

Admonition in Ndokwa Funeral Dirges

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Abstract: *The paper examines “Admonition” as one of the socio-cultural functions of Ndokwa traditional oral funeral dirges. The objectives are to identify and offer explanation for the place of admonition in Ndokwa traditional oral funeral dirges; and also discuss the three distinct types of admonition in same dirge-song-texts. The data used for this study consist of six dirge-songs, randomly selected from numerous Ndokwa traditional oral funeral dirges that are drawn from five randomly selected villages in each of the three local administrative authorities that make up the geographical entity, called the Ndokwa ethnic nationality, namely: Ukwuani, Ndokwa-West and Ndokwa-East Local Government Areas, respectively. The necessary steps taken to conduct the study include the active participation of the researcher in burial proceedings, coupled with personal observation of cultural events, the recording of the randomly chosen traditional oral funeral dirges (i.e. the primary data), conduct of oral interviews and the subsequent transliteration and analysis of such data. The theoretical framework used for this study is The Functional Theory of Folklore, as enunciated by William Bascom in his text, Contributions to Folkloristic. The study finds that Ndokwa traditional oral funeral dirges are enacted on occasions of mourning, for the purposes of, ‘admonition’ of the bereaved, the ‘admonition’ of the dead and the admonition eliciting uprightness in same dirge types, through the active use of relevant literary devices in appropriate contexts.*

Key Words: Orality, funeral, dirges admonition, Ndokwa

INTRODUCTION

This paper examines “admonition” in Ndokwa oral funeral dirges, as instances of earnest petitions, warnings, or counselling, towards guiding man to conforming to expected behaviour. It establishes the fact that admonition is deployed in Ndokwa oral funeral dirges, to advise the bereaved, to guide

the dead in the course of transition, and also to elicit uprightness from members of the Ndokwa community.

Synopses of Related Literature

In the first instance, Akporobaro, F.B.O., writing on cultural relativity and African forms of poetry, is of the view that dirge is that lament that exists in poetic form and is used by a mourner to mourn the departure of a loved one (59). He equally sees it as one of the sub-genres of oral poetry, hence, the appellation, “funeral dirge”. Furthermore, he asserts that dirge is a highly stylized form of expression which conveys the mourner’s feelings of bereavement, the enactment which “is governed by specific poetic recitative conventions” and “performance procedure” (59).

On their own part, M. H Abrams and Geoffery Galt Harpham are of the view that dirge is “a versified expression of grief on the occasion of a particular person’s death” (102). They conceive dirge to be short and less formal and postulate that both dirge and elegy are same in terms of the major thematic pre-occupation, death.

The more reason why dirge is popularly regarded as a text to be sung, for example, Shakespeare’s “Full Fathom Five Thy Father Lies” and William Collins’ “A Song from Shakespeare’s Cymbeline” 1749). To buttress their argument, they assert that any “elegy or dirge which is presented as the utterance of a single person” is referred to as a monody, while threnody is the equivalent for „dirge“ [may be of other kind] (102).

The New Encyclopedia Britannica affirms that a dirge is a funeral song or tune that is rendered in commemoration of a dead person. It equally refers to a dirge as a “slow” mournful musical composition that can be labeled a “funeral hymn or lament”. On a further discuss, it asserts that a dirge is usually sombre and expressive of grief as would be appropriate for performance at a funeral. It traces the origin of the word “*dirge*” to the Latin word “*dirige*” as in the following Latin expression: “*Dirige Domine Deus Meus in Conspectus tuoviammeam*, meaning. “Direct my way in your sight, O Lord my God” (331).

Isidore Okpewho explains the concept of dirge in relation to the nature of African Oral poetry, the development of modern African poetry and the relationships between the oral and written poetry, among others. Furthermore, he dwells on the occasions that call for the singing of dirges, the singers of dirges (that is, men and women, in his opinion), the themes inherent in such dirges and the striking literary features and aesthetics. For clarity, he analyzes some selected funeral dirges from *Akan*, *Ewe*, *Acholi*, *Yoruba* and *Igbo* society, among others. Okpewho’s postulations are in line with the expectations of this researcher work in terms of the meaning of dirge, the inherent subject matters, the occasions and moods of composition and performance, the literariness in its structure, the musicality and linguistic features.

Exploring what he regards as the gnomic forms of oral literary taxonomy, Nkem Okoh stipulates that the funeral song (for example, the dirge) is one of a kind among existing songs in Africa milieu. Some others include: praise songs, work songs, tale songs and heroic songs, among others. According to him, the term “funeral songs” emanates from the singular fact that the concerned songs are sung only on the occasions of death and or mourning. Quoting Nketia, J.H, Okoh asserts that, “the funeral dirge represents one [of] the most common type of poetry in Africa. Its scope is that of the lament, and it is characterized by an elaborate use of imagery, symbolism and allusion” (40). The more reason Okoh himself calls it, “Igbo abu” or “mbe”, in acknowledgement of such characteristic literary features inherent in dirges of Igbo extraction (139 – 140).

Titus Ohwonohwo’s work is an ethno-poetic study that centres on the themes and functions of Agbarha-Otor dirges, as embedded in the dirge-songs enacted in Agbarha-Otor community of Delta State, Nigeria. The author is of the belief that dirges form an integral part of the people’s (Agbarho-Otor indigenes) culture and tradition. For this particular reason, dirges are used to praise the dead, and also to express a sense of loss of dear ones. The other related functions of Agbarho-Otor’s dirge-songs include: serving as rite of passage for the dead, depiction of the unbroken family relationship between the dead and the living, admittance of loss, a kind of purgatory to ease the bereaved, psychologically, a medium of request, and a veritable vehicle for the conveyance of the people’s feelings, among others. Among the numerous theme discussed in the work are: lamenting the dead, helplessness of the bereaved, and putting blame on Death, among others. The paper also treats funeral dirges as “songs that are sung by people or individuals; prayers offered during funeral ceremonies by presiding priest(s) and encomiums by friends of the departed” (1).

