



INTERNATIONAL
STANDARD
SERIAL
NUMBER
INDIA

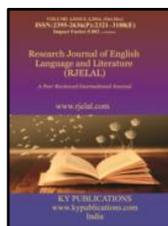
2395-2636 (Print);2321-3108 (online)

FROM RITUAL TO DRAMATIC ART THE UKWA WAR DANCE OF EKID PEOPLE

UWEM AFFIAH, *PhD*¹, JAYNE OWAN²

^{1,2}Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Calabar, Calabar, Nigeria

²Email: uwemaffiah@yahoo.com; ²jayne.owan@yahoo.com



ABSTRACT

Whereas the incipient focal point of interest in research in indigenous African drama was and still remains masquerade performances, the research feasibility survey for this work revealed a preponderance of war dances within the corpus of African Oral Literature. Fascinated by the impressive number of war dances in existence, the researchers decided to carry out this research work on the "Ukwa" War Dance. The work sets out to analyse the performance within the context of drama, establish a theoretical basis for considering war dances as dramatic art and in the process crystallize the elements and defining characteristics of this dramatic art form. Relying rather heavily on field work, with little library research, the researchers viewed the performances in situ in a number of locations though using Eket as its target location. Video recordings were also made. The researchers interviewed several members of the target community with a view to gaining proper understanding of the performance which would in turn yield correct analysis of the performance. We applied a theory known as "ethnodramatics", a theory emanating from an earlier research work by one of the researchers here. That work is available in hard and soft copies online for interested researchers. Aside from all of these, this research work reveals that through the application of aesthetic elements such as symbols and symbolisms, mime, gestures, suspense and the total theatre elements of dance, music and song, the Ukwa War Dance reveals the sophisticated nature of African culture and put to lie the notions of 'primitive' and 'savage' often used in describing the same culture by Eurocentric scholars using Eurocentric critical canons. The significance of this work rests on its absolute originality.

Keywords: War dance, indigenous drama, field work, ethnodramatics, mime, gestures, suspense, music, songs, dances.

Background

In the pre-colonial and pre-Christianity era, internecine wars were rife. This was one of the outstanding life-threatening situations. During wars, people lost their lives in large numbers. Therefore, as with all other endeavours, there was great need to solicit the support and protection of the Supreme Deity through the minor deities and ancestors each

time there was war. Writing about the belief in the Supreme Deity, magic and charms during wars, P. A. Talbot writes in *Life in Southern Nigeria*:

Before warriors start on the warpath, it is customary to offer sacrifice to the chiefs of the fetish of the town ... and afterwards each of the chosen band submits himself of the "shot and magic juju", ... which consists

of the priest rubbing magic leaves over the whole body of the warrior, in order to render him invulnerable, and a black juju powder over his face to make him invisible to his opponents (233).

Talbot writes further:

In the war-shed at Ikot Ibiuk, (sic) a village near Eket, (sic) may be seen a section of tree-trunk, hollowed bowl-wise, some three feet in diameter and encircled by a string of buffalo skulls. Medicines mixed, according to my informant, or magic leaves, human blood and that of buffaloes – the latter regarded hereabouts as the symbol of brute strength – was poured therein, and of this portion each warrior was given to drink before starting out for the scene of action (233).

Ikot Ibiuk is actually spelt Ikot Ibiok and it is not a village 'near Eket' but a village in Eket.

Talbot devotes one chapter to the belief and use of magic and charms in warfare and in the process describes many magical practices and charms which, like the ones here referred to, shed some light on the people's world-view and the idea of 'Ukwa'. For instance, he talks of 'juju' made to weaken the most powerful warriors of the opponents by conjuring their souls out of their bodies and rendering them soulless and as a result powerless to fight.

Usually, when all these things had been done, we had warriors from whose necks and wrists hung charms of various kinds and who carried little bags containing magic roots and herbs. They would, on concluding their rites, form into a single file and march straight into the enemy's territory without a single word spoken.

It was part of the people's belief that warriors should, at least seven days before the commencement of fighting, avoid any contact whatsoever with women including food cooked by women.

According to Bassey Andah art for the Eket man is a means of graphically and expressively portraying life "in order to give as vividly and completely as possible their emotional interpretation of ... aspects of life" (220). For the

Eket man, art serves as a means for expressing those thoughts and feelings which manifest in their particular life style and the processes which take place in it. Thus, art becomes "a very delicate instrument for expressing human emotions and a people's ideology ... what is sometimes described as a person's or people's outlook" (220). It seems apparent, therefore, that the Eket man considers arts a vehicle for the re-enactment and reflection of his history, socio-cultural values, religious beliefs, life philosophy and even aesthetic opinions.

As we examine the origin and nature of 'Ukwa' in the next section, the complex relationship between it as an art form, and the Eket man's world-view would become clear.

