



## SATIRIC FOLKLORE: POETICS OF ABIGBO MBAISE

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### ABSTRACT

Folklore comprises traditional narratives that are handed from one generation to another. Among the Mbaise Igbo of Nigeria evolved *Abigbo* – a folksong, subgenre to folklore, that satirises any perceived misnomer in the society. Most scholars have examined the ethnomusicology of *Abigbo* with little attention to the satiric elements embedded in it. *Abigbo* uses wit and other poetic devices to satirise any misconduct in the society. Through the structural functionalist lens, a textual analysis of *Abigbo* songs reveals that the satiric elements embedded in *Abigbo* are purposely rendered to ridicule the foibles and follies of humanity. While *Abigbo* seeks to expose and ridicule the foibles, its major aim is to reorient the society towards morality and engender in people the need for change, stability and harmony.

**Keywords:** Satire, folksong, Poetics, *Abigbo*, Mbaise

### 1.0 INTRODUCTION:

Literature is not only written but also oral in nature. Even when literature is written, Ong (2002) asserts that “[w]riting can never dispense with orality” (p.8). Ong justifies his claims by elucidating that writing is “a ‘secondary modeling system’, dependent on a prior primary system, spoken language. Oral expression can exist and mostly has existed without any writing at all, writing never without orality.” Ong’s position supports the functionality of orality in society in view of its importance as a recorder of social memory.

The orality and textuality discourse has been explored by many scholars. Plato’s *Phaedrus* is one of the earliest discourses of this divide. Plato (380 BC) contends that the written word is inferior to the spoken word because it lacks the full context and meaning of the speaker’s word. Plato’s argument elevates the spoken word over the written word. Derrida (1997) argues that the

spoken words are “the symbols of mental experience ... and the written words are the symbols of spoken words” (11). He further argues that the voice, the initiator and the producer of the first symbol has an essential relationship and immediate proximity with the mind which is the first producer of the first signifier. The translation of this conventional relationship between the mind and logos results to spoken language.

Derrida therefore surmises that “the feelings of the mind, expressing things naturally, constitute a sort of universal language which can then efface itself. It is the stage of transparency... and the closest to the signified... the written signifies is always technical and representative.” (11). In relating the orality and textuality divide to literature, Ruth Finnegan (2012) maintains that oral literature, which is called folklore, is associated with the primitive society and non-literate society while the written is associated

with the “civilized” cultures. The idea that oral literature is somewhat inferior to written literature stems from the fact that it is mostly associated with the primitive and undeveloped society while the written is ascribed to the ‘civilized’ society. However, I argue that both the oral and the written literature are related, with one dependent on the other.

Chinweizu *et al* (1980) also observe this interconnectedness as they argue that the “African narrative is oral” (p.32). The oral form of most literature predates the written form. These scholars believe that the oral form of most literatures typically comes before the written counterpart since humans speak before they write. Some of these oral performances include: folklore, rituals, dance, myths, proverbs, and many other verbal arts. Even within the context of written literature, Fasan (2010) also upholds that other forms in Nigerian written literature get their bases from the oral, despite appropriating some of the Greco-Roman characteristics.

The Western characteristics come because of interactions between Nigerians and Western imperialism. He further notes that:

The connection between oral and written Nigerian literature may not be self-evident given the state of near extinction in which Nigeria’s indigenous oral art forms have fallen; but the connection exists and is not always peripheral. A close reading of some of the best texts in written Nigerian literature in any of the three major genres of literature would yield enough evidence to justify this position (p.34).

Fasan’s position remains that oral literary tropes are embedded in written literature. Folklore which comprises the traditional narratives that are handed over from one generation to the other, written or oral, is one of the forms in oral literature. Ihueze (2015) submits that folklore is “all forms of prose narrative, written or oral, which has come down through the years” (p.57). She further argues that this includes “folk songs, folktales, riddles, proverbs, or other materials

preserved in words or in writing” (p.57). From this point of view, folklore encompasses folktales, riddles, folksongs/folk music that are handed down from one generation to another.

