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LITERARY AESTHETICS OF URHOBO AND IGBO ‘BABY SONGS’

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the aesthetic features of ‘baby songs’ as a form of indigenous poetry among the Urhobo and Igbo people in Nigeria. It undertakes a textual analysis of selected songs from both communities to reveal the features, composition, forms and functions of the ‘baby song’ genre. To achieve its purpose, the study utilizes a qualitative and comparative approach, and cultural criticism. The research finds that ‘baby songs’ among the Igbo and Urhobo are composed based on needs, situation and features of the child. The songs serve pacifying, communicative, expressive and educative purposes. The songs are broad classified, in this study, into two categories: individually composed songs and songs that have attained communal status. Spontaneity of composition, repetition, simplicity, and appropriate use of word content characterise the creative process of the songs.

KeyWords: Baby Songs, Igbo, Poetry, Songs, Urhobo.

Introduction

Among the Urhobo and Igbo people of Nigeria, a child is prized above wealth and any form of achievement a man can attain in life. This is represented in Urhobo names such as ‘Emoefe’: Children are wealth, ‘Omonigho’: A child supersedes wealth, and the Igbo name: ‘Nwankaego’ which means a child is more valuable than money. It is a common phenomenon then, in both communities, to have the childless wealthy couple mocked or refused audience in social gatherings that treat the issue of children. It is no surprise then, that the birth of a child is bourn with anticipation and welcome with rejoicing and merriment. The child is thus given good and proper nurture to keep the pride of the parents.

While the grown child is the perfection of the parents’ pride, the greatest task in the nurturing process lies in the period of infancy and early childhood. The child’s demands at this stage are often self-centered and

expressed with little or no clear communication ability. Responding to the needs of the child, to pacify him/her and allow 'peace' for the entire family, is a challenge to the child-tenders. The responsibility of child-tending is laid on the shoulders of any adult that is available for the child in the family. A common means of pacifying the child, which has proved helpful to the Urhobo and Igbo child-tenders, is the use of children songs. The songs are composed and sung to children with the aim of lulling them. The songs are referred to as ile'grhegrhe among the Urhobo and urinwa among the Igbo.

Songs of this nature are easily composed by any child-tender to suit specific purposes. This creates a corpus of songs that are peculiar to individual composers. This study, however, delimits its search to the examination of those songs which have attained communal status in both Igbo and Urhobo communities. By communal status, we mean those songs that by length of existence have come to be utilized by several families and have come through three to four generations of child-tenders. Some of the sources interviewed in the course of this research, claimed they remembered their mothers use the songs. They in turn are using the songs for their children. It becomes likely that the children will take it on to their own children.

By drawing these songs, from the Igbo and Urhobo communities, the study's aim is to examine the literary features of the songs and evaluate their social relevance in both societies. To achieve these, the paper is structured into parts which address the following questions: who are the Igbo and Urhobo people and what is the place of the child in their cultures; how are the songs composed and what needs do they meet in both cultures; what literary features can be identified in the songs; and what is the relevance of the songs to the family and society at large? The research sets to provide answers to these questions by utilizing a qualitative approach that combines the tools of fieldwork research, observation, and interview to generate relevant data.

The Child in Urhobo and Igbo Cultures

The Urhobo and Igbo people are two distinct tribes found in the Southern part of Nigeria. While the Urhobo are located in the south-south geopolitical zone of the country, the Igbo are located in the south-east zone. Though of different languages, cultures and separated by space, certain values, morals and norms and aspects of culture seem to interface both cultures. Some of such areas include costume, meals and the place of the child in the society. In most parts of the Igbo community, the traditional costume is similar to that of the Urhobo. Both male and female adorn wrapper from the waist downwards. While women use blouse and headgear to suit the wrapper, the men use traditionally styled shirts and walking sticks to suit theirs. They also share in common, some delicacies like the palm-kernel soup, although prepared with different skills.