The Emergence of the Drama

There seems to be no certainty about the origin of "Ukwa" as there are no written records along that line. The only available source of information is oral tradition with its many limitations which create doubts about reliability and authenticity.

For instance, Chief Akpeyu (a 67 year old man from Efoi, Eket) one of the informants interviewed by these researchers claims that Ukwa was copied from the Efiks and taken to Eket by indigenes of Eket who had visited Calabar.

Although he was quite confident in his account, his claim is a questionable probability. Indeed, Ukwa as a dramatic performance exists, to the knowledge of this researcher, in Efikland and in Ibibioland, including Oron. It is important however to note that no research work known to these researchers has determined at what point in the history of the Efiks that Ukwa emerged as a dramatic art. It is also important to note that the Efiks had lived with the Ibibio in Ibibio country before moving to their present settlements (which include Calabar) as a result of disputes. Indeed, some scholars, foreign and Nigerian, believe that Ibibio is the parent stock of the Efiks. In his book *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa*, Reverend Hope M. Waddell writes: "Originally they (Efik) dwelt in Ibibio ... country ..." (309).

Edet Udo in *Who Are the Ibibio* writes "in 1894, Sir Roger Casement, British Consul-explorer who undertook to explore the hinterland Ibibio-

speaking areas on behalf of the British Government stated that the Efik were Ibibio" (12). Others who have expressed similar opinion include Sir A. Johnson in his *A Comparative Survey of Bantu and Semi-Bantu Languages, Vol. II*. G. I. Jones and Daryll Forde in *The Ibo and Ibibio Speaking People of South – Eastern Nigeria* and Thomas Hutchinson in *Impressions of West Africa* among others.

The Efik are believed to have lived in Uruan in Ibibioland. Today, many Efik people agree that they had settled in Uruan after leaving Ibom in Arochukwu. Since it is not known yet whether the performance of Ukwa began before or after they left Uruan, it is difficult to ascertain who copied it from the other. This, perhaps, can be resolved by future research.

In his book *Life in Southern Nigeria* (193) Talbot has left no one in doubt as to the warlike nature of the Eket. Indeed many other colonial administrative officers who served in the area have testified to this quality of the Eket. Not a few of these colonial officers documented instances during which they would have lost their lives at the hands of the Eket. It always required a large number of troops to maintain order and give backing to decisions taken by the colonial officers.

For instance, Talbot writes: "The night I arrived, the wily Eket celebrated the occasion by breaking into the factory, taking, stealing, and carrying away most of Twist's crockery and household utensils" (295)

Meanwhile Talbot's predecessor had only managed to escape being murdered. But even before the coming of the British, there were several border disputes between the Eket and their neighbours. Talbot notes that, "When the armistice with Germany was signed, Eket was in restless state; there was an unsettled boundary dispute of long standing ..." (297).

It is believed, however that it was the British invasion of Eket country more than anything else which informed the need for a warrior group and brought out the best of the Eket man's fighting spirit. As a result of the fore-going, various Eket communities formed warrior groups which were given the responsibility of training young men of the communities in the art of warfare, defence of their

territorial integrity and the acquisition of more land to effect expansion. For a warrior group to be of any use at this time, its members had to master the art of Ukwa (fencing).

Able-bodied men who desired membership were recruited and initiated. It should be noted that the Eket society, like most African societies, cherished bravery, courage and strength. Those who proved to have these virtues occupied places of pride and prestige in the society. Hence, there were usually many wishing to be members of the group. Recruitment and initiation were done once a year. During recruitment, very many were taken but only those who readily mastered the use of the sword were retained. These ones were called 'iren owo uko' (men of valour). Of course, the decision to go for recruitment was in itself a sign of courage and bravery.

After the recruitment, the 'Obong Ukwa' (Head of Ukwa) led the recruits to the sacred forest (akai) where they remained for seven days. Among other things, remaining in the forest for seven days was meant to remove the last traces of fear from them and embolden them to confront all manner of opposition head-on. During the seven day period, all forms of sexual relationship were totally prohibited. They, also, did not eat food prepared by women. These restrictions were to enable them overcome similar situations during times of war.

The initiation process involved a number of things. The initiates were taught, in line with the people's world-view, how to offer sacrifice of appeasement, propitiation and appreciation to the communal spirits and ancestors who would in turn plead with the Supreme Deity, Abasi Ibom (Great God). This stemmed from the belief that no war could be won without God and his functionaries on their side.

They were also shown special herbs which when pounded and smeared on the body, rendered them immune to all forms of harm. Their swords were similarly treated.

Then came the training session during which the initiates were taught the art of warring through ways of handling the sword, the distance to maintain between the warrior and his opponent and different positions of pouncing on the enemy. They

were taught war songs for various occasions – provocation to war (challenge), celebration of victory, coronation of a chief and burial of a chief. They were also taught how to manufacture and use the instruments which accompany the songs. At the end of this training period, they were deemed to be ready to fight battles which they were expected to win. At this point, and at the end of the seven day period, they were presented to the rest of the community. During the presentation which took place on their return from the forest, there was a mock victory dance during which the initiates displayed their newly acquired skills. Thus, the community would behold the men to be relied upon in times of trouble.

