



ISSN 2278 – 0211 (Online)

Songs as Agent of Satire in *Ɔmpɛ* Traditional Ensemble of Effutu

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Abstract:

Songs are largely noted for varied usage in the milieu of many cultures across the world. This essay seeks to explore the satirical nature of selected songs that critique societal challenges. The Osimpam Ɔmpɛ ensemble is a pure traditional group that uses the happenings of the day-to-day activities of the citizenry to either criticize or commend them for their actions. In the case of this ensemble, songs are seen or shown as agent of satire. The ensemble in effect uses its songs especially in the area of politics, social and personal deeds of leaders and the entire society. It then uses its performance of songs to expose and denounce behaviours that are injurious to the health of the society. The paper employs the use of content analysis as an approach to investigate the element of satire in the songs the ensemble produces.

Keywords: Satire, ensemble, *Ɔmpɛ*, song, tradition

1. Introduction

One significant observation in a multilingual African society like Ghana, is the barrage of diverse music ensembles that are identifiable with a particular group. For instance, ensembles like *Adowa*, *Adzewa*, *Ɔmpɛ*, *Asafo*, *Adenkum*, *Nwomkoro*, *Bɔsɔɛ* and *Sikyii* are identified with the Akan while *Kpalongo*, *Kolomashi*, *Kpatsa* and *Sunu* to the Ga and Damgbe. *Agbadza*, *Bɔbɔɔbɔ* are identified with the Ewe while *Bamaya*, *Damba*, *Tɔra* are identified with Dagomba and some tribes in the northern part of Ghana. These ensembles, be it the dance, songs, and other aesthetic values it conveys have its unique roles in the lives of the people where *Ɔmpɛ* a traditional ensemble in Effutu is not an exception.

Traditionally, songs play a major role in the lives of men. It serves as an avenue for expressing feelings and emotions. Largely, many people appropriate songs as a way to escape from the pain of life. It does serve such purpose however, it transcends past the relief of pain, reduction of stress and mere entertainment. In the world, the continent of Africa of which Ghana is not an exception, use songs in rituals and religious ceremonies to pass on the ethos of the society to its next generation. Rwafa (2010) asserts that songs carry values, norms, attitudes and beliefs of the people and that of individuals. Songs are then, an effective tool for communicating ideas and criticize behaviours that society abhors. Therefore, in the African societies, songs in its traditional sense have played an important role in the preservation and production of the African heritage strongly within and outside its borders.

However, songs have its message to its intended audience. Songs are generally composed of two elements namely; sound, which is the primary element and lyrics, as its secondary component. This implies that lyrics or song text play a significant role in the performance of songs. This is because through the lyrics, the audience is able to understand and appreciate the meaning and the message the song carries. Dallin (1994) expressed that; Lyrics are written as a form of interaction between the writer and the listeners. Most of the times, they carry a message (whatever that might be) with the purpose of motivating the listeners, at least, to think about it. Such a purpose and form of interaction are embedded in the cultural context of these people, according to their preferences, time etc.

By implication, every song has its message. The appeal and /or effectiveness of the song to the audience is predominately dependent on the lyrics. Again, the message contained in the song must reflect the cultural beliefs and ethos of the people to elucidate the appropriateness of the meaning to the audience and even the mode of delivery of the lyrics as well.

Given the role of songs in the lives of traditional societies, it appears that in this contemporary time, performances from traditional ensembles such as the *Ɔmpɛ*, *Nwomkoro* and *Adowa* to mention a few, are losing its touch on its audience. The reason is that traditional songs seem to be looked at with disdain since it is not really of importance to the society and culture. That erroneous thought about music (songs) or the creative arts as not essential to the function of the society and

even our culture needs to be looked at. Most of the changes and development of the society largely rest on the shoulders of the creative arts that is music, drama and dance that has put the nation on the world map of importance and respect.

On the flipside, it is the music that creates that basis for debate on some societal challenges that appear as a canker. In Nigeria for example, it was the music of Fela Kuti who took the nation on the dictatorship of the government of the day. In view of this, Saleh-Hanna (2008) corroborates that, it was Fela's culturally appropriated music as political tool in resisting the military dictatorship at the time.

Accordingly, the overwhelming social, political, and moral challenges bedeviled with the African and the continent can rarely go unattended to by the African composer or writer. The composer or the writer is a street journalist who is part of the community, observes the behaviours, hears it rantings, feels it joys and pains, and experiences the daily concerns of the people from dawn to dusk (Yirenkyi, Mensah & Yeboah, 2019,). So, Ogun (1985) clearly expresses this concern as:

When the writer in his own society can no longer function as conscience, he must recognize that his choice lies between denying himself totally or withdrawing to the position of a Chronicler and Postmortem Surgeon. The artist has always functioned in the African society as the record of the mores and experiences of his society and as the voice of vision in his own time (p.21).

