

SATIRE IN NJANGE WAN
(BIRTH SONGS OF THE OKU WOMEN OF
CAMEROON)

Oku people form the second largest fondom 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°40 and 6°50 North and longitude 10°40 and 10°50 East (Ngwa, 1985:6). The fondom 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, on the west by Boyo division, on the south by Ngoketunja 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 on 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.

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. Songs in Oku are often composed extemporaneously on given social, cultural and informal occasions. The performance may or may not be accompanied by musical instruments and the performers can either perform singly as in Key of (lament) or in groups as is the case with Njange Wan.

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 honoured in song and dance (Warren, 1970:4).

Birth celebration is a very important rite in Oku society. During this celebration, marriage rituals like the preparation of *fesuswan* (child's sauce) are performed. A woman who has not been delivered of a baby has not experienced the meaning of being a wife in Oku society. Birth celebration provides a unique opportunity 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 life are awakened and given choral 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 and comically presented in some of the lyrical compositions which women present as birth songs. (Otagburuagu, 1994:27).

Njange Wan 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 verbal expressions which reflect both personal and social experiences. The themes tend to centre on events and matters of common interest and concern to the women in particular, and the community as a whole. Njange Wan deals with everyday life, with the beliefs and customs of the Oku society. In the Oku society, unlike in the Igbo society, where songs are identified as birth songs by the content (Ebeogu, 1992), 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 or the nature of the audience. The song below for example, which is a satire against Shei who sets her husband's house on fire because he married another wife is composed when Shei arrives at the arena of the performance. The song goes thus:

Weh beih Shei loeh nguk ndaa wil
 Weh nyak ndaa ge brick eeè
 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.

A discussion of the concept of satire is necessary for a proper understanding of this discourse. 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 be 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).

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. When there is persistent deviation from the established norms by either a fraction of society or the entire society the women will go naked to the village square and after a sorrowful ululation, begin to sing satirical songs warning the perpetrators of the ills. The culprits will become outcasts until they repent. This is done only when *ibunle* - condemnation of social ills in songs, laments and stories have failed to change these social deviates.

Ibunle is a common form in Oku oral literature. Oku women thus, use each occasion of birth to bunle the ills in the society. Besides the expression of joy for the gift of a child, praise and thanks to God for giving them children and taking away 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 stinginess. This is the main concern of this paper.

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 ee

Chorus: Ishas eyum oh ee

Eh shike kejang eh those iykful

Jofe kejang ke nyime ndaa

O.O. Tata weh beih weh chokes nglezhie.

Solo: Tonge nde iykful ka kewaih ee

Chorus: Ishas eyum oh ee

Eh shike kejang eh those iykful

Jofe kejang ke nyime ndaa

O.O. kewaih, weh beih weh chokes ngezhe.

Translation

Solo: Who is shouting in the toilet like Tata?

Chorus: Naked

Went lovemaking and fell into a toilet

It is proper to make love at home

Oh, oh Tata how you disgraced yourself

Solo: Who is crying in the toilet like Kewaih?

Chorus: Naked

Went lovemaking and fell into a toilet

It is proper to make love at home

Oh, oh Kewaih, how you disgraced yourself.

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 Njange wan. 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 Iaan yen weh kfukfu nowan
Lee Iaan ghe yen weh
Chorus: ka weh seih
Ka weh seih: shik kejang ne wan deye o
Ka weh seih

Solo: Lee Iaan ghe yen weh nowan bawan
Lee Iaan ghe yen weh

Chorus: ka weh seih
Ka weh seih ndu nyuime ne ghone yafe ah
Ka weh seih

Translation

Solo: It is today that we will see your 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.

To the 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 the next song:

Solo: Wuchia dise ke basilum ee
Yanchong tonge ke neiy neiy ken ge shwai
Chorus: Repeats.

Translation: Wuchia opened her bathroom
Yangchong went in and sounded shwai
Chorus: Repeats.

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?

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

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.

Solo: Eh bine lee no wan weh bine se teng ah
 Ge wan ne vin chi maih ndeh?
 Chorus: 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?
 Chorus: We dance, mother you dance too?
 Who threw away this child?

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
 Chorus: Wan ebie e e eh
 Wan eblumen ah
 Eh sei bii ka weh eh join 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?

