

## **SATIRICAL LORE IN OKU**

### **Personal Information**

**First name:** Frida. **Middle name:** Menkan. **Surname:** Mbunda- Nekang

**Mailing Address:** Dept of English, University of Buea, PO box 63, South West Region, Cameroon, West Africa

**Phone Number:** 0023775090633

**E-mail:** [da\\_nimo@yahoo.com](mailto:da_nimo@yahoo.com) or mbunda.nekang@ubuea.cm

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### **ABSTRACT**

Oku society is a closely-knit community and, to maintain an orderly system of social relation, People have to be subjected to some degree of compulsion; there are therefore, laws which have been enacted to safeguard the dignity of the individual and the society as a whole. Satirical songs are composed to ridicule individuals who go contrary these norms and customs. Fai Ndifon, an Oku oral artist in an interview, maintained that “a good artist is one who besides his excellences in composition tells stories that direct the society and teach moral’. Social criticism is thus a staple ingredient of Oku oral literature and satire is the form through which this criticism is done. Satire manifests in folktales, masquerade performances, proverbs as well as in songs. This paper examines the state and function of satire in Oku. The scope is limited to songs because songs form an integral part of Oku culture (they are inextricably bound with every aspect of communal life, with the rites of passage from birth to death, with religious observance, with festivity, occupational engagements and leisure) and particularly to birth songs because birth celebration is a very important rite in Oku society. Besides dealing specifically with childbearing and children, the birth song touches on social attitudes beyond the limits of childbearing. Its themes are universal and range from the mundane to the spiritual. The songs are a medium for creative verbal expressions which reflect both personal and social experiences. Birth celebration provides a unique opportunity particularly for Oku women to demonstrate their creativity. They like Igbo women, see birth as:

A great occasion for merry making, lyrical compositions singing and dancing. It is a period in which the women’s emotions and passion for family are awakened and given expression. Bedroom and kitchen gossips are animated and couched in maternal songs. Criticism on contemporary social life, especially as it relates to sexual behaviour among men and women in the clan are euphemistically presented in birth songs. Grim ironies or biting satires are comically presented in some of the lyrical compositions which women present as birth songs. (Otagburuagu,1994: 27).

## Introduction

Oku people form the second largest clan in the Bui Division of the North-West province of the Republic of Cameroon. They occupy a stretch of land lying approximately between latitude 6°50 North and longitude 10° 40 and 10°50 East (Ngwa, 1985:6). Oku is made up of thirty three villages with a population of about a hundred thousand inhabitants. It is bounded on the north by Noni sub-division and on the west by Boyo division, on the south by Ngoketunjia division and on the east by Kumbo. The Oku society is a closely-knit community and, to maintain an orderly system of social relation, it fits into the submission of John Beattie that:

People have to be subjected to some degree of compulsion. They cannot all the time do exactly as they like for often self interest may incite behaviour incompatible for the common good, and so it is, that in every society some kind of restraints of people's behaviour are acknowledged and on the whole adhered to (1964:1).

In the Oku society there are therefore, laws which have been enacted to safeguard the dignity of the individual and the society as a whole. Satirical songs are composed to ridicule individuals who go contrary to the acceptable norms and customs of the society.

Satire is thus a common form of literature in Oku orature. It manifests in folktales masquerade performances, proverbs as well as in songs. Mbunda (2002: 21) states that "Oku folktales act as a vehicle for satire and social protest. This paper examines the state and function of satire in Oku. The scope is limited to songs because songs form an integral part of Oku culture, they are inextricably bound with every aspect of communal life, with the rites of passage from birth to death, with religious observance, with festivity, occupational engagements and leisure; and particularly to the birth song because birth celebration is a very important rite in Oku society.

In an African village, unlike in the Western world where as (Warren 1970:41) maintains, a baby can be born, taken from hospital, assume its place as a member of the family unit and receive gifts from its uncles, cousins and aunts without a single musical sound made, apart from perhaps the baby's crying, the musical tradition surrounding the birth of a child begins before the baby is born. It is the witch doctor whom the young woman approaches in order to be assured that she will have a successful delivery, the witch doctor sings and dances to make sure that all goes well. Afterwards, the family or possibly even the entire village will join in the singing and dancing of a special song for the occasion. There is music for the ceremony of celebrating the birth of a baby and if twins are born, the villagers (especially the women) outdo themselves with their singing and dancing. The naming of a baby and the appearance of its first tooth are both honored in song and dance (Warren, 1970:4).

Birth celebration provides a unique opportunity particularly for Oku women to demonstrate their creativity. They like Igbo women, see birth as:

A great occasion for merry making, lyrical compositions singing and dancing. It is a period in which the women's emotions and passion for family are awakened and given expression. Bedroom and kitchen gossips are animated and couched in maternal songs. Criticism on contemporary social life, especially as it relates to sexual behaviour among men and women in the clan are euphemistically presented in birth songs. Sometimes grim ironies or biting satires are comically presented in some of the lyrical compositions which women present as birth songs. (Otagburuagu, 1994: 27).