Of utmost importance in their common values is the importance attached to children. In both communities, a man or woman without a child is considered to have achieved nothing. The child is thus the most prized possession anyone can have. A man's ego lies in how well his child or children are nurtured and fare in the community. The child is a means of exhibiting the total success of a man; since he is believed to be 'working' for his children. The child therefore attracts great attention, so as to be a proper representation of

the parents, family and community. The best attention given to the child is believed to be those given during childhood. This is because they see this phase as the foundation, upon which the magnificent towers of the child's future is built. Thus both parents are expected to meet the financial, physical, emotional and social needs of the child. In both societies, the child's importance lies in its symbolic representation of the future or continued existence of the family and community at large. Sustaining the child's existence through useful means is therefore greatly welcome.

Justification of the Study

Songs composed to lull babies belong the poetic category of oral literature canon and also to the genre of children literature. The field of oral literature, especially in Africa, has attracted considerable research attention for several decades. These works have generated an unending debate on what constitutes drama, epic tales, and poetic forms in Africa. In spite of these studies, very little research has been directed towards the study of oral performances that are tailored specifically for children. Ruth Finnegan emphasizes the dearth in children verse when she says that that,

it is hard to believe that it is only in Zulu and Dogon-two of the most comprehensively studied African cultures-that rhymes [children verse] ... can be found, and it is very possible that further research will reveal similar ... forms in many other African societies. (295)

Few research on African oral poetry, on the contrary, give preference to the study of 'children songs'. Akintunde Akinyemi in his "Yoruba Oral Literatures: a source of indigenous education for children" examines the educational import of Yoruba oral literatures associated with children. With his focus on tongue twisters, lullabies, riddles, puzzles, songs, games, poetry and folktales, he contends that because of their potential to influence the thinking of children, they should be included in school curricula and academic syllabi. By focusing on several forms of oral literatures associated with children, attention to the aesthetics of children songs is minimal. This leaves room for more inquiries into the genre. M.E. Sotunsa, in her work *The Concept of African Traditional Oral Poetry*, lays emphasis on the features, composition, and classification of African traditional poetry and the theories that inform them. The study reveals that African traditional poetry is characterized by transmission through oral means, actualized in performance, realised in any of the three modes of speech, chant, and song (1-12). The work however does not textually analyse children songs, a task which this study undertakes. Aderemi Bamikule supports the need to for oral literary scholarship to engage in textual criticism which reveals the nature of oral literature rather than engage in defensive criticism (48).

On Yoruba poetry, Abidemi Bolarinwa concentrates on the translation of Yoruba poems, previously recorded in English language by Ulli Beier, back to the original language. The poems include: praise of rulers, magical formulas, poems about death, and ballads. Ulli Beier had published the poems in an essay entitled

“Poetry of the Yoruba” in 1968. Bolarinwa’s work creates Yoruba versions of the English translations without much recourse to textual analysis. Adeleke Adeeko, in his “Poetry and Hegemony: Yoruba Oriki” discusses how the oriki as a form of Yoruba/African traditional poetry depicts a combination of a proud progeny and worthy endeavour. He posits that the oriki as a praise poem embodies poetic elaborations of individual names that reveal a connection between the past and present (182-183). Luke Eyoh also touches the oriki praise poems when he explores indigenous poetry across various ethnic groups in Nigeria. His research reveals how shared thoughts, worldviews, and values across ethnic groups in Nigeria constitute effective tool for national integration, unity and development. Although Eyoh’s work does not focus on ‘children song’, the values of unity and development espoused in the study are part of those encoded in the Igbo and Urhobo ‘baby songs’ under consideration.

