

Teaching Ideals and Conduct through Traditional Drama: The Obam of Ugep.

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Abstract

Traditional African societies held in high esteem, and cherished, certain moral values, ideals, conduct and philosophies. Many of these formed the bedrock of existence and survival of the people. Informal education was the means by which these were handed down from one generation to another. The oral performance was and continues to be one very effective vehicle of informal education. The Ugep people hold very dearly values like courage, bravery, honour and dexterity. They also cherish their history. The Obam oral performance was created to perform this function, in addition to entertaining and giving a sense of nationalistic pride and patriotism.

Key Words: *Moral values, ideals, conduct, oral performance, informal education.*

1. Background: Ugep World-View and the Seed of Obam

The Ugep person generally does not condone or accept any form of cheating. Thus, he usually will resist being cheated no matter what is involved. Land, in particular, is a prized possession to a typical Ugep person. For this reason it is believed that a typical Ugep indigene will not accept to be cheated out of any inch of his land. Rather than be cheated, he would fight to the very end.

Vengeance is also a prominent aspect of his world-view. Every act injurious to him must be avenged. They also believe that in any war, the enemy should not only be defeated, but should be totally humiliated and annihilated in a manner that he cannot rear his head, ever again. Therefore, during and after war, certain acts are carried out which physically and symbolically show the total humiliation and annihilation of enemy forces. Such acts also protect the Ugep, they believe, from spiritual attacks from both slain enemies and their living kith and kin.

These beliefs and attitudes led to many wars with her neighbours, a situation which ensured their emergence as an ethnic group of warriors. The belief in the use of medicines and charms is strong among Ugep people even to this day. They believe that after preparing and acquiring charms, bullets, machetes, bows and arrows and

spears no longer penetrate the warrior's body. The medicines and charms are believed to be so effective that machetes would rather bend than cut the flesh of anyone who has acquired them. Also, bullets will only land on the body and fall to the ground.

The gods occupy a prominent place in their world-view. They have great faith in the powers of the gods in all matters. Thus, the gods are responsible for the fertility of the soil; they are responsible for making a small slice of yam to become a full tuber; they are responsible for protecting the warrior or the hunter in the field. In effect, they are responsible for all the good things which happen to the Ugep man. For all these, the gods must be revered, thanked and appreciated so as to attract their goodwill continuously.

Based on this kind of mindset and world view, we can understand how and why courage and bravery, valour, dexterity and heroic deeds in war and hunting have become highly cherished ideals which have found permanent places within their psychosocial and culture subsystems. The determination to preserve and transfer these ideals, conduct and values from generation to generation along with the sociocultural values incidental to them find expression in a number of ways, including art. One of the most prominent of such artistic media is the Obam traditional drama, the nature and complex dimensions of which are the concerns of this research report.

2. **Origin, History and Nature of Obam**

The unavailability of documented information on *Obam* has compelled a heavy reliance on oral tradition through interviews. Therefore, the origin and historical development of *Obam* is constructed purely from oral tradition.

Traditionally, Ugep people are known to be, in the main, farmers and hunters. *Obam* is believed to owe its origin to a particular hunting expedition during which the hunters' experience draws parallel to that which inspired John Keats' "*Ode to a Nightingale*". On this occasion, the hunters whose number is not stated decided to sit down under the shade of a tree to rest, after a long period of traversing the forest in search of game. While resting, they were captivated by the song of a particular bird called 'Ubibi'. The bird sang with amazing sonority and mastery. Its song and voice were charmingly rhythmic and melodious. Such was it that the hunters were aroused, arrested and inspired into adding words to the bird's tune, to which they danced.

Using the bird's tune, and with some innovations, they composed songs of their own soon after they got home. As others joined the original hunters, more innovations were introduced. Issues of war and hunting dominated the songs, these being the primary vocation of the composers.

The hunters formed a dance troupe, introduced appropriate musical instruments and suitable choreography for the rhythm and themes of the songs. This, performance, they called **Obam**. The performance of **Obam** became a means and opportunity to perform rituals of propitiation and appreciation to the gods and ancestors for their guidance during war and hunting exploits and all other good things which the people experienced.

At its inception, membership was restricted to great hunters and warriors who had, in the course of their careers, acquired a number of human heads to show for their courage and bravery. No one not credited with the acquisition of human heads was made a member even as age was not a barrier. Indeed, most of those who became members of the group were deeply involved in 'juju' practices, which provided them immunity to bullets, machetes, spears, daggers and bows and arrows. The off springs of such members gained automatic membership.

