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**'IKPIRIKPE OGU' (OHAFIA WAR DANCE) AS MEDIUM OF DRAMATIC SYNTHESIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This work proceeds from the premise that, aesthetic elements can and do form a link among the arts that make up the vast corpus of performance arts. This is why it is possible for dance to become a medium of dramatic synthesis. The study seems to confirm that dance links theatre (drama) and literature. We have arrived at this conclusion by applying the aesthetic principles of indigenous African dramaturgy to *Ikprikpe Ogu* (the Ohafia war dance). The research report is an analysis of *Ikprikpe Ogu* for meaning and relevance to existing human conditions in Nigeria, Africa and the world at large. In order to apply the aesthetic principles of indigenous African dramaturgy to the dance, it was necessary to study the background and history of all topical, thematic and inspirational sources that may have informed the creation of the dance as well as the socio-cultural experiences and beliefs of the target community. This research report is a product of a three-pronged process of:

- i. research feasibility survey,
- ii. field trip, and
- iii. analysis and report writing.

The work is a contribution to scholarship which aims to question and erase several assumptions, presumptions and misconceptions about Africa and African culture which have been tagged 'primitive' and 'savage'. On the contrary, this work highlights the sophisticated nature of African culture in addition to teaching morals, ideals and conduct via a dramatic analysis of the dance. The significance and relevance of this study is threefold. Firstly, it presents our application of indigenous aesthetic principles of drama in the analysis of the dance. Secondly, the work is an example of an interdisciplinary application of methods between dramatic literature and dance. Lastly, the work is evidence of the intellectual and artistic properties of dance as an art form.

**Key Words:** *Ikprikpe Ogu*, aesthetic principles, dramaturgy, dance, synthesis, indigenous

**Background**

In his Ph.D. dissertation (1987), Ndubuisi Osuagwu quotes a portion of Jeffreys' *Igbo Warfare* (1956) in which Jeffreys asserts that: "fighting among the Ibo... partook of the nature of individual tourneys or combats ... in fact, war was a friendly but exciting display of human force employed to break the monotony of the dry season" (22). From this assertion, it is observed that Jeffreys actually believes that war is purely a

friendly affair and, perhaps, a sport among the Igbo. If this assertion is true, then war for the Igbo must be a very trivial affair.

Osuagwu debunks this assertion and states that even though Jeffreys' assertion can be ignored and considered as mere speculation or calculated exaggeration, it would be dangerous to ignore it, for based as it is on ignorance, it presents a misleading impression of the people's world-view. The Ohafia are Igbo whose world-view and social values are located within the general Igbo world-view and value systems. They do not perceive war as a 'friendly' act or display, whatever that means. Nothing else is further from the truth or more contradictory of their world-view than this. Osuagwu avers that according to their world-view, "war is basically regarded as the product of severe hatred and there has been no evidence to show that friendly communities ever engaged each other in war, out of the blues – just for the sake of sport"(24).

Available evidence, however, shows that friendly communities do come together as allies to wage war against a 'common enemy'. There was nothing friendly about the killing of Nna Atita Akpo's son, during the period of the Ohafia migration and the wars which they waged against their neighbours as a result of that killing. Contrary to Jeffreys' assertion, in their world-view wars are seen as occurrences borne out of extreme hatred. You must, justifiably though, hate another, to wage war against him. Thus, to wage war on another for the fun and sport of it as Jeffreys would have us believe is considered by them as recklessness. Closely related to this is their belief that a war cannot be fought confidently if their gods do not fight on their side and their gods are not known to fight if there is no justifiable reason for going to war. It is agreed that there have indeed been unjust wars but based on their world-view such wars are seen as recklessness. Therefore, while war is a means of testing superiority between one community and another there must be a justifiable reason before embarking on such test of superiority.

At the level of the community, war confirms that the people are warriors and affirms their superiority over other communities. Since they hold dear the virtues of bravery, courage and heroism, war provides the individual the opportunity to demonstrate these virtues. No doubt, traditional sports such as wrestling, hunting and dancing also provide opportunities and avenues for individuals to manifest these virtues. That war is similar to these traditional sports of the Ohafia man in that they all provide opportunities and avenues for the manifestation of the social values of strength, heroism, bravery, prestige and respect, does not make war a friendly affair or a sport in the sense of wrestling, dancing or even hunting.

