

Contemporaneity, Aesthetics and Pedagogic Content of Proverbial Lore Among the Bakor of Northern Cross River State, Nigeria: A Case Study of Ekajuk Proverbs

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Abstract

Despite the volume and diversity of scholarship on proverbial lore, no single uniform definition of proverbs has been reached as acceptable in all disciplines and cultures (Madumulla 1998: 258), which portray the extent of malleability to which proverbs are prone in terms of contextual relevance and variability. It also shows that, as society progresses, the changes in structure and function of societal segments determine proverb metamorphosis as these changes get reflected in proverbs since the creative impulse of artists reworks the proverbs to reflect contemporary culture and landscape of the society where the proverb is created and realized. Proverbs are thus sustained by contemporary contextual experiences which debunk earlier or past suppositions concerning the obsolescence of oral compositions. Each society, therefore, boasts of proverbs that reflect the level and extent of development to which that society has been prone as reflected in proverbs and other oral narratives. Proverbs are therefore generally accepted as veritable tools for knowledge impartation and mnemonic purposes for the improvement of reasoning abilities. They have also been described as metaphors to guide moral choices and self-examination, while serving as pedagogic devices that provide experiential case material on which reflection is based (Ngalim 2014: p.58). From this perspective we have focused on Bakor proverbs with the aim of realizing their distinctiveness as products of a particular cultural milieu. It is discovered that the proverbs are products of and reflect contemporary experience aesthetically realized within contextual situations that serve pedagogical purposes in Bakor society. Each proverb therefore has a context of use that enhances clarification of experience and vivification of concrete behavior in society.

Keywords

Proverbs, Pedagogy, Aesthetics, Contemporary Experience, Contextual Imperative, Bakor, Orality and Identity

1. Introduction

In the bid to make oral literature studies more meaningful and rewarding it is often necessary for the researcher to have back-ground knowledge and insight into the African experience and cultural life particularly the communal and holistic nature of African life and the predominance of Orality as a communicative mode. For this reason ethnographic knowledge of communities under study is emphasized as a condition for realistic and gainful investigation. This is even more pertinent when working on proverbial lore because the proverb is, to my mind, more open to the creation of social

meaning through spatial and contextual manipulation by individual artists than any other genre of oral art.

However, this susceptibility to change that proverbs are prone to can be regarded as a kind of recreation during performances seen as intrinsic to oral literature. The attempt therefore at an examination of the aesthetic and pedagogic content of proverbial lore among the Bakor amounts to talking about the functions of literature generally which include those of entertainment and then education which presupposes in-depth knowledge of the ethno aesthetic and ethno-historical background of the Bakor to enhance a meaningful exercise. The authors of this write-up, as Bakor sons, brought up within Bakor tradition and culture and being teachers/lecturers, have

been additionally exposed to the Bakor cultural landscape during fieldwork and so are presumed to possess enough background knowledge necessary for this study on the aesthetic and pedagogic content of Bakor proverbs.

The study, however, raises the question of focus as the proposed examination centers on an exploration of the contemporaneity rather than obsolescence of proverbial lore in traditional societies where proverbs are supposedly generated or suspected, albeit erroneously, to be domiciled. Proverbs, as traditional narratives, involve such concepts as traditional ethics, cultural identity and even National pride and other such functional concerns while conversely modern literary forms tend to emphasize the form and style or other formal elements of the literary product like plot, characterization, point of view etcetera which perhaps explains why early studies on the oral narrative misplaced focus on content rather than contextual analysis of oral constructs.

This past view of oral material has naturally constrained it to the past as fossils created by past generations and bearing ancient truths about human existence. However, more meaningful views and sustained analysis of literary products of any nation reveal that most, if not all, of modern literature derives from or is a direct product of oral literature or the outcome of a pre-literate culture that depended largely on oral or verbal communication for the articulation or portrayal of their cultural artifacts particularly non material culture. (see Lindfors 1973). The gamut of oral tradition is therefore worldwide and has greatly impacted on modern society and as such cannot be regarded as primitive as has been the case in the past. Furthermore, the skill at linguistic manipulation displayed by oral artists and evident in these traditional literary constructs particularly in proverbial lore bears testimony to the beauty and richness of culture at the traditional context while the versatility and artistic skills displayed during performances of the literature within their contextual environment of production reveals not just the beauty but also the functional value of the narratives.

