

Toward the Classifications of Idoma Oral Traditional Lyric Poetry

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Abstract: This study is a classification of Idoma oral traditional lyric poetry. It analyzes the different components that constitute the oral lyric poetry genre of Idoma oral literature. It defines and explains the various units of the classification, it describes its main facets or dimensions, and it also offers detailed explanations of the context and content of performance of all the components of the classification for purposes of communicating meaning. The study adopts survey design. It makes use of primary and secondary sources of information. Interview and observant-participation constitute the primary sources of data collection. Secondary data are sourced from oral performance-related literature, academic research reports in journals and periodicals and books from libraries and internet sources. Analysis is based on New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt and Michael Foucault. It concludes that Idoma oral lyric poetry is classified into three taxonomical domains such as funeral song (elegy / dirge), song of praise to the king (Ode), and invocation to the gods (incantatory & religious poetry). Subsequently, it was discovered that the texts of Idoma oral poetry are products of a historical context through which the people's cultural and intellectual histories are comprehensively understood. The study further exposes certain vital functions of oral performances among the people such as entertainment, awareness, socialization, language skills, and political as well as religious-cultural values.

KEYWORDS AND PHRASES: classification, Idoma, New Historicism, oral performance, Poetry.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Lyric is one of the three general categories of Idoma poetic literature, the others being narrative and dramatic. Though the differentiating features between these classifications are sometimes not noticed. This is so because in Idoma traditional lyric poetry there exist element of poetry which evidence their origins in musical expression – singing, chanting, and recitation to musical accompaniment. For instance Idoma-Alekwu poet uses a certain musical equipment to enhance their voices. It looks like harmonica in shape but with different sound production. In harmonica for instance, the lyrics are lost while the one Alekwu uses only blends their voice melody. Though the drama and epic as well as the lyric may have had their genesis in a spontaneously melodic expression which soon adapted itself to a ritualistic need and thus became formalized, music in dramatic and epic poetry was secondary to other elements of the works, being mainly a mimetic or mnemonic device. It was secondary because the concern of the narrator is not in the song; for it is only meant to keep the audience awake.

In the case of Idoma lyric poetry such as funeral song (elegy / dirge), song of praise to the king (Ode), and invocation to the gods (Incantatory & Religious poetry), however, the musical element is intrinsic to the works intellectually as well as aesthetically. The musical element becomes the focal point for the poet's perceptions as they are given a verbalized form to convey emotional and rational values. The primary importance of the musical element is indicated in many generic terms which various cultures have used to designate non narrative and non-dramatic poetry. For instance, the English 'lyric', derived from the Greek 'Lyra' or musical instrument; the classical Greek 'melic' or Mele (air, melody); the Chinese 'shih, or "word song"; the Idoma "Ikpo'ela ije", meaning (the seed-words of song) are all linked and connected to the idea of music or singing.

Idoma people call their lyric poems "Ikpo'ela ije" because it is believed by them that the language is emotive in nature. To them, the "Ikpo'ela ije" meaning, "the seed-words of song" is not an ordinary expression since in their belief the words contained in the songs are such that communicate meanings and feelings beyond mere information. Just like seeds are dropped and they germinate into something else (tree) other than their original forms, so also the "seed-words of songs" produce meanings other than their denotative meanings.

Typically, Idoma lyric poems are short, although they may be long, sustained emotional utterances. They are strongly unified forms of poetry, for all aspects of content are shaped toward the emotional focal

period. No wonder Charlotte Lee and Timothy Gura assert that a lyric poem has been compared to a flash of lightning that illuminates some object in a brief moment of emotional vividness” (340). According to them, lyric poets usually give little, if any, account of what lead up to or follows the emotional experience, since their concern is with sharing the experience” (340). Moses Tsenongu stressed on this point when he says, “though there is emotive language even in humanity’s every day communication, the lyric genre of poetry is distinguished as a result of the degree to which it emphasizes linguistic emotiveness” (52). The emotion that characterizes “Ikpo’ela ije” is often expressed in terms of reflection or reflexivity.

