Content, Style of Funeral Songs and The Ogba Cosmology

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Abstract

Death is a natural phenomenon and Ogba people revere their dead relatives and loved ones with elaborate funeral rites, which include the performance of funeral songs. It is believed that if the necessary rites of passage are not performed for the deceased, the soul will continue to haunt the living. This paper focuses on the content, style and cosmology in twelve (12) Ogba funeral songs analysed. It establishes that Ogba funeral songs articulate the Ogba people's worldview on death. The contents, styles and Ogba cosmology are enhanced in the songs through the elaborate employment of styles by the performer in the rendition of the songs which enhance beauty and raised emotions. The paper concludes that occasion and performance are the hallmark of Ogba funeral songs through which their renditions serve for the venting of pent up emotions. The paper recommends that since the songs serve other purposes aside from being dirges, government agencies and cultural organizations should strive to collect and preserve the songs for posterity.

Keywords: content, style, cosmology, Ogba, funeral songs.

Introduction:

Ogba funeral songs are largely composed, performed or transmitted orally. As an oral art, the Ogba funeral songs have a bipartite structure of verse and refrain. The leader through the verse line introduces the rhythmic motif, which is picked up and concluded in the refrain or the chorus. The voice itself is a structure of repetition, which is a basic principle of oral art.

In Ogba, funeral songs are embellished with some literary / linguistic features. A song can be a story- telling event which presents the myth of death and the dead with some historical data to prove the authenticity of the words in it. The Ogba myth of death and the dead espoused in the songs is purportedly real, but with a questionable veracity due to the transience of oral communication. The funeral songs portray the dynamics of lively and theoretical artform with some characteristics of literature. Ogba funeral songs usually derive their natural features from image which are archetypes of death. Such images as the cause of death, the position of the dead and the hope of reincarnation. Some songs explain

the origin of different phenomena of death as a journey, a market, and eternal loss, evil and so on. The songs also highlight the Ogba people's perception of death.

The Occasion of Ogba songs

Ogba funeral songs are sung on the occasion of death. Occasionality of use is an integral feature of Ogba funeral songs and oral literature generally. Occasion determines the type of performance. It is a preservation strategy. Commenting on the occasionality of use of the oral genre, Finnegan (1977) posits that:

> Oral pieces are not composed in the study and later transmitted through the personal and detached medium of print, but to be directly involved in the occasion of their actual utterance. It is designed for and arises from particular situations like funerals, weddings, celebrations of victory, soothing a baby, accompanying works and so on.

From this position, funeral songs are composed on a particular occasion as an oral piece. Occasionality of use determines the type of performance in Ogba funeral songs. As a condition for the oral art Mbunda (2007) Points out that it " should be" directed towards shaping the people's worldview, defending social beliefs and discouraging deviances from accepted social norms".

In the same vein, Adali-Mortly (1967) in his discussion of Ewe poetry observes:

> These poems can be sung on the appropriate occasion. One does not sing a mourning song unless death has actually occurred. Even to sing a farming song or hunting song at home in the village without a cause one has to apologize to the gods. It is sacrilege to sing these songs when feeling is not aroused and when it is not intended to arouse feelings.

Still writing on the occasion if use, Chukwuma (1994(a)) notes that:

> "Funeral songs are sung on funeral ceremony and wake keeping. These occasions dictate their use. Singing funeral songs out of season is ominous and is strongly discouraged. Oral genres are not only occasional; they also dictate their times of use".

Funeral songs are rendered during funeral ceremonies and vigil nights. Among Ogba people, death and funeral ceremonies are the occasions for the performance of their funeral songs. The death of a close relative, friend or even a distant colleague causes pain and

sorrow as people burst into uncontrollable cries of despair. During the outburst, pain and grief become the predominant features with rhetoric questions about the dead and death. The occasion for the performance of Ogba funeral songs can be divided into three distinct parts. One of these distinctions is observed at the pre- burial stage while the other two occur at the burial stage. The first pre- burial occasion is the pronouncement of death, which begins at the point of a person's demise. Usually, the death of an individual is announced with a bitter cry signifying that a great calamity has befallen the family and the community. The spontaneous weeping and wailing give rise to songs of deep emotional feeling. These songs are rendered by those weeping for the dead as elicited from song 1.

Song 1: Isi ala ni, anye ye isi-o
L: Isi ala ni
R: Anye ye isi-o
L: Isi ala ni
R: Anye ye isi-o
L: Ememu me ala-o
R: Anye ye isi-o
Translation
L: Head has gone
R: yes, yes, head has gone – o
L: Head has gone
R: yes, yes, head has gone – o
L: What will I do – o
R: yes, yes, head has gone – o

The second occasion is when the person charged with responsibility of preventing flies from perching on the corpse (iwhe-eji) is appointed. This person is a female relative next in age to the deceased; she performs the duty of preventing flies from the corpse throughout the period of lying in state while recounting deeds of honour of the deceased in his/ her lifetime. This is called "*ịtụ-eka* or *itnu-ewhna*" praise song.