The relevance of the Ukwa warrior group diminished to zero with the passage of time but the mock victory dance which usually followed the end of initiation and training has almost completely taken a social or entertainment dimension.

Since the people view art as a means of representing reality, preserving and transmitting their history and values, the Ukwa mock dance transformed into a dramatic performance. Initially, the dancers were only initiates of the Ukwa warrior group. Today, though not everyone can perform in the dance, the group comprises of skilful dancers who must, in any case, be brave because the performance even today can easily lead to injury and death. One must strictly be a member of the performing group to be able to perform and membership offers the member the opportunity to be trained in the art of using the sword.

The Basic Nature of Ukwa

The dance is by nature a war dance. The dance movements are fast and swift, wild and frantic while the songs have a lot to do with fighting. The drumming is usually high spirited and frenzied.

The following components can be identified: poetry, ballads and the dance or opera. Through the songs the soloist articulates virtues of warriors and their great achievements in war. The soloist uses ballads to narrate the stories which validate the people's value system. The dance or opera dramatizes some of the virtues which the people hold dear.

There are two forms of Ukwa, namely: Oyoho Ukwa and Ata Ukwa. Oyoho Ukwa is the complete Ukwa, the performance of which is somewhat bizarre. It is the type performed on the death of a paramount chief.

Oyoho Ukwa involves long term planning and the use of charms. It is, in effect, an attempt to re-enact as realistically as possible the events of the battle field. The performers, in line with actual war practice, withdraw into the forest for at least seven days before performance. During these seven days, they abstain from sex and generally avoid women. They do not eat food cooked by women or even greet or respond to greetings from women. They all drink a special concoction. This is believed to raise their psychic power and make them to become immune to all weapons of war. In Oyoho Ukwa some of the performers called "mme okposon" (the tough ones) dance about with swords pushed through parts of their bodies like the jaws or stomach. It can never be performed without the "Mkpokporo", a masquerade which carries a rotten human skull on its head.

On the other hand, Ata Ukwa is the common or ordinary form of Ukwa. It does not feature seven days preparation which marks Oyoho Ukwa and although it may involve the use of charms, such usage is at its barest minimum. This form or Ukkwa might be performed without the Mkpokporo but the masquerade called "Ewa Ikot" is often used.

Performance Venue and Occasion

Ukwa can be performed anywhere depending on the occasion for performance. If it is the burial of a person, the physical setting is usually the deceased's compound. If the performance is for a coronation ceremony, then the physical setting would be the chief's palace. Of course, if the performance moves along a route to the final performance venue, then the route also forms part of the physical setting.

However, most often, the physical setting is the village play ground. The village play ground is usually prepared for the performance by planting a young palm tree at the centre. This is mainly for the purpose of the performance. Besides the palm tree is kept a pot containing the special concoction. The

drums are also pre-arranged before the performers enter the arena. The sociological setting as we have seen can be festive as in coronation or some other communal celebration during which the entire community is involved; men and women, young and old, rich and poor come together and the class structure is temporarily dissolved. It could, also, be a funeral occasion such as the burial of a paramount chief or a member of the group.

Therefore, sociologically, it is a time for reunion, the making of new acquaintances and meeting of old friends. Some members of the community who are not so privileged then have the opportunity to see and meet their chiefs.

Ukwa was performed in those days on the way to the scene of battle, in other words before battle, and as a victory dance (after battle). It was also performed, as we have seen, during the presentation to the community of newly initiated and trained members as a mock victory dance during which the new initiates displayed their newly acquired skills. It was performed during the burials of chiefs or their coronation. The occasions for performance have not changed much today.

We are almost certain that the installation of a paramount chief or burial of same would feature the performance of Ukwa. It can be performed during the burial of members and other very prominent members of the community. On the occasion of the burial of a deceased member, the family of the deceased has to request for the performance and bear the financial cost which is substantial. As a result of this and the extensive preparation required for its performance, the performance of Ukwa is not a frequent occurrence. Often, however, it is performed during festivities like Christmas, launchings and other such festive periods. Which form of Ukwa is performed on a given occasion is at the discretion of the Obong Ukwa otherwise called Obong Mbire.

The Performers and the Performance

There are twenty-one performers. There is nothing special or symbolic about this number. It is fairly certain, for instance, that a performance can take place with less than this number of performers.

Normally, there are ten dancers, three masquerades, six instrumentalists, the Obong Mbire

(Captain) and the adviser (Ono Item). The instrumentalists are made up of four drummers, who play the following drums: the Ibit (single headed drum), the ekpiri ekomo (single headed and open-ended small drum), akamba ekomo (big and double headed drum) and the Obodom (the slit drum). Then there are two gong players – one wooden gong (etikang kang) and one metal gong (obukpong). One of the gong players also blows the whistle (ifiom).