A typical performance was an occasion to display the skulls of human beings killed at one time or the other. Other parts of the victim's bodies were used to adorn and to complete the costumes of the dancers. For example, most of them wore small round caps completely embroidered with human teeth while other parts of the human body, sometimes very fresh and still dripping with blood, were used as properties, reminding the audience of the stuff that the performers were made of.

Today, however, the combined forces of education and civilization, religion and missionary activities have caused great changes in **Obam** performances. Also, membership is no longer restricted to hunters and warriors who own human skulls. Any skilled dancer, drummer and singer can become a member. Though the head hunting phenomenon and protection against bullets and machetes still exist, albeit on a very minimal scale, not all those who indulge in these practices today belong to the **Obam** dance troupe. Also, it is not common to see fresh human body parts during performances today though dried human skulls still feature with fresh animal flesh as improvised human flesh.

Despite the historical development of **Obam**, it has maintained its basic nature. Being the brainchild of hunters who were equally warriors, it is combative in nature. This is projected through the choreography, costumes and music. All these largely depict the business of hunting and war with their attendant themes of courage and bravery, valour, dexterity and heroic deeds.

3. Setting and Occasion

Osmond Enekwe states that "theatre space is wherever the actors and audience interact. It does not even matter if there is no formally designated playing space ..." (32). Nnabuenyi Ugonna concurs when he asserts that "any location where

spectators witness performers in action becomes a theatre ...” (48). While Etherton, with the typical Euro-American mindset, says, technically a stage is a raised platform for performance, he does not indicate whether this raised platform has to be in a four-walled rectangular building or not. But he agrees that it is "in fact any acting area be it raised, sunken or a piece of earth" (18).

The *Obam* stage fulfills the African expectation of the stage. The only special feature is the 'Kebamtam' or *Obam* shrine. The *Obam* physical setting is usually a forest, a battle field or any other place where an enemy is killed or captured and can be represented anywhere — a street, a patch of land covered with grass or even a hard dusty piece of land with or without tree shade.

Often times these places are, in traditional Ugep, the *Obam* shrine and the four playgrounds of the four corners which the performance will move to and finally the open-air play ground in front of the 'Obol Loapon's' palace. The Obol Loapon is the paramount chief of Ugep. Regrettably, this researcher is unable to describe the interior of the 'KEBAMTAM' as outsiders are refused entry. Besides, no one would describe it for fear of exposing secrets. Men, women and children come together during a performance. In traditional Ugep some performances bring about reunion as sons and daughters of Ugep and friends come around. Performances could hold as part of the 'Leboku' (new yam) festival, title taking ceremony, launchings, burials of chiefs, members and other prominent members of the society. Hence, sometimes the occasion is one of joy while at other times it could be that of sorrow, grief and mourning. It is, also, a time when the people come to meet and know their natural rulers. During a typical *Obam* performance, all the traditional rulers and the Obol Loapon, the Paramount Ruler, are present. Thus, it is an opportunity to meet and know, and interact with them.

As can be seen from the immediate preceding paragraph, occasions for the performance of *Obam* in contemporary times have expanded. In spite of this, government is sometimes wary of its performance depending on prevailing socio-political circumstances. Being a war dance whose performance in times past meant preparations for or the execution of war, government, even today is usually not comfortable nor willing to accept the performance of *Obam* when there is a border conflict. This attitude is also manifested during periods of intense political activities. The truth, however, is that *Obam* has largely become a dance for social entertainment and an avenue for the teaching of communal ideals and conduct.

4. The Performers and the Performance

Most traditional African drama performances consist of dance and music. Of the components of drama in Africa, Ruth Finnegan says there is "often music; and-of particular importance...dance" (501). Okpewho seems to clarify this when he says:

“...in Africa generally, drama as conventionally understood is only One aspect of a larger spectacle – involving music, dance and other activities” (216).

Indeed, the nature of traditional African drama makes it imperative for the performers to include musicians and dancers all involved in a single dramatic process which results in a product of artistic clarity, beauty and unity. *Obam* is of this nature. Hence, its performers are made up of musicians, dancers and a host of others.

