

UTILITARIAN ANALYSIS OF IGBO SATIRIC POEMS

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Abstract

Oral literature, especially oral poetry been an instrument of social control which blends or repudiates a person for doing what are regarded as contrary to the mores or laws of the society. Oral satiric poems have been good instruments for checkmating the society. This paper examined the utilitarian value of oral satiric poem to ascertain their value to the society. Three research questions were raised to guide this study. It is a descriptive study. The data was collected through oral interview, published, unpublished and recorded tapes. Seven (7) oral satiric poems were collected for easy investigation. The analysis revealed that satiric poems have social as well as cultural relevance. The study recommended that the rich cultural heritage which abounds in the Igbo satiric poems should be harnessed by compiling and documenting them to preserve them for posterity.

Keywords: *Oral literature, oral poetry, satiric poem, utilitarian analysis*

Introduction

Africans as a people are highly creative. The art of poetry is one which runs through every sphere of life in the African culture. As Onwuejeogwu in Obiego (2013) observes “past generation of Africans who developed the African songs and chants in the indigenous language had great creative minds than some modern African professors of literature or music that spend time reciting Chaucer or listening to Beethoven. Africans express all forms of emotions with poetry. Emotions such as anger, frustration, pain, loss, happiness, joy and so on have various poems that fall in line with them. According to Onwubiko (1991) music in the African culture features in all emotional states, when they go to work, they share the burden and pleasures of the work they are doing through music. They compose music that suit the occasion and create the desired atmosphere and evoke the desired responses. The role of music, songs and poetry and the effect they have in the African community is so prominent that Equiano in Isichei cited in Obiego (2013) despite many years of separation from Africa, still proudly recollected “Africa is almost a nation of dancers, musicians and poets”. Every event in Africa is accompanied with songs and music. To Igbo people, poetry is part and parcel of their everyday life and activity. In their daily activity of farming, there is a poem known as work song (abu oru), in bewailing their dead they use funeral poetry (abu akwa). For purposes of war, a special poem known as abu agha is used while praise song (abu otuto) is used for eulogizing the gods and great men and women who have achieved outstanding feats in the society. Satiric poem (abu ikpe) is a kind of poetry that is shared by all sexes and all ages. It touches on the morals and value system of the people. It could be used for expression of prejudice and ridicule for actions that contravene the values and mores which govern and guide

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members of the society. It checkmate members of the society and help to guard against the abuse of the society's morale and value system. Its core usefulness does not lie merely in castigating the culprit but its power lies in making people to desist from breaking the norms and moral of the society. The value of oral poetry and its effect in the African community cannot be over stressed. Yet oral poetry in recent times has come under serious attack due to the fact that it is regarded as primitive, outdated and unchristian. The village poets are greatly discouraged from practicing their trade. Modernization, westernization and civilization has dealt a deadly blow on African oral poetry making them seem irrelevant to the life of the people. One can argue that most African are yet to understand the fullness of African society and its cultures a Most elites have a negative attitude towards African culture. To them they are barbarous pagan noise.

Bemoaning the unfortunate fate which has be fallen African oral poetry and Igbo oral poetry in particular the research advices that more time should be allotted to projecting African literature or orature to avoid its extinction within a few decades. Following this, therefore, this study intends in show that there is a category of Igbo oral poetry known as satiric poetry that touches on the morale and value system.

Given to the problems raised above the purpose of this study are to:

- a. Examine the concept of Igbo oral satiric poem and its status in oral poetry.
- b. Ascertain if there were oral satirical poem that were use in the past to checkmate the society.
- c. Undertake the utilitarian analysis of Igbo satirical poem from the field work.

Research questions

- To what level does Igbo oral poetry has a category known as satiric poem?
- What are the satiric poem in the past that were used to correct erring members of the society.
- What are the values of Igbo satiric poems to the society?

The significance of the study lies in showing how this aspect of the oral poetry of the Igbo can draw out attention within the context of meaningful research. The study also holds the significance of being a way of showing that Igbo satiric poem are of immense value to the society. The study will be of immense help to researchers on the field of Igbo language and culture. It will also be useful to the ministry of information, culture and tourism for showcasing the rich cultural potential in Igbo satiric poetry.