The place of war in the world-view of the Ohafia is seen in the preparations for, and the reception given to the warriors on their return from war. The entire society as well as the individual makes elaborate preparations to solicit and obtain the support of the gods. In the same way, they perform sacrifices of appeasement and propitiation meant to stand them in good stead with the gods. At times, medicine men find their way to the field of battle where they perform incantations and offer prayers intended to secure protection and victory for the warriors. Discussing the influence of religious belief on warfare among the Ibo generally, Osuagwu quotes Basden:

the day having been fixed, a medicine man of repute was imported whose business it was to concoct medicine, to provide charms and offer sacrifices to ensure success. For three days, the ceremonies, with much chanting and excitement were observed without ceasing, and in due course, the head and body of each warrior was smeared with the medicine.... Anointed with this solution, the fighter would be immune against flying bullets... they would not touch him at all, or ... they would simply flatten against his body and fall harmlessly to the ground (25).

The Ohafia man believes that it is mandatory for him to perform these rituals as failure to do this will lead to his death in the battle field. In consonance with his beliefs, as the Ohafia warrior prepares for war, he buys some black kola nuts (Oji Igbo) which he grinds together with other condiments. He obtains fresh palm wine which has not been mixed with water (elu elu) and pours some on the ground, calling on the ancestral warriors to drink and offer their protection to (him) the warrior. The warrior sips and pours small quantities of the

palm-wine to the ground seven times after which he is blessed by the elders and is given a piece of white ram woolly hide (nza ebulu), the white colour of which represents purity.

During the absence of the warrior from home and as he is in the field of battle, his wife fasts and prays and remains indoors dressed in a white wrapper. She abstains from filth and trouble, keeping herself pure so that she can transmit her spiritual strength to her husband. It is in this state that she awaits her husband's return. When he eventually returns victorious, there is excitement and the warrior's wife now changes into red wrapper representing gallantry, heroism and the blood of the warrior's victims. The woman is, thus, portrayed as the wife of a hero.

The successful return home of the warrior, more so with the heads of his victims calls for celebrations elaborate enough to befit great achievements. The Ohafia believed that these successful warriors required ritual cleansing before they can enter the compounds. The cleansing was a grand ceremony involving sacrifices to the gods of war such as 'Ikwan di-orie' and 'Uduma Mmin'. The high-point of the ritual cleansing was the killing of a goat whose blood was sprinkled on the feet of the hero.

It must be pointed out that music, poetry and dance are integral and important parts of the ceremonies of preparation for war and reception of the warriors from war. The music, which is martial music (Ikperikpe) is played either by bands of hunters or warriors on the "Ikoro" while the dancers beat time with two pieces of sticks or wood. 'Ikperikpe Ogu', says Osuagwu, "falls under the category of war dances whose music Harcourt Whyte has described as 'Ikperikpe' music (28). According to Harcourt Whyte, as averred by Osuagwu :

'Ikperikpe' music is the martial music of South  
Eastern Nigeria...all the dancers keep on beating  
time with two sticks or pieces of wood...(28-29).

#### ***Ikperikpe Ogu : origin and development***

Having examined the Ohafia world-view and the idea of *Ikperikpe Ogu* it seems pertinent, now, to discuss the origin and historical development of *Ikperikpe Ogu*. The Ohafia people, are very warlike and are dreaded cum skilful head-hunters. The need for rituals of appeasement, propitiation and appreciation, which were elaborate ceremonies involving music, dance and poetry has been located within the world-view of the Ohafia man.

Thus, it seems correct to hold that Ohafia men aspired to attain the height of fame and prowess by washing their cutlasses in human blood. Great satisfaction was derived from bringing home the head of a defeated enemy for this was an indication of strength, prowess and bravery. A man's identity in the community became synonymous with the number of heads he brought home. Hence, once there was (in their reckoning) justifiable reasons to do so, the Ohafia would go to other towns, besiege them and return with human heads. It is said that the warriors carried the heads in traditional rectangular baskets known as 'Abo' (a cane basket). Each warrior carried his own 'Abo' with his acquired heads as they returned home. The people hailed them, and welcomed them, with songs. They used 'Uri' (cam wood) to design their bodies and tied 'Nza ebulu' (ram's mane) on their arms to distinguish themselves as heroes. All these were part of the purification intended by the ritual cleansing. At the end of the ritual cleansing which was signified by the killing of a goat and sprinkling of its blood on the warriors' feet the 'Ikoro' called the names of the warriors and they all sprinted about in the village square demonstrating their war antics. This was closely and immediately followed by the 'Iri Aha' or war dance.