Among the Urhobo people in Delta State, the satirical poetry tradition (*Udje*) has received research attention more than other sung forms. This is observable in the works of J.P Clark, G.G. Darah, and Tanure Ojaide. In similar feat, C. N. Nwandiokwu et al, in their discourse on African rites of passage, focus on birth rituals among the Ika (Ibo) people of Delta state of Nigeria, with emphasis on maternal merriment rather than the child. This trend also has its toll on most thesis reports on oral poetry. This can be seen in such works as those of A. D. Falade and G. R. Imbukuleh which discuss respectively the use of *Ewi* poetry to pass down and preserve Yoruba culture, and the form and style in African oral poetry. Ironically, if Finnegan saw her poetic expenditure for the search of children verse as limited, further research exploration is yet to bridge that void. Although Finnegan’s research voyage takes her across cultures such as the Ngoni in Malawi, Nyoro of Uganda, Swahili, Zulu, Dogon, Kamba and Rundi in search of lullabies and nursery rhymes, one cannot but imagine the vast cultures that need further exploration on the subject, especially in Nigeria. Further exploration of ‘children poetry’ across cultures is expedient as poetic forms, audience, context and purpose vary according to culture.

J. P Clark in his “Another Kind of Poetry” discusses the poetics of African oral poetry as a form of poetry that is distinct from Western poetry which thrives on the lettered tradition and demands that poetry be actualised by the movement of words “across and down the page in precise line formation, all in well measured feet, falling to recurrent echoing sounds.” African poetry, in his view, is “poetry that is delivered by word of mouth and aimed at the ear to move the body ... relies for its propagation and preservation on performance and memory” (17). Performance and memory are features that make African oral poetry to thrive on improvisation. This makes every poetic rendition, such as the ‘baby songs’ considered in the current study, unique in terms of context, occasion and purpose. So, it is common, according to Ruth Finnegan,

for many different genres of poetry to be recognized simultaneously, each with its own type of performer, reward, and occasion. No single picture can cover all ... [the] variations ... of poetry in Africa. (84)

Consequently, to discuss the common patterns of the ‘baby songs’ or lullaby as a form of children poetry, there is need to depend on the constitution of the society that produces the songs and the conventions that govern their construction in that society. This implies that “one cannot necessarily assume that ‘children’s songs’ of another society are directly comparable to those of one’s own” (Finnegan 295). Following this view, it is necessary not only to examine the Urhobo and Igbo lullabies as “another kind of poetry”, but also as a unique poetic composition owing its nature to the cultural aesthetics of the Urhobo and Igbo people. Isodore Okpewho describes the cultural aesthetics of the people as the substratum of all cultural endeavours which guides the definition and classification of oral art forms from one community to another. He contends that **cultural aesthetics remains “the ultimate irreducible element, and ... classificatory system [of oral performance] ... [and] our last hope of understanding the true character of the oral ... art” (71).** Okpewho’s and Finnegan’s stance on not imposing the aesthetic values of one culture on the arts of another is in consonance with the current study’s adoption of cultural criticism for its evaluation of the literary aesthetics of Urhobo and Igbo ‘baby songs’.

Critical Approach for the Study

Cultural Criticism is a theoretical approach to the study of cultural phenomena. The theory was first associated with British Marxist academics in the 1950s to the 1970s. It was later taken up by scholars in diverse disciplines, making it an interdisciplinary approach to the study of cultural constructs. Drawing upon its multidisciplinary models, the theory is concerned with the examination of the forces that underlie the cultural constructs of any community of people. In literary perspective, these forces are the aesthetic principles that foreground the creative configurations of a communally organised group of people. In other words, the theory is concerned with the ‘how’ and ‘what’ of the creative process of cultural or indigenous literature, and how the people use their cultural creations to generate and disseminate meaning, and challenge non acceptable norms. In this research, the meanings that the Urhobo and Igbo people generate and transmit to the younger generation using the ‘baby songs’ are the lessons and morals encoded in the songs. The configurative principles of the songs are those collectively accepted by the communities as the creative conventions of such singing art among their people. By adopting this critical approach, the study finds room to vary its critical stance and medium in line with the aesthetic tides of the songs.

The overall methodology of the study is qualitative. By adopting the qualitative approach, the study uses interviews, observation, recording and documentation of songs using digital apparatus (voice recorder in

android phones), translation of song texts from the Igbo and Urhobo languages to English before interpretation, and use of cultural context to aid interpretation of the texts. This approach is necessary because the oral literary art to which the ‘baby songs’ belong is aural in nature and demands an interaction of both the performer (caregiver) and the audience (baby). Such an art demands a qualitative approach which focuses on making literary meaning out of the data collected from both cultures under consideration.