This very work on Agbarho-Otor’s funeral dirges is a useful resources material towards the actualisation of this thesis on Ndokwa funeral dirges. The diverse thematic pre-occupations and functions of the dirges of Agbarho-Otor community, which bear semblances with dirges of Ndokwa people contributed significantly to this thesis. Moreover, *Agbarho-Otor* is a community in the Urhobo areas of the Niger Delta region, and the Urhobos share boundaries with the Ndokwa people as well as some cultural and traditional traits.

Theoretical Background

The Functional Theory of Folklore is the study of the social functions of folklores or oral narratives, as inherent in our societies. It is a theory propounded by William Bascom, in “Four Functions of Folklore”, which serves as an introductory text that is aimed towards the study of the diverse but distinct functions of folklores in the field of Oral Literature. This theory is regarded as an off-shoot of Bronislaw Kasper Malinowski’s view that centres on the functions of myth in primitive society.

Malinowski is regarded as the originator of functionalism, which later became a school of thought in Social Anthropology. Malinowski explains that individuals have physiological needs, such as reproduction, food and shelter and culturally informed demands, like social control, economics,

educational and political organisation, all of which require the devices of social institutions to attain fulfilment. He further posits that each institution usually has personnel, a charter, a set of norms or rules, defined activities, material devices – which centre on technology and (a) functional role(s) within this same cultural milieu. On this premise, therefore, Malinowski argues that culture functions to meet the demands (or needs) of individuals, invariably the needs or demands of the same society, and never the other way round. The principal concepts in Malinowski's functional theory, therefore, 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 function in the current contemporary operation of that culture.” (Firth, 55, as quoted by Eric Porth et al, 35)

This means that the feelings of the people and their distinct motives form the bulk of the requirements for a society's existence, therefore, are crucial means towards the understanding of how society operates or functions. Bascom, in his essay upholds the fact that myth, as enunciated by Malinowski, serves as charters for people's belief in a society. That is to say that myth explains the present existence of a group of people, invariably, safe-guiding the future, through the archetypal past of this same society in question. Furthermore, Bascom is convinced that this stance about myth, can conveniently be applied to such other folkloristic items, like proverbs, riddles, songs, superstitions, stories, and other oral narratives. The more reason Bascom asserts that proverbs “serve as charters for belief and models for actions (Alan Dundes, 279)”. The only difference, according to Bascom, is that proverbs are secular charters, while myths remain sacred. Again, Bascom asserts that a lacuna exists between the approaches employed by Anthropologists and Humanists in the study of folklore, therefore, the one sure way towards bridging this gap is the show of “common concern with common problems”, as distinct from the age-long “interest in a common body of subject matter” (Dundes, 279). These mutual problems, as itemized by Bascom, include (i) the social context of folklore (ii) the relation of folklore to culture, or the cultural context of folklorism, and (iii) the functions of folklore, itself (Dundes 280). In spite of the huge contribution by Malinowski to the study of folklore, he, inadvertently, failed to make comments on the “discrepancies” that exist “between folklore” and the “conduct(s)” of man (Dundes, 287). In Bascom's argument, he postulates that a particular item within a folklore, for instance, “verse, song types, rhythm, meter, melody and dramatic organization – as well as the aesthetic union of these elements” (Roger D. Abrahams, as quoted by Dundes, BackPage) can be channeled in a particular situation so as to serve a distinct function; and even if the item or form is similar to another folkloric item, the function may entirely remain different, depending on the context and need appraisals. The more reason

Bascom, in his functional orientation, asserts that a tale should not be adjudged to be, “a dictated text with intentional translation, but a living recitation delivered to a responsive audience for such cultural purposes”, as: the escape into fantasy and amusement, invariably avoiding repressions and aggressions that emanate from our geographical environments and biological limitations; the validation of aspects of culture, customs and taboos, thus justifying its rituals and institutions to its ardent practitioners; and the attainment of social control of the ethnic populace, maintenance of human conformity towards the modes of behaviours, and serving as pedagogic device that reinforces human morals and societal values in the course of disseminating the wisdom of ancient men and women (Thajuria, 43-44; Dorson, 220).

Geographical Location of Ndokwa Community

The Ndokwa ethnic group, also known as the Ukwuani People inhabit the area enclosed between longitude $6^{\circ} 6^{\circ}$ and $6^{\circ} 42^{\circ}$ East and latitude $6^{\circ} 3^{\circ}$ and $5^{\circ} 25^{\circ}$ North of Delta State, Nigeria. The entire land mass is bordered in the North, by the Benin Division; on the South by the Ijaw

Division; on the South-West, by the Isoko and Urhobo Divisions; on the Eastern part, by the River Niger; on the North-East, by the Asaba and Ika Divisions; and on the South-Eastern part by the Ahoada Divisions of Rivers State, Nigeria. This same ethnic nationality situates inbetween the Deltaic Swampy forests and the tropical rainforest of the Northern hemisphere. In this same Northern region of Ndokwa land, exist insurmountable swamps, creeks and dense forests, that bring about floods, during the raining seasons. This ethnic nationality encompasses the people who at present dwell in Ndokwa-East, Ndokwa-West and Ukwuani Local Government Areas, with the headquarters of such administrative structures, located in Aboh, Utagba-Ogbe, and Obiaruku, respectively. Prior to the above distinctive naming, the entire region was under one specific administrative unit, known as “Ndokwa Local Government Area”.