Oral tradition has it that 'Iri Aha' was introduced into Ohafia by a family known as Umu Erimma. This family is said to have had very able-bodied young men. During the time Nna Atita Akpo decreed that all able-bodied young men should go into the neighbouring village and return with human heads, there were only a few girls and parents left in the Umu Erimma compound. All the young men left for the head hunting assignment. On their return, they met their parents and sisters who welcomed them home with music and dance. On their part, the heroes responded to the songs and dance of welcome by re-enacting in dance their individual exploits during the expedition. They did so in turns with great embellishment of their acts. Nnanna Kalu Udo in an interview states that "this dance was developed and popularised in Ohafia and it became the present famous Ohafia war dance" (1985). The Ohafia thought of an aesthetic means by which the Ohafia

legacy, history, social values and war tradition would be preserved and transmitted from generation to generation. Thus, the formation of a dance group which transformed the 'Iri Aha' into a performing art was an articulation of the people's response to that need, and this brought *Ikperikpe Ogu* into existence.

At its inception the dance group was made up only of men who had 'washed' their cutlasses in human blood, tested warriors who had distinguished themselves in wars. Today, with the near total elimination of internecine wars and head hunting expeditions, the dance is performed by strong and able-bodied young men who may not be warriors or hunters. Besides, preparations for and reception from war no longer lend themselves as occasions for performance. As a result, it is performed today mainly as aesthetic celebration during the burial of chiefs, heroes, or members of the group. It is also performed on occasions such as launchings, new-yam festivals or visits and receptions of important dignitaries and sons of the land, who have achieved success in academics, business, community development and other spheres of human endeavours. Membership, today, unlike in the days of their fore-fathers when it was for the 'Ogbu Isi' (head hunters), is open to talented dancers, singers and instrumentalists who must be physically strong because the dance is physically taxing.

#### **Nature of *Ikperikpe Ogu***

Generally speaking, *Ikperikpe Ogu* has five basic characteristics, namely: ballads, lyrics, history, mythology and opera. Its music is, of course, martial and as Harcourt Whyte, quoted in Osuagwu, says: "the *Ikperikpe* music is the music of history in which one could hear of bravery, manoeuvres, patience, skill, and all that contribute to make up the science of war". The dance itself he describes as "wild and frantic and calls to mind the South Eastern Nigerian art of war" (29).

Of its nature, the performance is concerned with heroism; it is dominated by a mood of tension, strife and competition. The music is quite capable of spurring and inspiring the people and galvanizing them towards action. It creates a spirit of gallantry and a feeling of nostalgia for the ancestral heritage. The ballads consist of simple songs sung in verses with melodic accompaniments. They narrate popular stories of the people. The lyrics are poems with a very high level of musicality. This implies that the poetry is rendered in songs. They express, basically, the people's values especially relating to military exploits, valour, heroism and prestige.

In the historical concern we find the epic nature of the performance because here the people's heroic history is recounted. Their bellicose and warlike nature is given expression. The people's history which has been preserved through oral tradition and performances of the group is narrated via a stage by stage recounting of the events of the period of migration. Their warlike nature is manifested at every stage of their migration as they had to fight desperately, conquering many communities on the way to their present settlement. This recounting of history often commenced with invocation of the people's gods and ancestors. Following the invocations, are invitations to living heroes and warriors normally addressed by their praise names. The invitation of the heroes and warriors is usually punctuated in each case by the reeling out of the special abilities and attributes of each warrior. Then comes the narration of the migration as preserved through oral tradition. Through narratives the mythological concern of the performance is highlighted. Issues highlighted are some popular beliefs and ideas of the people. These beliefs and ideas deal with the gods and the ancestors and the roles they play in war.

Lastly, we have the grand opera featuring the dancing. Ndubuisi Osuagwu notes that even though the grand opera involves the dramatic expression of military manoeuvres, it can be quite humorous and entertaining. The grand opera also involves the display of might and prowess because primarily, *Ikperiikpe Ogu* was used to celebrate wars by dramatizing those values in war which were held dearly by the society. To show vigour and strength, to challenge and provoke, to portray the beauty of manhood through body movements which reveal the muscles and veins, the grand opera calls for an enormous amount of agility and dexterity.

#### **The performers and the performance**

A careful examination of a typical Ohafia War Dance group has led these researchers to conclude that a typical Ohafia war dance group can be divided into three, namely: the orchestra, the dancers and the 'Uyaya' carrier with his two side companions. The basis for this division is the role played by members of each group.

Prominent members of the orchestra are: the soloist, the 'akwatankwa' players, the Ikperikpe player and the 'Opu' (horn) player.

