Ẹ́hiẹ̀ Journal of Languages and Literature
Vol. 1, No. 1; Nov., 2024
Published by the Department of Languages, University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria

Form, content and style in song–texts of *Mmanwụ cult* dance performance in Ndọkwa communities of Delta State, Nigeria

Dike-Gegeri Gegeri, PhD[1]

Article history
Received: July 10, 2024
Revised: September 22, 2024
Accepted: October 4, 2024
Published Online: November 20, 2024

[1]Department of Languages (English and Literary Studies)
University of Delta, Agbor, Nigeria
gegeri.gegeri@unidel.edu.ng

Abstract
This paper centres on the form, content and style in song-texts of Mmanwụ cult dance performance in Ndọkwa communities of Delta State, Nigeria. It is divided into four parts: the first part, dwells on a brief history and geographical location of Ndọkwa nation, the origin of Mmanwụ dance in Ndọkwa land, its membership and priesthood. The second deals on the form, content and style of the songs, while the third is based on the creativity in performance, thematic analysis of the songs and the aesthetics, therein. The fourth, which is the conclusion, is on the importance of Mmanwụ in Ndọkwa land. Being a discourse on oral literary poesy and dramaturgy, the methodology so employed, encompasses oral interviews, active participation by this researcher, during the performance proper and the use of library materials and the Internet for purposes of elucidation of gathered information.
Keywords: Song-texts, form, content, style, Mmanwụ, Ndọkwa

Introduction

Ndọkwa, as a community, is made up of a conglomeration of villages or clans. It lies in the Northern Senatorial District of Delta State, Nigeria. She is bounded on the North by Urhonigbe and Ugoneki, in Edo State, on the South by the Ijaws, on the East by the River Niger, on the West by the Urhobos and the Isokos, on the North-East by the Ika and Asaba people and on the South-East by the Ahoada people of River State.

According to Cletus Elugbe (2000: 2), "Ndọkwa" is coined from the name of the two district councils that once existed in the former Aboh Division in 1938, namely the NDOSIMILI and ỤKWỤANI district councils. The "Ndo", the first syllable in NDỌKWA emanated from NDOSIMILI, while the second syllable, "KWA" was extracted from ỤKWỤANI. In the words of Okolugbo, E.O. (2004:3), this group of people occupies "the area lying approximately between longitude $6^0 6^1$ and $6^0 42^1$ East and latitude $6^0 31^1$ and $5^0 25^1$ North and they constitute a political division in the Delta State of Nigeria". (1). Again, Okolugbo is of the view that Aboh Division was created in 1931 with the amalgamation of Kwale and Aboh districts.

There are thirty-six clans in Ndọkwa land. Twenty-one of these are in NDOSIMILI. These are Abara, Aboh, Adia, Afor, Akari, Ase, Ashaka, Ibrede, Igbuku, Asaba-Ase, Okpai, Inyi, Ibedeni, Onuabo, Onyia, Ossissa, Umuolu, Utchi, Ushie, Utuoku and Azagba. The fifteen clans in the Ukwuani region are: Abbi, Ebedei, Akoku, Amai. Emu, Ezhiokpo, Ezhionum, Obiaruku, Onicha-Ụkwụani, Ogume, Umuebu, Umukwata, Umutu, Utagha-Uno and Utagha-Ogbe. Elugbe (2000:2) is of the view that,

> "Before 1951, the area also included Orogun and Abraka, as well as Ndoni. In 1951. however, Orogun and Abraka were transferred to the Urhobo Division and in 1976, Ndoni joined the Rivers State".

These distinct villages have diverse historical origins, but of unique importance is the common linguistic elements in the Ụkwụani idiolects of these same people.

Ndọkwa is presently divided into three Local Government Areas: Ndọkwa-East, with Aboh as the headquarters, Ndọkwa-West, with Utagha-Ogbe (Kwale) as the headquarters, and Ụkwụani, with Obiaruku as its headquarters, respectively. The population of these administrative units put together is 355, 496 (the 1991 and 2006 Population censuses); but to Okolugbo (2004:1), the population of Ndọkwa community is approximately 500,000.

Origin of the *Mmanwụ cult* in Ndọkwa land

Prior to the existence of the Mmanwụ cult in Ndọkwa land, the people had other functional traditional festivals. These included, the Ukpalabor festival, Ikenge festival, Ndukwu festival, Atu, Okwumeshi, Ezemmọr, Ifejiokwu, Utor, Ikaba, Ogbanje, Enyi, Asua and Igba festivals, among others. But with the advent of Christianity, most of these festivals have died a natural death.