Family disunity

Family and kinship are among the most important aspects of human society. They play an important part in the organization of people. Satire against family disunity is a recurrent theme in Njange Wan. These satires are directed at co-wife rivalry, negligent and irresponsible parents and husbands, and strained relationship between husbands and wives.

Satirical songs on co-wife rivalry are either sung by senior wives against junior wives or by junior wives against senior ones. 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 she is also a wife and not a mistress and reminds the senior wife that she has eaten her own share of their husband's wealth. The song goes thus:

Solo: Ghe se nyam mne ebvie weh mbui e e) 2x

Weh nganchimen bonghe zhie

Gha se se nyam me ebvie weh mbui ee

Chorus: Repeats.

Solo: Gha 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.

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.

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).

The following song clearly expresses the plight of an abandoned wife in the Oku society.

Solo: Me bii wan
 Me baa bonge njio
 Me lii nda ne babey fuife wom kiy me shom
 Chorus: Repeats
 Solo: me bii wan
 Me baa nyam me se ghe?
 Chorus: Repeats.
 Solo: Me bu wan kefaa kepnge
 Me lii ndaa ne babey fuife wom kiy me shom

Translation

Solo: I am delivered of a baby
 I did not commit an abomination
 But when I enter our husband's house my mate
 sighs
 Chorus: Repeats.
 Solo: I am delivered of a 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.

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 also 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.

The following song is danced 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 dancing this song 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 iynai 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 gwiw 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 iynai 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

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 to be blinded by the attention and love that she is receiving from their husband because her "Ndum" (a word borrowed from the Kom language meaning vagina) will, with time, depreciate. As the song maintains, the vagina, as it ages become tasteless, sour and 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 breasts are now sagged.

In the Oku society, like in most African societies, parents and relations are expected to take 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 sitters 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 me
 Ebliwan gwiw 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.

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 the mother to care, love and provide for the child.

In the next song Meichas, an 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 gwiw lii wan
 Meichas nyake nwale, baba gwiw 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

Solo: 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.

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 castigated in the song below for kicking his wife and causing her barrenness. The song goes thus;

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

Chorus: Repeats.

Solo: Weih Michael weh sak mom 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.

Surprisingly, there are no satirical songs against bad daughters-in-laws or in-laws generally. When asked the reason for this absence, Mama Nuse 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 member you expose yourself (Interview, 1997).

This concept of the family in Oku is similar to that of the Igbo, as described by Egudu when he states that:

The Igbo man's concept of 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 rancour, disunity (1973:18).

Stringiness

In Oku, the birth of a child is an occasion for joy and feasting not only 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. Stinginess and ingratitude are therefore condemned in Njange wan. A family is condemned if they invite people to celebrate with them but provide very little for entertainment. In the next song, the women ridicule the stinginess 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; an activity that is performed only when the stomach is full. The song goes thus:

Solo: Ghel ghe Ndi beh lughel ghe?

Chorus: Ghes sei cheme eh ndu se iykful ah

Solo: Ghel ghe Ndi beh lughel 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 iykful 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 cocoa yam 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.

The song is an exaggeration of the stinginess of Ndi's family. In order to let their 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 smile.

The next song is also a satire against stinginess. It ridicules a host who has provided just a little for the guests and still joins them 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. The song goes as follows:

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 foeh 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 wehghes 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 cocoa yam
 Chorus: Oh, a little cocoa yam for the celebration that the mother 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.

This song is 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: Ghenbin e ghone ghom
 Chorus: Dinyke dinj cha
 Solo: Ghen ko ke gwiyy wan ah?
 Chorus: Dingke ding cha
 Solo: Ghen bine ghone ghom
 Chorus: Dingke ding cha

Solo: Gheb 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

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

Stealing

Stealing is one of the vices that are satirized in Njange wan. Because the society abhors stealing, thieves are regarded as cursed 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 eh ma 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.

Even though the 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.

Satire in Oku birth song is used as a vehicle for social control and social purification. These 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).

This is all right for as Landey and Leroy 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 (1991:101).

Njange wan 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.

CONCLUSION

From this study, we can conclude that in Oku society, as in most societies, satires exist with a view to correcting social misbehaviour. But whether the satiric victims do actually mend their ways is another matter. In the Oku society, like in most African societies, the poet usually expresses the feelings of the society. He is not a poet just because he functions as a recorder of the mores and experiences of his society but because he can see what they cannot see. He looks critically at communal experiences, past and present, and makes pronouncements as a warning to society.

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