The poet of *Dirge for Mummy* for instance uses language to suggest what the person is saying and it takes alertness to grasp the message. Since he is only suggesting, he does not need many words – thus the application of linguistic economy. And why does he suggest? The suggestive strategy too is aimed at the serious participation of the sympathizing members of the audience. And in communicating through suggestiveness, the above poet also designs figures of speech to communicate his few suggestions. Figures of speech like irony, hyperbole, metaphor, personification, simile, etc which are fit for his economical and suggestive purpose. This linguistic suggestiveness is equally found in the poem rendered by Alekwu – afia entitled “Onya Ogbaja”

A particular characteristic of this poem is its peculiarity in the economization of words. In this case where the poem is rendered orally, the Alekwu – afia does not have any room to revise anything he has memorized in order to check whether every word is paying its dues. What is important however is that, this is an art the poet has learned, practiced and mastered. So the degree of linguistic economy in the above poem singles out the poet-performer and his patron who crafted the poem, masters of their art. The reason for the fixed nature of this act of rendition is because of the ritualistic essence in the performance. In *Onya Ogbaja* for instance, the performer’s concern is on carrying out a spiritual cleansing for the woman who commits adultery. This act of adultery is a taboo among the Idoma-Alekwu worshippers. When a married woman indulges in the act, she attracts wrath of the gods even though she can be forgiven if she confesses; hence Alekwu’s performance of this poem.

The poetic lines of Idoma lyrics contain some form of free rhythm without rigid meter which could be because of their mode of rendition or recitation. Alliteration and Parallelism are devices frequently used, as is paronomasia or punning and paradox. The lyrics treat such subjects as death, piety, love, loneliness, jealousy, martial, prowess and happiness.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Many studies have been carried out on the oral literature of Idoma. These earlier studies dealt with several issues but non sets out to investigate the taxonomical problems confronting the study of Idoma oral poetry as this present study. Armstrong studied Alekwu chants titled, *Onugbo Mlo Okoh: The Tale of Two Brothers* with particular focus on its literary style and language. Amali studied *Idoma-Otukpo Ichicha and Alekwu* with interest on performance aesthetics which is evidently far from our focus in this study. Idris in his own study concerns himself with Idioms and flute proverbs in *Idoma Aklama-itodo*. Ted Anyebe in his *Enhancing Rural Development through Drama: The Idoma Experience* states that “the communal essence which exists in the spiritual communal drama as seen in the *Alekwu* funeral is a source for national development” (12).

Other African scholars who address the topic in question in their studies of oral literature of other groups include, Emenanjo who studies Igbo oral literature and points out that scholars should treat universals with caution; a view Okoh agrees with stating that there shouldn’t be universality approach to genres. Finnegan’s and Zumthor’s contributions highlight the importance of the performing act as a crucial process in oral sung improvisation. To Fidel the context and performance are relevant in oral traditions, but they require theorizing. While Haring asserts that oral literary studies are so incoherent, so fragmented by national traditions, assumptions, languages, and institutional barriers--not to mention the rival claims on the material of folktales. Furniss and Gunner contributions suggest that studies of orature generally begin with an outline of genres. On the one hand, they observe that there have been attempts, more or less successful, to render the characteristics of particular forms in such a way that cross-cultural equivalent can be drawn. Emenanjo however disagrees that it is not every genre which is identified in every culture that has a specific non-descriptive and non-sentential name in the language of that culture. He supports this assertion citing Chukwuma’s view that “there is no word for drama in the Western use of the term in the Igbo language” (22) even when Ugonna, Ossie Enekwe and Amankolor’s studies have shown the prevalence of established various sub-genres of Igbo dramatic arts cherished by the people.

So the review of recent works did in taxonomical study of oral literature shows a number of common traits. Yet the development has not been cumulative. Each investigator goes his own way and explores his own path of inquiry. These paths do not merge; on the contrary, they branch off into different directions. For instance, Babalola studies the oral poetry of Yoruba titled; *Content and Form of Yoruba Ijala* with firm conviction that “Yoruba traditional poetry in general is best classified not so much by the themes as by the stylistic devices employed in recitals” (qtd in Okpewho, 129). Olatunji in *Features of Yoruba Oral Poetry*

agrees that style of vocalization (the “music mode of performance”) is a valid criterion for differentiation but thinks that the songs and chants could just as validly be grouped in accordance with their traditionally recognized performers. It is in view of this lack of uniformity in principle and approach to taxonomical studies in Idoma in particular and Africa in general that this study is designed to take another critical look at the taxonomy using Idoma oral performances, with a view to improve on them.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted survey design. It made use of interview and observant-participation which constituted the primary sources of data collected. Data were also sourced from oral performance-related literature, academic research reports in journals and periodicals and books from libraries and internet sources. These constituted the secondary source of data. New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt and Michael Foucault were used in the analysis.