Analyzing oral literature, in particular proverbs, from the perspective of aesthetic and cultural or ethical content therefore raises the pertinent question; can oral literature still be said to have been composed in the past, remain as a reflection of past values and/or cultural ethics and still be relevant to modern society? Put differently, why does the contemporary world still indulge in the creation or telling of oral narratives? The argument is simply that no society remains the same from one generation to another. Sociologists and anthropologists have severally posited that society is dynamic and so also is the culture that reflects that society. If therefore, society and values change in time and space, the oral narratives that form part and parcel of that dynamic culture that reflects those values cannot remain the same or in the past. It stands to reason that oral literature is contemporary and dynamic and cannot or should not be constrained to the past. Attesting to the invaluable place and function of narratives to every culture, Franz Boas (1935) argues that:

After all what people choose to talk about is often

important for an understanding of them and the narratives they choose to transmit from generation to generation and to listen to over and over again can hardly be considered unimportant in a fully rounded study of their culture.

If this were so we can then go further to ask the question, can today's generations of humanity depend solely on past narratives to articulate modern changes and reflect today's technological advances or do they create their own culture and narratives. Bronislaw Malinowski (1944: P.150) therefore categorizes culture to include among other things... a number of aspects such as education, social control, economics, systems of knowledge, belief and morality and also modes of creative and artistic expressions...all of which cover every aspect of human endeavor. Proverb rendition can thus be isolated as a cultural aspect under education and social control. Very pertinent and relevant to the view of oral literature as a contemporary artistic endeavor and pedagogic mode is Dr. Okoi Arikpo's (1957) assertion that:

It is well known that societies which do not have a written literature preserve their traditions and cultural heritage in the form of myths and folklore and the oral histories which are handed down from generations to generations in the form of legends and epics...a careful study and sifting of these legends and folklore may provide very valuable evidence about the people's past...{as} these stories depict the ideals and aspirations of the people, the qualities which the society or community values as most noble or frowned upon as base according to circumstances.

These observations record the invaluable position of oral literature to every human society particularly ours, the Bakor society that relies predominantly on Orality for communication and the impartation of knowledge systems. It is precisely for this reason that we have chosen to analyze the aesthetics of proverbial lore among the Bakor with the aim of finding out the extent to which they can and do serve pedagogic purposes for the education of younger generations in today's globalized context. Since proverbs, like most other oral narratives were erroneously categorized as fossils or creations of past generations, we have tried to argue that they can and do arise out of contemporary exigency and therefore, bear contextual relevance to modern society.

In making these assertions, we are continually aware of the very strong arguments that are usually put forward by exponents of literate traditions pertaining to the claims of supremacy of literacy over Orality and the consequent possible obliteration of oral cultures and their literatures, going by the Darwinian theory of the survival of the fittest. This argument is, however, highly untenable given recent trends in communication studies and the advocacy by communication scholars for consistent studies that aim at recognition of so called marginalized languages and cultures and which studies have yielded fruits in such works as Walter Ong's (1982) *Orality and Literacy: The Technologizing of the Word*. Other writers in this tradition who recognize the worth of oral traditions include, among others, Jerome Rothenberg

(1985, 1993), Kenneth Sherwood (2005) Anthony Webster and Paul Kroskrity (2013), Richard Bauman and Charles Briggs (1990), Dell Hymes (1996) etcetera, all of whose works see Orality and oral culture as deserving of attention and possibly assuming a more prominent place in today's global literary and communication technology. (See also Jan Blommaert: 2006). Oral communities therefore stand tall today as their cultures assume prominence in anthropological, socio-linguistic and ethno-linguistic scholarship. However, much work still remains to be done to bring the usefulness of oral literatures into proper focus as identity markers in today's world of cross cultural conflicts. Oral literature generally and particularly proverbs can, as such, be seen as a reflection of time-tested cultural facts about human nature and experiences which are applicable but not exclusive to the past and even more so to contemporary experience.

