

Ethnopoetic Study of Igbo Oral Funeral Poetry in Elugwu Ezike, Enugu State, Nigeria

John Odo Onu

Department of Linguistics Studies

University of Benin, Benin City

onujohn6@gmail.com

08065193744

=====

Abstract

This study is an ethnopoetic analysis of Igbo oral funeral poetry with particular reference to Elugwu Ezike. The principal objective of the study is to analyze oral funeral poetry performance of the Elugwu Ezike people with emphasis on the form and structure of Elugwu Ezike dirges and the impact of Christianity, Islam and western lifestyle on the performance of Elugwu Ezike dirges. An aspect of ethnopoetic theory known as infracultural model in folklore analysis developed by Alembi is used in the analysis of data. Recording and tape-recording are made firsthand during the funeral ceremonies in which these poems occur. Solo and response form is the basic structural features in most Elugwu Ezike dirges, there is constant repetition of words and sentences in the dirges, the funeral artists make use of linguistic and paralinguistic features at their disposal to realize the aims of their performance and various imageries are used in the dirges to showcase emotion, events and objects such as loss, death and hunting, lion, kite, forest and mountain respectively. The findings of the study also reveal that the dirges poetically reiterate the theme of satire, praise for the dead, theme of vulnerability of death and theme of death as a universal phenomenon. Christianity, Islam and western education have negatively and positively affected the performances of dirges in such a way that Christian music is used in funeral ceremonies in recent time.

Keywords: Elugwu Ezike, Dirge, Igbo oral funeral poetry, performance, stylistics, rhythm and form

1. Introduction

Man has always expressed his feelings experiences, expectations and dreams through the medium of poetry. Although, there may be no final definition of poetry, all ideas about poetry centre on one thing: man's display of emotions in a unique language that is devoid of everyday usage. Oral poetry is essentially a collective enterprise handed down by word of mouth dependent upon the memories of listeners and story-teller. Traditional poetry is, therefore, the cultural heritage of indigenous people. Poetry may also be described as the song of the heart which touches on and rekindles the very living chords of human experience.

Dirge as a form of oral poetry makes use of language to communicate experience. Funeral dirge or lamentation for the dead is an important genre of folklore. It is as old as man's concern with death. According to Ajuwon (1982) dirge can be viewed as poem of lamentation which may be

improvised by the mourners, according to traditional formula and themes. The invariant context is the performance of rites of passage at the time of death. Death is a fundamental human experience. A look into the attitude of man towards it should give us some insight into human emotions at moments of grave stress.

Oral funeral poetry is the property of non-literate societies. Every African society is very rich in traditional poetry which is the common property of the whole community. The poet or the praise singer uses that to express the communal vision of life. Thus, African traditional poetry is culture-tied and handed down orally from generation to generation. Oral poetry represents our classical tradition, that is, that body of texts which lies behind us as a complete and enduring literature through constantly being renewed and which most profoundly informs us the world views of our people.

Among the cultural practices which have become dominant in Igboland are the burial rites and its associated funeral dirges. Available evidence reveals that burial rites have some mythological and super-natural explanations. The Igbo mythology appreciated the fact that man was composed of body and soul, that these spirits by ways of decent burial receive a kind of worship by ways of undeniable and very necessary rites for the progressive journey of the soul to the spirit world. There are also mythological propositions that without decent burial rites, the spirit of the dead roam about helplessly (Amadi, 1974).

Since nobody wants his dead relative to roam about helplessly, grand burials and funerals are planned first, to protect the living from the unfortunate apparition of familiar ghosts and the societal shame. Secondly to win a place for the dead in the land of the spirits the Igbo perform burial rite for the deceased. In Igbo cosmology, there are many other sacrifices made to the dead during the burial. It is generally assumed in Igboland that when all burial and funeral rites have been performed, the dead assumes greater power to do and undo many things at will. It is the people's duty to offer sacrifices to the dead so that they enjoy their protection and expect their aid towards procreation, fertility, prosperity and progress.

Although burial practices and funeral dirges are generally performed in the entire Igboland, a lot of variations in the pattern, mythology and mode of practices of the burials of the departed vary across communities. Since each community possesses its own pattern of thought and appreciation of the universe, their ideas and practices are bound to vary. Burial rites and oral funeral poetry are aspects of human culture which for obvious reasons have undergone some unhealthy metamorphosis as a result of the western culture.

In recent years, there has been a reawakening interest in African folklore. Research on literature has appeared revisiting and exploring the nature of folklore as expressed verbally and speculating about its role in future. The present study is an attempt to offer an insight into the role of the enduring African oral traditions and its artistic forms. The study is focused on the construction of the Elugwu Ezike Igbo perception of death through oral funeral poetry such as *ogele*, *obini* and *okanga*. The Igbo, like other peoples of Africa with identifiable culture, have a rich poetic heritage. This poetic heritage or traditional poetry of the people can be regarded as a prime form of art because

it depicts their ways of life. Igbo oral poetry treats subjects related to the predominant activities of the people like farming, hunting, cooking, eating, carving, weaving, fighting, celebrations of births and deaths, courtship, marriage and anniversaries of these events.

The cultural and religious beliefs and observances of the people of Elugwu Ezike are also interwoven. These are kept alive by oral transmission from one generation to another and celebrated during great occasions. Most poems within the oral tradition of Igbo poetry are composed to satisfy the needs of those engaged in different human activities. They also express intense emotions and project profound ideas. Although these poems have not been influenced by techniques associated with formal education, they show the great verbal mastery of the composers and reveal great thought. There are poems expressing joy or happiness and sorrow and those that show family ties, as well as those composed to ease tension or serve as aids to relaxation after a hard day's work.

Opoku (1976:133) observes that death is the inevitable end of man, but the attitude towards it is everywhere ambivalent. He further explains that West Africans in general, regard death not as the end of life, but as a transition from the present earthly life to another life in the land of the spirits. Death is thus a journey which man must make in order to reach the life beyond and continue to live as an ancestor. The dead, therefore, do not remain in the grave, but become spirits and proceeds to the spirit world, called *ala mmuo* by the Igbo people.

There is a strong Igbo belief that spirits of one's ancestors keep a constant watch over the living and must be placated through prayer. Ancestors who live well, die in socially approved ways are given correct burial rites, are allowed to continue the afterlife in a world of the dead. The world of the dead that is filled with honoured ancestor mirror the world of the living, and the deceased relatives were periodically reincarnated among the living. Those who die bad deaths and lack correct burial rites cannot return to the world of the living or enter that of the dead. They wander homelessly expressing their grief by causing destruction among the living counterparts.

