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# UNDER THE FULL MOON IN URUK USO: A SCENARIO IN SEARCH OF A PERFORMANCE

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## Abstract

*Akwa Ibom people of South South Nigeria have a rich performance culture. However, lack of documentations, the Akwa Ibom people being among the minority tribes in Nigeria without good representations in high-profile state appointments, skepticisms and unserious notions accorded the study of performance-based disciplines in tertiary schools, late introduction of Theatre Curriculum to the University Programmes and the far prioritized attention given to science and technology-based programmes to the detriment of the arts; all relegated research interest into performance creation and performance, to the background. But with recent democratic liberalization and subsequent creations of more states and local governments, the founding of state and private universities, hitherto neglected and "unknown" tribes and their cultural and performance forms, have come into reckoning. Federal presence tool, leading to the establishments of federal universities and research institutions, in state capitals, have extended research interests into performance related areas. These researches have revealed such strong antecedents in performance-type, artistic production, the role of the performer and audience expectation and participation. These artistic revelations have changed what is known about Akwa Ibom Performance Theatre.*

## Introduction

**T**he above title, as innovative as it sounds, is not without some borrowing. Not just a borrowing from one source; but up to four 'elder' sources which had come long before. The first that any serious dramatists of scholarly depth should easily identify is Luigi Pirandello (1994). This Italian, with his *Six Characters in Search of an Author*, first popularized the attractive and curious title. In Pirandello's drama text, a group of six with a complete dramatically, promising story, storm a rehearsal venue where another play is being rehearsed, and demand for an author – writer, to put their own story into a performance. Pirandello's was borrowed by Dapo Adelugba (1977) when the latter coined his discourse on three Nigerian playwrights as, "Three playwrights in search of a language". And of course this title is ... "A Scenario in Search of a Performance". Though these dramatists have been innovative on their own right in the coinage of their very appropriate titles, the inclusion of "in search of" in the titles, gives off rather 'shoutingly' a Pirandello semblance.



In addition, Ikiddeh (1966), with his unpublished dissertation presented to the University of Leeds under the title "Ibibio Folktale Night: An Introduction to Ibibio Oral Literature", lends and *image* to this study. Ibibio folktale night happens usually under the moonlight, most probably under the fully moon. Therefore, with that Ikiddehan image, this author in another co-authored work on Ibibio proverbs with Effiong Ekpenyong, (2009) titled, "Performing 50 Famous Ibibio Proverbs under the Full Moon", also would wish to acknowledge even that, despite the proximity of authorial legitimacy.

The book, done to the pleasant memory of Chief Etim, from Uruk Uso, also intuited this author to situate this performance locale right there in the good man's village for dramatic accuracy and empathetic significant. A scenario is an unwritten story evolved through the process of improvisation by a director, (as in this case), or a director with his collaborators actors, designers, managers, etc. Usually, there is a coach-like guide or leader whose job it is to steer the creation and development of the improvised story within palatable dramatic courses and within acceptable or preferred generic line and bounds, until an ideal or approved structure would have emerged. Many performances have been based entirely on developed scenarios without reliance on any particular playwright and/or playwright's script. There are even some professional performance groups whose thrust is absolutely anti-script. They develop their performances based on their (or to satisfy their) type-focus; for example, political theatre, feminist theatre, agit-prop theatre, etc.

For purpose of generic branding or identification, this work can be classified under oral literature or oral performance. The attempt here is to take a typical moonlight performance in the Akwa Ibom community from the village square to the in-house theatre and perhaps spice it up with one or two stage ingredients to allow for tasty savouring.