Folksong, which is a subgenre of folklore, is also transmitted orally from one generation to another. Oghiator (2017) affirms that “Folk songs are traditional or indigenous songs of a society” (1). He argues further that:

These songs are not written down but they are passed from one generation to another orally. They are also transmitted by what is described as “home-made, hand-made-down in words and music, songs accepted by the whole community, songs voted well by the generation of singers and passed on by words of mouth to succeeding generations. (p.1)

Kassim’s position illustrates the fact that folksongs are traditional, passed from one generation to another verbally, and typical of the community of its origin. Other scholars like Lasisi (2012), Ojukwu and Esimone (2014), Li (2016), Alvan-Ikoku (2017), maintain that folksong or music is traditional, cultural, indigenous, rural, communal, as well as a custodian of mores and cultural infrastructure of a non-literate society. The assertions of these scholars affirm that folksong remains an integral part of the community where it originates.

The community owns the verbal art, since its composition and performance are determined by the community. George (1996) reiterates the utilitarian nature of verbal art in Africa as it serves as a fountain and mode of teaching the cultural ethos and norms of the traditional society. Nnamani (2014) supports George’s (1996) position as he contends that “The Igbo folk music is a media through which idioms and proverbs are learnt. They are channels through which noble ideas and vices are acknowledged or condemned, encouraged or discouraged. Our folklores oftentimes warn, praise or entertain” (pp.306-307). Therefore, African oral literature as these scholars, George and Nnamani,

contend, teaches, chastises, eulogises, corrects, satirises and helps to checkmate vices in the traditional society.

### **Structural Functionalism**

Structural Functionalism, a theory that sees the society as a complex system of interconnected parts that work together to promote social cohesion and stability (Giddens, 1991; Merton, 1968) is used in this paper to argue on how the satiric elements in *Abigbo* promote social cohesion and stability among the Mbaise Igbo and the society at large. Radcliffe-Brown (1952 p.179) contends that the life of an organism is conceived as the functioning of its structure. It is through and by the continuity of the functioning that the continuity of the structure is preserved.”

Hence, social structures and institution from this perspective serve important functions of maintaining social order and cohesion in the society (Durkheim, 1893; Spencer, 1851). Structural functionalism argues that social structures and institutions shape and influence individual behaviour (Giddens, 1991). Therefore, the economic system of a society may influence an individual’s career choices and the way in which they allocate their time and resources (Merton, 1968). In that same vein, the educational system serves the function of transmitting knowledge and socialising individuals into certain values and norms (Giddens, 1991).

However, structural functionalism has been subject to criticism for its deterministic approach which may downplay the role of conflict and change in society (Giddens, 1991; Merton, 1968). Other critics argue that the functionalistic perspective tends to overemphasise that stability and consensus within a society and fails to adequately account for social conflict and change (Blau & Scott, 1962; Parson, 1951). Blau & Scot, (1962) further contend that the assumption of consensus and social cohesion may not always be present in reality especially in a society with high degree of diversity or conflict. In such situations, social structure and institutions may not always serve to promote stability and cohesion, but may instead

contribute to social conflict and change. Scholars like Bourdieu (1990) & Giddens, (1984) also argue that Structural Functionalism focus more the macro-level structures of the society and neglects its individual agency and the micro-level processes that shape social interactions. While the functionalist perspective provides a useful framework for understanding the overall stability and cohesion of the society, it may not always capture the complexity and diversity of individual experiences and interactions.

Despite these criticisms, the concept of structural functionalism remains a useful perspective for understanding how social structure and institutions contribute to the stability and cohesion of society (Durkheim, 1893; Giddens, 1991; Merton, 1968; Spencer, 1851) notwithstanding the fact that other factors, such as conflict and change may also shape and influence social dynamics and *Abigbo*, being one of the social structures that is associated with the Mbaise Igbo is interrogated through this lens to see how its songs which is satiric, contribute to the stability and cohesion of the Mbaise Igbo society and the Nigerian nation at large.

