

**TAXONOMICAL STUDY OF THE POETICS IN IDOMA ORAL
PERFORMANCES**

BY

**ABAH, IKWUE
PG/PhD/15/77708**

**A THESIS SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF ENGLISH AND
LITERARY STUDIES, UNIVERSITY OF NIGERIA, NSUKKA AS PART
OF THE FULFILMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY (Ph.D) DEGREE IN ENGLISH AND
LITERARY STUDIES**

SUPERVISOR: PROF. DAMIAN U. OPATA

SEPTEMBER, 2018.

DECLARATION

This is to certify that this Doctoral Thesis is an independent study carried out by me, Abah Ikwue with registration number, **PG/PhD/15/77708** under full supervision and in accordance with the requirements of the Department of English and Literary Studies, Faculty of Arts, University of Nigeria, Nsukka, in partial fulfilment for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in English and Literary Studies. I also certify that this work has not being presented in part or full for the award of any other diploma or degree within or any other university.

Student
Abah Ikwue

Signature

Date

APPROVAL PAGE

The Department of English and Literary Studies hereby approved this Doctoral thesis, *Taxonomical Study of the Poetics In Idoma Oral Performances* written by Abah, Ikwue with registration number, **PG/PhD/15/77708** having fulfilled the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D) in English and Literary Studies of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

Prof. D.U Opata
Thesis Supervisor

Signature

Date

HOD
Prof. Ikenna Dieke

Signature

Date

External Examiner
Prof. Rems Umeasiegbu

Signature

Date

Dean, Faculty of Arts
Prof. Nnanyelugo Okoro

Signature

Date

DEDICATION

To:

The memory of my beloved father late Mr Ogili Abah whose corpse. Daddy you are the greatest inspiration, father and teacher to me. Rest peacefully as I promise never to let your legacies die.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to first appreciate God whose mercy endureth in me throughout my life. I acknowledge my supervisor, Professor Damian U. Opata, beginning from my Masters programme to this Ph.D. He has been a father, mentor and an inspirator whose philosophy and intellectual school of thought, I am an ardent student. He has encouraged me in several capacities which I lack the space to express here. My wife, Mrs Joy Chinasa Abah-Ikwue, my son, Mr Goldmine Ogili Abah-Ikwue and daughter, Miss Ene Christabel Abah-Ikwue are acknowledged beyond measures for been everything to me. I equally appreciate my course mates in Ph.D especially, the course leader, Miss Dina Yerima, for her wonderful support.

I thank specially the H.O.D., Department of English and Literary Studies, University of Nigeria Nsukka, Professor Ikenna Dieke for his encouragements. Also worthy of mention are Professor A.N. Akwanya, Professor Sam. Onuigbo, Dr Fred Ononye, Mr Chidi Nwankwo, Hon. Uche Nnamani, Mr Fidelis Okoro for encouragements. Also of note are contributions of some of my colleagues in Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education, Owerri, for assisting me in this programme. They are, Sir ABC Duruaku, Dr Patience Oguoma and Kenneth Kanu. What about the prayers of my siblings, Echoda, Benard, Ooja, Abah, Judith and Uncle Pastor Omakwu toward the success of this programme.

Finally, I wish to appreciate the palaces of His Majesties, Och'Idoma in Otukpo and Och'Umogidi the Late Chief Omakwu Aibe in Umogidi for allowing me access into their cultural archives. Also not left out is the Alekwu Cultural Institution from whom most of the oral literary materials analyzed in this work were collected. I acknowledge immensely too, those scholars whose articles I consulted in the course of this research.

ABSTRACT

This study attempts a classification of the poetics in Idoma oral performances through the analysis of the different components that constitute the oral poetry genre of Idoma oral literature. It defines and explains the various units of the taxonomy, it describes its main facets or dimensions, and it also offers detailed explanations of the context and content of performance of all the components of the classification for purposes of communicating meaning. The study further highlights the functions of oral performances among the people such as entertainment, awareness, socialization, language skills, political as well as religious-cultural values within the context of the present study through the theoretical lens of Greenblatt's New Historicism.

KEYWORDS AND PHRASES: Poetics, Idoma, Taxonomy, Oral Performance, New Historicism.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Declaration -----	i
Approval Page -----	ii
Dedication -----	iii
Acknowledgements -----	iv
Abstract -----	v
Table of Contents -----	vi

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study -----	1
1.2 A Brief Survey of Idoma Society -----	7
1.3 Statement of the Problem -----	18
1.5 Objective of the Study -----	20
1.6 Significance of the Study -----	20

CHAPTER TWO: REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP

2.1 Review of Related Scholarship -----	21
---	----

CHAPTER THREE: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1.1 Methodology -----	38
3.1.2 Sources of Data -----	38
3.1.3 Data Collection Procedure -----	38
3.1.4 Subject -----	39
3.1.5 Instrumentation -----	39
3.1.6 Transcription -----	40
3.1.7 Method of Analysis -----	40
3.2 Theoretical Framework -----	41
3.2.1 The Concept New Historicism -----	41
3.2.2 New Historicism and the Present Study -----	47

CHAPTER FOUR: TAXONOMY OF IDOMA POETRY

4.0	Classification of Idoma Oral Traditional Poetry -----	50
4.1	Idoma Oral Narrative Poetry -----	51
4.1.1	Idoma Oral Epic -----	52
4.1.2	Idoma Traditional Ballad -----	56
4.2	Idoma Oral Traditional Lyric Poetry -----	59
4.2.1	Idoma Dirges -----	62
4.2.2	Religious Poetry -----	64
4.2.3	Idoma Oral Incantation Poetry -----	68
4.2.4	Idoma Oral Traditional Praise Poetry -----	71
4.3	Idoma Oral Traditional Dramatic Poetry -----	78
4.4	The Poetics of Idoma-Alekwu Oral Poetry Genre -----	88
4.5	Challenges of Translating Idoma Oral Poetry from Vernacular to English -----	90

CHAPTER FIVE: CLASSIFICATION OF IDOMA ORAL TRADITIONAL POETRY ACCORDING TO THEMES AND FUNCTIONS

5.1	History in the Context of Idoma Oral Poetry -----	105
5.2	Functions of Environment I Idoma Oral Poetry -----	110
5.3	Migration, Child Vulnerability and Power in Idoma Oral Poetry -----	116

CHAPTER SIX: CONCLUSION

6.0	Conclusion -----	124
	Works Cited	

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background to the Study

It is a known fact that oral poetry exist in performance. One indeed appreciates the oral literary forms of Idoma by recognizing them as “performance literatures”. Ruth Finnegan seems to have provided answers to these questions by asserting that “it is well known in some circles—but worth adverting to again in this context—one way into tackling these questions has been through the notion of *oral forms* of literature” (2). According to her, this is evident by the various literary materials that are originally oral but later transformed into written literature e.g. Beowulf (epic of the Old English), the Homeric epics (in some sense at least “oral”), Elizabethan lyrics, performed poetry, folktales, scripts for or from plays—all these have long been captured in writing and studied as literary texts. A next step, however, has been more radical: taking the *oral*-ness of such examples as a positive and essential quality of their nature.

Therefore, orality studies have developed in various guises, mainly from the 1960s onwards. It has become increasingly clear that an oral performance can be analyzed not just as the contingent setting for some enduring—writable—text but as *itself*. There is now a large body of scholarship focusing on concepts like “oral,” “orality,” “oral literature” or “orature,” concerned among other things to understand oral performance in its own (that is, oral) right. A Ugandan linguist Pio Zirimu coined the term orature in the early seventies of the last century to counter the tendency to see the arts communicated orally and received aurally as an inferior or lower rung in the linear development of literature. His brief definition of orature as the use of utterance as an aesthetic

means of expression remains tantalizingly out there, pointing to an oral system of aesthetics that did not need validity from the literary.

This has meant extending the concept of literary expression to include many unwritten forms, and equally significant, treating their orally performed qualities as crucial to their literary realization. After all, we read in Nguggi's *Notes Toward a Performance Theory of Orature* that "central to orature is the interconnectedness of all artistic elements and central to them, is performance" (4). He justifies this view by asserting that each of the art forms is a performance genre since performance holds them together.

In the Idoma Alekwu praise song, for instance, the praise singer fascinates his listeners through acoustic effects—rhythms, sonic parallelisms, strained mode of articulation, intonations, and ringing praise names while the sophisticated artistry of the lead Alekwu masker who narrates the epic genealogy of Idoma history of origin lies not just in verbal content but in the vivid way the narrator voices the performance and the skillful use of vocal dynamics, tempo, and intonation. More interesting about Idoma oral performing arts is the fascinating way in which the maskers dramatize various actions/issues captured in the renditions. This dramatization of actions makes the poems assume the proportion of life, even though they are purely imaginative fiction.

Part of our concern is to ascertain the literariness of these performances. The answer to this question regarding the literariness of these materials of Idoma oral poems under study can be found in David Daiches comment quoted in *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics* that "work of literary art, by its diction as well as other devices, provides an implicit set of direction concerning the distance from the object in which the reader must stand if he is to see it for what it is" (6). Daiches' comment implies that every artist must bear the responsibility of incorporating into his

works those devices that will help the reader determine the perspective or distance at which the work should be viewed. Also, borrowing from Jean Baudelaire's view of experience as "a forest of symbols" to which the poet must give order, the artiste of Idoma oral poems tries to communicate concentrated feelings through the use of evocative symbols rather than rational statement and they also try to refine and purify language to obtain this sort of communication.

Furthermore, Idoma oral poem like most forms of oral performance are an integration of artistic forms. In its performance, for instance, there is drama. There is a combination of verbal elements with musical accompaniment. There could be visual aspects involving the use of costumes, mime and dance. In the Idoma Alekwu poems, especially the religious type, the rendition made during pouring of libation becomes important not only in the utterance of the poet/performer but how the message of the person on whose behalf the ritual is performed is weaved into the rendition. The action of pouring out the libation, the positions of feet, hands and indeed dramatic aspects such as how the artist holds a cup of Oburukutu (locally brewed beer) are all integral aspects that evoke the full essence of the performance. The artist in this instance addresses an audience that is physically present or one that is invisible such as ancestors. These assembled images go to remind us of Allan Poe's assertion that "the symbolists were also conscientious craftsmen interested in the complex and subtle relationships existing between the total poem and its component words and images" (*Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, 6).

On her own part, Finnegan states that performance in oral poetry is a function not only of the skill or virtuosity of the reciter, but also of the type of occasion and the nature of the material being performed which may be pure recitation or invocation, chanting or full rhythmic singing with or without instrumental music. Similarly, Elisabeth Hangartner-Everts posits that "a piece of

oral literature is being created through performance, be it a song sung by a singer or a story or poem told or recited by an oral performer” (13). According to her, oral performance draws on visual resources. Such resources convey certain information very effectively. These could be the performer’s dress, accessory items of dress and equipment, or gestures of the performer in response to the demands of the audience.

To Charles Bodunde, this involvement of the community in the creative process as well as in the criticism is “one of the characteristics of oral traditions, which relates to the nature of performance” (1). He points out: “Finnegan reveals that in a creative performance, members of the audience neither listen silently nor wait for the chief performer’s invitation before they join in. Instead, the audience breaks into the performance with their additions, questions, and criticisms” (1). So Finnegan postulates rightly that oral genres from throughout the world once “dismissible as crude and “preliterate,” from Mongolian oral epics or the lyrics of Indian love songs to the extensive unwritten performances of Africa, have now come to be analyzed as forms of literature of “oral literature” (4).

This study endeavours to contribute towards the taxonomy of Idoma oral performance and aims to provide a tool to interpret and understand the people’s oral song poetry. This is not an isolated case of oral literature: many other expressions all over the world follow similar patterns which are all part of the study of oral performance encompassed within the umbrella term Orality, understood as the use of speech, rather than writing, as means of communication, especially in communities where the tools of literacy are unfamiliar to the majority of the population. Walter J. Ong distinguished between ‘primarily oral cultures’, cultures “totally untouched by any knowledge of writing or print” (23); and ‘secondarily oral cultures’, cultures with “a more deliberate and self-conscious orality, based permanently on the use of writing and print” (Ong,

136). He defines ‘residual orality’ as “the verbal expression in cultures that have been exposed to writing and print, but have not fully ‘interiorized’ the use of these technologies in their daily lives”. ‘Verbal art’ was introduced by Bascom in his classic article, *Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives* as ‘a convenient and appropriate term for folktales, myths, legends, proverbs, riddles, and other “literary forms”’ (245). Finnegan informs us that a great deal of work has been carried out under this label, particularly by American folklorists and anthropologists. “It now usually also covers songs and poems, together with verbal processes like naming, rhetoric or tongue twisters” (118). According to her, the term is somewhat less contentious than many of the others here. It tends to highlight aesthetic aspects while avoiding the implicit constraints of ‘oral literature’ in not being confined to longer textually articulated forms. “It thus, facilitates verbal artistry of all kinds being treated together, while avoiding the emotive overtones sometimes associated with the term *oral*” (118-9).

In Ong’s view, orality and globalisation are somehow opposed terms: Ong says that “many of the contrasts often made between ‘Western’ and other views seem reducible to contrasts between deeply interiorized literacy and more or less residually oral states of consciousness” (Ong, 29). A view as this is somehow lopsided owing to the fact that the term exists in all cultures and languages including ‘globalised’ and ‘Western’. Among the Igbo of Eastern Nigeria, for instance, Emenanjo did a cursory study on how the language is used in modes. According to him, “in Igbo, for example, the spoken mode is realized on one hand as *Okwu* or *Uka* (living or free phrase speech) and is manifested as *akuko*, the generic name for non-folktales (41). On the other hand the spoken mode is realized as *inu-inunu* or *ilu/ilulu* the name for all sorts of gnomic, formulaic, short and witty statements. Among the Idoma of Benue state of Nigeria for instance, the sung, recited or chanted mode is manifested in songs, verses, ballads and poems are called *Ikpela Ije* while the

prosaic ones such as folktales and legends are called *Ocha*. The act of telling them is *Ocha'Ocha*. Proverb is called *Ita* while the act of telling it is *Ita-Okwu*. In fact, the idea of unwritten literature already occurred in nineteenth-century writing (Koelle 1854, Macdonald 1882, Burton 1865, Chatelain 1894). The concept was further propagated by H.M. and N.K.Chadwick's massive opus on the 'growth of literature', where they explain, 'the connection between literature and writing is accidental, and belongs to a secondary phase in the history of literature' (Finnegan, 189).

It goes on and on as "it is clear that when we talk of poetry as the early Greeks and Romans knew it, we are not distinguishing between the oral and the written forms. Indeed, the oracle of Delphi and the Cumaean Sybils recited poetry, so did Homer; but Vergil, Horace, Ovid, and other creative minds wrote poetry" (Nwaegbe, 155). In English literary history, *Beowulf* probably was composed in England sometime in the eighth century AD. The poem was created in the oral-formulaic tradition (or oral poetic method), probably developing over a period of time with roots in folktales and traditional stories until a single, very talented poet put it in something very near its current form in 1000 AD.

Therefore, in this study, orality offers a framework for the study of oral literature, as it is an interdisciplinary field composed by many different areas. The key scholars in the creation of the study of oral traditions are W. Ong, M. Parry, A. Lord and J. Foley: their studies on oral formulaic theories during the 20th century highlighted the necessity for a separate but interconnected field that would then include contributions from disciplines like literature, ethnography or music, among others. All these field of study will help us to establish a general background for the taxonomical study of the poetics in the Idoma oral performances.

More importantly, an interdisciplinary framework is vital for the aim of this study, hence the adoption of Greenblatt's cultural poetics as a major theoretical base in the analysis and classification of Idoma oral poetry. The proposal of this taxonomy aims to achieve three main objectives; first, a polyhedral approach will be proposed for the analysis of oral performance, a transversal field which has been approached from different angles. So this taxonomy seeks to offer a "first draft" of a multidisciplinary tool, adapted to Idoma poetry; second, the integrated vision of oral poetry will enhance empirical studies based on the current poem production, but it will also allow partial analysis of the corpora, as such, this taxonomy provides the possibility of undertaking combined research without including all the approaches; and last, the potential result of this study wants to be the first step in developing a powerful tool to widen the horizons of the study and research of Idoma oral poetry.

This research will have three main sections. The first part will be based on the description of Idoma oral poetry, explaining the content, context and reality of the oral performance aesthetics among the people. The second section will be devoted to the taxonomy, including its theoretical framework, some methodological guidelines and the description of the classification. A third part will account for the functions and contributions of the oral poetry to the social, educational, political and cultural advancement of the Idoma people. The last include the final considerations including summary, observation and suggestion for further studies. These sections will help throw light on the taxonomy.

1.2 A Brief Survey of Idoma Society

i. **Origin:** Idoma people hailed from Apa in Kwararafa Confederacy and are all descendants of Idu. It was learnt from the interview I carried out with Alekwu poets that the father of the entire

Idoma was Idu who happened to be the second son of Ale. Ale gave birth to four children: Atta, Idu, Idoko and Agabi. While Atta fathered the entire Igala kingdom, Idu fathered the Idoma, Idoko fathered the entire Igbira people, and Agabi fathered the Iyala and Ogoja people in Cross Rivers State.



A picture showing the front-view of Ochi Idoma palace in Otukpo during the fieldwork

Apa was a Jukun homeland. In most traditions, this locality was also known as Okali or Okolofa which is today called Wukari. The voice of the different Idoma historians and the epic poets is the same that Apa was the ancestral homeland of Idoma people. There are some suggestions by the informants, too, that some Idoma ancestors lived in Apa side by side with other ethnic groups and that the term Apa was a blanket one covering a wide collection of people, which is an evidence in this research interview with one of the narrators of this history as shown below:

IDOMA

Aalo ni'Idu maa, Aalo mna Apa

Aipe ni' Idu maa, leki Idoma

Okoko, oi ki' Idu, ada ko' Otukpo

Ale, oi ki' Idu, ada ke' Egwumale

Ode oi ki' Idu, Omo' Ogwuche, Onah, Ejuh

Ogwuche ada ko' Oglehu

Onah ada Ku' Ugbokpo

Ejuh ada Ku' Umogidi

Aalo ba' Apa mla' ache oha

Ache lebe ku Jukun, Igbira, Igala

Wukari mla' ache oha Eyeeyee

ENGLISH

We the children of Idu are from Apa

The children of Idu are named Idoma

Okoko, son of Idu and the father of Otukpo

Ale, son of Idu who begot Ogwuche, Onah & Ejeh

Ogwuche fathered Ugbokpo

Ejeh fathered Umogidi

We stayed in Apa with other people

Like Jukun, Igbira, Igala, Wukari and others.

This evidence is also backed by Armstrong's suggestion that "the Idoma, Igala and the Yoruba formed part of the same social complex until about 6,000 years ago" (14).

The various folktales, myths and legends rendered by Alekwu and Ichicha, and those narrated by the oral historians of Idoma such as the one above suggest that Idoma have been involved in series of migrations before arriving at their present location. Based on the Idoma history traditions, Erim suggested this period, "1535-1625 A.D as the earliest recorded migration in the Idoma history" (6). All the traditions beginning in the third phase of Idoma emigrational history suggest that Idoma left Apa as a result of untenable conditions created by constant warfare. It would seem that the fortunes of the inhabitants of Apa in these wars were reflected in dynastic struggles, which brought about an increasing sense of insecurity. This situation continued to get worse for a period of time and Apa was eventually deserted. According to other historical sources, the war that caused the final migration that brought the Idoma to this part of the lower Benue valley was "the horse war" which the narrator termed "efu onya".

The Idoma ethnic group in the present location is situated at the South eastern part of Benue State and is the second largest ethnic group after Tiv. Benue State was created on 3rd February, 1976 from old Benue-Plateau. The state lies between longitudes 6° – 10° East and latitude 6° – 8° North. It is bounded by Nassarawa State in the North, Taraba in the Northeast, Enugu, Ebonyi and Cross River to the South and Southeast and Kogi to the West and Northwest. The state covers an area of about 69,740 square kilometers.

The Idoma-speaking group is also found in considerable number in Nassarawa and Cross River states. The recent population census put the population figure of the nine Idoma local government areas of Benue State at one million, two hundred and ninety three thousand (1,293,000).

ii. **Constituents:** The Idoma ethnic group, as earlier pointed out above is a very broad entity which comprises nine local governments that make up the Benue South senatorial zone. The Local Governments are Apa, Agatu, Otukpo, Ohimini, Okpokwu, Ogbadibo, Obi, Oju, Ado. Among these are five dialectal variations in the Idoma language. The dialects of Otukpo, Ugboju, Adoka, Umogidi, Oglehu and Onyagede all of Otukpo and Ohimini local government areas resemble one another. The Otukpo dialect is described as the standard central dialect and has been chosen (consciously or unconsciously) as a lingua franca (so to speak) with Otukpo remaining as the cultural, commercial and administrative headquarters of the Idoma kingdom.

This research and investigation is centrally based in Umogidi and Otukpo. The other dialects are the Egwumale that differs significantly from all others and has been influenced by Igala, while that of Okpoga has specific feature. Otukpa, Owukpa, Orokam have common resemblance and are influenced by Nsukka Igbo. Another dialect is Agatu which differs from the others except Ochekwu, with which it has certain affinities.

iii. **Religious/Social Life:** The Idoma people are very hardworking, hospitable people who treasure self-respect and independence. They are mainly farmers whose chief crops are yams, cassava, guinea corn, groundnuts, rice and cotton. Apart from farming, they also indulge themselves in hunting, fishing, carving and weaving. They usually live in clans which have central open playgrounds. They have a very strong chieftaincy which antedates colonial administrations. The institution of Oche is the political organization of chiefdom in Idoma nation. The head of this institution of government is what in Idoma is known as Oche (Chief or King). The Oche of the entire Idoma is known as *Ochi Idoma* whose palace is in Otukpo and his title is Agaba-Idu, meaning the lion of Idu.



A sculpture showing Agaba in front of Ochi' Idoma palace, taken during the fieldwork

The day-to-day running of the kingdom is not completely left in the hand of Oche who is the Chief Executive but there are other smaller Chiefs who assist him. They are the representatives of their various districts. They are district heads who legislate in the Oche's palace.