The Configuration of Urhobo and Igbo ‘Baby Songs’

The Urhobo and Igbo ‘baby songs’ like all forms of lullaby are designed by adults for children. The child, being the primary audience of the songs is central in the convention of composition of the songs. Factors such as the need to pacify the baby, his or her features, circumstances surrounding the conception and birth of the baby, the needs of the child, communicative and expressive need (of parents or caregiver), family/marital relationship, usefulness in moral education, , simplicity and spontaneity. Whatever the factor that prompts the composition of the songs, they express not just the feelings of the adult toward the child and its needs, but also consciously embody and disseminate meaning to the child and community at large.

Singing is a pacifying therapy not only to the child, but to the adult that is ‘bothered’ by the needs of the child. The average Urhobo and/or Igbo child, like children world over, has needs that may range from physical to emotional. The child may get angry or upset over these needs and throw a tantrum that could upset his or her health and unsettle everyone around. Such distress becomes a problem to both the child and adults. While the cause of the trouble may not be treated to its chore, it is often pacified through singing to the child. This brings calm to the child and peace to those around. The songs can be composed either by fathers or mothers, depending on fondness to the child. There is hardly any claim to origin and source in cases where songs are communally shared. The characteristics of the child and related circumstances however serve as inspiration to composing the songs.

The creative process (of the songs) is characterized by the need to easily sing the songs and memorize them. In some cases, the songs are adapted from folktales meant to teach morals to children. An example of this is a song from an Urhobo tale titled *Iyanre*. The tale tells the story of a little ghost girl murdered by a relative. To reveal her murderer, she sends a parcel to her brother through another child, who is returning home from the farm. The child attempts opening the parcel to unravel its content, but the parcel begins to sing:

Song I: “Iyanre”

<u>Urhobo</u>	<u>English</u>
1 Ona okon mhe vwho re Iyanre	This is a parcel I sent to Iyanre
2 Tɔlɔre	Do not pinch it
3 Nabogba	Tie it properly
4 Tɔlɔre	Do not pinch it
5 Vwio hoze	Put it into a basin
6 Tɔlɔre	Do not pinch it
7 Vwhorhe	Give it to him
8 Tɔlɔre ooh	Do not pinch it ooh

In its adaptation, parents usually manipulate the names to suit occasion and purpose. A child can be given a wrapped item as toy and asked not to uncover its content until either the father or a relation shows up to receive it. The song reminds the child of the need to be faithful to the responsibility of keeping the parcel. The parcel becomes a distraction to the child, calming him while he anticipates the arrival of the recipient of the parcel.

The ability of the baby songs to appeal to and calm children when in need, may be seen in the length of the songs, the use of repetitions, rhyme and melody. These features make the songs easy to sing with accompanied clapping, music, dance and demonstration. From the example of “Iyanre” above, the song consists of does and don’ts. The lines: ‘tolore’ represent what is not expected of the child, while lines 3, 5 and 7 represent expected behaviour. The sound /e/ comes up in all lines except line three. This makes it interesting to the child and easy to memorize. In the Igbo song titled *Mama*, the child is pacified by reassurance that he or she is more important than the mother’s other responsibilities such as shopping. The song is created as a dialogue between the child and the singer/child-tender. The singer speaks on behalf of the child who inquires excitedly about mother’s return from her outing. The song asks:

Song II: “Mama”

<u>Igbo</u>	<u>English</u>
1 Mama olowala ee,	Eeh is mother coming back,
2 Mama olowala ee,	Eeh is mother coming back,
3 Ono na’hia emegha gini?	Is she still in the market?
4 Ono na’hia a negha ekele.	She is receiving greetings in the market.
5 Hee-hee ebelebe egbuola!	Hee-hee this is wonderful!

