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THE COMPLEXION OF ABU-OZU (DIRGES) AMONG THE OSHIMILI PEOPLE OF DELTA STATE, NIGERIA

Анотація / Abstract

У статті досліджено поховальні пісні народу Ошімілі, що проживає в штаті Дельта в Нігерії і розмовляє мовою *igbo*. Традиційна музика для нього є засобом комунікації, входить до ритуалів поклоніння, зцілення, супроводжує розваги та представляє їх за межами спільноти. Вона передає вірування, звичаї та зміцнює суспільні зв'язки, оскільки представники цього народу діляться своїм культурним спадком. Саме цей контекст зумовив необхідність проведення цього дослідження, яке вивчає музичну майстерність людей, утілену в їхніх похоронних піснях. Аналізуються ритуальні плачі, а також прислів'я, співи в традиційних похоронних церемоніях. Водночас вказано на деякі сучасні елементи, відображені в піснях і виконавській практиці похоронних обрядів серед громад Ошімілі. Результати дослідження засвідчують, що *Абу-Озу* – це давня музична традиція, мало вивчена науковцями. Це музичний супровід похорону, що включає також речитативи, прислів'я, афоризми та лаконічні народні казки, що органічно вплітаються в пісні. Це своєрідні послання для померлих і живих, щоб привернути увагу до реальності смерті, допомогти впоратися з горем.

Це один із фольклорних жанрів, у якому обмежується склад виконавців, твори не репетируються; але його виконують ті, хто має безпосередній стосунок до родини померлого: це можуть бути *Оквулагве*¹, *Умада*² або *Ікпохо-Огбе*³ з кварталу *Огбе*⁴. Оскільки виконання *Абу-Озу* регулюється і контролюється, музика, пов'язана з ними, є досить рідкісною. Вважається, що якщо не вивчити її вчасно, існує ризик втратити її на користь сучасності, як це відбувається в даний час з іншими традиціями.

Ключові слова: *Абу-Озу*, Ошімілі, жалобні пісні, культурні практики.

The funeral songs of the Oshimili communities living in Delta State in Nigeria and speaking the *Igbo* language are researched in the article. Traditional music is a means of communication for them, a part of rituals of worship, healing, accompanies entertainment and presents them outside the community. It transmits beliefs, customs and strengthens social ties, because the representatives of this people share their cultural heritage. It is the context that has caused the necessity of the submitted study, investigating the musical skills of people embodied in their funeral songs. Ritual laments, as well as proverbs and chants in traditional funeral ceremonies, are analyzed. At the same time, some modern elements reflected in the songs and performing practices of funeral rites among the Oshimili communities are pointed out. The results of the study indicate that *Abu-Ozu* is an ancient musical tradition that has been little studied by scholars. This is a musical accompaniment to a funeral, including also recitatives, proverbs, aphorisms, and laconic folk tales those are woven organically into the songs. These are peculiar messages for the dead and the living to draw attention to the reality of death and help cope with grief.

It is one of the folklore genres in which the cast is limited, the pieces are not rehearsed; but it is performed by those who have a direct relationship to the family of the deceased: these may be *Okwulagwe*⁵, *Umuada*⁶ or *Ikpoho-Ogbe*⁷ of the *Ogbe*⁸ quarter. Since *Abu-Ozu* performing is regulated and controlled, the music associated with it is quite uncommon. It is believed that if it is not researched in time, there is a risk of losing it to modernity, as it is currently happening with other traditions.

Keywords: *Abu-Ozu*, Oshimili, dirges, cultural practices.

Introduction. Every world culture performs one funeral rite or the other according to their beliefs and worldviews. These funeral rites and observances differ from one cultural clime to the other. However, the involvement of music in funerals is a common phenomenon in these cultures. In Nigeria, it is almost near unthinkable to find a burial ceremonial without a musical performance. Even as the mourners cry, the

lamentations are laden with vocables, chants and recitatives either in displeasure with death itself, or death wishes for the deceased that its next earthly life be more eventful and glorious.