### **Abigbo and Mbaise People**

*Abigbo* is one of the folksongs found among the Mbaise Igbo of Nigeria. *Abigbo* is a traditional chorale ensemble indigenous to the Mbaise Igbo of Nigeria. *Abigbo* has become so popular that the villages, hamlets and semi-urban areas surrounding Mbaise now play and dance it. Onyeji 2002) identifies two meanings of the word *Abigbo*. It is either Abu- Igbo (Igbo song or hymn) or Abi-Igbo (wit or pun of Igbo). Both words when written together will yield the same word ‘*Abigbo*’ because in Igbo language, when two words to be merged together have vowels in between them, the last vowel in the first word must give way for the first vowel in the second word. For instance: ‘*Abu-Igbo*’ will be written as ‘*Abigbo*’ as the ‘u’ in ‘abu’ will be dropped.

The same goes for Abi-Igbo as ‘i’ in ‘abi’ will be dropped to have it written as ‘*Abigbo*’. Therefore, whether it is Abi-Igbo or Abu-Igbo, the compound word will still be ‘*Abigbo*’.

However, Bishop Ezeribe Onwukwe favours ‘Abuigbo’ as the real name of the ensemble (personal communication, January 1, 2019). He further names his ensemble as ‘Abuigbo Mbaise wu Otu’ (Igbo hymn of Mbaise is one) instead of ‘Abigbo’ Mbaise wu Otu to justify his claims. *Abigbo* dance, according to Onyeji (2002), is a derivation from *Nkwa Otile* (music for the buttocks) and *Nkwa Ogbo* (a dance essentially for fun and jokes) which he argues has become extinct. *Nkwa Otile*, he argues, is a male form of dance which was performed in the night.

The male performers dance naked knowing that they were in the presence of God and ancestors. However, *Nkwa Otile* metamorphosed to *Nkwa Ogbo* as a need arose to present the dance to the public. *Nkwa Ogbo* still remains a dance for men only. *Nkwa Ogbo* was in vogue from 1910 to 1930 until a leader of *Nkwa Ogbo*, Mr Samson Onwukwuikpe, whom Onyeji (2002) through his informant Mr. Daniel O.C. Onwuka of Umuebenogu, of in the present Amuzu Nwe-Ahia Nkwo autonomous community, Amuzu, Aboh Mbaise, which Onyeji (2002) asserts to be in Ezinihitte Mbaise, informed his group that he was inspired in his dream to adapt *Nkwa Ogbo* to *Abigbo* around 1930. *Abigbo* from Amuzu spread to other parts of Mbaise and its environments.

However, Okoro (2021) through his informant Mr Emmanuel Nwadonye Njoku claims that *Abigbo* originates from Ngwa Igbo of Nigeria instead of the Mbaise Igbo people of Nigeria. Okoro and Okubor (2021) also argue that *Abigbo* is associated with Mbaise Igbo of Nigeria not the Ngwa Igbo where he previously claimed that *Abigbo* originates from. Interrogating the two articles, Okoro (2021) and Okoro and Okubor (2021), it is noted that the previous literature on the origin of *Abigbo* are not reviewed before validating the claim of his informant. However, the non-review of the previous literature on the origin of *Abigbo* does not negate the fact that the Itu people of Ezinihitte Mbaise learnt *Abigbo* from their neighbours across the river after all *Abigbo* from Onyeji’s perspective has been in Mbaise since 1930 when it is transformed from *Nkwa Ogbo* to

today’s *Abigbo* and the Itu people of Mbaise learnt it in 1932 from the Ngwa. Moreover, Mbaise and Ngwa are neighbours only separated by the Imo River. Therefore, there could be cultural diffusion from one group to the other. However Onyeji (2002, 2004), Okoro (2020, 2021) and Okoro and Okubor (2021) agree that *Abigbo* is associated with the Mbaise Igbo not the Ngwa Igbo of Nigeria. Moreover, the onomatopoeic ‘Aah ee!’ which ends most of *Abigbo* songs are emblematic and a mark that *Abigbo* is indigenous to Mbaise.