## **Theoretical Foundation**

Ikiddeh (1966) agrees with the possibility of staging folktales and actually identifies the moonlight, "folktale night", as the proper and most aesthetically suitable background for it. Listing games, songs, dances, music and proverbs as regular entries in the moonlight package, he summarizes the experiences as uniquely satisfying and often insatiably looked forward to. Similarly, Ikiddeh (2005) defines and states the generic



forms of oral literature so as to clear doubts about its pre-occupation as follows:

*Or literature derives its material from that body of a people's spoken, as opposed to their written, culture that we call that oral tradition.*

*Some of its major forms are folktales, fables, myths legends, incantations and libations, proverbs, riddles and other forms of prose narratives and sorter expressions.*

*Oral literature also embraces such forms as traditional epics, dirges, praise poems, ritual and topical songs, festival and occasional drama and other forms of poetic and dramatic performance that are traditional in form.*

From the listing above, it becomes obvious that oral literature forms are so numerous and varied. A student or dramatist of oral literature does have to know all the manifestations of the genre; however, in a performance situation or even research purpose, compulsion is not placed on the student or artist to use all the forms at one sitting. It would amount to creative impossibility to succinctly achieve such a feat. The best that the student or literature can do in the circumstance is to collect his material, examine the text of his collections, decide what category, if any, it belongs to and whether it yields any literary interest. This is the approach adopted in this work.

The moonlight performance does not hatch all the oral forms. One night could not be sufficient for them. The features given expressions include palm-trumpet summoning sounds; traditional music, songs, games, proverbs and riddles, drumming, and wrestling. It is a no-break, non-interruptive flowing sequence, one enactment dovetailing into another, sustaining excitement in an ascending build up which hits the climax at the last performance and everyone goes back to sleep savouring and may be dreaming the cryptic experience all over.

Ikiddeh (1966) also states the characteristics of folktales to include simplicity of plot and language, interesting story, fascinating characters, songs that commonly underscore the motifs and the moral that permeates it whether implied or explicitly stated. These he concludes, combine to make the folktale a medium of late night entertainment for (men), women and children. He agrees that the storyteller usually story and punctuate



the narration at convenient points in a call and response dialogue with his audience.

Narrator: *Ekon nke-e*

Audience: *Nke ekon Abasi*

Together: *Ekon aka*

*Ekon anyon*

*Ekon isimaaha udim*

*Kpa eiyo Abasi!*

This formula which literally sounds like a battle cry, appealing to the warring spirit of the audience, is actually a solidarity and attention-getting formula, a call to order and sensitivity for the commencement and participation of all in the about ensuring performance. In this performance, it is compulsory that the traditional formula shall be used as it is creatively and traditionally supposed to be used. There is also the guarantee that at the end of the performance, a moral(s) would have implicitly or explicitly been disseminated.

## **Performance in Pre-colonial Africa and Nigeria**

Brockett (2003) accept the existence of performance forms in pre-colonial Africa in general and Nigeria in particular. Acknowledging that Africa in general and Nigeria languages which advantageously makes for "immediacy of communication and performance on the local level", they however notes that the same numerosity of language "limits cross-communication and accurate perception of performance and theatre beyond its own language-specific area" (578). Without documentary preserves, though "the continent was teeming with performance activities-ceremonies, festivals, religious rites, story-telling and various kinds of celebration - - all interwoven into the daily life of various African cultures" (p.578). European colonialists concluded that African was devoid of theatre. And with further penetration of the African cultural milieu by the missionaries, realization proved that the people had well-entrenched indigenous performance forms. But both the missionaries and the colonial authorities discouraged local religions and indigenous performances, which were perceived as barbaric or as potentially subversive.

Lending credence to the sizeable place of oratory as the major domain of the African performance medium, Brockett and Hildy (1958)



acknowledge the complexity of performance elements in indigenous forms of which “words are the least important element”. Rather, “other languages” of the African performance idiom and medium include drumming and dance, visual imagery, symbolism, gesture, mask and costume, all of which may convey specific meaning and resonance difficult to describe or explain (p580)

Daring to find comparisons and establish authentication, Brockett, and Hildy (2003, p.581) write:

*Much of what Africans considered to be of historical importance was embodied and preserved in their performances. Especially important in several cultures was the griot, the story-teller and sometimes “living archive” of the society who committed to memory and passed on the successors a record of the tribe ... story-tellers told stories both as education and entertainment, in a tradition analogous to the Homeric epics of ancient Greece and the scops’ tales of Teutonic Europe, both of which in oral form preceded written records of them. The storyteller often appears as a narrator or as a character.*

From these concrete accounts, this paper is roundedly covered with the blessings of authenticity of form. What’s best, is it provides a rare attempt to experience an indigenous performance in its pure form, or nearly pure form, void of the contemptuous contaminations of colonial effusions.