It is a general opinion that music helps to set the tone and mood of individuals in many religious and cultural settings during burial ceremonies either as background or foreground music as may be exigent. In Nigeria cultural

setting, music for conducting burial rites comes in different shades; there is music that accompanies the burial processions, those used in wailing and mourning for the dead – which are generally termed dirges. These dirges vary from communities to communities and sometimes within sub-communities. Oshimili of Delta State is one of such communities in Nigeria. It is our primary concern. In today's Delta State, Oshimili, for administrative convenience is split into two local government areas (Oshimili North and South).

Whether north or south, the musical cultures of the *Oshimili* communities are very similar. This is however not to rule out some peculiarities that may be found in some traditional religious settings. In line with the above view, Onu [11, p. 72] declares that “although burial practices and funeral dirges are generally performed in the entire Igbo land, 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”.

Despite the slight differences, Oshimili communities share the same indigenous songs and musical practices. Their cultural beliefs are described through indigenous cultural activities and burial practices. These practices further help in showcasing age-old cultural practices inherited from their fore-fathers, which serve as powerful expressions of oneness, communal interests, spirituality, identity and commemoration which bring into light the richness as well as diversity of local cultures. Oshimili communities share common, yet distinct traditions in their indigenous music. *Abu-Ozu* is one of these traditional musical genres which serves as a harbinger of musicking in this locale. Here, the criteria for music performance spans beyond entertainment. Although music is hardly ever absent in the organisation of a traditional burial among the *Oshimili* communities, *Abu-Ozu* plays a major role. Their music is the conduit through which musical accompaniment with apt songs are

provided to their deceased and the mourners of the deceased. These songs which are often laced with recitatives, proverbs, aphorisms and pithy folktales are woven seamlessly into songs. These messages are packed up in dirges for the dead and the living to draw attention to the reality of death, engender grief management / coping with bereavement and promote healing.

Given the foregoing background, this study is set to interrogate the evolution of *Abu-Ozu* in Oshimili land, identify the actual events that this performance is held, examine the roles the songs play, analyse the song texts of *Abu-Ozu*, inquire into the reason for no pre-rehearsal nature of *Abu-Ozu* and attempt a textual documentation of select *Abu-Ozu* songs to gain insights into the peoples constructs on issues surrounding death and bereavement in this study area.

Presentation of the main article material.
Method of Investigation. This study employs a qualitative design whereby ethnographic and phenomenological approaches were utilized in exploring the musical practices of this people and in eliciting data for this study. Consequently, active participation observation technique was chosen as a means of investigation in that it gives room for extensive and authentic data gathering. Twenty-one burial ceremonies that involved the performance of *Abu-Ozu* were investigated among Oshimili communities in the following towns (Oko-Anala, Oko-Ogbele, Okwe, Odifulu, Aninwalo, Ugbolu, and Ukala) which amounted to three in each town. A total number of seventy persons made up of full-blown adults between the ages of 25–59 years and the elderly of 60–80 years. Twenty-five (34,72 %) were women while forty-five were men (64,28 %) among the seventy respondents. This is understandably so because as agnatic and patriarchal communities, the men are those eminently qualified and vested with the authority to discuss the peoples' traditions. These towns were chosen because they are rural areas where this musical tradition still blooms. Data gathered were complemented by available literature from our respective libraries and the internet.

Locale of Study. The Oshimili communities of Delta State Nigeria are Igbo speaking. They migrated from various parts of the country and settled on the land which is today called Oshimili North and South. The south comprises Asaba, Oko-Amakom, Oko-Anala, Oko-Ogbele, Okwe and Odifulu. While the North are Ibusa, Akwukwu-Igbo, Okpanam, Illah, Aninwalo, Atuma, Ebu, Ugbolu, and Ukala. All the towns interact through trade, and many other avenues like inter marriages and other exchange factors. The occupational strength of these communities lie more towards farming, trading and fishing which are the main source of livelihood. During their pastime, they celebrate festivals which are keyed to their agricultural and religious calendars. Music making is also a means of livelihood for the Oshimili communities. There are professional musicians as well as music lovers and instrumentalists who are singers and composers that play very important role during activities that require the presence and use of professionalism where the performer needs to be conversant with the history, proverbs and folk culture of the community. These group of persons are usually the custodians of the people's culture.