A funeral ceremony in Igbo society involves sacrifices, singing and dancing. Funerals are characterized by deep feelings that are partly, expressed through poetry. Thus, poetry performances become useful avenues to let out pent emotions that could easily be harmful to the health of the bereaved. To this extent poetry performances are therapeutic. Funerals are also characterized by feelings of joy that are expressed through poetry. Contrary to what Finnegan (1970) records in a general discussion on elegiac poetry in Africa, claiming that wailing and singing are solely characteristics of feminine mourning; all members of an Elugwu Ezike community wail and sing at a funeral. Wailing and singing are the popular ways of "escorting" the dead to *ala mmuo*, the world of spirits. In fact, funeral and burial are seen by Elugwu Ezike Igbo as a process of seeing off the dead to the next abode in the world of spirits. In support of the above view, Egudu and Nwoga (1971:22) postulate that "the end of a man's journey through life is remarkable because it is a stage at which the gods have decided to claim back what they gave the world". To the Igbo, earthly existence is transient. It is not the end of life because life continues in the great beyond after the cessation of immediate life on earth. There is a growing body of knowledge on African oral literature. A number of pioneer studies on African oral literature tended to cover many communities and groups in one study. Among

the pioneer scholars are Finnegan (1970), Okpewho (1979, 1984, 1994), and Uzochukwu (2001) among others. Due to large spatial units, social groups and area coverage, there are disturbing generalizations made by these scholars on the oral poetry of a number of African communities. The contributions of these pioneer scholars in showing the place of African folklore in human knowledge cannot be denied. However, their generalizations and distortions cannot be allowed to escape a severe judgment by the critical analysts. Hence, the need to redress this problem by undertaking an insider informed micro level studies.

Within the Elugwu Ezike community, a lot of funeral dirges and ritual performances have been associated with the traditional burials of the dead, but unfortunately enough, most of these funeral dirges associated with the various traditional ritual performances of the dead have not been preserved in any way. It was further observed that there may be variations from the former practices of the pre-colonial people to the present time.

Although emphasis has been placed on culture and the need to preserve the cultural practices of the people, no serious attention has been given to the documentation of burial rites and funeral dirges associated with the burial rites in most communities of Igboland. The problem of the study, therefore, is that of trying to assess and document the burial rites and the associated funeral dirges of Elugwu Ezike community in Igbo Eze North Local Government Area of Enugu State. Also, to be assessed is the stylistic features of the funeral dirges of Elugwu Ezike Igbo.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Oral Poetry

In the analysis of oral poetry, there is often confusion between poetry and song. These two are not exactly the same. Song is just one way of delivery of poetry. A poem may be sung, declaimed or recited. Miruka (1997:88) defines oral poetry as “the verbal expression of feelings, ideas and thoughts using versified language”. The oral poem is principally composed and rendered using word of mouth. In oral performance, especially of song, the text is often not fixed. It has the call and response structure and most oral poetry is performed to an audience making it a public affair. In oral poetry performance, there is the use of body, face and movement to reinforce the words and voice. Finnegan (1977:16) describes oral poetry thus:

Oral poetry essentially circulates by oral rather than written means, in contrast to written poetry, its distribution, composition or performance are by word of mouth and not through reliance on the written or printed word.

The three ways in which a poem can most readily be called oral are in terms of (1) its composition (2) its mode of transmission, and (3) its performance. Oral poem is an essentially an ephemeral work of art and has no existence or continuity apart from its performance. The skill and personality of the performer, the nature and reaction of the audience, the context, the purpose are essential aspects of the artistry and meaning of an oral poem.

The performance of oral poetry is an interactive enterprise where the poet performs before a participating audience. Babalola (1981:7) suggests that oral poetry is a dynamic art form. By suggesting that oral poetry is a dynamic art form, Babalola may be referring to a number of meanings. Firstly, it is produced in a dynamic context where the artist and the audience freely interact to produce an effective and lively performance. Alembi (1993:2), Finnegan (1970:82), Okpewho (1985:8), Olajubu (1981:93) and Miruka (1994:111) argue that oral poetry is said to be dynamic because it has no fixed length of performance. The length of any verse is determined by a number of factors pertaining to the audience and the physical circumstances surrounding the performance. For instance, if the audience is interested and eager to listen and dance to a particular song, the artist will prolong it by frequent repetition.

2.2. Performance

Performance is always important in oral literature. It is an element in all oral art, and some of the controversies about style can only be fully understood by reference to performance. Jacobson (1974) defines performance as a form of expression which uses poetic language of which body is the vehicle that gives form that which one wishes to communicate. Each act of performance is reflexive, creating an experience while reflecting upon this experience at the same time.

Similarly, Bauman (1977:11) describes performance as:

A mode of verbal communication which consists of taking responsibility of a performer with regards to the audience, by manifesting its communicative competence. This competence is supported in knowledge and talent and it possesses to speak in the socially appropriate way from the audience's point of view, the performer's expressive acts which are subject to evaluation according to their efficiency. The better the capacity, the more intense the experience will be, thanks to the pleasure offered by the intrinsic qualities of expressive acts.

Finnegan (1977:118) observes that "the main means of performance of oral poetry are through intoning and spoken voice. It may sometimes appear that most oral poetry is sung. The singing voice is a very common medium. A recitative type of delivery is also common. Scheubs (1977:89) sees performance as:

An underlying process of balancing, loosening, bending, twisting, reconfiguring and transforming the permeating eruptive and disruptive energy and mood below and to the sides of focused attention.

In the context of this study performance is used to denote a collective activity which involves one or more performers and an audience. One additional mode of poetic performance is delivery through drums and similar instruments.

3. Theoretical Framework

This study is premised on an aspect of ethno-poetics known as the infracultural model in folklore analysis. This strand of ethno-poetics is developed by Alemi (2002) for research into oral poetry. The infracultural model of oral poetry analysis combines elements from two strands of ethno-poetics developed by Dell Hymes (1982) and Tedlock (1983). The term infracultural model is used in this thesis to mean interpretation of words and actions within specific cultural contexts. This in essence means that the meanings of the words and actions can only be located within the perceptions of the study community. This model seeks to bring together the researcher and the study community in a reflective process to gather information on funeral poetry and interpret it together as partners. This entry by the researcher into the rhythm of life of the Elugwu Ezike community act as a good basis to learn and experience their beliefs, expectation, fears and perceptions of death. Thus,

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:6 June 2019

John Odo Onu

Ethnopoetic Study of Igbo Oral Funeral Poetry in Elugwu Ezike, Enugu State, Nigeria 474

instead of concentrating on Hyme's strand of ethnopoetics which lays emphasis on the written text or Tedlock which emphasises living discourse, the infracultural model gives cognisance to performance, the oral text, and the written text. The key elements of the model are that it demands an insider analysis and interpretation of works of art in a given reality of a community, and interpretation of oral literary pieces in their cultural context. It also examines oral texts beyond mere concern with stylistics in order to elucidate the theme of the study. It equally emphasizes the researcher's deep involvement in dialogue and interaction in order to understand the structural and underlying issues surrounding a phenomenon and a community. It assigns meaning to oral text based on the cultural traditions of the performer and audience and a close observation and participation in live performances of a given genre of oral art (Alembi, 2002).