It is uncertain when, where, how and why the Mmanwụ cult started in Ndọkwa land, so most of the information is hinged on the oral history of the Ndọkwa people. According to Otu Egbune, the *Mmanwụ* cult originated from the Okija community in Anambra State, Eastern Nigerian. But Chief Onyiuwee Robert is of the view that, "its origin dates back to the *Mmanwụ's* activities in Okpai", an enclave in the eastern part of Ndokwa community. But the most popular version is that which traced it to Aboh, another Ndọkwa village, along the riverine section of Ndọkwa land.

However, legend has it that before the coming of the Whiteman into West Africa, and before he ventured into the shore of the River Niger, along the boundaries of Ndọkwa land, there used to be some black navigators (using improvised canoes) on the high seas. These were mostly the people of Anambra State, an

assertion based on their medium of communication via the Ibo language. Since the nearness to water makes for effective agricultural practices, the people inhabiting this part of Ndọkwa land were mostly hunters, farmers and fishermen. The more reason, too, why trade flourished in this same region. The Igbos, then, from the West of the Niger, exchanged for fishes, bush-meats, yams, plantains, peppers, snails, hides and skins, such articles of trade, like kolanuts, spices, garden eggs, mask, raffias, fruits (udala, ukpa, ukwa, etc). According to Pa. Egbune, "that was the famous period of the trade by barter". As the commercial activities developed, certain cultural traits were transferred and assimilated, among these groups of traders, a phenomenon that was given a boost by the common linguistic affinity, migrations, settlement of emigrants, founding of villages and inter-tribal marriages.

At first, the *Mmanwụ* dance remained the reserved right of the hinterland communities in Ndọkwa – Aboh, Abara, Inyi, Igbuku, Okpai, Utchi, among others, until it gradually spread to other parts of Ndọkwa land. Among the Ndọkwa Villages where the *Mmanwụ cult* exits till today include: Emu, Amai, Abbi, Ezhionum, Ogume, Obiaruku, Aboh, Ashaka, Ibrede, Igbuku and Okpai, among others. This is aimed towards finding avenues for social recreation, entertainment, and solace in times of crises, among others. There is no fixed time, period or place for its performance. The more reason the dance can be rendered during rehearsals, initiation of new members, events of societal importance (deaths, wars, festivals, marriages, divorce), or visits by top-government functionaries.

Membership and priesthood

"The masquerades - (dance of masked figures of various kinds) probably vary through the region in content, purpose and pattern, but they all seem to include" a unique element, that of being a secret cult which activities remained secretive to its members (Finnegan, 1970.p.509)**.**

Initiation into the cult cuts across sexes and is mostly based on personal interest and the trust reposed on someone. The membership is divided into grades and members attain relevance based on their active participation and payment of membership dues. Each cult has a headman, officials and unwritten constitution. The male-members get initiated from the age of fifteen upwards, while that of the females come up between the ages of eighteen and twenty. On certain occasions, children are initiated on grounds of incessant sickness, attacks by evil spirits, wizards, witches, or for the fact that their parents are members. The women are called "Adamgbarigo", the men, "Adukwu-ọgwu", while the children are the Adaelele. The non-members ("Ogbodi") are not allowed into their members midst, neither are they given the chance to interact with members or bestride the sacred walls of the cult's shrine. Initiation is carried out in a secluded environment where the initiates are made to encounter the *Mmanwụ* "spirit" in its true form. The intricacies involved are never revealed because all initiates are sworn to oaths of secrecy. The priesthood is based on age, marital status and years of experience as a member. This office accommodates two prominent personalities: the Oliakwu (or Otiogbodi) and the Egbochi-Ọgwu or Ntechi). The Oliakwu gives the approval for the performance of *Mmanwụ* dance. He directs the messenger (Ọmaekwe) to summon the members for a meeting or a performance. Thus, the "Ọmaekwe" remains the public relations officer, while the Oliakwu is the chairman.

The Ntechi interprets the guttural voice of the "spirit", to both the members and non-members. He also defends and directs the movements of the *Mmanwụ* during performance. He is usually diabolical, hence the name "Egbochiọgwu" (barricader of evils), a role likened to that of the chief of defence in the army.

