

**FORM, CONTENTS AND FUNCTIONALITY IN THE MYTHIC ORAL SONG-TEXTS OF ẸGỤ
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University of Delta, Agbor, Delta State, Nigeria.****Phone Number: 08033442668****Email: gegeridike@gmail.com****gegeri.gegeri@unidel.edu.ng****Abstract**

The concern of this paper is on the form, content and functionality in the mythic oral poetic song-texts of Egu Omelimo ojenoku as are hatched during the Omelimo Okumeshi (the festival celebration of Okumeshi). The paper also dwells on the myth of origin of the Ojenoku festival dance, the movements or the dramatic shifts during the in-performance, proper, as well as the aesthetics, symbolisms and functionality, therein. The concluding part of this same paper is on the factors inhibiting the effective enactment of the Ojenoku festival dance cum song rendition, and the recommendations to upholding the tenets of the dramatic dance. The methodology encompasses oral interviews, personal observations, video recordings of the dramatic performances, as well as the recourse to the library and the internet for further clarification. And, because the festival dance cum song-texts are culture based, Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski's "Theory of Functionalism" and William Bascom's "Functional Theory of Folklore" are adopted as the bases for the theoretical framework for this paper, so as to depict the socio-cultural functions of the Ojenoku festival dance in Umusume Quarters in Obiaruku.

Keywords: Ojenoku, Umusume, Form, Content, Functionality**Introduction:**

Egu Omelimo Ojenoku (that is the Ojenoku Festival Dance) is an annual rejuvenation festival that is celebrated in Umusume Quarters in Obiaruku, by a group of people called Umụ- Esụme. It is usually performed to mark the end of the "O Bụlụ O Bụlụ"(the feast of excessive pounded yam, fish, and soup) festival, just shortly after the Umụlẹ festival (which is the second phase of the O Bụlụ O Bụlụ festival) comes to its final celebration cum conclusion. The Egu Omelimo Ojenoku as a festival dance is imbued with lots of tantalizing song-texts, as well as captivating dramatic displays, which can be adjudged, artistic renditions, hence, the vested interest of the natives in its annual performance and the ardent zeal towards the discourse of the same.

The Umusume (Umụ-Esụme) People:

The Umusume People, also known as Umụ-Esụme (that is the children or descendants of Esụme) are the group of people resident in Umusume Quarters in Obiaruku. The history of origin dates back to the first waves of migration, from the 15th to the 16th centuries, when Esụme, the forebear of Umusume People, left Umụoshị Ezhiokpo and joined the first groups of immigrants to the present day Obiaruku and settled in the area known and called, Umusume (Okolugbo, O.E,6-7; Harrison Ajede-Akpotohwo,8-9; K.B.C Onwubiko, 107-112). This same group of people are majorly the descendants of the four children of Akashiádá, viz: Okpo, Ezhi, Ebụ and Ovilị; all four that are associated with the founding of Ezhiokpo, Ezhiñum, Umụebụ, and Ovilị (Abraka-Inland) (Okolugbo,7). But, presently, the native inhabitants of Umusume Quarters are the direct descendants of Esụme, himself, except for some few stranger-settlers. There are four distinct family delineations in Umusume, which are: Umụ Ozegbe-Anię; Umụ Opią-Okụ; Umu Ugbó (all three that make up the larger Umụ Ogwezhi) and Umu Oshẹ-Ojje, respectively. The language spoken by the Umusume is Ukwuąnj.

Myths of Origin of Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokú:

The history of origin of Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokú is woven round the myth of a mysterious event that took place in Ezhiokpo, a long time ago. And it is this same story that makes for the incorporation of Ojenokú dance renditions into the annual celebration of the "O Bùlù O Bùlù"(the festival of excessive pounded yam, fishes, meats, soups, and drinks).

"Myth", according to F.B.O Akporobaro, can be defined as:

A traditional story in prose or verse evolved created in pre-literate societies and handed down orally, [or]: "any narrative in oral or written form imbued with a symbolic value, and which offers

An explanation of events, happenings or human experiences

which are beyond rational or simple rational or scientific explanation (215).