A detailed examination of the *Obam* performers reveals that there is the *Obam* Chief Priest who conducts the opening ritual at the KEBAMTAM (Obam Shrine). His function is to call on the gods and the ancestors to ensure a successful outing. The world-view of the people has a bearing on this. They believe in the supremacy of the gods and the ancestors. They believe that through rituals they can always remain in constant communication with them, yielding to their wishes as a means of ensuring a harmonious existence enhanced through the blessings of the dead who never depart. Of this belief Bassey Andah opines that “... both ancestors and nature spirits play similar roles with respect to the overall fortune-misfortune complex” (91). On his part Talbot talks of “shrines to which all in need might flee; there to claim the special protection of the deities” (9). The belief contained in this world-view underscores the importance of the ritual in the KEBAMTAM before an Obam outing.

There is the 'Otumise' (Chief drummer) who creates and sustains the background music throughout the duration of the ritual in the KEBAMTAM. The rhythm in this context is esoteric and provides the right atmosphere for the ritual. We have the second drummer who beats the second (female) drum. There is also the metal gong player. There are host of singers.

The dancers form the next group of performers. The group is further sub-divided. It has the hunters whose role is to dramatize the business of hunting and project the values associated with it which the people hold dearly. The hunters also serve as reminder of the origin of the dance. Then there is what is often regarded as the main Obam dance group. This group is led by a dancer who carries a staff called the 'Ebanti'. He is usually the best dancer, in recognition of which achievement he is given the staff of the dance (in the sense of an institution). The lead dancer is usually followed by a group of warriors dressed in raffia. Then there are the other performers who carry other paraphernalia: these include the dancer with a big sack which is adorned with little bells that jingle as he dances along. The sack is said to contain the heads of human beings and various animals killed during hunting expeditions. He therefore serves as the custodian of the harvest of courage and bravery.

Another outstanding character is the carrier of the 'Kekenti' (the wooden tray

containing fresh animal flesh). Other prominent characters include two 'women'. These are actually men disguised as women through the use of costumes and make up. They have braided hair, wear costumes of heavy distended breasts and pronounced feminine buttocks. Their presence reminds the audience that in Ugep, there are women who qualify to be men because they have done the kinds of brave things which real men do.

There are two masquerades and two chain bearers for each. Each masquerade wears a facial mask designed like a human skull. It is said that in the days gone by it actually was a human skull which was used. This reminds the audience of the stuff of which these men are made.

Lastly, there are the pot carriers, two in number. One of the pots contains herbs for divination and the other holds the palm-wine for libation. These are the performers who perform during a typical Obam performance.

A typical Obam performance begins from the Obam shrine, the KEBAMTAM. Formal preparations, including ritual and dressing of the masquerades for the performance, are made here in the shrine. The ritual involves the invocation of the ancestral spirits and the deities: it consists of appeals made to them to grant a peaceful outing free of any unpleasant incident and trouble. Part of the ritual is the slaughtering of a goat or chicken in the shrine. The slaughtering of the goat is done in a manner to emphasize dexterity and valour as the neck of the goat is cut off with one stroke of the machete.

During the performance of the ritual activities in the shrine, the Otumise or chief drummer beats a soft but esoteric rhythm on his drums, but immediately after the ritual is over he reverts to a more constant and coherent rhythm thereby signaling the take-off of the performance.

Leading the dancers is one of the masquerades followed by the hunters group attired in full hunting gear. All through the performance, this group dramatizes the business of hunting. They are followed by the main Obam dancers who are led by the lead dancer. The group called the main dance group and which is led by the lead dancer is made up of the warriors. This group dramatizes the business of war. After the group of warriors come the carriers of different paraphernalia, the sack carrier, the carrier of the wooden tray with flesh, the pots carriers, the women who are men, and the second masquerade. In this order, and followed by men, women and children, the performers proceed in a procession to the four corners of Ugep, stopping for a brief performance at each of the four play grounds of the four villages making up Ugep.

After the last of the four villages, the performers move to the central play ground in

front of the palace of the Obol Lopon of Ugep. Here, an elaborate performance takes place. The performance here involves dramatization of some historical events relating to wars fought by the Ugep people, general war experiences and hunting. Thus a dancer might dramatize the rolling of the stone at the top of the hill to crush the enemies who were on their way up. This is a historical event which occurred during the Ugep people's war with the Oban people. Another dancer might dramatize the stalking of and cutting off of the head of an enemy warrior, while yet another would dramatize the capturing of an enemy alive. A hunter character would demonstrate the killing of a wild and dangerous animal.