The birth song is a product of the imagination of Oku women and, besides dealing specifically with childbearing and children; it touches on social attitudes beyond the limits of childbearing. Its themes are universal and range from the mundane to the spiritual. The songs are a medium for creative expressions which reflect both personal and social experiences. The themes tend to center on events and matters of common interest and concern to the women in particular, and the community as a whole. Oku birth songs deal with everyday life. In Oku unlike in Igbo society, where (Ebeogu, 1992) says songs are identified as birth songs by the content, birth provides the context but does not determine the content of the songs. The content can change as a result of the creativity of the artist of the nature of the audience. The song below for example, which is a satire against Shei who burned down her husband's house because he took a second wife, was composed when Shei arrived at the arena of the performance. The song goes thus:

Weh beih Shei loeh nguk ndaa wil  
Weh nyak ndaa ge brick eè  
Weh beih Shei weh nyuk nda wil

**Translation**

Oh Shei you burned somebody's house  
You burned somebody's house because of bricks  
Oh Shei you burn somebody's house (song 1)

**Satire**

Satire is traditionally defined as the use of irony, ridicule, sarcasm, or the like, to denounce or deride vice and folly. The Encyclopedia Britannica defines satire as:

A mocking spirit or tone that manifests itself in many literary genres but can also enter into almost any kind of communication. Whenever wit is employed to expose something foolish or vicious to criticism, there satire exists; whether it is in song or sermon, in painting or political debate. (1992: 173).

Abrams adds a new dimension to this definition of satire, stating that:

Satire is the literary art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it scorn. It is different from the comic in that comedy evokes laughter as an end in itself, while satire "derides", that is, it uses laughter as a weapon against a butt existing outside the work itself. That butt may be an individual or a type of person, a class, an institution, a nation or even – the whole race of mankind. (1957: 153).

Satire censures and ridicules wickedness and folly and satirists, as Elliot has observed, "fight under the banners of truth, justice and reason, - they attack none but the guilty" (1960: vii-xi). Despite the savage criticism of satire it remains the most prevalent form of literature in most societies. Gilbert (1962:26) justifies this prevalence by the fact that satire destroys individuals and groups in order to benefit society as a whole.

Satire in Oku is known as keluo and ibunle. Keluo is the most pungent form of satire. This is employed only when ibunle has failed and can be done by either the masquerade or female cult. When there is persistent deviation from the established norms by either a fraction of society or the entire society the masquerade begins to satirize these social deviants in the village square on market

day. *Ibunle* by the female cult is often the last resort and at this point the culprit became a social outcast. To do this, elderly women go naked to the village square and after a sorrowful ululation, begin to sing satirical songs warning the perpetrators of ills. The culprits will become outcasts until they repent. This is done only when *ibunle* – condemnation of social ills in songs, proverbs, laments and stories have failed to change these social deviates.

Besides the expression of joy for the gift of a child, praise and thanks to God for giving them children and taking a way the reproach of barrenness, disapproving of behaviour which discourages childbearing, and reflection on life, birth celebration provides an opportunity for Oku women to sing satirical songs, for example, songs, satirizing sexual misconduct, family disunity, negligence, irresponsibility and parsimony.

### The Content of satirical lore

Satire is so prevalent in Oku society that every singer is involved in it. The content of satire in Oku ranges from the mundane to the spiritual. The themes centered on matters of common interest to the community. These include sexual misdemeanors, family disunity, parsimony and irresponsibility

### Sexual Satire

The Oku society acclaims the act of childbearing as that which ensures its existence. It is as Nwoga has pointed out: “The area in which human beings are closest to the divinities” (1981:233). The act of sex, an important act in this process of procreation, is thus, regarded as sacred, private, and respected and must be done in a prescribed way. Any sexual misconduct is frowned at and is associated with shame. In the song below, Tata and Kewaih made love in an indecent way and are ridiculed. The song goes as follows:

Solo: Tonge nde iykful ka Tata  
 Solo: Tonge nde iyful ka Tata e e  
 Chorus: Ishas eyum oh e e e  
 Eh shike kejang eh tohse iykful e e  
 Jofe kejang ke nyime ndaa  
 O o Tata weh beih weh chokse ngezhie  
 Solo: Diye nde iykful ka Kewaih e e  
 Chorus: Ishas eyum o e e e  
 Eh shike kejang eh tohse iykful e e  
 Jo fe kejang ke ngime ndaa  
 O o kewaihh weh beih! Weh chokse ngezhie  
 Jofe kejang ke nyime ndaa

### Translation:

Solo: Who is shouting in the toilet like Tata?  
 Chorus: Naked.  
 Go love making and fell into the toilet  
 It is proper to make love at home  
 Oh Oh tata how you disgrace yourself  
 Solo: Who is crying in the toilet like Kewaih?

Chorus: Naked:  
 Love making and fell into a toilet  
 It is proper to make love at home  
 Oh oh Kewaih, how you disgrace yourself.(song 2)

These two were making love in the bush and in an attempt to run away at the sound of footsteps fell into an uncompleted toilet. They are ridiculed because they have violated the moral code of society by disregarding the proper place for love-making and resorting to the bush.