Death in Oshimili and the Place of Abu-Ozu.

In most traditional Nigerian ethnic nationalities, there is a general belief that death is one very good thing created by God. It is a leveller. But for death, a whole lot of things would have gone wrong in humanity. Even when the people firmly believe that there is no life without death and life is the beginning and precursor of death [3], accepting it when it strikes is a problem. For example, there are some proverbs that tend to approve of death. Quite prominent are that *one cannot be sick to the extent of not being able to die. When sickness is too prolonged, even the patient's healer will opt for death on behalf of his patient. There is the age a man gets to and he will not be afraid of death any longer.* Antithetically, the same people who appear to approve of death for some obvious reasons of sickness, long sickness, and old age as could be elicited from the proverbs above are also quick to observe that *death spoils all things. When*

death strikes, it strikes the living and all their plans. However, death has funeral observances that go with it. While speaking of the Esan situation of Edo State, Aluede [3, p. 76] maintained that:

In most Esan communities, funerals often start with *Ujie* performances. During the *Ujie* performance, the children, siblings and friends of the departed are able to 'hi' (chant) in respect of the dead. This 'hi' chant is mainly associated with *Ujie* performance. Note that, to hi for the dead, is to say some chants, recitatives or even songs in praise and prayer for the deceased. Where the challenges that befell the dead are known to some family members, the chanter prays against all of them in the dead person's next earthly life.

Speaking generally of death and its associated funeral rites, Aluede & Ikhidero [5] opined that the nature and kind of death begets a kind of interment. Beyond interment, the kind of death, the age of the dead and resources available at the dead's offspring's disposal are strong indicators of the kind of funeral. Funeral ceremonies are very important avenues for cultural and emotional display and these have valuable attachments to the belief systems of societies in Nigeria particularly among communities in *Oshimili* of Delta State. Every community has its system of mourning the dead, though there are similarities that concern the solemn period of mourning where dirges come into play. Burial / funeral music or songs are somehow different and have their various roles which they play depending on the community and also depending on the sex of the deceased as well as their statuses.

Among the *Oshimili* communities, burial ceremonies are considered as a very important aspect that the people are engaged communally in and since it is part of their cultural package, every member of the community is involved directly and indirectly. Burial ceremonies are serious affairs of the community hence they portrays the serious and solemn disposition of the community towards celebrating and honouring the dead. Akande [2, p. 192] recounts that the death of a loved one is usually accompanied with emotional outburst, wailing and shedding of tears. And in the course of expressing their

emotional attachment with the deceased, people can chant the praise of the deceased and that of his lineage as well as sing in honour of the departed soul. This form of orature known as funeral dirge is a universal genre which is ubiquitous across the globe.

Speaking of obsequies among Igbo people, Amadi [6] in Onu [11, p. 73] comments that:

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 supernatural 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.

Abu-Ozu in Oshimili Worldview. *Abu-Ozu* which is also known as dirges are apparent at a particular session of burial ceremonies among communities in Delta State. Dirges are usually slowly sung, and they are solemn and mournful. In most communities, dirges are sung or chanted, to announce the death of an individual and further mourn him / her, telling of the family history and the contributions of the deceased and the feelings of the people towards death. *Abu-Ozu* songs / music are usually accompanied with handclapping (for the women mourners), while on the other hand the men make use of the bell (*Agogo*) or sometimes drums as accompaniment to their dirge songs. Men play very important role as mourners and in their dirge singing. Their songs are very solemn, mournful and moving especially if the deceased was very young and the death was sudden. The youths are usually the organisers for *Abu-Ozu* sessions and it is their duty also to go and bring back the corpse from the mortuary in the company of the children. The dirges are sung at the lying-in state and this is done by sets of men who are mainly the youths and the

women that comprise *Umuada* and *Ikpoho-Ogbe* (i. e the daughters and wives from the quarter where the deceased is from).