The average Idoma person is religious. The traditional religion of Idoma teaches people to believe in different gods, including earth god and ancestral god which Alekwu represents. Religion pervades all aspects of the life of the people which is the reason why there is a belief that God is present in their lives all the time. According to the Idoma belief, one's success in life depends to a great extent not only on the correct observance of all the civil rules and regulations but meticulous adherence to taboos and acts that are prohibited. Respect or regard for the old people is part of such rules since they are believed to have constituted powerful intermediary between the world of the dead and the living. Any infringements on the rights and privileges of the elders will evoke severe repercussions as the ancestors and the spirits will also be offended. The Idoma people have a strong belief in ancestral Alekwu worship.

It is believed according to the Idoma worldview that the dead members of the Idoma kindred are *alive*. The implication of this is that death in corporeal sense did not remove the dead from the kindred membership as such. This suggests that when someone dies in the physical, the spirit keeps roaming about until it is invoked and initiated to join other members of the ancestors in the Alekwu cult which is symbolically represented by the mask of each ancestor. In that regard, certain classes of ancestors were considered vital and living members of the community. According to the Idoma world view, they are consequently endowed with certain rights and responsibilities, which in most cases include among other things to guide the affairs of the living

and to serve as link between the physical world and the spirit world. This position is similar to Bayo and Rasheed's assertion that the cult of the ancestors has been perfectly built into the African perception of cosmic and social existence (67). The resurrected ancestors or the Alekwu concretely transform themselves to Ekwu Afia. It is believed that they come to the world occasionally to feel the spiritual pulse of the kindred spirit. This agrees with Ted and Amali's positions on the reason why it is believed that the Alekwu in the Idoma society plays an important role in the lives of the people.

iv. **The Archive:** The ancestors re-invoked as Alekwu play not only a religious and metaphysical role, but also serve as carrier of the people's history, literature and philosophy. The Alekwu contributes towards oral history and literature of the Idoma, because in some festivities, including funerals, Alekwu Afia (masked Alekwu) recites the genealogies of the different lineages and sing praises for their legendary heroes since the time of migration. Alekwu is a re-invoked spirits of the dead ancestors collected and put together to guide and protect the lives of their living offsprings. They engage one another in a competition where they test one another's literary ingenuity by rendering beautiful poetry. In this instance, oral poetry in Idoma can be seen as a compendium of profound resources of language for expressing the feelings, thoughts, beliefs, philosophies, values and histories of the people. It contains aspects of culture such as social ethos, religious dogmas and all aspects of material and non-material culture in which the people live, move and have their being.

v. **The Idoma Verbal Arts/Performance**

The Idoma Verbal Arts: Like any other cultural group where oral literature and oral arts exist, the Idoma verbal arts are sustained fundamentally by performance. In other words, virtually every

study on the concept of an Idoma oral literature stresses the complementary nature of the verbal arts with performance.

It is in view of this fact that Amali explains that the Idoma religious/Alekwu poetry is “a verbal form of expression whose composers are generally not known, yet handed down over the centuries from generation to generation through the word of mouth” (32). Finnegan also asserts that one of the striking characteristics of oral as distinct from written literature is its “verbal variability” (8).

It is pertinent to point out here that every Idoma person who lives in that oral culture is a potential performer of some sort, but few ever distinguish themselves as artists of the first order. The reason is that, during this festival, the general adult members of the community (males) participate in this performance. Alekwu-afia numbering about fifty engaged one another in a poetic rendition of different kinds, testing and proving their imaginative/creative ingenuities. As stated earlier, the artistes equally employ certain appeals not only in what they say but in the way it is said (whether in the manner of plain speech or of chanting or singing). Even in some categories of Idoma verbal arts where a more or less fixed body of text is recognized and the artiste is expected to recite it, much of the appeal lies in the quality of the voice used and the skill with which the speaker manipulates the tone of the words involved. Other more elaborate forms of oral performance during this festival involve the use of musical instruments and dance as accompanying devices. It is on this strength of creativity and imagination that we make bold to say that Idoma oral performing art is rich in literary qualities.

As an African group for whom praise and criticism are favoured forms of discourse, the freelance Idoma poets who sing praises of Oche in his palace employ certain stylistic elements in their

songs such as repetition. The interesting thing remains the way and manner in which the repetition is manipulated. The poets, especially Alekwu afia, during performance usually build imagery out of various elements taken from the surrounding culture and environment (e.g., animals, trees, rivers etc.). For instance, in one of the festivals a particular Ekwu afia uses the imagery of a goat selling leaves and yet could not find the same leaves to feed on even when it could not sell all the leaves it went to market with. This symbolically depicts a situation whereby someone finds himself amid plenty yet wallows in hunger and want. If present at the festival, one can see the various ways in which the oral poets (i.e. Alekwu afia) manipulate symbols and imageries within the poem, showing how one small image develops in scope as the poem is rendered. Speaking of Babalola's *Ijala*, Okpewho reiterates that he (Babalola) treats us to an insider's view of the various stylistic techniques and characteristic of the Yoruba language. According to him, this lends *Ijala* its poetic flavour, such as complex structure of imagery and allusion, the manipulation of sounds and of the voice to achieve specific effects of beauty and meaning, and (more interesting) those linguistic devices which are not common in everyday speech but are part of the *poetic diction* of *Ijala*.

The Aspect of Performance in Idoma Oral Poetry: More interesting about Idoma performing arts is the fascinating way in which the maskers dramatize various actions/issues captured in the renditions. This dramatization of actions makes the poems assume the proportion of life, even though they are purely imaginative fiction.

Furthermore, Idoma oral poetry like most forms of oral performance, is an integration of artistic forms. As pointed out earlier, in its performance, for instance, there is drama. There is a combination of verbal elements with musical accompaniment. There could be visual aspects involving the use of costumes, mime and dance. In the Idoma Alekwu poetry, especially religious

type, the rendition made during pouring of libation becomes important not only in the utterance of the poet/performer of Idoma ritual drama. The action of pouring out the libation, the positions of feet, hands and indeed dramatic aspects such as how the artiste holds a cup of Oburukutu (locally brewed beer) are all integral aspects that evoke the full essence of the performance. The artist in this instance addresses an audience that is physically present or one that is invisible such as ancestors.

Movement, an important aspect of acting, is involved as the artiste does not adopt a single posture. He may even put on a certain costume that may have colour symbolism. The costume worn by Alekwu afia has two colours of black and red with black symbolizing the world of the dead which is believed to be dark inside from which the ancestral spirit is believed to have lived, and later exhumed into the world of the living. The red on the other hand symbolizes the red earth where the said ancestor was buried when he died.

vi. Symbols and Meanings: In the simple act of libation, a whole range of meanings operate. To this end, Onuekwusi asserts that, “we are not just concerned with words but with movement, action and symbolism all of which go to enhance the meaning of poetry” (80). This agrees with Mezu’s assertion that one of the most interesting aspects of traditional African civilization is “the unity of the art forms” (93). To Baudelaire, there exist the unity and association of music, poetry, dance and painting in the process which the sounds of music, the rhythms, phrases and syllables, the allegories and analogies of poetry, the steps, movements, jumps and signals of dance and finally the colours of painting are unified in a symbolic world where religion provides a solid and firm structure.

In conclusion, the centrality of performance in the Idoma oral poetry genre is indeed significant. Songs are realized in performance and it is performance that gives each one of them its distinctive character. The good singer seeks the involvement of his or her audience through an appeal to both its emotional and intellectual faculties, thus the singer or performer of any kind of Idoma oral poetry needs to be very knowledgeable in the culture of the community. Because the effect that the singer has on his audience is invariably dependent on the dexterity with which he or she manipulates the values and resources embodied in the Idoma language, it is very advantageous for a singer to show unwavering allegiance to this crucial aspect of Idoma culture. In a similar study, Chukwuma Azuonye terms this *functionality* on the part of the artist, as according to him, by this principle, the Ohafia people evaluate the songs purely in terms of their manifest effects on culture and society and on the behaviour of individual members of the society. In his view, “this principle refers merely to the practical utility of the songs, especially when performing in association with the well known dramatic war dance of the people and its accompaniment of martial music as part of integrated heroic musical whole” (48).

The Idoma language too, has an exceptionally rich supply of proverbs and proverbial expressions, maxims, vowel harmony or assonance, puns, repetitions, alliterations, rhymes, tonal variations, and other sound patterns which heighten effect, and the gifted singer learns to use these materials to his advantage. In the Idoma worldview also are embedded numerous folktales, legends, anecdotes, myths, and beliefs that aid creativity.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

Since the field of oral literature is a vast one, classification becomes a crucial first step if we are to fully appreciate the diversity of materials which the society produces, disseminates and enjoys. Virtually in every scholarly discipline, classification constitutes a logical starting point.

There have been many studies of the vast body of the oral literature of Idoma, published and unpublished, dealing with arrays of issues but no work exists on the study of its classification with the view of bringing out the literary, social and aesthetic qualities in its poetics. Even a cursory glance at the works of such specialized scholars who have done much on this, like R.G. Armstrong, R.C. Abraham, S.O.O. Amali, Idris Amali, Ted Anyebe, and many others would show immediately that much work has been done on Idoma literature without attention given to its taxonomy. This inadequacy constitutes one of the reasons why this study is proposed.

Similarly, a look at the works of other specialized researchers of other African groups as Isidore Okpewho, Jasper Onuekwusi, Ruth Fennigan, Abdulashid Na'Allah and Bayo Ogunjimi, C.A. Okafor, Ode Ogede, Nkem Okoh, F.B.O. Akparobaro, E.S. Timpunza, Helen Chukwuma, Chukwuma Azuonye and many others, show uniformity in the taxonomical approach to oral literature. They followed an already established three pronged literary division with which we are already familiar in written literature to classify oral literature in terms of the following: 1. Prose 2. Poetry 3. Drama. This research also considers the transfer of this traditional, tripartite Western model of literary genres to the study and classification of African Oral Literature in general and oral poetry in particular a rewarding contribution to the field. The researcher however agrees with Emenanjo who warns that there is "a need for scholars to treat universals with caution" (36) since oral performance captures the socio-historical, cultural, philosophical and religious ethos of the society under study; a problem this research equally seeks to address to take another critical look at the existing taxonomy with a view to improving on them.

1.4 Objective of the Study

The aim of the study is to carry out taxonomical study of the poetics in Idoma oral performances. The specific objectives are to: (i) produce a concrete taxonomical model for the study of Idoma oral poetry; (ii) explain the content, context and reality of the oral performance aesthetics among the people; and (iii) investigate the functions and contributions of the oral poetry to the social, educational, political and cultural advancement of Idoma people.

1.4 Significance of the Study

This study becomes relevant to the study of Idoma oral poetry in that it would have contributed towards the classification of the performance poetics of Idoma oral literature with a view to provide a tool for the understanding and interpretation of the people's oral poetry. Through the study of the poetics in the Idoma oral performances, the people's literary culture is re-situated in the context of other literatures. The work involves a broad interdisciplinary discourse with the aim of producing a concrete taxonomical model for the study of Idoma oral poetry in order to expose some of the vital issues concerning the greater sensitivity of representation, interpretation and evaluation of oral poetry genres. This study further argues its relevance, in that it is an attempt to open up Idoma oral literary universe to readers, students and scholars and to explore the way the interplay of culture and oral literature has enabled the society to develop a complex social system characterized by collectivism and egalitarian norms. The study also classified the meanings and themes of Idoma oral performance in a broader social context. Even the exploration into the significant roles the variant poetry genres play in maintaining collective wisdom, national identity, solidarity and traditional moral values equally justifies the relevance of this study.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED SCHOLARSHIP.

There have been many studies of the vast body of the oral literature of Idoma, published and unpublished, dealing with arrays of issues but very little work exists on the study of the taxonomy of Idoma oral literature, especially their poetics. Even a cursory glance at the works of such scholars like R.G. Armstrong, R.C. Abraham, S.O.O. Amali, Idris Amali, Ted Anyebe, and many others would show immediately that much work has been done on Idoma literature without much attention given to its literary qualities and classification. Therefore the chapter is aimed at reviewing available literatures in Idoma oral performances to start with, and proceeds to review other scholarly works done on the taxonomy of other African groups to see if there are gaps left uncovered that this present study can cover. After that, come the summary of the reviewed literatures and conclusion.

R.C. Abraham, a colonial researcher in Idoma, in his work, *The Idoma Language*, postulates that “Idoma ethnicity like many other African groups has a very rich literature expressed in a beautiful language” (101). R.G. Armstrong who conducted an empirical research on Idoma historiography and their literature complemented this assertion. He was the first scholar to do a research on Alekwo chants entitled, *Onugbo Mlo Okoh: the Tale of Two Brothers*. His second work is *The Idoma Kings: the Nature of their Office and their Changing State*. He classified Idoma oral poetry into court poetry, freelance poetry and religious poetry. He further postulates that the court poetry is found around the Oche’s palace. According to him, the professional praise singers sing the chief’s praises and those of their predecessors and their achievements. While freelance poetry are those songs sung by poets who go about freely to performe in any occasion for them to be paid for

their services. The religious poetry however, are those performances, which do not only involve the people whom they represent, but also their lives and their relationship with their gods.

S.O.O. Amali too has paid attention to Idoma poetry in his work: *Idoma Dances and Their Continued Relevance to the Society. A Study of Idoma-Otukpo Ichicha and Alekwu*. In this work, his focus is no doubt on the social relevance of the Alekwu religious practice and its poetic performance through the dramatic mode. He posits that the Idoma religious/Alekwu poetry belongs to the community that practices it. In his view, “it is a verbal form of expression whose composers are generally not known, but handed down over the centuries from one generation to another. During the time of performance, addition, modifications and alteration are not welcomed as that can destroy the original theme and content” (32). The opinions and views of scholars and even the informants are related on this point. This is why the Idoma Alekwu/Ichicha religious poetry is said to be fixed. They are classified as fixed because they are sung and performed according to a laid down mode set by the ancestors of Idoma people. In the course of performing the arts, the artiste has no room to alter anything outside the set standard. Amali’s concern, however, is how Alekwu/Ichicha songs can be used as a vehicle for social change.

This is evidently far from our focus in this research. Other African scholars who address the topic in question in their studies of oral literature of other groups include Emenanjo who studied Igbo oral literature and points out rightly that “the preoccupation with taxonomy remains one of the live and interesting but problematic issues in academic discipline” (35). Okpewho observes that many European and American scholars, Malinowski, Bascom, and Ben-Amos being perhaps the most notable have suggested that “whatever systems of classification we apply to the folklore (including oral literature) of a people must be based on the systems traditionally recognized by the

people themselves” (127). This view, Okpewho so praised, yet added that, “but the trouble with relying solely on the judgment of the indigenes is that we will be unable to see each society in relation to the other” (127). He explains further that even though we recognize that there are numerous ethnic and linguistic groups within Africa, there are nevertheless several common features and customs that unite these groups as an African people. This indeed underscores the reason behind the adoption of the already existing tripartite mode existing in written literature in the classification of African oral literature.

Oral performance and culture, therefore, whether in Africa or anywhere in the world differs as Bayo Ogunjimi and Abdul-Rasheed Na’Allah point out that various components of oral narrative forms, like myth, legends, folktales, proverbs, etc., “have their origin in the hierarchy of values of the African Universe. Even characters like the supernatural, the spirits, fairies, humans and animals have their abodes in the same universe” (19). Okoh agrees with this stating that “there shouldn’t be universality approach to genres” yet saying; “without necessarily anticipating exact terminological or formal correspondences, we follow, for our purposes, the three pronged literary division with which we are already familiar in written literature” (113). Emenanjo is of similar view when he posits that “the import of a critique is the need for scholars to treat ‘universals’ with caution” (36). What he means here is that, even though man is a universal being, the manifestation of man’s material culture, language and literature are essentially place-bound and time-bound. To him, “to, therefore, extrapolate the known from the unknown and generalize, therefrom, could lead to distortion or very inadequate analyses” (36). All the above caveats, notwithstanding, he posits further that; “is it not often academically the case that scholars throw out the ‘unknown’ baby with the known bathwater?” (36). However, Weisstein posits that “a

scholar concerned with classification must endeavour to operate descriptively rather than prescriptively (99).

To Peri Polonijo, “it seems that the problems of classification of the oral literary forms can be solved only if elevated to general level where they become examples for consideration in principle. Thus, we are forced to shift from the individual towards the general and vice versa, trying to find at least momentarily satisfying answers to the proffered questions” (3). To Emenanjo however, taxonomy remains problematic in so far as:

This is more so in a ‘new’ and/or multidisciplinary endeavour or in an old discipline as studied in a new world with its own peculiar non-European cultures, and non-Indo-European languages. Interestingly, however, there are, in every discipline ‘universals’-both substantive and relative- which, to the beginning researcher, could serve for heuristic purposes. The snag and temptation, however, are that even though universals are usually arrived at, *post priori* enthusiasts and Eurocentric scholars tend to treat them as a *priori* realities, constructs and mentifacts in their understandable ‘obsession’ to transfer knowledge across cultures and within and beyond cognate oratural and literary realizations, given such ‘scholars’, attempts to look for one-to-one anthropological, linguistic, oral and literary correspondence between what (they think) they have seen in the contents of their texts and their (Indo-) European counterparts (35).

To us in this study, to treat African indigenous literature in its own right, the main focus of attention should be on the established cultural traditions and historical experiences, together with those aspects of the social and political life of the Africans which are the most helpful sources of our inspiration and techniques. The transformation of African literatures from traditional form to high standard has its own well-founded historical reasons.

Chukwuma gives the following reasons hampering the taxonomizing of African oral literature:

The first of course is that oral literature is a relatively new field in its time of discovery and formalization than in terms of its origin and articulation. Secondly, African oral literature before 1970 had no status and independent existence of its own but was always tagged on Anthropology and Religion..... Thirdly, oral literature is often fragmented, each genre treated as a complete entity of its own. No composite picture of oral literature was given in a holistic framework.

Genres of oral literature are really integers within a whole (22).

Lee Haring shares the above view saying; “as a field of intellectual inquiry, oral literature studies are so incoherent, so fragmented by national traditions, assumptions, languages, and institutional barriers--not to mention the rival claims on the material of folktales--that they look as diverse as the multilingual islands Robert Chaudenson writes about” (2). Within the oral literature of the Roma, Michael Wog asserts that “several genres have developed with characteristic features both in form and content. Since the differences between the genres vary from one group of Roma to another, an outright systematisation of the genres is not easily achieved” (1). Therefore, in his view, “any attempt at classification deals with a genre system that is highly sophisticated and

serves both the artist and the audience in their need for edification, moral advice, artistry, suspense, etc” (1). He gives instance of a division between epic and lyric forms;

the latter usually finding musical expression in different types of songs. Ballads, epic songs, songs of mourning, songs of joy, wedding songs, dance songs, children’s songs, lullabies, and probably many more are known and practiced among the Roma. With regard to the former, there is a further general division into more or less fictional stories on the one hand and true stories on the other. A fictional story is usually called "paramisi", "pamarisi", "paramič(i)", "paramuzi" (or in certain communities "istorija", "priča"), and includes what Western tradition regards as fairy tales, fables, parables and legends. Riddles and proverbs as well as jokes are also common among the Roma. Non-fictional stories called "vakeriben" by Servika Roma and "tertenetura" by the Lovara include mulo-stories, anecdotes and more historical narratives in general such as life stories. Even though it is common to call any kind of story "paramisi"; the division between fiction and non-fiction remains significant (2).

In a similar vein, Emenanjo points out that a certain author has been accused of taxonomical inappropriateness thus:

There is a tendency for some writers to take advantage of the inconclusive nature of the scholarship with regard to the taxonomy of Igbo oral tradition to present their own suggestions as established

facts, [The author claims that] there are seven genres of traditional Igbo oral literature and list them. They raised an unnecessary debate which the author could not take up in an introductory paragraph. *Egwuregwu Odinala* (Traditional Drama) and *Ukabuilu* (Anecdote) appear to be the author's translation from English categories. Even *Abu* (*Mbem, Uri*) for traditional poetry and verse appears to be the author's (and a few people before him) attempts at categorizing traditional poetry. The words are neither exhaustive of the possible names of songs and chants in Igbo nor is the attempt at categorizing now conducive to satisfactory exploration of the various Igbo categories of poetry. By this I mean that these words do not represent Igbo genres as such but are abstracted by the scholar for their specific Igbo references to take on the quality of generic terminology as counterpart of the English categories (35-6).

Emenanjo in this instance observes that it is not every genre which is identified in every culture that has a specific non-descriptive and non-sentential name in the language of that culture. For example, "the Yoruba and Igbo languages do not have a term for tongue twister. Yet tongue twisters are fully realized in Yoruba and Igbo" (39). Ogundipe, Olatunji and Emenanjo among others, have given an independent generic status and stylistic treatment of Yoruba and Igbo tongue twisters respectively. Chukwuma equally posits that "there is no word for drama in the Western use of the term in the Igbo language" (22). Yet Ugonna, Ossie Enekwe and Amankulor's studies have shown the prevalence of established various sub-genres of Igbo dramatic arts cherished by the people. Again in Igbo, it is observed that "there is no word

corresponding to poetry in Igbo” (Emenajo, 40). Yet studies by Egudu, Nwoga, Uzochukwu, Ossie Enekwe, Amankulor, Chukwuma and Azuonye have shown that there are in Igbo songs, song-forms, sung-forms, recitations and chants. The same thing applies to ‘anecdotes’. Yet Egudu and Emenajo have conclusively shown that in the corpus of Igbo oral literature anecdotes constitute a separate and independent genre, close to folktales but different from them and sharing features with folktales, proverbs and jests.

Polonijo in his study, *Oral Lyrical Poems Classification according to the Record and Function* observes that two circumstances prompt us to systematically deal with the problems of oral literature classification. The first is that, in the last decades, folklore studies have been in a situation, as has the literary science, to re-examine and reach new solutions and theoretical explanations from their respective fields. In this reexamination, oral literature forms according to him;

have an important role, not only through their interpretation but also through their classification. The second is that everything that happens in written literature (e.g. the cancellation of traditional forms, the termination of barriers between literature and other forms of communication through language, as well as reliance on certain traditional genres and on spoken literature genres) and even in the relation, the written - the oral, dictates the classification to deal with the general principles of literary division, with works of literature in each separate sphere (oral and written-artistic), with ways and nature of their organization within their own poetics, but also dictates the

classification to deal with the question to what extent it is itself necessary and possible (4).