In one performance, a warrior demonstrated the sighting of an enemy, and crouching on the ground to avoid being spotted by the enemy, he turned to the audience and using mime, told them that "this one is finished; I have got him." He returned to his dramatization. He watched his enemy and, at the right moment, struck with his machete. Then he bent down and simulated the lifting of the enemy victim across his shoulders and heading home.

Another performer, a hunter character, dramatized the search for game with his hunting light. Soon he located one, and gave a chase. At a point, he stopped and watched his prey carefully, then, swiftly and dexterously, he swung his machete directing it to the animal's head. He then squatted to examine his game and satisfied that he had killed it successfully he nodded his head. He then butchered the animal, removing its entrails which he buried in the ground and demonstrated that by stamping his feet in a particular spot a number of times. The rest of it he carried home. Thus, through such dramatization, hunting exploits are re-enacted. Individual performers, in this way, tell of their exploits in hunting and war, and recount the people's history. All through the performance, the content of the palm-wine pot is continuously sprinkled yet it never finishes before the end of the performance.

Besides the solo performances, there is choreographed dancing. Three lines are formed with the dancers occupying the two outer ranks, while the central rank is occupied by carriers of the various properties mentioned. The dancing here consists mainly of leg movement in the manner of soldiers on the march. The machetes are outstretched in an offensive manner, while all bodies are tilted forward with faces kept stern. At a signal from the talking drums, the dancers make sudden, swift turns to the sides and back, and at another signal all machetes are raised up in an apparent gesture of triumph over the enemies. Usually, the first indication that war is approaching is given by the appearance of one of the masquerades. Thus, the appearance of the masquerade with a human skull is a warning of the approach of the war dance.

The masquerades, which also brandish machetes, are chained around the waist and the chains (or ropes) held by two chain bearers. Africans consider masquerades as ancestral spirits' representatives or as being possessed by such spirits and are therefore not responsible for their own actions. Consequently, they must be controlled by the chain bearers. During performance, they violently rush at the audience, occasionally causing them to run in different directions.

After the performance in the central play-ground, the procession now returns to the Kebamtam signaling the end of the performance. All others return home leaving the performers who perform rituals again, including the slaughtering of a goat done by one of the masquerades. This time around, the ritual is one of appreciation.

5. Costumes, Properties, Symbols and Symbolisms.

Drama, be it literary or traditional, employs costumes to delineate characters and contribute to the overall thematic concern of the performance. Obam as a dramatic performance is not an exception. It seems that in Obam, costumes, properties and make-up emphasize characterization, contribute to the realization of the central idea and enrich the spectacle of the performance. The costumes, properties and make-up provide considerable information on the performance. In Obam, they portray the businesses of war and hunting all of which call for courage and bravery, valour and honour as well as bring pride and prestige. Properly attired, a typical Obam dancer wears a small pant over which is the 'Nkwang'. The Nkwang is a piece of assorted clothing materials held together at the waist by a string. Normally, this is the traditional wear of Obam and it is expected to make the dancers smart, allowing for freedom of leg movement which is an important element of physical combat. This attire on its own depicts the business of war, a matter which requires courage and bravery, strength and valour, precision and dexterity. These are all values dear to the people and expected of all mature males as a mark of manhood.

The upper part of the body usually remains bare and is smeared with white clay powder. The clay powder adds to the beauty of the dancer and thus contributes towards enriching the spectacle. Of more importance is the spiritual symbolism of the white clay powder. It is believed that the warrior whose body is so smeared becomes immune to harm and the evil machinations of his opponents.

Some of the dancers, especially the warriors, also, have raffia wrapped around the waist. In most present day performances, some of the performers, mostly the hunters, wear khaki shirts and shorts. This, perhaps, is one of the consequences of the passage of time on the performance.

On the head is a small round cap covered with animal teeth. In pre-colonial times, these caps were actually covered with human teeth. The human teeth or animal teeth

commonly used today symbolize the wearer's achievements in war and or, hunting. It was the ultimate indication of manhood. The masquerades are also attired in the 'Nkwang' but have the entire body covered with very fresh and newly formed palm fronds which are yellow in colour. Covering the masquerades' heads and faces are masks designed like human skull while the hunters carry hunting lamps on the forehead.

The upper arms of some of the dancers are wrapped with a hairy animal skin. Make-up in Obam is light. It consists mainly, as has been mentioned earlier, of white clay powder applied to the bare upper part of the body. Its spiritual symbolism has been stated already. On the leg, from the region immediately below the knees to the feet, they smear a yellowish paste called 'Ejangna' which is of no significance, except that it adds to the performance spectacle by colouring the dancers.