In the light of the above postulation by Akporobaro, tradition as was recounted by the Ogbuimi and Ezeakpa of Umusume Quarters, Chiefs J.O. Onefeli and G.O.C. Okpotu, respectively, has it that the Ojenokú festival dance renditions evolved from the formal traditional arrangements by the Umusume People to incorporate the traditional displays into the "O Bùlù O Bùlù" festival performance, as a way to signal the end of the "O Bùlù O Bùlù " celebration, as well as a means to cleansing the community of its filths that might have existed within the same community, since the last episodes of the Ojenokú dance enactments. In continuation, the duo stated that there once lived an Ezhiokpo lady that was married to a man from Umú Mgbolobia Quarters in Umukwata, both villages that are situate in Ukwani Local Government Area of Delta State. On a fateful day, that same woman went washing some clothes at the Okwumeshi River in Ezhiokpo. In the course of the laundering, she envisaged a mysterious object floating towards her position; and out of fear for her life, she took to her heels but was instructed by a strange voice to return to the scene of encounter and pick up the mysterious floating object and take it home and show the same to her husband.

But rather than obeying the instructions from the strange voice, she decided to hide the mythic experience and object from her husband, and thereafter, went to her biological father and handed the object concerned to him. The father of the said woman on sensing the dangers associated with such mysticism, rejected the same object and instructed his daughter to return same to her husband. When eventually the Oracles were consulted, the Ezhiokpo People were instructed to device a feast in honour of the Okwumeshi River, with the Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokú in Umusume and the other villages, as the final stage of performance. And, for the fact that the said brother-in-law(that is the father of the concerned Umukwata man) was an upright man, the people of Ezhiokpo, then, beckoned on their in-law's relatives for a joint celebration, hence, the celebration of both the Omelimo Okwumeshi and Omelimo Ojenokú, in Umusume Quarters, Ezhiokpo and Umukwata, simultaneously, up to the present time. But it should be noted that the same Ojenokú dance renditions also take place in such places as Ogume (where it is called "Olu"), Utagba-Ogbe (where it is called "Olikpo"), and in Ijaw communities (where it is called, "Osuopele", "Amabenimo", "Beniseide" and "Oki", respectively), but the events that brought about the celebration of such related dance displays are beyond the scope of this paper. And the names of both the Ezhiokpo woman, the woman of the first song, "**O Welí ní**", and the Umú-Mgbolobia man are lost to the mystery of History, too as all the interviewees claimed not to have known the related names, or it was a deliberate way to keeping with the demands of Umusume culture and traditions; and as such, will form a part of another research in Umusume culture and tradition.

Theoretical Framework:

This discourse encompasses oral song-texts, historiography, dramaturgy and translation, therefore, finding an adequate theoretical framework for its discussion will be a Herculean task. And, again, this topic is largely underrepresented in cultural undertakings, hence many scholars of Oral Literary tradition will argue against the choice of a certain theoretical framework for an obscure discourse as Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokú in Umusume Quarters in

Objarukū Community. However, this paper, as a result of its complicated nature, adopts as its theoretical framework, "The Functional Theories" as enunciated by Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski and William Bascom's "The Functional Theory of Folklore", and occasionally delves into ideas bothering on myths and drama.

In the Theory of Functionalism, Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski (1926) is of the view that:

...any theory of culture [like that of Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokū] must start from one organic needs of man, and if it succeeds in relating [to them] the more complex, indirect, but perhaps fully imperative needs of the type which we call spiritual or economic or social, it will supply us with a set of general laws such as we need in sound scientific theory (72-73).

