduction

Songs constitute avenues for creative lyrical impressions that can be reflective of personal or social experiences or both. The use of songs is a characteristic feature of most human speech communities and humans use songs for a variety of social functions which include: entertainment, celebration, healing, to accompany a dance, to communicate ideas/emotions, to ridicule, to express mockery (Udosen and Anyanwu, 2022p.197). Songs can be folksongs or non-folksongs. Folk songs, which constitute a genre of oral literature (performed oral arts) are songs that originate in traditional popular culture and are of unknown composer/authorship. They are mainly performance-oriented and it is within the performance that their aesthetic value is fully appreciated. They are passed through oral tradition from one generation to the next. They are sung for a variety of societal functions and based on such functions and cultural inclinations/beliefs, the themes of folksongs can be centered on love, healing, war, mockery/satire, work, religious worship, initiation rites, historical/cultural events, birth of a baby, etc. Folk songs can include ballads, lullabies, mourning songs, work songs, ritual songs, birth songs etc. Non-folk songs on the other hand, have authorship and are creative works of musical artists who use language to create memorable and harmonious lyrics/rhythm). They include novelty songs, anthems, rocks, blues, soul songs (Udosen and Anyanwu, 2022). The focus of this study is on folk songs with special focus on the Kperembhu ethical ritual dramatic satirical songs among the Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom Community in Obingwa, Abia State, Nigeria. This study is significant not just in contributing and enriching academic discourse but also in providing a text descriptive documentation of the songs used in the Kperembhu festival for preservation and thus, highlight the ethical and satirical themes which underlie the songs to make them veritable tool for the promotion of moral values. This study also reveals the interface between orature, ethics and dramatic performance and how they are blended through communal engagement to achieve social order.

The paper is organized thus: section 1 is the introduction while section 2 provides an overview on ethical ritual dramatic songs. Section 3 is the methodology, while section 4 provides an overview on the Obikabia/Umuokenya community and their Kperembhu festival. In section 5, we present text data on the Kperembhu ethical ritual dramatic satirical song performance while in 6, we discuss the findings. Section 7 is the conclusion.

Ethical Ritual Dramatic Satirical Songs: An Overview

As noted by Abrams (1998p.275), satire is the art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation. Satire blends a critical attitude with humour and wit for the purpose of improving human institutions or humanity (Udosen and Anyanwu, 2022). Some folksongs can be satirical, exposing human vices, abuses, short comings and follies to ridicule/scorn or expressing a trenchant wit, irony, or sarcasm used to expose and discredit vice or folly.

One group of such folksongs is ethical ritual dramatic satirical songs. These are artistic oral traditional expressions that consist of lyrical songs embellished with inherent sarcasm and dancing performance rendered within the ethical cultural context of a people (Abimbola, 1976, Okpewho, 1992). Just as it is named, ethical ritual dramatic satirical songs employ the use of irony, ridicule and sarcasm to expose and criticize societal vices and follies (Holman, 1980). With the incorporation of musical and dance performances, the messages of the songs are passed through criticism and ridicule and are made much more engaging and forceful (Sampson-Akpan, 1991). With respect to the ritual context, ethical ritual dramatic satirical songs are performed during festivals, ceremonies and ritual performances thus adding splendour, flavor and significance to such events (Okon, 2003). Ethical ritual dramatic satirical songs constitute a robust and unique combination of oral traditional art, culture expression with the aim of promoting societal moral values (Udosen and Anyanwu, 2022). Thus, this blend of traditional oral arts in the form of songs constitutes an interesting intersection of ethics, ritual, dramatic performance and satire. As has been noted, these forms of verbal art significant for the roles they play in social commentary and ethical societal transformation (Soyinka, 1976, Abimbola, 1976) and intergenerational transfer and preservation of culture (Okpewho, 1992). Bakhtin (1984) within his 'carnival' theory views ritual dramatic satirical songs as carnivals which challenge prevailing negative 'unpopular' ideologies and promote positive societal change. Turner (1969), in his theory of 'liminality' states that ritual dramatic satirical songs create liminal spatial orientation which creates social criticisms that potentially lead to positive social transformation. Several studies (e.g. Anyanwu and Udosen, 2020, Udosen and Anyanwu, 2022, Ukpah, 2013, Okon, 2003, Sampson-Akpan, 1991, Okpewho, 1992, Abimbola, 1976) have examined the use of satirical songs in African cultures with the resultant convergent view that the songs play important roles in enhancing societal norms and values.