Textual Analysis of Select Abu-Ozu.

During burial ceremonies, dirges are usually profusely sung. This provides relevant avenues for mourners to portray their beliefs. The songs used during such ceremonies include a plethora of songs that are characteristically indigenous. These songs are laced with values that reflect their beliefs and practices right from the time of their fore-fathers. The performance forms part of the solemn period that people come together to honour the dead through songs, chants and recitations, etc., which is specifically for the purpose. We glean from these songs, ideas of siblingship, the weight and ultimateness of death, the spiritually in death and in life after death.

Below are dirges used during *Abu-Ozu* of Oshimili local government area.

Onye Ayana!

(Song 1)

Text in Igbo
 Onye ayana-o
 Onye ayana nu nwanne-o
 Nu ya dor-o
 Ayana nu ofu-afu
 Onye ayana nu ofu afo-o
 Nu ya dor-o 2
 Aya bao-lu-o
 Ayaba olu-o ayabao-lu
 N'akuku-eheli-o
 Weli Oso-o
 Weli oso, Weli je-o
 Shi-e nwanne-o
 Debe ugbo-o
 Debe ugbo-o, debe amala-o
 Shi-e nwanne-o
 Debe iwe-o
 Debe iwe-o, debe onuma-o
 Shi-e nwanne-o
 Togbo iwe-o
 Togbo iwe-o, togbo onuma
 Shi- e nwanne-o

Onye Ayana

Folk song

$\text{♩} = 100$

Call  Ony'a - ya-na-o a - ya na nu nwan - ne n'u-

Response  On-y'a - ya na nu nwan - ne n'u-ya dor-o On-y'a

7

Call  a - ya na nu'o-fu'a - fo - o


Resp.  ya na nu nwan - ne n'u-ya dor-o On-y'a - ya na nu fu'a - fo n'u-ya


13

Call  A-ya bo - lu-o we-li'o - so

Resp.  dor-o a-ya bo - lu, a-ya bo - lu na-ku-ku'heli-o we-li'o - so-o we-li

20

Call  de-b'u-gbo de b'i

Resp.  je - o shi'e nwan - ne-o de-b'u gbo, de-b'a - ma-la shie nwan - ne-o

26

Call  we - o to - gb'i -

Resp.  de - b'i - we - o, de - b'o - nu - ma shie nwan - ne - o

30

Call  we - o

Resp.  to - gb'i - we - o, to - gb'o - nu - ma shie nwan - ne - o

English Translation

Let no one forget
 Let no one forget his sibling
 It is a taboo
 Do not turn your back on your sibling
 Do not turn your back
 It is a taboo
 If one keeps arguing
 If one keeps arguing
 The side will be cut off
 Make haste
 Run, make haste
 Keep a cordial relationship
 Keep the canoe
 Keep the canoe, keep the paddle
 Keep a cordial relationship
 Forget anger
 Forget anger, forget bitterness
 Keep a cordial relationship
 Shelve every anger
 Shelve your anger, shelve your bitterness
 Keep a cordial relationship.

In most Nigerian societies including Oshimili, there are a corpus of proverbs and aphorisms which talk about death, its qualities and its limitations. For example, it is said that death does not kill an earthenware pot and also kill its cover and that as twins, children may be born the same day but they are unlikely to die the same day. These proverbs are often woven into songs and such songs are infused into dirges that enjoy common currency and profuse use during burial ceremonies. In the song above, we see that everyone is being admonished to a matter of necessity respect familiar bonds even in death. This is of course why it is popularly said that “keep watch over my house does not mean keep watch over the walls of the house but the people in the house”. In the second song below, we read that death is no respecter of anybody and death knows no king. Consequently, since death has some destructive attributes, everyone should avoid it by not engaging in any activities that is likely to cause death.

Texts from these dirges speak clearly of how the community sees death and reacts to the supernatural and spiritual beings. It also

portrays the reactions of the people when young ones die. The pain of losing the younger ones in the community are expressed in songs showing how sorely hurt they feel. Music and songs are used in these activities to console the bereaved, uphold their indigenous belief systems especially in regards to their religious inclinations. Here these musical pieces function as calmativ to save the mourners from guilt feelings, suicidal thoughts and depression. These impressions are engrained in song number two below.