Literature Review

Literary works relating to the present work are numerous. Plato in Ezejideaku (2003) describes a poet as a man of divine inspiration with peculiar sensibilities that enables him to perceive what members of his society cannot perceive and to put his perception across to them in a way that will inspire them to take actions aimed at safeguarding their rights and interests. According to him, one of the literary arts employed by the Igbo poet in achieving this goal is satire which is the literary art of exposing folly, vice and other social misdemeanors to ridicule. Coffey (1976) describes satire as "the use of invective, sarcasm, burlesque, irony, mockery, raillery, parody, exaggeration, understatement and wit in any form to make the object of attack abhorrent or ridiculous as a way of denouncing the vices of either an individual, group or the society". For Olaoye (2000), satire serves as an artistic weapon for communicating ideas, thoughts and feeling about what is going on in the society. Mbah and Mbah (2007) describe satirical poetry as a kind of didactic poetry which exists to instruct members of the society in which it exists on the need for the right conduct and adherence to the mores of the society. The satirical poetry is used both to punish as well as correct

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those people who go contrary to the norms of the society. According to Uzochukwu (2001) it is hoped that this form of punishment by bringing the delinquent to ridicule and shame through satiric poem will help to correct him. Olisa (2002) observed that ridicule is meted out to notorious character or outright offenders through satiric songs, proverbs and innuendos all aimed at making the misbehaving individual feel shame or guilt.

In satirical poems, vices, follies, abuses and shortcomings are held up to ridicule, ideally with the intent of shaping individuals and society into improvement. Though satirical poems are usually funny, its purpose is often social criticisms administered constructively using wit as a weapon. Satiric poems could be regarded as the most effective source to understand a society, the oldest form of social study. They provide a deep insight into a group's collective psyche; reveals its values and taste and the society's structure of power. Its power and effectiveness in the Igbo society lie in the fact that the people firmly believe that "good name is better than riches". With this at the back of their mind, people are careful not to indulge in activities regarded as wrong by the society.

In Igbo society, satiric poem is not an exclusive preserve of any group as in war poetry which is exclusive preserve of men. It cuts across all ages and sexes. In this wise Anochie (1979) asserts that "the general picture of women is that she is the house and the guardian of morality. On account of this, in some areas, only female groups in the public dances and songs expose the personal faults of notorious men and women. Satiric poems has disciplinary effect and proves the most affective way of checkmating adult morality. Obi (2010) also affirms that women organize themselves in groups and visit the houses of various offenders and defaulters, singing song that highlight the abuses and crimes committed with an intention of exposing them. According to him, these songs are commonly used to castigate young women who become pregnant before they get married; premarital sex was not only frowned at but was regarded as sacrilege, young children who unveil scatological or pornographic images of their parents are caricatured, indirectly cautioning parents about their carelessness which are capable of spoiling the younger generation. Womanizers, illicit lovers, pretentions lovers, diviners and all those who are parasites on the mores of the society are roundly castigated in an unequivocal manner. Beautiful proud girls, who toss men bidding to marry them around, are painted in a manner that bemoans their existence. Obi further explains that everybody is researched on and interestingly everybody is the society's informant. The satiric songs are so strongly worded that everybody tries to avoid being part of their object. He added that the ultimate consequences of satire are that people of all ages control their behaviour in every facet of their lives, men, women youth, and even young children are not left out of the picture because they sing or hum such songs on their way to the stream, to farm, to gather firewood and other errands. It has also been observed by researchers that satirical focus on various topics that touch the lives of the members of the society and its values. From earliest times, the primary topics of satirical poem are politics, religion, sex, economy, moral and others.

According to Ohia (2017) satiric songs provide advice, warning and elicit good behaviour among members of the society. He further asserts that satiric songs provide unwritten moral code, which ensures peaceful co-existence in the community. He further explains that through satirical songs, murder and other crimes are condemned in their entirety; and the destructive effect of vengeance discouraged, in the songs culprits admonished to accept the consequences of their actions, also they covertly warn a would be culprit to check the gravity of his intended offence before embarking on it, consequently, evil doers refrain from their act.