The above assertion explains the fact that composers or writers are part of their societies and so, have a better view and vivid explanation of what is happening around them as they operate as the conscience of the society. They have committed themselves towards restoring order to their communities which have been consumed in a myriad of socio-political and economic disorder. The burning desire of the writer or composer therefore, urges them to use the power of their medium and specialty as a weapon to awaken the sense of liberation, patriotism and a fortitude for change in their societies to foster peace, morals, and developments in all fabric of their societies.

Since time immemorial, man has been in the vanguard of social change. Mention can be made of Philosophers such as Aristotle, Socrates, Horace, Karl Max, among many others have been astute agents for change through their writings; charting paths and courses of how societies must behave and response to issues. The question has been how has the artist been able to assess the social, moral, economic and political system in its society? This query warrants satire as the artist's mode in assessing the problem confronted with. Satire which is a form of writing that makes fun of foolish or wicked behaviour of people, institution and the society by using irony.

Satire is one of the oldest forms of humour. It has been efficient in setting the boundaries of behaviour as well as reprimand reprobates without violence. According to Abrams (2012) he avers that 'satire is the literary art of diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking towards it attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation' (p.166). Music has over the years been a major asset in the discourse of social, political, religious to mention but a few, in the endeavours of human existence. Satire therefore has been a crucial dramatic technique used in ensuring the ills of society are questioned and order the behaviour of the people for peaceful co-existence and development. It therefore connotes that all cultures have been using this artistic technique in their societies. In Africa, the use of folklores, proverbs, verbal arts and songs employ this technique to comment and ridicule human foibles and to attack common social vices.

Similarly, satire is mirrored as a unique technique that shares in the principles of parody, invectives and lampoon that are the fundamental ingredients. Satire with its usage by artist tends to conform to the universal acceptance as a device used to ridicule the faults in the society. Hence, the artist or the satirist puts up a façade to enable him or her creatively make the supposedly poisonous or cancerous phenomenon appealing to those concerned to embrace it for the needed effect it can bring to the society. Furthermore, the satirist could be likened to the Akan mythology of the *Santrofi Anoma* (the dilemma bird) as expressed by Anyidoho (1997) "is both a blessing and a curse... a blessing for the clarity of its vision but a curse for its irritating and irrepressible urge to expose the unsavory side of society" (p. 5). Equally, many artists have fled into exile or jailed because of their "mouths". It is therefore imperative for satirist to mask his or her intentions in a crafty manner to avoid such unpleasantness as intimated above by wittingly using appropriate device herein songs.

Consequently, in the Ghanaian performance space there are varied usage of its arts – especially songs; and one cannot but be struck by its varied complex form and pristine didactic concerns it carries to its audience. Considering the traditional rituals, festivals and ceremonies, they are largely moved by songs in its performance. These performances of songs tell the story and experiences of the people with costumes that are aesthetically artistic. Therefore, songs are predominantly one essential part of human expression in almost all cultures.

In view of this, songs appear to be one of the most pervasive, persuasive and aesthetically potent agents in oral form in Africa to drive its daily endeavours of its users from the cradle to the grave. Songs herein is the very 'kra' (soul) of the people. This is because, the African usage of songs are typified by its didactic nature since it is the litmus that instigates most societal phenomenon. In view of this, songs have its literal and implied underpinnings which serve its peculiar occasion and people. It is in the light of this that the paper examines the satirical nature of selected song texts from the *Ɔmpɛ* ensemble using content analysis as a method whiles interviews and participant observation used as data collection tools for the study.

2. Brief Historical Account of the Ɔmpɛ Ensemble

The *Ɔmpɛ* traditional ensemble is a group that performs songs that talks about happenings among the people of Effutu specifically Simpafo in Winneba in the central region of Ghana. *Ɔmpɛ*, literary means 'we don't like it'. As the name suggests, was as a result of the youth inability to adapt to the slow, exaggerated movement and rhythmic patterns of its

musicality as compared to the Apatampa which was brisk and livelier. Their continuous refusal to join whenever they perform with the response being 'we don't like it' translated into naming the ensemble *Ɔmpɛ*.