In line with the above postulation, this paper affirms "Functionalism" to mean that theory that adjudges human society as that complex system with distinct parts, the latter which work in a harmonious association, with a drive towards enhancing the stability, solidarity and the onerous and/or continuous existence of the entire system, hence the likening or comparing of a habitable society to an living organism which various organs function in unison for the same to coordinate, properly. And for a society or an organism to thrive effectively, the context matters a lot, as can be deduced from Bronislaw's words:

The text [the Ojenokū dance renditions] of course, is extremely important, but without the context, it remains lifeless. As we have seen, the interest of the story is vastly enhanced, and it is given its proper character by the manner in which it [the myth of origin] is told. The whole nature of the performance, the voice and the mimicry, the stimulus and the response of the audience mean as much to the natives as the text...The stories live in native life and not on paper, and when a scholar jots them down without being able to evoke the atmosphere in which they [such stories and other items of folklore] flourish, he has given us but a mutilated bit of reality (24). Therefore, the principal concepts in Bronislaw's Functional Theory, according to (Firth,55), as is quoted by Eric Porth et al, are:

"To understand behaviour in terms of the 'motivation' of individuals, including both 'rational' scientifically validated behaviour and irrational, ritual, magical or religious behaviour... recognizing the interconnectedness of the different items which constituted a 'culture' to form some kind of system, and understanding a particular item by identifying its functionality in the current contemporary operation of that culture (35)."

It is on the above Bronislawian notes that this paper takes a recourse to William Bascom's "Functional Theory of Folklore"(1982), which is considered by many scholars as an offshoot of Bronislaw Malinowski's functional theory. In this theory, Bascom propounded an authoritative discourse on the social functions of folklore or oral narratives that are predominant in human societies all over the world. In the text, "Four Functions of Folklore"(1981), Bascom defends Malinowski's position that myth is the charters for people's ardent beliefs in a society, and thereafter, argues the fact that Malinowski's positions concerning myth and society are applicable to other items of folklore, such as proverbs, riddles, songs, superstitious, stories, among others (Alan,Dundes,279). For the purpose of clarification, Bascom enumerates the functions of folklore to include: (a) the escape into fantasy and amusement, invariably, avoiding repressions and aggressions that emanate from our environments and body chemistries;(b) the validation of the aspects of our cultures, customs and associated taboos, thus making for justifications of the rituals and institutions;(c)

the attainment of social control of the native populace (invariably, maintaining human behaviours),and (d) serving as a pedagogical means to enforcing societal values (especially, the morals)to humanity (Thajura,Parthari,43-44; Richard Dorson,211; Gegeri,D.G,57-58). From the

above discourses on Malinowski's and Bascom's theories, *Ègù Omelimo Ojenokù* in *Umusume Quarters* in *Obiarukù*, suitably fits into the descriptions of folklore types, and the discourse of this paper too, is also covered by the theories of Functionalism, so adopted by the researcher

The Celebration of Ègù Omelimo Ojenokù in Umusume Quarters:

The *Ègù Omelimo Ojenokù* in *Umusume Quarters* in *Obiarukù*, is celebrated, annually, in the month of November, within a period of seven (7) days, from an *Oliè* day to the second *Nkwo* market day. The Celebration of this revered festival dance is the sole prerogative of the people of *Umusume Quarters*, except for the invitee-participants that partake in the watching of the performances and the feasting on the foods and drinks, so provided by the indigenes of *Umusume*.

