

# Mirroring Communal Ills: A Dramatic Approach A Study of Ike-Ogu Folk Play Performance

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## Abstract

The essence of drama in community sensitization, mobilization and reformation has seriously been deemphasized and misinterpreted among indigenes. Some people see and appreciate the entertaining aspect of drama as mere form of relaxation, entertainment and recreation only, thereby neglecting the communicative-corrective potency imbibed in drama. The high rate of social ills in communities are becoming too alarming that at times the indigenes are afraid of who to talk to, when to talk and how to talk about their existing problem in order to get a positive redress. Drama as an investigative and reflective act form would have been the best tool for the mirroring the ills of the society, but based on people's myopic understanding of drama, they tend to see it as a less powerful tool in procuring solutions to any of their existing problems or issues. But recently based on scholarly findings the use of drama in mirroring communal ills performs a three hydra-headed function: entertainment, education and formation, at this stage drama takes the good news of positive change closer to the people that owns it and not the people who are closer to it. In order to achieve these three hydra-headed functions in drama towards a positive change, an analytical interpretation will be carried out on an indigenous folk play performance called Ike-Ogu as a working metaphor. This paper therefore looks at drama as a reflective-corrective tool towards achieving a positive change and not as mere entertainment.

## Introduction

Drama is a natural activity which is as old as man and his environment. Both primitive and modern men portray similar instinctive dramatic responses to their environments and its characteristic social and cultural dynamic. Drama as a natural attribute of man stems from the truism that man is the most imitative creature on earth. Hence, his learning and delight in imitative art enabled him perfect his primitive attempts to interpret and control nature. According to Aristotle as cited by Canice Nwosu,

Imitation... is one instinct of our nature. Next, there is the instinct for harmony and rhythm, meters being manifestly section of rhythm. Person therefore, starting with this natural gift developed by degreed their special aptitudes till their rude improvisations gave birth to potency. (34)

Drama activities provide lots of opportunities for revealing, supporting and developing amenities in indigenous communities. Drama is an instrumental method which helps individuals develop themselves in multi-dimensions by empathizing with others, be active in educational and instructional process, be able to express themselves and also be keen on research and on learning. Sternberg as cited by Ozoemir Soner states that;

Drama offers participants the opportunity to practice constructive behavior and processes a medium through which indigenes learn to cooperate and collaborate and it also develops self-confidence and self-esteem as well as providing learning and socialization. (24)

Drama provides active participation rather than being passive, being independent rather than dependency and making independent decisions becoming democratic and noticing one's own skills. Tahta F. maintains that;

One of the most important characteristics of drama process is to give the individuals the opportunity for self-actualization, group work and sharing responsibilities. (24)

Drama also provides indigenes with an opportunity to get encouraged, to have new experience, to be at peace with themselves and with others. Morgul G opines that "through drama, individuals can recognize themselves better, develop a creative personality and realize their skills (26). Drama as an act form goes beyond entertainment and plays important role in educating, informing and sensitizing communities against any social ills.

## Fascinating ways to use Drama in the community

The use of drama at this point goes beyond mere delivering of lines on stage or mere action reaction by actors on stage, rather it has remain a symbolic tool in influencing indigenes both in their thoughts, ideologies and imagination. The sole aim of drama is to influence people in various forms such as:

### a. **Drama engages people in creative problem-solving and decision-making**

Deep experience through drama, guides and supports people's problem-solving skills, while at the same

time works to encourage an increasing awareness in how to solve issues at hand especially among communities.

**b. Drama can enhance people's psychological well-being**

The use of drama here is very effective because it gives people room to express their true feelings or sense of personality without fear of being judged or criticized.

**c. Drama builds cooperation and develops other social skills**

Working together as a group promotes, encourages and motivates cooperation. It is essential that each of the participants during rehearsals feel accepted and works well with others in order to create and build a safe environment for all to learn positively through drama. The use of drama towards community sensitization and reformation simply brings the indigenes together allowing them to find different characters that best suit them in their roles, in order to express who they are and different ways to build upon and develop social awareness.