In most of the meetings that bring together Mbaise sons and daughters, one of the effective ways to draw the attention of the audience is to say ‘Mbaise Aah’, and the audience will answer ‘Ee!’ *Abigbo* also uses this popular method to make significant the message they have to their audience. Mbaise as an ethnographic group is a child of circumstance created by the colonialists. Named by Joseph Iwunna, Dennis Abii, Pius Nwoga and other pioneer political leaders of five clans making up the community, (Mbakwe 2017,p. 2) in a meeting of chiefs of the area presided over by the then District Officer, Mr. L. E. Chadwick, to ease up the administrative bottleneck. According to Nwala, “The coming of all the kinship groups under a common political umbrella and administrative unit was secured in 1941” (p.18), thereafter the name Mbaise (five clans) was born.

Therefore, there is neither common myth nor migration pattern that discusses the origin of Mbaise people. Mbakwe (2017) affirms that Mbaise “is situated within latitude 5-6 degrees north of the equator and longitude 7-8 degrees east of the Greenwich Mean Time (GMT).” (p.2) The political units that make up the five clans of Mbaise are Oke-Ovoro, Ekwereazu, Ahiara, Ezinihitte and Agbaja. These five clans today are found within three Local Government Areas in Imo State which includes: Aboh Mbaise (Oke-Ovoro and Agbaja clans), Ahiazu Mbaise (Ahiara and Ekwereazu clans), while Ezinihitte clan is a lone Local Government Area. Today, Mbaise has formed a kinship that one may not know that they were once different clans that were brought together due to colonial

political exigencies. *Abigbo* chorale ensemble and *Iriji Mbaise* (Mbaise New Yam Festival) are among many cultural affinities that unite the Mbaise people and present them as one ethnic group in the present time.

***Satire and Abigbo Text***

Satire has been with human since time immemorial. Satirists, as those who engage in satire are called, have been ridiculing human foibles in order to push for a change. Therefore, satire is as old as human folly and foible. Satirical text mixes humour with wit in order to improve human institutions. Emphasising on the importance of satire to the society, Ngugi(1972) notes that:

Satire takes for its province a whole society, and for its purpose, criticism. The satirist sets himself certain standards and criticizes society when and where it departs from these norms. He invites us to assume his standards and share the moral indignation which moves him to pour derision and ridicule on society's failings. He corrects through painful, sometimes malicious, laughter. (p.55)

Ngugi's observation reinvents the importance of satire to society as it censures societal misdemeanour through criticism. As the societal conscience, the satirist checkmates the identified departures from its norms and values through laughter and derision. It also corrects and restates the value chains of the peoples' institutions using the media of wit and derision. Satire oftentimes makes use of wit as one of its keys in the enhancement of change. Commenting on the use of wit Elliot (1954) observes:

Once wit has been brought into the service of the satiric impulse, then all the stock devices by which the literary satirist achieves his end become available: irony, burlesque, innuendo, the beast fable, the imaginary voyage, allegory – all the devices of indirection which make the study of satire so fascinating and so confusing. (p.245)

*Abigbo*, being satirical in its nature, makes good use of wit. The clever structural pattern of the song always amuses its audience thus reaffirming Onyeji's observation that the meaning of the chorale ensemble may have been Igbo-wit (Abi-Igbo). Sometimes, *Abigbo* may end their song with *onye anyi kawa amarala* (the person we are critiquing knows) or *odighi onye anyi kporo aha na-egwu anyi ee ah ee* (did we mention any person's name in our song ah ee!). These are structural indirections infused with wit to amuse in order to push for a change in the society. Sometimes as some of the text in this paper portrays, *Abigbo* directly names the institution, events or persons to be satirised.