However, several approaches to classification are possible, and as Weisstein points out, one of the commonest is the criterion of content and form. According to Wellek and Warren, “If we understand by content the ideas and emotions conveyed in a work of literature, the form would include all linguistic elements by which contents are expressed” (140 qtd in Okoh, 113).

Panja further asserts that we can deal with the classification of the oral literary genres, especially oral lyrical poems, on different levels, bearing in mind the fact that the principles for classification are pure conventions although not arbitrary. Thus, he argues that,

The problem requires the elaboration from the literary and theoretical aspect as well as from the aspect of folklore. Having in mind these two aspects as starting points, we have been trying to suggest the classification system of division which could have purely practical purpose (in computer catalogization), but also in permanent study and the interpretation of particular poems. The solution was found in the compromise between literary theory and folklore criteria, so that the division between oral lyrical poems according to the record and according to the application has been suggested. It seems that the division is appropriate to the analyzed structure, without any illusions about its universal application and comprehensive description (1).

Notopoulos claims that: “The society which gives birth to oral poetry is characterized by traditional fixed ways in all aspects of its life” (45). Oral poetry then is a thing that is clear and distinctive with well known characteristics and settings. Oral Poetry can take many different forms and occurs in many cultural situations; it does not manifest itself only in one unilateral model envisaged by some scholars while these various forms are expressions of the people’s poetic imagination. Ben-Amos emphasizes the way the categorization of oral literary forms occurs in accordance with the thematic domains of a text. A society usually classifies verbal communication into three ways: first, identifying and interpreting literary forms or genres within a wider ethnographic system (cognitive), second, performing them in a particular social context (pragmatic), third, formulating the oral art using poetic languages that are peculiar to them (expressive). The taxonomy of oral art becomes coherent and valid if stylistic, thematic and contextual aspects are taken into consideration. The proper perception of specialized phrases or expressions, their general functions in a particular verbal text, and the symbolic meanings of these groups in a given society are the defining features of forms of the verbal genres.

In their own contribution, Furniss and Gunner state that studies of orature generally begin with an outline of genres. On the one hand, they observe that there have been attempts, more or less successful, to render the characteristics of particular forms in such a way that cross-cultural equivalent can be drawn, and so we commonly use terms such as ‘tales’, ‘proverbs’, ‘songs’, etc. On the other hand, there are those who have directed their attention to the terminologies and distinctions employed within the language and culture under discussion. In looking at the myriad ways in which particular cultures draw their own distinctions, they assert that, “it soon becomes clear that any such discussion of genres covers a full range of distinctive criteria: performance

characteristics, social or ritual occasions, content, form, style of language, and performers” (4). According to them, both approaches, however, produce the tendency to regard genres as catalogue in which each component has its separate and more-or-less equally important niche within an overall classification. In their view, this can obscure, on occasion, an alternative view whereby, as Bahktin points out with medieval European carnival and church liturgy, the one form may define itself specifically in antithesis to another, sometimes simply exemplifying definitional distinctiveness, and in other cases presenting itself as subversive and oppositional.

In a similar vein, Finnegan gives four forms of oral poetry: Epic, Ballard, Lyric and Panegyric. However, the four forms do not cover all areas of oral poetry like the elaborate mythological chants of traditional religion, verses such as prayers, street-cries and counting out rhymes or the special oral poetry of African drums and horns. Oral poetry as it applies to the Idoma people, is observable in all aspects of life as in manners, customs, observances, ballads, proverbs, myths, etc and is transmitted by words of mouth. According to her,

If the comparative study of oral literature is to involve contemporary world situations based on formal criteria or the use of language on the basis of traditional standards of correctness, researchers often prefer to construct classifications that would be valid both at local and international level. By and large every culture has its own yardstick for interpreting the natural world in its basic taxonomies of genres. Of all the reasons for selecting and/or employing a particular genre, the way it serves as a representative image, whether it is supposed to have national and international significance and its relevance to the

changing social and political circumstances are what interests most folklorists (4).

To Xabier Fidel, the context and performance are relevant in oral traditions, but they require theorizing. Although Ong, Toelken or Foley bore in mind the performative factor, it was Finnegan who first applied some implicit and explicit performative concepts, from areas like romanticism or sociology, to oral poetry. Her book, *Oral Poetry: Its Nature, Significance and Social Context*, revolves around the nature of orality. The outcome of her study reveals that the poet is as important as the audience, the context and their function. However, Finnegan does not connect the Oral-Formulaic theory to her conclusions.

Finnegan's and Paul Zumthor's contributions highlight the importance of the performing act as a crucial process in oral song improvisation. At the beginning of the 80s, oral formulaic theories originate in the scholarly study of epic poetry and developed by Milman Parry and Albert Lord. Their study focused on the mechanism (or formulae) whereby some oral poets are able to improvise poetry and on the characteristics that improvised oral poetry does have, as an art somehow opposed to written poetry. The inclusion of the performance as the intrinsic scenario that is strictly necessary to understand the whole meaning of the improvised poetry widens the horizon of the study of oral poetry. This, regretfully, underlines the incompleteness of the oral poems registered until that moment, as not many researchers carried out a detailed study of the context of the oral poems they gathered in their fieldwork.

Consequently, a whole dimension is devoted to the study of the widest context in which the improvisers perform; other scholars such as Barre Toelken approach oral poetry from a folkloristic perspective and conclude that the performance is part of an ethnical cycle, and then, they propose that the context of the performance has to be analyzed within the wider context

provided by the cultural background shared by a community. The immediate context that feeds the imagination of the performers is rooted in the memoirs and expectancies of the general audience.

To this effect, in a recent textbook surveying the genres and literary features of African oral literature Okpewho looks in vain for any questioning of why anything should be called literature to begin with. According to him, “inscribing has certainly occurred in the mere transcription and translation of African oral traditions, as well as in the reclassifying of oral histories, genealogies, and personal experience narratives as legends” (Okpewho, 183-203). Contributors to this issue give new data about how African artists frame some utterances into performances—how they “entextualize.” “But if one can re-read everything as literature,” Derrida continues, “some textual events lend themselves to this better than others, their potentialities are richer and denser” (12).

Ahmed and Furniss and Camara, in this issue, give especially forceful instances of textual events of that sort. Derrida concludes with a warning to those who observe, record, transcribe, and translate:

Even given that some texts appear to have a greater potential for formalization, literary works *and* works which say a lot about literature and therefore about themselves, works whose performativity, in some sense, appears the greatest possible in the smallest possible space, this can give rise only to evaluations inscribed in a context, to positioned readings which are themselves formalizing and performative (46-7).

This issue presents formalizing, and performative readings of African oral traditions. In the past, classic approaches to African oral traditions have sought their ground in anonymous social forces, “primitive” mentality, the entextualizing words, or metaphysical presuppositions. Often the approaches have been positivist, in the sense of the 1892 definition cited by Raymond Williams, “the representation of facts without any admixture of theory or mythology” (200). Facts in the colonial period were the decontextualized words of spoken performances, captured with the pain voiced by Smith and Dale in what was then Northern Rhodesia (336).

This was an organic conception of literature and a separation of literary criticism from sources, social effects and backgrounds, history of ideas, and politics, for the sake of attention on the object called literary, which was separated from its producer and socio-historical setting (Leitch, 26-35). New Criticism thus unknowingly justified the practice of generations of Africanist ethnographers, who published lists of proverbs and riddles, translations of folksong lyrics, and texts of folktales quite separately from their accounts of economic activity, gender roles, and political organization. The principle of such an “objective orientation,” wrote the New Critic M. H. Abrams in 1953, is to regard the work of art “in isolation from all these external points of reference” and analyze it “as a self-sufficient entity constituted by its parts in their internal relations” (21). This “objectivism,” now generally rejected in African studies, was classically refuted by a zealous, penetrating researcher of Tanzania, T. O. Beidelman: “if folklore has any lasting merit as a field of study by anthropologists, it is in its relation to other spheres of society and social action. Indeed, this too is the relevance of literature,” which, he concludes, can have significance only “within a wider cultural context, including social relations and cosmology” (xiv-xvii). Moreover, most students of African oral traditions would concede these points, while regretting the lack of information about social relations and cosmology to inform the collections

made in the past. Azuonye and Ahmed and Furniss accord their texts the sort of evaluation that, New Critics held, should be based only on criteria intrinsic to the mode of being of the work itself (Abrams, 21). They conceive its mode, however, as inextricably imbricate in social life.

Conclusively, in order to treat indigenous literature in its own right, our main focus of attention should be on the established cultural traditions and historical experiences, together with those aspects of the social and political lives of the Africans which are the most helpful sources of our inspiration and techniques.

Conclusion

Many studies have been carried out on the oral literature of Idoma. These earlier studies dealt with several issues but none sets out to investigate the taxonomical problems confronting the study of Idoma oral poetry as this present study. Armstrong studied Alekwu chants titled, *Onugbo Mlo Okoh: The Tale of Two Brothers* with particular focus on its literary style and language. Amali studied *Idoma-Otukpo Ichicha and Alekwu* with interest on performance aesthetics which is evidently far from our focus in this study. Idris in his own study concerns himself with Idioms and flute proverbs in *Idoma Aklama-itodo*. Ted Anyebe in his *Enhancing Rural Development through Drama: The Idoma Experience* states that “the communal essence which exists in the spiritual communal drama as seen in the *Alekwu* funeral is a source for national development” (12).

Other African scholars who address the topic in question in their studies of oral literature of other groups include Emenanjo who studies Igbo oral literature and points out those scholars should treat universals with caution; a view Okoh agrees with stating that there shouldn't be universality approach to genres. Finnegan's and Zumthor's contributions highlight the importance of the

performing act as a crucial process in oral sung improvisation. To Fidel the context and performance are relevant in oral traditions, but they require theorizing. While Haring asserts that oral literary studies are so incoherent, so fragmented by national traditions, assumptions, languages, and institutional barriers--not to mention the rival claims on the material of folktales. Furniss and Gunner contributions suggest that studies of orature generally begin with an outline of genres. On the one hand, they observe that there have been attempts, more or less successful, to render the characteristics of particular forms in such a way that cross-cultural equivalent can be drawn. Emenanjo however disagrees that it is not every genre which is identified in every culture that has a specific non-descriptive and non-sentential name in the language of that culture. He supports this assertion citing Chukwuma's view that "there is no word for drama in the Western use of the term in the Igbo language" (22) even when Ugonna, Ossie Enekwe and Amankulor's studies have shown the prevalence of established various sub-genres of Igbo dramatic arts cherished by the people.

So the review of recent works did in taxonomical study of oral literature shows a number of common traits. Yet the development has not been cumulative. Each investigator goes his own way and explores his own path of inquiry. These paths do not merge; on the contrary, they branch off into different directions. For instance, Babalola studies the oral poetry of Yoruba titled; *Content and Form of Yoruba Ijala* with firm conviction that "Yoruba traditional poetry in general is best classified not so much by the themes as by the stylistic devices employed in recitals" (qtd in Okpewho, 129). Olatunji in *Features of Yoruba Oral Poetry* agrees that style of vocalization (the "music mode of performance") is a valid criterion for differentiation but thinks that the songs and chants could just as validly be grouped in accordance with their traditionally recognized

performers. It is in view of this lack of uniformity in principle and approach to taxonomical studies in Idoma in particular and Africa in general that this study is designed to take another critical look at the taxonomy using Idoma oral performances, with a view to improve on them.

CHAPTER THREE

3.0 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND METHODOLOGY

3.1 Methodology

The study adopted survey design. It made use of primary and secondary sources of information. Interview and observant-participation constituted the primary sources of data collection. Secondary data were sourced from oral performance-related literature, academic research reports in journals and periodicals and books from libraries and internet sources. Analysis was based on New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt and Michael Foucault.

3.1.1 Sources of Data

The researcher first of all travelled to the villages where informants were interviewed and data collected. On other occasions, the researcher had to attend the Eje-Alekwu festival where they, Alekwu poets chanted songs reflecting the Idoma culture and history. These songs were recorded, transcribed into the texts of Idoma language and later translated into English for analysis. Dirges were also collected during burial and funeral ceremonies.

3.1.2 Data Collection Procedure

The data were collected during the festival performance of 2014, 2015 and 2016 at Umogidi community to mark the annual Eje-Alekwu. Many of the artists did not only recite their songs but equally performed them. This was the period during which most of the oral materials we are using in this research were collected; it was such an engagement with the core cultural values of the community that endeared the performances to the audience. The event had drawn together many Idoma people from different economic, educational, and social backgrounds to share their

common interest in the value system Alekwu represents. Data were also collected during burial ceremonies around communities in Idoma.

3.1.3 Subject

As common with the analysis of literary texts, various figures of speech such as metaphor, simile, irony, hyperbole, oxymoron, assonance and even proverbs were identified. Other devices identified in the works include theme, mood/atmosphere and the audience involvement as well as the content and context of performance. As part of a research method, literary analysis and poetics can be a significant tool for gaining insight into collective practices and behaviours. Classification of oral performance has the capacity to help in understanding the larger cultural, historical and socio-political well-being of Idoma people. The following themes are deduced; the futility of existence caused by inevitability of death, the metaphysical component in Idoma oral poetry, the epistemology and tradition in Idoma oral poetry, and finally, peace-building in Idoma oral poetry. More importantly, the following classification models have been formulated for Idoma oral poetry. There are fixed, unfixed or freelance Idoma oral poetry. Ogili Abah during an interview in the field classified those rendered by Alekwu and Ichicha especially during funeral, festivals and masking of the dead ancestral fathers as fixed. They are fixed because the content, mode of delivery and performance are constant and have remained so over the ages as set by the ancestors of Idoma people. The unfixed ones are those songs chanted by the deceased, freelance praise singers such as Joe Akatu, Aja, Peter Otulu and those sung by the court music bands and flutists.

3.1.4 Instrumentation

The instruments used in collecting data for this research were tape recorders for recording raw data while interviewing the informants and the Alekwu poets. Other instruments were video recorder and camera for capturing the performance aspect of the ceremony especially during

festivals and burial ceremonies. Three members of a research team carried out the fieldwork. This becomes important since the Idoma verbal arts are sustained fundamentally by performance.

3.1.5 Transcription

This is the stage where the collected data were carefully studied and transcribed from the recorder to the text of the original language. In this study, the interview was carried out in Idoma language after which it was transcribed into the texts of the same language and later translated into English language for analysis.

3.2 Method of Analysis

The analytical method employed in this research is “New Historicism”. This method has been carefully designed to analyze and classify the texts through the medium of language and other literary devices to reveal the layers of interpretation and understanding that surrounds the people’s oral performance.

It is a post-modern trend in literary criticism; a model for culture-study, and a practical method for historiography. It holds the study of history as the core of literary criticism and prepares a method for the explanation of human culture. Originating from and developed in America, as the consequence of the analytical study of the Renaissance literature, New Historicism helps to destroy the barriers in such fields as history, sociology, anthropology, economics, political thought, art, literature, etc. Through the application of this theory, a particular text of Idoma oral poetry is subjected to criticism with reference to a particular context – a search into the natural causes to understand the relationship between discourse and power. In other words, New Historicism does not confine itself to the study of a text in relation to literature, but includes the purview of society, culture and nation. It is in that light that this study views Idoma migration epic from the view point of a New Historicist, Michael Foucault’s view that “power circulates rather

than moving vertically down a hierarchical system” (281). To this key theorist of the Post-Structuralist movement, discourse like this present study allows negotiation of the exchange of power by establishing categories of regulated behaviour and norms for that behaviour. The choice of New Historicism as a theoretical frame for this study is further necessitated by Tyson’s assertion that “historiography must be based on the ‘objective’ analysis especially where history is characterized by linear chains of causal relationships” (25). The study believes that cultures develop many myths about themselves, but no one mythos explains that. Therefore, through this analytical model, Idoma ethnic group is viewed as one which is shaped by events of their past and present.

3.2 Theoretical Framework

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

3.2.1 The Concept of New Historicism

New Historicism seeks to find meaning in a text by considering the work within the framework of the prevailing ideas and assumptions of its historical era. New Historicists such as Stephen Greenblatt, Louis Montrose, Jonathan Goldberg et al, concern themselves with the political function of literature and with the concept of power, the intricate means by which cultures

produce and reproduce themselves. These critics of historicism focus on revealing the historically specific model of truth and authority reflected in a given work. Truth and authority to them were viewed as a cultural construct and thus a need for them, truth and authority, to be deconstructed.

In other words, history here is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, but rather a complex description of human reality and evolution of preconceived notions held as tenets to those in that particular society. Literary works may or may not tell us about various factual aspects of the world from which they emerge, but they will tell us about prevailing ways of thinking at that particular time: ideas of social organization, prejudices, traditions, social values and so on. This view of history became problematic to the New Historicists who felt that history should be more concerned about society and culture than digging deep into information that might be interesting but not important and concerned with ideological products or cultural constructs which are formations of any era. As a discipline that arose as a reaction to the traditional or 'old' historicism, New Historicism insists that ideology should manifest itself in literary productions and discourse, and in the interpretive constructions which the members of a society or culture apply to their experience.

It is probably true that its 'newness' may relate to the 'New History,' especially that which the 1960s is opposed to. The orthodox historiography concentrates on political and diplomatic events, and it relies on narrative as the essential means of articulating the past. Therefore, New Historicism was supposed to be seen as repeating a historical past in its own universal way, which is, having a neutral approach to history by escaping the subjective position in history and the cultural limitation that is always present in this position. Therefore there was a need to demystify

the tenets of the 'old historians' that the past events and situations are unique and non-repeatable and therefore cannot be understood in the universal terms of their own particular contexts.

The rise of New Historicism owes heavily to Post Structuralism in general and Michael Foucault in particular. The Post Structuralism assumptions that appealed to New Historicism included that history was always 'narrated' and therefore the first sense of the events of the past are unreasonable and cannot be defended successfully and that a unified history or harmonious culture, like during the Elizabethan times, was a myth spread by the ruling classes in their own interests. Eustace Tillyard on his introductory notes brings out Elizabeth ruling thus:

People still think of the Age of Elizabeth as a secular period between two outbreaks of Protestantism: a period in which religious enthusiasm was sufficiently dormant to allow new humanism to shape our literature. They admit indeed that the quiet was precarious and that the Puritans were ever on alert. But they allow the emphasis to be on the queen's political intuitions, the voyages of discovery, and the brilliant externals of Elizabeth life (2).

Tillyard talks of the way the Elizabethan culture has been thought of as a seamlessly unified system of meanings, which could not be disturbed by unorthodox or controversial voices and that Christopher Marlowe never seriously challenged this settled world of the renaissance age. It is through this publication Tillyard in 1943 and with such kind of sentiments that defended the Elizabethan reign that became the sustained object of attack by the New Historicists and was used as the centre for establishing the dimensions for their own methodologies.

Tillyard in his own right tries to establish the interconnections between literature and the general culture of a period. However, the New Historicists departs from Tillyard's approach in every

aspect. Selden outlines the new set assumptions which were as a result of the poststructuralist intellectual revolution of the 1960s and 1970s which include the fact that history is not unified and is unstable. According to her, “the past is viewed as impure and can only be availed to us in the form of ‘representations’. Every expressive act, or the ‘representations’, is viewed as a network of material practices” (105). During the renaissance period, human experience was shaped by the social institution and, to be more specific, the ideological discourses.

Under the influence of Louis Althusser and Michael Foucault, the New Historicists in America and Britain wrote a body of works in Renaissance literature and society. In his essay, *Return to History*, Foucault emphasizes the relationship between structuralism and history by saying that structuralism, in its initial form, was an undertaking that aimed to give historical investigations a more precise and rigorous method. He further argues that, “structuralism did not turn away from history, at least not in the beginning; it set out to construct a history” (419). The expression ‘in its initial form’ gives us an impression of the stance he will take in the later form of structuralism, which is actually Post Structuralism. Through his critique on Franz Boas, an American considered to be the father of structural ethnology, Foucault argues that the human society, whether simple or complex, does not obey internal relations that defined them in their specific organization. By this, he was putting forward the fact that history is not always narrated. To him, there was no detached or objective study of history.

New Historicism was characterized by ‘re-situation’ of literary text in the historical context and redefinition of literary studies in terms of an activist agenda which was basically committed ideologically to the aim of subverting the hierarchies of power. In his challenge to Friedrich Nietzsche’s view of discourse as wielding power, we find Foucault’s view of discourse equally wielding power which is relevant in the above characterization. According to Foucault, culture is

essentially textual and verbal productions, poetry included, are equally products of discursive practices or episteme whose unforeseen ruptures dominate a historical period's thinking. But we find that New Historicists, on the other hand, have used Mikhail Bakhtin concept of 'Carnival' as a way of escaping the apparent structural closure of Foucault's historical theory. 'Carnival', which was regarded as a second culture opposed to the official Elizabethan culture, and which was carried on by the common people throughout the middle ages, provided one way of describing how subjects might respond to dominant discourses through, as Selden puts it, "the modalities of 'counter-identification' or even 'disidentification' (109). To him therefore, the micro-physics of power produced by discourse creates a network of relations that encompasses the rulers as well as those they rule in a large web of discreet, local conflicts and makes the individual as subject in, as well as subject to, the disciplinary mechanisms of the capitalist ideology. Through the above discussion, we can see that New Historicism covers a wide range of approaches to the study of literature and history.

According to author and critic Kristi Siegel, New Criticism's formalist exclusionary approach to analyzing literature spawned the reactionary theory of New Historicism, which offered a theoretical approach skeptical of the inherent subjectivity of historical narratives. According to her, New Historicism which emerged in the late 1970's and early 80's, differentiates itself from traditional biographical historicism, in which "literature was seen as a (mimetic) reflection of the historical world in which it was produced. Further, history was viewed as stable, linear, and recoverable—a narrative of fact." Additional evidence of New Historicism's differentiation from other critical theories is the integration and consideration of "cultural, social, political, and anthropological discourses at work in any given age" (Ferguson, 1). This inclusive approach to

other disciplines also closely links and intertwines New Historicism with Cultural Materialism and Cultural Studies.