According to oral narratives the specific date cannot be ascertained due to lack of documentation. However, it is believed that the ensemble existed before the Europeans touched the shores of Winneba in 1479. It is a unique ensemble that performs to entertain its varied audience at funerals, durbars, festivals and any other recreational activities that their services are needed. The group played a major role in the governance of the first president of the republic of Ghana, Osagyefo Kwame Nkrumah. He became its first patron and toured with them in almost all his engagements within and outside the country.

The unique thing about this ensemble is its dramatic performances that conveys the messages in its lyrics to the audience either to praise or chastise using humour in upholding the ethos of the society.

2.1. Songs as Political Satire

Traditionally, chiefs and elders of any community are highly idolized by its subjects. The belief is that they have been chosen and ordained by the gods to rule the people for peaceful cohabitation and development. By this, the people are able to hold them accountable for any eventualities and again praise them when successful in any venture. Therefore, politics as satirized in the dramatic performances of the *Ɔmpɛ* ensemble, has to do with the attitudes of leaders in their governance of the society. For instance, in the song titled *Ɔtanfo Noara* is a classic example of the ills of ingratitude, discontentment, backbiting by members of the incumbent and the opposition who are always seeking an avenue to water down any good the ruling government does. It is this 'pull him down' syndrome that has set most societies in the African continent into a rather backward march. In one of the lines in the song text it reads; *Nkaano mapanyinfo wɔ ye nkonkonsa, Ye nyim hɔn*. This is an allusion that comments on the acts of backbiting and gossiping. The ensemble ridicules their behaviours in allowing the opposition, herein referred to as the West to still have access to our society to continue to have dominance in our affairs.

Lyrics	English Meaning
Ɔtanfo noara rohwehwɛ biribi ɔayɛ hɛn Osidan ntsir a? Ye ka yi ooooo (wɔ ya ye oooo)	The enemy is seeking to harm us Why so? We said it
Ɔtanfo noara rohwehwɛ biribi ɔayɛ hɛn Kwame Nkrumah ayɛ bi ama hɛn ooo N'anso ye mpɛ oooo (yee eye yee yee) Kwame mbo na ye ooooo	The enemy is seeking to harm us Kwame Nkrumah has done a lot for us But we rejected it Well done, Kwame
Nkaano mapanyinfo wɔ ye nkonkonsa Ye nyim hɔn.	Our fore fathers were gossips, We know them

Table 1

Another song from the collections of the ensemble for this study is *Obi Nkum Ananse* which literary means No one kills Ananse is a political satire song. This song can reincarnate as parody and humour to turn things around for the good of the society. It sounds metaphorical however, it exposes the ills of the society especially leadership and governance.

Lyrics	English Meaning
Ekum Ananse a ɔman yi bɔbɔ ɔdomankoma bɔ adze, bɔrbɔr bɔ adze obi nkum Ananse, ekum ananse a ɔman yi bɔbɔ.	This world will collapse if you kill Ananse, As the creator created this earth, no one kills Ananse, If you kill Ananse, the world will collapse.

Table 2

This political satire song predates the era of democracy in Ghana. The Ghanaian composer uses the character *Ananse* as a metaphor for leadership in governance system. The mythical character *Ananse* is believed to be endowed with special abilities that surpass his contemporaries in leadership and better still governance. Hence, its elimination from the helms of affairs has an untoward challenge for the society. Accordingly, in the political space in Ghana, good leaders have had series of stalled projects due to upheavals that were needless. For instance, ousting the first president of Ghana, Kwame Nkrumah while he was away in Hanoi on a diplomatic visit. That 1966 coup and subsequent ones stalled the progress of Ghana hence this song to ridicule the society of their insensitivity to development and the need to carefully have patience in analyzing situations before taking an action. Again, the song set the tone for members in the community not to be used as stooges by some few people who wants to satisfy their whims and caprices at the expense of the general good of all. That is why the song emphasis that *ekum Ananse a ɔman yi bɔbɔ*. It is therefore very important for the citizenry irrespective of their political affiliations to be circumspect in their politics so as not to do things that will set the nation in a backward match. This is because good leaders are rare to come by.

To buttress on the attitudes of people in leadership, phrase or the lines *Nkaano mapanyinfo wɔ ye nkonkonsa, Ye nyim hɔn* literally explains the culture of backbiting which appears as a common albatross on our elders. This assertion indicates the gravity of the cancer of backbiting among the elders whom society have entrusted the values, morals and the ethos of the society to them to ensure there is progress and development. However, the situation rather turns out to be at variance to development and peaceful co-existence.