As the first line is raised, the child joins the singer to watch the door to see if the mother is actually returning. The song is not meant to be derogatory to the mother, but to tell the child that several things demand for the mother’s attention, but he or she is the most important of them all.

Each song is composed for a specific purpose and occasion, besides lulling the child. It can be used as a tool for reinforcement, motivation and encouragement when faced with the challenge of coping with certain developmental tasks. It is also used to inculcate morals, values, expected behaviour, social norms, praise during meal time, etc. it is thus not unusual to find children learning to speak and communicate by using aspects of various songs that best represent their needs. By distracting and calming the child, the songs also serve the purpose of creating a peaceful and conducive environment for adults while tending the children. The lessons the child learns from the songs cut across the mental, emotional, psychomotor, intellectual and other aspects of the child’s life. These lessons are conveniently transmitted to future generations and reinforced through the songs.

Considering the need to use the songs to move children bodily, emotionally and intellectually, and transmit lessons to them, the Urhobo and Igbo people give aesthetic prominence to combination of melody and word content, when composing the songs. One striking feature about the songs is the word content. This serves as ideas and messages that are transmitted from adults to children. The word content of the songs is a

vital means of communication between the adults and the children. This message is bourn from one generation to another as long as the songs live. The songs therefore embody social concepts, artistic use of language, and thematic discourse.

The examples of “Iyanre” and ‘Mama’ above, demonstrate the artistic combination of content and melody. Both songs are each realised as single stanza, with few lines: 8 and 5 respectively. In “Iyanre”, four lines are given to repetition of the word ‘tọlọre’. This gives it a kind of melody that makes it easy to be sung and remembered. The words used to compose the songs are words, with which children are familiar. They bring to the child objects and actions, with which the child is conversant. The song makes use of simple language; avoiding the use of proverbs, concentrated lines and excessive use of figures. In terms of meaning/message, it depends on the use of metaphor and symbolism. The parcel is a symbol for responsibility, the command to tie the parcel properly signify craft, and the delivery of the parcel to the recipient typifies occupation. The idea of occupation is evoked by the act of rendering service to both the sender and receiver of the parcel. The central idea in the song is honesty and commitment. The process of delivery the object: parcel, conveys meaning and lessons which go beyond the momentary pacification of the child.

The song “Mama” on the other hand thrives on rhetorical device, which makes the lines concentrated and laden with meaning. The first two lines are questions meant to express the prolonged absence of the mother. Lines 3 and 4 are ironic statements. They express the wonder and seeming justification of other issues to the mother. These however cannot be equated with the child. The appeal of the song to the child lies in its length (5 lines) and few words. The lessons/ideas the song tries to teach is ordering of priorities in the presence of important preoccupations.

The song ‘Nwa n’ebe’ sung as follows:

Song III:

<u>Igbo</u>	<u>English</u>
1 Nwa n’ebe	Baby is crying,
2 Nwa n’ebe	Baby is crying,
3 Kuo kuo	Sorry, sorry,
4 Iwuo-oh	What a pity.
5 Nne n’abia	Mother will soon come,
6 Nna g’alota	Father will soon return,
7 Nwe ndichi ka nne lota	Be patient for mother to come,
8 Nwe idichi ka nna lota	Be patient for father to come.

It is less concentrated than ‘Mama’. It is structured in two stanzas, each of four lines. It is an appeal to the child to patiently wait for the return of the parents, so that the child-tender can find his or her job easy. The first stanza rhymes in aabb while the second stanza rhymes in cccc. Each stanza makes use of enjambment. Each line is made to flow immediately into the next aiding musicality and movement of the body in dance.