Oku people regard lovemaking as a purposeful act and this purpose is for procreation. Individuals who neglect their social duties and engage in sex just for the pleasure of it are condemned in the birth song. The song below is a satire against Kfukfu who goes flirting with a man while her baby cries. It also satirizes parents who neglect their sick children just to make love.

Solo: Lee laan ghe yen weh kfukfu nowan  
 Lee laan ghe yen weh  
 Chorus: ka weh seih  
 Ka weh seih shik kejang ne wan deye o  
 Ka weh seih  
 Solo: Lee laan ghe yen weh nowan bawan  
 Lee laan ghe yen weh  
 Chorus: ka weh seih  
 Ka weh seih ndu nyime ne ghone yafe ah  
 Ka weh seih  
 Translation  
 Solo:It is today that we will see you mother  
 It is today that we will see  
 Chorus: As you will go  
 As you will go flirting while the child cries  
 As you will go  
 Solo: It is today that we will see your mother, father  
 It is today that we will see  
 Chorus:As you will go  
 As you will go and make love while the children are sick  
 As you will go. (song 3)

To Oku people, the vagina is sacred and private. It is euphemistically referred to as a “bathroom”, so women like Wuchia who just allow every man into the “bathroom” are ridiculed. This is exemplified in:

Solo:Wuchia dise ke basilu  
 Yanchong tong eke neiy keg e s  
 Chorus: Repeats  
 Translation:  
 Solo:Wuchia opened her bathroom  
 Yanchaong went in and it sounded shwa  
 Chorus: Repeats (song4)

The society also frowns at elders who seduce young girls not for marriage, but just to satisfy their lust. The next song is a satire against such irresponsible men.

Solo: Eh bine lee baaghone ghen binese teng ah  
Ge ebnue ne vin mumle ghi ndeh?  
Eh bine lee baaghone ghen bine seteng ah  
Ge ebnue ne vin mumle ghi ndeh?

Chorus: Repeats

Solo: Eh zhie lee elumen zhie se teng ah  
Ge wan ne vin chii beise ndeh?  
Eh zhie lee ne elumen zhie se teng ah  
Ge wan ne vin chii beise ndeh?

Translation

Solo: We dance and fathers dance too!  
Who does these things?  
We dance and fathers dance too?  
Who does these things?

Chorus: Repeats.

Solo: We eat and men eat too!  
Who destroyed (defiled) this child  
We eat, and men eat too!  
Who destroyed this child? (Song 5)

The men are criticized for impregnating under-girls (girls who are not able to farm and take care of a home), and then coming to rejoice at her delivery. The young girls themselves are not vindicated. In the song below, an under-aged girl called Maih is ridiculed for being delivered of child when she is not yet of age.

Solo: Wan ah se wan ebbol

Chorus: Eh loo mom kine ah?

Wan ah se wan ebbol eh loo momo kine ah?

Solo: Maih ah se wan ebbol

Chorus: Eh loo mom kine ah?

Maih ah se wan ebbol eh loo mom kine ah?

Translation

Solo: A child, just a child?

Chorus: Did this?

A child, just a child, did this?

Solo: Maih, just a child

Chorus: Did this?

Maih a mere child, did this? (song 6)

In the past, chastity was highly revered and girls were expected to go into their marital homes as virgins. With the advent of Westernization, pre-marital sex and single parenthood have become the vogue. In Oku, nowadays, a girl is only ridiculed when she gets a child at a very tender age or when she attempts to dispose of a child through abortion or to throw away the child after birth as is the case with the girl in the song below:

Eh bine lee nowan weh bine se teng ah

Ge wan ne vin chi maih ndeh?  
 Eh bine lee nowan weeh bine se teng ah  
 Ge wan ne vin chi maih ndeh?  
 Translation

Solo: We dance, mother you dance too?  
 Who threw away this child?  
 We dance, mother you dance too?  
 Who threw away this child? (song 7)

This girl is mocked for rejoicing with others when the child she had thrown away is recovered alive. In the next song, youths are warned of the implications of throwing babies into toilets. This according to the women would lead to the extinction of the community. The song goes thus:

Solo: Wan ebie e e e h  
 Wan ebluemen ah  
 Wan ebie e e eh  
 Wan eblumen ah  
 Eh sei ne bii ka weh eh jion ndumaih ah  
 Fene weh ne loo gha ah?

Translation

Solo: Girls  
 Boys  
 Girls  
 Boys

If we had been delivering and had been throwing away as you do today would you have been? (song 8)

### Satire against Family Disunity

Family and kinship are among the most important aspects of human society. They play an important part in the organisation of people. Satire against family disunity is a recurrent theme in the birth song. These satires are directed at co-wives, negligent and irresponsible parents and husbands. In the Oku society, like in the traditional Sierra Leonian society, as Bond has observed:

The wives are treated as tools to satisfy their husband's sexual needs ... they (the women) are often dissatisfied for when an African husband is tired of one wife; he just abandons her and finds another (1975: 723).