Methodology

The present study is a text descriptive documentation and a socio-cultural analysis of the ethical and ritual dramatic satirical Kperembhu songs among the Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom Community in Obingwa, Abia State, Nigeria. This study was carried out between June 2024 and, December 2024 in Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom Community in Obingwa, Abia State, Nigeria where the Ngwa Igbo is largely and homogeneously spoken by the indigenous population of the area, consisting of people from all walks of life (civil servants, farmers, business men/women and students). The data for the study were mainly collected by the authors, two of whom are native speakers of the Ngwa-Igbo and of one these two, an indigene of Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom Community. The data were collected through participant observation in the month of August 2024 in natural discourse situations where women and men

groups were performing the ethical and satirical songs to celebrate the Kperembhu festival. One-on-one elicited oral interviews were also conducted on some purposively selected respondents (seven women and seven men) to cross-check and confirm the data collected. The data (ten songs) collected were text-documented and descriptively analyzed, highlighting the socio-cultural implications of the songs in the context of the community life of Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom Community.

The Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom Community and the Kperembhu Festival

The Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom community is part of Akuma-Imo autonomous community in Obingwa Local Government Area, Abia State, Nigeria and located south of the Local Government headquarters, Mgboko. Like most communities, it is a communal society whose ethics and morality are valued for the common good of everyone. As a result of this communal nature, the individual has to behave in a way that does not violate the community approved values. The good of the community supersedes the individual's own well-being. This entails the need to submit to a general ethos that is inherently embedded and approved in the people's traditional culture. This ethos reflects their norms by which every individual is expected to abide. These unwritten but accepted rules help in maintaining virtues that give rise to peace, stability, health and prosperity to the entire community. Thus, the communal ethos seeks to balance the individual's behaviour and the community's overall well-being. Everybody understands the ethical, moral, and social values of the community and violating them calls for chastisements. One form of such chastisements is through the use of the dramatic satirical songs during Kperembhu cultural festival. The songs are performed to chastise the corruption of the communal ethos. When the wrongs of individuals or groups are exposed through satirical songs, the individuals concerned would be so ashamed of themselves and they would desist from such violations in future.

The satirical songs forms part of the communicative rituals during the Kperembhu cultural festival; the songs define and give cultural flesh to the celebration of Kperembhu by the people of Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom community. The origin of the word 'Kperembhu' is not known but the term is used by the community to refer to both the ritual communicative performances and the deity that is believed to direct the performances. According to oral sources, Kperembhu whose spirit is as old as the settlement of the community itself, was purportedly brought to the area by the founding fathers of the land who were said to have migrated from Okpuala in Isiala-Ngwa North Local Government Area of Abia State. The spiritual deity is regarded as an all-seeing spirit. It is believed that it makes its appearance in the last week of the month of July every year when the community people start preparations for its festival up to the third week of August when the festival is celebrated.

It is believed that the Kperembhu spirit has its potential permanent 'home' at Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom community. The spirit of the deity is rekindled and renewed in the minds/psyche of the community members through a simple yearly renewal initiation ceremony involving series of ideational sacrifices by men. In this initiation process, men pour libations and make incantatory expressions as a way of applauding and appeasing the spirit of the deity. Women are not allowed to participate in nor visit the community village square (the place of abode for the Kperembhu spirit) during the initiation or at any other time even though

they participate strongly in the ceremonial events that follow after the initiation renewals. The feeling of fear that the spiritual deity conjures in the hearts of the community members originates from the popular belief that Kperembhu holds the key to the secrets of every individual, (the-one-who stands on tip-toe and sees even beyond the current year the intentions and activities of every member of the community). Kperembhu lives up to this appellation by exposing, still through some members of the community, the misdeeds of everybody in the community in the past year.