The three masquerades are: the 'Ewa Itok, the 'Obiom Ekebe Okpo-Owo' and the 'Mkpokporo. The appearance of the Mkpokporo is not mandatory on all occasions and sometimes depends on the form of Ukwa to be performed. The Obiom Ekebe Okpo-Owo carries a coffin while the Mkpokporo carries a rotten human skull.

It should be borne in mind that with the passage of time rigidity has given way to flexibility. Thus, it is possible to have a performance without one or two of the masquerades.

A typical performance begins in the forest where preparations would have been concluded and the group moves straight to the town hall led by the Ewa Itok. In the town hall the 'Mbong Ikpaisiong' (elders) will 'prepare' them further for the performance. From here they proceed to the already prepared village play ground. As they proceed from the forest to town hall and then to the play ground, they are led in song by the Mkpokporo or the Obong Mbire.

In the course of the performance, if any performer's sword falls to the ground, he is not permitted to pick it up. The Obong Mbire will do so and the performer will be fined at the end of the performance. Also, if in the course of performance a performer is killed, he will be put in the coffin carried by the Obiom Ekebe Okpo-Owo. Of course, he will shortly be seen dancing back to the group from behind the crowd. This normally elicits shouts of 'Uwou-Uwou' from the women and rounds of gun shots from the men.

In a performance observed in Edo, Eket, the village arena was prepared by planting in the centre a young palm tree. This was done purposely for the performance. Beside, the young palm tree was kept the pot of special concoction. The young palm tree is

a symbol of the peoples economic continuity and growth while the concoction reminds everyone of its role in their various victories.

The drums and other instruments were also pre-arranged in the arena. The members of the orchestra then took their places and awaited a signal from the lead dancer or captain.

The lead dancer entered the arena and offered prayers for a successful and hitch-free performance by pouring libation. He used "Ufopop" (local gin) in doing this. He muttered an incantation, poured some of the gin and then drank some. On completing this assignment, the drummers and audience standing around bade him welcome – welcome from the land of the spirits where he went to solicit for support and protection for the performers.

He left the arena and once outside he raised a song:

Ukwa ekedi idem uko

(Ukwa the dance of brave men)

Edaha k'usung k'ukwa k'edi.

(is on its way, please give way.)

This being the signal the drummers were waiting for, they began. First the ekpri ekomo was beaten twice, the akamba ekomo followed with three beats and then the lbit with one beat. Full instrumentation then commenced.

The dancers danced into the arena in a single file led by the lead dancer. They entered with a snake-like movement. The snake-like movement depicts the craftiness with which war is prosecuted. The instrumentation approached frenzy and so did the signing. By now all the dancers were in the arena and the soloist began, through songs, exhortation to the warriors to fight. He glorified them. On their part, the dancers strut and leapt about the arena brandishing the akangkang (sword) in various positions.

Suddenly, the instrumentation stopped. The warriors peered into different directions in the manner of searching for the enemy. In due time the enemy troops were located and the warriors on stage now took strategic positions to enable them descend on the enemies effectively. While this was going on, the soloist reeled out the genealogy of the community's heroes, past and present. He dwelt on

the innate abilities of the heroes and in this way he inspired the performers.

All movements by the performers became very swift. They jumped in and out of the arena and stamped their feet on the ground in accordance with the rhythm of the drums which had resumed performance. The performers became very wild, running in and out of the performance arena at high speed. The performance was beginning to approach a crescendo and the performers sang:

Akadan osop akan ekuri ikpihi eto-o

Akadang – o

Translation

The Blade is shaper than the axe but the blade cannot cut a tree.

This is a kind of mockery or provocation directed at the enemy. It implies that the opponents being over confident and underestimating the performers will end up in defeat. Being in very high spirits still, their eyes darted up and down the arena. This indicates alertness which is much required in a war situation. As the performance progressed, the performers engaged one another in fighting. The dancers were divided into two groups, with each member of one group squaring up against one member of the other group. Once the dancers moved into this formation on the instruction of the talking drum, the soloist raised the song:

Iyip owo! mbem mbem nduok.

(Human blood! Let us see who will spill some first.)

Iyip owo! mbem mbem nyere.

(Human blood! Let us see who will smear some first.)

The performers engaged in real combat at this point. Anyone who is not versed in fencing or who is not tactful will actually be injured. The soloist sang on:

Ekomo oyom iyip.

(The drums need some blood)

Nnyeneke iyip emi nduokde nno ekomo.

(I do not have blood to pour on them)

The combat intensified as the performers struggled to fulfil the words of the song.

Thus, the warrior-performers displayed their skills and dexterity with the sword.

This way, on-lookers and would-be warrior-performers are introduced to the skilful use of the sword.