The soloist does all the singing. He uses ballads, lyrics, history and mythology with melodic accompaniments in his performance. He narrates popular stories and uses poetry in form of songs to express the people's basic values relating to war, valour, heroism, and prestige. He narrates popular beliefs and ideas which the people hold about their gods and ancestors and the roles played by them in the Ohafia war endeavours. He recounts the heroic history of the people featuring their migration and warlike nature. He, also, addresses living heroes and warriors by their praise names, recounting each one's special abilities. The soloist exerts tremendous influence on the entire performance because he determines the mood, tempo and pace. The akwatankwa players take their cue from him. The akwatankwa players usually number three in theory but practically depend on the number of the instrument available. Akwatankwa are flat sticks of about a foot each, made from the ribs of an elephant, but now commonly from Indian bamboo sticks. Then there is the Ikperikpe player. The Ikperikpe is the long drum. The Ikperikpe player together with the akwatankwa players play important roles in the performance. This will be examined in some detail when discussing music *Ikperikpe Ogu*.

The Opu player is another prominent member of the orchestra. The Opu is the 'talking' horn made of the horn of a deer or a similar horn of a ram.

The second group of performers are the dancers. The number varies between twelve and twenty. They are usually agile and virile able-bodied men particularly grounded in the *Ikperikpe Ogu* dance pattern.

The third and last group is made up of the bearer of the Uya-ya and his two side-dancers. They are, indeed, the star dancers. His involvement in the performance is meant to inspire awe and call attention to the pristine symbolism of the performance.

During performance, the orchestras first enters the stage and occupy one corner of it. A typical performance commences with the akwatankwa players playing their instrument. The sound from the akwatankwa players becomes the background rhythm for the music. Shortly after, the akwatankwa players are joined by the Ikperikpe player. The Ikperikpe initiates the dance movements. It also, taking its cue from the soloist, dictates the tempo of the dance. The Ikperikpe operates on the principle of surrogation by simulating human speech. It produces a background sound like kpum-kpum, kpum-kpum, in a rhythm which readily exhorts the dancers to readiness for the performance.

Gradually, the tempo of the music rises and as this happens the dancers dance onto the stage with one dancer out in front with a reasonable distance between him and the others. His eyes are piecing as he shifts them from one direction to the other. He seems to be cast in two roles: firstly as the spy and secondly as the commander. When he moves further ahead of the others as the dancers come on stage, he acts the role of the spy. Ohafia warriors were known to send spies (about two in number) to spy the land they intended to attack and bring back information which would aid them attain success. This is emphasized by the look in his eyes and his stealthy mannerism.

He changes from the role of a spy to that of the commander suddenly. This he does as he suddenly feigns hitting his left toe on a stone. Immediately, the other dancers close up and surround him. In consonance with the world-view of the Ohafia, hitting of the left toe against a stone signifies ill-luck. They believe that should a warrior hit his left toe, he should not proceed to battle and if the commander hits his left toe the entire group of warriors should return home and consult the oracle.

Portraying this aspect of their world-view in the drama, the dancers now dance in the form of scurrying about with the feet digging up earth. This dance movement represents a search, a search for the source of the ill-luck. When the dancers have executed this movement for a while, the Ikperikpe changes beat, dictating a change in the dance steps. At this point the dancers move a few paces forward signifying that the source of the ill-luck has been found and settled. But, once again, the lead dancer makes an abrupt stop, and once again, the other dancers close up on him. He demonstrates and gesticulates in a manner indicating that he is explaining to the other warriors the strategies and tactics to be adopted in the impending offensive. Once he is through with this, the dancers fan out, ending up with the picture of a circle.



The tempo of the music now approaches its crescendo. The Ikperikpe player now reels out sharp rhythmic beats while the dancers, brandishing their machetes in the air as if slashing at something, dance forward. In a while they execute only backward movements. The forward and backward movements indicate attack and tactical withdrawal.

The Opu, silent all this while, comes alive. Applying the principle of surrogation the Opu player uses the Opu to dish out instructions to the warriors, asking some to advance and close in, and others to retreat. The Opu might, also, instruct everyone to attack or to retreat at the same time.

When the movements and ideas described above have been executed, the dancers settle down to some entertaining performance. The basic dance pattern involves the rhythmic throbbing of flesh on the trunk and biceps in consonance with the drum beats. They reveal the beauty of manhood through body movements which reveal the muscles and veins of the body. All these they do in consonance with the rhythm of the music. At a point, they raise one leg by bending the knee and having the toes pointing backward. They stand still and shake the body from the waist to the shoulders without the bones moving. This shaking of the body is very vigorously but skilfully done by moving the muscles of the chest and shoulders and is meant to inspire awe in the opponents. The way the muscles ripple leaves no one in doubt as to the magnitude of practice or rehearsal required to perfect the art.