iii.i Sources of Data

Informants were interviewed and data collected. On other occasions, I attended the Eje-Alekwu festival where Alekwu poets chanted songs reflecting the Idoma culture and history. Transcriptions were carried out on the recorded songs from the oral to the texts of Idoma language. Later, the texts were translated into English for analysis. During burial and funeral ceremonies, dirges were also collected.

i. Theoretical Framework

The theoretical base of this research is hinged on ‘New Historicism’ of Stephen Greenblatt’s “Poetics of Culture”. This study investigated the classification of Idoma oral traditional lyric poetry with the aim of exploring and revealing the relationship between the poems and their socio-historical relevance to the Idoma people. “New Historicism” assumes that texts not only document the social forces that inform and constitute history and society but also involve prominently in the social processes themselves which fashion both individual identity and the socio-historical situation.

ii. Classifications

The following are the classifications of Idoma oral traditional lyric poetry.

v.i. Idoma Dirges

Beginning with the dirge, for instance, in the Idoma worldview, it expresses elemental anguish, and its mood is always almost pervaded by hopelessness and despair. The primary goal of a dirger is to condemn the act of dying in a way of preserving and celebrating life. He mourns the loss and in grieving condemns those held responsible for the breach of human peace occasioned by the death.

The “fixed” Idoma dirges are the ones sang by Alekwu and Ichicha. The ceremonies involved in the process of singing these; too do not change. The ‘unfixed’ Idoma oral poetry on the other hand are those sung and recited by the chief mourners, sympathizers and relations of the deceased as in dirges; the court poetry sang by the palace flutists, music bands and chief praise singers. On the part of the dirge, the “unfixed” Idoma dirge does not follow any set mode and, if any at all, emotion on the part of the mourner determines the form and content of the dirge.

On the content of the Idoma dirges, the Idoma on hearing the news about the death of a person, gather at the house of the chief mourner who could be the parent, wife or husband of the deceased. The place of this happening is always the village of the deceased. In most cases the news of the death of the deceased is received before the corpse arrives. This applies to someone who dies in the hospital or in a far away city. While the mourners are waiting for the arrival of the body, there is a little or no crying as if to wish that there should be a miracle or the news is fake. At times it happens like that, but most times, the news is true. This is when most of the mourning is done. When the corpse finally arrives, the whole compound is thrown into confusion as there is usually, screaming and weeping by those present.

This eventually dies down and then the women move and are separated from the men. The next stage is the bathing of the corpse normally done by members of the age-group of the deceased. This is symbolic and it simply suggests that the dead has come to the end of a journey on this earth and about to take another to the great beyond. Therefore, it is important that it should be cleansed of all filth before embarking on the journey. After bathing the corpse, it is dressed and laid in state usually in the ‘itakpa’ resting hut. Here the chief mourner and other relations sit on the ground round the corpse baring their minds.

The period of the laying-in-state depends on the age of the deceased. Burial takes place on that same day unless the deceased is above seventy years. This implies that, those above seventy years when they die are not committed to mother earth that same day. There must be wake-keep and during the wake-keep a lot of activities take place. They include among other things; the appearing of the Alekwu ancestral spirits; the singing of elegies as well as performing of different traditional dances by professional artistes.

The following day is the burial day. Later in the day, selected masks still perform in honour of the deceased and this applies mainly to men when they die. While masks perform, one great event takes place; which is the "Ikpela Okwu' (inquest) which represents a traditional autopsy. In so doing, the 'Opa', an indigo piece of cloth used for burial among the Idoma is presented and shown to the public around the square. Other materials used are gift items, money, garments and caps for dressing the corpse.