According to Elugbe;

“Ndokwa” is a coinage from the names of the two district councils that once co-existed in the former Aboh Division, in 1938, namely, the NDOSIMILI and UKWUANI district councils – „*Ndo*” the first syllable, emanates from Ndosimili, while the second syllable „*kwa*”, is derived from Ndokwa. (1)

Distributed within these two former British administrative units are thirty-six clans, with twenty one in NDOSIMILI and fifteen in UKWUANI area. Among the twenty-one clans in Ndosimili are: Abara, Aboh, Adia, Afor, Akari, Ase, Ashaka, Asaba-Ase, Okpai, Ibrede, Inyi, Ibedeni, Onuabo, Onyia, Ossissa, Umuolu, Igbuku, Itchi, Ushie, Utuoku and Azagba; while the fifteen in Ukwuani area are: Abbi, Ebedei, Akoku, Amai, Emu, Ezhiokpo, Ezhiogum, Obiaruku, OnitchaUkwuani, Ogume, Umuebu, Umukwata, Umutu, Utagba-Uno and Utagba-Ogbe. Again, Elugbe is of the view that: Before 1951, the area also included Orogun and Abraka as well as

Ndoni. In 1951, however, Orogun and Abraka were transferred to the Urhobo Division and in 1976, Ndoni joined the Rivers State. (1).

The language spoken by the Ndokwa or Ukwuani People is known and called the Ukwuani Language.

The Concept, “Admonition”

According to Stephen Unthank, quoting Benjamin Reach, Admonition is “a faithful endeavour to convict a person of a fault, both as to matter of fact, and his duty there upon, charging it on his conscience in the name of the Lord Jesus with all wisdom and authority”. (110).

Again, David Owen offers an etymological view of admonition, thus: “The Greek word for, “admonish” is “noutheteo,” which literary means, “to place on one’s mind”. It is translated, “to counsel, to warn, and to instruct”. (6) Owen adds that, “Admonition is moral correction through verbal confrontation motivated by genuine love”. (10) Owen explains further that, “Admonition seeks to correct those who are damaging themselves and others by their wrong moral choices” (13).

Based on the above postulations, by Stephen Unthank and David Owen, “admonition”, is a sort of counseling or warning to either an individual or a group of persons, in order to guide such a person or the group against a fault, or an oversight. It is an act of warning, an instance of reproving of (a) person(s) with an aim to preventing some negative consequences that will likely result from certain misdeeds in life. The major target of admonition is man himself, most especially, the living.

On the occasions of death in Ndokwa communities, dirges are sang as warnings or gentle reproof to man to change from his sinful ways and embrace moral, which will bring about conformity to the standard of right behaviour as sanctioned by one’s conscious and ethical judgment. Such warnings or reproofs, as inherent in Ndokwa oral funeral dirges, are of distinct types, viz: the admonition of the bereaved, the admonition of the dead, and the admonition eliciting uprightness from Ndokwa people.

Admonition of the Bereaved

This entails the earnest petitions that are rendered to the immediate members of the family of the dead. Such petitions, if received, not only lessen the burden of sorrow over death, but ginger the bereaved lots to display a positive motion for life and disconnect with the negative fear of death, also. A good example of such admonition is attainable in the dirge, entitled, “*Cheli m adi ni EnuIgwe.*” In this dirge, the poet-singer buttresses the fact that salvation, which is an aftermath of a person’s death, is personal. As a subject of discourse, the poet, at inception, says that all heavenly-bound souls do not wait or loiter somewhere, in anticipation of the arrival, or the expectation of loved ones who are either alive, on earth, or had died long ago:

Ụkwụani:	English:
Cheli madi ni-Enụ-Igwe	No loitering in Heaven
Cheli m	Waiting for someone
adi aya	Is non-existent
Cheli m	Waiting for somebody
adi aya	Is non-existent
Cheli m	Never exists in Heaven
adiwa ni enụ-igwe e	Wait, awhile, for me
Ke m cheli nwa m	I'll wait (a while) for my child
Odi aya	Is non-existent
Ke m cheli nne m	I'll wait for my mother
Odi aya	Is non-existent
Cheli m	Waiting for a companion
adi wani enụ igwe	is an impossibility in Heaven

In furtherance of the admonition, the dirge-singer says that God, alone, owns and exercises the power to give life and bring about death, too: “*Chụkwụ nwe okike e*” (All power belongs to God). The more reason man should not be pre-occupied with the problems of this world, most especially, the pains of death. This philosophical statement shows the vulnerability of man in the event of death, thus:

Ụkwụani:	English:
Ke m cheli nwa m	I'll wait (a while) for my child
adi aya	is non-existent
ke m cheli nne m	I'll wait for my mother

adi aya	is non-existent
cheli m	Waiting for somebody (me)
adi wa	is non-existent
ni Enụ-igwe	in heaven
Chụkwụ nwe okike	All power belongs to God

The words, “*cheli m*”, is an imagery depicting the unseriousness associated with someone lingering or tarrying in expectation of having something done or happens, before making a move. This same imagery also serves as a commentary on the hatred the Ndọkwa people have towards the lukewarm attitude of procrastinators in the bid to achieve the goals of life. It is a clarion call to awaken lazy people to face the challenges of life, with doggedness.

Repetitions abound in this very dirge, as several words and lines are repeated, for emphasis. These include, “*Cheli*”, “*m*”, “*adi*” “*ke m cheli*” and “*cheli m adi aya*,” among others. Such repetitions, as captured in the lines without terminal punctuation marks, depict the urgency with which the disengaged souls travel to Heaven. This journey motif awakens the sensibility of the bereaved to the obvious truth of individual aloneness in the essence, called life. Although a funeral song, this very dirge ends on a joyful note, with the poet-persona acknowledging the overwhelming power of the God-head. The mourner’s use of such familiar words, like “*Enụ-Igwe*” “*Chụkwụ*” and “*Okike*”, will definitely inspire the bereaved-listeners to visualize the world of the celestial beings, a pointer to the poet’s skill in bringing about admonition, through such soothing words.