The performers are not complete without their properties. The warriors and masquerades brandish traditional swords and carry shields. The symbolisms here are not difficult to understand as they relate to the overall significance of Obam, bravely and courage, strength and valour, pride, honour and prestige.

The hunters carry dane guns and search lights on the forehead. These are also symbols of their profession, a profession requiring courage and bravery and one's success in it brings pride, honour and prestige within the community. It is clear from all of these how costumes and properties in Obam contribute to the overall thematic concerns. A number of the performers carry human skulls to reflect the nature of the entire performance, as well as create and establish the right atmosphere and portray their individual achievements. The skulls also serve as a warning to onlookers as to what these warriors can do and the likely consequences of engaging Ugep in war.

The properties for an Obam performance, also, include the two clay pots containing some items. One contains herbs for rituals while the other contains palm wine for libation. Their use during the performance symbolizes the Ugep man's belief in the powers of the gods and the ancestral dead, the communication which goes on between them and the living, as well as the need to fulfill their wishes as a means to secure their blessings. Put differently, these symbolize the roles of the gods and the ancestral dead in the life of the people in all spheres. Some performers in present times carry a miniature human being to represent their victims, some of whose corpses they usually took away. Once more, it is interesting to note that in pre-colonial times, real human parts or bodies were used.

There are the ropes or chains tied around the waist of each masquerade and held by two strongmen. This has its roots in, and symbolizes the African's belief that masquerades are spirits. They are at least possessed by spirits during the time of

performance. Consequently, these masquerades must be held in check as they are not responsible for their own actions anymore. Of this belief which is generally African, Ugonna writes:

Spirits are also believed to have the capacity to animate any material objects such as staff, stones and masks and in this way either lend force, or endow spiritual mobility and character, to such objects. Thus emerged the idea of ... a spiritual being that animates a masked form (14).

In the opinion of Graft, this belief also explains why “in spite of the fact that the village audience recognized some of the impersonators through their disguise, it was prepared... to accept them in their new identity ...” (8). From the foregoing we can understand the necessity for the ropes or chains and why two strong men have to hold a single masquerade.

One of the dancers carries a big sack adorned with little bells. In the sack are the heads and skulls of various animals and human beings killed during different wars and hunting expeditions. These symbolize their trade.

Finally, there is the use of the 'kekenti'. It is believed that the warriors and hunters feed on this flesh as they go along. Indeed, before some of the changes which have been forced on Obam came into manifestation, the kekenti actually contained human flesh which was actually eaten. Obviously, it was the flesh of a victim of war from the opposing side.

In today's Obam, most of the properties have taken symbolic significance. They are of purely functional dimensions as the real things cannot be used in most cases. However, the message is obviously clear in every instance because they still conjure up images which drive home the point - some form of re-enactment of reality.

6. Music

Obam music speaks of war and hunting and their prerequisites which are courage and bravery. The music is very captivating and irresistible. The story has been told of three Portuguese who arrived Ugep during the performance of Obam and found the music irresistible. They were so animated that they danced towards the direction of the music until they came upon the performers. Unfortunately, they came to a tragic end.

The music is produced by the Otumise and another drummer who beats the second drum. The drums communicate through fixed signals using the principle of surrogacy, which involves the simulation of human speech. The rhythm is wild and

galloping, coming from the two drums known as the male and female. The female drum cools the male by producing less aggressive rhythms after the male drum has reached its peak. There is also singing by the entire cast. The drum beats become musical accompaniment for the lyrics of the songs.

The songs touch on war and hunting, praise singing and history. Music in performance commences with the Otumise beating an esoteric rhythm in the KEBAMTAM during the ritual ceremony immediately preceding the public performance. At this point, he calls on the ancestral dead for guidance during the performance. After calling on the gods and the ancestors, he goes on to call on the leaders of Obam beginning with the head:

Nkokim Ntokin (twice)
Ugep Eburutukparikpari
Ebla Emerigi
Ebla Emerigi
Usegon Ebribara
Usegon Ebribara
Obam Abrigba Nem Abrigba

Head of Abam
Head of Abam
Of this great Ugep
A dog delivers but eats
A dog delivers but eats
Obam of Abrigba.