Finally, Alekwu comes to symbolically open the road to the land of the dead. By so doing, the spirit of the deceased is free to roam into the spirit world "alekwu lowe he klanu". Before this, the women leave the 'itakpa' to allow Alekwu perform the rites and this is usually the last time the women set their eyes on the body. One can imagine the weeping and wailing. What Alekwu does at this stage is more of a ritualistic essence where Alekwu and Ichicha jointly render a religious poem even though it is a poem for funeral rite.

v.ii. Religious Poetry

Idoma religious poetry emanates from the people's perception of their universe. They believe that the physical world is linked to the world of the spirit and that of the dead. So, most of the poems that belong to this category of Idoma oral lyric poetry are performed to appeal the gods and spirits of the dead ancestors. To this end, Bayo and Abdul - Rasheed point out "the existence of the supernatural layers in the gradation of values which implies that man who is at the centre of the universe, must take care of his existence and being-ness by worshipping those forces above him" (25).

Therefore, Idoma religious poetry is mostly performed during the rituals and sacrifices that are accompanied on many occasions by chants, songs, incantations, musical elements and dramatic oral performances. To an Idoma man, these are very necessary elements for properly locating the importance of these supernatural forces. It is necessary to point out too that the liturgical system or mode of worship in traditional Idoma societies is organized around the survival of man. The people's religious poetry is fundamentally philosophical and socio-cultural. Traditional religious poetry in its various forms is related to the Idoma belief system. Therefore, the various components of the lives of the Idoma people have poetic renditions with which are associated with myths, legends and archetypal forms.

In the renditions of this genre, cultural artifacts are very important. It has been argued that cultural artifacts are essential apparatus in the poetic descriptions of the supernatural forces. Each of the gods and goddesses being praised in poetry has images and other extra verbal apparatus. These embellish the performance of the poetry and make for the actualization of the poetics of the object of description.

Idoma religious poetry also embraces other structures of the belief system such as taboos. Idoma religious poetry guides certain values and ethics of the social system. For example, it is believed that worshippers of certain gods and goddesses should not eat certain types of animals, hence sacrilege will be committed. It may even be specified that certain categories of people must not be involved in the ritual process as in the case of "Okwu Ogogo" and "Eje' alekwu" festival among the Idoma where women and under-aged are not allowed to participate. When a stubborn woman insists on seeing the ritual as it is performed, the act is capable of leading her to permanent barrenness and some other infectious diseases. When such occurs, Ada' alekwu sings the following song to intimate other members of the cult.

IDOMA:

Ebi lenya
Onya no le' ebi kpo
Ole' ebi kpo
Ebi bio
iii! Ebi bio
Ifu no gu joka' obla aa
Anu mo ane
O'gole lohi ga ee
Anu mo mia' ane
ENGLISH:

Abomination has occurred

The woman who commits abomination
Commits abomination
And abomination holds her
Yes! It holds her
The rat that goes to cat's market
Looks for trouble
It knows better
If it returns safely e e
It knows better.

However, it is pertinent to point out at this point that, the study is not merely discussing the philosophy and sociology of religion, but arguing that most of these belief systems are contained or integrated, in the poetic imagination of the traditional artiste. This verification becomes necessary since this chapter dwells solely on the classification of Idoma oral poetry.

The position of Plato may be tenable in appreciating the creative milieu and psyche of the custodians of traditions/religious poetry. Plato asserts that the poet must be inspired by gods and goddesses through divine frenzy. This frenzy is translated into poetic verbalizations of the artiste. In tandem with this assertion, Abah in his work, *The Link between Traditional & Modern Poetry* postulates that “the Romans called poet “vates” which meant a diviner, a seer, a prophet, a priest who they placed on a high scale. These diviners kept a constant touch with the Greek Gods from whom they received their visions and inspirations to perform” (64).

This is not peculiar to Romans as even in African tradition particularly among the Idoma, the priest who is the link between the people and their gods renders beautiful poems through chants in the course of performing certain rituals. This fact is captured in stanza four of the poem “Festival” by Abah.

The holy man of God Pilot people's message
To each family ancestral spirit
Items presented to chief priest (83).