The last line, “*Chụkwụ nwe okike*”, ie, “All power belongs to God”, is an exclamation, an affirmation of the unique power of God in the creation of man, and the subsequent determination of the fate of this same man. This line is a further commentary on the high esteem with which the Ndọkwa people uphold the supremacy of God, the Almighty.

In another dirge entitled, “*kwa na*”, the poet-singer implores the bereaved to bemoan the departure of their dear one, whose demise was sudden, and probably the result of protracted illness or other accidental events, like murder, warfare or poisoning. It is an eight line dirge meant to depict the essence of living a good life style, and the futility that is death. In the first movement, the dirge-singer wails, persistently, since this death is unexpected, as in:

Ukwani:

English:

Kwa na	Mourn (the deceased)
Kwa na o!	Mourn (the deceased)
Kwa na o!	Mourn (bitterly)
Kwa na o!	Mourn (bitterly)
Kwa na o!	Mourn (him/her), deligently

The prompting of the bereaved to mourn the dead is informed by the fact that since this death is unexpected, a suggestion for inspiration must be given to such bereaved family to mourn their departed loved one. In the second movement, the poet-singer laments the paradox that is life:

Ụkwụani:	English:
Oge Ọ biakọ enụ-ụwa	On the course of his/her earthly journey
Shi	The conception (the thought)
O loni shi o deke li eli	Is about rosiness of life
Ya kẹ o lụni enụ o	(But) on arrival to this earth
Ọ mali shi	One never predicted
O deka anwụ anwụo	it to be death

The dirge-mourner advises that life is not a bed of roses. And since man in the course of “his” earthly visit cannot predict the future, we should be careful how we live our lives. Man should live a life devoid of pride, anger, hatred and/or rancour, as nobody can uphold what life has in store, for them. This journey motif buttresses the world view of the Ndọkwa people, which states that individuals are sojourners, who came to this earthly-life for the sole purpose of buying and selling, with an intent to return home, whenever their commercial transactions are concluded.

The last and single line, “*Ụya dini ọnwụ,*” i.e, “Death is laden with sorrows,” is a message and reflection on life exigencies. The dirge-singer sees death as an embodiment of grief, sorrow, disappointment and helplessness. This also brings to limelight, the idea of individual aloneness, either in death, or in life. This gory image of death, as painted be the dirge-mourner, therefore connotes a death that is unwelcomed, therefore, painful.

There is the use of repetition in the initial three lines, “*kwa na o*” to denote urgency, invariably, spur the bereaved into mourning the dead. In these same lines, is hinged the admonition for one to partake in the mourning of the dead in order to be mourned, mutually, when one dies, too.

To the dirge-singer, life ought to be fun, but the irony rests in the fact that this same life turns sour, because death does exist, and man is bound to obey the call of death. This idea is succinctly put forth as,

Ukwuani:	English:
Oge Obiakọ enu-ụwa	At the time of (his/her) journey to earth
O loni shi	He was of the opinion that
O deke eli elio	It’s pleasure, all the way
Ya“ Ke Oluni Enu - ụwa o	But on getting to (this) earth
Omalishi	Unknowingly, Man was unaware
O deka anwu anwu o	That “he” is to die

The dirge-song is picturesque as the listener is made to visualise the image of a mourner compelling other mourners to put up a cry; the image of someone on a journey to a place called earth, and the image of this same man experiencing an unfortunate death, and subsequently prepared for a burial rite. The tone of this dirge is melancholic and the singers disposition, is moody, therefore, this death is not welcomed.

Admonition of the Dead

In Ndokwa community, it is a widely held view that the dead do live on, after-life on earth, in another realm, called, “Ndokwa”. The more reason the dead, during occasions of burials, are implored by the living to help deliver messages to their forebears so as to assist the living towards achieving one aim or the other, in life. On such occasions, too, such deceased are admonished to either reincarnate as rich men, fearless warriors, Godly men, potent and reproductive men, among others. Often times, such deceased are advised to be weary of obstacles that are capable of derailing their transition to the world beyond. A good example of such admonitions can be seen in the dirge-song, entitled, “*Obi Chukwu* “. In this dirge song, the poet-mourner extols the virtues of a deceased human, whose life time is associated with meekness, compassion, humility, kindness and hospitality. The dirge is made up of five uneven stanzas, of irregular lines. In the first two stanzas, which also serve as the chorus, the poet persona, in the bid to extolling some personal gaits, indirectly eulogizes those of the deceased. The deceased was a man of peace and humility, as in:

Ukwuani:	English:
Obi m mee	My own conscience
Obi m mee	My own conscience

Obi m mee	My own conscience
Obi Chụkwụ ee	is the conscience of God
Obi m mee	The working of my mind
Obi m mee	My innermost disposition
Obi Chụkwụ ee	is that of God, Almighty

These words are metaphorical references meant to show that the dead person is a lover of peace, which probably rendered him vulnerable to human manipulation, invariably bringing about, his eventual death. The thrust of the matter is that the deceased was so humbled to a fault, hence the admonition to man, to rise up against the antagonistic tendency of fellow men.