2. Methodology

Research on proverbial lore is rather wide and varied which is why we do not claim herein to have achieved a wider coverage of the diversity of opinion expressed in scholarship on proverbial lore. Neither have we attempted any form of categorization of proverbs which is a very difficult and cumbersome exercise that led M. Kuusi (1972), to disagree with Grigory Permyakov who claimed to have arrived at an International type system of proverbs. Kuusi argued that because of the diversity and complexity of proverb lore in different societies, "specialists in proverbs lack a common International reference code by means of which they could be able to communicate with precision." Our study is therefore only limited to an attempt at the exposure of the contemporaneity of proverbial lore particularly in societies where proverbs aid the enhancement of pedagogic models in such communities. We have also limited our study to a particular society; the Bakor people in Cross River State, Nigeria. For the purpose of the study, we have also extended the term "Bakor group" to include all the Ejagham speaking communities in Ogoja, Ikom, and Etung Local Government Areas of Cross River State in Nigeria. The reason for this extension derives from the fact that apart from geographical contiguity, these communities operate within a relatively contiguous linguistic affinity albeit with dialectical differences. It is also hoped that this kind of study on the Bakor specifically and the Larger Ejagham ethnic Nationality will help to close the linguistic gap between the several Ejagham speaking dialects, aid the authentication of Bakor and Ejagham culture and literature and affirm the current sustained quest for identity and empowerment of the Ejagham Nation in the Nigerian Polity and world global power play politics.

3. The Relevance of Proverbial Lore to Pedagogy

In carrying out a study of this nature, we have had to keep at

the back of our minds the fact that Bakor proverbs and the aesthetic concept thereof are obscure literary entities as Bakor oral literature itself still remains unknown to the larger world of modern literary scholars. Until recently only marginal recognition had been accorded this artistic endeavor of the Bakor people by early anthropologists among who were Charles Patridge, Percy Amaury Talbot and Rosemary Harris who worked in the Upper Cross River region of Nigeria. But these narratives embody or are products emanating from the cultural, social and political or economic lives and situations of the Bakor people. Proverbial lore, therefore, plays the vital role of maintaining the collective wisdom, cosmic viewpoint, cultural identity, traditional norms and moral values of the Bakor ethnic entity and the Ejagham nation of which the Bakor are a sub-group. One here views proverbial lore as the most apparent mode or process of social transformation which articulates the creative needs and aptitudes of new generations as the entire society undergoes social and ethnical rejuvenation. These changes accord the proverb the most malleable attribute as it is created in-situ to reflect and enhance the explanation of contextual and contemporary experiences in a given space and time. Just like the Bakor folktale hero-protagonist who metamorphizes as an embodiment of the totality of Bakor cultural values, (Ganyi 2012), the Bakor proverb is a composite of the wisdom of the people encapsulated within a terse statement that reflects and represents the respect and dignity accorded it as a pedagogic mode which also attempts to establish a cultural identity for the people. We must, therefore, note that the relevance of proverbs as oral literature derives from the proverb's ability to give credence and coherent shape to the meaning of societal experience encapsulated within its contextual use. We must as well, not interpret a proverb out of context or its artistic role and relevance will be lost and its efficacy doused. However, when proverbs are interpreted correctly within their context of production and realization, and the contextual meaning succinctly grasped, the proverb reflects and exudes not just the past culture but also contemporary societal needs and outlook. In today's constantly changing world therefore the Bakor proverb becomes even more relevant as the older generations continually rely on it as a major means of impartation of Bakor knowledge systems and values to their younger ones.

J. S. Madumulla argues that the proverb "has an outer and inner face. The outer face can sometimes be elusive to the reader or hearer owing to its supposedly simple linguistic garb." He further asserts that "in the process of using a proverb, the user has the feeling of being in the sanctuary of the collective voice of the past as it is reflected in the present." If contemporary exigency does not warrant the proverb, it loses its efficacy and becomes obsolete which is why he again reiterates that:

There comes a moment in the development of a society where the genres and trends [in oral literature] either undergo a tremendous change or stop being routinely required in everyday use and hence retreat into clichés. This denotes that those which have changed into clichés,

their moment of activeness in social use has become very limited... they are used as tired horses of speech.

But this is not the case with Bakor proverbs or Proverbs generally in African Society where there are still very vibrant in Traditional Society that depends on Nature and societal experiences for the education of their younger generations. Here proverbs are extant and vibrant as pedagogical tools. Madumulla finally observes that:

Although the proverb in Tanzania has generally been regarded as the domain for adults, this is no longer the case now. There have been rapid social changes which have affected the Traditional Social Structure thus opening up new avenues and horizons for the genre.