True, storytelling remains a vital form in African drama. Our scenario has a good dose of it. Awodiya (1995, p81) attests of Femi Osofisan, a most popular Nigerian playwright, as often using it as “the most suitable vehicles to convey his message to the audience”. Gbilekaa (200p33) one of the unrepentant exponents of the Kwagh-hir theatre fame, writes, “The Kwagh-hir theatre developed out of the art of story-telling among the TIV of Nigeria”. Momoh (2002p119) cite Chinua Achebe, Wole Soyinka, Osofisan and Rotimi as those who indigenize the English language by using “proverbs, metaphor, riddles and stories taken from the local environment to fashion out in English to communicate their local



experiences". And Yerima (2003, p110) acknowledges in strong assertion that:

*Every ethnic group all over the world has great cultural tradition of storytelling with a strong presence of the oral performer. Oral performance of storytelling was primarily a mode of communication. Oral performances were culturally rooted and helped to highlight human behaviour and explain the meaning of human action.*

Okoh (2005) includes herself, in *Edewede*; Zulu Sofa in Wedlock of the Gods; Wole Soyinka in Kongi's Harvest, A Dance of the Forests, Deaht and the King's Horsemen and The Strong Breed; Old Rotimi in The Gods are Not to Blame, Kurunmi and Ovonramwen Nogbasi; Femi Osofisan in Once Upon Four Robbers, No More the Wasted Breed, Another Raft; J.P. Clark in Ozidi and Songs of a Goat; and Fred Abigbeyegbe in *The King Must Dance Naked*. These are Nigerian playwrights who abundantly use oral traditions in the "dramatization of a people's belief system and world view of hopes and fears". In what Okon (2005) the female Professor of Theatre Arts calls "the corpus of the unwritten Nigerian art", she lists history, myths, legends folktales, praise-poetry, proverbs, riddle, music, song, dance, traditional practices and rituals as prominent indices (p.116).

With the boldness accredited to this attempt in its legitimacy of form, within a universally acceptable performance purview and Nigeria's theatricalus corpus juris, we are enmeshed in confidence to schematize a one-of-a-kind performance, oratural and improvised in aesthetics, but cultural and "satisfactoral" in rendering. The clouds have been appeased. They have parted ways for the entrant of the full moon. The glow is warm and soothing. Let's hop to the square lest we miss any fun of the night.

## **Concept**

The high sense of patriotism and the need to contribute a performance agenda in the ranks of Yoruba theatre, Igbo theatre, Hausa theatre and the like, challenged the mind of this writer to think out the possibility of creating and staging a promotional cultural performance. The attraction that performances that are culturally biased, especially such that are thrust-presented with the paraphernalia of the total theatre aesthetics, goaded the researcher with a promising appreciation bet. And the fact that it would have challenged further researches, the more,



cushioned the interests in a sustainable process. With all these favourable indices, the idea of staging a moonlight performance-type, integrating the typical 'genres' that often made appearances in the night such as, summoning antics, the mood of the performances, the serenity of the setting, the storytelling enactment, games, dances, proverbial presentations, songs, drumming and wrestling in a thrill-shrill packed performance night, was birthed.

## **The Setting**

Akwa ibom villages are characterized by play ground, often, where many road meet. At some other time it can be a deliberate space within approximant reach of the neighborhood in the community. sometime, the market square, the chief's compound could be a preferred performance space-especially in daylight performances. An unwritten decorum which did not allow moonlight performances to be staged in the chief's palaces, was, so that, the chief's rest may not be interrupted, as he might be dreaming and communing with his forebears for the well being of the community.