The song ‘Umukujere’ is sung as follows:

Song IV:

Urhobo

English

- | | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| 1 Umukujere | A little spoon |
| 2 Avwo jalo jalo | Is what is used to scoop and swallow. |
| 3 Umukujere | A little spoon |
| 4 Avwo jalo jalo | Is what is used to scoop and swallow |
| 5 Adakrere | We don't drink for long |
| 6 Erharhe ghwo ghwo | A roaring fire burns out quickly, |
| 7 Oko jiriri | Friend it will go down fast. |

It is a song of reinforcement, teaching the child that a task is not to be avoided, but attempted little at a time, but consistently until it is done. The process of eating is used as a metaphor for the handling of the task. Spoon becomes a symbol for instrument and food a symbol of the task. The image of the burning fire captures the nature of zest with which the task or chore should be attacked. The child thus learns from the song hard work and consistency as a vital means of attaining success.

The need for expression of maternal and marital needs also prompt the composition of some of the 'baby songs'. Though this class of songs can pacify the baby, its word content and lessons are not directed at the child. The songs are narrative in tendency. They encapsulate tales that reveal the dynamics of marriage and motherhood in the Urhobo and Igbo Societies, and the place of the child in mediating the power play in these aspects of the family and society. The Urhobo 'baby songs', "Omowwe" (My Child) and "Mi Rovwon" (I do not worry), and Igbo song: Nwa mara mma" (A child of beauty) below fit into this category of songs.

Song V: "Omowwe" (My Child)

- | <u>Urhobo</u> | <u>English</u> |
|----------------------|---------------------------------|
| 1. Omowwe me mre | It is my child that I consider |
| 2. Oma ko vwero vwe | That is why I am happy |
| 3. Oshare ya lahovwe | Even if my husband maltreats me |
| 4. Obe davwe ya o | I count it as nothing |
| 5. Omowwe me mre | It is my child that I consider |
| 6. Me vwo ghogho o! | That is why I rejoice! |

Song VI: "Mi Rovwon": (I do not worry)

- | <u>Urhobo</u> | <u>English</u> |
|------------------------|---|
| 1. Mi kp'iruo | If I do not go to work |
| 2. Mi rovwo | I do not worry |
| 3. Mi kp'eki | If I do not have a trade |
| 4. Mi rovwo | I do not worry |
| 5. Omowwe na jevwe ro | I am so much in love with this my child |
| 6. Mi kp'iruo | If I do not go to work |
| 7. Mi rovwo | I do not worry |
| 8. Mi kp'eki | If I do not have a trade |
| 9. Mi rovwo | I do not worry |
| 10. Omowwe na jevwe ro | I am so much in love with this my child |
| 11. Ot'udje t'udje | It is enough to dance and dance |
| 12. Ovwurie, vwurie | S/he is well fed and rounded |
| 13. Ot'uvie, t'uvie | Worth a kingdom, equals a kingdom |

Song VII: Nwa mara mma": (A child of beauty)

- | <u>Igbo</u> | <u>English</u> |
|---------------------|--------------------|
| 1. E lere nwa | Behold the baby, |
| 2. E lere nne ya e | Behold the mother, |
| 3. Nwa mara mma | A child of beauty, |
| 4. Anyi ja yam ma e | We must praise. |

In song V, the child is used as the object of the song and as a symbolic anchor that holds the marital relationship between its parents from drifting apart. Lines 2 and 6 depict a character that is happy and rejoicing. However, lines 1 and 5 draws the attention of the listener to the fact that all may not be what it seems with the “happy mother”. The happiness she displays is out of consideration of the child. The underlying sadness is confirmed in lines 3 and 4. Line 3 states that the mother is being maltreated by her husband, whereas line 4 depicts that she ‘endures’ marital mistreatment, counting it as nothing when compared to her child. The song is a statement of commitment to the child and the worth the mother places on the child. The importance of the child in palliating the marital conflict between its parents is emphasized by the element of repetition of lines 1 and 2, as 5 and 6. The repetition of the consideration of the child and the happiness of the mother becomes the emphatic lesson in the song, making light the message of mistreatment in line 3.