4. Empirical Review

Ogede (1995) carries out an investigation on the context, form and poetic expression in Igede funeral dirges. Igede, a minority tribe in Benue state, has a tradition of expression that is as vibrant as that of any of Africa's large language group. As a storehouse of Igede beliefs, practices and wisdom, the dirge leads us into a world of spirits, a dreadful world of ancestors fearfully conjured up as a universe of monstrous, malignant forces before whom man is a vulnerable being, constantly constrained to plead for protection. Ogede in this study demonstrates that there is genuine creativity in Igede dirges which compares favourably with those found among other people the world over. Onuekwusi (2001) in his study of dirge in African context discovers that the main purpose of dirge is to honour the deceased, mourn him, elevate him, and adore him and to cherish his name. According to Onuekwusi, funeral celebration springs from a background that is somewhat religious especially the African concept of the universe and the belief in life after death. It is believed that there is a world of the dead created in the same pattern as the world of the living.

There are therefore beliefs in the home-coming of the dead. Morality, ethics and indeed the total human condition will become part of lamentation. In order to accommodate all these aspects of the dirge, it generally has a flexible structure that allows spontaneous creations by the individual mourner, his reflections and sentiments on the dead. There is, rather, free use of kingship terms, of names, epithets and phrases. The occurrences of these structures suggest a strong social relationship and organization in the society. Alembi (2002) conducts a study on oral funeral poetry in Abanyole in Kenya using ethnopoetic theory in the analysis of data. He finds out that majority of deaths among the Abanyole people is blamed on the people exercising mystical powers. He demonstrates that people who use mystical powers are greatly feared and hated to the extent that the sons and daughters of such people often fail to get suitors from among the Abanyole. They then marry from distant ethnic groups or families within Bunyore or outside of it with the same characteristics.

Okpewho (1992) has an interesting study of dirge performances in Africa. The areas that Okpewho explores include the definition of dirges, the occasion for their performance, and some of the stock words and phrases used in some of the dirges, particularly the Akan funeral dirges in Ghana. The major finding of his study reveals that most African dirges have musical qualities since they are often chanted or sung. The study also reveals that lament may be present or absent in some dirges depending on how the community perceives death. Similarly, Egwuagu (1995) carries out a study on

the content of funeral dirge in Ezinifite in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra state. The study reveals that dirge is a creative verbal musical expression which takes place alongside the poetry of songs, drums, horns and pipes. The study also observed that living situations provide the contexts in which dirges are created and re-created. Some Ezinifite funeral dirges take the form of lyrics and the musical element is more pronounced and verbal aspect less developed than dirges without instruments, which are delivered in a spoken or recitative style. The language of Ezinifite dirges has the following stylistic features: dialect words, proverbs, rhythm, figures of speech such as personification, hyperbole, idiom and metaphor.

Furthermore, Ugwuoke (1998) makes an interesting revelation about the funeral of *ozo* title holders in Obimo community in Nsukka. According to him, the burial of *ozo* title holder in Obimo community is very expensive and colourful. Burial rites of an *ozo* title holder in Obimo community include: washing the corpse thoroughly with a local pomade (*elu aki*), supervision of the corpse by the *ozo* titled men to know whether the body is well prepared for the burial, covering the body with black cloth and placing his cap on his head with eagle feather and a red feather (*awo*) and his title staff (*aru*) put in his hand. In Obimo, the dead *ozo* titled man's grave is dug into two chambers, one chamber for his corpse and the other one for his bed. Uzochukwu (2001) in another study conducted on the traditional funeral poetry of the Igbo holds that funeral poetry inculcate in the living the knowledge of what constitute good character and that in some areas in Igboland, funeral artists constitute themselves into a sort of trade union. The findings of this study is similar to the present study because in Elugwu Ezike, *Okanga* group performers constitute themselves into such a trade union and their services are hired for during funeral ceremony to entertain the audience. The study further revealed that the most prevalent stylistic devices employed by the Igbo funeral artist are figures of speech. This gives us ample scope to include the following in our treatment of funeral poetry: simile, metaphor and metonymy, personification, euphemism and hyperbole among others, all of which constitute poetic imagery. Many of these songs are full of praise for the dead.

5. Summary of the Related Literature Reviewed

In this chapter, literature related to the study was reviewed in order to identify gaps to be filled by the current study. It was established that most of the literature centred on the concept of death, burial rites and funeral dirge in African communities without an in-depth analysis of the stylistic features of the oral funeral poetry as an integral part of oral funeral poetry and the interpretation of meanings therein.

In addition, from the above literature review it could be seen that both Africans and the Igbo people share the same view on the concept of death and burial rites. All of them believe that death is unavoidable it must come when it wishes, and that death is not the end of man's life. Man has another life to live in the hereafter and that it is the befitting burial rites that make the ancestors or the people in the spirit world to accept the deceased with an open arm.

Furthermore, most of the issues are dealt on a general basis and are not specific to a particular community. The literature reviewed established that in addition to the already accomplished scholarly works concerning the analysis of form and structure of funeral dirge, there is need for further

investigation in regard to function, contexts and stylistic features of oral funeral poetry in Elugwu Ezike.

6. Method of Data Collection

In the collection and documentation of Elugwu Ezike funeral poems, library research and field work were used.

6.1. Library Work

Library work was conducted before the actual – field work. This is necessary because it helps to illuminate the broad perspective of the oral funeral poetry. A critical study of books, dissertations, thesis and articles on funeral dirge investigated provides advance information on the area studied.

6.2. Field Work

At the preliminary stage, the researcher makes sure that he has procured the equipment and materials necessary for field work. They are functional audio cassette recorder and materials such as cassette tapes, batteries, and a good camera. Batteries are essential needs because most of the performances take place in areas lacking electricity supply.

Recording and tape recording are made firsthand during the funeral ceremonies in which these funeral poems occur. Sometimes, the researcher joins the enactment of the funeral songs and dances. He does this to establish a rapport between him and the ever suspicious performers and informants. Thus, in participating in the performances, the researcher is enlisted as a person who identifies with the significant elements in the people's aesthetics rather than someone prying into the secret of the people.

6.3. Interview

The interviews are conducted at the venue of performance to give the whole exercise an aura of freshness and authenticity. In order to obtain good results, interviews were not arranged as a fixed questionnaire, rather, they were arranged in such a way as to allow the informants to have the freedom to elaborate aspects of special interest within the context of funeral oral performance.

6.4. Methods of Data Processing

After assembling funeral poems collected from the field work, the researcher made an effort to critically read and identify messages on death as well as aspects of socio-cultural causes and effects of death as presented in the poems. The data collected from fieldwork were transcribed from the tape and translated into English. The notes taken during the recording sessions (interviews) as well as the observation were analyzed to identify the major themes of the research under study.