This attitude of African men leads to animosity in polygamous home. The following song is performed only by senior wives from polygamous homes. The most junior wife in a polygamous home as well as women from monogamous homes are prohibited from participating in the performance because they are not familiar with the experiences described in the song. The song goes as follows:

Solo: Kechii ke me nei gwiye ah!  
 Chorus: ah eh e ee eh kel wiy iy nai fufe  
 Solo: Ngvuse kwaake beh ya  
 Chorus: Kel wiy iy na fufe  
 Solo: Mbeise tongnen beh ya

Chorus: Kel wiy iy na fufe  
 Solo: Eh nyuke ndumse beh ya  
 Chorus: Kel wiy iy na fufe  
 Solo: oh ndum wan oh  
 Chorus: Kel wiy iynai fufe  
 Solo: weh ndum djumen ah!  
 Chorus: kel wiy iy nai fufe  
 Solo: O ndum laome ah  
 Chorus: kel wiy iy nai ndjun  
 Solo: O ndum lome ah  
 Chorus: kel wiy ey nai lom  
 Solo: O ndum wan o'  
 Chorus: kel wiy iy na lom ah...  
 Solo: kechi ke me ne gwi ah  
 Chorus: Ah eh e ee eh ki wiy iy nai ndjune  
 Solo: Ghel chake eh beh yal ah  
 Chorus: kel wiy iy nai lom  
 Solo: Oh ndum lomen ah!  
 Chorus: kel wiy iy nai lome ah  
 Kel wiy iy nai fufe ah  
 Kel wiy iy nai luye ah  
 Kel wiy iy nai inlum ah  
 Kel wiy iy nai lome ah.

Translation

Solo: On the day I came  
 Chorus: Ah eh eee didn't know it will fade.  
 Solo: Fowls cackled in the compound  
 Chorus: Didn't know it will fade  
 Solo: Goats bleated in the compound  
 Chorus: Didn't know it will fade  
 Solo: Cows moaned in the compound  
 Chorus: Didn't know it will fade  
 Solo: Rat moulds were roasted in the compound  
 Chorus: Didn't know it will fade  
 Solo: Oh the child's Rat mould  
 Chorus: Didn't know it will fade  
 Solo: Oh the child's Rat mould is old  
 Chorus: Didn't know it will get old  
 Solo: Oh Rat mould is now tasteless  
 Chorus: Didn't know it will be tasteless  
 Solo: Oh the child's Rat mould  
 Chorus: Didn't know it will depreciate  
 Solo: On the day I came  
 Chorus: A eh eee, didn't know it will get sour  
 Solo: People rejoiced in the compound  
 Chorus: Didn't know it will depreciate  
 Solo: Oh the child's Rat mould

Chorus: Didn't know it will become tasteless  
 Solo: Didn't know it will depreciate  
 Didn't know it will ever fade  
 Didn't know it will be out dated  
 Didn't know it will ever be bitter  
 Didn't know it will depreciate (song 9)

This song is a satire against the pretentious nature of men who, when they desire to take a second wife begin to pretend that the other woman is no more alluring and an advice to the latest wife not be blinded by the attention and love that she is receiving from the husband because her "Ndum" (a word borrowed from the Kom language meaning vagina) will, with time, depreciate, as an faded. Hence, the latest wife will also be in the same state of misery as the other wives when the man takes a new wife. The song describes the day a woman comes into her marital home as a day of joy and feasting and compares it with the passing of time and the disappearance of the newness of the vagina. The plight of women in polygamous homes is portrayed by the use of vivid images, for example, they see themselves as "old dishes" and their firm breast are now sagged.

In polygamous homes, the husband often lavishes undue attention to the latest wife. She thus becomes a victim of jealousy and scorn, in the song below, a junior wife rebukes the senior wife who envies, insults, hates and curses her. She emphasizes the fact that the senior wife has eaten her own share of their husband's wealth. The song goes thus:

Solo: Ghe se nyam me ebvie weh mbui e e) 2x  
 Weh nganchimen bong zhie  
 Gha se se nyam me ebvie weh mbui ee  
 Chorus: Repeats  
 Solo: ha se tele me ebvie weh mbui e e) 2x  
 Me lam wiy ndon ne weh  
 Gha se teile me ebvie weh mbui e e  
 Translation  
 Solo: Don't maltreat me senior wife) 2x  
 You have eaten your share  
 Don't maltreat me senior wife  
 Chorus: Repeats  
 Solo: Don't insult me senior wife)2x  
 I don't cook in your pots  
 Don't insult me senior wife. (song10)

The junior wife emphasizes the fact that she is not dependent on the senior one. The senior wife's hatred for her is thus unfounded. The next song clearly expresses antagonism in a polygamous home in Oku society

Solo: Me bii wan  
 Me baa bong njio  
 Me lii nda ne babey fuife wom kiy me shom  
 Chorus: Repeats  
 Solo: me bii wan  
 Me baa shike iyfim  
 Fuife wan nyam me se ghe?