**The sociological effect of drama on communities**

Drama has certain effects on people. It encourages individuals and enables them to develop experiences as all groups have the right to participate. Akyo Koksai state that;

The individuals involved in drama studies are provided with an environment of continuous discovery, evaluation, creation and asking questions towards finding solutions and all these contributes to the individual positively. (2006)

Drama as an act sociologically supports to improve the creativity existing within individual, rouses imagination and helps multi-directional development by making them acquire skills related to developmental properties. Aral Baran maintains that;

Drama ensure that people see themselves and their environment in depth and at universal dimension rather than superficially.(207)

Drama as a reflective tool gives the participants a chance of investigating social roles and social problems. The animation of social problem causes an individual to understand the society and the relationship in it better. Lambert as cited by Zeynep Hamamci opines that;

The individuals participating in drama studies learn the situations, events and relationships in the process of drama by discovering. The participants use their real life knowledge and experience to create an imaginary world in drama and they learn to investigate events and relationships while defining the situations and roles they envisage there. (208)

In dramatic performance the participants always put themselves in the place of others. In this way, individuals learn about themselves and their environment in a better way

**The Actor's body as an interpretative communicative tool in community sensitization**

In community sensitization, what makes an actor is the ability to communicate positively with his/her body on the stage. The communicative potency of any actor depends on the actor's ability to use his body as a core interpretative tool. Akas Nicholas states;

The body as a tool in acting during sensitization stops been a mere tool for entertainment only, but rather a positive instrument for actualizing meaningful communication.(8)

The actor uses his body to externalize the director's innermost emotion and reproduce it before the audience in order for them to understand the originality of the drama both in its forms, content and style. So for the actor's body to communicate effectively, it must undergo series of training, formation and adaption in order to enhance the communicative essence in the drama. The dramatic actions are well crafted within the actor's body during the performance in such a way that it will make a positive statement before the live audience. John Sags opines that:

It is the body interpretation of the actor that portrays the socio-economic, socio-political and religious essence in the drama. (8)

The actor's body as a decisive tool helps in passing the in-depth message of community sensitization and reformation in the drama before the audience.

**Approaches in Participatory learning through drama**

**Brain Storming**

Here the members of the community are asked to think of any idea that comes to mind and list all the ideas without evaluation or judgment. The quantity not quality is what matters. These ideas are discussed positively towards the growth and development of the community.

**Folk songs**

Folk songs are used as a learning process in participatory learning through drama. Here the people are asked to sing a song during dramatic performance after which its didactic essence is positively explained to them. Folk song at this point goes beyond moonlight tales only for relaxation rather its presence in drama serves as

corrective medium towards community sensitization.

### **Approach members constructively**

This method is very important in participatory learning through in our community; here every member of the community needs to know their contributions are appreciated during the course of the learning. This motivates the member of the community not to see themselves as inferior but rather as important agents towards achieving the community's set goal.

### **Participatory Theatre as a Deceive Tool for Change through Drama**

The concept of theatre has particular connotations in Africa due to its historical use for religious and ritualistic purposes, as well as to celebrate social events. In the pre-colonial period, the combination of various activities in theatre such as poetry, myths, songs, dance, acting, wrestling and hunting; all of these aided in bringing out the communicative potency in drama. Oguta Sophia states that "Theatre has a strong cultural grounding in Africa, which makes it an important and powerful expressive medium. (206). Most African societies have strong oral traditions to which theatre is closely related, indeed of which it is part and parcel. The theatre can adapt to a wide variety of contexts and facilitate communication on a number of different levels such as information's, analytical, emotional, spiritual and physical levels. Coulibaly Fanta maintains that;

In Africa in particular, since other means of communication are relatively underdeveloped, theatre plays an important role in terms of preserving history, disseminating information and education, and also in facilitating participation all key to the guarantee of freedom of expression. (72)

All forms of theatre share the objective of using theatre to educate and empower people who might not ordinarily have access to so called "elite" forms of theatre. The theatre has the potential to engage people in exploring issues that are important to them and to challenge the status quo. Musengeshi Apollri opines that "participatory theatre can make a particularly important contribution to the right to communicate as it gives voice to those who otherwise have difficulty making their views heard. It can help communities to articulate common positions around issues that affect them. (4) Participatory theatre is the only art form in which the whole human being is actually employed as the instrument for expressing or investigating the human condition. Based on this, it allows dichotomizing of the self or objectification of reality, so that human beings can observe themselves in action. Musengeshi observes that;

This act of seeing oneself allows one to envision alternatives since participatory theatre in its essence is a communal activity, which facilitates a sharing of knowledge and experience that may lead to it becoming a rehearsal for positive change.(4)

Theatre serves as an important means to promote participation in decision making and policy process. Through participatory theatre, communities which otherwise would not be able to do so, can articulate their interests and views on matters of importance. In this respect, participatory theatre through drama can play important role in ensuring the presence of voices which are not usually heard to be heard.