The dry season, and that, during harvest times, typically witnessed most moonlight performances. The dry season provided dry surfaces both in the square and the nearby bush (for hide and seek games). Harvest time and dry season, also created a conducive satisfying mood with the provision of food, good health and pleasant light-hearted minds for necessary recreation. Moonlight performances were cultural phenomena handed down from generations. Children grew into it as a common feature and expression of their lives and socializations. The forms and practices needed no formal training as they were more or less innate and part and parcel of the community's inborn socio-cultural register. With this type of early orientation, the performers were at their creatively-polished best in the enactments be they songs, dances, proverbs, story-telling and the like.

Similarly, the participants-audience had no tolerance whatsoever with anyone who could not perform any role so ascribed to him/her with expected artistic dexterity and finesse. The moonlight catered basically for basic illumination for the performances. The performers needed to see the stage and the participant-audience needed to see the performance and enjoy same. The moonlight also revealed creeping dangers, like sneakers, whose nearby habitat might have been invaded for them to strand out to spy the goings on. Added to the moonlight setting was of



course the sheer aesthetics it colourfully supplied to the performance-environment with vistas of shades, shadows and discrete coverings for quick traditional secret romance within taboo-accommodating ranges.

## **Summoning Antics**

In the Ibibio traditional societies, not every night perse was open and free for all to participate in moonlight performances. There were time tables for different activities, performances rituals and rites of passages. Ekpo cults, the most serious administrative cult them, had its season, within which only initiates of the cult would be found out in the night, and even in the day. Obon and Ekpe had their seasons and their restrictions. The chiefs and elders in recognition of the need for farming, marker operations, socializations, etc. arranged the seasons to favour all categories of the citizenry. Even young maidens had when their pride-showing and open declaration of their virginity status in the market square, were accommodated. Young men played their "ekpo ntokeyen" – boys masquerade – at convenient time with within the calendar without undue harassment by 'senior' ekpo cult performances.

Therefore, at the night during provided for seasons, there was usually a summoning signal. "Palm-trumpets" would be blown in the neighbourhood signaling performance-readiness for the night. Joyous shout, adulations, drumbeats or "obodom" would sound, inviting the community to gather in the square for the performance. Responses were usually predictable bound to be appreciable in number. The compositing cut across the entire cadre of the community old, young, men, women, boys and girls. Talents would carry their instruments such as flutes, drums, rattles to the performances square in anticipation of necessary backup and accompaniments to the presentations. Performance-types for the night might have been predictable, but of the sequence they would follow and those who would lead, the playground revealed them at appropriate times.

## **The Performances**

The performances cut across all present. Roles were voluntarily assumed based on leadership capabilities and talent-inherent in such persons. Leaders were as many as expertise in different genres, songs and fund would dictate. Group participation was also automatic except in story-telling enactments that the story leader may have to cast the



participants for role-playing. However, if anybody knew that his or her performance was not up to the creative standard expected in the community there present, such a person could stand down his or her role to serve raw-critical battering or give the show a mediocre presentation. Performers were creative, flexible, malleable and talented, curtesy of the culture which oriented and fabricated them. It was so easy to spot those with overwhelming potentials, such potentials were even rewarded with cash gifts and promises in kind. These tokens enhanced and encouraged not just the artist to build and expand his/her creative ambience but others were thus also challenged to come to the level of that appreciable standard in performance. By so doing, health and qualitative standards were built and sustained for the community continuum.

## **The Audience**

In the moonlight performances, neat categorizations of actors, directors (?) or audience do not exist. Not one person leaves his/her house solely to go and see. No. Everyone comes to the square to participate. The programme of the night may not be known in advance in exact terms. But whatever it may comprise, there will always be room for all to participate and enjoy maximally. Be that as it may, not everyone would participate in every genre or activity. People had preferences. It is normal to do so. So, in the events that one may not take part in, one then would constitute oneself into a participant audience – applauding, commenting, critiquing and supplying all the spontaneous attaché evoked by the sprouting and renderings of the performance. Some enactments (as we would see later) might be ground-based, that will attract sitting in a semi-circular formation by the performing group. Others might attract squatting or kneeling. But the majority attracted standing. Some playgrounds had locally-constructed bamboo seat lining the circumference of the square. A few tree stumps could also be handy in some. Elders who may not be strong enough physically to stand through the night performance, usually relaxed in such seats. Sitting preference is not on first come first served basis, rather, it is absolutely on age grounds. An elder must always be preferred to sit to any other person. In some cases, and elderly women may be preferred to the elderly men, that is, if the seats could not be enough for both them.