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Methodology

The research design used was descriptive design. Seven (7) satiric poems were selected. The source of information was oral interview, and a tape-recorder. The method of analysis used was descriptive approach. The analyses of the poems are based on utilitarian value. The poems are numbered for easy referencing in the analysis. English language translations of the poem are provided to facilitate the analysis.

Results

Utilitarian Analysis of Igbo Satiric Poems

Utilitarianism is concerned with the ultimate purpose or use of a thing. It is the major criteria to be considered in the analysis of the satiric poems in the work. The satiric poems collected from the field was analyzed based on the following values:

Igbo Satiric Poems: As a means of Social Control

One of the chief functions of satiric poems is for people of all ages to control their behaviour in all facet of life. Satiric songs are so strongly worded that members of the society avoid being the song's object. In many cultures across the world, satire seems to have come along as a force of control used by the society in influencing people through criticism and ridicule. An example is this song from modern Abigbo dance in Obiego (2013).

O nwere notisi anyi na-enye unu
Umuagbogho ji mini skeeti acho anyi, okwu
Ma ndi nke shi ha yi trawuza gbara oto
Ikpogia sagin I bu Alaye Legos gi agwa anyi?
Unu gwakwa ha, onwunwa ka ekwensu na job mma n'aka
Ijee n'ime owere gi ahu ha, I gaa nime Aba gi ahu ha
I gaa na legos ha bu aja
Pot na Abuja bu Itali anyi nwere
Ma ndi, gbachara isi awo n'ukwu afo
Mgbe nwanyi gbara isi awo n'ukwu afo
Ndi nke anyi, akwukwo ritayamenti ya alola
Aturu nyuru odu ya nshi mere onwe ya.

Translation

We are giving a notice to you
Young girls who use mini skirt to infuriate us
Including those who claim they are putting on trousers but are naked
You call it sagging, tell us are you Lagos Alaye
Tell them temptation is better between Satan and job
Go to Owerri you will see them. You go to Aba you will see them
Port and Abuja is our Italy
Including those who have grey hair on their pubic region
When a woman has grey hair on her pubic region
My people, her retirement time has reached
A sheep that messes up its tail cheats itself.

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The above poem through its criticism of the half-dressed modern day females also seeks at the same time to deter others from imitating them by discouraging indecent exposure of one's body.

Igbo Satiric Poems: A means of correcting Social Ills

Another value of Igbo oral satiric songs/poems is the correction of social ills in the society. It is observed that Igbo satiric poems are powerful tools for correcting social ills. This is achieved through the use of powerful and critical language to condemn the ills that abound in the society. It points out the lapses which are not in line with the society. The poem below from Abigbo Chokoneze vol. 1 attests to this:

Unu ahula na-elu uwa emebiela?
Naijiria akala njo , o yikwala mgbe oge ogu gara aga
Ndi ntoro mmadu akala anyi ike
Ndi bara eze bewe akwa
Ututu na anyasi ihe oriri anoghi ha n'ahu
Ndi nwere moto agbawa ya
Ufodu ji agbawa bos ejewe oru
Ndi gbara jip futa n'ama
Ndi ntoro mmadu anwuchie ha
Anyi etinyela chineke okwua n'aka
Ujo atugbuola m-o

Translation

Have you seen that the world has spoilt?
Nigeria has become worse; it could be likened to the period of war
Kidnappers have overpowered us
The rich are crying
Morning and evening they are restless
Those that have cars do not use them
Some of them enter bus to work
Those that came out with their jeep
The kidnappers caught them
We have handed everything over to God
I am terribly afraid oo

The above poem highlights social ill of kidnapping which is an offshoot of greed and moral decay in the society. Igbo satiric poems are powerful tool for correcting social ills. This is achieved through the use of powerful and critical language to condemn the ills that abound in the society. It point out the lapses which are not in line with the societal norms and which do not portend good for members of the society as shown in the poem.