The soloist began to reel out the genealogy of past heroes, an indication that the fighting should progressively die down. The performers at this stage responded to the soloist by the use of gestures which indicated that they are as good as the past heroes the soloist is praising. In view of this, the drummers took over the praising. Using the principle of surrogacy they began praising the performers. As each performer was praised he responded with gestures and facial contortions which revealed to the audience who was being praised at every point in time. At this time, also, the performers stamped their feet hard on the ground and moved the arms uniformly.

As the wild frenetic dancing was sustained, the performers wearing very fierce looks and trying to look muscular dashed about the stage. They may suddenly stop all other movements and begin to brandish the akangkang (sword) emphatically to portray its strength and efficiency. In doing this, they seemed to be saying that 'this weapon can keep a people in captivity as well as give power, authority and importance to the user'. This is similar to what the gun does today in the hands of its user.

Physical movement is suspended at this point. We now have long sustained songs interpolated with calls, short phrases and shouts. These interpolations which could also be whistling and cat-calls are done by the performers and audience members. The performers let themselves go, singing at the top of their voices and feeling great about their victory. Then gunshots were heard and the shots were followed by the jingling of bells. These heralded the entry of Obiom Ekebe Okpo-Owo, the masquerade.

The masquerade came to inform the chiefs of the source of happiness. When he announced the source of the happiness which is the victory of the warriors, the people responded with the song:

Ekomo mikwe ekiko idiaha

(The drums are in need of a cock)

Ekiko oworo iyip akan ebot

(Because the cock has more blood than the goat.)

Ekomo mikwe ekiko idiaha

(The drums are in need of a cock)

This song is sung at this time because the emergence the Obiom Ekebe Okpo-Owo calls for sacrifice which is made with any stray cock which is caught.

The chiefs responded to the masquerade's information by joining the performers to perform. This way they express their own happiness over the victory. The chief's involvement in the dance at this time enhances audience participation.

The audience claps and insert shouts like: *Uwou—uwou—uwou*. A great deal of artistry is manifested in the dance steps. The gestures of the performers connote and interpret the mood and rhythm of the drummers and the drums. The performers show their strength by stamping hard on the ground as this action connotes strength. It is important to note that there is a strong relationship between the choreography and the rhythm of the drums. This is often explained by one of the people's proverbs which states that "the drum beats determine the way you move your feet". This is a way of emphasizing that relationship.

A great deal of dance movements in Ukwa take the form of various facial contortions, arms swinging and leg movement. Notwithstanding these, there are times when the entire body moves. When in the course of performance, a performer suddenly puts up a serious facial expression, he is understood to have spotted an enemy. Thus, he tries to find ways to get the enemy. Accordingly, he will tip-toe around the arena without stamping as usual. Then, suddenly, he springs in a manner suggestive of pouncing on the enemy. These movements give a graphic account of battle field events.

At a point they use only mime to tell the story using swift dashes and seriousness of the face. By this means, battle field events like laying ambush, actual attack, victory and joy are re-enacted.

The use of facial contortions and arms swinging for effective dramatization is also seen in the way they say a few more things. For instance, when a performer thrusts out an object and swings his sword as in cutting it down, he is saying that he defeats his enemies with ease and skill. Also, when he carries an expression of fright on his face and moves backwards he is saying that the enemy forces

are afraid and are beating a retreat for fear of being outnumbered and over-run. All these, executed in conformity with characteristic rhythms re-enact battle field events.

Symbols and Symbolisms

It is a characteristic and prominent feature of costumes, properties and make-up that they help in establishing characters and characterization as well as establish mood in a performance. Little wonder then that they seem to be meticulously chosen in Ukwa. The costumes and properties are visible manifestations of the emotions of war. Make-up is almost none existent or very lightly used.

The dancers and members of the orchestra are similarly costumed. Though there are basics in the Ukwa performer's costumes, it is good to note that there is no rigidity in costuming. From his head downwards, a fully dressed Ukwa performer may have a cone-shaped red cap made from wool (iyara) on his head, or he may tie a white piece of cloth around his head.

Sometimes, to depict real war scenes, he may not use cap but would rather tie around his head nkpete (twining grass). During wars, this enabled the warrior to hide in the bush by blending with the shrubs. In today's performance of Ukwa, any of these can be used. He wears a white, round-necked singlet. A white and a red band cross from each shoulder to the waist. The red cone-shaped cap symbolises danger or blood. The red band symbolizes blood and danger also, while the white one symbolizes peace. These symbols establish the mood and nature of the performance and help in its taxonomy. They also contribute to the overall thematic concerns of courage and bravery, valour and strength. Beyond these, they symbolize the warrior as being ready for either peace or war and, also, that after war comes peace. They also use the red and white bands around the neck. Some pin the feather of an eagle on their caps, symbolizing strength for which the eagle is known. He uses a costly wrapper called "usobo" as a symbol of his importance in the society. The colour of the wrapper is a matter of individual choice.