## **Ibibio Moonlight Performane: A Theatri- cultural Re-enactments**

The audience sits in a four-sided oblong-shaped formation de-ranged and re-arranged. The raised platform area has seats for the audience members. Levels have been built-in to allow for the barest minimum, with cyclorama hanging all through the two lengths of the hall. The background under special lighting effect with moonlight rendering, cast a beautiful village impression on the cyclorama.

Everyone sees at least one side of the auditorium wall clearly and captures this picturesque and absorbs the setting and the moon created. A village mind-sided seating arrangement re-enacts the theatre-in the round arrangement, typical in traditional performances – to allow for cross breeds and the performances, and sometimes between the audience and follow audience members.

### **Movement One:**

Very typical and old traditional must wells up through the heavy loudspeakers from two opposite corners of the hall. Oldies immediately re-capture times while their minds play on other associated cultures and experiences typical of the depicted times. Yong people absorb their historical essence re-played live before them as they are taken years behind their advent to a glorious culture of their forefathers. Then the music fades and wanes and form a distance, Palm trumpet sounds are heard summoning the community to the square for the moonlight fun. From the opposite direction comes the “ntakrok and ‘ibid’ instrumentations while farthest always, the “obodom” sounds. Immediately, the night fees very promising. Performers/ audience members arrive in high spirits, exchange pleasantries, gossip carefreely, joke and mix with that unhindering and uninhibiting communal and secure abandon. One by one, more people arrive, comprising children, young persons, male and female, adults and the elderly. The cast is complete. The story teller raises a song, all, in a familiar and popular bravado, jump at the song, dance steps are traduced and all, take time to perform the same song in dynamics of dance steps representing age and times. The orchestra joins with the instrumentalists on stage, and the effect is exhilarating. With “ekong nke-e-ee! Nke ekong Abasi ...!” the story teller brings the movement to a close but not without highlighting what would constitute the package for the night.



## **Movement Two:**

“Okpotop Isip” – The nut thrower. This game, as the name implies, involves nut-throwing. Since there could be common nuts on the playground, to differentiate this particular thrown one from the rest, the thrower either had to come with nuts that had been heated by fire and they have still retained the warmth, or he would have been to dash to any nearest hut to the playground and quickly bury his nuts in the embered fire-place to heat them up. Thrown nuts are usually warmer than any other kernel nut on the square. The nut is still within its shell, it is the shell that is heated up. The thrower stands or bends or squats at one end of the playing area while participants, usually children and young people of any number, squat on the other far end to catch the nut. The thrower can roll the nut, throw the nut, fling the nut, as the case may be, but it has to drop within the playing area. Whoever catches the nut does not identify him/herself, because if he/she does, another person would touch him or her and that will annul the point. Essentially, who ever catches the nut in the midst to of all searching for it, has to keep it secret and feign that he has not seen it, and keep searching until an opportunity opens up for the catcher’ to dash and return the nut to the thrower untouched by a fellow player. Of course, the thrower knows his nut such that if any other nut was brought to him, he would discountenance it and give the catcher no point. That wrong catcher will also receive a booing from participants while the search for the ideal nut would intensify until it is found. In most cases, the nuts will be found. But should it have entered the bush and got missing, the thrower would be warned to be careful and limit the force of the throw. Whoever catches more nuts during the rounds of throwing which can get up to ten, fifteen or twenty times, depending on the excitement sustained by the game, is honoured and declared winner as the most careful and alert in the group. The thrower would then bless him or her with all the nuts. He or she could stuff his nuts and take them home, break and eat his reward, if he/she like, or dispose of them as he or she chooses. Have you tried some roasted nuts for a change of recent? Try it.