There are two kinds of Mmanwụ - the huge one, known as the mother masquerade, "Mmanwụ Nkwụkwụ" and the small masquerade, called the "Akakpọr" (dwarf). The huge masquerade hatches and carries out the actual performance, while the dwarf enforces orderliness during performance. This agile nature of the

Akakpọr weaves the myth about his ability to jump over a heightened rope meant for hanging washed clothes. To Ruth Finnegan (1970:511),

> these masks have conventional meanings. Some are represented as masculine, some as feminine, some are fierce", (like the Akakpọr") "some comic, some (mostly the feminine ones) beautiful. This the 'beautiful' masks, portrayed according to Ibo ideas of stylized beauty and feminine character (but worn by men), who do most of the actual dancing;... the comic masks amuse by clowning, whereas the fierce ones are meant to frighten... others are used to keep the crowd back from the dancers, and threaten them with whips".

The *Mmanwụ* dance is not performed indiscriminately by anybody or groups of persons, as the masquerade cult belongs to the 'privileged few, group or family. The *Mmanwụ* is believed to be a representative of the spirit world since it usually appears from ant-holes. In acknowledgement of this awesome postulation, everyone in the community (including the Ọkpala-Ụkwụ and Ada-the oldest man and woman in Ụkwụani villages) revels the *Mmanwụ*, whenever it comes on stage.

Form, content and style in *Mmanwụ* song–texts

The *Mmanwụ* songs (Ẹbu-mmanwụ) constitute a genre of verbal art practiced mainly by the Ibos of Eastern Nigeria and the Ndọkwa communities of Delta State. These songs are usually rendered during the dramatic enactment of the *Mmanwụ* dance. The lead-singer is the Ọkwu-ẹbu, a specialist in song act. The *Mmanwụ* songs are of diverse forms with characteristic subject-matters that are given impetus by the poetic devices employed during their renditions. In the course of performance, the lead-singer doubles as a reciter-performer. The songs include ballads, lyrics, religious songs, funeral dirges, chants, elegies, odes and incantations. Others are panegyrics (Praise Songs), war-songs, social songs and didactic songs.

The verbal content of these songs tends to be short, though the actual performance may be lengthy and often ephemeral. There is usually plenty of improvisations and spontaneous responses imbued with repetitions of words and parallelisms. The praise songs are performed *in-situ*, mostly to shower praises on distinguished members of the society, or on certain noble lineage and families. At times, they are rendered on members of the cult, as in:

Ụkwụani:	**English:**
Bene Bene Bene nde egu m oo	come and watch, come and watch my dancers
Ehe ehe Bene nde egu m	hasten up, hasten up, so as to watch my dancers
Ebele meuwa bu nwana m oo	ebelemeuwa is my father's daughter
Ehe ehe bene nde egu m (chorus)	hasten up, hasten up, so as to watch my dancers

The war-songs feature prominently as they possess some peculiar elements that permeate all songs rendered during performance - repetitions, allusions, exaggerations, ironies, metaphors, among others. For instance, the song "Ọdumegwu haya", though a dirge and didactic, is a war challenge to evil doer(s) in the society (herein, Ọdumegwu) to come for a combat.

A song is adjudged successful in the manner the Singer-Artist employs and commands such poetic devices, like repetitions, digressions, parallelisms, word-pictures, metaphors, similes, allusions, epigrams, elisions and adds humour to the refrains in the songs. Repetition is the bedrock on which the songs rest. Without repetition, the songs are insignificant, poetically. As a stylistic device, it remains a pointer to measuring the singer's intelligent-quotient as he recounts series of incidents and names of creations, as in this song:

Ụkwụani:	**English:**
Omenanio	Tradition
Egwu Omenani adalala	Traditional dance does go extinct
Omenani ooo	Tradition ooo
Omenani sili ani bia	Tradition came from the earth

Omenanio ooo	Tradition ooo
Egwu omenani adalala	Traditional dance don't go atrophy
Omenani ooo.	Tradition ooo

The repetition of these lines spurs the audience into active participation, as they took turns to chorusing the songs, invariably, bringing about emotional purgation. Again, it creates avenues for the *Mmanwụ* to recourse into memory lane, so as to reiterating new styles from the stock of available formulas (formulae).

In rendering the songs, the artist, at times, digresses from the former thematic pre-occupations, so as to provide varieties of themes, teach morals, create a suspense or bring about comic reliefs in a terse atmosphere. For instance, the singer shifts emphasis from Ọdumegwu's sexual promiscuity (with his sister – incest) to bestow praises on the elders of the community. This may take the form of verbal salutes, use of witticism or references to memorable events, as depicted below:

Ụkwụani:	**English:**
K'anyi weli ife tani anyi ni ngede si enwa	let us assume anything that stung us at night to be a mosquito
W' ahali ife n' ana ne' gwu	people leave the moon at night during dance in order to reach their homes.