Praise names are commonly used and this is typical of war and heroic dances such as Obam. Devices like allusion are used. For instance:
Obam Abrigba
Obam Abrigba

Akpu borokom
Usumanjom kan kan kan kan

Obam of Abrigba
Friend of Abrigba
When they are seated
It is the masquerade that will detect anything amiss.

The Otumise also calls on other clans, and villages which enjoy a cordial relationship with Ugep to come and be entertained. Below for example:

Nko Nko je lopon
Lopon lojejoje lopocode

Nko Nko is the town
No other town can match it.

The call on friendly villages to come and be entertained emphasizes the need for unity. When the drummer calls on these other clans and villages he proclaims their greatness and challenges other villages to dare them. An illustration of this, is:

Ugep Eburutu (Ugep the great)
Efik Eburutu (Efik the great)
Nko Eburutu (Nko the great)
Usegon Ebiribara (Dog which delivers and eat who are you?)

Along the line he chips in a word of praise for the head of Obam:
Udom Ekpe gari gari
Ornini Ugep Eburutu kpari kpari
Ipu lbori gbori
Gbone bume fe ka

He that is stronger than others is coming
Better hold your goats.
Thereafter, he continues with other villages.
The Otumise does not only praise. He also criticizes those villages with which Ugep does not have a cordial relationship. For instance:
Ekori non se sit edogode
Kekoka tolibe aben
Ndabelega Kilimilikili

Ekori does what its heart tells it.
It is the refuse bin that follows it to the toilet

I laugh at them
Hahahaha.

Or Idomi Okporoko Okporoko
Keji duba duba

You who are more in the bush than in the village.
The Otumise sometimes employs subtle and witty proverbs to satirize:

Mkpani ofoto bitoto

The okpe plant does not appear in the clear patch it only does in the bush. There is profuse use of repetition and parallelism to emphasize courage, bravery and heroism and as such contribute to the overall thematic development of the performance.

The above discussion of music in Obam has focused on the drum simulating human speech. There are, of course, songs with lyrics and musical accompaniment produced by the drums. These songs are concerned with courage, bravery, strength, valour, honour, pride and prestige through war and hunting. For instance:

Eto tong Ebun
Ebun Edon Eto.

Head hits bees nest
that's why bees sting head.

It should be recalled that in discussing Ugep world-view, it was stated that the Ugep man will resist any attempt to cheat him and will certainly respond to any form of provocation. The above Obam song alludes to that fact. It may be understood to mean Obam does not shy away in the face of provocation. It strikes back. It could also allude to the tendency to exact revenge.

Sometimes the performers use songs to refute some allegations against Obam.
Odam Oyom ket Oba
Oyo yoyo
Odam oyom ket oba.

Man lies on the path and dies
Man lies on the path and dies
In this song, the performers refute the accusation of murder preferred against the group. A simple understanding of the song could mean: the man laid on the ground and died; I didn't kill him. Ironically, the song rather seems to reveal the activities of the group.

Often, as is typical of songs of a war dance, the performer blows his own trumpet and boasts of his prowess like in the Obam song:
Odum Obimeka Oyamim
Odum Obimeka Oyamim

Man does not see me he boasts
Man sees me he runs.

The list of songs is long and cannot be exhausted here. The characteristic feature is

the concern with issues of bravery and courage, pride and honour. The Otumise is the griot while the singing is done by the entire group. But the music and songs do not seem to recount much of the people's history neither do they seem to be much concerned with their myth. No doubt, however, they do emphasize those values which are paramount to the people and which highlight their warlike and bellicose nature.

7. Presentational Techniques and Paralinguistic Resources.

Mime stands out clearly as an important feature of the dramatic techniques. Through mime, individual dancers tell of their exploits in hunting and war. We can recall one or two instances of the use of mime which have been mentioned earlier, during the discussion of the performance.

A dancer, it has been observed, can narrate how he killed an animal, by the use of mime. The dancer pretends to be chasing something all over the place. At a point he stops and watches his prey very carefully. Soon his sword is firmly in his right hand in readiness for the strike. At the appropriate time he swings his sword cutting off the animal's head. He moves over to his prey and squats over it for examination, and then nods his head apparently as a sign of satisfaction on his success. The miming continues as he opens the animals, removes the entrails which he buries while he goes off with the rest. He mimes the burying of the entrails by stamping his feet on a particular spot.

In one performance, an audience member used to the art of man hunting joined the performance and using mime, narrated a successful man hunting event which he carried out.