The *Ojenokù* festival dance begins immediately, after the feasts of *Umule*, as are arranged and enacted by the Priests of *Umusume* idols, on the *Eke* that precedes the *Olie* day for *Ojenokù* dance. The first *Olie* day marks the first outing of two *Ojenokù -ifutu* (early appearance of two *Ojenokù*), as organized by the *Otu-Onuogbe*, whose duties include the use of charms to fortify the *Ojenokù*, accompanying the *Ojenokù*, mostly in the evenings, to various places and households in the village, to receive cash gifts and other favours, among other functions. From the evening of the first *Olie* day to that of the last *Nkwo* market day, the performance proper does take place, usually at the village square, amidst pumps and pageantry. The second *Olie* day marks the day of bestowing honour on the Priests (or, owners) of idols (*juju*) in *Umusume Quarters* and thereafter, the accompanying dance displays at the village square. The final performance (*Iṣa-Olu*), which is on an *Nkwo* market day, witnesses the participations of the entire *Olu* godheads in *Àkashida* Clan: the *Ojenokù*; the *Ogbo*; the *Okpokume*; the *Kpambolu*, and the *Àjukpe*, of distinct configurations. It is significant to note that it is the exclusive right of the *Umù -Ojiè* family (particularly, the *Umù-Ogwashi* lineage) to enact the *Okpokume* displays; the *Umù Ozegbe-Àniè* (especially, the *Umù-Àkà*) for the *Àjukpe* ritual acts, while any *Umusume* man that is matured and physically fit can partake in the performance of the *Kpambolu* and the *Ojenokù* dramaturgies. Suffice to state that the last two dance (*Ègù-ìkpeazu Àjukpe*) renditions by the *Àjukpe* are usually hatched on the way to the *Iṣu-Okwumeshi* (the abode/shrine of the *Okwumeshi* gods), to the delight of the members of the *Àjukpe* masquerade. The next task is the cooking of sumptuous meals by the *Otu-Onuogbe* age grade to appease the mask heads (of all *Umusume* gods) that were used in the *Ojenokù* festival dance renditions. Thereafter, is the *Ogene-ìkpazu* (the last singing acts) by the womenfolk, as they sing festival songs and visit the *Inotu* (Chiefs), who in turn, appreciate the women group (s) with such items as (a) tuber (s) of yam; a bottle of hot; balls of kolanuts, and money. Such women groups are often accompanied by some men and youths of the community, and if a chief defaults in such obligations, he is lampooned and reported to the entire community.

The taboos that are observed during Ègù Omelimo Ojenokù include:

- (a) It is forbidden that a woman touches the chairs meant for the *Ojenokù*, or any of the props that are provided for the performance;
- (b) It is forbidden that a woman will cross the stage arena during performance, in-situ;
- (c) It is forbidden that an *Ojenokù* falls down, or attempts to pick up his "èzuzu (native fan) from the ground. On this note, he is to sacrifice a live cock to appease the gods of the land.

Form, Content and Style of Ègù Omelimo Ojenokù Oral Song-texts:

The renditions of the *Ègù Omelimo Ojenokù* Oral Poetic Songs-texts are usually during the performance of the *Ojenokù* festival in *Umusume Quarters*, or in *Ezhiokpo*, or *Umukwata*, or *Ogume*, or *Utagba-Ogbe*, as the case may be. This is based on the fact that the natives are barred from hatching such sacred song-texts in the absence of the festival dance. And the aesthetics within such Poetic-Songs are vividly captured during the dramatic displays of the *Ojenokù* dance movements, which are majorly five in number, viz:

Movement I:

Herein, the Ojenókú steps out and actualizes the dramaturgy of the dance as woven round the song, "O Welí ní":

Ụkwụ̀ṅṅi:

O ye
ni O welí nì 0000!
O yoyo 0000
00000
Oyá gho ko 0000!

English:

Get set/ready
It has started, earnestly
Ride on (with the performance)
Yes 0000
Yes, go on (with it)

The above words, " O wel nì 0000!" and "O yoyo 0000" are series of exclamatory remarks in Úkwúání parlance, which near-interpretations can be seen in the English translations. This song-text is usually in the Canto-Refrain format, which is then followed by an intermittent interjections from members of the audience-singers:

Ụkwụ̀ṅṅi:

Ụkọ Olụ ke nụ
bụ Ụkọ Olụ dī m
Ịshì Olụ ke nụ
bụ Ịshì Olụ dī m
Bụ Ụkụ-egụ ke nụ
abụ Ụkụ-egụ dī m

English:

That Ojenọkụ costume
is my husband's
That Ojenọkụ mask
is my husband's
but the dance steps
isn't his

At the end of the interjections, an alarm is raised, thus heightening the tempo of the song renditions, as in:

Ụkwụ̀ṅṅi:

Obodo
chọsà ni m dī m 0000

English:

Ụmụsụmẹ community
search for and return my husband to me 0000!