In most of the songs, the parallelism between the lines render the diction poetic and figurative, as in this song:

Ụkwụani:	**English:**
Ngwa Ebelemeuwa bu 'wanamuo	alright Ebele is my sister
Anwu manimaesu bu 'wanamuo	the beautiful sun is my sister
Ife n'eti ni osa bu nw' anamuo	The moon that shines on all is my sister

"Ebelemuwa" and "Anwumanimaesu" and "Ifenetinosa", are names of people, possibly members of the *Mmanwụ* cult. The parallelism is drawn between the wicked world and the compassionate God (symbolized by the sun and moon that shine on the good and the bad people).

During performance, the artist, depending on his imaginative capacity, employs descriptive words to heighten the audience's sense of imagination. We therefore see the pictures of the chick, the virgin girl and Odumegwu, who makes love to a "chick". Odumegwu's is evil, hence the incest with his little sister:

Ụkwụani:	**English:**
Odumegwu haya ahahaya	Odumegwu I dare you to a combat
Kweni odumegu haya ahahaya	Chorus Odumegwu's fight challenge
Odonegwu ola mwaokwu haya hahahaya	Odumegwu who sexed a chick, haya ahahaya

Most of the songs are metaphorical and filled with personification as can be seen in the ascription of human traits to animals, in acknowledgement of the uncommon feats attained by such animals, birds, spirits and man in their domains. These include the eagle, lion, tiger, tortoise and legendary figures, among others, as illustrated in this song

Ụkwụani:	**English:**
Nwaugo 'wu' goacha nwa' go ugoachanio	The eaglet has matured, yes, gotten matured
Nwaugo nwa'gonachao ugo	The eaglet must get matured
Nwa'go 'wu' goacha nwa' go ugoachanio	The eaglet has gotten matured
Nwaugo nwa' gonacha ugo	The eaglet must become matured

This is a metaphorical way of portraying the exploits of a great warrior in the village. This feat is likened to the domineering status of the eagles in the kingdom of birds and the subsequent metamorphosis into a white eagle.

Allusions and epigrams are recurrent decimals in most of the songs. These feature mostly in the incantations, religious songs, dirges, elegies and praise songs, as in these lines.

Ụkwụani:	**English:**
One mmanwu g' apusa K'anyi Kpoo?	Which masquerade dares me?
One mmanwu g' apusa K'anyi Kpoo?	Which masquerade dares to fight me?
Egbe n'ekwe ooo!	Gun is booming ooo
Ehe ehee, ehe ehee	Yes, yes, yes, yes
Egbe n' ekwe n' ilo oo	Gun is booming in the our community
K' amali ife Oyibo meni igbo oo!	For us to know what the White men did to the Igbos

This is an allusion to the Nigerian Civil war and the ruthless defeat of the Ibos by the Federal troops. The "Oyibo" is a reference to the sophisticated weapons of warfare, as was used by the Nigerian Army, during the Nigeria- Biafra Civic War, as compared to the ones used by the Ibos, popularly referred to as, " Ogbunigwes".

As a style of rendition, the performer often makes use of hyperbole to create vivid images, pictures and humour. In one of such songs, "*Mmanwụ* Ofe ngige e", there is an exaggerated painting of the *Mmanwụ* as ruthless and mystic.

The form and style of the songs are equally shaped by the methods of word formation, like elisions, ellipses, compounding, reduplications, among others. The tone sequence of certain words are often changed, not because of the techniques associated with the renditions, but for the artist's desire to keep up with the pace of performance, so as to produce worthy songs. Elision occurs in the shortening of adjacent vowels that belong to two different words and the reduction of long syllables in some words, as in the song: "'Nwa'go Ugoachia 'wu' go 'ugo' 'chanio', which when rendered in ordinary everyday speech is, "Mwaugo Ugoacha Mwaugo Ugoachanio". In short, elisions are the catalysts with which *Mmanwụ* produces the guttural voice during performance.

Creativity in performance

The artist (the *Mmanwụ*) employs various formulae in the course of his oral compositions. These include memorization, recitation, digression, turn-taking, among others. He memorizes and improvises on the spur of the moment, depending on the occasion. He is usually given a prompt or cues by the Ekwe (the "talking" wooden-gong), which motivates him into action, via the language of the ancestors, as in:

Ụkwụani	**English:**
Ogbuefi, ogbuefi, ogbuefi!	Killer of native cow (3x)
Ogbuebunu bu agwo!	The reputable native doctor
Dibia mmo!	The esteemed herbalist
Mmanwuchukwu	God's own masquerade
Makanka emechi!	He, who sees the future
Mmanwu sili' igbo nuaolu!	The masquerade that came to us, from igboland!