The Kperembhu Ethical Ritual Dramatic Satirical Song Performance

The ritual songs are presented in a three-phase performance as follows:

First Phase Performance by Women

The first phase of the performance is enacted by women at the main play-ground of the community referred to as *Mbaraama*. This takes the form of songs and dances which provide the needed comic relief in content and in form to the relative serious didactic male act of Kperembhuritual drama. The songs are bawdy in content, focusing attention on the failings of men in the society in sexual matters as well as the bad characters of men, such as failure to provide for their families, drunkenness, laziness resulting in poverty and indebtedness, and so on. Similarly, the dance is characterized by vigorous and suggestive wriggling of the body especially the waist. The reason for the licentious nature of the female performance is the desire of the society to create the right atmosphere for the release of the caged feelings of woman with regard to male attribute and vices. There is no fixed formula as to the type of songs the women choose to begin their performance with. The choice of song depends entirely on the mood of the performance and the taste of their leader. However, very often, men are the subject of attack in their songs as the following song (1) performed during Kperembhu festival shows. In the song titled *Nnanta*, (a man's name; the song is hypothetically addressed to unmarried men) a man is satirized for marrying late and as such he is suspected of being impotent.

Song 1: Nnanta! (referring to a hypothetical man named Nnanta!)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1.	Nnantaaruolaulo!	Nnanta has built a house!
2.	Zuogbatumtum!	Has bought motorcycle!
3.	Zuooche	Has bought chairs!
4.	Zuobeedi	Has bought a bed!
5.	Dozieulo	Has equipped his house
6.	Ya la onyenga-ebi e ee?	With whom will he live?
7.	Ya la onyenga-ebieeee?	With whom will he live?
8.	Ndomndijusi,	Married women, are asking?
9.	Hweifuchiri	What you hid and wrapped with cloth around your waist!
10	Q diindu?	Is it alive?
11.	Ta onwuruanwu?	Or dead?

In the song (1), *Nnanta* is satirized for his delay in getting married. Despite the fact that he has made all preparations necessary for marriage, he is still unmarried. Therefore, he is suspected of being impotent. This satirization is a way of pressurizing him to marry and thus, make him to conform to the communal expectation. Impotence is viewed as very serious case in the life of a man because of the premium placed on having children of one's own within the community. Song 1 is thus, sung to appeal to the conscience of able-bodied men who are of age and have the resources not to delay any further but to get married and be viewed as responsible men within the community. Similarly, in song 2, sexual weakness is exposed and ridiculed in the case of an elderly man who married a young lady, but has been unable to give her the minimum sexual attention. The song is titled *Okobirinwoko* (elderly man).

Song 2: Okobiri Nwoko! (Elderly Man!)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1	Okobirinwoko!	Elderly man!
2	Okobirinwoko!	Elderly man!
3	Akwaralaanwuola	With weak male body organ!
4	Ngaraluruagboghobia	Who has married a young lady!
5	Ndiigbo cha! cha! cha!	A young lady full of life!
6	Odoolayaobuuchichi	He has starved her of night meals!

Song 2 indirectly frowns at the marriage between elderly men and younger women within the community because the elderly men have exhausted their youthful life and may not have the sexual energy drive that will match the younger women. The song satirizes this phenomenon among those concerned so that it can also be a warning for other men who may be potential indulgers in this act.

In song 3 titled *Di m lee!*, (my husband!) a married man is satirized for his greed, tightfistedness and selfishness. The song laments about a man who prepares his own food contrary to the expectation of a man's domestic role.

Song 3: Di m (Lee!) (My Husband!)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1	Dim lee!	My husband ..lee!
2	Dim lee!	My husband...lee!
3	Di m baa usekwu!	If my husband enters the kitchen !
4	Ya eteemiiri!	He prepares soup!
5	Suoakpu, zutuo!	Poundsfufu and hides!
6	M gaahara di a!	I will abandon this husband!
7	Kp?k?r?umu.ooo!	I will take my children!
8	Tinyeisilawa la kenna m!	And head for my father's house !
9	Ojoka. ooo!	It is terrible .ooo!
10	Ojokanu.ooo!	It is terrible my people.ooo!
11	Obi ojooajoka!	Tightfistedness is terrible!
12	Ewoo, ala di mu.oo	Oh, the land of my husband. oo!