## **BRIEF HISTORY ON UMUAKAM COMMUNITY**

The community Umuakam is been referred to as the smallest community in Imo State. According to Uzoma Akamerekeya, the reason for referring to the community as the smallest is because of the low population of people in the community. The low population of people in the community really affects their agricultural and economic power till date, thereby making the men in the community to be lazy people, drunkard and womanizers. The community is believed to have been cursed by the gods of their land called 'Iru-chi'. 'Iru-chi' is believed to be a god of just, hardworking and faithfulness, but it was recorded according to the history of Umuakam community in Imo state that "their fore-fathers where so lazy, drunkards and thieves, instead of them working hard to feed their families, they depended solely on stealing from other people's farm and sleeping with other people's wife', because of their bad behavioral attitude "Iru-chi" turned his back on the community and cursed the community that nothing good will enter that community again only pains, suffering and death. Based on the curse by their 'chi' nobody has ever lived beyond forty- five years in Umuakam community till date. The name Umuakam is very symbolic because it simply means "Those who depend on other community for survival. The laziness of the men in the community exposes them to wayward lifestyle and serious health issues. The history of Umuakam to serve as a watchdog to the present youths of the community base on their lifestyle, health issues and not to immediate the ways of the ancestral fathers, the history about the community is preserved inform of a play called Ike-Ogu folk performance till date. The youths in Umuakam community are fondly referred to as "Ndi-Uwa".

### **Mirroring Communal ills: A Study of Ike-Ogu performance**

Ike-Ogu is an indigenous folk play performance written and directed by Uzoma Akamerenkeya. The thematic essence of the play centers on how the men from Umuakam community were seen as lazy people, womanizers

and also spending their money on things that did not concern the growth of their family. This barbaric act by men of Umuakam community was so uncontrollable that their wives could no longer withstand the shame, humiliation and depression from their husbands attitude, so they all decide to take the bull by its horn by beckoning on their “chi” to fight for their just cause for them, by punishing their husbands whenever they cheat on them or spend their money unnecessary.

### **A symbolic analysis on Ike-Ogu performance**

#### **Oguamala Anyi**

The men in this community sees themselves as demi-gods and always right in all their dealings with their wives, thereby making their wives to be afraid of them, not chat with husbands and always communicate with them from a very long distance. The men believe strongly that no woman has the right to question a man’s authority and not to talk of their wives. Mazi Okwu said in one of his lines that;

Mazi Okwu: a woman we married with our own hard earned money and manage to make pregnant so that she will not be lonely has no right to question any man’s authority.

Based on the above lines, the men of umuakam committed a lot of abominable acts like womanizing, beating their wives if they complain and spend their money on things that are not necessary. Their wives at this point where so afraid to complain, react or air their views, if such is done based on their general agreement to maltreat any of their wives that complains. This was seen in the lines of Mrs. Ikeoma, when she said;

Mrs. Ikeoma: The rate of abominable acts committed by our husband’s is highly on bearable for us. But the issue is we are handicapped because nobody to complain to and if we do, they all have agreed to beat us. (6)

The men of Umuakam at a point see themselves as superiors and colonial masters by turning their wives into slaves before the eyes of their concubines. To them they have the right to marry or befriend any woman of their choice. And once such is done, it is the duty of their personal ideal wife to be submissive to their concubines or they will lose their positions as the ideal woman, while their concubines will automatically assume their position. So to avoid losing their positions they do a lot of odd jobs for their husbands and their concubines. At times they wash their under wears, they cook for them and their husbands, they allow them to sleep on their bed, while they sleep on the floor and also at times their husbands allow them to watch while they kiss and romance their concubines. These mundane acts by the men of Umuakam place their wives in sleepless nights and constant tears seeking for whom to complain to.