Depending on individual preference, a dry palm-frond or a dry animal skin or a real piece of cloth is tied on the biceps. In his right hand he

carries a sword (akangkang) and in the left a shield. The handle of the sword is usually made from solid wood like Iroko and carved like a human head. Some performers who will miss no opportunity to show that they are men of valour by highlighting the bloody nature of what they represent, will also tie a red piece of clothe to the handle of the sword. The tip of the sword is usually very sharp.

The "Mkpokporo", so called because of the human skull which it carries, usually dresses in a black sprawling gown. The gown could be about twenty-five yards because it does cover the masquerade performer until it sprawls on the ground around him. His head is decorated with raffia. Often, he has to gather his gown as he goes along. In his right hand, he holds a sword. The human skull which he carries is of symbolic meaning. It symbolizes the belief in the existence and power of the ancestors. The use of the human skull is a symbolic call on the ancestors to provide support, guidance and protection to warriors.

The Ewa Itok is costumed in a red flowing gown. It wears a mask, the eyes, nose and mouth of which are circled with white clay chalk. It also carries a sword in the right hand. The symbolisms seem fairly obvious –red for blood, white for peace. The head is decorated with eagle feather.

The Obiom Ekebe Okpo-Owo is attired in a black top and a black wrapper. It carries a coffin on the head – all these symbolize death. It has rattles on the legs and carries three small bells tied around the waist with a black piece of cloth.

Depending on preference any of two patterns can be used for make-up. At times the faces of the dancers and drummers are divided into two halves. One half is painted white using native chalk and the other half is painted black using charcoal. Another pattern of make-up consists of using the white chalk to draw circles around the eyes and horizontal lines on the cheeks. The purpose of make-up is to disguise the performers and make them unrecognizable to the audience.

It can thus be seen that, generally, costumes and properties and make-up are carefully selected to accentuate characterization and contribute to the overall thematic concerns through direct and symbolic meanings.

Music

Music in Ukwa helps to establish the mood of the dance and helps in its classification. It can, thus be said that music here is basically of the nature of war music. The music is characterized by high spirited drumming. The songs have a high emotional quality. The songs all go with the frenzy of the drums.

Different strains are recognized in the music. We have ballads, lyrics and epics. In the ballads the soloist narrates popular stories with musical accompaniments. The stories which often teach moral lessons are rendered at the lowest level of musicality of the voice. The soloist also expresses the people's values and beliefs concerning war. This is rendered like sung poetry. Thus we can consider such renditions to be lyrics. The values so expressed include courage, and bravery, valour and heroism. In the epics the soloist recounts the heroic history of the people, recounting and re-calling the genealogy of the community's heroes, their special abilities and brave deeds which have ensured and sustained the survival of the people.

The ballads are used to arrest and retain the attention of the audience partly by audience participation in the performance during the rendition of ballads. The lyrics are used to teach would-be warriors the importance of values such as courage and bravery, valour and heroism while the epics are used to inspire the performers to spectacular performances.

Music obviously turns out to be a means of adding artistic embellishments to the performance. The language is terse as the soloist makes apt choice of words. The preponderance of imagery aids the conciseness of expressions. For instance, in praising warriors, brave men and past heroes, the soloist draws on powerful animal images and natural phenomena. These men are metaphorically likened to powerful animals like the lion, elephant or tiger and natural phenomena like thunder and lightning which connote strength and swiftness.

For example:

Edoho ete, Etubom mme ekpe, ete emi
Obong mme obot ye
undisong, ata unam ikot, owot asua esie,
ekpeme mme ufan esie,

emi midiyake iyip mbon Ekid ofioro k'ison
midiaha mkpa ye ntime.

Translation

Edoho ete, Lord of the leopard and the lion, master of the elephant, king of the mountains and valleys, eater of other animals, destroyer of his enemies, protector of his friends, who cannot allow the blood of Ekid people to flow without calling forth death and destruction.

Ruth Finnegan has observed that because war songs often express and reinforce the militant spirit of a group, they generally lend to dramatize values relating to war. This accounts for the thematic emphasis on military glory, triumph and the possibility of attaining honour and position through achievement in war (206-209). The song below in which a hero is praised on account of the victory which he achieved for his people seems to conform with Finnegan's observation:

Okop odudu eyen isong

ikwo fi koro afo odotde.

Mi ikpidihi afo, nnyin ikpatak k'ubok mme asua.

Edi afo akanam ediono et eke ekid odono nti mkpo.

Oworo aka ye uko eren owo akada ibuo
asua nnyin osok nnyin iminuho k'isong ikom
fi-o-o.

Translation

O powerful son of the soil

We sing of you because you are worthy of the praise.

But for you, we would have perished in the hands of the enemy.

You proved that Ekid has powerful men.

You went out courageously and brought the head of our enemy

We bow before you and greet you our hero.