The proverb therefore serves as a code for moral and ethical judgment for individuals within the society; it becomes the referential statute for adjudication and is particularly attractive for its aesthetic and indirect potential.

The value of the proverbs also becomes apparent in the poetic and aesthetic power of the proverb when appropriately rendered to explicate a given situation or experience. Artistry, aesthetics and functionalism thus go hand in hand in proverb rendition in the enhancement of Pedagogy. The particular way in which a proverb or a piece of oral art satisfies contemporary expectations portrays its ethno-historical and ethno-aesthetic relevance which relevance also depends on the poetic or artistic attribute of the proverb realized in its creation and applicability to societal experience. The proverb thus becomes a handy tool for pedagogy in traditional society particularly as its terseness speaks volumes and its application graphically describes situations and explicates experience for younger generations. Elders, who are accomplished orators, therefore, employ proverbs to teach their children or even the entire community as education in traditional Bakor ethics and culture is a communal affair and is never left to specific family members. The performer or proverb artist establishes a rapport between himself and his audience as long as he derives his proverbs from within the ambience of his immediate community which is known to his audience and which establishes a socio-cultural and ethno-historical relationship between him and his audience.

The aptness of the proverb as a pedagogic tool also derives from the fact that long speeches are sometimes boring and easily lead to loss of attention and comprehension. The proverb reduces an otherwise long speech to its barest minimum but expands thematic association almost indefinitely in the sense that very many similar situations or experiences can be linked to a particular proverb within a particular cultural context. The Ekajuk and Bakor proverb “Ebi erunghu kpo nonghor ngo ebunghu mfonor” literary means, “a bad or rotten water yam remains in the owner’s yam barn”. Its pedagogic potential lies in the fact that it can be contextualized and applied in several diverse situations. Its internal or embedded meaning is that every bad person or object remains for the owner but a good person or object is of interest to everyone. The proverb comes handy for child

education since everyone wishes to impress good behavior on his offspring. In Bakor society where communalism is the vogue and is a cherished norm, remaining in one’s kindred family is a sign of failure and lack of actualization. No one individual or family desires that kind of person. In another parlance, the same proverb can be used mildly to warn people against stealing or removing anything that does not belong to one even when it is perceived to be useless to the owner. The context of use therefore determines the value of the proverb.

Furthermore, in proverb rendition, the proverb artist usually goes beyond the immediate setting or occurrence to reflect on experience then creates a proverbial expression that vivifies the immediate context or situation and satisfies his audience’s aspirations, visions and expectations. Proverbs therefore succinctly validate experiences i.e. historical, political or social experiences of a people. In this parlance, proverbs assist the reflection and validation of the truths that make up the totality of a people’s cosmic beliefs and knowledge systems. Through them, a people impart knowledge to their younger generations while impacting positively on societal regeneration and continuity of traditions. Generally therefore, Bakor proverb thrust is on moral and ethical rejuvenation particularly evidenced in what I have described elsewhere as “obscene proverbs” in Ekajuk (see Ganyi: 2012a)

4. The Contextual Imperative of Performance in Bakor Proverbial Lore

For a proper understanding of the import of oral literature, it is pertinent to first understand the place of performance which underlies the impact of the oral narrative and from which the meaning of the narrative in a particular culture can be derived. Without the performance context the narrative is banal and its meaning and relevance can completely be missed by a researcher. We, therefore, emphasize here that the efficacy of proverbs, like other creative oral forms derives from their context of performance. It is no longer a hidden fact that the concept of oral literature generated a lot of controversy among scholars primarily because most of them failed to appreciate the place of performance in the perception of oral literature. Scholars in sociology, folklore, anthropology, psychology and even history were all involved in the debate which as at now is unnecessary as most people have come to realize the interdisciplinary nature of oral literature. The debate, however, centered on the literariness or otherwise of oral literature which is a function of the performance context. It is now obvious that there is no way an oral narrative can be effectively analyzed for its functional benefit without the performance context for without it the narrative does not exist. For these arguments see Finnegan: 1970; Okpewho: 1979, 1992; Lord: 1960, 1995; Hymes: 1972 and Bauman: 1984 and 1990. Performance becomes the central concept in oral literature studies and also in the concept of proverbial lore. Studies in performance have, therefore, highlighted what has been described as the contextual imperative of performance as

vital and indispensable to an understanding of oral literature. We have no intention here however to get to the nutty gritty of the concept of performance but it is necessary to note the centrality of the contextual imperative without which oral literature is a lifeless exercise. Speaking of the contextual imperative in oral literature analysis Bronislaw Malinowski (1926) observes that:

The text is extremely important but without the context it is lifeless. As we have seen, the interest of the story is vastly enhanced and it is given its proper character by the manner in which it is told. The whole nature of the performance; the voice and the mimicry, the stimulus and the response of the audience mean as much to the natives as the text.

The perception and analysis of oral literature therefore depends on performance and the attendant contextuality from which the artist derives his images and which context also influences the artist's linguistic choices. If the context is so vital to the full realization of myths, legends, folktales etc, how much more will it be to proverbial lore which derives its force entirely from contextual experiences that determine their relevance. Again in defense of the contextual imperative Albert Lord (1960 and 1995) posits that:

Text and context are inseparable. Without a sympathetic knowledge of context, the text may be misunderstood...

He goes further to add that:

.....yet it is not sufficient to study performance and contextuality without an understanding of the tradition underlying them.

This situates the proverb as oral literature and emphasizes its contemporaneity because its relevance, its vitality and its force derive from background knowledge of the culture and ethics within which the proverb is created, expressed and operates. The culture as well as the socio-linguistic choices available to the proverb artist determine and authenticate proverb meaning within the context of its use. Proverb resilience therefore depends on cultural beliefs and linguistic provenance of the proverb user meaning that a particular proverb can exist in two different cultures with two unrelated meanings. Even within the same culture, the context and manner of usage may ascribe two different meanings to a proverb. For instance, in Ekajuk Language the proverb "ntol kpm ebol bol," literally means "there is no rotten yam in a new yam festival". The proverb comes handy mostly during the new yam festival. However other such ceremonial occasions utilize it during which time the real or deeper meaning is applicable which is that "one does not anticipate fear of poison in a feast or social gathering. The Ekajuk phrase "ebol bol" is prone to double meaning or interpretation. The first and general one is "rotteness" and the second is "fear," which are here applied to the proverb but in different contexts. Bakor people believe that no normal person deliberately introduces poison into food meant for a gathering. The

proverb, however, derives from the new yam festival when people eat and drink indiscriminately without fear of poison from even their arch enemies.

From the perspective of the contextual imperative of performance therefore, the advocacy is for a closer examination of proverbs at the contextual level with the aim to decipher the extent to which they serve as expressive forms or Socio-linguistic structures that concretize abstract ideas as well as enhance graphic and artistic use of language which aid the vivification of contemporary experience. We must therefore realize that even though a proverb may have been created in the past or past cumulative experiences of elders, it is its current contextual application that endows the proverb with contemporary relevance. To know our present and be able to build our future, we need knowledge of the past, we need also, an understanding of the dynamic nature of the proverb in context as a creative endeavor, an artistic product emanating, most times from past experiences and realized aesthetically in such a way that it captures the interest and attention of modern generations of Bakor children while serving pedagogic purposes in today's culturally dynamic environment. This way the proverb, like any other genre of oral literature satisfies the Bakor quest for identity and social meaning in today's global context.

Let us quickly add here that as earlier noted (see Ganyi 2012a) most of the impact of proverbs is lost in translation particularly when researchers fail to replicate the context of usage of the proverb in a write-up of this nature. What we have tried to do here is to proffer explanations for contextual situations which, even here, only amount to an approximation of the real impact of proverbs. Meanings of proverbs and their impact are best felt within the context of use which research papers of this nature may not easily provide except with the aid of video-clips which in themselves pose other problems of translation from the original language of proverb use. Where then do we start with our analysis of the impact of the Bakor proverb as a pedagogic tool?