Like any other literary school of thought, New Historicism has suffered criticism by undergoing attacks all the time. Its approach of history from a neutral position and its pervasive notion of power, being deterministic and monolithic, leave no room for freedom and even resistance to oppressive practices of the state and this has fallen into disfavour with the postmodernists. New Historicism refuses the claim that the society has entered a postmodern phase, and apparently denial to make a systematic theoretical assumption and has avoided an explicit political position. By this, we find that New Historicism has weakened the struggle and resistance which Foucault states that they are naturally part of every structured system of power. Other than the postmodernists, the New Historicists also found themselves having problems with the cultural conservatives for undermining traditional conception of history and literature. The cultural conservatives viewed literature as serving the purpose of disseminating the cultural heritage and values that are the foundation of political and social institutions but we find that the New Historicist regarded this as a failure since the historical account of the literary works of the Elizabethan age, for instance, did not serve this purpose adequately. Finally, New Historicism was criticized by the literary critic, Harold Bloom, for reducing literature to a footnote of history and for not paying attention to the details involved in analyzing literature.

All said and done, we cannot overlook the fact that New Historicism has played a substantial role not only in contemporary literary studies but also in other disciplines such as history, anthropology, arts and in other interdisciplinary fields as well. Though, it grew out of a limited area in the European academy, the renaissance literary studies, its extension to other historical

periods has made it acceptable due to its accommodation to the conventions of the academy and it is yet to give rise to other literary thoughts.

3.2.2 New Historicism and the Present Study

Applying the critical method of New Historicism to the Idoma migration epic, lyrics, ballads, etc, justifies the claim by new historicists that artistic texts are both products of a historical context and as the means to understand cultural and intellectual history. The epic for instance, reflects the movement of Idoma people from Kwararafa confederation to their present location.

In one of the poems, collected during Eje-Alekwu festival in Umogidi for instance, the poet praised the heroic qualities of the first king of the community, His Majesty, Omakwu Aibe. The poems that will be analysed in detail in chapter four were performed to herald the arrival of Omakwu from Otukpo to Umogidi his father's land. At this time, Omakwu was a wealthy man who traded on several goods between the Idoma nation and other surrounding ethnics like the Igbos through Obolo-afor, in the present Enugu State, Iyala and Ogoja in the present Cross River State, etc. The poem further reveals that, on his arrival in Umogidi, his people saw him as the only one who could liberate them from the attack of their hostile Tiv neighbours. As it is common with historical poems, the poem succeeds in revealing the incredible power of the character which eventually gave his people their freedom; an achievement that made them crowned him king.

This study therefore, sees the texts as historical artifacts that emerge among particular social, political, and economic circumstances in Idoma society. The study is further concerned with the tendency to emphasize the “voices”- the perspectives and existential concerns- of power or group

who were marginalized or unrepresented within that Kwararafa political circle or discriminated against because of their gender, ethnicity, religion, or social class.

This could be what Greenblatt had in mind when he explained that by means of an economic metaphor, texts and other symbolic goods contribute to the distribution of social energy by which he means the intensities of experience that give value and meaning to life and that are also indispensable to the construction of self-awareness and identity. His aim is to prove that Literature and the arts are integral with other social practices that, in their complex interactions, make up the general culture of an era.

In the interpretive and analytic procedures we adopted in this research, we have been able to establish a strong link between the Idoma oral literature, poetry in particular and their history. This is so because, interviews with a group of Idoma oral historians at the palace of Omakwu revealed that Idoma people hailed from Apa in Kwararafa confederacy and are descendants of Idu. This claim is supported by a particular Alekwu poet who chanted a poem on the people's migration history. He established that Idoma ancestors lived side by side with other ethnic groups and that the term Apa was a blanket one covering a wide collection of people.

In view of the above, we find in the evaluation of the legendary poem for Omakwu an insight into the social cultural experiences of the community of birth of the subject of praise which is Okwutachi and circumstances surrounding his birth. Through its constituent elements of allusions, events, oblique references, we also see in the above poem the construction and the deconstructions of the migration history of the Umogidi people. The poem no doubt fuses imaginative inventiveness with historicity. The new historicists, most of them literary scholars, have challenged and resisted the assumptions and goals of traditional historicism thus:

They deny, for example, that anyone can ever know exactly what happened at a given time and place. All that can be perceived is what has been handed down in artefacts and stories, making history a narration, not a pure, unadulterated of precise observations (Dobie, 176).

Therefore, to avoid being swept away by criticism of the New Literary Historicists, the researcher seeks to understand in this research, the texts of Idoma poetics under study, by examining their cultural context; the anxieties, issues, struggles, politics (and more) of the era in which they were created, by looking at the people's literature. It is important to point out too that the texts even though performed recently are literature handed down to the current generation of artistes by the ancestors of the people. What is important however is that, the thematic thrusts of them are such that are relevant in all ages and times? So the concern of this study is to classify the people's oral poetry and see how these oral materials can be used for the socio-cultural, religious and political well-being of Idoma people.

In achieving this, the study seeks to look at the 'point of origin' of Idoma oral poems under study, by first of all, looking at the biography of the Alekwu poets who recited them. By so doing, the study considers the expressed intentions of the artists, because, these intentions have also modified the developing history of the works. The study seeks to learn the history of the works' reception, as a body of opinion which has become part of the platform on which the study is situated when the works are studied at this particular 'point of reception'. The study further points toward the future, toward its own audience, defining for members of this audience the aims and limits of the critical project and injecting the analysis with a degree of self-consciousness that alone can give it credibility.

CHAPTER FOUR

4.0 CLASSIFICATION OF IDOMA ORAL TRADITIONAL POETRY

As it is, genres are societal constructs that arise within the context of human discourse. They are recognizable units of discourse with traits which separate them from other units of discourse within a society. These distinguishing traits become institutionalized or highly conventional and units of discourse (texts) are produced within these conventions or rules of discourse formation and classification. Genres are then to be understood as boundary-marked units of discourse production and referring (Opata, 62).

The above assertion by Opata has underpinned the thrust of this study about the genre formation of Idoma oral poetry which sets out to investigate; bearing in mind Furniss and Gurner's proposition that "any such discussing of genres covers a full range of distinctive criteria: performance characteristics, social or ritual occasions, content, form, style of language, and performers" (4). Ben-Amos however envelopes this distinctive criteria into three major categorization domains: first, identifying and interpreting literary forms or genres within a wider ethnographic system (cognitive), second, performing them in a particular social context (pragmatic), third, formulating the oral art using poetic languages that are peculiar to them (expressive). The taxonomy of Idoma oral traditional poetry becomes coherent and valid if stylistic, thematic and contextual aspects are taken into consideration. The proper perception of specialized phrases or expressions, their general functions in a particular verbal text, and the

symbolic meanings of these groups in a given society are the defining features of forms of the verbal genres. Oral Poetry has been classified by types, genres, functions and themes according to innumerable systems. Some are based on content, some on structure, and some on combinations of both elements. In most cases, classifications of oral traditional poetry overlap and you will find differences of opinion about the proper category for which certain oral poems should be placed.

Therefore, this chapter broadly classifies Idoma oral poetry into three taxonomical domains; Oral Narrative poetry such as epic and ballad; Oral Lyrical poetry such as funeral song (elegy / dirge), song of praise to the king (Ode), and invocation to the gods (Incantatory & Religious poetry). This classification is based on a consideration of the persona – the speaker in the poem which guides the artist's relation to the audience. As with stories and plays, it is imperative we know who is speaking in the poem, to whom the person is speaking, and whether the experience is being revealed directly (as in a narrative poem), is overheard (as in a dramatic poem) or is the personal utterance of a simple speaker (as in a lyric poem). In spite of the above however, the chapter goes further to investigate the poetics in the people's oral poetry thereby bringing out their distinctive and well known characteristics and settings. By so doing, we have extended the concept of literary expression to include many unwritten forms of Idoma traditional poetry and, equally significant, treating their orally performed qualities as crucial to their literary realization. The chapter also interrogates the challenges of translating Idoma oral poems from vernacular to English.

4.1 Idoma Oral Narrative Poetry

Idoma oral narrative poetry tells a story or relates a series of events that lead up to a climax. In this respect, the people's oral narrative poetry resembles narrative prose which can easily be

mistaking for a folktale because of the long story it narrates. There however remain distinguishing features such as versification, the use of complex imageries and symbols, figures of speech as well as condensed expressions. The two main types of Idoma oral narrative poetry are epic and ballad. The former has the same metric line being repeated for the entire song; whereas the latter, the ballad is stanzaic. This seems to be the most reliable distinction between the two forms. All other points of difference between them probably stem from the different manners in which they are performed. The epic tends to be longer songs because of the rapidity of telling; whereas the ballad tends to be shorter since the stanza is usually a slower method of narration and an audience runs quickly out of patience.

The most distinctive characteristic of Idoma oral narrative poetry is its fluidity of text. While this is best seen in long epic songs, where the length renders impossible exact memorization from frequent repetition, it is discernible also with shorter oral poems like ballad. In them, however, the text becomes more stable in the hands of a simple singer in direct proportion to the number of times that it is sung.

4.1.1 Idoma Oral Epic

Idoma Oral Epic is characterized by its extreme length, by its elevated tone, and especially by the types of events it relates. For instance, Idoma-Alekwu Oral poet narrates an epic on the hero of Idoma people known as Omakwu whose exploits in wars they fought throughout the period of their later stage of migration saw them through. The epic, *Okwutachi*, centres on his superhuman proportions, both morally and physically. Idoma people boast of this long verse work that describes their origins and history. Other kinds of Idoma Oral epic rendered by Alekwu concern

humanity's battle with the forces of evil, human fortunes, lucks and ill-lucks especially during hunting expeditions. Such epics are *Onugbo Mlo Okoh* and *Kwararafa*. In as much as this study equally hopes to look at didacticism in the poems under study, this chapter strictly investigates the literariness of these poems to prove how any of them can be called a literary object in the first place. This is drawn from the point of view that art is self-sufficient, need serve no ulterior purpose, and should not be judged by moral, political, or other nonaesthetic standards.

One of such literary qualities, is imagery, which refers to images produced in the mind by language, whose words and statements may refer either to experiences which could produce physical perceptions to create sense impression in the minds of the readers. Therefore, performers of these oral epics who are maskers of Alekwu, marked by Idoma people as men possessing peculiar qualities of memory and vision. In fact they are seen as purveyors and refurbishers of popular tradition concerning gods and heroes. They are credited with being able, by special inspiration, to transcend the limitations of sense (some are said to have been gifted by gods) and to rescue the past from oblivion, restoring it to life and moving their hearers to pity and fear. It has been agreed by the people that there is something more than natural about such reciters (maskers) and their faculties regarding the way they have been able to memorize the people's origin, history and record of migration. These poems make their impacts upon the audience imaginations rather than upon their intellects.

We find in *Onugbo Mlo Okoh* what Aristotle in the *Poetics* reacted to Plato's strictures against imitative poetry. This is an oral epic that treats serious issue of man's endless and incautious struggle with fate, destiny, luck and ill-luck leading to a tragic end. He, Aristotle claims that for epic and tragedy, there is convincingness beyond ordinary probability and verisimilitude and a moral purposefulness in the pleasure they could create.

The Alekwu oral poet who narrates this epic is concerned with actions consequent upon good moral choices, but also with errors and frailties, with happiness and unhappiness all housed by the images of sun, hunting and pond; both characteristically present outstanding and noble personalities in both Onugbo and Okoh his younger brother. They are both famous for their ingenuities, exploits and tactfulness in their hunting expeditions. The actions in the epic include the killing of fourteen lions by Oko the younger brother; followed by the seven grasshoppers killed by Onugbo the elder brother. In this instance, there is a synecdochic shift from whole to part, whereby the performer, in order to speak about the supreme reality, concentrates upon one attribute at a time. And there is the metaphoric shift from abstract to concrete, whereby the attribute thus momentarily isolated is presented under the figure of a familiar image. Parable and allegory are further manifestations of this tendency toward figurative speaking.

Subsequently on the fourth day of their hunting Okoh kills an elephant and his elder brother kills none. At this point, the both parties become thirsty during which Okoh stumbles on a water pond at the foot of a tree. He drinks to his fill and invites his brother to come and drink his turn. Unfortunately, before Onugbo could get to the pond, a white horse had gone to muddle the water. This particular incident got Onugbo seriously infuriated after which he raises his gun, shot his younger brother Okoh and killed him. What happens here reminds one of when Archibald MacLisch says, in *Ars Poetica*, that a poem should be “Dumb / As old medallions to the thumb (76).” Here, he does not only mean that the language of poetry should make important use of imagery, he also exemplifies what he means by expressing it in terms of imagery: a poem, he implies, as stated earlier, should make its impact upon the imagination rather than upon the intellect, much as a person feels an old coin with his fingers (a physical perception). When, however, he says “a poem should not mean / But be,” his meaning is the same but his language is

not, for this statement is abstract rather than concrete and imagery bearing, dealing as it does with an idea or concept rather than a perception or sensation. So the mental picture audience of this performance leave the arena with is that of what envy can cause among brothers and not the physical images presented by the narrator. As distinguished from metaphor, these images tended toward figurative speaking, can be translated more or less adequately into literal expository terms, and to that extent they represent a secondary rather than a primary linguistic phenomenon.

The actions treated in the epic have clearly defined beginnings, ends and middle parts amplified by appropriate episodes. Simultaneous happenings are consecutively developed. The story centers on Okoh the tragic character whose success, fortune and luck bring him hatred and incautious envy from his elder brother. The movement is simple and straightforward. The manner in which Onugbo's envy grows fast toward his younger brother effectively creates and stimulates amazement in the minds of the audience which is a plausible style introduced in this narrative to sustain the illusion of actuality. The narrator employs a single meter (dactylic hexameter), which is suited to a narrative like this for its dignity and to figurative language for its flexibility.

In *Kwararafa*, another oral epic, the narrator weaved the events of recent and actual history for his subject matter and dispensed with supernatural "machinery"- the manifest intervention of gods and goddesses in human affairs. In another oral epic, the narrator takes us through the heroic deeds of Idu, the ancestral father of Idoma people who in company of his other brothers, Agabi, Atta and Idoko withstood the onslaught of Abakpa (Hausa people) who invaded his people. Because of his exploits in this war and some others his people titled him "Agaba Idu" meaning "the lion in Idu" and subsequently crowned him king. The Alekwu poet then narrates the affairs and deeds of Idu and in an unconscious manner, reflects in it the history of Idoma origin and

migrations. Idu is spoken of in this epic as a man practically supernatural and worthy of all accolades on account of his wisdom and bravery.

4-1-2 Idoma Traditional Ballad

Among the Idoma people, this is another form of oral narrative poetry which has been in existence for very long time. Many Idoma Alekwu oral poems have or share some of the characteristics of this form of oral poetry. These characteristics are that, they are short, swift, stark narrative, simple in plot and material in structure. Alekwu afia (mask alekwu) employs the language that is unadorned with easy flow of sound yet tells a fast-moving and exciting story.

Examples of such ballads among the Idoma people are *Agbo Geji* performed by Alekwu-afia during Eje-Alekwu festival and *Oklobiam Tete* narrated and sung by Plantaishun Boys. While the former tells the story of a hunter who describes himself as a brave, fearless and courageous lion with the use of “I” persona pronoun repeatedly, the later tells the story of the narrator’s humble beginning and how his friend whom they started life together made it and abandoned him half way. In both ballads the language sits on music that joins the emotional and logical content which is evoked by the distinctive style of the performer.

Another characteristic of Idoma traditional ballads is the refrain. This helps Alekwu-afia the narrator to implement the plot which is often primarily rhythmic. In *Agbo Geji* for instance, the narrator who doubles as the poet persona repeats certain phrases or groups of lines such as lines one and two.

The repetition of these lines after a refrain reveals important aspects of the speaker's life and reflects the unique world of the tale. The Alekwu-afia undertakes this refrain to continue to show us something distinctive about the character or speaker. This becomes necessary because so much of the impacts the ballads could have on the audience is dependent upon the conviction of the teller and reality of the tale being told.

Agbo Geji focuses on a single crucial episode or situation whereby Agbo the principal character finds himself in a hunting contest. As common with ballads, this poem begins at the point where Agbo the human character likens himself to a lion, "The Agaba (Lion) of the jungle" and continues the action which is decisively directed toward its climax with the animal character who finds itself with other animals in a hunting expedition in the forest. The narrator in a summary fashion hurriedly tells this crucial and conclusive episode leading to the climax. In this case, the Alekwu-afia who narrates this ballad pays little attention to describing settings; indeed, circumstantial detail of every sort is conspicuously de-emphasized.

The event being narrated in *Agbo Geji* is done in a dramatic fashion. For instance, the zooming movement of the headgear and the gesticulating body movement of Alekwu masker and narrator are deliberate styles employed. These are gustoes that make the story convincing. In this instance, we are not just told about the event happening; we are shown it happening. Every artistic resource employed in *Agbo Geji* is pointed toward giving an intensity and immediacy to the action and toward heightening the emotional impact of the climax. This is the point at which the lion has killed a certain animal and let it lying down there in the pool of its own blood without taking any piece of the meat. At this point, the principal character, Agbo raises his hand and hits it on his chest boasting that "if a lion goes for hunting no other animal dares".

After some time, the lion will return to check if any animal dares to eat of the meat of that animal before him. At discovering that the game remains intact, it will dissect it and remove the intestine, liver, gizzards and heart and leave the remaining part for any other animal to feed on. At this point in the ballad, the protagonist, Agbo is allowed to speak to himself, other characters and the audience, which means, of course, that dialogue sets in eventually. The narrator seldom allows his own subjective attitude towards the events to intrude. The narrator from time to time uses "I" as pointed out earlier but he does not forget that he is the deputy of the public voice and is not speaking from private judgment. The basis he shares is of course, a communal one.

This is particularly right because *Agbo Geji* is usually narrated by Alekwu-afia in communities around Idoma to remind the people of how brave, courageous and undaunted their ancestral father "Idu" was during the wars they fought with Abakpa (Hausa) people during their stay in Apa kingdom in Kwararafa confederacy. It is also a ballad reminding people of the genesis and origin of the revered title of "Agaba-Idu" i.e the lion of Idu. Subsequently, his brothers crowned him king and he retained that title. This suggests the reason why the paramount ruler of Idoma people is titled Agaba-Idu till date.

This reminds us of a heated argument on the origin of ballad among ballad scholars. A school known as individualists led by John Meier and Louis Pound assert that all ballads are the work of individual poets and are "popular" merely in having been taken up by the folk. Another school known as the communalists led by F.B. Gummere, W.M. Hart, G.L. Kittredge insist that the prototypical ballad was crafted in assemblies of the folk in the exultations of choral dance.

Drawing from the Idoma experience, this study concedes that the traits of “ballad-ness” may be explained by the communal theory, but holds that Idoma ballads are the work of individuals’ i.e, Alekwu- maskers. It is however important to note that the work of an individual Alekwu poet does not become a ballad until it is accepted by the folks who are members of Alekwu cult and remodeled by the ballad conventions in the course of its tour in tradition.

4.2 Idoma Oral Traditional Lyric Poetry

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

In the case of Idoma lyric poetry such as funeral song (elegy / dirge), song of praise to the king (Ode), and invocation to the gods (Incantatory & Religious poetry), however, the musical element is intrinsic to the works intellectually as well as aesthetically. The musical element becomes the focal point for the poet’s perceptions as they are given a verbalized form to convey emotional and

rational values. The primary importance of the musical element is indicated in many generic terms which various cultures have used to designate non narrative and non-dramatic poetry. For instance, the English 'lyric', derived from the Greek 'Lyra' or musical instrument; the classical Greek 'melic' or Mele (air, melody); the Chinese 'shih, or "word song"; the Idoma "Ikpo'ela ije", meaning (the seed-words of song) are all linked and connected to the idea of music or singing.

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

Typically, Idoma lyric poems are short, although they may be long, sustained emotional utterances. They are strongly unified forms of poetry, for all aspects of content are shaped toward the emotional focal period. No wonder Charlotte Lee and Timothy Gura assert that a lyric poem has been compared to a flash of lightning that illuminates some object in a brief moment of emotional vividness" (340). According to them, lyric poets usually give little, if any, account of what lead up to or follows the emotional experience, since their concern is with sharing the experience" (340). Moses Tsenongu stressed on this point when he says, "though there is emotive language even in humanity's every day communication, the lyric genre of poetry is distinguished as a result of the degree to which it emphasizes linguistic emotiveness" (52). The emotion that characterizes "Ikpo'ela ije" is often expressed in terms of reflection or reflexiveness.

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

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

The poetic lines of Idoma lyrics contain some form of free rhythm without rigid meter which could be because of their mode of rendition or recitation. Alliteration and Parallelism are devices

frequently used, as is paronomasia or punning and paradox. The lyrics treat such subjects as death, piety, love, loneliness, jealousy, martial prowess and happiness.

4.2.1 Idoma Dirges

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

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

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

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

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

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

Finally, Alekwu comes to open the road to the land of the dead. By so doing, the spirit of the deceased is free to roam into the spirit world "alekwu lowe he klanu". Before this, the women leave the 'itakpa' to allow Alekwu perform the rites and this is usually the last time the women set

their eyes on the body. One can imagine the weeping and wailing. What Alekwu does at this stage is more of a ritualistic essence where Alekwu and Ichicha jointly render a religious poem even though it is a poem for funeral rite.

4.2.2 Religious Poetry

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

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

In the renditions of this genre, cultural artifacts are very important. It has been argued that cultural artifacts are essential apparatus in the poetic descriptions of the supernatural forces. Each of the

gods and goddesses being praised in poetry has images and other extra verbal apparatus. These embellish the performance of the poetry and make for the actualization of the poetics of the object of description.

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

IDOMA:

Ebi lenya

Onya no le' ebi kpo

Ole' ebi kpo

Ebi bio

iii! Ebi bio

Ifu no gu joka' obla aa

Anu mo ane

O'gole lohi ga ee

Anu mo mia' ane

ENGLISH:

Abomination has occurred

The woman who commits abomination

Commits abomination

And abomination holds her

Yes! It holds her

The rat that goes to cat's market

Looks for trouble

It knows better

If it returns safely e e

It knows better.