This song-text depicts the story of a warrior who was killed during an inter-village war, and was supposedly to partake in the Ojenókú dance renditions; but the wife noticing the husband's absence, became inquisitive and had to interject into the song rendition of, "O welí nì 0000"

Movement II:

The song-text concerned is entitled, "Kweye nì nẹ", while the accompanying dance rendition is called, "Ochokolo". The song goes thus:

Ụkwụ̀ṅṅi:

Kweye nì nẹ
Ohohoho!
Kweye nì nẹ 000
Elene elene ọ dī nẹ
Kweye nì nẹ
Ohohoho!
Kweye nì nẹ

English:

Be more active (with the singing)
O yes!
Be up and doing
However the situation
Be actively involved
Alright, we concur
Be actively involved

This song-text is repeatedly hatched for seven (7) times, thereafter, continued as in:

Ụkwụ̀ṅṅi:

O welí nì
Hooooo!
O welí nì
Hooooo!

English:

He has started (the performance)
Alright (go on)
He has started (the enactment)
Alright (proceed)

This segment of "O weli ni" song is often recast, severally, until the song fades. This same song is a plea for the active involvement of the people in the Ojenokú dance performance; but an indent analysis of same song, depicts it as a solemn call to the audience towards agreeing with the demand of the bereaved woman.

Movement III:

The dance rendition for this stage is called, "Itu-Oda" and the rhythm of the music is tailored towards a free dance participation, for both the audience and the masked figures of the godheads. The "Itu-Oda" dance steps demand agility from the participants and usually no song is involved.

Movement IV:

The concerned song-text for this shift is known as, "Be je ko Ásháká". It is usually sung and repeated several times to the regular beats of the Ojenokú musical instruments. Ashaka is a village in Ndokwa-East Local Government Area, known for the presence of beautiful women. May be, the song-text might be a warning to the Ojenokú not to perform, poorly, amidst the presence of women-spectators.

Movement V:

This last movement is designed to align with the first. The accompanying song is, "O lú wo", as in:

Ụkwụ̀nị:

O lú wo O lú wo
O me wo O me wo
Álụ̀gụ je ooo
Álụ̀gụ ́nà ooo
Álụ̀gụ je ooo
Álụ̀gụ ́nà ooo!

English:

He went (to the battlefield)
It happened (actually)
Álụ̀gụ (the warrior) go, ahead
Álụ̀gụ has gone(home)
Álụ̀gụ go, ahead
Álụ̀gụ has gone, home

This song is repeated, severally; thereafter, the Ojenokú casts dispatch, and the subsequent musical beats usher in the Ájúkpe masquerade performer, whose duties include: the enactment of the dramaturgy of cleansing the stage; wiping off the sins of the people; and the performance of the three last dance enactments, thus:

Ụkwụ̀nị:

Ájúkpe we lị onye ịwẹ ná ooo
O yoyo oooo
O ya oooo
Áya m belele!
Oyoyo nje nị ma o
O yoyo oooo
Oye nje nị ma o
O yoyo oooo!

English:

Ájúkpe send the wicked to the grave
We implore you earnestly
Ájúkpe, terminate the life of the wicked
We implore you, please!
be quick about it
We beg of you, please!
be quick about it
We beg of you, please!

Functionality of Egu Omelimo Ojenokú in Umusume:

The socio-cultural functions of Egu Omelimo Ojenokú in Umusume Quarters include:

- To mark the end of Omelimo Okwumeshi, as entails in the worship of the Okwumeshi River and the celebrations, therein;
- To serve as a subsequent ritual act to the Umule performance, so that the Okwumeshi festival will not end abruptly;
- It serves as the ritual cleansing of the sins and filths in the community, as can be envisaged in the Ájúkpe performance acts;
- Above all, people see it as a means of getting entertained, invariably, purging themselves, therapeutically and emotionally., among others.