5. Bakor Proverbs: Their Meanings and Pedagogic Potential

To attempt an analysis of Bakor proverbial lore and its pedagogic potential perhaps one should hasten to point out that what we are doing is only a representative survey which cannot cover the whole range and variety and even complexity of the proverbs. A more detailed analysis will require a full book length which we will contemplate later. Also it is pertinent to make certain clarifications on Ekajuk and Bakor life and culture before delving into the representative survey of the proverbs. Firstly it is worthy of note that Bakor society is principally a performance oriented society where every facet of life from leisure walks to farming chores are subject to judgment from the perspective of style or finesse that is "the ability to do it beautifully", which also borders on their aesthetic perception. Doing something implies acceptance to do it "good", to satisfy people's taste and solicit appreciation.

This explains why a man's movement can be criticized as "moving without shaking one's balls". A man is expected to be brisk and smart in Bakor culture and dullness is hardly entertained.

From this perspective, proverb performance is no exception which also explains why effective proverb use and/or application become the yardstick for measuring linguistic competence or oratorical accomplishment.

Secondly, we must note that Africans generally emphasize communalism as a way of life and share their resources ranging from ideas and information to food and hospitality. This underlies and forms the essence of African identity which is captured in the African philosophy of "Ubuntu". In this set-up, proverbs fulfill and enhance collective impartation of African knowledge since they encapsulate the totality of experience given in a simple terse statement. Proverbs supply teachers and learners with pedagogic tools for cross fertilization of ideas to enhance co-operative or communal education for the benefit of the entire community or learning group. Individual learning thus becomes a collective responsibility of the entire community. It is within this set-up that the centrality of the oral narratives is recognized as the means by which African philosophy, culture and tradition are coded and imparted to the generality of citizens. Asangba Reginald T. (2015) recognizes the inviolability of oral narratives in the lives of Africans when he posits that:

Before the advent of Europeans, every existing African Community had its own means of education. Like the kasena, the world view of most communities is inextricably woven into the fiber of their oral traditions. Kasena oral traditions express beliefs, values, ideas and other socio-cultural negotiations that depict their philosophy of life... Oral traditions embody the sense of time, place and identity of the Kasena in this multi-cultural world. The ways and manner to practice good hygiene and conserve the environment are embodied in proverbs, whereas the code of conduct and several other social negotiations are carried in folktales and puzzles. However, in the wake of globalization and its attendants such as Christianity, formal education and rural-urban migration... the role and purpose of Kasena oral traditions have taken a down turn.

This description of Kasena oral narratives is applicable to most other traditional African communities and we'd say the same fate awaits Bakor oral traditions except that proverbs seem to endure more than other genres because of their pedagogic content and applicability in all facets of human endeavor and the fact that they are susceptible to manipulation to reflect even contemporary experiences. The Bakor proverb therefore serves as the bedrock of literary expressions as well as the means by which cultural norms and ethics are encoded and transferred. Even with the advent of formal education, the Bakor proverb still remains the major means by which the traditional community transmits knowledge and wisdom. Different aspects and experiences in life have therefore given birth to several proverbs that vivify and imprint them in

human memory. Finally and again from the aesthetic point of view, we must point out that the Bakor, like all other Africans, conceive of beauty as an intrinsic and holistic attribute implicit and derivable from nature and so Bakor oral narratives, proverbs inclusive, must approximate to that beauty and are the means by which the beauty is actualized.

Through Bakor proverbial lore, the Bakor aesthetic principle is contextualized and realized. The concept of physical beauty, to the Bakor, is only a reflection of the totality of what constitutes beauty which spans from individual physical or tangible beauty to moral, psychological and spiritual and even natural. Beauty is thus equated with harmony and balance in natural phenomena. To the Bakor therefore the concept of beauty or aesthetics approximates to ethics and moral values intrinsic to society and societal coherence and rejuvenation. Beauty can therefore be said to define identity that is what the people like and cherish and what they hate or abhor. It is from this perspective that we analyze the content of Bakor proverbs to observe how and why they are veritable pedagogic tools for societal regeneration, since proverbs enhance shared experiences and provide a sense of belonging to a community. As earlier pointed out, to fully realize the import of a proverb is to interpret it within the context of its rendition which is what we have tried to do with the following Ekajuk proverbs.

During the course of this research, the authors asked nshor Awup Akobi, an elder in Nwang village why proverbs seem to be the preserve of few people even among elders. His reply was with the proverb

"Ngane bo kpomo tubu adabe anneh"

Meaning "Proverbs are not told to foolish people"

On further probing, he was of the opinion that younger Bakor children seem to be too pre-occupied with foreign films and discos to learn about their culture and to him they are foolish because they are averse to learning their cultural values. He went further to emphasize that the young ones are almost a lost generation hence the proverb.