The third occasion of Ogba funeral songs, at the outset of the burial ceremony, begins after the departure of the masquerade society *ukwnu-ndoche* known as Okorosnu-Ihiamini" (bathing masquerade). At the end of the ritual, the lid of the casket is fitted. Thereafter, four different songs are rendered.

In Ogba, funeral performances from the time of death to the day of burial last between eight days for males and four days for females. It may be longer, depending on where

death occurred. If an Ogba person dies outside home, it may take a longer time for the family members and the clan to consult among themselves to raise funds to transport the body home for burial.

Within the time that elapses for proper arrangement of the burial, a big tarpaulin is hoisted in the compound of the deceased to accommodate the sympathisers and those involved in the burial process. From this period, funeral performances take place, accompanied by the sporadic outbursts of wailing that characterise the mourning period. The night preceding the burial of the deceased is marked by sporadic wailing and rendition of captivating funeral songs which touch on the themes of death and the dead (its victim) as in song 2.

SONG 2 – KWE LA ALAWHE IWE-MBA

L: Kwe la alawhe iwe mba
R: Alawhe alawhe iwe mba
L: Benedict nwna ohia dila ejna
R: Alawhe alawhe iwe mba
L: Okpaka Eze dibia dila ejna
Whne ownu ni mire ye
R: Alawhe alawhe iwe mba
L: Ownu buru madu akpo mu okwu
La azama whne ownu ni mire ye
R: Alawhe alawhe iwe mba
L: iji je ali lo iwe mba
R: Alawhe alawhe iwe mba
L: Echa je la ali lo iwe mba
R: Alawhe alawhe iwe mba

Translation

L: Shout away, clan anger
R: Away, away clan anger
L: Benedict the son of Ohia
See what death has done to us
R: Away, away clan anger
L: If death is a human being and greets me, I will not respond. See what death has done to us.
R: Away, away clan anger
L: Yam has gone to earth and came back, clan anger
R: Away, away clan anger

L: Cassava has gone to earth and came back, clan anger
R: Away, away clan anger

At the grave side, different types of song replete with meanings are rendered while the grave is covered and they include songs: 3, 4, 5 and 6.

SONG 3: AJADI
L: Ajadi
R: Iye wu ajanma iye
L: Ajadi
R: Iye wu ajanma iye
L: Aja ka umu Nkwo
R: Iye wu ajanma iye
Translation
L: Pond bailer
R: Iye wu ajanma iye
L: Oh! pond bailer
R: Iye wu ajanma iye
L: The pond of Nkwo kindred
R: Iye wu ajanma iye

SONG 4
L: Iye amra oje
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Atumatu chuku tru
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Atumatu nwna eze eligwe
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Isi adi nka okpa adi nka otuknrnu
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Nwnayni mma nwna Diohna
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Ogba wnuyedi bu la abrna ukwu
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Ego ka oyne ibi guru la nkwesieje
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Ona gure nwna ihuru m gure nwna okpo
R: Oje iye, oje iye

L: Iye amra oje
R: Oje iye, oje iye

Translation
L: This is God's plan
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: The plan of God
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Beautiful girl, the daughter of Diohna
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Co-wives good relationship manifests in the bailing of a big lake
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: The denial of a person suffering from swollen testicles ends when bailing pond
R: Oje iye, oje iye
L: Mother take tilapia let me take catfish
R: Oje iye, oje iye

SONG 5
L: Ewu oriema
R: Nje siye le iye
L: Otu okrobia egwu ya rula
R: Nje siye le iye
L: Mini biko gbro pisi
R: Nje siye le iye
L: Aznu biko gbro biya
R: Nje siya le iye

Translation
L: Sing oriema
R: Nje siye le iye
L: Young men the song has started
R: Nje siye le iye
L: Water please flow away
R: Nje siye le iye
L: Fish please flow to me
R: Nje siye le iye

These are primarily work songs used for bailing pond. They are adopted for use at burials during the energy sapping exercise of covering the grave because of their fast tempo and rhythm, which will energise the young men. It follows that occasion of performance varies the form of Ogba funeral songs as exemplified in the songs above. It is also probable that pond bailing was the occupation of the deceased. These songs are used for both male and female burial ceremonies. After interment, different funeral songs are rendered till dawn.

Content of Ogba funeral songs

The content of Ogba funeral songs comprises that which is contained in the corpus, that is a summary of subject treated in the songs. Consequently, content here may mean the gist, substance, and the significance of the songs in literary perspective. More specifically, content is "the amount of certain substance, matter of a work of art (song).