Chorus: Repeats.  
 Solo: Me bii wan kefaa kepunge  
 Me lii ndaa ne babey fuiife wom kiy me shom  
 Translation  
 Solo: I am delivered of a baby  
 I have not committed an abomination  
 But when I enter our husband's house, my mate sighs  
 Chorus: Repeats.  
 Solo: I am delivered of Ia baby  
 I did not join a secret cult  
 Why does my mate maltreat me?  
 Chorus: Repeats.  
 Solo: I have just been delivered of a baby, a good thing  
 But when I enter our husband's house my mate sighs (song 11)

The woman accused of sighing in the song has been neglected by her husband for so long and she had hoped to have access to her husband's bed when her mate (the preferred wife) is breast feeding but her mate is still very much around their husband. The frustrated wife resents her mate and shows this resentment by sighing whenever her mate enters their husband's house. This resentment could be as a result of jealousy which is a common feature in polygamous homes. Though the women sympathize with the preferred wife, they do not condemn the senior wife because they are aware of the plight of senior wives in polygamous homes.

In the Oku society, like in most African societies, parents and relations are expected to make care of their children, some of the songs performed during birth celebrations are satires against irresponsible parents and relations who neglect their children. Modern mothers who abandon the duties of child care like bathing, and feeding to baby sisters so as to make love with their husbands are satirized, as exemplified in the following song:

Solo: Ebliwan gwiye ko wan eh ye suu eeh)3x  
 Eh me ye ndu massa chiyte meh  
 Ebliwan gwiye kowan ye suu eeh  
 Chorus:Repeats  
 Solo: Ebliwan gwiye ko wan, eh ye zhiese eeh)3x  
 Eh me ye ndu ne iytem yom chia meh  
 Ebliwan gwiye ko wan eh zhie se eeh  
 Chorus: Repeats  
 Translation  
 Solo: Sitter come and take the baby and bath)3x  
 Let me go, my husband is waiting for me  
 Chorus:Repeats:  
 Solo: Sitter, come and take the baby and feed)3x  
 Let me go lest my heart abandons me  
 Sitter, come and take the baby and feed.(song12)

This song stresses the fact that child bearing requires readjustment of roles; people become not only husband and wife but parents to the new baby. Society expects especially them other to care, love and provide for the child.

In the next song Meichas, and irresponsible husband, wishes to be relieved of the burden of taking care of his wife. He refers to her as dirty and wants his in-laws to reclaim her, but his father-in-law does not go for his daughter because he dreads returning the bride wealth, the callousness of the father-in-law is revealed in his reply” you can kill her for the bride price. Though he does not want his daughter to be killed physically, his reply portrays his heartlessness, the song goes thus:

Solo: Meichas nyake nwale, Baba gwi y lii wan  
 Meichas nyake nwale, baba gwi y lii wan  
 Meh baa kang dote

Chorus: Repeats.

Solo: Baba Fiise ge, weh konge weh yuye  
 Baba Fiise ge weh konge weh yuye  
 Se weh ketu ebkaa

Translation

Meichas wrote, Father-in-law come and take your daughter  
 Meichas wrote, Father-in-law come and take your daughter  
 I hate dirt  
 Chorus:Repeats  
 Solo:Father-in-law replied, you can kill her  
 Father-in-law replied, you can kill her  
 For the bride price (song 13)

Both the husband and the father-in-law are a disgrace to the society. This is because in the Oku society, husbands are expected to love and care for their wives but when they are as irresponsible as Meichas, the parents-in-law are expected to return the bride wealth and reclaim their daughter. Oku people abhor wife beating. Michael is castigating in the song below for kicking his wife and causing her barrenness. The song goes as thus;

Solo: Weih Michael weh beise mbom wan  
 Ne ehvee ebkwange ge mekale e e  
 Weih Michael weh beise nbom wan

Chorus: Repeats.

Solo: Weih Michael weh sak mbom wan  
 Ne ehvee ebkwange ge mekale e e  
 Weih Michael weh sak mbom wan

Chorus: Repeats.

Translation:

Solo: Oh Michael you destroyed the womb  
 With your shoes because of civilization  
 Oh Michael you scattered the womb

Chorus: Repeats.(song 14)

Surprisingly, there are no satirical songs against bad daughters-in-laws or in-laws generally. When asked the reason for this absence, Mama Nuse a satirist explained that:

Your daughter-in-law is your daughter. She belongs to your family and a family is supposed to be united. There is supposed to be love, commitment, support and understanding, and cooperation. If it is otherwise, we settle matters within the

family. When you expose your family members you expose yourself (Interview, 1997).