Onwu bulu aku, onye ga hali onwu (Song 2)

Text in Igbo
 Onwu bulu aku
 Onye ga hali onwu-o
 Onwu bulu aku
 Onye ga hali onwu-o?
 Onwu bulu nni
 Onye ge li de we-o?
 Onwu bulu nni
 Onye ge li de we-o?
 Onwu bulu akwa
 Onye ge je de we-o?
 Onwu bulu akwa
 Onye ge je de we-o
 Onwu bulu eze
 Onye ge chi de we-o?
 Onwu bulu eze
 Onye ge chi de we-o?
 Onwu bulu alo
 Onye ga kpa da wa-o?
 Onwu bulu alo
 Onye ga kpa da wa-o
 Onwu bulu uno
 Onye Ge bi de we-o
 Onwu bulu uno
 Onye Ge bi de we-o
 Ife me Na b'enyi-o
 Ife me Na b'enyi-o!

English Translation

If death is wealth
 Who will choose death?
 If death is wealth
 Who will choose death?
 If death is food

Onwu bulu aku

folk song

$\text{♩} = 120$

Call  O-nwu bu -l'a-ku 'nye ga 'li on-wu

Response  O-nwu bu -l'a-ku 'nye ga 'li on-wu

9
Call  O-nwu bu - lu nni onye ge li de - we-o

Resp.  O-nwu bu - lu nni on - ye ge li de - we-o

17
Call  O-nwu bu -l'a-kwa on - ye ge ji de - we-o

Resp.  O-nwu bu -l'a-kwa on - ye ge ji

24
Call  O-nwu bu -l'e-ze on - ye ge chi de - we-o

Resp.  de - we-o O-nwu bu -l'e-ze on - ye ge chi

32
Call  O-nwu bu -l'a-lo on - ye ge kpa da - wa-o

Resp.  de - we-o O-nwu bu -l'a-lo on - ye ge kpa

40
Call  O-nwu bu -l'u-no 'ye ge bi de - we-o

Resp.  da - wa-o O-nwu bu -l'u-no 'ye ge bi

48
Call  U-mu a - da-ba i - fe me na b'e nyi-o

Resp.  de - we-o U-mu a - da-ba i - fe me na b'e nyi-o

Who will eat it?
 If death is food
 Who will eat it?
 If death is cloth
 Who will tie it?
 If death is cloth
 Who will tie it?
 If death is Eze title
 Who will take it?
 If death is Eze title?
 Who will take it?
 If death is a title
 Who will take it?
 If death is a title?
 Who will take it?
 If death is a home
 Who will live in it?
 If death is a home?
 Who will live in it?
 Something has happened to us
 Something has happened to us!

Song three below is centred on the unimaginable sorrow, pain and calamity which death goes with. The song is themed: 'death has done the unimaginable in our land' *Death does not know a scanty village to spare* is a common aphorism among the Oshimili people and other

neighbouring communities. It abbreviates life, human ambitions and dreams and comes with excruciating pains in the hearts of those left behind. In a similar strain, song four specifically talks of the death of young lads and lasses as very painful in that it robs them of their future and throws their parents off balance watching their hopes blighted. It is commonly said that everything done early is good except death. It is not a good phenomenon to die quite early without achieving one's set out goals. However, when death comes knocking, one cannot say one is not ready. These ideas are captured in songs 3 and 4.

Onwu-o

(Song 3)

Text in Igbo

Onwu-o!
 Onwu me'ofu n'obodo
 Ikolobia din'obodo
 Wa nwu anwu onwu-o
 Umu-agbogobia
 Di n'obodo
 Wa anwu-anwu-o
 N'onwu mee ofu
 N'obodo.

Onwu o

Folk song

♩ = 100

On-wu o, on-wu m'o-fu n'o-bo-do Onwu o, on-

wu m'o-fu n'o-bo-do, i-ko-lo-bia di n'o-bo-do nwua an-wu on-wu U

mu'a-gbo-go-bia di n'o-bo-do wa nwua an-wu n'o-wu mee o-fu n'o-bo-do.