Scholars like Onyeji (2002) affirm *Abigbo's* satiric and poetic nature, especially in the use of invectives, satire, lampoons, to either eulogise or ridicule the events in the society. *Abigbo's* audience oftentimes attend their meetings or engagements to hear new songs composed based on either the contemporary or past events in the society. There is no limitation to what *Abigbo* can use to compose their songs.

Sometimes, the chorale ensemble, *Abigbo*, serves as a mouthpiece of the society in revealing the ills in the society through their songs and no one, even if it is the culprit in the composition, will bear any offense. Rather, the person will change his ways for the betterment of the society. *Abigbo* song text often starts with any of these intro: *onwere okwu di nkpa anyi na-ekwu* (There is an important discourse we are to deliberate on) or *Onwediri ajuju di nkpa anyi na-aju?* (There is an important question we have to ask?) by the lead vocalist. This rhetorical mode of enquiry arouses the expectation of the audience to know how important the song text is.

The lead vocalist will then introduce the song and the other *Abigbo* members will sing it. *Abigbo*, being a folksong, serves in this nature as "a means of social control among the citizens and a way of stamping out communal vices" (Nnamani 2014 p. 307). Pasita Amuma ashi ya na ndi okada onye ka nma? (The False prophet

and *Okada* riders who is better?) by *Abigbo* Chokoneze Mbaise illustrates an attempt by

*Abigbo* song text in stamping out perceived vices in society.

*Song I:*

**Pasita Amuma ashi ya na ndi okada onye ka nma? False prophet and *Okada* riders who is better?**

Onwerediri kweshion anyi na-aju  
 Pasita amuma ashi ya na ndi okada  
 onye ka nma?  
 Anyi amarana ufodu ndi okada zuwe ohi  
 Ufodu ndi okada kwowa ndi ohi  
 Ihuna Pasita amuma ashi, Pasita amuma  
 ashi  
 Ovutere anyi ala adighi nma  
 Ekpere midinaiti akariala  
 Okacha njo nime ulo nwanyi wu ishi ikpe  
 Nime ulo nwanyi wu ishi ikpe  
 Ulo nwanyi wu ishi ikpe  
 Ndi nwere agbohobia toro eto  
 Ebe midinait ha agbara abia  
 Ha enyiri kootu gowu ugo  
 Che sa ndi nwe ala ahughi ha  
 Anyi gwawa gomenti chiwa anyi  
 Biko tinyere iwu ekpere midinaiti gala  
 Kwushi  
 Ma owughi otu ahu ne ezhi okwu  
 Egbe kwuoloni n'uchichi  
 Onye atala anyi oo aa ee!

There is a question we are asking  
 False prophet and *Okada riders* who is better?

We knew that certain *Okada* riders are thieves  
 Some aid and abet thieves  
 But the false prophets, the false prophets

Has brought an abomination to our land  
 Midnight prayers are much prevalent  
 Especially in the house of a widow  
 In the house of a widow  
 The house of a widow  
 Those that have mature ladies  
 In the midnight the false prophets will come  
 Wearing black coat  
 Thinking that the community did not see them  
 We are announcing to the government  
 To make a law limiting the frequency of midnight  
 prayers  
 If the government fails to do so  
 And the sound of gun is heard in the night  
 Nobody should blame us! Ah eee!

The text, “Pasita Amuma ashi ya na ndi okada onye ka nma?” (False prophet and *Okada* riders who is better?), starts with the groups of people in the community one with the penchant for misdemeanour, the other, expected to lead a virtuous life in the society. Pastors and prophets from the cultural point of view are priests who are supposed to be the messengers of God. They are to bring good tidings and lead through their good conducts and moral uprightness.

evil. It is because of this exalted nature of the priest of which the modern day pastors represent that necessitates this song in order to ridicule and debase their status to the level of *Okada* Riders. This act of comparison is to create and situate the imagery of the perceived vice in the mind of the audience and how the target immoral act to be satirised should be condemned and thus uprooted from the society.