It is thus the duty of member of every family in Oku to ensure that he or she does not drag the name of the family into mud by his behaviour. This concept of the family in Oku is similar to that of the Igbo, as described by Egudnu when he states that:

The Igbo man's conception of the family life is one of absolute solidarity, cooperation, common destiny and commitment, and love must be apparent even if behind this façade of overt love gesture there lurks some rancor, disunity (1973:18)

### **Parsimony**

In Oku, the birth of a child is an occasion for joy and feasting not for the woman who has been delivered of a child and her family but for the whole community. When a child is born, the whole community rejoices because they will have something to eat during the birth celebration. Parsimony and ingratitude are therefore condemned in the birth song. A family is condemned if they invite people for celebration but provide very little for entertainment. In the next song, the women ridicule the parsimony and ingratitude of Ndi's family. The women inform the audience and their host of the need for more food by saying that they have not gone to toilet; and activity that is performed only when the stomach is full. The song goes thus:

Solo: Ghel ghe Ndi beh lu ghel ghe?  
 Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh ndu se iykful ah  
 Solo: Ghel ghe Ndi beh lu ghel ghe?  
 Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh ndu se iykful ah  
 Solo: Ngkante bange Ibih ghes baa yen  
 Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh ndu se iykful ah  
 Solo: Na kewange kelang ghes baa yen  
 Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh ndu se iykful ah  
 Solo: Ngkante bottle mduk ghe baa yen  
 Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh ndu se iykful ah  
 Solo: Ngkante mango ghes baa yen  
 Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh ndu se iykful ah  
 Solo: Ngkangte mango ghes baa yen  
 Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh ndu se iyjful ah  
 Solo: Ghel ghe ndi beih lu nduse ebgvul  
 Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh nduse iykful ah  
 Solo: Ngkangte orange ghes baa gen  
 Chorus: Ghes ghe sei cheme eh ndu se iykful ah  
 Solo: Ghel ghe ndi beih lu Mnkwen  
 Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh ndu se iykfula.

#### Translation

Solo: Ndi's family! What caliber of people are they?  
 Chorus: When we dance we go to toilet  
 Solo: Ndi's family! What kind of people are they?  
 Chorus: When we dance we go to toilet.  
 Solo: Even a piece of kola we have not seen  
 Chorus: When we dance we go to toilet

Solo: Even a piece of cocoyam we have not seen  
 Chorus: When we dance we go to toilet  
 Solo: Even a bottle of beer we have not seen  
 Chorus: When we dance we go to toilet  
 Solo: Even a mango we have not seen  
 Chorus: When we dance we go to toilet  
 Solo: Ndi's family is unappreciative  
 Chorus: When we dance we go to toilet  
 Solo: Even an orange we have not seen  
 Chorus: When we dance we go to toilet  
 Solo: Ndi's family is lazy (song 15)

The song is an exaggeration of the parsimony of Ndi's family. In order to let the host know that they are not satisfied with what has been given to them, the women say they have neither been given a piece of kola, a piece of cocoa yam, a bottle of beer, an orange nor even a simile.

The next song is also a satire against parsimony. It ridicules a host who has provided just a little for the guests and still joins in eating it. The women inform the people of the need for food and drinks by ironically saying that they will eat and drink despite their impecuniosity.

Solo: Weh Febihlese ee  
 Chorus: weh Febihlese wan ka bawan fe eh kasi fii kful  
 Solo: Weh Felangse ee  
 Chorus: weh Folangse wan ka nowan fo eh kasi fii zhie  
 Solo: Weh fendum wan ee  
 Chorus: weh fendum wan ka bawan fo eh kasi fii kful  
 Solo: Ah aa ah ghan laan weh ghes zhie  
 Chorus: ah ah ah ah ah ah  
 Solo: Ghes zhie gese nue  
 Chorus: ah ah ah ah ah ah  
 Solo: weh Fechambase ee  
 Chorus: weh Fechambase wan ka bawan Fo eh kasi fii nue  
 Solo: weh Fe nyam ee  
 Chorus: Fenyam wan ka ba wan Fo eh kase fii kfule

Translation

Solo: Oh a little kola  
 Chorus: Oh a little kola for the birth celebration that the father gave and again took and ate  
 Solo: Oh a little cocoyam  
 Chorus: Oh a little cocoyam for the celebration that the mother gave and again took and ate  
 Solo: Oh a little Rat mould  
 Chorus: Oh a little Rat mould for the celebration that the father gave and again took and ate  
 Solo: Ah aa ah it's today that we will eat  
 Chorus: Ah ah ah ah ah ah  
 Solo: we will eat and drink  
 Chorus: Ah ah ah ah

Solo: oh a little champagne  
 Chorus: oh a little champagne for the celebration that  
 the father gave and again took and ate  
 Solo: Oh a little meat  
 Chorus: Oh a little meat for the celebration that  
 the father gave and again took and ate (song 16)

This song sung until the family concerned respond by bringing more food and drinks. If the family is adamant, the women continue with songs like the one below:

Solo: Ghen bin e ghone ghom  
 Chorus: Dinyke dinj cha  
 Solo: Ghen ko ke gwiw wan ah?  
 Chorus: Dingke ding cha  
 Solo: Ghen bine ghone ghom  
 Chorus: Dingke ding cha  
 Solo: Ghen koo ke gwiw wan ah  
 Chorus: Dinyke dinj cha  
 Solo: Ghen ngvumle ghone ghom  
 Translation  
 Solo: Dance my children  
 Chorus: Dingke ding cha  
 Solo: Did you come for the child?  
 Chorus: Dingke ding cha  
 Solo: Bend my children  
 Chorus: Dingke ding cha  
 Solo: Did you come for the child?  
 Chorus: Dingke ding cha (song 17)

In the song above the women are urged to continue dancing even though they have not been lavishly entertained because they came to see the child.