Other people who are not participating in the nut game usually flank the wings of the square, teasing, commenting, and confusing the searcher-players. Sometimes a thrown nut could get to the winged standee. The person could cover the nut with his foot while spitting out suggestion as to the area he saw the nut heading. Then, if he/she has a



favourite among the players and the person drifts near him/her, the standee would simply secretly kick the nut to the person to pick and score a point. Many times 'accidents' happen as the kcik could very well head towards another person other than the one intended. Light is usually very dim in the performance area so that the nuts cannot be easily exposed. The game teaches among others, alertness, determination, good competitive spirit, exercising one's luck, ability to be self-controlled in the midst of excitement and reward for efficient sportsmanship. Every round of the game commences with all –response chant as follows:

<b>Thrower:</b>	Okpotop Isip-oh-oh	(Nut thrower...?)
<b>Players :</b>	Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh	(Oh yeah ....!)
<b>Thrower:</b>	Okpotop Isip-oh-oh	(Nut thrower...?)
<b>Players :</b>	Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh	(Oh yeah ....!)
<b>Thrower:</b>	Ada edem da isip do-oh-oh-oh (Those behind, catch then my nut)	
<b>Players :</b>	Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh	(Oh yeah ....!)

### **Movement Three:**

As the nut thrower hands over the nuts to the overall winner of the "Okpotop isip" game, another volunteer leader, this time "ekpa-ekpang" takes the stage. "Ekpa-ekpang" is a hide and seek game based on the belief that ekpa-ekpang flogs silly all recalcitrant people who contravene acceptable moral codes. For this reason, people hide away from him or at least, keep a safe distance. A leader empowers a player with the spirit of ekpaekpang; give him a bunch of leaves on stalks. The invocation of ekpa-ekpang spirit on the playr is believed to take place when this chant is made by the leader.

*Ekpa –ekpang oh-oh, ekpa-ekpang oh-oh  
Ekpa-ekpang otop owo uduang anwanga,  
Ntokeyen uso uso, ntok eyen uka uka,  
Esomo ke obio ekpo uso, ke obio ekpo uka  
Oh-oh-oh-oh-oh-oh!*

*The translation of the chant goes thus:  
Ekpa-ekpang@ ekpa-ekpang!*

*If ekpa-ekpang stings you, you'll sure shit in your pants.  
Therefore, children, disappear (if you can) into your  
forefather's would and your foremother's world!.*



While this chant and the mounting is going on the "spirit" closes his eyes while everyone has disappeared into hiding. Meanwhile, the leader chanting also blocks the eyes of the ekpa-ekpang player. He hits his head with the bunch of stalky-leaves. At the end of the chant, the leader throws the bunch afar off-distant enough for him to escape also into hiding, as ekpa-ekpang spares nobody. While ekpa-ekpang searches for his bunch – the symbol of empowered authority of ekpa-ekpang spirit, everywhere is calm- but not without a crack or shaking – usually, signals for ekpa-ekpang to head there to catch a victim. Whoever he can beat with the leaves has been stung by ekpa-ekpang. But while the craze to sting a victim rages on, others within safety distances escape to a marked circle of safety within the playground where ekpa-ekpang cannot sting anybody. If all should escape without him stinging a victim, he would need sting himself by being re-mounted by the leader, to try another round. But if he stand some victim, that victim would be the one to be mounted by the leader with the spirit of ekpa-ekpang. The game, usually a very exciting one, can go several rounds. The more different people are stung before they can escape to the circle of safety, the more the variety would spice up the entertainment. Ekpa-ekpang sends a disciplinary message to all recalcitrant, rebellion, disobedient and morally-bankrupt children in the Akwa Ibom society to rund away from such conducts afar off, otherwise, ekpa-ekpang – standing for hard-core discipline, would be meted at such child – who might even die in the process of discipline for al the society cares.