This message is a pivot to any excellent performance as the *Mmanwụ* is gingered into creativity, thereby releasing the songs and accompanying refrains. Such refrains serve as the choruses to the verses or the initial lines of some songs

During performance, the innate or intuitive nature of the song-composer comes into play, as he weaves the concerned songs and effectively harmonises the desired words towards creating further new songs. He manipulates all formulas (avoids delays, interruptions, substitutes word-phrases) within his intellect and delivers a good performance. Though the *Mmanwụ* is the sole composer of the songs, often times he gets

assistance from one or more of his followers. He dictates the tune while the followers engage in the chorus. Ruth Finnegan (1977:85), succinctly described this action as follows:

> "he may sing the first half of each two-dimensional structure and a single accompanist may sing the other half antiphonally, or a large group may split up to perform antiphonally" (Finnegan, 85)

For instance, the *Mmanwụ's* call on the Ntechi or Egbochi, is a signal to him to take charge of the performance and immediately, the Egbochi will sing:

Ụkwụani	**English**
Nwáugo, Nwáugo acha	The eaglet, the eaglet has become matured
Nwáugo, ugo achani ooo	The eaglet, the eaglet has gotten matured, already
Nwaugo,ugo n'chaugo"	The eaglet will become matured

The *Mmanwụ* may interrupt this turn-taking or call-response patterns in composition in order to help out the lead singer. An example is when the *Mmanwụ* interrupts the song rendition of the female-composer as illustrated below:

Ụkwụani	**English**
"Agamebulu oji	I'm about to display
Mkpomkpor bulo' ji n'ga	Be fast about it
Mkporkpor" – sings the female.	Be fast--sings the female
"Agamebulu oji m o	I'm about to show my skills
Mkpomkpor	Go ahead
Ehe ehe mkporkpor	Oh yes, go ahead
Mmanwu n'eliogwu"	The masquerade that loves war-
– intrudes the *Mmanwụ.*	– intrudes the *Mmanwụ*

There may be occasional digressions during performance, like when the singer takes a verbal salute of some eminent persons or alludes to significant events that occurred in his immediate or remote environments. In this regard, repetitive words and paraphrases are employed in the song renditions and the refrains, invariably attaining excellent compositions. Such words and paraphrases also act as filler-gaps, which enables the artist to exploit stock of traditional formulae, without the audience noticing the delay. This filler-gaps are achieved also when the *Mmanwụ* puts a stop to the songs and concentrates on his dance steps.

The audience remains silent during a performance, except the members who are parts of such dramatic enactment. There are usually remarks of disapproval when a chorus or a rhythm deviates from the norms of song- creativity. The *Mmanwụ* might use one or more of these formulae to re- awaken the consciousness of the followers:

(a) He might tell the "ekwe" to call him with caution:
Ekwe weli udo nakpomuo
(b) He might play the role of the chorus instead of initiating the song,
(c) Or he might resort to an indirect chant like:

Ụkwụani:	**English:**
Agamegwu adimmaniaju	the prickling leave is unsuitable as a head pad
Nekume ebeijioko yepusu	Thread carefully so that you would not get lost
Nwamuo weli udo kimali ife Ineme	my child be cautious and know your duty.

The above statements are ironical ways of regulating the anomalies observed during performance in-situ.

Thematic analysis of the songs

There are diverse themes in the songs of the *Mmanwụ cul*t in Ndọkwa land. They include the themes of war, patience, beauty, birth, marriage, initiation, injustice, oppression, ill-fate, praise, transition and reincarnation, among others. For instance, the theme of war cum subsequent victory is succinctly captured in this song:

Nw ' ugo Nw ' ugoacha Nw' ugo 'U goachanio — 2 times
Nw' ugo Nw' ugonachia ugo

Ugoacha
Nw' ugo mw' ugonacha ugo — 2 times
Yohoho

The "Ochani" being a symbolic reference to the swiftness of the eagle, and the war conquests as were achieved by the warriors of Obiaruku. Most of the songs are clarion calls to the indigenes of the community to come out in defense of their ancestral homes, as in the song, entitled, "One mmọ g'apusa k'anyi kpoo?", translated into English as:

Ụkwụani	**English**
Onemmanwu gapusa Kanyi Kpoooo?	Which masquerades dare me for a combat
Onemmanwu gapusa Kanyi Kpoo?	Which masquerades dare me for a combat
Egbenekwe oo	The gun is booming
Ehehehee ehehehee	Ehehee ehehee
Egbe n'ekwe ni ilo	The gun is booming outside
K'ayali ife Oyibo menigboo	so that we reminiscent on Nigerian Civil-war

The theme of endurance is captured in the song about a man and the bee – a metaphorical allusion to the physical and spiritual attacks on "men" by "enemies" (whom later in life, got exposed through God's eternal providence, as in:

Ụkwụani	**English:**
Ama m ihe mme ni odudu	What is my offence
K'e odudu ji ata m oo	That the bee keeps stinging me?
Amam	I don't know.

This song is repeated several times to achieve the desired effects. At times, the misfortunes that befall an individual or a society are put into songs, like that of the virgin girl that was raped by her elder brother, Odumegwu:

Ụkwụani	**English**
Odumegwu haya aha haya	Odumegwu, I challenged you for a fight
Kweni odumegwu haya aha haya	Chorus Odumegwu's song
Odumegwu ola nwane	Odumegwu who rapes his sister
Haya haha haya!	Chorus Odumegwu's song
Odumegwu omete Kanife	Odumegwu the doer of unbelievable.
Haya haha haya	Chorus Odumegwu's song

On the event of a death, either of an influential man or a member of the cult, death becomes the thematic pre-occupation of the songs during the burial ceremony. The songs will dwell on the futility of life and the destructive nature of death - wicked and awesome. Prior to the interment, the song may take this form:

Ụkwụani	**English**
Anido Anidu m o	land be blessed land guide my steps
Anidumo k' anyi j' egwu (refrain)	Land guide me to make a dance
Ani do anyi ana	Land be blessed we are going
Anidumo kaje egwu	Land guide me to make a dance

Immediately the burial is over, the group moves away, singing this song:

Ụkwụani	**English**

K'ajegide Uzoteka K' ajegide	Let us go for the distance is far
Uzoteka	The distance is far.
K'ajegide uzoteka K' ajegide	Let us go for the distance is far

This is a metaphorical reference to the journey that must be embarked upon by the deceased – a mystery that is above human comprehension. It is believed that the spirits of the dead undergo a journey into the unknown land of spirits (animmọ) to join their ancestors. In the course of any performance, by the *Mmanwu* Masquerade, the song, "uzoteka", usually, marks the end of such performance.

Aesthetics

The *Mamnwụ's* costume is a beauty to behold, even those of the Ntechi and Ọchiagha, his foremost lieutenants. The other initiates of the *Mmanwu Cult put on their costumes in* accordance with their needs and likes. The robe is made up of series of thickly packed dried raffia, called, Efete. At the top of this regalia are stumps of black hairs gotten from the tails of the local cattle, Efi, which are carefully fixed to serve as the *Mmanwụ's* hair. These symbolize strength as the local cattle is associated with bravery. Some feathers adore that same headband of the masquerade and they are gotten from the eagles, therefore symbolize power, authority, might and swiftness.

The *Mmanwụ* in the course of performance, holds a sceptre called "Ojji". It jingles and permeates the rhythms of the songs. This symbolizes kingship. The red cloth on the *Mmanwụ's* face and its components signify fierceness and temperament. The huge *Mmanwụ,* possesses a pair of woven whitish clothes situate close to his chest and these are the breasts. The trousers and shirt (made from sacks) are to create the myth of invisibility and cruelty.

On the event of a performance, the Ntechi who pilots the *Mmanwụ*, handles a bundle of broom sticks or an animal skin and a cutlass (depending on their wishes). He directs the movements of the *Mmanwụ* by touching the body with the broom or the cutlass whenever he attempts to go wild. At times, he flogs the skin with the cutlass. It is believed that brooms sweep off misfortunes, therefore, can be used to wipe off evils coming towards the *Mmanwụ*. The Ntechi is usually dressed in red attires, stripes of white clothes and goes on barefoots. The red colour signifies danger (a warning to enemies to stay clear), the white symbolizes peace (to would be friends), while his barefoot on the ground, are believed by the initiates, to be the means of communication with the gods and gaining of spiritual powers from the ancestors. In short, a successful performance depends on the ability of the Ntechi to carry out his roles, effectively. The matchet held by the Ọchiagha symbolizes strength and the metallic instruments, the Ụkolo, that are tied to his waist, intensify the rhythm of the music as they jingle during the dance. It is also a symbol of heroism, being a prop for war-lords of the land. The "Ukolo" also awakens the ancestors and transmits messages to the *Mmanwụ* and his followers.