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

The position of Plato may be tenable in appreciating the creative milieu and psyche of the custodians of traditions/religious poetry. Plato asserts that the poet must be inspired by gods and goddesses through divine frenzy. This frenzy is translated into poetic verbalizations of the artiste. In tandem with this assertion, Abah in his work, "The Link between Traditional & Modern Poetry" postulates that:

The Romans called poet "vates" which meant a diviner, a seer, a prophet, a priest who they placed on a high scale. These diviners kept a constant touch with the Greek Gods from whom they received their visions and inspirations to perform (64).

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

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

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

Looking at the nature of religious poetry in Idoma, it is however, possible to make classifications based on the occasion in which a specific type of poetry is rendered. Let us base our classification on the following examples: Religious poetry dedicated to gods, goddesses,

spirits and deified ancestors such as Alekwu, Aje and Idu; Religious poetry in the context of communal activities and symbiotic relationships noticeably observed in festivals. Life rhythm and spiritual strength are provoked by such communal festivals where oracular poetry is performed.

We shall in the course of our analysis in chapter five present one of these religious poems for analysis.

4.2.3 Idoma Oral Incantation Poetry

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

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

In one of the festivals in Umogidi community of Otukpo L.G.A in Benue State, Otohi Okoh (The community Priest) recites the following incantatory poem:

IDOMA:

Okpancho mle' eche
 Aje nya me no nwule fie duu aa
 Igbo! ikpa'aje nya no yo aa
 Ee no nyo di dago alewa aa
 Omakwu oi ka'Aibe
 Oje no bogo eno bogo egwa
 Eno ge nya 'anyakwoche mla'aibe
 Otote no ge kwe Eje mla abo ancha
 Agaba no la' abo nandla ne'eche mlo ola
 Alo ga inyobu ko' iche ee
 Aipolo le' eje te nyi ee
 Emi no owo nyo
 Lo owo bi gla lo
 Lo owu bobi kpowu ge che-che
 Eje'alekwu koi le ebo-ebo.

ENGLISH:

Heaven and the earth
 The land has grown the mighty

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

So the audience of this type of performance is only the traditional custodians of these magical and formulaic expressions and selected members of Alekwu cult. Albert Mosley gives the catalogue of those that we can regard as the real poets of the incantatory poetry as those who are members and practitioners of a particular belief system who carry out certain religious and cultural functions on behalf of the members of the community. To this end, as in the case of religion, people look for forces that can rescue them and make their existence possible and peaceful. Idoma Incantatory poetry associated with magical apparatus serves the same purpose. We can then recall

what J.S. Mbiti refers to as the "vital force" in the survival of the human beings. There are many ways in which incantations provide this safety value for human existence. To the Idoma people, incantatory poetry serves the following function:

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

4.2.4 Idoma Oral Traditional Praise Poetry

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

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

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

IDOMA:

Aje loi nehi ma e e
 iii! Ogbobe' efu ka' alo
 Elo ma e e
 Oje noi boyena, boge' egwa
 Eno inye' nenche
 Mle' enehi
 Oto' ote noge kwe' Eje
 Mla' abo ancha
 Agala no la'abo nandra
 No' ola gbohi
 Oha' alo ta ga e e

Chorus:

Olo' ofu ka' alo
 Olo' ofu ka' alo
 iii! olo' ofu ka' alo
 Ga e e.

ENGLISH:

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

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

The poem as the one above and some others we will be looking at shortly, are performed by a court poet or courtesan by a bard or good imaginative and inventive speaker. Idoma oral praise poem is in some ways historical in some respect that it deals with a historical character, his deeds, behaviour, his clan, those associated with him, the places he has been and the realities of the

period in which he lived. To buttress this point, let us still look at another poem chanted for the same character by one of the Alekwu-afia in one of the festivals in Umogidi community:

IDOMA:

Ole Okwutachi

Abo no ya aa

Aje Oma alo gbela to

Aje no mo ma kunu afleyi aa

Onya nehi

Ene nehi ka alo

Eyijum onya ka' Aibe

Otu ole kunu a' aleche he ta

Oma ko' Oche K'alo

Alo to aho nya

Eko noyi aa le jle echa' ahapa aa

Elo' Ojo ke' efu gwo

Efu nya? Efu ko' Onya kau Fulani

Ohi gbo' oyei kuwa aa

Odun dache kwi inya ikwu

Eko ne loju ju mla mli wa aa

Ka kwo ohonye ta ka lo

Itu gi' ipenkpo aa

Ko jega luwa kwinyaq gwao olela kuwa ta

Amanche, Ene ache

Onya ka oba dodu

Ofa nana nepla' anu gbo gbo aa

Ee noke kwo' Omakwu itayi nu ipi ikpa

Ee ninye efu oi kwu

Ene! Ogbo' gbu ka' alo

Ene! Olo' ofu

Ene! Ohonye ta ka' ache.

ENGLISH:

At Okwutachi

There it happened

The land that leaves much to be imagined

The land that first witnessed

And heralded the people's emancipator

The doggedness of a mother

The strength of a woman

Eyijum wife of Aibe

Her courage resulted to people's freedom

The mothering of the people's legend

To you we owe many thanks

When the child (Omakwu) turned seven days

There rang a bell of war
 Which war? The Fulani "horse war"
 For their dear life
 Everybody ran away
 After dinging-donging among themselves
 For the people's freedom fighter
 To be cast into the river
 To enable them hide away from their enemies
 The mother of children
 The wife of all husbands
 Resisted after several chivvy
 She then hid him (Omakwu) inside the calabash
 While the migration continued

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

Through the motifs found in the above poem, we have been given an insight into the socio-cultural experiences of the community of birth of the subject of praise which is Okwutachi and circumstances surrounding his birth. Through its constituent elements of allusions, events, oblique references, we also see in the above poem record of the migration history of the Umogidi people. To this end, it is not out of place to assert that, the praise poem fuses narrative with praise. It also

fuses imaginative inventiveness with historicity. For instance, it has been established in the above poem that sometime in history, the Fulani people invaded the Okwutachi community which was a settlement in the old Apa kingdom where the entire Idoma people migrated from, to their present place of settlement. So through the poem too, we have come to know that the migration of Idoma from Apa in the old kwararafa confederacy was caused by the war they fought with the Fulani people in what was called "the horse war".

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

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

1. It boosts the morale of individuals who are adjudged good, patriotic and nationalistic in the society. At the same time, it indicts individuals that violate and contradict the ethics and values of the society.

2. It serves as records for the historical life, and experiences of the people for improvement on the social, cultural, economic and political life of the communities. This is the great relevance of Idoma oral tradition to the study of her history.
3. It affords Idoma people a very effective medium for praising, consulting, involving and requesting for favours from the supernatural forces.
4. It affords the elderly members of the community opportunities to display their knowledge of the history and culture of the people, for educating the young generation.
5. It enables the members of the community to exhibit their artistic talents in oral composition, performance and language of expression.
6. The budding generation is able to imitate good qualities demonstrated by some objects of praise and shun those that are inimical to their growth and that of the society.

4.3 Idoma Oral Traditional Dramatic Poetry

In Idoma oral tradition, it is difficult to find any particular genre of oral poetry that is not performative or dramatic. This is because the orality itself which is central to performance is an action, since it concerns a person or persons, and because it contains a distinct development or revelation such as articulation and voice modulation as well as physical body movement. In his *Poetics*, Aristotle suggests that drama originated in the rendition of this kind of poetry. Here, there is a lead singer; a masked Alekwu who leads and responds to the chorus as a character in the midst of three members of Ichicha group who form the chorus. They squat in circle having broken calabashes in their hands, clapping each of them to the earth as they sing the chorus. What goes on here is indeed, ritualistic. This is performed only when someone dies and Alekwu and Ichicha

are to perform the ritual to appeal the spirit of the dead ancestors to open the road for the dead to roam freely from the world of the living to the world of the living-dead.

IJAMATA SONG

IDOMA

Leader: Umogidi moyi ee

Lemi ijamata yogo

Chorus: Ijamata mali' igwu

No male' eye ee

Leader: Omakwu moyi ee

Lemi ijamata yogo

Chorus: Ijamata mali' igwu

No male' eye ee

Leader: Oika Aibe moyi ee

Lemi ijamata yogo

Chorus: Ijamata mali' igwu

No male' eye ee

ENGLISH

Leader: Umogidi gave birth ee

To Locust plenty

Chorus: Locust gave to guineacorn

And gave birth to millet ee



Chorus singing IJAMATA SONG during the adaptation of Onuigbo Mlo Oko epic

Leader: Omakwu gave birth ee

To Locust plenty

Chorus: Locust gave to guineacorn

And gave birth to millet ee

Leader: The son of Aibe gave birth ee

To Locust plenty

Chorus: Locust gave birth to guineacorn
 And gave birth to millet ee

This is dramatic because the poets (Alekwu and Ichicha group) reveal the communal thoughts and emotions through the song with an added force and vividness. In this performance, the members of Ichicha cycled Alekwu on profile. And as Anyebe speaks of Aja Dance, the muscles of their bodies act on the kinesthetic process, the entire bodies are propelled forward by the constant jerking of the bodies toward the direction the lead singer (Alekwu) desires. Some of the Ichicha women turn in place, or around the lead singer who also makes a spontaneous turn around while the audience joins the chorus. This is in consonance with W.B Worthen's observation that in the *Poetics*, Aristotle suggests that "drama originated in the singing of the dithyrambic choruses whereby a masked actor was first used to respond to the chorus as an individualized 'character' in the mid-sixth century BCE" (15). The emphasis is on the qualities that make the singers appropriate exponent of philosophy being expressed. Among the audience, there is the feeling that, there exists another world where one dies and goes to live, other than this one we are living in. This is the philosophy of life-after-death. It is a common belief among Idoma that there is the continuation of existence after death, regardless of whether or not that continuation is indefinite. To them, an essential part of an individual's identity or consciousness continues to exist after the death of the body. This, the people believe, takes place in a spiritual realm, and in their view, the individual may be reborn into this world and begin the life cycle over again. This is reincarnation which is equally found among Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Sikhs, etc.

The Alekwu poet also performs dramatic monologue. In this case, the audience accepts the speaker as someone who is accurately and honestly revealing his or her inmost thoughts. A typical example of this is a poem performed by Alekwu-afia during one of the Eje-Alekwu festivals in Umogidi community of Otukpo L.G.A in Idoma land entitled *Inspiration*.

As stated earlier, the poem was performed by Alekwu of Abah in Umogidi community during the Eje-Alekwu festival in 2010. The festival creates an avenue for all the Ekwu-afia to come out and compete among them who possesses the greatest power of oratorical skill. This is in line with Deranty's assertion that the substantial significance of Kant's 'Copernican revolution' which states that history, philosophy and other ideas go behind literature to bring out a more concrete meaning of whatever study carried out in literary discourse and that the most important elements in textual analysis is discovering how the text was formed.

The Ekwu-afia finds it necessary to first of all seek the protective and inspirational power of his great ancestor before meeting his competitor. The puzzle here is that, is the poet who is Alekwu of Abah really referring to the competition he is about to enter with his fellow Alekwu afia or the invocation is a symbolic representation of the relationship between the man and his God who possesses the supernatural power to bless and protect? If the answer is in affirmation, then, the 'voice' in the poem represents any of such supporting powers or gifts from God that man needs to overcome life's threatening challenges. This thought been expressed here is articulated in the people's pantheistic tradition, meaning Idoma people worship and draw powers from several gods like ancestral gods, earth gods, river gods and goddesses. These different gods are in hierarchy looking at the way they are called:

IDOMA	ENGLISH
Owo-Icho	God in heaven [supreme God]
Owo-Kum	Ancestral gods
Owo-Aje	Earth gods

What happens here reminds one of Akporobaro's view that:

The uncertainty principle in life which leads man to worship, sacrifice, adoration, prayers and songs has generated unique forms of performance or recitative poetry. The Orikis of the Yoruba people, the prayers of the Dinka and the Psalms of David are culturally differentiated forms of poetry which established the link between poetry experience and the local environment (240).

The poet communicates with ancestors, deities, gods and goddesses and like the above poem, the rendition is mostly performed during the rituals and sacrifices that are accompanied on many occasions by chants, songs, incantations, musical elements and dramatic oral performances. To an Idoma man, these are very necessary elements for properly locating the importance of these supernatural forces. It is necessary to point out too that the liturgical system or mode of worship in traditional Idoma societies is organized around the survival of man. This survivalist tendency in the poem brings one to the question of reality and being-ness. So the uncertainty principle in human existence pushes the Idoma people to seek for protections of the forces they believe control the universe.

My interest however lies in the fact that since in this kind of performance the content is not just revealed but re-enacted with due resources of vocal modulation, histrionic movements, and so on, the result is not simply poetry but dramatic poetry. Also in the content and context of this oral poetry performance, one other factor that reinforces the element of the dramatic is the active participation of the audience both in terms of an emotional dialogue (i.e. an interplay of intentionality) and of overt gestures like occasional questions or other kind of interjections. This leaves one with an impression that Alekwu of Abah has mastered the art of moving and disposing the traditional materials of his compositions in such a way as to impose in his audience responses preferred by himself. The effect of his mastery can be observed in the emotions of pleasure written largely on the faces of his listeners, and in their comments. Of course, few listeners can fail to applaud a singer who can offer so much variety in any performance from so rich a repertoire as that expressed by Alekwu of Abah.

Also in Idoma oral dramatic poetry, the persona directly addresses other characters, who are also affected by the incidents taking place and who help motivate the persona's reactions and train of thought. In this case, other characters are members of Alekwu cult whose message the speaker is delivering to the gods. This can be seen in an invocation poem *Inspiration* rendered by Alekwu of Abah to seek protective powers of his ancestors. This is an invocation that begins a particular epic poem among Idoma people entitled *Kwararafa* which is rendered by Alekwu-afia who acts as a narrator seeking the creative inspiration from his ancestors to weave stories of the people's migration history and the exploits of their leader, Idu.

4.4 The Poetics of Idoma-Alekwu Oral Poetry Genre.

At the beginning of this chapter, the study classified Idoma oral traditional poetry into Narrative, Lyric and Dramatic poetry. The question however remains: how does Idoma oral poetry fits into these conventional classification domains without distorting the original forms and structures of the oral poetry recognizable by the people. A question like this begs for scholarly attention because of indicting opinions of Europeans who conducted research into African oral literature earlier. Finnegan for instance observed that a considerable amount of work has been published on the subject of African oral literature in the last century or so. Okoh asserts that; “For the literary scholar in general and the critic in particular, any analysis of literature necessarily involves such points of interest as the meaning or theme, structure, or form of the particular piece of writing” (4). Therefore to start with, poetry itself as a genre of literature is named “ikpela ije” by which is literally translated as “the seed-word of song”. It is called so because Idoma people believe that poetry is metaphorical which suggests that when the word(s) are dropped, they are expected to germinate into a new form (tree). What this means is that the language of Idoma traditional poetry has both denotative and connotative meanings. While the original (initial) expressions (seed-words) are denotative, the later form (new meaning) is the connotation of the seed-words.

This suggests the figurativeness of the traditional oral poetry of Idoma. It is equally a testament to the people’s conception of poetry tilting in the direction of pragmatic theory which sets a poem in a means – end relationship, regarding the matter and manner of imitation as instrumental toward achieving certain effects in the reader. Therefore the Alekwu poet who recites the poem entitled *Inspiration* has his audience in mind. The poem reveals the mystical/spiritual properties of the Idoma environment. The mystic nature of the river in Idoma tradition is represented in the poem

by the Alekwu afia's expression of utmost faith in the powers of his ancestors represented by "Entekpa" and "Ogabakpa" streams to turn around his life and bring luck and fortunes to his endeavours.

Metaphorically, the lines "Entekpa stream give me voice" are loaded with images and symbols that connote something else. The "voice" in the above line is a signifier which the signified is a body of skills and abilities that are obtained through seeking the protective powers of one's ancestor. For, granting that language is the medium of poetry, the status of Idoma poems as linguistic production is nonetheless different from the status of ordinary language productions. Idoma oral poet finds it necessary to shift from the factual world of plain narration to the fictive experience to be subsequently evoked by both linguistic and extra-linguistic factors such as a good and charming voice by the poet. The others are the poet's facility with the language of poetry and his ability to use his body-face, trunk, arms and legs-as materials for the evocation of a fictive experience for his audience.

The poet of Idoma oral epic especially *Onugbo Mlo Oko* uses his voice and body to convey the emotions of the two characters: Onugbo and Okoh his brother. This is basic for the achievement of initial aesthetic harmony with the audience. These skills according to Ropo Sekoni;

Serve as devices for diverting the attention of the audience from the private thoughts and preoccupations to the experience of images that are being selected and organized by the narrator with the hope of transferring to the audience ideas about some aspects of the recurrent concerns of the narrator's community (141).

Cognitively, the narrator of *Onugbo Mlo Oko* relates individual images to a theme or a comment on a specific aspect of human behaviour in his community. In the above epic for instance, the Idoma people through Alekwu-afia bemoans a brother who instead of celebrating his brother's success envies him to the point of killing him.

IDOMA: Moda na'anya ge ya aa

Oko oinem

Oko o! Oko !! Oko ajeega!!!

Eleele! Ehe!! Wuu!!!

Oda kun leje neeeeeee.

ENGLISH: See what anger can cause

See what envy can cause among brothers

“Oko my brother

Oko o! Oko !! Oko ajeega!!!

Eleele! Ehe!! Wuu!!!

Had I but known

It also shows how regrettable it is to kill someone as demonstrated in the last stanza of the poem when Onugbo hates even himself for the action of killing his own brother because he (Oko) outshines him in their hunting expedition. In other words, the diverse images in the epic or the units of behaviour externalized by characters in this narration suggest to the audience the

narrator's statement(s) about some of the recurrent concerns or values of the community. This reminds us of Tillyard's attempt to establish the interconnections between literature and the general culture of a period. However, as a study hinged on the theory of New Historicism, the concern is to see this cultural history of Idoma people that is presented to us as unstable by viewing the past as impure which can only be availed to us in the form of 'representations'. Some of these concerns and values are such social issues as honesty, order, peace and respect for elders. Others found in the epic, for instance, are such ontological considerations as death, the purpose and dilemma of man's mission and struggle for survival, the origin and ultimate end of man.

In the epic, Oko exhibits the above mentioned values Idoma people promote and cherish. To start with, he demonstrates honesty in his dealings with his elder brother Onugbo.

IDOMA: Oko Ajeega Jogwugwu
 Onugbo mlo of Oko
 Onye tu nwa lu'nya
 Odi tu nwa lu'nya
 Onugbo gbo ho Oko oinenu igwu ee
 Oko ee! Oko ee!!
 Odi ya najenkpo bug am aa
 Oko degba'ehe! Wuuu'!!
 O ami jenkpo bu ano
 Ehe!
 Enkpo num anana aa

Agabi Idoma

Anyale motu ko'Onugbo

ENGLISH: Oko Ajeega Jogwugwu

Onugbo brother of Oko

Who caused the trouble?

What caused the trouble?

Onugbo began to call Oko his brother

Oko ee! Oko ee!!

Why have you spoilt the water for me

Oko shouted; "ehe! Wuuu!!

It was not I who muddied the water

Ehe!

The water which I saw just now"

Agabi Idoma

Anger boiled in the heart of Onugbo

He told him an honest truth concerning the muddied water but his elder brother failed to believe him because of already accumulated hatred caused by envy, and killed him and later found out that what his younger brother (Oko) told him was the truth.

IDOMA: E negbe kunu ke kela kputu

Onugbo lo'Oko Oinenu mno e

ENGLISH: And his gun spoke kputuu

Onugbo has killed Oko his brother

He however, soon realized that his brother was not the one who muddied the water. This realization dawned on him when he later saw the white horse that truly muddied the water running out of the pond. This left him with serious regret for his action.

Oko's character represents peace, love, luck and honesty which the society cherishes, while Onugbo's represents hatred, envy, bitter jealousy and ill-luck. At the beginning of the story, the poet/narrator tries hard to let the audience know what the causes of the envy and hatred are; first, Oko kills fourteen lions while Onugbo kills seven grasshoppers. Knowing that his brother's blessings are more than his, he refuses to celebrate it with his younger brother. As they proceed in their hunting, Oko kills an Elephant which aggravates more of Onugbo's anger. At this point, the two characters become thirsty of drinking water. Oko finds a pond and drinks his turn, but unfortunately a white horse ran into the pond before Onugbo's arrival. These show luck on the side of Oko and ill-luck on the side of Onugbo.

At this point, the narrator has achieved emotive satisfaction by manipulating the feelings of the audience through performance. This is so because, at this point, the audience sympathy is already with Oko but their emotions become aggravated when Onugbo shows envy and hatred for his brother for outshining him. Their emotions become stabilized again when luck shines on Oko for finding a water pond to drink from in the midst of thirst and dryness of throat. To achieve this, the

Alekwu poet/performer arranges his images in such a way that subsequent images fluctuate audience emotion. Therefore, there exists a fluctuation of audience sensation. This is attempted through the relationship existing between two images or sets of image which the audience is confronted with. In presenting these images, Alekwu-afia meanders through the crowd flagging his head-gear looking for his patron until he rests it on his shoulder while the audience claps with admiration as the performance progresses. For example, in this story of *Onugbo Mlo Oko*, Alekwu-afia raises the audience's expectation when he says;

IDOMA: Wuuu.....
 Ada no mum
 Ene no mum
 Eno chei kpa kpa, out ibium

ENGLISH: Wuuu.....
 The father that bore me
 The mother that bore me
 Sun is upright, night overtook me

The last line carries two nature images of "sun" and "night" who's patterning presents a gloomy picture of someone who is overwhelmed by trouble he never expects. But he (Alekwu-afia) fluctuates audience sensations or feelings by intermittently activating stabilizing or even depressing audience emotion in the subsequent stanza. He achieves this in stanza two when he states;

IDOMA: Odi tu nwalu lo'Onugbo mlo'Oko aa

Aine epa
 E pia toha nehi
 Odan ko'Onugbo imo'Oko n
 Oge ga dodu n
 Odi tu nwalu nya aa
 Nwalu ko'Onugbo mlo'Oko nya

ENGLISH: What caused trouble between Onugbo and Oko?