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|----|--------------------|--------------------------------|
| 13 | Ewoo, ala di mu.oo | Oh, the land of my husband.oo! |
| 14 | Hweisonsoemela! | What you abhor has occurred! |

Implicated in song 3 is the belief that cooking is not a married man's domain of chores in the traditional community, but his wife's. The song exposes how the man hides his food from his children contrary to the expectation that a parent should see to it that his/her children are fed first before he or she eats. As a result of this man's attitude, his wife threatens to go back to her father's house with her children and further condemns tightfistedness especially from men.

In song 4, titled *Nwoko*, a man who induces himself into poverty is satirized. The man, due to his drunkenness and laziness becomes so poor that he is not able to build a house of his own, and has only one piece of cloth which he wears to farm and also to social occasions. The song further narrates how on a particular day, a falcon snatches the man's only clothing which he had hung outside to dry and this embarrassing situation made the man to cry and beg the falcon that had flown into the sky to return his cloth.

Song 4: Nwoko! (A man!)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1	Nwoke..ee!	A man .ee!
2	Nwokondi la alana!	A man who lives in this community!
3	Kporouwei!	Buy yourself a cloth!
4	Uwaarasiala i ukwu!	Poverty has licked your legs!
5	Rasia i aka!	And has licked your fingers!
6	Kporouwei!	Buy yourself a cloth!
7	Kama o doro la udu!	Instead of the wine to remain in the keg!
8	Yadoroi la afo	Let it be in your stomach!
9	Kporouwei!	Buy cloth for yourself!
10	Ugankwuevurulauweil!	A falcon has snatched your cloth!
11	Akwaafuyalaonu!	And you have been lamenting!
12	Uwe m alaala Rima oo	My cloth has gone to Rima.oo!
13	O laalaRima .oo!	It has gone to Rima.oo!
14	O laalaRima .oo	It has gone to Rima.oo
15	Eeee! Eeee!	

The performance of the womenfolk provides the women the cultural license to be coquettish, the opportunity to refashion their stock of songs and of course the chance to add new ones derived from contemporary experience. The entertaining womenfolk dramatic song representation has a great rewarding moralistic role. While openly confirming the supremacy of men in the society, the songs nevertheless, sarcastically allude to the limitations of men and also give the men the opportunity to adjust their ways positively both in their family and community.

Second Phase: Performance by Men

While the women are performing at the main play-ground of the community (*mbaraama*), the initiated male followers of Kperembhu are gathered at any designated point (chosen for the day) waiting for the mandatory procession along the streets and thus, this begins the second part of the Kperembhu festival drama which forms the kernel of the day's total performance. From this point, the men move into the streets, at which point, the women would wind up their taunting dances/songs, run into their houses and lock their doors; for no woman beholds the spiritual deity which the initiated males represent. At this point, the festival moves on to its climax, unfolding the satirical element of the main Kperembhusong performance by the men. This stage takes the form of songs redolent of pitchy and sarcastic statements rendered in respect of community members who have deviated from the social and spiritual ethos of the community and the Kperembhu spirit as well.

Unlike the women's performance which takes place at *mbaraama*, the men's performance moves from place to place across the community. As the men are approaching the house of one whose misconduct is about to be revealed, all singing and dancing are suspended and except for the shuffling of feet, there is silence. There is tension evoked by this dramatic element as women and children wait and listen in terror from within the houses. The tension is further heightened by the sounds of decorated wooden totems of Kperembhu carried by one of the men which he hits against each decorated wooden totem. The sound of these instruments performs the symbolic function of announcing to the community the discovery of a citizen who has committed crime against the land. This is then followed by the following introductory singing chants presented as song 5 titled *Kperembhu abiadula* (*Kperembhu has arrived*).

Song 5: Kperembhu Abiadula! (Kperembhu has arrived!)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1.	Kperembhuabiadula!	Kperembhu has arrived!
2.	Eeeeeeeee!	Yes eeeeeeee!
3.	Obiadulanñana.oo	He has arrived at his place.oo!
4.	Onyemmegburu Kperembhu!	Whoever that has committed a crime against Kperembhu!
5.	Mmegburuonweya!	Has committed the crime against himself/herself!

The above opening song performance may be followed by a statement of crime of the victim also rendered as song (6) in an indirect manner thus:

Song 6: Amaala lee! (My kinsmen!)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1.	Amaala lee!	My kinsmen. lee!
2.	Amaala lee!	My kinsmen .lee!
3.	Adi m ichonwaokukom.ooo!	I am looking for my fowl.ooo!
4.	I juolaegbe ma o buugankwu?	Have you asked the kite or the hawk?
5.	Laalooloo!	Laalooloo!
6.	I juolaegbe?	Have you asked the kite?