Wonder, amazement and admiration are the words used to describe the state of audience members when the dancers begin to shake the chest and shoulder muscles and at the same time use their feet to dig up and yet their heels do not touch the ground. This cat-walking which is common battle field occurrence is done to avoid kicking the toes against stones. In re-enacting it during the dance the dancers do so uniformly to the left, to the right then forward and backward. The changes in dance movements are regulated by the Ikperikpe as its beats change. When the tempo of the Ikperikpe falls and the akwatankwa maintains its tap-tap sound, the dancers relax and regroup giving room for solo performances.

While the music still plays, the soloist keeps up his performance, recounting the people's past and heroic achievements. He sings praises of the heroes past and present. A dancer may go into a solo performance to demonstrate how he cut an enemy's head, or single-handedly foiled an ambush or raided a village. He takes a few steps forward, stops abruptly, cranes his neck and listens. In a zig-zag fashion he dances back moving on his toes. On his face there is an intent expression. He circles and makes as if he is about to charge at someone with his hand going to the handle of his machete. The machete does not come out of its sheath in any case. Ndukwe explains that:

an Ohafia warrior does not bring out his machete without making sure that the person he is seeing is not his brother but an enemy because as soon as the machete leaves its sheath it makes straight for its target (85).

Now, the dancer crouches and moves forward. The moment he straightens, he makes straight for his target; the machete is out of its sheath in a flash, and slashes through the air. The dancer bends in a gesture to indicate the picking up of something from the ground. This is followed by a loud ovation from the crowd. Thus, a head-cutting incident is re-enacted.

A significant action which takes place at the beginning of the dance is the sideways stretching of hands. This represents the spreading out of the dancers before serious dance steps commence but is more significant as the flexing of muscles before a fight.

Once in a while, in the course of the dance, the Uyaya bearer will take off towards the crowd who will run helter-skelter in all directions. Sometimes, he moves towards the elders of the village or the drummers saluting and hailing them by raising his 'opia' (ancient dagger). Once in a while, also, he does a dance step or two with the others.

### **Costumes, properties and symbolism**

*Ikperikpe Ogu* costumes, properties and make up are used to enhance characterization and heighten dramatic action. The dance is regarded as a dance for the brave and costumes are intended to portray this fact. A fully geared dancer is bare from the waist up, revealing the chest and the muscles. This also makes it possible for the muscles of the chest to be flaunted during the shaking of the body. His waist is covered with 'onugwe' (thick vertically striped blue and white cloth) folded between the legs and fastened around the loins

with some part of it forming a flap in front. This attire in itself symbolizes war. In it, the dancers who are being portrayed as warriors look smart and are assured of swift and easy movements as it permits them to run and jump in any direction. This attire is generally known as “half cloth”.

On the head is ‘Okpu agu’, literally leopard cap. In Ohafia society, this cap which was worn by head-hunters became the means by which to identify men of valour. The colours of the cap are symbolic: red for danger and blood, black for death and white for peace. These men were men who could face danger head-on and had washed their cutlasses in human blood. Their vocation could very easily lead to peril and death either on their part or on the part of the opponent. However, after each successful campaign, peace reigned and the warrior was at peace with himself.

The make-up is mainly made up of decoration on the face, leg, chest and arms made with traditional white chalk (cam-wood) or ‘nzu’. This heightens the frightful appearance of the warriors.

A good deal of properties are used. In Ohafia society, only brave warriors who had killed wild and dangerous animals or had brought home a human head used sheath originally made of leopard skin, but now usually of goat skin. Therefore, to highlight the role and character which they play, the dancers tie the leopard skin sheath around the waist and in it is the opia. The opia (or ancient dagger) together with the club and machete were considered strong, portable and dangerous weapons often or mostly used in the severance of heads. ‘Abuba Ugo’ or quill of an eagle was normally used to honour warriors who came home victorious after a battle. On the dancers’ caps it symbolizes strength and kingship which the eagle is known for.