Akande [2, p. 192] reflects that there is hardly any society where the dead is not celebrated and honoured with the rites of passage. This accounts for the popularity of dirges across the globe. In addition, Onu [11, p. 72] states that dirge can be viewed as poem of lamentation which may be improvised by the mourners, according to traditional formula and themes. Dirge as a form of oral poetry makes use of language to communicate experience and that funeral dirge or lamentation for the dead is an important genre of folklore. It is as old as man's concern with death [11, p. 72].

Each of these aforementioned groups above has their musical roles to play and their songs are mainly dirges. It is important to note that it is those gifted in songs and compositions that lead the dirges sung during this aspect of burial performance. Their songs range from praising the dead, lamenting the effect of death on the loved ones, the pains and losses others have experienced especially if the deceased is a bread winner and etc. This aspect of mourning creates room for talent in composition; improvisation and language for most of the songs are packed full with lots of proverbs and wise sayings. Singers in this ceremony are highly expected to have a good command of their dialect, knowledge of their history (family history), and that of their community, their achievements and all. For one to possess such qualities also, he / she must be a good singer and a talented instrumentalist. Dirges may directly or indirectly imply the history of a cultural community through the performance medium of dirges by recounting aspects of communal beliefs and ethos. Highlighting the historical opulence of dirge songs, the dirge singer calls on the deceased by his or her praise names and lauds his great deeds and ancestry. Corroborating dirge performance among women and men of Oshimili communities of Delta State, Finnegan [8] quotes [9, p. 15] that:

The occasions for these laments differ from people to people. Often dirges are song round the copse (or round the house in which the corpse lies) which it

is being prepared for burial. Sometimes, as among the Akan, this is followed by a period of public mourning, during which the corpse lies in state and dirges are sung. Akan dirges are chanted by women soloists. Also the laments sung by a chorus of women, sometimes led by one soloist, and often accompanied by dancing or drumming, are common. In some other occasions, women are core performers of dirges; example is found among the Yoruba women who lament at funeral feasts. Other instances where women feature as dirge singers include *zitengulo* songs of Zambia sung by women mourners. Occasionally, men are involved but among the Limba the initial mourning over the corpse is invariably by women in either chorus or antiphonal form; also, all normal burials are accompanied by singing. Deaths are also often celebrated by memorial ceremonies later and these too are usually accompanied by songs that sometimes include strictly funeral songs and sometimes panegyric of the dead; but in the case of an adult male the burial itself is by the men's secret society and the accompanying songs are sung by men.

Active participation has helped to mould and produce men and women who are gifted in the knowledge of the language and the indigenous music of their community. Active participation has not only helped them to gain access to learning and understanding their cultural heritage, it has also exposed them to discovering their musical talents hence during performances, good singers, composers, dancers, and instrumentalists are discovered, recruited, and admitted into the community's music forum. Active participation is therefore a vital means to promoting indigenous music of communities and also building talents of musicians who are gifted and have the prowess in creating and composing music. Dobbins, notes that, "verbal language excels in literal and figurative description of technical processes and physical properties". He stresses that, "the language of music excels in

the direct communication of moods, emotions, physical sensation and states of consciousness". In addition, Atyev [7, p. 1] describes that Tiv dirges consist of metrical words and / or lines by means of formulas and formulaic thematic expressions. The dirges belong to a tradition of oral verse-making, created through a traditional style of learning, memorizing, composing, performing, and audience participation.

The qualities above are also apparent in musical presentations among the Oshimili communities. Dirges during burial ceremonies are often sessions for talent display among those who are conversant with proverbs, happenings and the language of the community. Each musician or singer improvises in the songs which they sing during this session using proverbs and oratory in their songs. These songs are either sung, chanted or recited. No restriction is placed to the way the dirges are sung as long as the messages are highlighted. Writing on the characterization of dirge, Szito [12, p. 15] comments that:

The Hungarian dirge is an improvised speech-song of grief, a unit of speech with a set of distinctive features that identify it as text, as an oral folklore genre which has the unified force of a speech act, and as performance. Although some of these features may occupy extra linguistic or paralinguistic levels of discourse in addition to the linguistic levels, these levels prove essential for the characterization of the dirge.