Besides, the use of mime, the dramatization relies heavily on the use of the paralinguistic devices of oral literature. The histrionics of performance such as gestures come into play. Gestures are put to great use in driving home the messages embedded in the songs. For example, the gestures which go with the songs:

Man does not see me he boasts
Man sees me he runs away.

The gestures used during this song drive home the point. The dancers emphasize the boasting, the seeing and the running away by the use of gestures.

The dance steps are used for dramatization. Usually, in any drama performance, actors are expected to move. In this case, dance becomes the vehicle for dramatic movement. It becomes the justification for movement from one point of the stage to another albeit to achieve other purposes other than the beauty of movement or form.

Dance in Obam is also a vehicle for characterization. The head of the warriors is the chief dancer and carries the staff of the dance. In this way, he is set apart from the other performers and his position and achievements as chief warrior or hunter is highlighted.

The performance dramatizes a story and the story is the story of the Ugep community. Therefore, the Ugep community is the subject of the drama. Thus, dance becomes the technique of drama which ensures the participation of a majority of the members of the community. As Amankulor avers, "their dances of joy or sorrow complement the dramatic conflict symbolize by the fortunes of the few participants who take on character roles" (86).

Suspense is another dramatic technique put to use. Each moment of conflict is marked by intense drumming and more vigorous dancing. For instance, when a solo performer takes center stage to recount a particular man hunt or animal chase, the drumming intensifies and the dancing becomes more vigorous. The atmosphere becomes charged with tension and suspense as the audience awaits the resolution of this conflict.

The paralinguistic device of using implements and objects with visual impact is also a dominant feature of the performance. Here we can mention the carrying of the human skull, the wooden tray of fresh meat, the bag of animal and human heads or skulls and the miniature human being. There is no doubt about what roles these items play in contributing to the overall thematic development, in highlighting the nature of the performance and contributing to its taxonomy or even in characterization.

Men who carry guns, swords and machetes and human skulls must strike us as warriors; they must strike us as men whose business has to do with war or hunting; they must strike us as men whose hallmarks are courage and bravery, strength and valour, honour and prestige.

Thus, as Okpewho notes of objects with visual impact, the visual implements create visual images which impress "the message of the text far more deeply in the minds of the audience" (49).

The last paralinguistic resource used in the performance is music. The music spurs the dancers into striving for superlative performances as when music is used to sing their praises and trace the greatness of their genealogy.

Besides, music and songs support the oral text of the drama and help to drive home relevant points that are made and contribute to the impressiveness of the overall

spectacle.

For instance, the Obam warrior's boast:

Man does not see me he boasts

Men sees me he runs away

Or the Otumise's:

He that is stronger than others is coming

Better hold your goats.

8. Performer/Audience Interaction.

The Obam audience is made-up of men, women, children and chiefs. It is sometimes, depending on occasion and location of performance, wholly local or a conglomeration of various elements. No doubt, today, it is rare to find a wholly local audience during an Obam performance. Without doubt, however, the audience does influence the performance in some ways and this is typical of Oral Literature.

First of all, the nature of the audience will determine the nature of the Obam performance that will be staged. Implements with visual impact which contribute to the overall realization of the performance as well as dramatic action are usually affected. A performance of Obam in the U. J. Esuene Stadium for an audience which includes the State Governor and the Commissioner of Police, for instance, cannot see the use of the visual implements which would normally have been used in the absence of such persons in the audience. For this reason, it took Ojukwu's special permission and assurances for Obam to be performed in its true nature for him in Enugu in 1967.

Similarly, the songs even though they may not exert much influence on the performance, might themselves be influenced by the nature of the audience. While the Otumise may praise the Efiks and satirize the Mkpanis in one instance, for instance if the performance took place in Calabar, the reverse would be the case if for instance they were performing during a civic reception for Clement Ebri at Mkpani when he was Governor.

But by far the most important aspect of the audience/performer relationship has to do with the participation of audience members in the performance. Here we may note that women and children in the audience join in the dancing but without entering the circle of performers who have assumed character roles. In spite of this, as we pointed out earlier, their dance of joy or sorrow corresponds with the fortunes of the performers who have assumed roles in the performance. Besides other considerations, this type of performer/audience relationship ensures the participation of a majority of the member of the community and confirms the communal and festival nature of indigenous African drama.

During a performance of *Obam* in Calabar, for the burial of a late member, a man hunter from Ugep who did not assume character role in the performance, danced onto center stage and performed the traditional greetings. After this, he entered into an elaborate performance, using dance as the vehicle and basis for movement and mime as a dramatic technique to reenact a human hunting episode he had successfully carried out. In the end, as he danced out of the arena, a loud ovation greeted his performance.