#### **Agakoro Onye**

The high rate of mundane act committed by men of Umuakam was too alarming that their wives were speechless, worried and confused on whom to lament to. Sleepless and midnight tears became their only source of expression based on their husband’s animalistic behaviors. The women were subjected to slavery in their own house before the eyes of their various husband’s concubines. This can be seen in the lamenting lines of Mrs. Onyeka, when she said:

We the married women of umuakam are all humble slaves in the various family we have been married into before the eyes of our beloved husbands and their concubines.(7)

The men of Umuakam reduce their various wives to mere servants before the eyes of their concubines. They ask their wives to cook for them, wash their under wears, leave the bed for them, while they sleep on the floor and also take care of their concubines’ children while their own children are left to suffer. It is an abomination for the women to complain to the hearing of their husband, because if they do it, this will warrant serious beating or at times locked outside the house for a whole night. Based on these maltreatments, the women of Umuakam community in the folk play performance felt depress, rejected and dehumanized in the hands of their husbands. Some of them who couldn’t withstand the maltreatment, humiliation and rules, committed suicide, ran mad, returned back to by parents willingly and also ran to churches to seek for protection. At this point, the men see themselves as demi-god and almighty alpha and omega, so the well-being of their ideal wives does not concern them that what concerns them most is total enjoyment, freedom of spending and freedom of sex. But women based on these freedom sprays by the men laments so bitterly. This lamentation can be witness in the lines of Mrs. Obi Ozo when she said;

Mrs. Obiozo: We have lost our best women, best in its totality who cannot withstand the barbaric acts of their husbands into the ungodly hands of madness, suicide and depression.(10)

This total depression and forceful silence have really caused a lot in the lives of women of Umuakam so they all agreed to put an end to it, not by physical combat, but by resorting back to their chi “Ike-Ogu” who fights for just cause for innocent and upright women in Umuakam community especially the married ones.

## Ike-Ogu

This is the goddess of justices in the folk play. It is a goddess that fights for the rights of women who think they are maltreated by their husbands, who feel depressed because of their husbands' actions, who feel they are not satisfied sexually or who feel their husbands keep another extra-marital affair. It is the duty of the goddess to fight for justice in situations like this. But on conditions that the woman or women in question must be honest, submissive, hardworking, caring and very contributive in her family welfare, once all these are kept the wrath of Ike-Ogu the goddess when cast will not befall on her/them. The women of Umuakam community ran to Ike-Ogu (goddess of justice) for divine assistance. They ran to her shrine half-naked crying and singing, saying;

First woman: (singing) Ike-Ogu, the mother of all mothers, the great lioness in mist of lions and wolves.  
All: Your married daughters are before you full of tears hear our cries.

2<sup>nd</sup> woman: (singing & praising) Ike-Ogu the ever alert goddess. The only goddess that chooses to die than see women of umuakam especially their married ones cry.  
All: (holding their breasts) our breasts are soaked with our mid-night tears. Please clean it for us.

1<sup>st</sup> woman: (shouts) Ike-Ogu!!! Open your doors and welcome us for we are innocent, humble, submissive and contributive too to our husbands.

All women: (chorus) their concubines have made us slaves in our various homes. So we seek for revenge.

At this point all the women knelt down before the goddess (Ike-Ogu) half-naked seeking for total revenge, and protection in the hands of their husbands. Before the shrine, the women were holding their breasts saying the following before the goddess;

- a. Let any woman that have tested our husbands manhood be barren till death.
- b. Any of our husbands that have slept or cheated on us let him have weak erection.
- c. Any of our husbands' concubines that have eaten our husband's money let that money destroy things inside her body.
- d. Let our husbands be for us and not be shared at all.

After their wishes before the Ike-Ogu shrine, things weren't the same again for the men of Umuakam community. They tried using their manly power to know if they can put an end to the new situation of things in their lives. But all to no avail, so they were forced to seek for divine assistance. They were told that their ideal wives cried before Ike-Ogu for her assistance, and she is working already on their behalf. So the only way to set themselves free from more wraths is to change totally, be faithful and charm the spirits of their wives by being extremely nice to them. It was at this point that the men of Umuakam turned a new leaf and remained faithful to their wives.