In song 6, *egbe'kite'* or *ugankwu 'hwak'* which is known to predate on fowl is indirectly used to represent the offender. Sometimes the statement of guilt may be expressed directly in a satirical song without the use of the conventional refrain as in the following example as presented in song 7.

Song 7: Nwanyiocha! (The fair-complexioned woman!)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1.	Nwanyiocha!	The fair complexioned woman!
2.	Ndiizuahiaanu la-adighiokpukpu!	That is into business of bone-less meat (penis)!
3.	Kwusiya..oooo!	Stop that business .oooo!
4.	I mazutaoriammiwu!	Otherwise you will contract a deadly disease!

The song in 7 satirizes a flirtatious woman.

To vary the form and effect of the performance, Kperembhu followers occasionally bring in a striking feature of the offender's physique or an aspect of his/her character as the leading line of the song of revelation as shown in song 8.

Song 8: Okoroochaimimbia (You light-complexioned young man with flat nose)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1.	Okoroochaimimbia!	You light-complexioned young man with a flat nose!
2.	Imimbia!	Flat nose!
3.	AtuwalaAda nnayaim!	Has impregnated his step sister!
4.	Alaaruola!	The land is defiled!

After all the songs for the day have been rendered and repeated as many times as possible with the accompaniment of hand-clapping, beating of the wooden instruments, dancing and ululation, one of Kperembhu's followers who has a loud, sonorous and resonating voice would interject the deity's praise-song as presented in song 9.

Song 9: Anya ndi-ihuhweezoroezo! (The eyes that see whatever that is kept secret)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1.	Anya ndi-ihuhweezoroezo!	The eyes that see whatever that is kept secret!
2.	Inyikirinyi!	Charcoal!
3	Tufuoalahummoo!	The opened hole upon the earth through which spirits see!

If the head of the house where Kperembhu's spirit potentially pitches its tent can no longer bear the anguish of listening to the unsettling tales of betrayals within the community, he would plead on behalf of the victims, by repeating the deity's praise names as in song 10.

Song 10: Anya ndiihuhweezoroezo! (The eyes that see whatever that is in secret!)

Lines	Lyrics	Idiomatic Translation
1	Anya ndiihuhweezoroezo!	The eyes that see whatever that is in secret!
2	Inyikirinyi	Charcoal!
3	Tufuoalahummoo!	The opened hole upon the earth through which spirits see!
4	Kaiwe I churu.oo	We plead with you!
5	Kpaakpa!,	Reprimand!
6	Egbulaegbu.ooo	Do not kill ooo!

Once the message of plea in which the head of the house genuinely expresses his plea is rendered, the performance of this plea song will move to other points in the community to render similar plea in conformity with the code of ritual observance.

Third Phase: A 'Communion' Experience

The third phase is the climax of the Kperembhuritual festival and it is referred to as *nriko 'the communion experience'* because it is believed to be the celebration of the appearance of the spirit of Kperembhu at the local market square usually on 'Afo' market day. The celebration includes the entire members of the community, friends and well-wishers. The celebration involves drumming and dancing as the members of the community shower praises on the spirit of Kperembhu in accordance with their belief that the earth has been appeased and the wrath of Kperembhudeity averted by exposing the evils of the society that can hinder the progress of the people.

Discussion of Findings

From the songs presented so far in tables 1 to 10, It is obvious that the main purpose of the formalized ritual dramatic songs is to make the perceived offending members of the community to suffer ridicule for their actions, with hope that there would be some noticeable change in their behaviour for the good of the society in general. It is therefore absolutely necessary that the community members are not left in doubt as to the recipients or targeted individuals or groups of particular songs. This is why the satirical contents/parts of the songs are repeated over and over for such effect. From the lyrics of the songs and their description, it is observed that the specific purpose of Kperembhu ritual dramatic songs reflects not only the form of the songs but also the scope of the performance of the songs. The performance of each song by both the men and women is brief and this brevity in performance derives from the brevity and the form of the songs. All songs are short with piercing and provoking meaning and they derive their force through repetition. Although the lyrics of the body of songs vary from the mocking, through the lewd and to the serious, the components of the songs nevertheless, reveal their relevance to the satirical context. Another point to note is that in order to fully achieve the satiric intention of the ritual dramatic songs, the medium of exposition has to be thoroughly understood by both the actors (the singers) and the audience (the listeners).