Igbo Satiric Poems: A Means of Upholding Social Norms

Igbo satiric poems could also be used as an instrument for upholding the social norms of the society. People who go against the social norms of the society are used as objects of satiric songs. They are railed at, abused, cursed etc. All manner of invectives are employed to dampen their spirit

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and instill shame and fear in them. On the other hand, those who listen to the culprits' humiliation are discouraged from imitating them. The following poem from Onyeaghala (2012) attest to this:

Ofeke fecha o febata n'ulo
Aku fecha o dara awo
Okafo a lota si na o biara Ibu eze
Onye na-amaghi ezi nna ya
O na-achi umunna ya?
Onye na amaghi ji na ede
Ekwesiri ikpo ya mmadu?
Onye na amaghi omenaala ha
O kwesiri I bu onye isi?

Translation

A good for nothing, after wandering wander back to his house
The termite after its flights becomes a meal for the toad
Okafor, suddenly surfaces, declaring that he has come to be king
He that cannot pinpoint his father's compound
Does he deserve to be addressed as a human being?
He who is ignorant of their customs
Does he become a leader?

The unacceptable norms that come to the full glare of the satiric poet above are pride, being far away from the people at home for a long time and ignorance of the custom. Therefore, in the above poem, Okafor is satirized for being far way from his home for a long time, for being ignorant of the custom of his people and still wants to rule his people.

Igbo Satiric Poems: A Means of Showcasing the Belief and Value System of the People

The nature of some Igbo satiric poems make them good instrument for showcasing the culture of the society. They give insight into the beliefs and value systems of the society as in the poem below which criticizes the rampant conferment of chieftaincy titles on undeserving sons of Igboland by greedy monarchs.

Kama m chile chifu buru onye ohi
Ma anoro n'efu, ihe oma di n'elu uwa agwu agwu
E lewe umu okorobia echiwa echichi
Ufodu gaa Legos gaa gbuo ozu
Ha alota n'ulo chie echiche
Gaa n'ulo chochi tuo mma mma
Ufodu agawa n'amala chie echichi
Onye eze hu ucha ego
Ya echie ha oluogbalaga

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Translation

Instead of becoming a thief in order to become chief
I will rather stay without, good things are in abundance
Looking at the young men who are given titles
Some went to Lagos to do dubious business
When they go to Lagos and do dubious business
They go to the church for thanksgiving
Some will go to the traditional rulers for titles
When they give the ruler money
He will give them the title of he that looted and escaped.

Igbo Satiric Poem: A Means of Protest

Igbo satiric poems are also good instruments for protest. The poem below from Uzodimma in (Obiego 2013) protests the imposition of alien food and language..

Gupu n'efere m nri akamere
Nke eliri n'ime komkom
Ma mezie ya nsi ogbu ngwangwa
Butere m efere akpu
Ofe olugbu na ebele mmai
Tinyere m ji awayi
Eji uziza na ose sokpoo anya
Chitara m oka na ube
Chitakwa aki na ukwa
Ihe mmeghari onu
Ndi gbafuru mgbe miti pai
E ji ataka ede na ogwu azu mee
Mabatara n'ama anyi
Nyeghachi m olu m
Olu nna m jiri jaa m ike
Olu enyi m jiri choo m mma
Nyeghachi m olu m
Nke riri mbombo
Mgbe asusu nsunimi
Wuchara ka onye agha
Ma buruzie akara nzerendu

Translation

Remove from my plate
The canned artificial food
Changed to a weapon of destruction
Bring a plate of fufu for me
Bitter leaf soup and a jar of palm wine

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Dish for me yam broth
Richly spiced with uziza and pepper
Bring corn and pear
Also bring palm kernel and fried bread fruit
That suddenly went on untimely retirement
When meat-pie prepared with spoilt cocoyam and fish bone
Jumped into our compound.
Give me back my language
The language my mother used in naming me
The language my father used in praising me
The language my friend use to beautify me
Give me back my language
That ran away when English language
Marched in like soldier
And became a mark of survival

Igbo Satiric Poems: A Means of Expressing Public Opinion to the Government

The electorates us satiric poems to register their dissatisfaction against their leaders when they fail to fulfill their electioneering campaign promises. The poem below from Abigbo Mbaise dance in Obiego (2013).