Aesthetics can be seen in the gong that telegraphs the messages of the spirits to the *Mmanwụ*. It is made from a strong tree (the "Ufie" or "egbu"). This idea of strength is associated with kingship, because a king (*Mamnwụ* in this case) should be talked to through an object associated with royalty. Other things associated with the *Mmanwụ* performance include "Nzụ" (the white native chalk), Ọmụ ekwu (palm-leaves), ọji (native kolanuts). But these are used for the purpose of initiaition. The Nzu symbolises success, the palm leaves signify peace, while the kolanuts (as eaten together by the members) show the essence of communalism and the idea of brotherhood.

In some occasions, the songs of the *Mmanwụ* are fine-tuned by the use of a local trumpet. called the "Ọkwaọdum," which produces the whistling effects (Ofili). This "Ọkwaọdum" is made from the horn of the buffalo (Mpi Ugbolomili) and the Buffallo is regarded as a symbol of swiftness, which can be seen in Kings (herein, the *Mmanwụ* itself) in Ndọkwa land, it is often called "Ọja" and is made from a strong wood that thrives in the forest.

It should be noted that modernity has brought a lot of changes into *Mmanwụ* performance that most of the groups now incorporate the use of drums into the production of the music. This goes a long way to intensifying the rhythm of the music and the tempo of the dance.

Functions of *Mmanwụ* in Ndọkwa land

The functions of *Mmanwụ* in the Ndokwa Communities range from political, social, to cultural and religious. The *Mmanwụ* maintains law and order in Ndokwa communities. For instance, in the event of a dispute over the ownership of a land, fish ponds or a hunting ground, the *Mmanwụ* serves as an arbiter. It settles these disputes, gives verdicts over the disputed property and will not hesitate to punish any of the parties that goes against its rulings. If the *Mmanwụ* pins his "Ojji" on such a land or in the ponds, no man has the right to pull it out, as the *Mmanwụ* is believed to be potent and has diabolical powers, capable of destroying any man. For, according to Chukwuka Okoronkwo (1988: 8):

> In the community, it is generally believed that,
> "Mask or masquerades are the spirits of the persons of the Clan. Their
> genesis they claim started with death and their existence symbolizes
> ancestral religious and divination, social rejuvenation and order".

As a socio-cultural group, the evils in the society are carefully woven into songs and drama formed out of them. The songs are satirical and the impulse in them is intended to regulate the excesses of evil-doers in the community. As Chukwuka Okoronkwo (1988:12) puts it,

> "amidst frightening sounds, they reveal the wrong deeds of every villager. They can ridicule or shame any man or woman who has committed a sin against the community. It helps so check quarrelsome couples, lazy men, and those who disturb others by cooking very late in the migle.

An example is the song "Ọdumegwu", where the evil doer was ridiculed for having carnal knowledge of his younger sister. At times the *Mmanwụ* may kill a goat or any other domestic animal with his "Ojji" and the evil doer will be made to pay for it. This will serve as a deterrent to such an offender and warning to others.

Religion seems to be the major aim for the establishment of the *Mmanwụ* cult in Ndokwa community. As a religious institution, "its origin could be found in the belief and desire of men of the old times to communicate with the dead"- the ancestors (Chukwuka, 1988:10). It is derived from two morphemes "muo" meaning spirit and "onwu" meaning death, hence, "*Mmanwụ*" means the "spirits of the dead". In their desire to ascertain what the future portends for the village and the individuals, the villagers recourse to consulting the distance *Mmanwụ*, the spirits that are believed to be reincarnations of their ancestors. The consultations lead to the attainment of spiritual purity, invariably a shield against attacks by witches and evil spirits. For this reason, the ancestors are treated with reverence.

As an entertainer and unifier, the *Mmanwụ* performs on occasions of great importance, i.e., during a village festival, coronation of chiefs, child naming, loss of dear ones or the visit of a top government functionary. Presently, the *Mmanwụ* performs during Christmas, New Year and Easter celebrations. Since the membership of the *Mmanwu* cult is based on personal choice or association of like-minds, members are expected to respect the *Mmanwụ* and the constitution (if any) binding them The members usually meet, either to renew their membership, pay allegiance or share social experiences. In the words of Chukwuka Okoronkwo (1988:11):

> "This home coming at certain seasons of the year,
> While providing opportunity for merry-making, also
> Provides an opportunity for the formulation and
> Execution of developmental projects".