The burial of an Ohafia hero was never complete without the slaughtering of a ram (ebulu). Consequently, the hairy mane from the ram became a symbol of heroism. Sons of dead heroes who were themselves heroes used it to portray themselves as heroes. Used by the dancers around the biceps it becomes a symbol of heroism. It is important to remember that the ram is known as a persistent fighter. In his mouth the dancer particularly the Uyaya carrier, places a yellow palm frond (omu) between his lips. This was an identification strategy which also symbolized that the person was on a secret mission and so should not talk. Later when their opponents started to use ‘omu’ also so as to confuse the Ohafia, the Ohafia coined the phrase ‘Ira Achi?’ ( which means did you eat achi?). Achi is a condiment especially used by the Ohafia to prepare soup. The respondent usually answered in the affirmative to this coded question in order to successfully identify himself as an Ohafia indigene. The onugwe which is quite durable is tied around the waist such that it stops just above the knees. It is a symbol of war and makes for easy, swift movement. While the costumes and properties make the dancers appear colourful, they are more important for their symbolisms.

There are some properties used in the performance which adorn the stage or performance arena. In this category, we have the ‘Ite Odo’. This is a pot painted earth brown (odo). ‘Omu’ is used to decorate it. A human skull and cock are hung on its mouth while inside there is palm wine. Only men of valour drink from it. Its presence on stage during a performance of *Ikperikpe Ogu* emphasizes the status of the performers. This is becoming extinct in recent performances.

Evidently, all costumes and properties used are geared at contributing to the over-riding themes of courage and bravery, valour and strength, honour and prestige.

### Music

The music of *Ikperikpe Ogu* has been described by Harcourt Whyte as *Ikperikpe* music. This term is used as a result of its martial nature and sustained frenzy. It is also derived from the name of the drum. The songs reflect various aspects of Ohafia world-view and socio-historical experiences. The musical instruments which were mentioned earlier during our discussion of the performance include: the *Ikperikpe*, a long drum made of a piece of log hollowed out and covered with animal skin on one end. The *akwatankwa*, which is made of short Indian bamboo sticks of one foot each. Initially, it was made from the ribs of an elephant. There is the *opu*. It is the talking horn made from the horn of a deer. The horn is dried and hollowed out. All these instruments operate on the principle of surrogation.

The soloist learns the songs, some of which have fixed texts. But even the songs with fixed texts are amenable to improvisation since there is room for the soloist to put to exhibit his creativity. The themes of the songs are drawn from historical facts and epic deeds of the people from ancestral times to the present. The songs comprise of ballads in which the soloist narrates popular stories, lyrics through which he delivers poetry

at a high musical level, mythologies in which he tells of the people's beliefs and ideas relating to the gods and ancestors, and histories in which he recounts their migration and the epic battles which they fought in the process. He also sings the praises of the heroes past and present.

Songs for performance and the tone of rendition as well as the rhythm and tempo of the instruments are determined invariably by the occasion for performance for the occasion could be a title talking occasion or a burial ceremony. The creativity in the soloist's use of voice modulation can be seen in his use of broken tones in the dirge for fallen heroes and a high pitched voice for joyful occasions such as title taking. At intervals and depending on occasion he shouts "unu kwe wo" to which the chorus of audience reply "woh!" on pleasant occasions and "wee gee!" "chai!" "Onye me meee!" during funerals. The soloist and the chorus also use facial expressions to convey the emotions required on a given occasion.

Some of the songs are philosophical and teach moral lessons. For instance:

Udumeze kwenu, Ohafia kwenu  
Onwe Otu Mgbe owu,  
Agu bia di tarike oti umu anumanu  
Anu uku ndi ike di neri nde nta  
Ubochi olu rua. Agu kpari je hun  
Agu amaghi obu dichi uzo  
Agu dabaran obu Fe 'lu fe fe ali  
Odifa efepusa. Ya chea nke taa  
Oya awu Agu arande r'obu  
Noo abali ato. Orighi nri  
Enwa akparijele, mi ibe Agu  
Lokuga onye no nbue.  
Enwe si oya.  
Agu si ya "Enyim Enwe, owu elerugi"  
Anyia dowom onodi onwa...

#### Translation

Udemeze I greet! Ohafia I greet!  
Once upon a time  
The leopard was the strongest beast in the animal kingdom,  
(A great beast that fed on the small).

Then one day  
The leopard went on a walk  
And fell into a ditch.  
He did not know the ditch was in his path  
And could not climb out on his own.  
He pondered what to do for two days;  
so the leopard must sleep in a ditch  
He went without food for three days.

Then the monkey came that way  
And heard the leopard calling on any passerby.  
And he said to the leopard: "what went wrong?"  
And the leopard replied; "My friend monkey, it was lack of care that put me here"...