Such songs stimulate the desire for achievement and heroism. They are calculated and composed to instil the spirit of bravery in the warriors and fear and fright in the enemy. Such songs involve chants and responses by the soloist and dancers.

For emphasis, some of the songs employ repetition of whole statements, ideas and words.

They could, also, at the same time contain figures of comparison like metaphor. For instance:

Akadan osop akan ekuri
The blade is sharper than the axe
Ikpihi eto
But it cannot cut a tree
O akandan-o
(Whereas the axe can do it very well)

The functions of the two are compared. The song is a mockery directed at the opponent's under-estimation of the warriors and the subsequent outcome of the battle which was won by the warriors.

The song below is a good example of repetition of words, whole phrases and sentences and the employment of parallelism:

Iyip owo! Mbem mbem nduok
Human blood! Let us see who will spill
some first
Iyip owo! Mbem mbem nyere.

Human blood! Let us see who will smear some first
The musical instruments are used on the principle of surrogacy. The musical instruments seem to have specific functions. The most vital of these functions seems to belong to the talking drums. They communicate with the dancers by releasing known notes which convey specific information. Such functions include prayers through incantations, a call to action and warning or raising alarm. They are also used to praise heroes past and present and trace their genealogy.

The features of such drumming include repetition and the use of ideophones. Consequently, the dancers are masters of drum language with a keen sense of the total variations of individual words.

The wooden and metal gongs tell the stage of the dance. For instance, when the gongs are beaten very hard, it is an indication that the performance is at its peak. The combination of all the musical instruments, the high and low pitches create the tempo for each given moment while the aggregate of tempo gives rise to rhythm with rhythm invariably leading to variation in dance movements.

Even as there are fixed song texts handed down from generation to generation by elders, there is room for creativity. Therefore, to an extent, composition is done in situ. The soloist only has to be observant of his surrounding and be current. His ability to weave into the song text contemporary issues or events of the immediate performance environment offers him the opportunity to manifest his creativity. In the olden days, performers were trained to improvise and weave contemporary issues into the songs.

Dramatic Techniques

In terms of dramatic techniques the performance is a typical indigenous drama performance. It employs the dramatic techniques open to this kind of drama.

There is an ingenious harmonious synthesis of the activities of the musicians, the masquerades and audience all involved in the stage performance. There is absolute balance in the various acts leading to a performance with a distinctive artistic clarity and beauty. This kind of harmonious interaction gives rise to the total theatre concept which indigenous drama is so well noted for. The various arts come together so harmoniously that they lose their individual identity and existence. As the audience and performers blend in the performance the communal and festival environment which lends this kind of theatre the much needed support is heightened.

Mime, action without words, is carefully slotted into the performance at intervals. Miming is not haphazardly done. It seems much more of stylized movements done in accordance with characteristic rhythms to recapture graphically battle field events. For instance, when a performer moves backwards with a look of fright on his face, he is dramatizing an instance when the opponents sensing imminent defeat beat a retreat. Or when he feigns thrusting an object into the air, cutting it with dexterity mid-air, he is dramatizing the ease with which he defeats the enemy.

Gestures are an outstanding dramatic technique in Ukwa. A great deal of dramatization in Ukwa is achieved through facial contortions, arm and leg movement. Various facial contortions portray different meanings. So facial contortions can

be used to portray fear, happiness and triumph in battle, etc.

Music is also used as a dramatic technique in Ukwa. The talking drums for instance are used to dramatise acts of bravery and heroism. This is done by chanting the praise names of notable warriors and past heroes citing specific war events in which they victoriously participated. Dramatization is enhanced as the dancers interpret and execute the message from the musical instruments. Thus, the point when the dance reaches its peak is determined by the beats of both the metal and wooden gongs. Besides, the instruments themselves, to those who are tonally sharp give a vivid description and interpretation of war activities. Music is also used as an interlude, creating moments of short break from continuous dancing. In addition, music is used to enliven the performance.

It is normal that in drama, performers move about the stage. But there must be a motivation for movement. Dance serves this purpose here. While serving as the reason for moving from one point to another, it enables the performer to get to the point where he needs to be executing a given action. Various dance movements and patterns are themselves significant. For instance, the snake-like movement which dancers execute signifies the craftiness with which war is executed.

Lastly, there is the use of suspense: a good instance of this is seen during the breaking of the performers into two groups. This results in pairing during which the performers now confront one another. The soloist sings:

Human blood! Let us see who will drop
some first

uman blood! Let us see who will smear
some first

And

The drums need some blood and I do not
have some to pour on them.

Even though fighting one another, the performers will fight as though it were real combat. Of course if anyone is wounded, his blood will be smeared on the drums. Therefore, the performers fight to fulfil the wordings of the songs and as this goes on there is plenty of suspense as no one knows what will happen next.

Conclusion

There are some basic universal principles uniting world literatures. However, in view of the differences in socio-cultural and historical experiences among peoples of the world, there has to be room for fundamental differences. It is perhaps for this reason that Traore quotes Adande: "...it is clear that development of theatre in black Africa took a different turn from that of modern Europe" (19).