## Larceny

Larceny is one of the vices that are satirized in Oku birth song. Oku society abhors larceny so thieves are regarded as accursed people and are not allowed to interact freely with other members of the society. However, because of the humiliation of childlessness, some women even go to the extent of stealing children. The song below is a satire against a woman who stole a child.

Solo: Nowan weh lie gha wan ah  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma nowan eh ma  
 Solo: Nowan chi chonge wan wil ah  
 Chorus: Eh ma ehma nowan eh ma  
 Solo: Nowan chi chonge wan wil ah  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma nowan eh ma  
 Solo: Lu wan wil Bolo  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma nowan eh ma  
 Solo: Lu wan wil Nso ah

Chorus: Eh ma eh ma nowan eh ma  
 Solo: Ghen ghal fii  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma nowan eh ma  
 Solo: Ghen tel fii ah  
**Translation**  
 Solo: Mother from where did you get a child?  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma mother eh ma  
 Solo: Mother, from where did you get a child?  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma mother eh ma  
 Solo: Mother you stole a child  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma mother eh ma  
 Solo: It is a Bororo's child  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma mother eh ma  
 Solo: It is a Noni person's child  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma mother eh ma  
 Solo: It is a Nso person's child  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma mother eh ma  
 Solo: Arrest her and take the child  
 Chorus: Eh ma eh ma mother eh ma  
 Solo: Beat her and take the child.(song 18)

Though people love children the song advocates that a woman who steals a child should be caught, beaten and the child taken from her. This is because a thief constitutes a social nuisance more than a barren woman. Unlike in the Igbo society where acts considered as abominations are satirized in songs (Ohale 1996:159), crimes like incest, suicide, homicide and adultery with the Fon's wives which are considered as abomination in the Oku society are sanctioned by kwifon (the sacred cult of the land). People do not speak freely about these crimes and they are hardly included in songs for fear that the youths who are often adventurous and daring may imitate the culprits.

### **The Function of satirical Lore**

Satire is very effective in checking conduct in Oku society. John Dryden's contention that "the true end of satire is the amendment of vices by correction and the true satirist is no more an enemy to the offender than the physician is an enemy to the his patient when he prescribes a harsh remedy to make surgery unnecessary" cited in Gilbert Hight ( 1962:241) is true of satirical lore in Oku. Satire in Oku is used as a vehicle for social control and social purification. In Oku like in Igboland as seen in Nwoga (1981:230) "the aim of satire is to expose the victim. Everybody is brought into full knowledge of what the person did so that his spirit would fight an internal battle with him and he would spend sleepless nights worrying about himself". Satirical songs are meant to castigate the culprits for benefit of society as a whole. To Bloom (1969:127) the satirist, like a despairing parent, applies the verbal lash or the jeer as instrument of moral and social therapy. These are painful but he hopes that they will in time bring about a wholesomeness that must compensate for the hurt". Satire in Oku is didactic and makes its point by projecting instances of failure in human conduct and institutions. Oku people employ satire in birth song for instructional purposes: to teach the virtues of sexual purity, frown on excesses and all forms of irresponsibility.

The birth song provides the performers with the poetic license to comment on events in the society without being held to ransom. It provides an outlet for suppressed emotions and protects the society from direct attack and drastic change. For example junior wives can comfortably reprimand senior wives and women can openly expressed disapproval of social codes without appearing rebellious. For example, women openly ridicule the pretentiousness of their husband and he cannot raise a hand against them. This is all right for as Landey and Leroy (1991:101) have observed, ‘to say such things outside the song would be just insulting him... just provoking him, but so long as it was done through singing there will be no dispute’

### **The Aesthetics of Satirical Lore**

Satirists are motivated not only by ethical desire for reform or preservation of social order but by aesthetic desire for self expression and entertainment. It is therefore necessary for us to examine the aesthetics of Oku satirical lore. Aesthetics deals with the principles of beauty and artistic taste. It is concerned with critical statements that describe, interpret, or evaluate particular works of art. The question of aesthetics is crucial to literary criticism, for, it raises fundamental questions with regard to the language of poetry and poetic semantics. Aesthetics deals with the criteria for distinguishing good works from bad ones. Distinguishing the aesthetic from the non-aesthetic has been a recurring preoccupation among philosophers of arts. To this aim, a number of books and articles have appeared since the time of Plato attempting to define aesthetics, but without exception these definitions have failed to satisfy most aestheticians. This issue of the conceptualization of aesthetics is noted by Hosper when he maintains:

In aesthetics we attempt (1) to clarify the basic concepts we employ in thinking and talking about the objects of aesthetic experience (which are usually, but not always, works of art – they may also be objects of nature such as hillsides, trees, sunsets and even human beings). We are interested in words too, not for their own sake but only for the sake of clarity in identifying and handling concepts. Among the concepts constantly used in talking about aesthetic matters, the following are typical: The aesthetic beauty (or aesthetic value) aesthetic meaning, symbolism, representation, expression, truth, art. But in aesthetics we also attempt to answer certain questions in which these concepts are embedded- questions such as: under what circumstance can a work of art be said to exist? When is an object beautiful? Is there anyway of deciding when there are varied interpretations of a work, which one is correct or is there no such thing as correctness of interpretation. Are there any criteria for distinguishing good works of art from bad ones? Are the criteria of value, if there are any, the same in works of literature as in the works of music for example? If not, how and why do they differ? What is the relation of art to nature? Has art anything to do with truth or with morality? (1969:2).