The above story has as its essence the value of applying common sense in judgments. Equally, it derides selfishness while encouraging courage, justice and fair-play in settling disputes. In its presentation the soloist recites more than sing. In other words, the level of musicality of the voice is low in the rendition of the story as only a few lines are sung. However, the terseness of the language ensures that there is a free flow of



words which happens to be the source of beauty of this particular presentation. Such stories as the one told in the above rendition are popular stories with the people.

The soloist is aware of the presence of the audience and since African indigenous drama performance is a communal affair, the soloist creates room for audience participation. Occasionally, and especially when the rendition is in the manner of telling a story, he interrupts himself with:

Ohafia, I salute  
Udumeze, I salute  
Am I recounting our history?

To this the audience will chorus yo-o-o-o.

Sometimes when the soloist thinks he has made an important point, he breaks off, now calling the ancestors and some prominent members of the society. He addresses them by their praise names, e.g.

...Ohafia unu kwen  
Udumeze kwen  
Unu kwe nu o  
Okorie e e e!  
Owu ulue elu  
Ogbu twu twu

#### Translation

...Ohafia I salute  
Udumeze, I salute  
I salute you all.  
A builder of storey houses  
Expert head-cutter.

He then continues his rendition from where he stopped. Of course, the break to address these ancestors and heroes can also come at the end of the particular rendition.

The soloist must be vested in the art of improvisation because at times he has to improvise words on the spur of the moment, words suitable for the moment. This in itself is creativity. At other times he manifests his creative ingenuity by arranging his words in a way that calls for audience participation by way of response:

Soloist: Unu kwe woh  
Audience: Wooh!

#### Translation

Soloist: I salute you all  
Audience: Yeah!

Indeed, the soloist must be versatile and dynamic to be able to cope with the demands of his role. He must know when and how to break off from a recitation or song to indulge in idiomatic expressions or proverbs and allusions. He may recite or chant them. One of the literary merits of this is the use of imageries. For example:

Ohafia e e e!  
Ndi ji ozi eje mba  
Oje ngwaalangwa  
Udumeze ha!  
Anu nwe uzo aga nko

#### Translation

Ohafia e e e!

People who carry messages to a far land  
People who are brisk about their businesses  
Udumeze, Oh!

Animals that own the path but they walk by the side fearlessly.

The soloist's acuity and versatility manifests, also, in his occasional beautiful and harmonious juxtaposition of recitation and chanting. This is, however, achieved by having a second soloist to sing along, in alto, with the main soloist.

Though, this study has not, and cannot, exhaust the song texts, the creativity and literary merits are evident from the discussion so far. In rounding off this section, it should be said that just as the music inspired the warriors to greater heights and gave them strength in times of war, so does it inspire today's *Ikperikpe Ogu* performers to superlative performances. The songs on the other hand have become a vehicle for the teaching and conveyance of moral, social values and the preservation and transmission of the community's history. New songs are constantly included in the repertoire of songs to reflect contemporary developments.

#### **Dramatic techniques and paralinguistics**

The total theatre concept which has become the bed-rock of indigenous drama performance is used to great advantage. This concept which involves music, dance and song sees musicians, the soloist and the dancers all involved in the stage performance. Their harmonious interaction in the creative endeavour speaks a lot about the creative ingenuity of the various performers when the unity of their arts leads to the artistic clarity and beauty that is observed in the performance.

Mime is effectively used to heighten dramatic action. Quite early in the performance, the lead dancer is surrounded by the others. He goes into miming as he places before the others the strategies and tactics to be adopted in the offensive which they are about to mount. The import of this is driven home when the viewer realizes that such instructions even on the actual battle field are best given in this manner since any attempt to be verbal may attract the opponent as well as expose the plans and reveal the position of the attacking army.

During solo dance acts miming is also put into effective use. In the solo act described in the performance earlier, the solo performer uses mime to narrate how he successfully cut the head of an enemy. Miming frees the audience from distractions, forces concentration on the performance thereby focusing attention on the intrinsic value of the performance.

There is good use of suspense. Despite the fact that the audience is familiar with the story, there is the 'willing suspension of disbelief' induced by the naturalistic spectacle of the performance. Consequently, anxiety mounts as to what would happen next. For instance, when the commander hits his left toe against a stone or when the solo performer locates an enemy there is suspense. The favourable resolution of the conflicts in favour of their warriors brings relief, joy appreciation and admiration to the audience.

All the paralinguistic resources of the oral performance, namely, gestures, dance, implements with visual impact and music come into play.

Gestures are used to emphasize action and convey meaning. The gestures and facial expressions enhance communication and make meaning clearer.