#### **Movement Four**

As those who have escaped the sting of ekpe-ekpang celebrate their lucks and victories in the circle of safety, the story-teller's voice from the distance, thunders "ekong nke-e-ee!" and the crowd at alert, responds "nke ekong abasi." That automatically signals the beginning of a new movement. This time, it is proverbs presentation. The form it takes is that everyone sits in a circle. Those with proverbs will tell it. Some other person will give the interpretation, if the interpretation is the correct one, the participants will applaud. Every proverb released attracts response in one from or another. If it is a very strange one, the crowd will cheer the archival penetration of the speaker as a true son or daughter of the soil. In fact, the aim is to premiere proverbs that are unfamiliar to many people. But usually, the age bracket of the people in the performance arena does



not permit much of what should be premiere proverbs. Only if very old elders were in the majority will such strange proverbs drop off from their props of wisdom. If a proverb is released and there is no one in the team to interpret, the person who released it will be heroically applauded and pleaded to give the interpretation. It is the story-teller, the "initiator" of the proverbs performance movement that sets the ball rolling. Interpreters are free to add colour to the interpretation.

- Proverb:** *"Adia asa adadia asa edi nkwa asa edikongo Udo Ekperikpe."*  
(crowd responds excitedly. Comments are made as per the verve of the proverbs and its significance. The name Udo Ekperikpe attract fun).
- Interpretation:** The eater of pottage eats pottage, but the corn seed chokes Udo Ekperikpe. (There is general applause and provable excitement. Comment on 'how can that be are generally expressed!)
- Proverb:** *"ke akpaniko ndisime-ndisime aduongo okpo ekporoko"* (Crowd responds with loathsome comments on the proverbial character. Mocks stupid behaviour and ridicules foolish actions).
- Interpretation:** Of a truth, it is only the very stupid that throws away stockfish bones (Comments on the delicacy of stockfish and its bones are made at random).
- Proverb:** *"Inuen afuruke ke enyong okpo owot isong."* (this being a very familiar proverb attracts interpretative and signified responses from participants)
- Interpretation:** The bird that flies in the air will someday perch on the ground.
- Proverb:** *"Abeheedet akananwan akpeta ekporoko amin akparawa nkpata itiat."* (The image this conjures sends ripples of excitement across the performance floor)
- Interpretation:** should a tooth-losing old woman eat stockfish, then I as a young man will eat stone. (laughter and random



comments on how old people struggle to eat stockfish and the like, delight the crowd for a while.

**Proverb:** "Obong isinekke unek ke usoro ubokkoufin ndito ufin omo." (This one is a hard one that the meaning is not very clear, especially to the less discernible. The crowd appreciates the excavatory prowess of the teller).

**Interpretation:** A king does not dance in the ritual of freedom performed by his slaves. (there is loud ovation for the interpreter for his ability to crack the hard nut of the proverb).

**Proverb:** "Ikang ataha okpo ebote nwaebek akeyom so?" (The crowd responds instantly – "iyii?" meaning how can they know? Some comments that they should ask the goat who might be handy with the correct answer. Another commentator warns those who keep long "goatish" beards of the danger of fire on their chin. There is such laughter by all).

**Interpretation:** The fire that burns the he-goat's beards was aiming at what? The answer is, it was aiming at the face.

**Proverb:** "Iso owo esit ibak ana akwanga nkom ayedie ndom" (The crowd shouts it's very true, very true. Hypocrites! Pretenders, fakes and feigners, wicked people etc).

**Interpretation:** The face that harbours a crime must have a wrinkle, no matter the amount of power on it. (The crowd looks at people's faces, attacks fellows with pseudo accusations of crooked faces and demands knowledge of the lurking wickedness in the heart).

**Proverb:** "Idoho uduang akedongo ekiko odor." (The crowd expresses nausea about bad smell and the sort. Others rebuff unseriousness of action).

**Interpretation:** That is not the shit that pressed the buffalo. (The proverb which questions and criticizes people who talk more than they can do, or who walk out when the



time for real action shows up, attracts wild excitement from the crowd either because of “shit” or “buffalo”).

**Proverb:** “Ofiong ke enyong ndedeng k’isong.” (Before the proverb lands on the ground, the crowd, in one accord responds: “Owo osukuma edidok ke esit” (The familiar spices up the entire place, heightening interest).

**Interpretation:** Moon in the sky, coolness on earth. Love in the mouth, wickedness in the heart. (Comments that God should seal the anus of such wicked people, their teeth knocked of, their mouths and their eyes plucked out of their sockets are wished for the wicked pretenders).