6.4. Method of Data Analysis

The analysis and interpretation of the Elugwu Ezike oral funeral poetry involved the people we had observed participating in funerals, the researcher's own analysis of the funeral context and the accompanying poetry and documentary sources available. In analyzing the

7. Data Presentation and Analysis

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:6 June 2019

John Odo Onu

Ethnopoetic Study of Igbo Oral Funeral Poetry in Elugwu Ezike, Enugu State, Nigeria

477

7.1 Performance of Elugwu Ezike Funeral Dirges

The performance of dirges among the Elugwu Ezike people actually begins during the all night wake that lasts till dawn. When the deceased is laid in state, the tempo of the mourning rises, and the performances of the dirges heightens and enhance the mourning. Because of the influence of Christianity, particularly in the more urban towns, it is now fashionable for the deceased's relatives to invite church choirs (bands) to sing and dance during the wake. Traditional dance groups too, some of them with masquerades (ma) playing assorted paraphernalia of musical instruments such as Orumnyi (big metal gong), Qkanga among others to show up at some wakes, especially the wakes of important persons in the community. In the course of the night wake keep one can hear isolated wailing, otherwise, the wake is characterized by singing and dancing all night.

The performance of these dirges is mostly a women's affair in the form of song and dance groups, although in recent years there has been a proliferation of mixed dance groups made up of both women and men, with the men playing musical instruments and constituting the background chorus of voices. Among these dance groups, there exist skilled and professional performers such as "Ogele" performers for women and "Qkanga" for men only who are formally hired for a fee and, as Okpewho (1992:156) puts it, "invited by the bereaved family to lend a certain grandeur or fullness to the occasion". The other less skilled performers in most cases, are not formally invited but are provided with food and drinks after their performances. Whether the performance is semi-skilled or professional, it usually involves dancing and drumming. In between the group performances, occasional soloists and dual performers come forward, at times sobbing, sometimes weeping as they lament the departure of the deceased or express a variety of themes on the nature of death.

Most of the dirges performed during funerals are well known by the audiences. Moved by the music, singing, and emotion of the performance, it is not unusual that many a member of the audience would leap forward and join the performers in their song and dance.

7.2 Form of the Elugwu Ezike Igbo Funeral Dirges

The performance aesthetics of Elugwu Ezike Igbo dirges is most often enhanced by the chant and antiphonal forms. Of equal importance is the structure of the dirges themselves, structure here is referring to the lengths of the dirges and alternating stanzas created by the constant vocal interaction between the lead singer and the chorus. The language employed by the performers of Elugwu Ezike Igbo dirges constitutes the third useful element in the discussion and appreciation of the stylistic features of these funeral dirges. It includes unique phonological and grammatical forms, lyrical repetition, and an elaborate utilization of appropriate imagery, apt metaphors, allusions, and figurative language. The most outstanding and identifiable literary quality of Elugwu Ezike dirges is repetition. Most often, like dirge No:1 demonstrates, the lead singer repeats lines she has previously sang, while the chorus re-echoes the same lines. Here, lead singer will be represented with "L.S." while the chorus will be represented with "ch". (Dirge No 1).

L.S. Nwanne m kachite obuə jiiireonuma – persevere with you sorrow

Kachite obu giə - take heart.

Kachite obu giə jiiire onuma – persevere with your sorrow

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:6 June 2019

John Odo Onu

Ethnopoetic Study of Igbo Oral Funeral Poetry in Elugwu Ezike, Enugu State, Nigeria 478

Kachite obu gə - take heart
 Nẹ o bu kẹ uwa shi adə - that's how the world is.
 Ch Nẹ o bu kẹ uwa shi adə - that's how the world is.
 L.S. Nẹ o bu kẹ uwa shi adə - that's how the world is.
 Ch Nẹ o bu kẹ uwa shi adə - that's how the world is.
 L.S. Ya bu gə jiire ye – so take heart

Where the stanza is longer, repetition occurs both within the individual lines of the lead singer. As Isidore Okpewho (1992:71) puts it:

Repetition is no doubt one of the most fundamental characteristic features of oral literature. It has both aesthetic and utilitarian value: in other words, it is a device that not only gives a touch of beauty or attractiveness to a piece of oral expression but also serves certain practical purposes in the overall organization of the oral performance.

Indeed, as Nketia (1955:104) also states repetitions in dirges are not monotonous, neither are they due to barrenness of thought: “on the contrary, they may have a musical mode of meaning or they may be a means of emphasizing points that mourners might wish to make”. It is in the same mode of thinking that Okpewho (1992:71) goes on to emphasize that:

It is necessary to grasp first the aesthetic value of repetition in a piece of oral performance. In a fundamental way, the repetition of phrase, a line or a passage does have a certain sing-song quality to it, if the repetition occurs between intervals in, say, a song or a tale, the audience is often delighted to identify with it and to accompany the performer in going over a passage that has now become familiar.

The refrain is another familiar pattern of poetic repetition in Elugwu Ezike dirges. Here, the lead singer sings the first verse of the dirge twice and the chorus takes up the repetition of the central thought of “the king has gone to the grave” over and over in several lines, to emphasize the importance of the dirge.

Dirge No. 2

L.S. Eze ala nẹ obu ẹja – the king has gone to the grave.
 Ngwere chishima ukwu – the lizard has strengthened its leg.
 Eze ala nẹ obu ẹja – the king has gone to the grave.
 Ngwere chishima ukwu – the lizard has strengthened its leg.
 Chi chi ngwere chishima ukwu – chichi, the lizard stretches its legs.
 Ch. Ngwere chishima ukwu – the lizard has strengthened its leg.
 Chi chi ngwere chishima ukwu – chichi, the lizard stretches its legs.
 L.S. Nẹ Agbedq Qnoja ala nẹ obu ẹja – that Agbedo Qnoja has gone to the grave.

=====

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:6 June 2019

John Odo Onu

Ethnopoetic Study of Igbo Oral Funeral Poetry in Elugwu Ezike, Enugu State, Nigeria

479

Ngwere chishima ukwu – the lizard stretches its legs.
 inuma chichichi - when you hear chi chi chi
 Ngwere chishima ukwu – the lizard stretches its legs.
 Nẹ Ugwuanyi Edogba Aanya ala, Ugwuanyi ala nẹ obu ẹja – Edogba Aanya nẹ onu ẹja, has
 gone to the grave.
 Nẹ nna muru anyi ala nẹ obu ẹja - that our father has gone to the grave.
 Ngwere chishima ukwu – the lizard stretches its legs.