The second stanza paints a better picture of what brought about this death. The deceased was endowed with wealth, possessions, procreation and health of mind and body, but to his chagrin, human beings became obsessed with jealousy, over his affluence and brought about the eventual destruction of the deceased:

Ụkwụani:	English:
A di m ‘keli ego	providence made me wealthy
ni nwa	gave to me some offsprings
ni ẹsụ-ike	and good health
N’ abia o	asi journeyed towards life
A di m „keli ego	providence made me wealthy
ni nwa	gave me many children
ni ẹsụ-ike	and good health
N’ abia o	as I journeyed towards life

E lụ m ụwa	on getting to this earth
Shi ndẹụwa	humans swore vehemently
Shi m b' akpa	to hinder my wealth
Bụ m b'amụ	my ability to procreate
Kẹ m b'eweli ẹsụ-ike m	and my health
K'eli ẹshi ni n' abia o!	as bestowed by providence

In this stanza, man is admonished to be wary of enemies of progress, whom usually pretend to be friendly, at first. Invariably, the deceased is being advised to be careful of mankind, per adventure, he reincarnates and comes to this earth, again. The imagery in these lines are gruesome and perturbing, as one can perceive the picture of a „supposedly“ progressive man, surrounded by numerous adversaries, plotting seriously to bring about his downfall and eventual destruction. A common phenomenon in this dirge-type is the journey motif that brings to limelight the Ndokwa man's belief that life is actually a journey to this earth, with a view to retiring back home, after man's sojourn on earth.

The single line, “*ụwa iwe!*” (what a wicked world)!, says it all. The world is actually not wicked, being an inanimate object. It is the humans inhabiting the earth that display acts of wickedness. This transferred epithet, is an effective medium through which the poet singer admonishes man to be wary of the creature, called man and the associated intrigues that this same man is capable of hatching.

The last stanza is an „imaginative“ or an „assumed“ lamentation by the dead, as it embarks on the journey to the great beyond. The lines are grief-laden, as the deceased, through the voice narrator, regrets its nonchalant attitude in the face of incessant attacks by men, which eventually led to his demise, as in:

Ụkwụani:	English:
Nde-ụwa emẹ m o	Humans have ruined me
Nde-ụwa emẹ ni me e	Humanity have conquered me, too
Ada nne m e	Oh, Ada, my mother
Oge shini m	it's the age (period)

Kolu ụwa n' abia!

that prompted my coming into existence

The message here is that one should be extremely careful, in the course of interacting and coexisting with other human beings. The wish of the singer, invariably, the deceased, is to be given another chance to live a life, devoid of those weaknesses that enmarked him for and gave him out for eventual destruction. The paradox is that the poet singer (the deceased, so to say) came earlier to life, therefore, ought to die, earlier, also.

There abound repetition of words and lines. Examples include, „*obi m*”, “*A dime keli ego ni nwa ni ẹsụ-ike*”, “*shi m*” and “*ndẹụwa emẹ m*”. Such repeated words cum lines are meant to buttress the warnings for man to be sagacious in the course of eking a living. These same repetitions equally heighten the tempo of the dirge-song, invariably, depicting the urgency with which the poet-singer should alert man over the dangers in life.

Again, “*ụwa iwe*” is an ironic statement. This earth ought to be a place of peace, with each man eking a living, devoid of human intrigues, but rather, we see the image of a world, housing various shapes of vicious humans, each plotting the downfall of others. In this statement, the singer wishes to admonish the dead, in the event of reincarnation, to be discreet and decisive amidst human conspiracies. But the warning is put, before the mourning audience, in such a way that the real meaning is emphasized, from the tone of the dirge-singer, before the mourning audience.

There is also the use of metonymy in the following lines:

Ukwuani:
A di m „keli ego
ni nwa
ni ẹsụ-ike
n' abia o
A di m keli ego
ni nwa
ni ẹsụ-ike
n' abia o

English:
providence made me wealthy
bestowed me with offspring
and good health
as I journeyed towards life
providence made me wealthy
gave me many children
and good health
as journey towards life

Herein, the affluence achieved by man is represented by three words or things that are usually associated with wealth. These are, “*ego*” (i.e money), “*nwa*” (children or descendants) and *ẹsụ-ike* (sound health), which in Ndokwa people’s world-view, denote the highest level of a man’s life achievement.

In the last stanza, “*oge*” i.e, “time” or “period of existence” is personified as capable of imploring man to come dwelling on earth. And it was the over-bearing influence of time (*oge*) that convinced the deceased, invariably, other humans too, into accepting the invitation to “visit” earth. This

reference to the alluring power of time makes the dirge- song to end in a hilarious note: “*Oge shini m kolu ɔwa n’abia*” (i.e “age” prompted or lured me into coming to live on earth), otherwise, the deceased had no prior intention to come into this “evil” world.

The admonition of the dead is also a theme in another dirge entitled, “*Enwe m ilolo.*” In this particular dirge, the poet-mourner laments the demise of one’s life-partner, either the husband, or the wife, or by extension, any of the loved ones. The dirge is a short verse, comprising ten irregular lines. The first six lines vividly depict the agony and pains the deceased left behind, as experienced by the loved ones:

Ukwuani:	English:
Enwe m ilolo	I’ve lost my thoughts
Ọsoni m aghali m ooo	my love has left me
Shi enwewe m ilolo o	and I am thoughtless
Ọsoni m aghali moo	my love has departed (my presence)
Shi enwewe m iloloo	and made me helpless
Shi ndu di ooo	if life (living) exists
Shi anyi n’ebi oo	then must we live
Buonwu abia	But dead has surfaced
Shi ilolo akpayafu	then our thoughts had scattered

This feeling of sadness becomes heightened, as painted in the last two lines of the dirge:

Ukwuani	English:
Gwani ni m Ọsoni m	do tell my beloved
Shi enwewe m ilolo o	that I’m hopeless (without thoughts) (defenseless)

Although those last lines are rendered in a mild tone, they are actually employed by the dirge mourner, as an advice to the deceased, not to abandon his/her dear ones to the dangers of life. This shows the belief in Ndokwa land, that communication do exists between the living and the dead, and that the dead, although out of this life, do exist in the after-life, therefore, are capable of defending their cherished relatives, against attacks. The more reason the poet-persona is by this medium, admonishing the departed to be of good spirit and ensure that the living live a hitch-free life. This is to say that the dead should fight the unforeseen enemies, prevent the living from contracting killer diseases and making them to prosper also, among others.