The assertion of Szito [12] corresponds with the characterization of *Oshimili* community dirge performance described that some of these songs are either in existence or composed on the spur of the moment, the singer at his / her discretion and with expertise, has the freedom to add more texts to the old songs, thereby improvising to soothe the moment and the occasion or mood of activity.

Nketia [9, p. 118] and Finnegan [8] state that:

Among the Akan-speaking peoples of southern Ghana dirges form just one among their many types of poetry. They are sung or intoned by women as part of

the public mourning during funerals. In them speech is inlaid with music, sobs and tears and conjoined to bodily movement.

So also, among the *Oshimili* communities, the women play special roles during burial ceremonies, be it the burial of a man or that of a woman. During the dirge session, the women gather together to perform their roles of mourning the dead with their songs which are meant to console the families and also talk about the effect of death on humans. The songs for dirges are usually sung by talented singers who can compose songs on the spur of the moment and can also take up old songs and improvise them freely using appropriate terms to soothe the occasion and communicate effectively. Dirges among the women do not follow a particular pattern besides the improvised methods employed during the performance and the accompaniment of the bell and handclapping. Most of the songs during this activity range from folk tale songs to historic songs that recount past deaths of renowned individuals. Their song texts are mostly solemn and sorrowful.

Dirges by the men / youth are usually accompanied with a drum or wood block. Since it is usually a solemn activity, musical instruments are hardly used for this session. Good and talented singers and composers are often the performers that make this session effective with words that are full of wise sayings, and proverbs. Their songs are also meant to portray the state of the activity and the personality of the deceased. Among the *Oshimili* communities for example, dirges by the men in Asaba community follow a pattern of going to bring the corpse, lying in state and taking their dirges which ends the session with the question of "are you sure he / she is dead? Let's go and check to ascertain our brother / sister is dead.

Discussion of Findings. *Abu-Ozu* which has been our primary concern in this work is of indeterminate origin. However, there is a general assumption that it is a traditional musical practice that has been associated with *Oshimili* people early in time. These communities have been integrated with people of other

communities and shared various aspects of their culture over the years. These influences have brought changes in this musical traditions in terms of the mode of performance, expansion of ensemble membership, duration of performance and avenues of its performance.

Findings further reveal that fundamentally, *Abu-Ozu* is a corpus of dirges that feature during burial ceremonies among Oshimili communities in Delta State. They are sung or chanted, to announce the death of an individual, mourn, tell family genealogy, and tell the contributions of the deceased and the feelings of the people towards death. Basically, *Abu-Ozu* is sung for the dead. It was also discovered that Oshimili communities organize hardly pre-rehearsals towards *Abu-Ozu* activities or performances. From available indices, the reasons for this stance are because they do not look forward to organizing burial ceremonies psychologically. Death is a negative phenomenon which they don't accept but believe it's unavoidable, the people see such rehearsals as wishing death upon a member of their community. However, the days of any *Abu-Ozu* performance creates an opportunity for pre-rehearsals. Gifted singers and composers are open to be part of the existing burial ceremony hence *Abu-Ozu* sessions also has its social strategy that welcomes talented singers and musicians.

Although *Abu-Ozu* is generally identified as dirge, given a critical study, it was found that their songs convey divergent ideas. *Though my body excites, but the body is dust* is one of the five songs that we analysed textually. This song admonishes everyone irrespective of beauty, social status and wealth, the human body is dust. *Abu-Ozu* showcases Oshimili people's construct of the weight and ultimateness of death, the spiritually in death and in life after death and the importance of siblingship. For example, one of the songs analysed presents a plethora of rhetorical questions such as: *If death is wealth, who will choose death? If death is food, who will eat it? If death is a title, who will take it? If death is a title, who will take it? If death is a home, who will live in it?* In all these inquisitions, we see that