The effect of the performance of this kind of dirge is that it cues the audience to sing along, repeating the familiar lines of the refrain with the chorus (Ngwere chishima ukwu – the lizard stretches its legs), thereby intensifying the mournful atmosphere in the funeral. “Eze ala nẹ obu ẹja” (the king has gone to the grave) means that the king has died while “Ngwere chishima ukwu – (the lizard stretches its legs)” demonstrates the posture of the deceased. One line can, in fact, be repeated several times. This trend in which dirge lines are repeated over and over is frequent in most of Elugwu Ezike Igbo dirges. It is a popular technique that the lead singer and chorus employ very regularly in the rendition of the dirges. This is seen in the dirge below: (Dirge No. 3)

L.S. Udele nẹ-erə n’elə oooo – the vulture is hovering on the air.
 Udele nẹ-erə n’elə oooo – the vulture is hovering on the air.
 Ch. O roo n’elə si ya roo n’alə - if it hovers in the air let it hover on the ground as well.
 L.S. Qkanagba atomiirə - the mighty has fallen.
 Ch. O roo n’elə si ya roo n’alə oo – if it hovers in the air let it hover on the ground too.
 L.S. Enyimenyi atomiirə - the elephant has fallen
 Ch. Elelelele wewewelo – Elelelele wewewelo
 L.S. Ogbodogbo o o o – Ogbodogbo o o o
 Ch. Elelelele wewewelo – Elelelele wewewelo
 L.S. Ogbodogbo o o o – Ogbodogbo o o o
 Ch. Qmadere etegə egwu n’efu – Qmadere does not dance without reason.
 L.S. Kamobə egwu ida – unless there is a drum music
 Ch. Ogbodogbo o o – Ogbodogbo o o
 L.S. Orihoro etegə egwu n’efu – Orihoro does not dance without reason.
 Ch. Kamobə egwu nryi – unless it is a dance for food.
 L.S. Ogbodogbo ye bə ememe – Ogbodogbo, movement is sluggish.

The peculiarity about this chant form is that it is performed by a single, individual performer, and, in most cases has a sustained verse form with repetitions. Of equal interest too is the fact that the performer acts as both lead singer and chorus.

The Ogele dirge chant form provides the individual performer with greater flexibility to treat the subject of death in her own manner and express her emotions in the words and melodies she chooses. For example, Enokpa Eze (2010) a professional Ogele dirge chanter has this to say: (Dirge No. 4).

Ugwuanyi atoru ozu – Ugwuanyi now lay dead.

Nẹ utobo gana avo okpa nẹgu – that Utobo (a type of four legged animal) is harvesting ground
 pea
 Onye vu ozu anagə agba oso munyi – corpse carrier do not look for shelter.
 Q gbaarə - If he looks for shelter
 Ovujeko ye bẹ onye? – on whose house should he go?
 Ugwuanyi agbaliire ije – Ugwuanyi is now embarking on a journey.
 Nẹ ẹnya ee nwuru anwu – the desire to see a dead.
 A nagə eme eme – man is not a welcome phenomenon.
 Nẹ Oyibo Ogiri atorū ozu – that Oyibo Ogiri is now lying dead.
 Nẹ nne anyi Oyibo Ogiri – our mother Oyibo Ogiri
 Ge eyiri ee shi oru lata – resembles someone who has just returned from a
 journey.
 Nwa nene Qmada – my sister, daughter of Qmada.
 Manẹ ozu na-adə emoro ee – so corpse is beautiful.
 Enokpa Eze, manẹ ozu na-agba mbafuru – Enokpa Eze, so the corpse sweats?
 Nwa Aame nwa Idoko – Son of Ame nwa Idoko
 Onye jeko be ogerenyi - one visiting an elder.
 Meme ufwarā – should make noise.
 Nẹ ogerenyi nẹ - eyi ekwa ka agwo – Because elders lay eggs like the Snakes.
 Nwa Aame nwa Idoko – son of Ame nwa Idoko.
 Asanya kweru ekele ooo – Asanya accept greeting ooo.
 Utobo, agaligbo ga-alakq – The deceased is going home.
 Itodo nwa aame muru gə - Itodo nwa Qmẹ is your father.
 Nẹ egbe anagə ehe n’udele nwa – Because a kite cannot nurse a baby for the vulture.
 Enokpa Eze sə - Enokpa Eze says
 O nwere ewu libe ewu – one who has goat should tie it on a tether.
 Nẹ odanwu də n’okporo – Because death is on the way.
 Qdanwu bu ogbo o yaarə - Death kills and leaves the deceased.
 Mẹ agə bu ogbo o vuru – But the lion will kill.
 laarə n’efwa je eryile – and take the corpse to the bush for meat.
 Enqkpa Eze. Qnwu ma oo – Enokpa Eze, as it pleases death.
 Enokpa Eze, onwu ma oo – Enokpa Eze as it pleases death.
 Edo oga ogiri, onwu ma oo – Edooga Ogiri as it pleases death.
 Edo oga Ogiri onwu ma oo – Edoqga Ogiri as it pleases death
 Qnwx ma kee o mele – death, do as it pleases you.
 Qnwx ma oo – As it pleases death oo
 Osede nene Qmada Eze – Osede, son of Qmada Qmada Eze
 Osede sə nẹ ya adəgə ebo n’elugwu – Osede says that he cannot be two on the mountain.
 Janyi nene Qmada – my colleague, son of Qmada
 Sə nẹ ya bu kpakpa – says he is a hawk.
 Enokpa Eze, agbaliire m ije – Enokpa Eze, I am embarking on a journey.
 Eeke nene Qmada – mother Qmada.
 Ekarā neere nə m ẹnya – let termite look after my house.

Edoga nwa Eze deeje oo – Edoga nwa Eze, I salute you.
Edoga Eze, onwu ma oo – Edoga Eze, as it pleases death.

This dirge form consists of direct statement to the theme of death. This dirge form involves the repetition of key phrases over and over. The chanter begins the dirge by singing a simple verse alone.

Another type of Elugwu Ezike dirge involves antiphonal collaboration between the lead singer and chorus. That is the solo and chorused refrain. The lead singer usually uses the refrain to gain time to think of the next thematic statement to insert in the dirge. In this case, the refrain takes the form of a predominant image from a preceding line: (Dirge No. 5).

L.S. Mənyi ukwu ze – when a heavy rain falls

Mənyi ukwu ze – when a heavy rain falls.

Ch. Mənyi ukwu zegbo q la n’oto – the heavy down pour will be collected in a hole.

L.S. Ugwuany [ezegbo la n’oto – Ugwuany] is dead and buried.

Ch. Məny [ukwu zegbo q la n’oto – After heavy down pour, it will be collected
in hole.

L.S. Ikoryiko e vute manya ba adobe – Trouble has brought wine.

Ch. Mə anyi ja anəchayile ba ala – And we shall drink it all before we go.

L.S. Gwongwo o gwongwo o – Gwongwo o gwongwo o.

Ch. Gwongwo o gwongwo o – Gwongwo o gwongwo o.

L.S. Mənyi ukwu ze – when a heavy rain falls

Mənyi ukwu ze – when a heavy rain falls.

Ch. Mənyi ukwu zegbo o la n’oto – the heavy down pour will be collected in a hole.