Shipley (1964(a)), seems to corroborate this when, regarding form and matter, he highlights that "the matter out of which a poet makes his poem as a language as it exists in his time and place ….. it is the product of more or less art". Furthermore, Shipley (1964(b)), to allay the fear of definitive problems in the conception of content and matter avers: the word content often replaces matter …and the form may be conceived as the accidental vehicle, trivial container, or frivolous wrapping, of a content "regarded as alone significance and substantial; indeed, the word substance is then often used in turn to replace content, or in conjunction with it.

Based on the forgone exposition on content, it is clear that the content and form of Ogba funeral songs derive from the people's perception of death and its causes. Hence the content of Ogba funeral songs contains issues such as various causes of death, effects, themes and other substances, which give the songs form. The funeral songs may be dignified and solemn or noisy depending on the nature of a particular death.

Perception of death in Ogba funeral songs

Ogba people perceive death as a general phenomenon that concerns everybody. Death is seen as being inevitable, partly because sooner or later everyone faces it; and partly because it brings loss and sorrow to everybody, family and community. It is in line with this perception of death by Ogba people that rituals connected with it are usually elaborate, as evidenced in the funeral songs for the dead. Some of the songs try to project death as no respecter of person since it kills old and young; rich and poor, brave men and cowards as in part of song 6 thus:

Song 6 – Ownu amrna oyne eze
L: ownu amrna oyne eze
R: Ocho dikne
L: ownu amrna oyne ulo-elu
R: Ocho dikne
L: Ownu amrna oyne guru ulo-ekirika
R: Ocho dikne
L: Ownu amrna nwnatakiri
R: Ocho dikne
L: Ownu amrna agadi
R: Ocho dikne

Translation
L: Death does not know a king
R: Search for the brave man
L: Death does not know the owner of a storey-building
R: Search for the brave man
L: Death does not know the owner of a thatch-house
R: Search for the brave man
L: Death does not know a child
R: Search for the brave man
L: Death does not know an old man/woman
R: Search for the brave man
The theme of sorrow and roguery are also noticeable in Ogba funeral songs in Ogba people's perception of death. Death is seen as a thief and mischievous character that comes secretly, steals its victim and runs away. Songs 7 and 8 buttress this point aptly.

Song 7 – Ownu bu oyne osni
L: Ownu bu oyne osni
Ownu ni gburu papa bu oyne osni
Ogbula gbalaga
R: Ownu bu oyne osni
Ownu ni gburu papa bu oyne osni
Ogbula gbalaga

Translation
L: Death is a thief
Death that killed papa is a thief
He has killed and ran away
R: Death is a thief
Death that killed papa is a thief
He has killed and ran away

Song 8 – Obịa ka eligwe bụ emụ
L: Obịa ka eligwe bụ emụ
Ọla ka eligwe bụ ekwna
Ka ye wure ndidi oo
R: Obịa ka eligwe bụ emụ
Ọla ka eligwe bụ ekwna
Ka ye wure ndidi oo

Translation
L: Coming to the world is with laughter
Departing from the world is with cry
Let us endure it with patience
R: Coming to the world is with laughter
Departing from the world is with cry
Let us endure it with patience

The metaphorical allusion of death as a thief is a clear indication of the rejection of death by the people whose relative has been killed by death. They are sorrowful when death occurs. In addition, the two songs clearly point out the bravery of the deceased and the cowardice of death. Hence the deceased is a "brave man" while death is a coward that kills and "runs away".

Ogba people understand death to mean that a person has breathed his last or has journeyed to the ancestors. So they keep searching for him/her as aptly demonstrated in song 9: Ndala nwnane kiye.

Song 9: Ndala Nwnane kiye
L: Ndala Nwnane kiye
Ndala Nwnane kiye
Ọla la la udno

R: Anye nwnane kiye
Anye nwnane kiye
Ola la la udno

Translation

L: Where is our brother?
Where is our brother?
He has gone in peace
R: Yes our brother
Yes our brother
He has gone in peace

In some cases, it is perceived that the deceased has gone home, slept, has gone far away, or has been forced down-all these are metaphors for death. Death is described in Ogba funeral songs from many perspectives. It is a journey, a rest, a home and such other things which it connotes. The overriding metaphor is the journey motif. The deceased is said to have embarked on a journey to the beyond. At times messages are sent through the deceased to be delivered to the ancestors in the beyond to tell them about the predicaments of their relatives in the present world and request from them protection of their living relatives as enunciated in song 10.