Considering the two songs which is a call and response approach in performance is normally performed together to address the need for the people - Ghanaians, to have a rethink of their attitudes towards leadership and governance. The oath of secrecy to protect and defend the country and its people must be paramount. By this the enemy would not have a foothold to cause any damage to the people. Effutu with its fair share of chieftaincy rumpus in the country must as a matter of need get the message of these two songs as a reawakening call to let go the past and pick up the pieces for unity and development.

2.2. Songs and Social Satire

Lyrics	English Translation
Ma wo tsir abaka yi nnyi dan	At this age, you don't have a room
Ɔtwea okotobonku a nye mbaa da	Shame effeminate
Ma wo tsir abaka yi nnyi dan.	At this age, you don't have a room

Table 3

The Ɔmpɛ ensemble is predominantly a social justice minstrel that uses the daily occurrences of both individuals and people in the society to speak against acts such as slothfulness, injustices, and deceits. In essence, they serve as a kind of vigilantes in the community. The song text above is ridiculing the young man who at his age has either deliberately or otherwise not gotten himself a job to do but rather sits at home idling. This is because the framework of the society is such that men must work hard to provide for the home – wife and children. It thus becomes questionable to find able bodied men idling without doing any meaningful work to care for the family. Society then frowns upon such attitudes of individuals in the community. In effect for them to be conscious of their behaviour and attitudes such a song is used to mock them.

2.3. Songs and Moral Satire

There are some songs that satirize moral issues in the community. A typical example of one the repertoires that comments on promiscuity among the indigenes is Ama Esiaba.

Lyrics	English Translation
Esiaba nana, Esiaba nana	Esiaba's grand daughter
Ɔbaa yi maafa no o	I have had sex with this woman
Pɔn enum	Five pounds
Onyi hɔ a	If she is not around
No kun mbɛgye, ɔmpɛfo e	Her husband should come for it; Ɔmpɛ members
Ei! Ama Esiabae	Ei! Ama Esiaba
Ɔbaa yi maafa no	I have had sex with this woman
Pɔn enum	Five pounds
Ayifar no kun mbɛgye.	As compensation, her husband should come for it.

Table 4

A critical look at the lyrics of the song above, is the topical issue it addresses for sexual promiscuity. The society abhors this act of relationship between a man a married woman. Interestingly, the society is so sacred that acts of infidelity is a serious crime and appropriate punitive actions are taken on persons found culpable. From the song text above, it is believed that Esiaba, a married woman could not exercise control over her sexual desires and allows herself to be used by another man for a just a token (five pounds). This is suggestive of a whore that the society believes that she would take anything to trade with her pride. The song ridicules and cautions persons who indulge in such acts to refrain from it. Adultery in the society is abominable and must not be encouraged. Therefore, the lyrics speaks volumes of the moral values that the society upholds and shuns any acts that compromises the societal values and its standards. Below are some remarks of participants on the song text and its meaning: This is what one participant intimated when interviewed on the song and its understanding;

It is absurd, and very shameful for a married woman to commit adultery. In the past such an act comes with severe punishment. Sometimes the culprits are expelled from the society. Another participant also expressed satisfaction when this song is performed with regards to the attitudes of people who engage in such acts as;

The song ridicules and cautions all -the elderly, young, females and males to as a matter of need guard themselves from engaging in sexual immorality. I am personally happy whenever this song is performed. Those who indulge in are shamed and sounds an alarm to any who would want to venture.

Accordingly, the topical theme which is sexual immorality is clearly spelt out. It carries the message and its meaning to perpetrators alike in the community. Therefore, the ensemble becomes a voice of the conscience of the society and composes such songs to ridicule, rebuke, reproof and correct deviant actions in the society.

3. Conclusion

The study set out to examine the satirical nature of the songs performed by the Ompe traditional ensemble of Effutu. It was argued that since songs are a part of the culture of the people, it has that power to question behaviours that are injurious to the health of the society. In effect, the use of satire as embedded in the lyrical language of the ensemble's performances rebuked acts of slothfulness, promiscuity, backbiting, ingratitude and further challenged the leadership and citizenry to wake up and refrain from such acts through entertainment.

The songs served as the catalyst to call everyone to examine himself or herself and make the necessary amendment possible to foster hope, unity and development. Songs, aside its entertaining aspect is a unique medium that draws various audience of all ages to the realities of life and charts a path for shaping and defining the course of a meaningful and positive energies for guarding the ethos of a society to foster opportunities for growth and development. The Ompe traditional ensemble has been and is still that voice that continues to praise and chastise its people for all their actions.

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