The improvising lead singer utilizes the sensitivity of this device to introduce moods of sorrow through intimate personal asides as she chants the dirge. The heavy down pour is referring to deceased and “ila n’oto” (will be collected in a hole) refers to burying the deceased in the grave. The “ikoryiko” (trouble) to have brought the wine refers to the death that has occurred. The idea of drinking wine here denotes that wine is essential in funeral ceremony to grease the occasion. The use of asides in funeral dirges transform impersonal words into intimate verbal expressions, making them emotionally charged with connotative meaning, and by so doing bringing both performer and audience to reflect on the implicit meaning of the words. It is quite important to underscore the fact that performers of Elugwu Ezike dirges have the flexibility to determine which dirge they would use during their performances. From time to time, the performers alternate between “the solo and chorused refrain” as shown above, and “the statement and response structure’ demonstrated below:

L.S. o nwuu yaarə anyi oo – He dies and forget us.

Ugwuja anwu oo – Ugwuja is dead oo.

o nwuu oo – He has died.

Ch. o nwuu ma – He has gone to sleep.

L.S. o labaare ma – He has gone to sleep.

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:6 June 2019

John Odo Onu

Ethnopoetic Study of Igbo Oral Funeral Poetry in Elugwu Ezike, Enugu State, Nigeria

482

Ch. o labaarə oo – He has gone.

L.S. Nwa Edogba a tomiirə - Edoga has kicked the bucket.

Ch. o labaarə ma – He has gone to sleep.

L.S. Ebe kẹ Ugwuja no ee – where is Ugwuja ee?

The constant repetition of the word “labaarə” and “nwuu” by both the lead singer and chorus reveals the aesthetic features of this particular dirge. The lead singer does not just introduce the song, she is allowed the flexibility for originality during its performance, while deciding how to end the song. It is important to emphasize that this statement/response form involving the lead singer and chorus is characterized by simplicity of words and expressions that are hardly changed during the performance of the entire dirge. From all indications then, it is obvious, as Ruth Finnegan (1979:262) states, that:

...the antiphonal form provides scope for far more flexibility, rich elaboration, and interpretation than is immediately apparent from the bald statement that this is the characteristic structure of African songs. It is also a most suitable form for the purposes to which it is put. It makes possible both the exploitation of an expert and creative leader and popular participation by all those who wish or are expected to join in.

The repetition and lack of demand on the chorus also makes it particularly appropriate for dancing. Finally, the balanced antiphony both gives the poem a clear structure and adds to its musical attractiveness.

It is quite obvious in this discussion that Elugwu Ezike dirges, like other varieties of African poetry, cannot be analyzed following the rules of English verse that are based on the measured effect of stressed and unstressed syllables. The musical accompaniment to the dirge, the rhythm of the dance as the dirges are performed, the energy, emotion, and passion with which the performers give vent to their inner feelings. All these elements provide a unique perspective in the appreciation of the Elugwu Ezike dirges.

7.3. Structure

The length of Elugwu Ezike Igbo dirges varies, with the number of performers determining the length of each dirge. Although some dirges performed by single performer are relatively short, the rule, rather than the exception, is that dirges performed by a single performer tend to be longer. Quite remarkable is the fact that the performance of these dirges is usually, though not always, executed by individual artists who sing and perform alone without musicians or a chorus. Such artists are sometimes commissioned to compose tailor-made dirges for particular funerals. These kinds of tailor-made dirges, like the following, are usually long, constituting not more than three stanzas: (Dirges N. 7).

Ugwu Edogb Aanya – Ugwu Edogba Aanya.

N’odori n’odome – In Odori of Odome.

Nwa oke eene – Son of a great man.
Kola onye ishi ẹwo aako – Tells a tale better than a grey haired man.
M m onye ije ga-agbaliko – A ma traveler is about to depart.
Ji enyiire Ugwu – The yam is now climbing the hill.
Edogba Aanya n’odori – Edogba Aanya of Odori.
Anyi ga-ano n’abada ekyirijeniye Agaligbo - we are at the bottom
of the hill watching Agaligbo.

Agaligbo – Agalibo.
Agaligbo – Agaligbo.
Ije gə buru ahaga – let your journey be successful.
Mẹ anyi nweru ahogo – so that we shall earn the praises.
Ladoore oyi - Go in peace.
Nẹ onwegə onye nẹ alakogə - For we shall all die one day.
Nẹ o bu afwa bẹ anyi biacharrə - the world is a market place.
Nẹ onye byiarə uwa ga-ala – Death is certain for everyone of
us.
Aanya nna m oo – Thank you my father oo.
Edogba Aanya Onogwu – Edogba Aanya of Qnogwu.
Gə bu ebule ocha azugu orye – You the white ram that will not
be taken to orie market.

Onu nwa okwo owaa Eje – Onu nwa okwo son of Qwaa Eje.
Muru Edogba Aanya – The father of Edogba Aanya.
Ugwu juru Ugwu – Hill among hills.
Ladoore oyi - Go in peace.

This three-stanza structure makes it possible for the message in the dirge to be delivered by a lone performer who resorts to improvisation in the course of the performance. Nonetheless, some dirges performed by a single performer could also be relatively short, closely mimicking the regular and irregular phrases in the song. The following dirge performed by a lead singer and chorus, for example, is just six lines: (Dirge No. 8).

L.S. Ije nduru – Dove’s movement
Ch. {uu we ee – just swiftly
L.S. Qmada ala oo – Qmada is dead
Ch. {uu we ee – just swiftly
L.S. Nene ala oo – mother is dead
Ch. uu we ee – just swiftly.

This short dirge is characterized by lyrical repetition. The /o/ and /ẹ/ sounds in the lines of both lead singer and chorus echo the sense of loss and sadness of the mourner. The lyrical repetition

is not just limited to sounds, it also extends to words in the song. For instance, the following dirge illustrates the above assertion: (Dirge No. 9).

Nene mu oo – my mother oo
Cho ogoro oo – cho ogoro oo
Nene ala oo – mother has gone oo
Cho ogoro oo – cho ogoro oo
Nwomaja ala oo – Nwomaja is gone
Cho ogoro oo – Cho ogoro oo
Nene ala oo – mother is gone oo
Cho ogoro oo – cho ogoro oo
Nene ala oo – mother has gone oo
Cho ogoro oo – cho ogoro oo
Nene ala oo – mother has gone oo
Cho ogoro oo – cho ogoro oo

The constant repetition of the words “Nene mu” and “cho ogoro” emphasizes the reality that although the performers wish the dead woman (Nwomaja) farewell, she is, in fact, dead and will never respond. The chanter of the above dirge has limited opportunities for verbal improvisation in contrast to the lead singer who has more flexibility to improvise in the course of performing the dirge.

In like manner, dirges performed by the chorus tend to have a relatively stable structure. Since most choruses of the dirges are short and repetitive, they are easy to memorize and master. The occurrence of parallelism in these dirges enhances their structure. In this regard, Elugwu Ezike Igbo dirges reveal a remarkable sense of balance in the form of semantic parallelism in which various images within a chant are developed independently and the relationship between them is not apparent on the surface” (Okpewho, 1992:81).