The two brothers

Very close brothers

If Onugbo did not see Oko

He would not go anywhere

What caused this trouble?

This trouble between Onugbo and Oko

At this point, the audience tensions are doused but quickly heightened when the narrator/poet performer asks rhetorical question; “what caused this trouble”? Pointing at members of the audience even though he never expects reply.

The artiste at this point arranges his images and stanzas in such a way that they circumscribe the perception of the audience. The poet also diversifies his images to vary audience emotion to move the story towards a complete closure but also to create a cognitive focus for the audience vis-à-vis the performer's preoccupation. Correspondingly on the emotive side, the performer aligns the images constituting his story in such a manner that he moves the emotion of his audience back

and forth on a spectrum of expectancy that is characterized at the one extreme by activation, in the middle by stabilization and at the other extreme by depression. In the epic, when Alekwu-afia announces the killing of fourteen lions by Oko, the audience sensation is activated as such blessings arouse their feelings and excitements. The audience sensation gets depressed when we hear through the authorial view-point that “Onugbo boiled inside of him”. The poet, in order to stabilize this depressed sensation created by this character’s ugly reaction to his younger brother’s blessings, introduces a conflict requiring resolution strategy. He, Alekwu-afia does this by presenting for the audience a new image of “Onugbo killing seven grasshoppers”. This gives additional, but not conflicting, information about an already activated or depressed sensation.

In other words, the sensation of the audience at the beginning and end of every stanza when a new image is introduced during the performance is stabilized and remains exactly as it was before the supply of a new image. From the first to the last stanza, the study finds out that conflict-resolving images depress sensation.

Conflict is therefore a major source of tension in this Idoma-Alekwu oral performance. Its substance is in the movement of images or episodes from the conception of conflict of interest over how one character is outshining the other to the partial resolution of the conflict conceived at the fifth stanza when Onugbo killed seven grasshoppers. It is however important to point out that this is not the major conflict. In consonance with this, Sekoni asserts that;

While a story is successfully completed when its major conflict is resolved, tension is increased and diminished in the course of a story by the creation of minor conflict that serves as the main axis of the story. The conception and resolution of such minor

conflicts are devices for the manipulation of audience experience during a narrative-performance (143).

Therefore, the major conflict in the epic is the water pond controversy. At this point, the audience experience of the whole story has developed into a climax.

“Onugbo my brother
 The water is muddied
 Still, you should cool your heart
 When we have hunted for a while
 We shall come upon another pond”
 Anger still boiled in the heart of Onugbo
 He turned away
 And Oko continued hunting

We come to see this conflict at the middle of the story, yet there are other conflicts at the initial like the unequal blessings of the two characters through the killing of fourteen lions by Oko and followed by Onugbo’s killing of seven grasshoppers. At the middle however, we find another minor conflict bedding the major one.

Then Oko turned away
 Oko continued hunting
 Oko’s gun spoke kputuu

Oko has killed a Leopard
 For the honour cleansing of face
 Oko shouted;
 Onugbo my brother, come quickly oo
 For I have killed a leopard
 Come and clean my face
 Onugbo ran: cha! cha!! cha!!!
 Oko you killed a leopard?
 But you were the one who muddied the water
 Anger continued to boil in the heart of Onugbo.

Oko's killing of Leopard (more blessing) aggravates the already existing anger in the mind of Onugbo towards his younger brother, caused by jealousy and bitter envy. This prompts Onugbo's action that finally pushes the conflict (major) to the point of highest tension. Here, Onugbo kills his brother Oko as exemplified in the following lines:

And his gun spoke kputuu
 Onugbo has killed Oko his brother.

At this point, the poet/narrator has succeeded in raising the emotion or feelings of the audience. He however finds it necessary to stabilize these feelings by dousing the already heightened tension as found in the following lines:

Onugbo turned back
And saw the white horses
Running after one another
Gbigidim! Gbigidim!! Gbigidim!!!
Before his very eyes
They ran into the water
Chagadam! Chagadam!! Chagadam!!!
Drank to their fill
And muddied it completely
Onugbo cried out;
Woo! Woo!! Woo!!!
See what anger and envy can cause among brothers
“Oko my brother
Oko o! Oko o!! Oko o!!! ajeaga!!!
Eleele! Ehe!! Wuu!!!
Had I but known”.

The audience are now relieved knowing that the truth has been revealed. Onugbo regrets his action and subsequently banished himself from returning home, to remain in the forest where he would be literally looking for his brother. To the audience, this is a deserving punishment as they

now feel relieved, as they assume members of the community where Onugbo would return, to kill him in place of his brother.

4.5 Challenges of Translating Idoma Oral Poetr from Vernacular to English

Translation is not merely a transformation of an original text into a literal equivalent, but must successfully convey the overall meaning of the original, including that text's surrounding cultural significance (Zawawy, 2).

One of the major problems one encounters in the translation of Idoma oral poetry from vernacular to English is the full retention and reflection of the sociological, cultural, historical and religious realities of Idoma society in the target- language (TL). Another is the problem of creativity in translation. At the beginning these challenges stirred me in the face like Zuma rock. To overcome this, I had to come up with novel strategies for dealing with these familiar or common problems, whether on the lexical, syntactic or formal levels. It is the challenges I encountered in applying these strategies in an attempt to translate the text of Idoma oral poems from the vernacular to their English equivalence to aid classification that this sub-chapter addresses.

For instance, in one of my fieldworks among the Alekwu-afia performers of Idoma speaking tribe of Benue state of Nigeria, one of the maskers told me that for one to comprehensively get the import or message in his recitation, the person must first of all put himself (mind) in a psycho-spiritual state as himself. This requires further explanation; for instance, members of Alekwu cult and even the entire members of the audience believe that the poems are warehoused in the memories of the maskers who perform them. The poems and even the impetus as well as the inspiration to perform are transferred to them by their ancestors. So in translating *Onugbo Mlo*

Oko for instance, I had to see myself like the actual performer to be able to represent the socio-cultural features found in the original texts of the source language (SL) in the target language (TL).

The oral poet employs the use of idiophones in the above poem which is performed at the funeral during the performance of the rite of passage by Alekwu-afia and Ichicha group. The artiste finds it necessary to establish rapport with his audience to raise their sensation and emotion.

Idoma Elee le le lee (ehe), ene no mum

Ada no mum ooo!!!

Aaaa! Aaaa!! Aaaa!!!

Eche! Eche!! Eche!!!

English: ele le le lee (alas) my mother who bore me

My father who bore ooo!

Aaaa! Aaaa!! Aaaa!!!

Earth! Earth!! Earth!!!

This suggests that something terrible has happened and the audience would want to know what it is.

The challenge here is how to represent these idiophonic sounds in target language. Getting their English equivalent helps the readers of the poem in the target language assume the same sensation as the audience who listened to the poem being performed in source language (SL). To overcome this, I decided to assume the personality of the poet and created an imaginary audience in mind. Therefore, I became focused on the detail by probing myself with such question as: why the use of such idiophones, what exactly do they mean, what are they doing in the stanza, what rhythmic effect do they add to the sound and register? I then began to find a way to replicate all that in

English; in fact, with the greatest precision possible. But at that, there are even some idiophones that their exact equivalent could not be found as shown in the above translation. No wonder Finnegan rightly observes that trying to translate live performance into written transcript is indeed to shortchange its vital multidimensionality. According to her, transferring a multi-faceted on-staged enactment into the simplex medium of writing may make a stab at capturing one dimension—writable words—but passes by those other elements in which it lives: “converting living species into museum exhibits” as Foley well expresses it. Correspondingly, a written script is surely a very different creature from the performance(s) into which it may ultimately be transformed. The two modes of realization—their means of existence—are simply not commensurate.

In spite of this, one thing remains certain, the translation has communicated the meaning as well as the beauty of expressions that readers of the target language understand effortlessly. Sometimes, I come across almost untranslatable words because of cultural differences between Idoma (SL) and English (TL). Such words of the source language in the poem *Onugbo Mlo Oko* is “Oko Ajeega joogwugwu”. The closest metaphoric expression in meaning to this in English is “Oko, the Lion in the jungle”, but it is not literally the exact equivalent of the former. Daniel Hahn shares similar experience;

Oh, all of it. Translation is impossible! And I don't just mean it is really really difficult, but really it is not actually possible. There is not a single word in any of the languages I translate that can map perfectly onto a word in English. So it is always interpretative, approximate, and creative. Anything that is, itself, a 'linguistic' quality will by definition being anchored in a particular language- whether it is idiom, ambiguity or

assonance. There is congruence between languages that are more closely related of course, but those relationships are very much in the minority (4).

Addressing this challenges Schleiermacher in Maria Sanchez begins by looking at the close relationship between language and thought:

On the one hand, all humans are under the sway of the language they speak; they and their entire thinking is product of that language, so that it is impossible to with complete clarity assume anything that lies beyond its boundaries (31).

The consequences of this is that target language readers cannot obtain a full understanding of such line as ‘Oko Ajeega Jogwugwu’ unless they can see the poet’s inimitable patterns of thinking and meaning available in Idoma socio-cultural contents of traditional literature, which are rooted in the traditional concept of the words. It is on this note that Okpewho points out the views of the cultural anthropologists that the process of translation is the process of the erosion of the contents germane to that cultural background. It becomes problematic according to cultural anthropologists because the aesthetic realization in the materials in terms of language and stylistic performance is difficult to be properly appreciated in translation. This to Finnegan is a significant issue. According to her, in the past this was only too often brushed aside. Thus performed African narrations were “reduced to writing and treated as if the simplified texts that resulted had captured their reality. In ways now much more fully appreciated, a failure to take account of the multidimensional ontology of performance is to transform it, misleadingly, into something quite other than its original realization” (45).

In this regard, Maria Sanchez queries; ‘does translation not seem a foolish undertaking’? In response, Schleiermacher takes into consideration a number of factors; for example, the level of familiarity that the reader of the target text may have with foreign languages and foreign cultures. But ultimately he is in no doubt about the goal of translation: “only one method, however, will usher us toward that goal-bringing the reader to the author” (31).

These whole propositions compound the problems I encountered in attempt to classify original texts of Idoma oral poetry performance into their separate types. This controversy exists even in my classification of Idoma oral narrative poetry into epic and ballad. For instance, *Onugbo Mlo Oko* which is described as epic in its target language texts is originally performed by Alekwu-afia during funerals at the rite of passage in accompaniment of Ichicha group. Among Idoma society, this is a dirge that epitomizes the final lamentation of Alekwu-afia before the final rite of passage. Here, Alekwu performs this to tell members of the audience that someone from the family is responsible for the death of the deceased, hence the expressions, ‘the maggot that kills the corn, comes from under the corn’, outside this contextual interpretation, the form and structure of this poem give it to narrative epic.

One thing however, remains certain; this particular poem yields itself to more than one genre of Idoma traditional oral poetry. As a narrative epic, there is a free and easy flow of narration where the length renders impossible exact memorization from frequent repetition. Even its rapidity of telling gives *Onugbo Mlo Oko* to the class of Idoma oral narrative epic. The events in the story are episodic in nature having the initial, middle and ending segmentations, thereby leading to the climax and denouement at the end. The context gives it to the class of Idoma traditional lyric poetry as a fixed dirge. This is so because the performance context of this type of Idoma dirge remains fixed as no addition or modification is accepted. However, the involvement of Ichicha

group who form a circle round Alekwu-afia (poet) dancing and singing Ijamata chorus as well as the zooming headgear and stick-like meandered dance movement of Alekwu himself gives the poem to the class of Idoma traditional dramatic poetry. This is equally the case with many other poems earlier classified according to the literary convention approved by the western canons.

In this way much of Idoma traditional Alekwu poems bear witness to what Raymond Williams has described in Anne McClintock as “the true crisis in cultural theory, that is, the conflict between the view of the work of art as object and the alternative view of art as a practice” (308). For the Alekwu poets, aesthetic value is neither immanent nor genetic but rather what Terry Eagleton has called “translative”, that is, “value for somebody in a particular situation which is always culturally and historically specific” (8). Therefore, the situation in which this *Onugbo Mlo Oko* is rendered gives it to the class of poetry known as Idoma traditional lyric poetry as a fixed dirge. Even the clapping of calabash on the ground during the performance which produces a certain kind of music in accompaniment of the rendition makes it a lyric and or dirge.

In more ways than one, Idoma Alekwu traditional poetry seen as fixed poses a serious challenge to notions of the poem as a freestanding creation, judged excellent if obedient to immanent rules radiating from within the craft. This is so because the ancestors of the people are seen as the patrimony of excellence who bequeathed to the poets from generation to generation the knowledge, skill and creativity to perform the poem.

It is on this note that this study makes bold to say that the profusion of Idoma-Alekwu oral poetry could not, however, be ignored; neither could it any longer be considered less than those profused by the western canons. Therefore, the nature of the people’s poetry conforms to some of the cherished values of the established aesthetic and also to the very idea of the western canon itself.

Meclintock however observes that, “critics became more vocal in their complaints: black poets were trampling on every property of the English, sacrificing formal decorum for the red haze of revenge lust and the ‘rat-rat-rat’ of machine guns of protest” (396).

It is however important to note that this study therefore, stands a distance from the Coleridgean sense of poetry as that which contains ‘within itself’ the reason why it is so and not otherwise was. In Idoma oral poetry like many others in Africa, oral poetry is focused on the performance in its social context on the function of the performance in society, almost to the exclusion of transmission of the text over time.

CHAPTER FIVE

5.0 CLASSIFICATION OF IDOMA ORAL TRADITIONAL POETRY ACCORDING TO THEMES & FUNCTIONS

5:1. History in the Context of Idoma Oral Poetry

Historiography, according to Tyson “must be based on the ‘objective’ analysis especially where history is characterized by linear chains of causal relationships. After all, cultures develop many myths about themselves, but no one mythos explains that” (25).

Therefore, through this study, Idoma ethnic group can be viewed as one which is shaped by events of their past and present. As a study hinged on new historicism, the focus is on revealing the historically specific model of truth and authority on Idoma people reflected in this epic entitled *Kwararafa*. The truth being spoken about in this text is that there existed cases of conquering and invasions for the sake of power and authority. It is learnt from the texts that “---- Kanejeji, the son of Yaji, King of Kano” invaded Apa, the capital of Kwararafa Confederacy, and took away able-bodied men into captivity to Kano Country and in return sent horses to the king of Kwararafa. According to the text, this invasion took the people unprepared at the time they had not developed their cavalry forces. After several years, they strengthened their military might and went through Zaria to capture the whole of Kano, “During which many of them flew to Daura”, “and we ate up the whole of the country”.

This agrees with a New Historicist, Michael Foucault’s assertion that “power circulates rather than descending vertically down a hierarchical system” (281). To this key theorist of the post-

structuralism movement, discourse like this present study allows negotiation of the exchange of power by establishing categories of regulated behaviours and norms. In the above story, the exchange of power between the king of Kano and Kwararafa is not achieved in an orderly manner, rather through military invasion and conquest.

What this means is that, to gain, regain and retain power one must fight and contest it. Therefore, it is believed by Idoma people, one of the inhabitants of this Apa Kingdom, that power is not given to someone for free. This is evident in the story told to the people by Idu, the putative ancestral father of the modern-day Idoma ethnic group of the central Nigeria. History as presented in this text by Idu is not a mere chronicle of facts and events, rather a complex description of human reality and evolution of preconceived notions held as tenet to those in Apa in Kwararafa confederacy. This is supported by Louis Montrose, a New Historicist, who asserts that “Literary works may or may not tell us about various factual aspects of the world from which they emerge, but they will tell us about prevailing ways of thinking at that particular time” (23).

The Idoma-Alekwu cultural and religious practices, through which this epic is originally narrated, thought of culture as a seamlessly unified system of meanings, which should not be disturbed by unorthodox or controversial voices. So the culture and practice of sending horses to a people after having captured their men into slavery as told by Idu in this text could be a myth spread by the ruling classes of that time in their own interest. Moreover, this kind of an appeal made to Apa people by the Kano King does not erase the pains their action has caused them especially that they had to launch a retaliatory attack which saw the whole of Kano country conquered and captured. This presents an aspect in which New Historicism borrows from post-structuralism. Post structuralism assumes that history was always ‘narrated’ and therefore the first sense of the events of the past is unreasonable and cannot be defended successfully.

After all, Alekwu Masquerade practice was first introduced according to history by a certain king in Idoma to control and subject his followers to respect and abide by the constituted authorities and laws of the land. It is a means of exerting power and authority over the people. Therefore, the events of the past presented here in this text by Alekwu-afia should be viewed as artistic material which can only be availed to us in the form of ‘representations’. It is in this light that this study differentiates itself from traditional biographical historicism, in which literature was seen as a (mimetic) reflection of the historical world in which it was produced.

And as a representation, this text captures the power tussle through regional as well as ethnic interests in Nigeria body-polity. In the text, the narrator, Idu presents Kanejeji the son of the king of Kano leading a troupe of fellow young men to conquer Apa. Beyond historical function, this oral epic helps us to understand that conquest is not a European idea of capturing of territories and kingdom alone, rather, it is something that existed and had existence in the African socio-political worldview too.

Althusser in Nyambane Monanti was right after all to have postulated that “a person’s desires, choices, intensions, preferences, judgments and so forth (Individual’s behaviour) are themselves products of social practices” (25). Though social practices, on their own, do not generate and transmit a community’s worldview, the constructing and transmitting of a worldview rather, Monanti et al postulate, “is achieved through the composing and performing of various artistic products of a community’s social practices such as song texts” (25).

The text under study, therefore, gives us ideas of social organization and political power play of Idoma society in particular and Nigeria, nay Africa in general. This interpretive attempt is in line

with the views of the deconstructionists that any discourse is bound to generate multiplicity of meanings. For instance, Derrida has observed that discourses generated by texts of art are “devoid of ultimate or fixed centres of meanings which result in the referring of the intended absolute meaning” (649-66). Another deconstructionist, Michael Foucault has argued that the meanings in texts result from discursive formations which are convoluted deep in the ideological arrangements of society. In plain terms, what the two deconstructionists are presenting to the scholarly world is that, in a text is to be found a multiplicity of meanings. Therefore, this study borrows the deconstructionists approach to arrive at the multiple meanings and discourses in the text, *Kwararafa* such as:

- i. The record of the people’s history and migration.
- ii. The events of conquest and political power tussle as part of the people’s worldview.

These are part of the meanings brought forth through textual analysis using a deconstructionist theory known as New Historicism.

The retaliation attack launched on the Kano people reflects the present day Nigerian political agitation whereby leaders of different regions and ethnic groups encourage and use their youths as militants and terrorists to score political points and even as bargain tools. Through the voice of the narrator we are informed that when the Kano army launched the first attack, the Apa people did not retaliate immediately because of weak and ununified force. This reason of disunity can be found in the following lines:

At the growth of Idu;

There come voices of common course

To unite them in creating a melody of sublime nobility

Instead of earlier divisive and fanatical cries of hatred.

Years later, the child is now a man

And there rang a bell of war

This presents Idu and his birth as symbols of new beginning and unity of purpose. He is portrayed as a mono-mythic hero though there existed a historical Idu who was the putative ancestral father of Idoma ethnic group of central Nigeria who ruled in Kwararafa confederacy in Apa several centuries ago. The poet utilizes the faction philosophy: mixture of facts and fiction. The textual Idu is a creation of the imagination of the poet and although the “two men” closely resemble each other in their actions, they are not identical.

The text can also be seen as reflecting the helpless nature of Africans during the colonial invasion. The Kano force represents the European colonizers while the Apa people represent Africa and the Africans. It x-rays the sufferings, oppression, dehumanization and liberation struggle during colonialism. The conquering of Apa people into slavery in Kano equally epitomizes the same European colonial agenda who did same to Africans in their first contact. Jan Vansina has postulated that all literature is metaphor. This postulation is very important as far as the study of literature, especially oral poetry, is concerned. It in essence prepares one to undertake a deconstructive analysis of any work of art in order to uncover the many meanings underlying the metaphor which is literature. It is on the same note that Opatá postulates thus:

Literature, we are told, deals with life and has life as its raw materials. However, literature does not just record life as it is; for if it did, it would degenerate to sociology or journalism. When we talk about the concept of literary presentation, we are not just talking

about mere reportage. We are concerned with the utilization of various literary devices to present issues of interest to us. Literature works by indirection and its strength, and if you like, its superiority, lies in its ability to effectively comment on situation without resort to the actual naming of circumstances under consideration (130).

This assertion becomes apt and relevant in this discourse bearing in mind that the epic *Kwararafa* is a literary artifact whose dissection and analysis produces an objective history of Idoma during their stay in Kwararafa confederacy. Idu emerges, therefore, uniting Idoma people towards the war. He uses the story of his people's encounter with the kingdom of Kano to teach the people the meaning of unity and encouraged them that they could still overcome and defeat their present enemies.

The text equally reflects and presents the martial roles of youths in power seizure and retention as well as in maintaining and sustaining peace in Idoma nay Nigerian society. The role Kanejeji the son of the King of Kano played in the capturing of Kwararafa kingdom justifies the above proposition. A similar example plays itself out in the text when Idu emerges to encourage and raise the consciousness of his people about the need to wake up and fight for their freedom and defense.

5.2. Functions of Environment in Idoma Oral Poetry

5.2.1 Introduction

Matters relating to the environment have dominated debate in academic space beginning from the twentieth to twenty first centuries across the globe. This has given birth to the postulation of notions of Ecocriticism by various ideologues. Understandably, the Idoma man's conceptions of

environment is quite different from that of the Western views as shown by the analysis of the selected oral poetry in Idoma, as Alekwu poets who recited them employ poetic and literary devices like personification and metaphor in pointing out the roles of environment in the lives of people.