As a priest, the pastor from the cultural point of view stands in between the society and God. The Igbo priests “are the keepers of the welfare of the people and are entrusted with the sacred rituals” (Onu & Ideh 2018, p.55). As the keepers of the societal welfare and sacred rituals, they are expected to uphold the sanctity of the norms and ethos of the society, stand upright and abhor

The text affirms that the priestly pastor has veered off from his supposed roles in the society and now engages in antisocial misdemeanour which creates disharmony in the society. The veering off from the standard roles of the priestly vocation leads *Abigbo* to its functional role as a satirical agent in order to stamp out the vice from the *Pasita Amuma ashi*. According to Oraegbulem (2010), “The Igbo recognize two

main classes of offences: those that are “*nso*” and those that are not. Green (1904) refers to the former as taboos and to the latter as natural offences” (p.63). The offences in the first group, according to him, are *aru* (abomination). These include acts that violate divine laws which range from murder, incest to theft of valuable property such as yams. Yam is the king of all crops among the Igbo. It was seen as a measure of wealth during the precolonial era. The more yams one has, the wealthier he was seen.

Chinua Achebe in *Things Fall Apart* and *Arrow of God* reveals the prominence of yam among the Umuofia and Umuaro people. Even today, many Igbo nations still celebrate *Iri-ji* (New Yam) festivals so as to mark the beginning of harvest. These characteristics make the theft of yam to be considered abomination among the Igbo of Nigeria. Oraegbulem (2010) also identifies the second group of offences as natural crimes, including stealing, failure to join community projects and disobedience.

Okada riders are criticised for being thieves, or aiding and abetting theft or robbery. The crimes of Okada riders are not seen by *Abigbo* as more abominable than that of clerics, rather it categorically states that it is the false prophets who have ‘brought abomination to our land.’ It is abomination because it violates the divine laws not necessarily natural crimes as Oraegbulem (2010) opines. Therefore, the *Abigbo* ensemble’s text agrees with the Igbo concept of offences as Oraegbulem (2010, p.16) argues.

Thus, false prophet commits abominable acts by using religion (midnight prayers) as a camouflage to engage in illicit affairs with the widow and her female children. This is viewed as more heinous crime in society than stealing or abetting crimes that Okada riders engage in. This view makes the act of the false prophets more prominent in the text and therefore should be stamped out from the community. Since the abominable act of these false prophets is subsumed in the frequency of midnight prayers, *Abigbo* therefore demands that a law be made by the government to prohibit or lessen the frequency of midnight prayers.

However, the text concludes by warning that if the government fails to make such a law, the community may be forced to eradicate the alleged abomination in their own way which is captured metaphorically in these lines “And the sound of gun is heard in the night / Nobody should blame us!” “The sound of gun” here implies that the community may mount and empower sentries to surreptitiously eliminate those who pollute the land and thus bring abomination unto it. The text in Song I satirises immorality and hypocrisy in Christianity as a source of abomination in Igbo land.

Another *Abigbo* group, Abuigbo Mbaise Wu Otu ensemble, in ‘Change Chain’, led by Bishop Ezeribe Onwukwe, also satirises the hypocritical nature of some Christians in one of their songs entitled *Ozioma Ipa Baibul Ewuchewe* (*Proselytising with the Bible is getting outdated*).

*Song II*

<b>Ozioma Ipa Baibul Ewuchewe</b>	<b>Proselytising with the Bible is getting outdated</b>
Ozioma iji-ivuli ipa Baiibul akpaghari	Evangelism with the Bible
Ndi Abigbo choro igwa gi si ozioma ipa Baibul ewuchewe	<i>Abigbo</i> wants to tell you that it is no longer in vogue
Ozioma ka nma na-ibi ndu mara nma	The best evangelism is living a good life
Karia ipa Bibul aga nso nso mana odighi ezi ndu no gi nime	Instead of walking holy, holy with the Bible but have no good character
Onye gba-aka Baibul kwuwe eziokwu	One with no Bible but says the truth
Aya ka gi nma karia onye pa Baibul agha ugha Ye ah ee!	Is better than one with the Bible that lies Ye ah ee!