7.4. Rhythm

Elugwu Ezike Igbo dirges, like most African songs have a free rhythm and no rigid metrical scheme. It is in this regard that Ruth Finnegan (1978:265) observes that:

The fundamental importance of rhythm in vocal as in other African music is widely accepted, but there is little agreement as to its exact structure. One helpful distinction is between songs in “free”, and those in relatively “strict” rhythm.

In the former songs, the singing is not coordinated with any bodily rhythmic activity such as dancing. The very common songs to strict time, however, have a beat that is articulated with dancing, rhythmic movement, percussion by instruments, or hand-clapping, all of which contribute to the form and attractiveness of the song. These rhythms are worked out in many different ways in various types of songs, but one commonly recurring musical feature seems to be the simultaneous use of more than one metre at a time, as a way of heightening the rhythmic tension.

The corpus of dirges in this study reveals a free rhythm like the rhythm in Yoruba Ijala which Babalola (1966:344) says has “a poetic language organized so as to create impressions and fulfill functions of poetic rhythm”. In this regard, dirges performed and sung by one lead singer tend to have a free rhythm. For instance, during the “Igba Ogige” (war song) performed in the honour of a married man, the flutist (Qkwa opu) will recite with his flute thus: (Dirge No. 10).
Onye byarə ije alaarə oo – the visitor has gone.

Elele lele, e lele lele – Elele lele e lele
Agə anarə ububu nwa ya oo – the lion has snatched an antelope its offspring.
o chi uta chita uta – He who has a bow, let him come along with it.
o chi egbe chita egbe – He who has a gun, let him come along with it.
Nə agə anarə ububu nwa ya oo – the fact that the lion has snatched an antelope
its offspring.

The dirge demonstrates how the individual performer has the flexibility to treat the themes in her own way, and by so doing, expresses his emotions in the words and melodies he chooses. Dirges performed in collaboration with a chorus, on the other hand, have a beat that is articulated by dance, the accompaniment of drumming, and the playing of a host of assorted musical instruments. All these contribute to the form and beauty of the dirge and bring out its poetic style. This can be illustrated in the following dirge. (Dirge No: 11).

L.S. Onye nẹ-ewotenə anyi ose? – who will bring us pepper?
L.S. Onye nẹ-ewotenə anyi ose? – who will bring us pepper?
L.S. Mẹ anyi worə gbayaarə olu – so that we can use it to clear our throat.
Ch. Itodo nwa Eze wotenə anyi ose – Itodo nwa Eze send us pepper.
Ch. Mẹ anyi worə gbayaarə olu – so that we shall it use to clear
our throat.
L.S. Mẹ anyi worə gbayaarə olu – so that we shall it use to clear our throat.
L.S. Olu anyi soorə xzq oso – let our voice follow the path he is
walking.
Ch. o haarə ẹmu, o ruure ida – may our voice sound high so as to
reach ida.
L.S. Onye ne-ewoterə anyi ose? – Who will bring us pepper?
Karo Onojo wotenə anyi ose – Karo Onojo bring us pepper.
Ch. Mẹ anyi worə gbayaarə olu – so that we can use it to clear our throat.
Olu anyi soorə uzo oso – let our voice follow the path she is treading.
O haarə ẹmu o ruure {da – may our voice sound high so as to reach ida.
o haarə ẹmu o ruure {da – may our voice sound so high so as to reach {da}.

As the deceased’s women kindred sing the above song, they will be clapping their hands and dancing calling on the deceased’s children to send edible things like kola, wine and food. This song is usually sung when the kindred women (umuada) are feeling hungry. The musical instruments such

as the use of empty milk cup that accompany the singing of the dirge determine the tempo of the rhythm. Hence, Nalova Lyonga's (1979:240) observation that:

...the drum principally dictates the tempo of certain kinds of performance for its rhythm slows down or quickens according to the movements of the dance, or more predominantly, its pattern may indicate change in action.

It is this rhythm which Lyonga refers to as contributing to the aesthetics of the dirges, especially when, as we have seen, they are accompanied by musical instruments which stimulate other mourners in the audience to sing and dance with the performers.

Men also use musical instrument such as Qkanga drum to stimulate other mourners to dance. The Qkanga musical group will sing the following dirges and transform them into Qkanga drum beats: (Dirge No: 12).

onyoko nyoko o rigə {dagba – onyokonyoko cannot eat idagba.
O gwuru Onu – He who has dug a hole.
Ba achiyima ẹka – should come and dip his hands.
Nẹ okwu adəgə ya – And there will be no problem.
Onye nna ya chiri Eze – one whose father was a chief.
E chiire ude – is now being crowned a king.
Onye sə nẹ ajədə ne-egbu eryl – He who says that the hunter kills and eats alone.
Ba afuma ajədə nẹ-ekparyikpa – should come and watch the hunter in a thick forest
Onye sə nẹ ajədə ne-egbu eryl – He who says the hunter kills and eats alone.
Ba afuma ajədə nẹ-ekparyikpa – should come and watch the hunter in a thick forest
Odo ne-egbu eryl – Odo kills and eats alone.
Ba afuma ajədə nẹ-ekparyikpa – should come and watch the hunter in a thick forest
Onye na-achi chiirə anyi - let the ruler rule us.
Mẹ okwu adalẹ ozo – so that there will be no trouble again.
Ugwu Eze chiirə anyi - Let Abugu Eze rule us.
Mẹ okwu adalẹ ozo – that there will no trouble again.

The Qkanga drummers will recite the above songs and translate them into Qkanga music. This Qkanga music will be accompanied with dancing by the deceased children and relations. This okanga music is only played when a cow is provided for the funeral ceremony of the deceased. It is important to note that in Elugwu Ezike Igbo, it is only those who have provided cow during their deceased's father's funeral ceremony that are qualified to dance the music. Thus, the popular adage in Elugwu Ezike Igbo that "okanga adag n'okwu ogbenye", that is okanga music is not played in the compound of the poor.

7.5. Summary of Research Findings

Language in India www.languageinindia.com ISSN 1930-2940 19:6 June 2019

John Odo Onu

Ethnopoetic Study of Igbo Oral Funeral Poetry in Elugwu Ezike, Enugu State, Nigeria

487

This study found that Elugwu Ezike oral funeral poetry is deeply rooted in myths and the beliefs of the people that form the basic philosophical foundation of the Elugwu Ezike cultural fabric and hence, its context specific. Each dirge is associated with a particular burial rite. Death is a debt which everybody owes. It is the separation of the soul from the body. The Elugwu Ezike Igbo like other African communities conceive death not as the end of life but rather a transition from the physical world to the spirit world.

Textual repetitions serve the purpose of emphasizing the messages embedded in the Elugwu Ezike oral funeral poetry. Burial rite is not just performed for a mere entertainment of the audience. There are various virtues embodied in the form, content and performance of the funeral dirge that accompanies it. Most virtues emphasize the importance of bravery, hard work, respect, collective responsibility and communal ties among others.