Unu tuoro anyi votu anyi chiwa
Anyi ga-aruchara unu ulo n'elu mmiri
Anyi atuchala votu, ha agbalaga
Nke batara n'ochichi
Unu ahula, ya agho biggi boi ka nna ya ukwu
Ndi turu votu bewe akwa
Sevini pointi ajenda biara ahia
Odi iri, otu abughi eziokwu
Nkwa ekwere anyi kara ndaganda

Translation

You should vote for us, let us rule
We will build houses for you everywhere
When they are voted in
They become big boys like their god father
The electorates are crying
They brought the seven point agenda
They were ten but none of them is true
The promises they made to us were false

Igbo Satiric Poem: As a Means of Criticizing Individuals and Beliefs

Igbo satiric poems have come a long way as a force of control used by the society through criticism and ridicule. The poem below from Abigbo Chokoneze vol.1 (2013) criticizes pastors who abandoned their duty of shepherding the flock and reverted to devouring the flock.

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O nwere kweshion anyi na-aju unu
Pasto amuma asi ya na ndi okada onye ka mma?
Anyi amarala sha ufodu ndi okada zuwe ohi
Ufodu ndi okada kwowa ndi ohi
Ihuna pastor amuma asi, pasto amuma asi
E buterela anyi ala adighi mma
Ekpere midinati akariala
Okacha n'ulo umu nwaanyi isi mkpe
Umu nwaanyi isi mkpe ndi nwere umu aghogho toro eto.
O ruo midnati pasto agbara bia
Anyi rioga govamenti chiwa anyi
Ha tinye iwu ka ekpere midnaiti kwusi

Translation

We are asking a question
Fake pastors and okada riders which one is better?
We know that some okada riders are robbers
Some of them also carry robbers
But have you taken notice of fake pastors
Fake pastors have brought a lot of ills to our land
Midnight prayers are becoming too much
Especially in the homes of widows
Widows who have grown up daughters
At midnight the pastor will come
We are begging the government to enact a law
So that midnight prayers will stop.

Discussion of Findings

The research findings from the oral interviews reveal that Igbo satiric poetry is a popular form of poetry which had been in existence in Igbo culture from time of old, and due to its popularity cuts across sexes and ages. Oral interview respondents also assert that the duty of satire lies in the fact that people are taught and are made to learn through the mistakes of others.

The analysis also reveals that Igbo satiric poetry is a tool used not only to punish but is also used to instruct, advice and correct erring members of the society. This is in agreement with Mbah and Mbah (2007), Olisa (2002) Uzochukwu (2001) and Ohia (2017), who assert that satiric poetry is a form of Igbo oral literature that reforms and punishes offenders. The findings also indicate that satiric poems serve as the most effective of checkmating the society and its members. This is a line with Anochie (1979), Obi (2010), Olisa (2002) who agreed that satiric songs are used to castigate erring members of the society and to serve as a deterrent to other members of the society.

Conclusion

Every society has a system built into the culture with the intent of using such to checkmate the members of the society. These systems are both formal and informal all aimed at changing and bringing back erring members of the society back to the right path and discouraging others from

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towing the wrong path. This paper therefore, has perceived Igbo satiric poem as a mirror of the norms, values, mores and ethics of the Igbo society. Its inestimable value in criticizing, punishing and correcting erring members of the society cannot be over-emphasized.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of the paper makes the following recommendations:

The society and public spirited individuals should harness the rich cultural heritage which abound in Igbo satiric poems by compiling and documenting them to guard against their total loss. Satirists, especially the illiterate ones, should be encouraged by giving them monetary incentives to help them record their songs because they are good instruments for showcasing the culture.

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Informants

Name of Informant: Mr. Aloysius Nwanguma

Sex: Male

Age: 72 years

Town/Village: Mbutu Ngwa

State: Abia State

Name of Informant: Mr. Ezire Alphonsius

Sex: Male

Age: 75 years

Town/Village: Obiakpu Egbema

State: Imo State.

Name of Informant: Mrs. Janet Mbonu

Sex: Female

Age: 70 years

Town/Village: Egbu

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