In this instance, the researcher seems to agree with Sa'eekat Aliyu's notion of "African Literary Environmentalism". According to Firdaws Ibrahim, Aliyu advocates this as a means of "establishing a systematic methodology of environmental analysis grounded within the African cultural context" (30) which she says recognizes "the relevance of a human centred environmental perspective in African Literature" (Aliyu, 16). She justifies this notion by reiterating that:

The existing models of environmental study reveal that the focus being solely on the preservation of the environment for the environment's sake is opposed to the functionalist perception of the environment in African societies, which also advocated the preservation of the environment from a human-centred perspective. (Aliyu, 16-77).

African Literary Environmentalism which Aliyu proposes as an alternative for the broad Western terminology of "Ecocriticism", according to Ibrahim, is defined, by the ideologue, "as a model of analysis which highlights Africa's cultural beliefs about the environment as possessing economic, spiritual, preventive, curative and mystic properties beneficial to human existence" (Aliyu, 77). It is on this note that theoretical proposition of Stephen Greenblatt in "New Historicism" readily comes to mind. He advocates that history and culture go behind literary objects or artifacts to make a text a complete whole. What this mean is that, in every work or literature, there exists the

history of people's culture and political ideology that define the era in which that text is written. Therefore, this study investigates the cultural history of Idoma people in relation to their environment through an examination of the keywords in the definition given by Aliyu, which include: spiritual/mystic, preventive/curative, as well as religious functions of environment in Idoma traditional poetry.

5.2.2 Spiritual/Mystical Properties of Environment in Idoma Oral Poetry

The spiritual/mystical realm is generally revered in the Idoma indigenous cultural setting, and the environment is believed to have its spiritual/mystic properties. This reverence of the environmental components is re-echoed with Mbiti's statement that:

It emerges clearly that for African peoples, this is a religious universe. Nature in the broadest sense of the word is not an empty impersonal object of phenomenon; it is filled with religious significance. Man gives life even where natural objects and phenomena have no life. (56 qtd in Ibrahim, 31)

Aliyu buttresses Mbiti's stance by explaining that he (that is Mbiti):

Stresses the highly religious nature of Africans which he identifies as the reason many environmental components, - trees, rivers, forests, the moon, the sun, hills and natural occurrences such as rainfall, earthquake and so on, are given spiritual or mystical interpretations (74).

These mystical/spiritual properties of the Idoma environment are what one Idoma–Alekwu poets depicts in his rendition titled *Inspiration*. The mystic nature of the river in Idoma tradition is represented in the poem by Alekwu-afia's expression of utmost faith in the powers of his ancestors represented by "Entekpa" and "Ogabakpa" streams to turn around his life and bring luck and fortunes to his endeavours.

The poet has demonstrated what G.E. Swanson describes as "Mana" which is a substance or essence which gives one the ability to perform tasks or achieve ends otherwise impossible. To the Alekwu poet of the above poem, "Ogabakpa stream", "Entekpa stream" and "Obobi of my father" possess the mystical power to increase his natural abilities and confer in him supernatural skills to help him overcome any challenge confronting him in life.

Therefore, Alekwu-afia creates an imagery of a "voice" which connotes a body of skills and abilities which are obtained through seeking the protective powers of one's ancestor. Access to these powers is acquired, that is as a gift or through the performance of appropriate rendition as the one above.

The poem is dramatic especially in its reliance on soliloquy, in the sense that, the poet is speaking to himself or better still to a spirit that is not physically present. What concerns this study is the mystical power that the poet has ascribed to three elements of nature and environment such as Entekpa, Ogabakpa and Obobi. It is believed that, thereafter the prayer and exposure to the elements, a spirit might come and teach him (Alekwu-afia) a song or dance or might tell him that he would find some plant or animal which would, thereafter, be a source of good luck.

He, Alekwu afia or poet sees life as a hunting contest. And to him, if he acquires the mystical and protective powers of these elements, he would become like a lion in a hunting contest. The metaphor, “what a lion in a hunting contest” epitomizes the fact that after acquiring these powers, nobody else can either defeat or challenge him in anything. The Idoma people would employ these powers to bring success in love or in hunting, to improve their performances as warriors, to heal their sickness or to aid them in their other endeavours.

This poem is also performed and rendered when an individual or a community is threatened with certain ailments or diseases that demand spiritual intervention, cleansing or purification. To this end, the chief priest seeks the mystical and spiritual powers of his ancestors which he believes reside in those natural elements mentioned earlier in the poem. The poet personifies these elements and makes them assume human proportion as if to say, they are human or living beings that possess the power to give to the poet the mystical and spiritual powers he needs to solve the problems confronting either him as an individual or the entire community.

In some cases, the prayers offered in this poem could make these supernatural spirits show the poet/priest some natural objects which he would incorporate into a medicine bundle, a convenient form in which to carry his talisman at all times, such bundles could be purchased by those who lacked a spirit’s visitation or who wanted to add to the charms which they owned. In this case, the spirits confer in the poet/priest certain rituals or objects which enable him to provide these mystical and protective powers to protect himself and other members of the community.

Therefore, these mystical and protective powers that the ancestral spirits provide through this nature elements as exemplified in the poem, may be directed toward the achievement of the individual's purposes or those of a group. In either case, they are substances which must be infused with human intentions or the intentions of spirits before their potentialities are realized. What this suggests is that the "voice" in the poem connotes these mystical and spiritual powers while the nature elements are believed by the Idoma people warehoused the power of the ancestors. This is so because, the people believe that the earth for example where these ancestors were buried when they died is where their power resides.

This brings us to the questions like, how, for example, does mystical/protective power of the ancestor as shown in the poem differ from a medical injection or a machine which enables men to do what formerly was impossible? How does the nature of the ancestor among the Idoma spirits differ from that of unusually strong or capable people who can master problems which can not be solved by others?

The anthropologist Malinowski has taken great pains to answer these questions by showing that primitives distinguish between the supernatural and other forces. According to him,

Behind natural events lies the supernatural a realm of potentialities and purposes of which natural events are but concretions or artifacts which are expressions of the potentialities and purposes held by the men who produce them (1).

Let us suppose that Idoma ancestral spirit represents the potentialities which underline nature as shown in the poem. The powers represented by the "voice" in the poem which in Idoma belief is

given by the spirits as “Ogabakpa stream” , “Entekpa stream” and “Obobi of my father” represent organized clusters of the underlying purposes.

These potentialities available in Idoma ancestral spirits serve a variety of purposes in the lives of the people. For instance, an individual activates the possibilities embodied in these transcendent conceptions, and thus influences the natural world by changing the supernatural. These spirits represent purposes and possess immediate access to the potentialities which underlie nature, and that can also manipulate natural events.

When he is confined to the world of nature, an average Idoma man believes he will be unable to produce what he wants merely by having the desire to do so, by informing the order with his purposes. Instead he must act upon it directly. He must create changes in the material universe which, of themselves, produce yet other changes until his objective is reached. At no point do his ideas or purposes, as such, intervene to change the environment. They must, in every case, be implemented by material action in the material world or that world remains as it was.

5.3 Migration, Child Vulnerability and Power in Idoma Oral Poetry

5.3.1 Migration and Child Vulnerability

Discourse on migration is a very complicating one considering its multidisciplinary nature and the dynamics of displacement are complex and often inter-connected. What are the repercussions of migration for the sending and the receiving economies, for the migrant themselves, for their families, are themes that invite inter-disciplinary enquiry. Reasons such as political unrest and armed conflict are associated with both Idoma first and second migration experiences from either

Apa I to Apa II and even to their present location. These are evident in the both texts I am using in this study. The texts are *Kwararafa* and *Okwutachi* respectively.

Even though there exists voluntary migration and forced migration, this present study finds all available textual evidences in support of the later. This is because, Idoma people in all instances as presented by the poets of these two texts find themselves migrating from one location to other because of political uncertainties or flight from persecution or conflict.

It is generally acceptable that minors are in a vulnerable position when unaccompanied or separated by their parents. This is evident in *Okwutachi* when Omakwu after seven days of delivery was to be abandoned and thrown into the river to prevent his cry from exposing the migrants of their hide out.

When the child (Omakwu) turned seven days
 There rang a bell of war
 Which war? The Fulani “horse war”
 For their dear life
 Every body ran away
 After dinging-donging among themselves
 For the people’s emancipator
 To be cast into the river.
 To enable them hide away from their enemies

This explains the dangerous and traumatizing experience minors all over the world go through during forced migration as the one above. In a time like this, the babies, minors and children are seen as constituting a nuisance to the adults from escaping danger and migrating to safer place

since it is the families of these babies and kids or other caregivers that play important roles in protecting their physical and emotional well-being.

In the text, Eyijum, the mother of Omakwu disagreed with the people over their decision to cast the baby into the river. She provides both emotional and physical protection for the baby by hiding him in an enclosed calabash while they continued in their migration. Even though she has shown the best of the care she could give at this time, but her action yet amounts to other forms of abuse of the baby's right to free air and quality health services. No wonder it is a common knowledge that refugee children may also face the risk of detention, sexual exploitation or abuse, violence, military recruitment, forced labour, human trafficking or lack of access to school, health services and basic assistance (Ruxton, 20; UNHCR, 25). So Omakwu as a baby is vulnerable because of lack of these needs and risks as demonstrated in the text. UNHCR defines vulnerability as the presence of such factors that increase the chance of exposure to risks such as physical and mental abuse. Risks can therefore be broadly defined as "conditions that increase the likelihood of negative developmental outcomes" (Brooks – Gunn, 104).

This study therefore, sees the texts as historical artifacts that emerge among particular social, political, and economic circumstances in Idoma society. For instance, there is overwhelming evidence in the text, *Kwararafa* that five totemic groups, three of which became royal kindreds in their new homeland, were involved in Idoma earliest migration led by Idu, the putative ancestral father of the modern Idoma. These totemic groups were the Owuna bird, the Black and Red monkey (all royal) and two Crocodiles. This is in consonance with Erim's view that the voice of tradition;

. . . is unanimous that this early phase was provoked by the endless unrest generated there by constant raids in which a large number of horses were used against them. The unanimity of this view is evident from the tradition which is typical of those recorded in many parts of Idoma land (23).

More important to me in this discourse is the perspectives and existential concerns of power or group such as the Kwararafans, the Zarians, the Kanonians, and the Bornonians who were marginalized or unrepresented within that Kwararafa in particular and the larger Northern political circle or discriminated against because of their gender, ethnicity, religion, or social class. This attempt argues its relevance by regarding the views of the cultural conservatives that literature serves the purpose of disseminating the cultural heritage and values that are the foundation of political and social institutions. This is because the historical account of the literary works of Idoma-Alekwu poetry, for instance, did serve this purpose adequately.

5.2.2 The Power Discourse

The study views *Okwutachi* for instance as a legendary poem for Omakwu which gives an insight into the social cultural experiences of the community of birth of this subject of praise which is Okwutachi and circumstances surrounding his birth. But as a study hinged on New Historicism of Stephen Greenblatt and Michael Foucault, the concern is on seeing the texts as symbols and metaphor whose dissection contributes to the distribution of social energy by which I mean the intensities of experience that give value and meaning to life and that are also indispensable to the construction of self-awareness and identity among Idoma people.

It is unarguably clear from the text that Kwararafa was a confederacy populated by several ethnic groups. With the collapse of the northern marches of the confederacy and the mass exodus of people to establish the new capital at Apa, the Idoma, the Jukun and the Abakwariga (Hausa people) struggled for power and this was reflected in the transfer of the capital first to Kororofa, then to Puje and finally to Wukari. At Jukun hegemony was assured and this explains why all kings are still confirmed there and why the place holds a special, almost sacred position in Jukun thinking. The following lines from *Kwararafa* explain that;

We are the Kwararafans
 Yes we are
 Apa is our capital
 Where our king ruled
 And received tributes
 From kings of our neighbours
 Suddenly, the forces from Borno
 Overran the capital and took the
 able – bodied away.
 The capital then moved
 To Kororofa, then to Pujue
 And finally, to Wukari.

It must however be remembered that until later in history, the Jukun state as recorded in the above lines did not form a majority of the Kwararafa population. By the later take-over of Wukari, the multi-ethnic confederacy had shrunk to a Jukun state. The political upheavals were almost constant as a result of the infiltration of the Jukun, midway. This is evident by the poet's view in

the above lines that “We are the Kwararafans” meaning the Jukuns were the later entrants into the confederacy. This series of events and constant change in leadership and seat of power indicates the shrinking of the protective umbrella of Kwararafa which is in turn provoked the southern migration away from the troubled areas.

Subsequently the text equally proves that what the Idoma mean by referring to Apa as their ancestral homeland is a geographical location. It has no bearing with their ancestral origin. This clarification becomes important as shown in the text by the poet because the Jukun took over Apa and a major sub-group became known as Wapa or the people of Apa. However, the Idoma evidence in the poem suggests that the name “Apa” pre-dated the Jukun invasion and was not associated with the Jukun but with the ancestors of many Idoma, Alago, Igbira and Igala, who claim Apa origins. More over *Wapa* in Idoma literal interpretation is “come into Apa”. Therefore, this supports the view of the poet that Apa was already in existence and populated by others before the arrival of Jukun people. The question however remains; where did the Jukun migrated from to join these other groups in Apa? This is scantily flashed on in the succeeding episode of this epic where the narrator mentioned Jukun as those who migrated from around Ogoja and Calabar in Cross River State through the Southern flank of Kwararafa confederacy to displace the Abakwariga and took over the headship of Apa.

Upon the basis of different situations within society, then, people are likely to develop different interests and this will inevitably lead to conflict over many issues. This is a major grouse the New Historicists have against the formalists. They believe in the re-situation of literary text in the historical context and redefinition of literary studies in terms of an activist agenda which was basically committed ideologically to the aim of subverting the hierarchies of power. It is on this note that this study challenges the historical claim among the Jukuns that Apa was their ancestral

homeland. There are reasons in the text, *Kwararafa* to believe this, but how am I sure that this is not a deliberate creation or historical invention to support the ideological power structure of the Jukun's ruling class in their own interest. This shows that there is inequality amongst groups of people that populate that confederacy with respect to power, and a group like the Jukun as recorded in the text has proved to be powerful, therefore, they can impose their will on others.

Therefore, history to me in this study should be viewed from a neutral position. More so, how did Idu become the leader or Oche of Idoma people in Apa? Is it not curious that in a segmented and egalitarian society such as the Idoma during their stay in Apa there should emerge an institutionalized leadership? Idu emergence could be attributed to "a father-figure" philosophy. It could also be attributed to the fact that he possessed attractive qualities and charisma which made others choose him as their leader. Textual evidence is in support of the latter option.

In the text Idu is a character who inspires his people to stand up in defense of their father land. He cites instances of similar war which their ancestors fought and lost and later fought again and won. So he is a symbol of unity and strength. These qualities may have attracted him followers and wielded for him some degree of influence. To Read, who is strongly identified with this school of thought, charisma wins because in a tradition-oriented society, it is the autonomous individual, superior as leaders, who usually win out. In other words, the emergence of the Oche among the Idoma should be traced to the existence of a charismatic leader who over the years attracted a number of followers who later recognized him and his descendants as their leader.

There is also a textual evidence in support of the view that the prevalence of warfare in Apa could have led to the emergence of military leader like Idu who would in turn develop a military institution to help his people. According to Spencer, if warfare is endemic in any society,

otherwise disparate groups unite against the common foe and if the threat to the existence of the group is continuous a war leader or his “governing centre” will emerge. This is clearly a classic combination of the conflict theory with that of the social contract. Thus, Spencer sees successful warfare as a major factor in state formation. He asserts that headship of a conquering chief has been a normal accompaniment of that political integration without which a high degree of social evolution would have been impossible. “Only by an imperative need for combination in war were primitive men led into co-operation and only by subjugation to imperative command was such co-operation made efficient” (24).

CHAPTER SIX

6.0

CONCLUSION

Orality is the use of speech, rather than writing, as means of communication, especially in communities where the tools of literacy are unfamiliar to the majority of the population. A piece of Idoma oral poetry is created through performance be it a song or a narrative poem told or recited by an Alekwu oral performer. This study has shown that, this act of performance is an aesthetic means of expression which does not need validity from the literary. This means extending the concept of literary expression to include many unwritten forms of Idoma oral poetry. Orality, among the Idoma therefore, connotes the unity of all oral artistic forms held together by performance. Meanwhile, Idoma oral performance also draws on visual resources. For instance, Alekwu maskers' dramatizations of various actions/issues in their renditions as well as the red and black colours of their costume support the above assertion. This dramatization of actions makes the Poems assume the proportion of life, even though they are purely imaginative arts.

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

Primarily, the study found out that Idoma oral poetry is classified into three taxonomical domains; oral narrative poetry such as epic and ballad; oral lyrical poetry such as funeral song (elegy / dirge), song of

praise to the king (Ode), and invocation to the gods (incantatory & religious poetry); and oral dramatic poetry. Subsequently, it was discovered that the texts of Idoma oral poetry are products of a historical context through which the people's cultural and intellectual histories are comprehensively understood. The epics for instance, reflected the movement of Idoma people from Kwararafa confederation to their present location. The study further exposed certain vital functions of oral performances among the people such as entertainment, awareness, socialization, language skills, and political as well as religious-cultural values. The study found out that Idoma past history can only be availed to us in the form of 'representations' which the epics, *Kwararafa* and *Okwutachi* aptly represented. These narrative poems, or the 'representations', is viewed as a network of material practices. It was found out too that Idoma past history was 'narrated' and therefore the first sense of the events of the past were unreasonable and cannot be defended successfully with a discourse of this nature. Infact, a unified history or harmonious culture, like during the reigns of *Idu* in Apa in Kwararafa confederation, was a myth spread by the ruling classes of that time in their own interests. However, the study pointed out that the true Idoma history and socio-cultural ideology can only manifest themselves in the above literary productions and discourse. This study therefore, concludes that the texts of Idoma oral poetry are historical artifacts that emerge among particular social, political, and economic circumstances in Idoma society. It investigated the "voices"- the perspectives and existential concerns- of power or group, in order to find out who were marginalized or unrepresented within that Kwararafa political circle or discriminated against because of their ethnicity, religion, or social class. Hence, the investigation of such topical issues as; Idoma history in their oral poetry, functions of environments in Idoma society, the cases of migration, child vulnerability and the exchange of power in Idoma oral poetry.

Works Cited

Abah, Ikwue. "The Link Between Modernity and Traditionality in African Poetry." *Nka: The Journal Of Arts*, Vol. 11, no.11, 2010, pp. 63-68.

Abraham, R.C. *The Idoma Language*. London: University Press, 1951.

Airoboman, F.A and Asekhauno, A.A. *Is There an African Epistemology*. www.transcampus.org/journals, 2012.

Akwanya, Amaechi N. *Semantics and Discourse: Theories of Meaning and Textual Analysis*, New Generation Books, 2010.

--- *Discourse Analysis and Dramatic Literature*, ACERNA Pub., 1998.

--- *Verbal Structures: Studies in the Nature and Organizational Patterns of Literary Language*, New Generation Books, 2011.

--- "The Criticism of African Literature." *Major Themes in African Literature*, edited by Opat, Damian U & Ohaegbu, Alloysius U., AP Express Publishers, 2000, pp. 55-70.

Aliyu, Sa'eedat B. *Aesthetics of Environmentalism in Selected Niger-Delta Poetry*. Doctoral Thesis. University of Ilorin, 2015.

Amali, S.O.O. *Idoma Dances and Their Continued Relevance to the Society - The Analysis of Idoma-Otukpo Ichicha and Alekwu*, 1985. [Unpublished Article].

Amali, Idris. "Flute Proverbs: The Case of Idoma Aklama Itodo" *Ujo*. edited Adejo, Armstrong, Eka Agabaidu Press, vol.1, no.1, 1999, pp. 23-35.

Anyebe, Ted. "Enhancing Rural Development through Drama: The Idoma Experience," *Ujo*. edited Adejo, Armstrong, Eka Agabaidu Press, vol.1, no.1, 1999, pp. 45-60.

Armstrong, R.G. *The Idoma kings: the Nature of Their Office and Their Changing States*. University Press, 1980.

- Aharoni, Ada. "Peace Culture Required for Sustainable Global Development". *Peace, Literature and Art*, Vol. 1, pp. 60-76, accessed, 12 Oct. 2016.
- Anthony A. Olaoye. "Towards Vision 20-2020: The Role of Language and Literature in National Development," *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, Vol. 3, No.5, Academy Publishers, May 2013, pp. 80-104, accessed, 10 Oct. 2016.
- Asogwa, C.I. *A Preface to African Philosophy*, Jemezie Associates, 2001.
- Azuonye, Chukwuma. "Kalu Igirigi, an Ohafia Igbo Singer of Tales," *The Oral Performance in Africa*, edited by Okpewho, Isidore, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1990, pp. 23-35
- Bakari, R.S. *Epistemology from an Afrocentric Perspective: Enhancing Black Students' Consciousness Through an Afrocentric Way of Knowing*.
<http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/pocpw12>, 1997, accessed, 11 Dec. 2016.
- Bascom, Williams. "Forms of Folklore: Prose Narratives". *Journal of American Folklore*, vol. 78, 1965, pp. 89-117.
- Bogumil-Notz, .S. "Encyclopedia of Life Support Systems," *Literature and Philosophy*, [EOLSS]. <http://www.eolss.net/EOLSS>, 2014, pp.51-65, accessed, 12 Dec. 2015.
- Chu-Reu, Huang. "Text-based Construction and Comparison of Domain Ontology: A Study Based on Classical Poetry," *Academia Sinica. PACLIC 18*, 2004, accessed, 23 Dec. 2016.
- Furniss, Graham and Gunner, Liz. *Relationships Between Genres in Hausa Oral Literature*, accessed, 15 Dec. 2017.
- Jean-Philippe, D. "Hergel's Metaphysics as Hermeneutics," *Parrhesia*, Number 11, 2011, 15 Dec. 2017.
- Jennifer, Carmel H., and Patricia, M.M. "Poetry and Pedagogy: Exploring the Opportunity for Epistemological and Affective Development within the Classroom". *LICEJ*, Volume

1, Issue 3, 2010, accessed, 15 Dec. 2017.

Chukwuma, Azuonye. "Kaalu Igirigi: An Ohafia Igbo Singer of Tales," *The Oral Performance in Africa*, edited by Okpewho, Isidore, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1990, pp. 23-40.