Song 10: Ijne nwnadno dno

L: Ijne nwnadno dno
Papa bu oyne obu oma
Ijne nwnadno dno
R: Ijne nwnadno dno
Papa bu oyne obu oma
Ijne nwnadno dno

Translation

L: Safe, safe journey
Papa is a kind-hearted person
Safe, safe journey
R: Safe, safe journey
Papa is a kind-hearted person
Safe, safe journey

SONG 11 – Ewu didi, ewu nnakiye

L: Ewu didi, ewu nnakiye
Umu didi ewu
Uriem aju ognu aju ownu
Adamma la la ugboma je zuru ikne
Nkwoma biko ije la
Ilesi ndeki eyna
Ebege siye le
R: Ojenye, ojenye, ojenye

Translation

L: Oh! My father, oh! My mother
Oh! My kindred Uriem
The children of Uriem who do not reject war and death
Adamma has travelled to the beyond to rest
Nkwoma please as you go
Protect your people
Ebege siye le
R: Ojenye, ojenye, ojenye

An interesting feature in the songs is the use of tense. The simple present tense "is" and "are" are used in the indicative mood to show that the dead still lives. When the simple present tense is used, it indicates action of the deceased or someone in the past before his/her death. From these perceptions of death, Ogba people in their funeral songs draw a lot of conclusions that death is a departure and not a complete annihilation of a person. Consequently, the dead is believed to have moved to join the company of the departed, and the only major change is the decay of the physical body, but the spirit moves on to another state of existence.

Some of the words describing death in Ogba funeral songs imply that a person goes "home" which means that this life is like a pilgrimage; the real home is in the hereafter. The perception of death by Ogba people is that death is cruel to humans; it stiffens, or evaporates a person, even if he continues to exist in the hereafter.

Style of performance in Ogba funeral songs

The use of words in communicating sense is the unique form of the oral milieu and part of the oral aesthetics. In oral literature, words are part of the expressive medium. It therefore follows that the oral style is verbalised in different ways and adapted for effect. In funeral

songs words are used to communicate the message of the songs to the audience. Chukwuma (1994) identifies points in the analysis of the verbal aspect of the oral style thus:

> In an analysis of the verbal aspect of the oral style, two significant points come to focus: first is the presence of a live audience which is being addressed directly and whose interest and participation are vital to the sustained life of the tradition, and second is an awareness of the transient nature of the spoken word and a consequent attempt at permanence seen partly in the choice and arrangement of words.

Ogba funeral songs adapt completely to these verbal aspects. They are sometimes satirical. Example is song 12 that uses words to admonish girls against moral laxity, and advises them to maintain their womanhood.

Song 12 – Eje nwna agbọ soagra

L: Eje nwna agbọ soagra
Adịka ya la ka ibne a mma
R: Eje nwna agbọ soagra
Adịka ya la ka ibne a mma

Translation

L: If a bad girl misbehaves (fornicates)
She thinks of being more beautiful than other girls
R: If a bad girl misbehaves (fornicates)
She thinks of being more beautiful than other girls

Therefore, the oral literary style in Ogba funeral songs is subjected to the artistry of the performer, and is portrayed in his/her use of language, idioms, verbal repetition and other styles as is evident in the songs analysed in this paper. Oral idiomatic phrase features in Ogba funeral songs. Sometimes oral form of emphasis such as epizooties (immediate repetition) and cloche (intermittent repetition) are employed in the songs.

Opening and closing formulae of the performance

The opening formulae in Ogba funeral songs are used to awaken and arouse the audience at the performance. The leader makes a passionate appeal to the performers and audience to rise up to the occasion. He also uses it to punctuate the songs when he wants to make a change or embellish the songs with some of his personal additives. Below are the opening formulae for male funeral songs.

L: Kwo
R: Ho
L: Edeni
R: Nye diahni
Translation
L: Kwo
R: Ho
L: Here
R: We are here

The lead performer uses these opening formulae to inform the audience to pay attention because the burial ceremony has started. He stretches his hands to the four cardinal points: East, West, North and South. This formula signifies the commencement of the occasion. When the leader wants to change lyrics, songs, or move into another song, he also uses it as an interceptive formula to communicate his intentions to the performers.

Opening formulae for the female are thus:
L: Egbla hima –a
R: Hima – a
Translation
L: Audience, stand up and come together
R: Stand up and come together

The opening formulae for both males and females declare the funeral song performance open and solicit for full participation of all in the performance. The leader appeals to the performers to rise up to the occasion in order to achieve a successful performance.

Conclusion
The paper is based on a repertory of Ogba funeral songs and a total of twelve (12) funeral songs performed at the funeral ceremony were collected and analysed. The songs are used in the occasion of burial, for entertainment, honouring the dead, instructing and teaching living members of the deceased family on the need to live an upright life and warning perpetrators of dastardly acts to desist from them. Courage, valour, honesty and fair dealing manifested in deceased persons are praised in the songs and the deceased eulogised. These are juxtaposed with dishonesty, craftiness, stealing, prostitution, violent crimes and other vices which are condemned. The paper recommends the documentation of these songs and they should be made accessible to scholars for further research because of their enduring capacity and relevance to humanity.

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