*Abigbo* in Song II attempts to purge the prevalent hypocritical nature of some Christians, especially those living contrary to the Biblical tenets. In an attempt to do so, it questions and satirises the biblical evangelistic method. The text depicts Bible evangelism as being out-dated. The out-dated nature of the biblical evangelical method stems from the fact that some Christians do not practise what they preach. These Christians live contrary to what the bible advocates but hypocritically preach it. The text concludes, therefore, that the best form of Christian evangelism is living ‘a good life / [i]nstead of walking holy holy with the Bible.’ The text pontificates that ‘One with no Bible but says the truth / Is better than one with the Bible that lies.’ ‘One with no Bible’ from the text is a euphemistic way of referring to a traditionalist. In other words, the truthful traditionalist who lives in accordance to the traditional tenets, the

text argues, is better than a Christian who preaches the gospel of Christ, but acts contrarily. The text, therefore, advocates a change in the lives of Christian hypocrites.

*Abigbo* in satirising the societal ill also expresses “opinions on important contemporary issues” (Nnamani 2014 ,p.308). This attempt to express opinion on contemporary issues by *Abigbo* is observed in *Ilulu Rochas Okorocho*, (*Rochas Okorocho’s Proverb*) in Mbaise Wu Mba Mara Mma by Abuigbo Mbaise Wu Otu ensemble led by Bishop Ezeribe Onwukwe. The song tries to situate and explain the meaning of the parable told by Governor Okorocho about Mbaise. The parable is centred on the tortoise and his in-law. In their song, they identify the parable as proverb thus *Ilulu Rochas Okorocho*



*Song III:*

**Ilu Rochas Okorochoa**

His Excellency Owelle Rochas Okorochoa

Ilu ituru anyi gbasara tortoise  
 wu eziokwu  
 Ilulu gbara uzo labu na ikowa ya  
 Ndi Mbaise anyi amarala uzo osi  
 mekutala anyi  
 Ndi Mbaise anyi amarala uzo osi  
 mekutala anyi  
 Owelle, onwekwere otu uzo oji  
 mekuta gi  
 Onye huru eziokwu kwuwe ooo  
 (Onye huru eziokwu kwuo atula ujo)  
  
 Onye huru eziokwu kwuwe ooo  
 Na ochichi Imo State di gi na-aka  
 Ndi Mbaise yiri tortoise ekere obu  
 Ndi Mbaise yiri tortoise ekere obu  
 Rochas Okorochoa eyiekweni ogo  
 yakere ya obu  
 Anyi riowa si totue na anyi hm hm  
 hm hm  
 Maka ndi lewe anya gani ikwu  
 Okwuoo ah ee!

**Rochas Okorochoa's Proverb**

His Excellency Owelle Rochas Okorochoa

There is truth in the proverb said to us about the tortoise  
  
 The proverb has a twofold meaning  
 Mbaise knows where it touches them  
  
 Mbaise knows where it touches them  
  
 Owelle, it also affects you in one hand  
  
 One who sees the truth should say it  
 (one who sees the truth should say it without fear nor  
 favour)  
 One who sees the truth should say it  
 The government of Imo State is in your hand  
 Mbaise is like the tortoise tied to a stake  
 Mbaise is like the tortoise tied to a stake  
 Rochas Okorochoa is like the in-law  
 that tied the tortoise  
 We are pleading with you to untie us hm hm hm hm  
  
 Because the critic will always do his critiquing ah ee!

As has been noted above, *Abigbo* ensemble does not discriminate when it comes to the composition of their song. They can use anything that touches the organisational structure of the society to compose their song. *Ilu Rochas Okorochoa* illustrates such a position. *Abigbo* in that text comments on the contemporary parable said by the governor in Mbaise where he used the tortoise as a metaphor. The tortoise, according to the governor, was given a bride freely but the tortoise went to his in-law and stole.