### **The negative lifestyles of men in ike – ogu community and its health implications**

The men of ike-ogu community lived a lot of negative life styles which really affected them so badly health wise. At the early stage of the drama, the men so much believed that life is full of enjoyment and there is nothing like second life after death, so they all agreed to enjoy to the fullest and wait for the aftermath later. This can be witnessed in the lines of Obidike when he said:

Obidike (drunk) all these adverts on television, radio and newspaper is  
to stop us (men of Ike-ogu) from enjoying, but is just mere stories to insert fear  
in us from enjoying ourselves now that we are still alive. (2)

Ikenna: As far as I am concerned there is no health hazard in  
enjoyment. So men of Ike-ogu community lets enjoy (7)

But the aftermath of their health implications was so much on them that they all started dying one after another. Their dangerous health hazard life styles are as follows;

1. Drinking
2. STD'S
3. Lungs disease
4. Hard drugs
5. Abuse of medications.

### **The health implications of those dangerous life styles on men Ike-ogu community**

1. Drinking

The men of Ike –ogu community based on their dogma of “total enjoyment” went into excessive drinking of all sorts of alcohol, which caused a lot of damages in their health conditions such as; damage of the liver, damage of the nerve, lack of vitamin B1 and permanent damage to the brain. These diseases that emerged through the drinking habit of the men in Ike-ogu community caused some of their wives to be widows.

2. STD'S

The men of Ike-ogu community lived a careless life style more especially sexually wise. They all had a lot of



concubines and also had unprotected sex. To them protected sex with condom is just a mere white-man story. This can be witnessed in the lines of Akaigwe when he said;

Akaigwe: unprotected sex is sweeter than protected sex. What is the joy again, covering our natural manhood with mere nylon called condom. Condom is a white-man's invention to derive us from sweet enjoyment (20)

The aftermath of unprotected sex caused the men of Ike-ogu community the following diseases such as; gonorrhea, genital herpes, HIV 1 and 2, human papillomavirus infection and syphilis. The contracted STD killed the men and their wives in numbers.

### 3. Lung disease

Some of them based on their "enjoyment theory" started smoking seriously which really affected their lungs and caused them a lot of lung disease as diagnosed such as; asthma, bronchitis, byssinosis, emphysema, lung cancer, pneumonia and tuberculosis.

### 4. Hard drugs

Some of the men went into taken various hard drugs such as cocaine, methamphetamine, lysergic acid, direthylamide and marijuana. All these drugs had a lot of psychological effects on them in the play such as;

1. Loss of memory
2. Brain damage
3. Problems during pregnancy
4. Damage of the reproductive system.

The use of hard drugs really rendered men in Ike-ogu useless most especially in performing marital their duties on reproduction.

### 5. Abuse of medication

When the health situations of men in ike-ogu community were becoming worst, they all resort into self medication thereby abusing the use of drugs. The abuse of drugs caused a lot of health damage in some of them such as;

1. Emetic behavior
2. Mental cloudiness
3. Confusion
4. Anxiety
5. Addiction

These entire health hazards really affected and killed a lot of men in Ike-ogu community that really forced their wives to seek for a redress.

## **The sociological effects of the play (ike-ogu) on the community towards their health behavior**

The play based on its sociological potency affected positively the health behavioral status in Ike-ogu community especially among the indigenes that watched the performance. The play reminded the indigenes that the life they live today tells more about their health in future whether it would be sickness oriented or sickness free. The corrective- reflective potency of the play based on its sociological effectiveness suggests the following;

1. That people should avoid multiple sexual partners and adopt one man, one woman.
2. That people should avoid excessive drinking, so that they can maintain strong healthy body.
3. That the people should avoid intake of hard drugs, so as to avoid mental illness.
4. That people should avoid unprotected sex, because it exposes them to a lot of sexually transmitted diseases.
5. That the people should avoid self medication, because it is an easiest form of death if misused. Based on the above suggestions, if perfectly kept Ike-ogu community would be a reference point for positive change to other communities that watched the performance.

## **Conclusion**

Drama has remain the only relax form of art that mirrors the communal ills without stepping on anybody, group or society toes. It is true that entertainment is of great essence in drama, but its undertone in communication, reflective and interpretative potency remains incomparable. At this stage, using the play performance Ike-Ogu as a yardstick, the audience that watched the performance were not entertained alone rather they were sensitized, informed, educated and entertained. Thereby projecting drama as a reflective-reflector of communal ills and at the end provides a workable solution to it.

Conclusively, the use of dramatic approach in mirroring the communal ills presents the community the way it should be and not the way it ought to be.

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