although all mortals see death as a natural end to human existence, majority of the people do want to die. Death is for them to be avoided, rebuked and prayed against. In a similar development, in one of their songs they talk of mutuality, collectivism and fellow feeling. In the song, they say that: *Let no one forget, let no one forget his sibling; it is a taboo. Do not turn your back on your sibling, it is a taboo.* In contemporary times, western-modelled education, religious beliefs and personal living have altered their age old traditions of togetherness. Now, not sharing the same faith, not as educated as oneself, and not being of the same social status have become grounds of not being close even though these communities are supposedly agnatic. For example, the holy bible makes it succinctly clear when it says that Christians should relate with those of the same household of faith. These impetuses have made it possible today for partial and total orphans to be abandoned to their own fates. Families are quick to provide grounds for not lending support to the bereaved needy along the lines of their beliefs therefore forgetting the ties they once shared. It is in realisation of such tendencies that the song says lucidly that it is a taboo to turn one's back on siblings.

Conclusion and Recommendations. It has been observed that funeral rites are considered as a function that cuts across the globe and that the activities that bring about the burial of the dead is a cultural practice among communities in African and Nigerian societies respectively. The way these activities are carried out however depends on the community, the fact still remains that it is a serious occasion for cultural display and presentation of their belief system in the supernatural and in their inherited culture from their ancestors. The belief that when one dies, he / she continues to live on the other side of the continent is upheld seriously, and activities are carried out to portray these beliefs through their songs and other non-verbal means which clearly shows the belief in the super natural / after death.

The need to involve the young ones in the cultural activities within their cultural

environment is very important. It will help to keep the distinctive feature of their musical culture and promote this culture that identifies them. It will also expose them to learning about their cultural history, absorbing it in order to document it and possibly defend its cause when they are met with oppositions with other cultures and other communities. The burial activities and performances among these communities serve as a playground for people to learn the systematic ways burial ceremonies are organised and the musical elements used for this occasion where the cultural package of the community is presented and their norms and values upheld for the consumption and education of people present.

Singers during these periods are not culturally controlled in the use of words in their songs during every session of a burial ceremony. The proverbs used during the dirge sessions are totally made up with words of wisdom and proverbs which are somewhat meant to either send messages directly or indirectly hence information and communication are used to give value to this activity. Therefore, more research should be conducted on various dirges among world cultures and documented for posterity

in that these dirges also highlight the historical essence of particular society.

The place of *Abu-Ozu* in the burial ceremonies in Oshimili communities cannot be detached from burial ceremonies. It highlights a solemn period of mourning the dead and creates possibilities for communal familiarisation and solidarity. It is therefore important that these songs sung during funeral observances be clearly defined and structured. They should also be distinct and documented purely as *Abu-Ozu*. That these dirges are not rehearsed may probably connote that this musical practice is marked for extinction. If in contemporary times, burials are properly planned for and choirs and funeral undertakers rehearse for weeks for requiem masses, holding tenaciously to the old beliefs can no longer hold sway. Rehearsal of *Abu-Ozu* should be encouraged before the proper occasion. This will give room to more songs from professional singers and even composers who are gifted in proverbs to craft some more songs and swell their repertory. To hold to the old order is to watch *Abu-Ozu* and many such indigenous genres head for extinction without any mechanisms put in place to salvage them.

Примітки

¹ Вікова група, члени родини померлого або подружжя, кожен із членів якого є *Умуада* (доньки кварталу / району).

² Старша донька.

³ Дружини або жінки, які живуть в окремих кварталах.

⁴ Має різні конотації, означає «великий» або «чудовий», але в контексті означає «квартал» (групу сімей, що проживають) у селі або громаді.

⁵ Age grade group, members of the family of the deceased or the spouse who are either the *Umuada* (daughters of the quarter).

⁶ Eldest daughter.

⁷ Wives or women living in particular quarters.

⁸ Has various connotations, it means big or great but in the context of the write up it connotes quarter (group of families living) in a village or community.

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Конфлікт інтересів

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