Ebruk bo weh kpomo bobor mbomor

Meaning "A bird should not be lavishly dressed"

What he meant was that children of today are like birds, you never know what they are after therefore dressing them with lavish clothing, which is teaching them proverbs, is a waste of time. On being reminded that there are still few young people who are ready to learn their cultural norms and values his reply was with another proverb

"eh tib re mbanghenab kpomor rin abang"

"Yes because the anus never lack shit", adding further that "afab kpomor kpor anne kpeh kpeh"

Meaning "Ants can never be extinguished totally"

Therefore we have few intelligent young people that is since the anus never lacks shit and ants cannot all die in one day. From him we learnt the following proverbs and many more which do not appear in this write-up.

1. When one is blessed with surplus of anything he cannot easily dispose of, the Ekajuk say

"Ajok bo kpomo gbale ngor ngubjing"

"Fat is never sliced off the body (with knife)"

2. In a difficult situation where resolution is hard and one is unable to predict the outcome or is led to take an unfavourable decision, the Ekajuk say
 “abang kpomo wuv nneh go alah”
 “shit never smells inside one’s stomach”
3. When one persistently behaves in a particular way, especially if he is good mannered or repeats a feat, the Ekajuk say
 “Ediji etan yimi nor, ebbili jom mal”
 “Where an anthill stood, the redness never disappears”
4. When someone lacks appreciation for assistance granted him the Ekajuk tell him
 “Ntoba nkok kam ashuum re meh eshi nkarr nkarr”
 “I assist you pursue your cock and you insult me that I have bushy hair”
5. To one who is incessantly lazy or displays no aptitude for any kind of work particularly on the farm, the proverb
 “a tokor mah lam alap, nyiam edale anim li”
 “If you can’t dive deep, you can’t eat a big fish”
 is used to warn him/her that without work there is no food for one’s satisfaction.
6. To warn people that assistance to people without judging situations discreetly is dangerous the appropriate proverb is
 “Ji shong kpor tare ntem eti”
 “Shift for me result to losing one’s seat” [even to a friend sometimes].
7. To impress upon people that physical beauty alone is unimportant in Bakor culture the Ekajuk say or even sing
 “Ekorr nneh anor shang, abomor nya shang enobor eljini ji”
 “Love for someone neither depends on physical beauty nor expensive clothing but on good upbringing”
8. When one is offered something he values highly, to express appreciation he needs the proverbial question
 “nli ten nkom mban jen?”
 “If I reject a ram, what do I dance with?”
 In Bakor culture, the ram or he-goat beard is very valuable as it symbolizes strength and valor. Brave men wear it around the arm as a sign that they have excelled in inter-tribal warfare. In age-sect or other social dances, the warrior carries it to portray his prowess as he dangles it in dance movement, hence
 “nten nkom ban jen”
9. A trouble monger or wicked individual in the society is abhorred and warned with the proverb
 “mbul li bip erung ajo kim etung”
 “If a goat becomes troublesome, it loses an ear”
 Losing an ear here symbolizes death, as the goat may end up being killed or sold out to be killed. A troublesome person is rejected by the community and may end up dying in solitude.
- 10 To indicate the necessity for accommodation and tolerance the Ekajuk use the proverb
 “mbul tokor fing ajo fere a mfonor”
 “If no one offers to buy a goat, it reverts to its owner”
 The implication here is that a person or property may be useless to other people but still remain someone’s possession.
- 11 To express greed and covetousness the Ekajuk use the proverb

“Ebim etong ji kili ten akpake elu”

“A refuse dump that never rejects yam peels”

Yam peels here refer to worthless objects. The expression means that the greedy person covets even worthless things. He is therefore like a refuse bin.

12 “Nyor ebkunu eshi ngor ebtaal, a li bormeh ajodor nyo nname” means “When a snake places its head on a stone, killing it must destroy the matchete’s edge”.

This proverb is used to depict difficult and dicey situations. The Bakor value their machetes for farm work, therefore, to cut a snake is to prevent danger but a snake on a stone presents an enigmatic situation just as people often face in real life e.g. Hamlet’s “to be or not to be”.