This dirge repetition is rendered solely through the use of euphemism. „Death“ is supposedly a serious discourse, in African milieu, but the dirge- mourner in an attempt to avoid some direct statements over an unpleasant experience of death, resorts to the employment of mild or vague expressions to depict this sad event. Rather than saying that a loved or dear one has died

(*Osoni m anwusu*), he says that a loved one has gone home or left for home (*Osoni m aghali m*). Again, the singer, as a master craftsman, juxtaposes “*ilolo*” (deep thought) for total helplessness (*uwa agwu*):

Ukwuani:	English:
Osoni m aghali m ooo	my love has left me
Shi enwewe m ilolo o	and I am thoughtless
Osoni m aghali moo	my love has departed (my presence)
Shi enwewe m iloloo	and made me helpless
Shi ndu di ooo	if life (living) exists
Shi anyi n’ebi oo	then must we live
Bu onwu abia	But dead has surfaced
Shi ilolo akpayafu	then our thoughts had scattered

The use of repetition in the first four lines is an emphasis on the nature of the death. The Ndokwa belief is that couples at their prime are the ones that often partake in discussions on how best to build up their homes. The more reason one can infer from this postulation that the dead is a young person. The same repeated words or lines are also meant to elicit the sympathy of close mourners, invariably, gingering them into partaking in the mourning rituals.

In the dirge, the singer conceives life (*ndu*) as a person, capable of bringing about peace, thereby, helping humans attaining a fulfilled life; and death (*onwu*) as that other fellow that brings about pains and sadness, making mankind helpless:

Ukwuani:	English:
Osoni m aghali m	My love has gone
Shi enwe m ilolo	and I’m without thoughts
Ndu di o	if life (living) exists
Shi anyi n’ebi oo	then must we live
Buonwu abia	But dead has surfaced

Shi ilolo akpayafu	then our thoughts had scattered
Gwani ni m Osonim	do tell my beloved
Shi enwewe m ilolo o	that I'm hopeless (thoughtless)

These same lines are meant to direct the deceased to always be on guide, over issues bordering on the welfare of the people “it” left behind. The dead should be seen to be protecting the living, against harms, warding off evil spirits from the homes of the living, soliciting for sound health and long life for the living, among others. This is hinged on the Ndokwa people’s belief that the dead do visit their loved ones at all time, most especially at nights, when prayers and supplications are offered to the dead, for guidance and protection. This belief receives impetus in the message to be delivered to the deceased through human communication.

In the usual manner with dirges, this dirge ends on a sad note, most especially as the death of the young and newly married are never welcomed in Ndokwa communities. The message and reflection revolve round the helplessness of man in the midst of many challenges of life, as explicated in such lexical items as, “*onwu*” (i.e, death), *ilolo* (ie. negative or positive thoughts) “*li*” (a plea for help) and “*Okpaya fu*” (disastrous), among others.

Admonition eliciting uprightness

The concern of dirges in this regard, centres on the earnest alive to indigenes of Ndokwa communities, to live a life that is morally and spiritually upright, especially, as it concerns their attitudes towards mourning and the burial of the dead. The admonition refers to exhortations or ardent prayers serving as instructional guidelines for one to live an upright life, amidst the turbulences of human existence. Often times, on the events of mourning, dirge-singers advise man to always partake in the burial of the dead, lend helping hands to the bereaved, not to mock the dead and the bereaved family, and not to desecrate the property of the dead, especially the grave among other pleas. A good example of such entreaties can be seen in the dirge entitled, “*Ajamma*”. In the first movement, the dirge-singer urges the people to mourn the dead through praises. The dead man, who is the focus of this dirge-song must have lived a pleasant life in the concerned community, the more reason everyone that was gathered should be an active participant in the funeral ceremony:

Ukwuani:	English:
Aja mma o	Profound awe (of God)!
Ajamma e !	Profound awe!
Aja mma o	Awe (for the dead)

Ajammo e!	Maximum respect!
Onye	Who is
Nweni Chukwu	that lucky one
Shi nnali aya	Whose father
Adi ni mmọ e?	is not in the great beyond?
Ajamma o	Great reverence (to God)
Ajamma e !	Profound praise!

The second movement is almost a repetition of the first, if not for the fact that the dirge-singer, this time around, substitutes “*Ndibe, e.*”one” extended or immediate relatives”, among others, in the place of ‘*Nnalaa*’ e, “father,”:

Ukwani:	English:
Aja mma o	Praise God!
Ajamma e!	Praise
Onye	Who
Nweni Chukwu	is so fortunate
Shi ndibe eye	That the lineage
Adi ni mmọ e?	are not in grave?
Aja mma o	Fear God, all of you!
A ja mma ee	Praise God

The essence of this dirge-song is to admonish man to have the fear of God in him and also to inculcate the habit of participating in the burial ceremonies in their communities. Since man cannot understand the nature of God, vi-a-viz that of death, it becomes improper to mock or castigate the dead or the bereaved.

The dirge-song above, is structured into two movements, with each movement having 2, 4, and 2 lines stanzaic formats. The first stanza, “*Ajamma/Ajamma e*”, which also serves as the chorus, is repeated at the inception of the dirge and ends each of the two movements. The repetition is to emphasize the dire need for man to appreciate and praise God, for His infinite mercy on the living. Man, through these repetitions of words, will get such advice sink into his memory and thereafter, will behave accordingly. In short, the entire dirge is hatched on a note of repetition. The initial repetition (the one serving as a chorus), and the subsequent repetitions of words and or lines, intensify the rhythm of the dirge-song, the smooth articulation of notes of legoto.