Furthermore, from the composition of the songs and their performance, it might be assumed that the Obikabia/Umuokenye Ovom community of the Ngwa-Igbo operates what Nwoga (1971) refers to as 'a shame' culture in which the major deterrent to crime is not 'guilt-feeling' but 'shame-feeling'. This is a culture which instills in the members of the community the fear of the weight of words where the words of the song conjure into them a sense of shame from wrong-doing just as the same way, a fixed momentary look by a mother at her child, instantly conjures in the mind of the erring child a spontaneous feeling of shame. In fact, for the individual youth, corporal punishment would be a more welcome relief than being put to shame in the community through ridicule.

The dramatic pattern that incorporates the satirical core of Kperembhu dramatic satirical songs can be likened to the ritualized form of Orisa-nla festival of Okemesi in Ekiti state, Nigeria as described by Adediji (1967). Both rely on the ritual procession for communication, and both depend on the element of suspense for delivery of the satirical songs. But an obvious difference in the two relates to the content of the satire. While the Orisa-nla performance as noted by Adediji (1967) focuses attention on ridiculing the conduct of highly-placed persons in the community, the Kperembhu dramatic satirical songs target men and women who have transgressed against the moral conduct or general ethos of the community; their position in the society notwithstanding.

Another basic difference concerns the mode of delivery of the invective. While in the festival of the Orisa-nla, the names of the people being satirized are never mentioned, in the Kperembhucase, there is a patterned dramatic progression culminating in exact exposure of the victim's identity.

Among the Obikabia/Umuokenya people, it has been observed that the satirical medium and the role-playing feature of the ritual drama are both generally endorsed. This is why, for instance, the men do not interfere with the seductive dance and the derisive songs of the women. This is in spite of the fact that some of the men might rightly or wrongly recognize the mocking songs and allusions made to their persons. Similarly, as soon as the men engage in their own ritual-process, the women would immediately disperse and listen to Kperembhu's message through the men's performance only from closed doors. Thus, for the ritual drama to have meaning within its context, the active and passive participants, in the ritual drama would have to be conscious of the significance of the element of role-playing in a performance of this nature. This is a point about dramatic elements in a non-theatrical context which has been elaborated upon by Ogumba (1978p.10) in his analysis of the function of role change in traditional African festival drama when he says:

Indeed, it is this role change which makes ritual possible, enabling the audience to cut out the individual and substitute the character.

Similarly, Bamidele (2000p.29), who, in drawing attention to oral literature (like the Kperembhu satirical dramatic songs) as a tool for understanding (indigenous) oral art and its aesthetics notes that, 'the attitude to oral art in all traditional societies can be described as 'aesthetics of total communion' involving members of the community. Also, citing an example of this 'communion' experience with oral Igbo poetry, Egudu and Nwoga (1971p.1) assert that:

(It is)... composed according to the social (cultural or ceremonial) needs of the communities... and according to the traditional practice deriving from, and indigenous to the communities.

From this assertion, it is obvious that a people's culture colours and shapes their literary creation and aesthetics.

Conclusion

From the foregoing discussion, it is glaring that satire is a formidable weapon in social discourse in the Obikabia/Umuokenya Ovom community. The spirit of Kperembhu's exposition of the moral misdemeanor with its goals and method of delivery is in the long run very noble because it helps to regulate the moral temperature of the community. It criticizes the ills of the society in order to encourage ethical behaviour of members of the society and as such helps in maintaining social equilibrium as well as promoting positive social change for upholding ethical and moral values of the Igbo people. The relevance of oral art in solving human societal problems is very significant and not limited to pre-literate societies. Oral literature is even more relevant contemporarily as communities employ it as means of protecting their ethical and moral values. There is therefore the need to sustain oral literature like the Kperembhuritual dramatic satire because it is a veritable tool not just for entertainment and information dissemination but significant approach in sustaining preserving and transmitting a people's culture.

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