The narrative in song VI centers on the economic and career status of the mother. The poetic personae is the mother as is the case in song V. The mother’s main preoccupation is her love for her child (lines 5 and 10). Her love reflects in her constant act of dancing to entertain the child (line 11), her commitment to feeding the child well making it “well rounded” (line 12). The reason for her commitment to the child instead of a career is captured in line 13, where she equates the child to a kingdom. In essence, one who owns a kingdom owns much more than economic power. More so, the child is being projected as being a career, besides trading or paid employment. The responsibilities of the child tending occupation as depicted in lines 11, 12 and 13 include taking care of the entertainment, feeding, health, protection and defence of the child. That is why the mother reiterates, in lines 1 – 4 and 6 – 9, that she is not worried if she does not have a trade or paid employment. From the song, one may also deduce a form of comparative feminine hegemony which puts the woman without a trade or ‘job’ in a marginal position. In such a situation, the ‘baby song’ becomes a challenge to the economic status and power of women who appear to be in the advantaged position.

The tone of song VII is boastful and full of admiration for the child and mother, thereby evoking a mood of pride. The poetic personae is a third person showing the mother and child to the listener. Beauty in line 3 is a metaphor for all the goodness the child brings to the family and the greatness it accords the mother, hence they (members of the family and society) must praise the child (line 4). The social status which the child accords the mother, as revealed in this song is perhaps the reason the child is equated to a kingdom in song VI. Whoever owns a child owns a kingdom and equals a king. This is no wonder that a mother is not bothered about ‘unemployment’ or ‘mistreatment’ in marriage. The songs V, VI and VII thrive on implicit comparison between the real owners and wielders of power (mothers) and the assumed power wielders (the husband, ‘employed’ women and the childless women).

Songs that are created using the features of the child belongs to the category of songs that are peculiar to individual composers. They are often an expression of the composers’ feelings towards the child’s nature and physical appeal. There are various versions as much as there are child-tenders. Most of the songs, in the

Urhobo culture can fit mainly into one or two lines such as: Omona, Apoi: This child, is so ‘poi’. This means the child is so polished, beautiful. So also is the song: Omona, ot’ughe, t’ughe: This child, is as good as a movie. The songs thrive on repetition for its rendition. Line 12 of Song VII fits into this corpus of ‘baby songs’ among the Urhobo. The, Igbo song below however belongs to the communal corpus.

Song VIII: “Nwa ma”: (My child)

<u>Igbo</u>	<u>English</u>
1. Nwata nke a bu nkem	This child of mine
2. Na-agbajupute mkpuruobim n’oke onu	Thrills my heart so much
3. Nwa ma	This my child
4. Na-egbuke ka olaedo	Is shining like gold
5. Na-achawapu ka anyanwu	Fair like the sun
6. Na-akpali m dika abu	Moving me like song

Summary and Conclusion

The study has examined eight ‘baby songs’, drawn from Urhobo and Igbo communities using cultural criticism and shown the needs that inspire the creation of the songs. The need to pacify or lull children foreground the creation of the songs. This need arises from the necessity for adults to rest well and become productive, given that a child’s tantrum unsettles the average adult. The study therefore concludes that the child’s calm and peaceful comportment connotes successful parents. Composite to the need to lull the child is the need for the child-tender (mostly women) to express their realities in the home. The child and the songs are in this case a means to purgation of emotions, conflict resolution and rejection of marginalization. In addition, the songs function as vital means of communication between the performer (adults) and the audience (children). The social concepts, artistic use of language, and thematic discourses which the songs embody convey various forms of messages to the child. This message is bourn from one generation to another as long as the songs live.

Considering the needs that engender the songs among the people, the study finds that the songs are not just sung. Specific aesthetic principles such as the purpose of the song, occasion and audience inform the structure of the songs. So, objects, subjects, themes, language, style and structure are carefully and intentionally chosen and applied to each piece of composition. Art and functionality are interwoven in the songs. Some of the functions which the songs realise for the individual and society include: projection and transmission of culture, ideas, norms and values; moving children bodily, emotionally and intellectually; and creation of social and emotional bond between the child and the child-tender. The songs therefore serve to reinforce social systems in both communities while acting as intellectual, psychomotor, physical and emotional managers and developers.

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