So the priest is believed to possess divine qualities according to Idoma (Alekwu) religion. Greeks also believed that the visions were then revealed to mortals in hexameter verses, in geometric figures and in arithmetical numbers. Just like oracle of Appolo at his shrine in the city of Delphi, the priest who recited to the new initiates of the myth of the Black Bagre in the lodagaa tribe of the North Western region of Ghana, was also looked upon as divinely created. More so, among the Greeks and Romans, the oracle of Delphi and the Cumaean Sybils talked poetry, so did Homer; but Vergil, Horace, Ovid and other creative minds wrote poetry.

Looking at the nature of religious poetry in Idoma, it is however, possible to make classifications based on the occasion in which a specific type of poetry is rendered. Let us base our classification on the following examples: Religious poetry dedicated to gods, goddesses, spirits and deified ancestors such as Alekwu, Aje and Idu; Religious poetry in the context of communal activities and symbiotic relationships noticeably observed in festivals. Life rhythm and spiritual strength are provoked by such communal festivals where oracular poetry is performed.

v.iii. Idoma Oral Incantation Poetry

Incantation poetry in Idoma can be discussed in relation to the metaphysical conception of the Idoma worldview. Every stratum of the hierarchy of values of the people’s culture and tradition has potentials of magical elements that interweave the cosmological and social components. Idoma incantation poetry is therefore associated with this magical world, identified through its magical formulaic codes. It constitutes another category of poetic expression in oral literary tradition.

Among the Idoma therefore, incantations can be described as creative and imaginative expressions, saturated with mystical power of emotions and loaded with word images and contents that are highly myth-poetic. The origin and nature of this type of poetry seems to limit the audience and those who participate in it. This is because, the Ogweba (Sayer) or Priest who usually performs or recites this kind of poetry does so in a very secluded place with members of the audience carefully admitted and selected. In most cases, the audience is those who have one problem or the other and want Ogweba to look into it for them. Or in a particular festival like Eje'Alekwu when the Priest (Ada'Alekwu) renders certain incantations to invoke the power of ancestral gods to instill calm especially when the event is threatened by certain unknown forces. In one of the festivals in Umogidi community of Otukpo L.G.A in Benue State, Otohi Okoh (The community Priest) recites the following incantatory poem:

IDOMA:

Okpancho mle' eche
Aje nya me no nwule fie duu aa
Igbo! ikpa'aje nya no yo aa
Ee no nyo di dago alewa aa
Omakwu oi ka'Aibe
Oje no bogo eno bogo egwa
Eno ge nya 'anyakwoche mla'aibe
Otote no ge kwe Eje mla abo ancha
Agaba no la' abo nandla ne'eche mlo ola
Alo ga inyobu ko' iche ee

Aipolo le' eje te nyi ee
Emi no owo nyo
Lo owo bi gla lo
Lo owu bobi kpowu ge che-che
Eje'alekwu koi le ebo-ebo.

ENGLISH:

Heaven and the earth
The land has grown the mighty
Yes! This is the land where he was
When he performed several wonders
Omakwu! The son of Aibe
The iron that digs the scorpion's hole
And also digs snake's hole
The one that buries the old and the small
A hunter that catches a Tiger with bare hand
The lion that his hand stretches and fire strikes
We are before your presence today
Your children have fermented guinea corn
In preparation for Eje'alekwu festival
Where has rain gone to?
Send rain to us
Send away the bad wind
Let Eje'Alekwu festival be a success.

So the audience of this type of performance is only the traditional custodians of these magical and formulaic expressions and selected members of Alekwu cult. Albert Mosley gives the catalogue of those that we can regard as the real poets of the incantatory poetry as those who are members and practitioners of a particular belief system who carry out certain religious and cultural functions on behalf of the members of the community. To this end, as in the case of religion, people look for forces that can rescue them and make their existence possible and peaceful. Idoma Incantatory poetry associated with magical apparatus serves the same purpose. We can then recall what J.S. Mbiti refers to as the "vital force" in the survival of the human beings. There are many ways in which incantations provide this safety value for human existence. To the Idoma people, incantatory poetry serves the following function:

1. It affords the artists the opportunity of recalling, composing philosophical, cultural, genealogical or historical records. This can be easily located in incantations used by Ada'alekwu during Eje'alekwu festival.
2. It assists in negating the destructive power of other cosmic or supernatural forces and even dangers posed by other elements in the cosmic and human environment.
3. It affords man the opportunity of looking into the future and predicting the motion or direction of human existence.
4. It revitalizes the physique, intellect and memory as in the case of "ogweba" in Idoma and even "ajidewe" and "isoye" in Yoruba tradition.

v.iv. Idoma Oral Traditional Praise Poetry

Praise or salvation poetry is a form of oral composition that deals with invocation, adoration or criticism of the objects of praise. These objects of praise, as will be enumerated later, cover all the gamut of Idoma worldview from the metaphysical, socio-cultural and political to natural elements. All these objects have their relationship to the Idoma cosmological setting.