When the *Mmanwu* appears, people, from the immediate community or neighbouring villages gather to watch and share their emotional experiences, which bring about peace and unity. During these periods in question, the numerous *Mmanwu* are colourfully dressed in attractive costumes to showcase the festive moods. As the spectators gather to watch the dance and acrobatic displays, they attain purgation and become relieved, emotionally. These dramatic enactments, no doubt, serve as recollections of the heroic exploits of the village warriors, living or dead.

Another aspect of the *Mmanwụ's* social relevance is that associated with its mysticism. Whenever a person dies a mysterious death, the *Mmanwụ* is called upon to pronounce a curse on the unknown assailant(s). This he does before the corpse, either in a room or outside, depending on the nature of the death and the peoples' wish. He performs some enigmatic feats as he conjures the spirits of the ancestors to guide this enterprise. This activity takes place on sacred days, mostly on Eke day, being a day of abstinence from all forms of farm work. If and when the culprit is later known, the *Mmanwụ* may be forced to pronounce a curse on him/her or banish him/her from the society or he/she may be killed, depending on the decisions of the elders of that community.

Conclusion

In Ndọkwa region of Delta State, Nigeria, there abound numerous functional traditional festivals and cultural displays, which include, the Ndụku festival, the Ezemmọr festival, the Enyi festival, the Asua festival, the Igba festival, the Okumeshi festival, the Ikenge festival, and of course, the *Mmanwụ* Cult festival dance, being the major thematic thrust of this discourse. Apart from the exposition of the history of origin of the *Mmanwụ Cult* in Ndọkwa land, this paper also dwelt on the membership of the concerned cult, its priesthood position, the form, content and style in the song rendition, the creativity in the performance, the thematic analysis of the song-texts, the aesthetic therein, and of course, the significance of the *Mmanwụ Cult* practice to the communities of Ndọkwa extraction, in Delta State. This very study, no doubt, will contribute immensely, to further studies on Ndọkwa people's traditional and cultural festivals, invariably, revamping the Ụkwụani language from going extinct, thus, preserving the cultural heritage of the same group of people.

Works Cited

Amaize, Emma. (2004) *"Story that touches the heart. Families rendered homeless as youths art villages, ablaze,"* Online Nigeria (Deface Nigeria), Retrieved 2007-10-07. Downloaded, 30th July 2024.

Elugbe, C.E. (2000) *Agitation for New Titles for Ndokwa Traditional Rulers* Lagos: Niger Delta Voice Newspapers. Maryland Shopping Complex, 350/350 Ikorodu Road,

Finnegan, Ruth (1970) *Oral Literature in Africa* Oxford: Oxford University press,

Finnegan, Ruth (1977) *Oral Poetry*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Okolugbo, E.O. (2004) *History of The Ukwuani and Ndosumili People of the Niger-Delta.* Benin City. Ethiope Publishing Corporation, Ring Road.

Okoronkwo, Chukwuka (1988) "The Mysteries of Mmanwu" in *Skypower: The Inflight Magazine of Nigerian Airways*. November/December.

Wikipedia, (2016) the free encyclopedia. *Ndokwa West, Ndokwa East, Ukwaani Local Government Areas*. Retrieved 30 July.

Oral Interviewees

Chief Adinebo, F.S. (Former Headmaster, Eze-Egbu-Ochu Primary School, Obiaruku). Aged 72. A native of Umusume Quarters, Obiaruku.

Chief Andrew Sombi (Retired Security Personnel, Adonishaka, Adonishaka- Ebedei). Aged 73. A native of Umukwata, Ukwuani L.G.A.

Gegeri, Onyiwee Robert, Aged 67, (An Essayist, Historian and Oral Philosopher), A native of Obiaruku, Ukwuani L.G.A., Delta State, .

Mrs. Nwashindi Izuegbu. Aged 75. A native of Ossissa, Ndokwa- East L.G.A.

Mrs. Ossai Ada. Aged 62. A native of Isumpe-Utagba Ogbe, Ndokwa-East L.G.A.

Otu Egbune, Aged 80 (A trado-medicalist, an Artist, Orator, Chief Priest of Ezemmọr and Oral Philosopher, A native of Amai, Ukwuani L.G.A .

APPENDIX I



***MMANWU* MASQUERADE PERFORMANCE IN OBIARUKU, UKWUANI LGA, DELTA STATE**

APPENDIX II



***MMANWU* MASQUERADE ENACTMENT IN ASHAKA NDOKWA-EAST L.G.A, DELTA STATE**