Aesthetics and Symbolisms in Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokū:

Aesthetics abound in Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokū renditions, as in the following:

- (a) The masked coverings on the faces of the performers denote invisibility of spirits, hence, the performers are representatives of the gods;
- (b) The shades of colourful wrappers that adorn the bodies of the performers depicts wealth and royalty, because Ojenokū figures are assumed to be the godheads of wealthy deities;
- (c) The pointed wooden structures on the heads of all the Ojenokū and the pointed tails, symbolize swiftness, because such outfits make the entire Ojenokū performers to appear like beautiful birds;
- (d) The "Ezuzu"(native fan) and the portable staff in the hands of the Ojenokū denote wealth and royalty, because, such paraphernalia are meant for the use of only the chiefs of Umusume Quarters;
- (e) The "Iba"(the rattling seeds) that are tied round the ankles of the Ojenokū performers denote vigilance, since the jingles from them keep both the performers and the audience at alert. The same sounds from such "Iba" boost the rhythm of the songs, invariably, elevate the music and dance renditions;
- (f) The cutlass so held by the Ajukpe symbolizes bravery and fearlessness; while,
- (g) the ancient drums that are formed from "Egbu"(the Iroko tree) and the other props, connote longevity, among others.

Findings:

The findings of this paper are as follows:

- (a) That the performers of Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokū are scarce to come by, because of many factors, such as Christianity, Islam, Education and Civilization;
- (b) That the performers have resorted to the enterprises of begging for arms, than the effective enactments of the dramaturgies of Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokū;
- (c) That the song-texts are not efficiently hatched, for the singular fact that the Úkwúaní language, invariably, the culture and traditions, are going, atrophy;
- (d) That most of the agile performers are engulfed with the exchange of pleasantries with the opposite sex, than with the business of Ojenokū dance enactments.

Recommendations:

This paper recommends the following as panaceas for the effective enactments of Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokū renditions in Umusume Quarters:

- (a) That the active participants in Omelimo Ojenokū dance rendition be encouraged, morally and financially, with a view to convincing the unwilling natives to participate in the annual dance rendition;
- (b) The act of begging for money or other associated gains should as a matter of urgency be considered, and if possible be discouraged, so as to bring about a worthy, performance exercise;
- (c) The elders should inculcate the knowledge of Umusume culture and traditions in the minds of the young ones, invariably bringing about cultural renaissance that can activate the ways and manners such mythic oral poetic song-texts can be hatched ;
- (d) The would be performers should be educated on the consequences that herald the disdainful attitudes of a performer that engages in unnecessary pleasantries with the female folk while putting on the toga of a masquerade and the mask of a godhead

Conclusion:

The Eḡu Omelimo Ojenokū is an annual rejuvenation festival that is usually celebrated in Umusume Quarters in Objarukū. It is designed by the community as a form of entertainment that will signal the end of the Omelimo Okwumeshi festival. Although the Ojenokū dance rendition is an age-long

cultural undertaking in Umụsụmẹ Quarters, its captivating dramaturgy, especially the song-texts performance, is not without certain challenges that tend to limit the effectiveness of the in-performance situations.

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- All pictures, courtesy of: MCONowu@<https://www.facebook.com/share/r/15u2oYR3uR/?mibextid=jmPrMh>

Oral Interview/Informers:

Chief Robert Osogbue
(Ootu-uku of Umụsụmẹ Quarters)

Okwa Chief Abanum George
(Odua of Umụsụmẹ Quarters)

Chief G.O.C Okpotu
(Ezeakpa of Umụsụmẹ Quarters)

Chief Onefeli, John Oyibo
(Ogbuimi of Umụsụmẹ Quarters)

- All the above chiefs were interviewed on the same day and at the same time on 5th October 2024, 12:30PM-3:00PM.
- The second interview section with the same group of Chiefs, 2nd September 2025, 3:00PM-5:00PM

APPENDIX I



Ogbo Masquerade Performer in Performance Mood



Ojenokú Dance Renditions

APPENDIX II



Distinct Ojenoku (Olu) Masquerade Performers in Performance situation



Ojenoku Performance at the Village Square