The concept of aesthetics hangs on the notion of the beautiful. Carrit (1949:21-24) defines beauty as “that assemblage of Grace or proportions of parts which pleases the eye, or imagination. To be beautiful an object must thus be significant by virtue of its sensible character or of the sensuous images it arouses in our minds.” (24). Chari (1967: 54) says ‘Aesthetics is the adoption of poetic means (words, sentences, figures and images) to poetic ends’. He points out that “The only criterion of poetic beauty is the criterion of appropriateness: words, images, and all other elements of style derive their efficacy by being appropriate to specific ends”. Aesthetic judgement depends so much on the context that it is difficult if not impossible to isolate any one feature of a work of art and say that whenever that feature is present, the work of art is a good one or even that it is better than it

would have been without it. For example, the use of rich imagery which is considered grounds for praise in one poem may not be considered so in another poem. Also indecency, unintelligibility, repetition and obscurity can all be merits in special circumstances. It is therefore impossible to separate any pure aesthetics from a sociological understanding of arts. We will be concerned with the various techniques which effectively present the birth songs and with the traditional aesthetics of the Oku people. That is, the canons of oral literary criticism which the Oku people apply to satirical lore, the parameters for measuring the beauty of a satirical piece.

The beautiful in Oku is realized in the following words: (1) Jofe: good, nice, example, Njange jofe - a good or nice song. (2) Kejunge: Fine, nice, example, Wan ebjunge = A nice child. (3) nyliake: bright, colourful, elegant. These words are used in describing objects or situations that are pleasing to the eye and senses. This is opposed to befe and behmen, which are used to describe objects and situations that displease the eye or senses. Some objects and animals in the Oku society have come to be regarded as aesthetic objects; so beauty is also conceived in relation to these animals and objects. Examples are: Fenuine Mbong, (a white cap believed to have been gotten from Lake Oku The Fon (the paramount leader of Oku) usually wears this during his installation) FEN (the lone species of the bird baanerman toracco) and lightning. We admire works of art for their intelligence, wisdom, sincerity, depth of feeling, compassion and realism

Oku satirical lore has value not only as an object of aesthetic contemplation but as a social and moral force. In assessing it, the critic should not indulge only in fashionable formalism for important as it is, the message in *Oku satirical lore* is more important than the form. The intrinsic value is there to lead us into the work so that we can penetrate its significance.

Satire in the birth song is achieved through indirectness and Figures like irony and sarcasm exaggeration and vivid description.

Irony is a language device either in spoken or written form, in which the real meaning is concealed or contradicted by the literal meaning of the words, or in a theatrical situation (dramatic irony) in which there is an incongruity between what is expected and what occurs. Irony is a form of indirection that avoids overt praise or censure. Irony is a common device in the birth song. The co-wife in song 11 is expected to rejoice with her mate over the birth of a child, but she shows resentment". Another instance of irony is in song 8 where children that are supposed to be loved are thrown into toilets by youths. Irony is used in the birth song to upset or mock. Under the guise of praise, a caustic and bitter expression of strong and personal disapproval is given as exemplified in song 16. In this song the women, want to emphasize the fact that they have not been provided enough food to appreciate their performance. Ironically, they say that they will eat and drink despite their impecuniosity.

Hyperbole is gross exaggeration or blowing up an object or idea much more than its normal size or proportion. Hyperbole in the birth song is used to ridicule. In the song 15, the stinginess of Ndi's family is exaggerated to ridicule it. Hyperbole is an effective weapon of securing the audience attention to the subject and reminding them of their expected roles in the community. It makes the satirical song sarcastic, the victim is infuriated not because he is ridiculed but because his act is exaggerated.

## CONCLUSION

From this study, we can conclude that birth songs constitute a very important instrument for living and the continued corporateness of the existence of the community. The occasion as well as the nature of the performance enhances group solidarity. The songs attempt to create healthy ethos among the members of the society because acts that ensure social harmony are praised as in songs while vices like jealousy, stinginess, irresponsibility, rivalry among wives, stealing and sexual misconduct that lead to social disintegration are condemned. Satirical songs are meant to castigate the culprits for the benefit of society as a whole. The satirist,

like a despairing parent applies the verbal lash or the jeer as instrument of moral and social therapy. These are painful but he hopes that they will in time bring about a wholesomeness that must compensate for the hurt” (Bloom, 1969: 127).

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