On a general note, the praise poem is a form of poetry which is to be found in varying degree of complexity in many societies such as the Yoruba people, Akan, Ashanti, Zulu, Xhosa, Banto, Sotho, Igbo, Efik and Igede, etc. In these ethnic nations the tradition is most developed. Praise poetry according to Akporobaro is by its nature "laudatory, panegyric and epideictic, which is meant for public hearing and performance" (290).

In the Idoma society which happens to be my focal point, praise poem is a poem which is deliberately created and performed to extol the heroic or noble qualities of chiefs, kings, hunters, animals or plants. The following is a good example of a poem that extols the heroic qualities of the first king of Umogidi, His Majesty, King Omakwu Aibe.

IDOMA:

Aje loi nehi ma e e
iii! Ogbobe' efu ka' alo

Elo ma e e
Oje noi boyena, boge' egwa
Eno inye' nenche
Mle' enehi
Oto' ote noge kwe' Eje
Mla' abo ancha
Agala no la'abo nandra
No' ola gbohi
Oha' alo ta ga e e
Chorus:
Olo' ofu ka' alo
Olo' ofu ka' alo
iii! olo' ofu ka' alo
Ga e e.

ENGLISH:

The land has grown the mighty
Yes! The general is born
The iron that digs scorpion's hole
And also digs snake's hole
The one that buries the old and the small
A hunter that catches a Tiger with bare hand
The Lion that his hand stretches and fire strikes
He is the one we are talking about

This was the poem of praise sang to herald the arrival of Omakwu from Otukpo to Umogidi his father's land. At this time Omakwu was indeed a powerful man who traded on several goods between the Idoma nation and other surrounding towns among the Igbos through Obolo-afor, in the present Enugu State, Iyala and Ogoja in the present Cross River State and some areas in Ebonyi State respectively. So on his arrival in Umogidi, his people saw him as the only one who could liberate them from the attack of their hostile Tiv neighbours. Therefore, on his arrival; he demonstrated incredible power which eventually gave his people their lasting freedom which made them to crown him king.

The poem as the one above and some others we will be looking at shortly, are performed by a court poet or courtesan by a bard or good imaginative and inventive speaker. Idoma oral praise poem is in some ways historical in some respect that it deals with a historical character, his deeds, behaviour, his clan, those associated with him, the places he has been and the realities of the period in which he lived. To buttress this point, let us still look at another poem chanted for the same character by one of the Alekwu-afia in one of the festivals in Umogidi community:

IDOMA:

Ole Okwutachi
Abo no ya aa
Aje Oma alo gbela to
Aje no mo ma kunu afleyi aa
Onya nehi
Ene nehi ka alo
Eyijum onya ka' Aibe
Otu ole kunu a' aleche he ta
Oma ko' Oche K'alo
Alo to aho nya

Eko noyi aa le jle echa' ahapa aa
Elo' Ojo ke' efu gwo
Efu nya? Efu ko' Onya kau Fulani
Ohi gbo' oyei kuwa aa
Odun dache kwi inya ikwu
Eko ne loju ju mla mli wa aa
Ka kwo ohonye ta ka lo
Itu gi' ipenkpo aa
Ko jega luwa kwinyaq gwao olela kuwa ta

Amanche, Ene ache
Onya ka oba dodu
Ofa nana nepla' anu gbo gbo aa
Ee noke kwo' Omakwu itayi nu ipi ikpa
Ee ninye efu oi kwu

Ene! Ogbo' gbu ka' alo
Ene! Olo' ofu
Ene! Ohonye ta ka' ache.