Such examples of performer/audience relationship are especially common if the performance takes place in traditional Ugep where most of the young men have participated and have initiated into the systems which *Obam* re-enacts.

Consequently, it is normal, as it has happened during several performances, for a young man to dance into the arena and sit on the *Obam* stone upon which non-performers are prohibited from doing so. In one of such performances, a young man recounts how having been ambushed by enemies he escaped unhurt as all their arrows, spears, machetes and bullets could not penetrate his body because he had been given the 'juju' which endowed him with such super-natural abilities. Such is the nature of performer/audience relationship in *Obam*. This leaves no one in doubt as to the communal nature of African indigenous drama.

9. Conclusion

Many scholars have opined that with its myriad of social, economic, political and religious challenges, Africa can ill afford 'art for art's sake'. Literature is a human activity, a function and product of society. Thus, literature has to serve society, it has to serve a useful purpose and cannot afford to remain fruitless entertainment. In the words of Bakare Traore, "every work of art...has a social function. Art is never a-social" (16). Put differently, African literature must serve a utilitarian purpose.

War and hunting were issues of particular interest in many pre-colonial African societies, and as a corollary courage, bravery, valour, heroism, honour and even dexterity were, and still are, virtues expected of the men, young or old.

Consequently, the concern with heroism in war or hunting gave rise to a specialized and complex manifestation of drama called war dance. Finnegan believes that as a form of drama war dances involve themes of boasting and challenge, danger and triumph, glory and heroism. *Obam* falls under this category of traditional African drama.

The Ugep people have a long history of migration with the attendant wars which seemed imperative. In truth, there is hardly any of Ugep's present day neighbours who have not been fought by the Ugep. It is widely believed, arguably though, that

in South Eastern Nigeria, besides the Ohafia and the other Bende head-hunting groups, no other group is as warlike in nature as the Ugep. So, their historical circumstances and their environment combined to make the Ugep people a warlike people. Little wonder, then, that values like courage and bravery, strength and valour, honour, pride and prestige occupy centre stage in their world view. It is against this back drop that one will understand the popularity of the Obam performance.

As we have seen, the performance is a combination of drumming, singing and dramatization. The soloist or narrator narrates the history of the community, praises the heroes past and present, expresses the community's values in relation to war, narrates stories with moral lessons and recounts the community's history while the dancers dramatize. So, a typical performance is a record of their history, particularly their heroic history as the music and dramatization concentrate on the glorification of the heroic deeds of both the ancestral and living heroes with a view to projecting their communal strength and greatness. It propagates their cherished social values and as Ruth Finnegan opines, it serves as a means of encouraging emulation and attainment of achievements (121). A typical performance offers boundless opportunities to publicly validate the status of heroes, achievers and workers of the society through the praise songs which are artistically woven into the songs of the performance. This kind of public validation of a man's status becomes, to the younger members of the society an encouragement to emulate such achievements.

The performance, also, exerts a stabilizing influence on the society. The moral lessons, cultural and religious beliefs which it propagates help in ensuring peace and stability. In spite of its utilitarian value, it offers entertainment and relaxation which ease tension and engender peaceful communal living. In so doing, it contributes towards producing wholesome individuals whose latent energies are then directed towards profitable engagements. In addition, as the performance brings together men and women, boys and girls, young and old, rulers and the ruled, in a relaxed atmosphere, there is a concomitant forging of bonds of friendship and unity.

From the analysis of the performance provided in preceding sections of this work, it seems safe to assert that the performance relies a great deal on the dramatic techniques of mime, gesture, suspense, music and dance. As can be seen in the analysis of the performance, miming is a very prominent dramatic technique which is put into very effective use. Indeed, the Obam makes extensive use of miming even as dance is a motivation for movement. The nature of the performance makes it imperative, sort of, for the use of suspense one of the dramatic techniques.

All of the foregoing confirm the fact that literature, be it oral or written, has been and remains a tool with which to inform, educate and entertain people. Almost all

African communities have values, etiquettes, ideals and conduct which are dear to the people. The oral performance remains an important means of teaching these from generation to generation. For the Ugep people, among other things, bravery, courage and valour are important ideals and mode of conduct which the people cherish. The Obam oral performance is a medium for handing these down from generation to generation.

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