The solo-and-response form is the basic structural feature in most Elugwu Ezike oral funeral poetry. However, in actual performance it was observed that there is no strictly fixed framework of funeral dirge as is the case in western music. The structure of Elugwu Ezike funeral dirge is a flexible one incorporating spontaneous creations of the individual mourner, her reflections and statements, about the deceased. These may also include conventional features of allusions to ancestry and accomplishments, kingship terms, epithets and terms of endearment. Its flexible nature allows it to dwell at length on the qualities of the deceased. Thematic development is based on spontaneity, extemporization and creativity. Variations in texts lead to variations in significant themes as dictated by speech rhythms and speech tones.

The infracultural poetic devices used in the study make oral funeral poetry appropriate for funerals. For example, at funerals, people express deep feelings about their loss, hence the use of imagery and symbolism. As mourners coin image after image, they often find it necessary to stress and emphasize the feeling of loss hence the use of repetitions. Because death is a very emotional subject, the mourners even exaggerate the loss, hence the use of hyperbole. Stylistic features and traditional elements of the music render the oral funeral poetry sing able and danceable, making them even more appropriate at funeral. The structure of Elugwu Ezike dirges, their chant and antiphonal form, the figurative language employed such as lyrical repetition, personification, symbolism, imagery, apt metaphors and allusions constitute some of the essential components that are utilized in the realization of this traditional oral funeral poetry. The performers portray their innate creative abilities to enhance their art, thereby giving this particular genre of funeral poetry much of its beauty.

The study also found that when funeral song is rendered, the words, facial expressions of the singers, vocal expressiveness and other paralinguistic strategies all add to the impression it creates. In all forms of performances, the performer exploits linguistic, tonal, musical and visual resources at his/her disposal to realize the aim of performance. The funeral dirge of a man and a woman may have the same theme of loss, helplessness and regret but the words of rendition change as a performer recounts the achievements of the man which in most cases are different from those of the woman.

Lastly, it was noted that emergent political, economic and social changes are gradually influencing the trend of the traditional oral funeral poetry of Elugwu Ezike performance. Changes in traditional burial rites and its accompanying funeral dirges are due to religious and socio-economic developments. Many churches discourage the use of traditional funeral dirges, preferring edifying hymns instead. The reason behind this, the researcher is told, is that dirges reflect a pre-Christian worldview and as such are to be eschewed by Christians. In addition, the coming of electricity to the villages halfway the nineties led to loud music taking the place of the traditional oral funeral poetry during the wake keepings. Culture is a moving target, always reviewing and reshaping itself, yet at the same time we cannot help but lament the imminent loss of such a rich vein of Elugwu Ezike Igbo culture.

7.6. Conclusion

The performance of Elugwu Ezike oral funeral poetry reveal an impressive array of descriptive passages in which persons and objects are described in vivid language coloured by the performers' emotions. These vivid pictures are conjured from the performers' imagination, reproducing fine shades of feelings and making the audience perceive familiar images through their imagination as though they were seeing them for the first time. The performers use different symbols in association with variegated images in the dirges to convey different moods that arouse various emotions in the audience. It is in this sense that the performers portray their creative abilities to enhance their art. The survival of Elugwu Ezike traditional funeral poetry is threatened by forces of modernization. The senility of the Igbo funeral artists, coupled with the fact that the Christian mode of funeral celebration prevents the emergence of new practitioners of this form of oral art, makes Igbo traditional funeral poetry vulnerable to extinction.

Changes in political organizations, religious practices, economic life and desire for modernity have led to the changed mode of funeral dirges in Elugwu Ezike which in turn, have led to adjustments in the organization of traditional funeral dirge practices to fit into the new culture. For example, Christianity has led to widespread use of the Christian music that has interfered with the performance format and role of funeral dirges. In some extreme cases, there has been total replacement of the traditional funeral dirges with Christian hymns and gospel music. This has been due to negative attitudes towards African traditional funeral dirges by some early church missionaries and perpetuated by the current Christians.

References

- Ajuwon, B. (1980). The preservation of Yoruba tradition through hunters funeral dirges. *Africa*. 50(1), 66.
- Ajuwon, B. (1982). *Funeral dirges of Yoruba Hunters*. USA: Nok Publishers International.
- Alembi, E. (2002). The Construction of Abanyole perceptions of death through oral funeral poetry. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis, University of Helsinki, Finland.
- Amadi, A.A (1974). Traditional burial rites in Aku community. *Okike*. 1 (1), 83-92.
- Babalola, S.A. (1966). *The content and form of Yoruba Ijala*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Bauman, R. (1977). Verbal art as performance. In: *American anthropologist*, 77.

- Egwuagu, N.I. (1995). The content of funeral dirge in Igbo oral tradition: A case study of Ezinifite in Aguata Local Government Area of Anambra state. Unpublished B.A. Long Essay, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
- Finnegan, R. (1970). *Oral literature in Africa*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Finnegan, R. (1977). Oral poetry in its nature, significance and social context. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Finnegan, R. (1978). *Oral literature in Africa*. Nairobi: Oxford University Press.
- Hymes, D. (1982). Narrative form as a grammar of experience: Native American and a glimpse of English. *Journal of Education* 164(2), 121-125.
- Jacobson, R. (1980). A postscript to the discussion of grammar of poetry. *Diacritics* 10(1), 21-25.
- Lyonga, N. (1979). Literary elements of African oral tradition in modern verse: The structure and form. *Abbia*, 240-245.
- Miruka, O. (1997). *Encounter with oral literature*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers limited.
- Ogede, O.S. (1995). Context, form and poetic expressions of Igede funeral dirges. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Okpewho, I. (1984). *The heritage of African poetry*. London: ESSEX.
- Okpewho, I. (1992). *African oral literature*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Onuekwusi, J.A. (2001). *Fundamentals of African oral literature*. Owerri: Alphabet Nigeria Publishers.
- Scheubs, H. (1977). Body and image in oral narrative performance, *New Literary History*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
- Tedlock, D. (1983). The spoken word and the work of interpretation. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Uzochukwu, S. (2001). *Traditional funeral poetry of the Igbo*. Lagos: University of Lagos Press.

INTERVIEWS

- Enokpa Eze. Aged 72 years at Arji on 16/01/2018.
- Onojo nwa Ugwuanyi aged 68 years at Amaja 10/2/2018.
- Monica nwa Ezeja. Aged 53 years at Amube 20/02/2018.
- Raphael Ezeja. Aged 68 years at Ikpamodo 22/02/2018.
- John Ugwuja. Aged 69 years at Igogoro 26/02/2018.
- Felix Ogbonnaya Aged 69 years at Ikpamodo 27/2/2018
- Oyimaja Ogbere Aged 78 years at umuida on 5/03/2018.
-