The tortoise's in-law, caught him and tied him to a stake along the market road. Some of the town's people saw the tortoise in the morning when they were going to the market and lambasted him. Towards evening, the tortoise pleaded with his in-law to untie him because he feared what would be said to him (his in-law) when those who went to market were returning

would not be the same. The in-law refused and when the townspeople came back, they changed the narrative and started to abuse the tortoise's in-law. The text acknowledges that the proverb has a twofold meaning: one, for Mbaise, and the other for the governor. *Abigbo*, which sees itself as the bearer and embodiment of truth, affirms that "one who sees the truth should say it without fear or favour", that such a fellow should not go ahead to allege that "Mbaise is like the tortoise tied to a stake", while the governor is the "the in-law that tied the tortoise." The text pleads with the governor to untie them "Because the critic will always critique him." The critic here becomes *Abigbo* critiquing the sayings and the governance of the Imo State government led by Owelle Rochas Okorochoa.

*Abigbo* also satirises any misnomer which goes against the cultural norms of Mbaise. Song IV satirises 'hall-dance' which was prevalent in the

70's and early 80's in Mbaise among the college students.

*Song IV*

**Umu Koleji Alohuole**

Onye muru nwa jimara nwa ya  
 Onye muru nwa jimara nwa ya  
 Umu koleji alo huole  
 (Egbe na-evu okuko na-ahia nkwo)  
 Egbe na-evu nwanyi alohuole  
 Ha hu nwa agbohobia maranma  
 Ha akwohariwa gawa holu je-igba egwu  
 ejewelehi holu je-igba egwu  
 Kpaya aka n'ukwu kpa ya n' ara  
 Onye gara holu ga di ime  
 Odina turu ime odina muo ya o  
 Agboho turu ime etekweleye-ete ee!  
 Ah ee

**The College Students Are Home**

One who procreates should take care one's offspring  
 One who procreates should take care one's offspring  
 College students are home  
 (The kite that feeds on chicken on *Nkwo* market)  
 The kite that feeds ladies are home  
 If they see a beautiful lady  
 They will take her to hall-dance  
 At hall where they've gone to dance  
 Touch her at the waist and breast  
 One that goes to hall is pregnant  
 Being pregnant is easier than giving birth  
 One who is pregnant shouldn't abort it  
 Ah ee!

*Abigbo*, being the conscience of Mbaise, sees the college students' act as evil, contrary to the norms and ethos of Mbaise culture. This misnomer, therefore, is censored. *Abigbo* in this text starts with a caveat to parents to take adequate care of their children, because 'college students' who are metaphorically referred to as 'kites that feed on chicken on Nkwo market' are at home. The imagery of a prey and a predator is encapsulated in the kite metaphor. College students refer to male students, who surreptitiously target female students (chickens), swerve and carry them off for consumption.

This human 'kites' move around the town, targeting 'beautiful' ladies whom they take to dance halls for *sexcapades*. At the hall, the human kite will 'touch' the captured lady 'at the waist and breast'; the 'beautiful lady' becomes pregnant. *Abigbo* avers from the text that 'being pregnant is easier than giving birth', but cautions both the 'kite' and the 'chicken' that 'one who is pregnant shouldn't abort it'. The message is accompanied by the onomatopoeic imprint of 'ah ee!' Song IV satirises the act of college students with the metaphor of a kite and a chicken.

The parents are also cautioned to be very vigilant and wary of the human kite that feeds on

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the chicken. *Abigbo* does not only raise an alarm about this misnomer but also proffers solutions by advising parents to be wary of the 'kite.'

**Conclusion**

The satirical functionality of *Abigbo* is embedded in the folklore of the Mbaise Igbo of Nigeria. *Abigbo* songs are deployed to satirise the perceived follies and foibles in the society. *Abigbo* uses wits, figures of speech and other poetic devices to satirise any abnormality that creates disharmony in the society. *Abigbo* through its songs promotes social cohesion and stability in the society.

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