In view of this, Eurocentric standards cannot be applied in toto in the analysis of indigenous African dramatic performances. Critical standards are based on aesthetics, that is, principles of form. Form is what constitutes literature and distinguishes it from other subjects. Aesthetic principles are ethnocultural. Therefore, the critical standards applied in analysing Ukwa must be based on indigenous aesthetic philosophies or conventions. It is for this reason that ethnodramatics is applied. This should provide an understanding of the differences in the defining characteristics of drama as seen in Ukwa.

Though arguable, in our opinion perhaps the most universal defining characteristic of drama is the principle of mimesis. Drama is a mimetic art. Amankulor clearly opines that drama or theatre is a mimetic art (84). The fact of mimesis or imitation or re-enactment or role – playing is, it would seem to us, the most universal of the principles of drama. Of course, this is one principle which Ukwa shares with drama the world over.

For those who have hallowed plot as the most universal element of drama, we do aver that though a story is the background of drama, however, action through imitation is the true and regular nature of drama be it African or non African drama. That is why contemporary scholarship even on Western drama is moving away from the Aristotelian elements of drama to seeing imitation, plot, actions and dialogue as the true defining characteristics of drama (Yesufu: 16-44).

Thus, from our examination of Ukwa, we find detailed and sustained dramatic action conveyed via mime, gestures, dance, music and songs. Though dialogue is one of the defining characteristics of drama, and is emphasised by

Western drama, Ukwu manifests dramatic exposition via these elements. Ossie Enekwe (1981) has argued that myth is not the essence of indigenous African drama. In addition, as Amankulor (1995) avers: in the convention of African drama, language is not necessarily verbal (88). The language is economical and subtle. The story is the story of the people so the audience does not need a verbose telling of the story to understand it. Therefore, Ruth Finnegan's denial of the existence of indigenous drama as a developed category based on the absence of linguistic content and elaborate dialogue as well as Beier's, Echeruo's and Uka's denial of the existence of African drama all miss the point and arise from a failure to understand the aesthetic concepts and conventions of indigenous African drama.

The unity of the performance is not in any way disrupted by the absence of linguistic content or elaborate dialogue and plot as it derives its unity from the consistency of the theme in the selected episodes emanating from the selective elaboration of events.

WORKS CITED

- Amankulor, J.N. "Dance as an Element of Artistic Synthesis in Traditional Igbo Festival Theatre" Okike: An African Journal of New Writing. Ed. Chinua Achebe. 1980. (84-95)
- _____. "Festival Theatre in Traditional African Societies: An Igbo Case Study". Readings in African Humanities: Traditional and Modern Culture. Ed. Edith Ihekeazu. Enugu Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1985 (83-96).
- Andah, Bassey. *African Anthropology*. Ibadan: Shaneson C.I. Limited, 1988.
- Beier, Ulli. *Introduction to African Literature: An Anthology of Critical Writing*. Virginia: Longman. 1979.
- Echeruo, M. J. C. "The Dramatic Limits of Igbo Ritual and Dance Drama". *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Ed. Yemi Ogunbiyi. Lagos: Nigeria Magazine Publication, 1981. (136-148).
- Enekwe, O. O. "Myth, Ritual and Drama in Igbo Land". *Drama and Theatre in Nigeria: A Critical Source Book*. Ed. Yemi Ogunbiyi.

Lagos: Nigeria Magazine Publication, 1981. (149-163).

- Finnegan, R. *Oral Literature in Africa*. London: Oxford University Press 1970.
- Forde, D. *The Ibo and Ibibia Speaking Peoples of South-Eastern Nigeria*. London: Oxford University Press 1950.
- Hutchinson, I. J. *Impressions of West Africa*. Sidney: Wentworth Press, 2016.
- Johnston, H. H. *A Comparative Survey of Bantu and Semi Bantu Languages, Vol. II*. London: Oxford University Press, 2013 (Digitized).
- Traore, B. *The Black African Theatre and Its Social Functions*. Indiana University Press. 1975.
- Udo, E. *Who Are The Ibibios*. Onitsha: AFP Publishers, 1983.
- Uka, K. "Drama in Nigerian Society". *The Hoe*, 1, No.1. July 1973. (23-32).
- Yesufu, A. R. *Elements of Drama*. Abuja: Nation Open University of Nigeria, 2008.
- Waddell, H. *Twenty-Nine Years in the West Indies and Central Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge Library Collection, 2010.
- Talbot, P. A. *Life in Southern Nigeria*. London: Frank Cass and Company, 1967.

List of Interviewees

- Chief F. R. Affiah
84 Years Old
From Effoi, Eket.
- Mr Asuquo Imo
60 Years Old.
From Atabong, Eket.
- Mfon Jackson
58 Years Old.
From Atabong Eket.