The rhetorical questions are meant to redirect man to toe the path of humility:

Ụkwụani:	English:
Onye Nweni Chụkwụ	Who is so fortunate
Shi nnali aya	Whose father
adi ni mmọ e?	is not in grave?
Aja mma o	Fear God, all of you!
Ajamma e !	Profound praise!

These same lines equally point out the overwhelming power of death over man, therefore, man should not forget to be humble.

There is the use of antithesis in the lines, below:

Ụkwụani:	English:
Onye	Who
nweni Chụkwụ	is so fortunate
Shi nnali aya	Whose father
adi ni mmọ e?	is not in grave?
Ajamma O	Fear God, all of you!
Ajamma e!	Profound praise!

In this very regard, the poet mourner arrests other mourners attention, as a sharp contrast is drawn, between „*Chukwu* “, i.e, “God” that depicts “grace” and ‘*Mmọ*’ i.e., ‘grave,’ which stands for pains”. The more reason the living should reverence God, as portrayed in this sacred context.

Furthermore, the dirge-singer makes a reference to “grave” instead of saying “death”, with all frankness. This representation of death through the use of “grave” is metonymy. It is the metonymic, since “grave” is associated with the issues of death of humans.

This vague expression, „...*shi/nnali aya/adini mmọ* (whose/father/is not in the grave), is purposely employed to avoid an unpleasant truth. Rather than saying “death” the dirge-personal uses “grave” to imply the act of dying. This is nothing short of euphemism. This makes the issue of death to appear mild, thus lessen the shock that is associated with issues of death. This very dirge ends with a note of warning for humanity to venerate the God-head, in His glory and majesty: “*Ajamma/Ajamma!*” (profound respect for the Almighty). This is based on the fact that man, no matter the affluence, must prostrate, before “almighty” death.

This same issue of admonition as exhortation, can be seen in another dirge of similar thematic pre-occupation, entitled, “*Ọ bụlụ uwa Di Ma*”, as composed by Kenneth Ugegebe (Deskenny). In this dirge piece, the dirge-mourner embarks on a search for that lucky fellow, that has not encountered any misfortune, in life. And if at all such a fortunate person does exist, the dirge-mourner implores and solicits that the fellow should oblige the poet-persona, the use of this (or his) fortune-bearing charm (*ntu*, i.e. ash), to enable him live an endless life. In the first instance, the dirge-singer addresses an anonymous being, whom, supposedly must have mocked this same dirge-singer, over the misfortune of death: Thus, the dirge-singer says:

Ukwuani	English:
Enu	Life (Living)
bụ abia ana,	Is coming and going
Makoni,	Because,
Onye kuni	He/she that said
Shi uwa aya amaka	That his/her life is the
Shi	best
	That

Onwu elube ni ibe	Death hasn't visited his/her home
Bu	But
Ọ bụlụ shi	Even if
Uwa kashi mma	your life is outstanding
Ni ọnwu elube ni ibe	Since death has visited him/her
Y' adi kpoye m	Let him/her extravagantly give to me
Ntu usekui	His/her kitchen ashes
Ke m weli	For me to
Gwọlu ọgụ ndụ	Concoct a charm of endless life
Makọni	because
Ọsa mmalu	Everyone
Chọni ndu ebebe	Desires an everlasting life
Ndụ ogonogo	Long life
Ele u k' O di	That's the truth

For this reason, the mourner demands for a gift of some particles of the ashes (a supposedly life elongation charm) from the kitchen of the one that mocked:

Ụkwuani	English:
Ụwa i di mma e?	Your life is excellent?
Gwa m	Tell me
ni ke m	For mine
akali m e	Has overwhelmed me
Ọnwu	Death
lụbọsuni ibe onye?	skipped which person's home?
gwa m	Tell me
ni ke m	for mine
agu m ike	has devastated me.
Ụwa i di mma e?	Your life is without misfortunes?
gwa m	Let me know
ni ke m	as mine
agu m ike	has crippled me

The above questions by the poet-singer are rhetorical, therefore, serve as the preparatory stage to expatiating on the concept of death in relation to uprightness in Ndokwa communities. Subsequently, the poet-singer says:

Ukwuani	English:
Ọ bụlụ shi uwa di mma e	If your life is auspicious
Kpoye m ntu useku i	Let me have bountiful of your kitchen ashes
Ke m weli gwọlu ọgụ ndụ	To concoct a charm for an endless life
Ọ bụlụ shi enu ka mma e	If your life is the best
Kpoye m ntu useku i	Let me have your kitchen ashes
Ke m nweli gwọlu ọgụ ndụ	For me to contrive a charm of endless life
Oku adi mma	Let me contrive the charm
M gwolu ogu ndu	and live forever
Bụ oku shili ike	But if crisis (problem) intensifies
Ogu a bia	Fighting will ensure
Oku adi mma	Crisis is useless
Ezhi efa	A good name
ka ejo-nwanne	Is better than an evil brother/sister

Oku a di mma

Crisis is of no benefit

Deskenny e

Deskenny e

The above lines are lucid if examined in the context of the dirges eliciting uprightiness from indigenes of Ndokwa communities. This is for the fact that such mockery, upheaval and back-biting are usually the causes of infighting, agitations, disturbances and turbulences in human societies, herein, the Ndokwa or Ukwuani communities.

Further on this same thematic pre-occupation of dirges eliciting uprightiness, the poetsinger repeatedly signs:

Ukwuani:

English:

O bụlụ shi ụwa I di mma e

If your life is so auspicious

O bụlụ ashi dim ma egwo

If your guardian angel is so caring

O bụlụ ụwa di mma

If your life is without misfortunes

Nge kpoye m ntụ-ụsekui

Then, let me have your Kitchen ashes

Kẹ m weli j' agwolu ọgụ-ndu

For me to concoct a charm for an endless life

Ke m gwolu ọgụ-ndu

Let me contrive that endless life charm

Kẹ m bi enu ndende

And live forever.