**Proverb:** “Ufa idiok udongo ono mbied idim ukpono.” (Comments on God taking away evil, diseases, affliction and epidemics from their land are splashed on the performance canvas by so many).

**Interpretation:** it is the strange disease that gives undue respect to the stream-side weed. (The interpreter is applauded for his accurate interpretation and challenged that since he knows the proverb’s meaning, he should as well find appropriate diagnosis. Everyone laughs at the interpreter).

**Story-teller:** (Standing) “Ekong nke-e-e-e-e!”

**Crowd:** (Responding) “Nke ekong abasi, ekong aka, ekong onyong, ekong isimaha udim, nkpaeyo abasi.” The crowd’s response simply means war comes, war goes, war must always remain a rampant throughout the seasons of life. Within that, the movement on proverbs performance comes to an end with everyone having knowledge of proverbs as passed down from generation and especially the deep nuggets of truth, morality and lessons that each of them elicits.



## Movement Five:

The drummer strike the drums, the song leader emerges and raises a song: *"Nda Asukwo emen efere afang mmi oyok adia nkpo, abu ndia usung ken so, abu adia usung ken so, mme enye abu ndia usung ke mmong efere?"*

The crowd is exhilarated with the lyrics of the song, the way and manner of the rendition, the nuances of the song leader's movement, the typical steps characterizing his expertise and the accurate adaptability of the song to the rhythm of the beats – all hike the mood to its crescendo. Meanwhile, the song he sings can be translated thus: my friend Asukwo takes my afang soup, warms it and eats fufu wit it. What does he want me to eat my fufu with? Tell me, what does he want me to eat my own fufu with? Does he want me to eat fufu with watery-soup? The song immediately and excitedly picked by all. There is a large circle of dancers comprising the old, the young, the children – all. The song-leader is encircled, a whistle from nowhere emerges from the crowd and get into his mouth. The dance movement is now dictated not by the song per-se but by the blown whistle, the beat of the lead drum and the accustomed steps of the lead singer/dancer. From footworks, hand movement, waist gyration, back-bending jerks, short-shuttles, stops, small runs, bends etc. the song leader takes the group through frills and thrills. Intermittently, ululations are sounded out of excitement. Group by group, he takes the children, the young women, the young men, the elderly, each leaving the larger circle to form an inner circle with their beats and dances. Excitements, cheerings, shouts, fill the moonlight air in expressions of appreciations, of dances well executed.

Then, suddenly, the beats change to something more vigorous and ecstatic. It is a specialized wrestling dance beats. Old men and women retrieve their dance steps to the larger circle; girls withdraw to the background clapping hands. A stoutly looking young man dances out, exhibits his muscles and bravado, then raises a song: *"Mbem mbem nsiowo, ikoso oh-oh!"* The crowd is caught in the schizophrenic wildness. Everyone sings with the spirit of a fighter, drum beats and other instruments heighten, another young man dances out to challenge the stoutly looking one already in the circle. An elder dances into the circle, makes a small circle with his foot, stretches his hand, the two strike the elder's hand signifying that they are ready to fight. The crowd cheers wildly. The stout fellow puts his foot on the small circle made by the elder



and challenges his opponent to do same: Of course, he obliges bravely. And they log on! The song is high, the beats are high, excitement is high, the firth is fierce. At moment of nearfall, the crowd shouts and cheers. The moment exhibit artistry and bravery of seasoned traditional tutelage. After a long while and exhaustive fight, the same elder dances back to the circle, gestures to the drummers, moves closer, but with cautionary steps into the middle of the fighters. Takes their hands and raises them up and announces a draw. Everyone cheers, and dashes into the circle to cheer the heroes. The drum climax in a frenzy of beats, then two mock fighters in the crowd, from nowhere, stage a fight, one lifts up the other high, and crashes him on the laps of the lead drummer, the drum falls off his hand, and the music stops abruptly... *Black out (The End. The house lights are switched on and the audience rises from their spell-bound seats clapping, embracing the performers, the crew and the entire team).*

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