The dance steps establish the nature of the performance and help in its taxonomy but above all, contribute greatly to the thematic development. Generous use is made of implements with visual impact. A few examples will illustrate this. The sheath made of leopard skin and the ancient dagger or machete in the sheath speak volumes of the characters carrying them. Thus, words are not needed whether in form of interior monologue, soliloquy or description to effect characterization and contribute to the overall thematic development. The above also holds true for the trophy or the eagle feather.

Lastly, there is the use of music. Quite clearly, this dictates the pace, rhythm and tempo of the dance and thus determines its classification as well as set the mood and tone of particular performances of the same dramatic form depending on occasion.

#### **Conclusion**

Indigenous drama including the entire gamut of the oral performance as an area of study deserving serious scholarly attention is relatively new. Indeed, meaningful study in the area began only in the latter half of the nineteenth century. Even then the early scholars such as James George Frazer (1922), John Roscoe

(1921), Robert Rattray (1969) and P. A. Talbot (1923) among others were more concerned with anthropological studies. Though they collected tales, songs, rituals and dances, Okpewho (1992) opines that they were more concerned with the entire question of human culture. As a result, in literary terms, their approaches were defective and deficient, thereby hindering the appreciation of the oral performance. Their studies produced assumptions, misconceptions and theories which hindered a true understanding of the oral performance in Africa. They were neither acquainted with the materials they studied nor the artistic conventions of those whose art forms they studied.

Invariably, relying on their methods and concepts which are full of short-comings, they deny the existence of Africa's rich literary heritage. We should state our concurrence with Ogunba and remind scholars and researchers that indigenous drama means:

an indigenous cultural institution, a form of art nurtured on the African soil over the centuries and which has, therefore, developed distinct features and whose techniques are sometimes totally different from the borrowed form...by...contemporary artists(4).

It is in a similar vein that Chinweizu avers that:

African Literature is an autonomous entity separate and apart from all other literatures. It has its own traditions, models and norms. Its constituency is separate and radically different from that of the European or other literatures (4).

Art is communication and communication implies that the artist should be aware of his audience. The language, or put differently, the ways and means of communication are determined by the particular audience for which the artist performs. The language or ways and means of communication is not restricted to spoken and foreign languages. On the contrary, it includes the imageries, symbolisms, style and the entire gamut of histrionics and paralinguistic resources which the artist employs. These are determined by the cultural ambience of the artist and the audience because while some cultures, like African cultures utilize subtle implications, terse expressions and understatements, some others prefer to be more explicit and obvious.

It seems apparent, therefore, that our method and approach should be recommended to scholars and researchers because they are justified by the fact that to judge, and to establish the validity of, African art forms, scholars, critics and researchers must do so against a background of critical standards based on aesthetic principles which are dependent on African culture and world-view. This, we have done here. This is in sync with the views of many scholars, researchers and artists, including Achebe (1979 and 1980), Chinweizu (1978) and Emenyonu (1990).

In carrying out this study, we had to embark, firstly, on research feasibility survey so as to acquaint ourselves with the target community as well as to get answers to preliminary questions. When we proceeded on field trip guided by the findings of the research feasibility survey, the field trip enabled us get the text (performance) as well as generate some critical material from the owners of the art form. Lastly, we settled for some library research and a thorough analysis of the art form. The product of all these is the research report which you now read.

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#### Interviewees and Informants

1. Agwu, O.  
Forty – four years old.  
From Ebem, Ohafia.  
Soloist of Ohafia War Dance.
2. Oke Ikeogu.  
Thirty years old.  
From Akanu, Ohafia.  
Final year student ( English and Literary Studies University of Calabar)  
He has performed *Ikperikpe Ogu* for twelve years.
3. Okereke, Ibe Osu.  
Twenty-five years old.  
From Akanu, Ohafia.  
Final year student (Department of Geology, University of Calabar)  
He has performed *Ikperikpe Ogu* for twelve years.
4. Nkata, Emetu.  
Ninety-nine years old at the time of interview.  
Chief of Amaekpu, Ohafia.  
He participated in some of the wars fought by the Ohafia people.
5. Udo, Nnana Kalu.  
Eighty-six years old.  
He was an Uya-ya carrier in his youth.
6. Udonsi, Kalu  
Fifty-one years old.  
From Amaekpu, Ohafia.  
Leader of Amaekpu, Ohafia War Dance Group at the time of the interview.
7. Uduma, Uka.  
Forty years old.  
From Ebem, Ohafia.  
Hostel Supervisor in the University of Calabar.  
Has performed *Ikperikpe Ogu* for twenty-two years.