The 'if' in the first three lines is indicative of the uncertainty of life exigencies, living and dying. These conditional statements smack of the fact that all men, one way or the other, must have experienced the pangs of death, therefore, can openly boast of being above death. They are actually ironical statements that are meant to express the opposite of such expressions, or what the dirge-singer meant to say. The essence of its usage is that man should not make jest of another man, since everyone has experienced the pains associated with death. The use of "ashes" is symbolic, since ashes in Ndokwa land is used, as a cleanser, a rejuvenating chemical," an antidote for poisons, among others, therefore, capable of producing the desired quest, as sort by the poet-mourner to wipe away unfortunate events from the lives of men.

The dirge-singer, in the subsequent lines, explains the reasons for wanting such ashes and the charm that emanates from it:

Ụkwụani:	English:
Kẹ m bi enụ ndende	Let me live for ever
Kẹ m bi ele m	Let me live, as I
gwani chi m o	Rightly told my guardian angel
Shi ụwa bụ k' onye?	(For) who actually owns this world?
Ụwa bụ ke Chụkwụ o	the world belongs God
Kweke ni m e!	Hear my cry, everyone!

The first three lines of this movement are sarcastic, since they are meant to hurt the pride of those that laugh over people's ill-lucks. In reality, these lines are used to admonish Ndọkwa people, never to create joy out of someone's death, since nobody is destined to live an everlasting life. This is the reason the poet-mourner demands to know if any human, but God, owns the world, or is capable, of giving and taking life.

There is the use of repetition in the lines, below:

Ụkwụani:	English:
Kẹ m bi enụ ndende	Let me live for ever
Kẹ m bi enụ ndende	If I live an everlasting life
Kẹ m bi ele m	Let me live, as I
gwani chi m o	Rightly told my guardian angel

The repetition, apart from heightening the tempo of the rhythm, is meant to be a constant reminder to man that life is transient and that death is, inevitable. The more reason, every man should be their brother's keeper, by providing for one another (the issue of the ashes), loving each other and

partaking in the pains of one's neighbour, especially, on the occasions of death and The references to „life“ (*Uwa*), „God“ (*Chukwu*), „living“ (*Ndu*), „everlasting life“ (*ndede*) and „guardian angel“ (*chi m*), are indications of the Ndokwa belief in the existence of an Almighty God, the creator of Heaven and earth, and the giver of life. This same reference to such celestial beings, equally depicts the poet-mourner as a master craftman of Ndokwa dirges. This dirge ends on a sad note: „*kweke ni m*“ (hear my cry). It is a lamentation over a painful death, a sort of plea to other people to join the dirge-singer in the mourning of a loved one. Actually, „*kweke*“ in Ndokwa land, is a distress cry, in the event of a sudden and an unexpected incident, especially, death. Therefore, its application to end a dirge as this is apt. The tone of the dirge is mild and the tempo is low. Such a tone and the accompanying tempo, is usually associated with dirges of this kind, that dwell on the intricate matters of existentialism and individual aloneness, both in life and in death.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has established that one of the significant social functions of Ndokwa oral funeral dirges, is „admonition,“ either of the bereaved, the dead, or admonition eliciting uprightness, from Ndokwa people. The more reason such oral funeral dirges are usually rendered on events of mourning and burial ceremonies in order to commemorate the demise of dear relatives, who might be a prince or princess, a traditional chief, a ruler, a king, a noble man, or an ordinary village folk.

Findings

The findings of this study include

1. The traditional oral funeral dirges in Ndokwaland are employed for admonition, through the active use of literary devices, in appropriate contexts;
2. Such instances of admonition pervading oral funeral dirges of Ndokwa origin, include, the admonition of the bereaved, the admonition of the dead, and the admonition eliciting uprightness, from Ndokwa people;
3. The Ndokwa oral funeral dirges are better medium to understanding the people's culture since dirges are hatched in candid moods, devoid of linguistic embellishment.

Contributions to Knowledge

This study has contributed to knowledge in the following ways:

1. The singing of dirges still flourishes in Ndokwa tradition, though with modified forms and conventions, as a result of acculturation, through Christianity.
2. The recognition of the oral funeral dirges of Ndokwa people, denotes the coming of a new aesthetics of morality aimed at revamping the language from going extinct, invariably, preserving the cultural heritage of the same people.

3. The functions of admonition underscore the idea that Ndokwa people, like other Africans, do experience same psychological trauma during dirge renditions. This invariably brings about a new perspective to the study of Ndokwa oral funeral dirges.

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Appendix I: Informers:

1. Mrs. Adenebo, Nwabuaku Naomi, Aged 68. A native of Obiaruku, Delta State.
2. Mrs. Osham Ese, Aged 64. A native of Umusume Quarters, Obiaruku.
3. Mrs. Maltida Osharm, Aged 65. A native of Umusume Quarters, Obiaruku.
4. Mrs. Nwose Orsly. Aged 66. A native of Okwelle Quarters, Abbi, Ndokwa-West L.G.A.
5. Mrs. Ossai Adaobi. Aged 60. A native of Ashaka, Ndokwa-East L.G.A.
6. Mrs. Nwashindi Izuegbu. Aged 75. A native of Ossissa, Ndokwa-East L.G.A.
7. Mrs. Odumosu, Rita. Aged 45. A native of Umusam-Utagba Ogbe, Ndokwa-West, L.G.A.
8. Mrs. Ukpene, P.N. Aged 45. A native of Abbi, Ndokwa-West, L.G.A.
9. Mr. Egbune, A. M. (Oyibo), aged 45, a native of Amai, Ukwuani, L.G.A