ENGLISH:

At Okwutachi
There it happened
The land that leaves much to be imagined
The land that first witnessed
And heralded the people's emancipator
The doggedness of a mother
The strength of a woman
Eyijum wife of Aibe
Her courage resulted to people's freedom
The mothering of the people's legend
To you we owe many thanks
When the child (Omakwu) turned seven days
There rang a bell of war
Which war? The Fulani "horse war"
For their dear life
Everybody ran away
After dinging-donging among themselves
For the people's freedom fighter
To be cast into the river
To enable them hide away from their enemies
The mother of children
The wife of all husbands
Resisted after several chivvy
She then hid him (Omakwu) inside the calabash
While the migration continued

Hurrah! The legendary hero
Hurray! The mighty
Hurray! The People's Emancipator.

Through the motifs found in the above poem, we have been given an insight into the socio-cultural experiences of the community of birth of the subject of praise which is Okwutachi and circumstances surrounding his birth. Through its constituent elements of allusions, events, oblique references, we also see in the above poem record of the migration history of the Umogidi people. To this end, it is not out of place to assert that, the praise poem fuses narrative with praise. It also fuses imaginative inventiveness with historicity. For instance, it has been established in the above poem that sometime in history, the Fulani people invaded the Okwutachi community which was a settlement in the old Apa kingdom where the entire Idoma people migrated from, to their present place of settlement. So through the poem too, we have come to know that the migration of Idoma from Apa in the old kwararafa confederacy was caused by the war they fought with the Fulani people in what was called "the horse war".

Like Zulu praise-poems, Idoma praise-poems can equally be likened to eulogies, for the purpose of the poem is to praise its subject as favourably as possible. The Idoma eulogy is not a catalogue of conventional attributes, however, it aims to give an assessment of the subject of praise that is consistent with reality. Favourable qualities that he lacks are not attributed to him, but un-favourable qualities tend to be overlooked, for the praise poem is biased towards praise. Idoma oral praise poems are like odes in that they presented a single subject for admiration, and like epics in that they record historical events. However, odes incline to philosophical reflection and epics purport to be complete historical records. Lestrades has the same thing in mind when he describes the praise poem as a type of composition intermediate between the pure, mainly

narrative epic, and the pure, mainly apostrophic ode, being a combination of exclamatory narration and laudatory apostrophizing. The praise poems are therefore eulogies combining some of the qualities of both the ode and the epic.

In Idoma society, the following are the functions of praise-poetry to the people:

1. It encourages individuals who are adjudged good, patriotic and nationalistic in the society. At the same time, it indicts individuals that go against the ethics and values of the society.
2. It serves as a warehouse for storing the historical life, and experiences of the people. This will help them to improve on the social, cultural, economic and political life of their communities. This is the great relevance of Idoma oral tradition to the study of her history.
3. It affords Idoma people use it to praise, consult, involve and request for favours from the supernatural forces.
4. It affords the elderly members of the community opportunities to display their knowledge of the people's history and culture and it to educate the young generation.
5. It enables the members of the community to showcase their artistic talents in oral composition, performance and language of expression.
6. The current generation is able to imbibe good qualities demonstrated by some objects of praise and do away with those that are inimical to their growth and that of the society.

IV. CONCLUSION

Through the review of related literature however, the study found out that many studies of the vast body of the oral literature of Idoma have been carried out, but no work existed on the study of its classification with the view to bringing out the literary, social and aesthetic qualities in the people's poetry. At the end, the study which used Greenblatt's and Foucault's New Historicism, carried out taxonomical study of the poetics in Idoma oral traditional lyric poetry produced the following specific objectives: (i) it produced a concrete taxonomical model for the study of Idoma oral lyric poetry; (ii) it explained the content, context and reality of the oral performance poetics among the people and (iii) it investigated the functions and contributions of the oral poetry to the social, educational, political and cultural advancement of Idoma people.

Primarily, the study found out that Idoma oral lyric poetry is classified into three taxonomical domains such as funeral song (elegy / dirge), song of praise to the king (Ode), and invocation to the gods (incantatory & religious poetry). Subsequently, it was discovered that the texts of Idoma oral poetry are products of a historical context through which the people's cultural and intellectual histories are comprehensively understood. The study further exposed certain vital functions of oral performances among the people such as entertainment, awareness, socialization, language skills, and political as well as religious-cultural values.

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