Bauman, R. *Story, performance, and event: contextual studies of oral narrative*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Bertsozale Elkartea, E. H. Minutes. *Oral Improvisation in the world*, Euskal Herriko Bertsozale Elkartea, 2006.

Birdwhistell, R. *Kinesics and Context*, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1970.

Brockett, Oscar G., & Hildy, F. *History of the Theatre*, Allyn and Bacon, 2003.

Burgoon, J. K. *Nonverbal Communication*, Allyn & Bacon, 2011.

Chadwick, H., & Chadwick, N. *The Growth of Literature*, Cambridge University Press, 1940.

Denton, C. "The History of Music Temperament and Pitch before 1750". *The Compound*.

<http://www.thecompound.org/writing/tuningpre>, vol.6, no.11, 1996, accessed, 22 April 2012.

Egaña, A. *The Process of Creating Improvised Bertosos*.

http://journal.oraltradition.org/files/articles/22ii/9_egana.pdf, 2007, accessed, 22 April 2012.

Eley, G., & Grigor, Suny R. *Becoming National: A Reader*, Oxford University Press, 1996.

Emenanjo, E.N. "The Generic Determination of African Oral Literary Texts." *Major Themes in African Literature*, edited by Opata, Damian U & Ohaegbu, Alloysius U., AP Express Publishers, 2000, pp. 35-53.

Erim, E.O. *Idoma Nationality 1600-1900*. Enugu: Fourth Dimension Publishers, 1981.

E.S Timpunza. "The Performance of Gule Wankulu-An Introduction". *The Oral Performance in Africa*. edited by Isidore Okpewho, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1990, pp. 20-36.

Foucault, Michael. "The History of Sexuality: An Introduction." Vol. 1, 1990.

F.B.O. Akporbaro. *Introduction to African Oral Literature*, Princeton Publishing Company, 2006.

Finnegan, Ruth. *Oral Literature in Africa*, Oxford University Press, 1970.

Firdaws, O. P-Ibrahim. "Environmental Aesthetics in Olajire Olanlokun's Children Poetry for Pleasure." *JLSN*. Edited by Afejukun, T.E., Mindex Press LTD, Issue 8, June 2016, pp. 78-94.

Jayalakshmi V. Rao. *Proverb and Culture in the Novels of Chinua Achebe*.

www.Postcolonialweb.org, accessed, 22 Dec. 2012.

Foley, J.M. *The Theory of Oral Composition: History and Methodology*, Indiana University Press, 1988.

Foley, J. M. *Homer's Traditional Art*. Penn State University Press, 1999.

Foley, J. M. *Oral Tradition Center*. <http://www.oraltradition.org/articles/basque>, 2005, accessed, 08 Dec. 2012.

Foley, J. M. Comparative Oral Traditions. *Ahozko Inprobisazioa Munduan*, 2001, pp. 6-22, accessed, 08 Dec. 2012.

Foley, J. M. "Minutes of the Congress." *Orality in the World*. Euskal Herriko Bertsozale Ellkartea. http://www.bertsozale.com/topaketak2003/dokumentua_164.pdf, accessed, 21 Dec. 2012.

Foley, J., & Jarvis, M. *Basque Special Issue: Oral Tradition Journal*, Oral Tradition Center, 2007.

Freud, Sigmund. *Totem and Taboo*, Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 1960.

Gallagher, Catherine. *Marxism and the New Historicism*. 1989, accessed, 21 Dec. 2017.

Gunner, Liz. "Africa and Orality". *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, edited by Olaniyan, T. & Quayson, A., Blackwell Publishing, 2012, pp. 67-80.

Gunner, Liz. "The Preservative, Transmission and Realization of Song Texts: A Psycho Musical Approach". *The Oral Performance in Africa*, edited by Isidore Okpewho, Spectrum Books LTD, 1990.

Gallagher, Catherine, and Stephen Greenblatt. *Practicing New Historicism*, 2000.

Greenblatt, Stephen. *Invisible Bullets: Shakespearean Negotiations*, 1988. *Towards a Poetics of ---Culture*, 1989.

Irele, Abiola. "Orality, Literacy, and African Literature". *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* edited by Olaniyan, T. and Quayson, A., Blackwell Publishing, 2012, pp. 45-60

Kolawole, Mary E.M. "Women's Oral Gene". *African Literature; Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, edited by Olaniyan, T. Qayson, A., Blackwell Publishing, 2012, pp. 82-94.

Lui, Alan. *The Power of Formalism; The New Historicism*, 1989, accessed, 21 Feb. 2017.

Montrose, Louis A. *Professing the Renaissance: The Poetics and Politics of Culture*, 1989, accessed, 12 March 2017.

Makward, E. "Two Griots of Contemporary Senegambia". *The Oral Performance in Africa*. edited by Isidore Okpewho, Spectrum Books LTD, 1990, pp. 11-22.

Nitchie, Elizabeth. "The Romantic Movement: Form in Romantic Poetry". *Notes on Wordsworth's Poetry*. A Critical Review by COLES, accessed, 09 Dec. 2016.

Nkem, Okoh. *Preface to Oral Literature*, Africana First Pub. Limited, 2008.

Nwaegbe, W.D.O. "Introduction to Poetry". *English Language*, edited by C.A Okafor, African-Fep Publishers, 1990.

Nwankwo, Chika. "The Oral Foundation of Nigerian Written Poetry". *Literature and Black Aesthetics*, edited by Emenyonu E.N, Heinemann Educational Books, 1990.

Nandwa, J., & Bukenya, A. *African Oral Literature for Schools*. Kenya: Longman, 1983.

Ode, Ogede. *Art, Society and Performance: Igede Praise Poetry*. Florida: University Press, 1997.

Okoro, C. "Problems of Metaphysical Philosophy". *African Nebula*, Issue 3, 2011, pp. 43-60.

Okpewho, Isidore. "Oral Literature and Modern African Literature". *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, edited by Olaniyan, T. & Quayson, A., Blackwell Publishing, 2012, pp. 201-220.

---*The Epic in Africa: Toward a Poetics of the Oral Performance*, Columbia University Press, 1979.

---*African Oral Literature: Backgrounds Character and Continuity*, Indiana University Press, 1992.

----*The Oral Performance in Africa*, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1990.

---- "Introduction: The Study of Performance." *The Oral Performance in Africa*, edited by Isidore Okpewho, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1990.

----"Towards a Faithful Record: On Transcribing and Translating the Oral Narrative Performance". *The Oral Performance in Africa* edited by Isidore Okpewho, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1990.

----"Wand or Walking Stick? The Formular and its Use in Zulu Praise Poems." *The Oral Performance in Africa*, edited by Isidore Okpewho, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1990.

Omatsola, Daniel. "Towards a Semiotics of the Literary Aesthetics of Itsekiri Drum Language." *Nigerian Journal of Oral Literatures*, No. 1, August 2013, pp. 65-80.

Ozumba, G.O. "African Traditional Metaphysics". *Quodlibet Journal: Volume 6 Number 3*.

<http://www.Quodlibet.net>, 2014.

Ong, W. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*, Methuen New Accents, 1988.

Ong, W. *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the World*, Routledge, 2002.

Onuekwusi, Jasper A. *Fundamentals of African Oral Literature*. Alphabet Nigeria Publishers, 2015.

Ohwovoriole, Felicia. "A Reflection on Urhobo Funeral Poetry as Socio-Cultural History".

Nigerian Journal of Oral Literatures, No. 1, August 2013, pp. 65-80.

Opata, Damian, U. "A Sense of Wonder: Towards a Functionalist Aesthetics of African Performative Arts." *Major Themes in African Literature*, edited by Opata, D.U & Ohaegbu, A.U, AP Express Publishers, 2000, pp. 163-188.

---- "Towards a Theory of African Literature." *Major Themes in African Literature*, edited Opata, ---- D.U & Ohaegbu, A.U., AP Express Publishers, 2000, pp. 219-238.

---- "Emenanjo and the Generic Status of Igbo Wellerisms." *Nsukka Journal of the Humanities*, edited by Chikwendu, V.E, No. 7, Faculty of Arts, UNN, 1994.

---- "Literature and Moral Values; The Role of the African Writer". *Readings in African Humanities; African Perspectives in World Culture*, edited by Egonu, I.T.K., Vivian and Vivians Publishers, 1988, pp. 34-56.

Parry, A. *The Making of Homeric Verse: The Collected Papers of Milman Parry*, Clarendon Press, 1971.

Payne, S. G. *Basque Nationalism*. Reno: University of Nevada Press, 1975.

Preminger, Alex. *Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics*, Princeton University Press, 1965.

Radloff, J. A. "Early Scholarship on Oral Traditions". *Oral Tradition Journal*, 1990, pp. 73-90.

Reiss, Edmund. *Element of Literary Analysis*, The World Publishing Company, 1978.

Luke Eyoh. "Indigenous Oral Poetry in Nigeria as a Tool for National Unity". *J Communication* edited by Kamala Raj, Vol. 2, No.2 , 2011.

Mvula, Enoch S.T. "The Performance of Gule Wankulu." *The Oral Performance in Africa*, edited by Isidore Okpewho, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1990, pp. 98-114.

Nkoli M. Nyigide. African Unity, Identity and Development in Some Contemporary Igbo Poems. <http://dx.doi.org>, 2016.

Swanson, G.E. "Experience of the Supernatural". *Sociology of Religion*, edited by Robertson R., Penguin Books LTD, 1969, pp. 123-145.

Sekoni, Ropo. "The Narrator, Narrative Pattern, and Audience Experience of Oral Narrative Performance." *The Oral Performance in Africa*, edited by Isidore Okpewho, Spectrum Books Ltd, 1990, pp. 154-167.

Schipper, M. *Oral Tradition and African Theatre*. Leiden University, 1986.

Schenb Harold. "The Oral Artist's Script." *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory*, edited by Olaniyan, T. & Quayson, A, Blackwell Publishing, 2012, 234-52.

Thiong'o, N. W. "Notes Towards a Performance Theory of Orature". *Performance Research*, 2007.

Toelken, B. *The Dynamics of Folklore*, Utah State University Press, 1996.

Volk, K. *The Poetics of Latin Didactic*, University Press, 2002.

Whitcomb, M. *Translations and Reprints from the Original Sources of European History*, University of Pennsylvania History Department, 1899.

Zumthor, P. *Oral Poetry: An Introduction*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1990.

Tsenongu, Moses. *Teaching Poetry*. A Handbook for Teachers of English Language and Literature. [Unpublished Thesis].

Tatu, Silviu. "The Study of Classical Hebrew Poetry: Epistemological Issues". *Studia Theologia*, vol, 111, 2005.

Vorgelegt Von and Ursula Goricke. *Poetry as Epistemological Inquiry: Reading Berstein, Reading Cavell, Reading Wittgenstein*. Kreis Heinsberg, 2003.

Veeser, Harold Aram. *The New Historicism*, 1989.

Uduma, O.U. *The Fundamentals of Philosophy*, WillyRose Pub., 2001.

Appendix.

ONUGBO MLO OKO

INTRO.

Ele! Lele! Lee! Ehe!

Wuuu.....

The father that bore me

The mother that bore me

Sun is upright, night overtook me

Oko Ajeega jooogwugwu

Onugbo and Oko

Oko and Onugbo

What caused trouble between Onugbo and Oko?

The two brothers

Very close brothers

If Onugbo did not see Oko

He would not go anywhere

What caused this trouble?

This trouble between Onugbo and Oko

Ele! Lele!! Lee!! Ehe!!!

We want to find out

We shall find out

There is nothing hiding under the sun

We saw the both of them hunting

When Oko went hunting

Oko said: "Onugbo my brother"

Onugbo and Oko went together

Oko said;

"Let us go in pair in case of trouble"

And in pair they went

Oko had gone hunting

Onugbo his elder brother had gone hunting as well.

Ele! Lele!! Lee!!! Ehe!!!!

It has started

The cause of the trouble

Has started unfolding

The maggot that kills the corn

Comes from under the corn

Oko is outshining his elder brother

Oko killed fourteen lions

Yes he killed fourteen lions

Oko shouted

Come o! Come o!!

My elder brother

Come and celebrate with Oko your brother

Onugbo boiled inside of him

Yet Onugbo smiled

And celebrated with his brother

Now it is the turn of Onugbo

Blessings they say come from God

He gives to whom

He wants to give

Onugbo keeps hunting

He killed seven grasshoppers

He didn't call his brother O

Idoma, the land of my father

Onugbo the brother of Oko

Anger boiled in the mind of Onugbo

Oko hunted toward Onugbo

He was full of happiness

Oko said: the brother of Oko ee

Ehe! Wuuu!!

God has done for you

Onugbo never answered

Anger boiled in his heart

They continued hunting

They hunted for long time

On the third day

On the fourth day

Oko and his brother Onugbo

They hunted from early morning
Okó's gun sounded kputu! Kputuu!!
Okó has killed an elephant
Despite the elephant Okó has killed
Okó went on hunting
Idoma, the land of my father
Okó Ajeega Jogwugwu
Okó saw a water pond
At the foot of a tree

Ele! Lele! Lee! ehe!

Wuuu!

Abomination! Mnn! Mnn!

The heaven and the earth

An evil spirit is about to cause trouble

Trouble, between two brothers

Between Okó and Onugbo

Ele! lele! le! ehe!

A white horse is not easy to ride

Okó went off hunting

As Okó Ajeega turned away

He went close to the pond

He drank from the pond to his fill

Oko called out:

“Onugbo my brother

Onugbo brother of Oko come O! Come O!!

Come there is water”.

Agabi Idoma

The world is so deep

It is complex and difficult to understand

Onugbo ran: cha! Cha!! Cha!!!

He ran to the pond

To drink the water

No doubt, the two brothers were very thirsty

It is the turn of Onugbo

To drink from the pond

Idoma, the land of the father who begot me

An evil spirit has stired up the water

Where did it come from?

A white horse came and drank the water

Before Onugbo arrived

It came and stirred the water completely

And went away.

Oko Ajeega Jogwugwu
 Onugbo brother of Oko
 Who caused the trouble?
 What caused the trouble?
 Onugbo began to call Oko his brother
 Oko ee! Oko ee!!
 Why have you spoilt the water for me
 Oko shouted; “ehe! Wuuu!!
 It was not I who muddied the water
 Ehe!
 The water which I saw just now”
 Agabi Idoma
 Anger boiled in the heart of Onugbo

Ele! Lee! Le! Ehe!

Darkness has come upon the earth
 Idoma, the land of my father
 Oko appealed to his brother
 “Onugbo my brother
 The water is muddied
 Still, you should cool your heart
 When we have hunted for a while
 We shall come upon another pond”

Anger still boiled in the heart of Onugbo

He turned away

And Oko continued hunting

Then Oko called out

“Onugbo my brother

Come a while! Come a while!!

Then Onugbo’s eye turned red

He raised his gun and said;

“Oko my brother

It was you who muddied that water”

Oko then replied;

“It was not I who muddied that water

Elee! Onugbo my brother

How can I do this to my brother

Remember how close we were

If you didn’t see me

You would not go anywhere

If I didn’t see you

I would not go anywhere

What has caused this trouble?

This world is a mystery

Which I find difficult to understand

It was a bad spirit that muddied the water

Onugbo, brother of Oko

I am sorry! Don't be angry”

Then Oko turned away

Oko continued hunting

Oko's gun spoke kputuu

Oko has killed a leopard

For the honour cleansing of face

Oko shouted;

Onugbo my brother, come quickly oo

For I have killed a leopard

Come and clean my face

Onugbo ran: cha! Cha!! Cha!!!!

Oko you killed a leopard?

But you were the one who muddied the water

Anger continued to boil in the heart of Onugbo

“I was not the one that muddied the water”

Onugbo's eyes turned red again

He raised his gun

Threw it up to the sky

And caught it

Hitting his legs on the ground

Gbim! Gbim!! Gbim!!

While his hand sounded

Tum! Tum!! Tum!!! On his chest

And his gun spoke kputuu

Onugbo has killed Oko his brother

Eleelele! Eleelele!! Eleelele!!!

The father that bore me

Idoma! The land of my father

The sun is upright

The night has over-run me

Ehe! The darkness has covered the earth

Oko is dying

Oko is dying oo

In pain he is journeying back

To the land of our ancestors

Oko uttered his last words;

“I was not the one that muddied the water

Onugbo, I am going forever”

Onugbo stood washing

Oko finally died

In the pool of his blood

Agabi Idoma

The maggot that kills the corn
Comes from under the corn
Onugbo stood washing
The lifeless body of his brother
Once the fire is out
You cannot warm yourself
With the ashes
Onugbo has turned to go
When the white horses
Trouped – in to the pond

Onugbo turned back
And saw the white horses
Running after one another
Gbigidim! Gbigidim!! Gbigidim!!
Before his very eyes
They ran into the water
Chagadam! Chagadam!! Chagadam!!
Drank to their fill
And muddied it completely
Onugbo cried out;
Woo! Woo!! Woo!!!

See what anger can cause
See what envy can cause among brothers
“Oko my brother
Oko o! Oko !! Oko ajeega!!!
Eleele! Ehe!! Wuu!!!
Had I but known

Appendix 2.

KWARARAFa

It started at his birth

With the clouds thickening

And darkness enveloped the earth

Even as the rays of sunshine piercing the clouds

To send darkness away

For the child to finally arrive

At his birth, over 2,000 people gathered

From different parts of Okwutachi, in Kwararafa confederacy

Under a hot, hazy sky

All to herald the arrival of a new baby.

On their returns there came a heavy rain

Which confined them to a particular location

At the growth of Idu;

There come voices of common course

To unite them in creating a melody of sublime nobility

Instead of earlier divisive and fanatical cries of hatred

Years later, the child is now a man

And there rang a bell of war

Which war? "The Fulani Horse war"

Without delay, men gathered at ohopu (open playground).

To the people, Idu addressed:

I, the son of Ale, tell you white and blue

That this is our ancestral homeland

This is Apa kingdom; it belongs to our ancestors

The children of Agabi-the Igbiras

The children of Atta-the Igalas

The children of Idoko-the Iyalas

You are all here!

What about our brothers?

The Jukuns at Puje and Wukari

At the west-end of Kwararafa

We are one, we are brothers

Let us unite against the invaders

From Abakpa (Hausa) country

Several years ago

Our ancestors told us

Those forces from Kano

Led by Kanejeji, the son of Yaji, King of Kano

Invaded our land and took away our men as slaves

And in return he sent horses to our king

The king of Kwararafa

At this time my brothers

We have not developed our cavalry forces

Years later, our military might grows stronger

And we made Zaria tributary to us

Through which we captured Kano

During which many of them flew to Daura

And we ate up the whole country

But here and now

Darkness has enveloped the earth

I see danger flying over us

Even the owl bird is flying and hovering up the sky

I see it about to perch on the roof of the King's house

I see! Yes I see!!

Even opa- the indigo cloth

Spread in the King's palace

Has torn into pieces on its own accord

A war is raging again

And women and children have been separated

From the men; the warriors

I see them migrating out of Apa.....

Appendix 3.

AGBO GEJI

STANZA I

I, Agbo that goes hunting and conquered

The Agaba-Idu one

The Agaba (Lion) of the jungle

If Agaba (Lion) goes hunting

Which other animal dares

STANZA II

Yet! Agaba (Lion) is the animal

That seeks innocence

For our elders told us

That innocence goes ahead of juju

STANZA III

Whenever the Lion kills a game

It leaves it there and goes away

To try other hunter animals

For greed and avarice

For many could eat up the game

Even before the lion returns

STANZA IV

When it returns

And meets the game untouched

It dissects it

Eats the liver, gizzards and other intestines

And also leaks the blood

STANZA V

At this time

Any other animal

Can come and eats of the flesh

Left there by the lion.

Appendix 4.

DIRGE FOR MUMMY

It was just yesterday I saw her

Euphoric as ever

Daring and loving as usual

She did not say she was ill

Nor did she complain of any pain

Now she is dead

Mummy you would have let me know of this

Please talk to me, Mummy please! Please!!

I was in my room when I heard the shout

I ran out to ask what had happened

When I saw my sister running

I knew the worst had happened

Immediately an ocean flowed out of me

As I ran there to see my mother dead

I knew it was over

Mummy why did you have to leave me

Without a goodbye?

I am lost, who am I going to run to

She that never had an enemy

She that was so kind

She smiled with everyone

Why is it that she has to go now

Death how can you be so wicked?

Nas, alas, alas!!!

Appendix 5.

ONYA OGBAJA

IDOMA

Ebi lenya

Onya no le' ebi kpo

Ole' ebi kpo

Ebi bio

iii! Ebi bio

Ifu no gu joka' obla aa

Anu mo ane

O'gole lohi ga ee

Anu mo mia' ane

ENGLISH:

Abomination has occurred

The woman who commits abomination

Commits abomination

And abomination holds her

Yes! It holds her

The rat that goes to cat's market

Looks for trouble

It knows better

If it returns safely e e

It knows better.

Appendix 6.

IDOMA:

Elelele lee, ehe wuuu.....

Ada no mum

Ene no mum

Otu ibium oo o

Otu ibium

Ikwu ogbonoko ijema noooo

Nnebe nya ma mnotu

Owuna ko' chochi ledu m ne

Nge yei lo iyawu nya chi

Ebi! Eno kweyi kpa kpa

Otu le bium

Oinem Okwokweyi

Ani'kwu ga jum anuaa oo

Ugwu biegba oide nana Okoklo leje

Ikwu odi num yo na ka'che koyehe tumge

Oinem noyi jona gam gele aa

Anu nikwu gaje nyoyoo?

Ikwu aba na ga kwum ma?

Ka ma boyi nenche obene tarn ma

ENGLISH:

Elelele lee, alas! Wuuu.....

The father that bore me

The mother that bore me

The night overtook me oo

The night overtook me

Death is wicked, he knows no relation

I saw this from night

If Owuna bird perched and told me

I would have stopped him from embarking on the journey

Abomination! The sun is upright

Night overtook me

My very good brother

He is the one death has come to take way aa oo

Hawk carries little fowl he does not inform the mother

Hawk has carried the fowl

Death what have I done that you expose me to laughter

The brother that feeds me

He is the one death has carried

Death why not carry me and leave the younger one?