13 To express desire and wiliness to accept or do something or in expression of eagerness to work the Bakor proverb that comes handy is

“nyor kor ejum li, nyor jom tub eromor”

“When the mouth is given something to eat, the mouth does not sigh”, or put differently “if the mouth is fed, the mouth never rejects food”.

14 To express awareness of danger or warn against repeated performance of a dangerous act, the Bakor use the proverb

“Nneh kpomor fameh etakpok ajing mkpele bal”

“A sane man doesn’t fall into the same ditch twice”.

Nobody is expected to court danger, so the ditch represents danger which should be avoided.

15 “Ndah fumu ashang”

“Hydrocele fits the hare”

is a proverb derived from a folktale in which the hare claims ownership of the hydrocele belonging to someone else but which was supposed to aid his dance movement. Hare suffers for his greed. The proverb is therefore a warning to those who claim things that do not belong to them. It is also a way of saying “if it fits you, be careful because you may pay dearly for it”.

16 To the Bakor, an elder must take responsibility for knowledge and experience which he imparts to younger generations. If he fails in this duty, the Bakor use the proverb

“eshi nenkul ji kpor kpoh agba”

“it is the head of an elder that is fit for knocks”

Literarily, the elders head may be bald and so is likely to feel pain but the disappointment he feels when his failure results to bad behavior on the part of younger ones is more than the pain of the knock he will feel when he reneges on the job of educating them.

17 A related proverb to the one above is

“ejeh fumu a nenkul”

“Witchcraft fits elders”

This proverb comes handy when an old man is erroneously accused of practicing witchcraft but is later exonerated. Young people in the past were hardly accused of witchcraft even though today the reverse is the case.

18 To express acquaintance and kinship in the community, the Bakor use the proverb

“ali jen shaam bo kpor bap nneh ebjing”

“What food did you keep for me is a question for a relation or a known person”.

19 “aligah fomor anyom nnab”

“if you are too eager you mistake the anus for the vagina”

This proverb expresses or is a warning against excessive haste which results in shoddy jobs or creation of objects that lack beauty. Bakor people value intrinsic beauty which cannot be achieved in a hurry.

20 “efa li gor ebjen mbaang”

“luck never gets to someone who makes no effort”

The entire proverb translates as “the pig says luck only comes when you move from place to place.” The proverb eulogizes hard work. No man achieves merely by sitting in one spot. You must be up and doing to actualize one’s self which is what the pig does.

21 To warn against rash behavior and extol patience along with a listening ear, the Ekajuk employ the proverb

“Nneh li shua ebdabe, a tiba elkaneh”

“if a man says you are foolish he teaches you to be wise”.

22 “ebtal eti jo fere a mfonor”

“a stone aimed at a tree returns to the thrower”

The proverb warns against careless and wanton behavior or wickedness to others because you may inadvertently harm someone close to you.

23 To warn that evil begets evil, the Bakor employ the proverb

“ebtal ni nonghor go njul ni kpor fub”

“it is the stone that is exposed to the sun that gets hot”

It simply means if you know and practice evil, one day that same evil will visit your homestead.

24 “ekpade kpomor taanghe a ndi”

“the foot does not quarrel with the earth”

Is a proverb used to express helplessness or inevitability. The foot has no option but must stand on the earth just as people are sometimes faced with situations they cannot change but must accept.

25 To express inactivity, dullness or in some cases patience, the Ekajuk employ the proverb

“mbed emnaanghe abonshe ebtub abor lokho”

“Porridge is cold, so little children have thrust their fingers into it”

The proverb is used to portray a dangerous situation that has lost its potency and is no more dangerous.

26 When someone behaves or hurts other people clandestinely, to justify revenge, the Bakor use the proverb

“ali tokhim ngor nnap ki fal abang, meh bakha tokho ngor nwul amal nnim fal”

“if you bite my anus without fear of shit, I will bite your nose without fear of mucus”.

27 To warn against stubbornness the Bakor use the proverb

“eshi njom wuk kpor kpakeh njam tak”

“the skull of a stubborn man ends up hanging behind a warriors backyard”

In Bakor culture warriors come home with human skulls which they hide behind their homesteads. A stubborn person who refuses counsel against going to war may get killed hence

the proverb.

28 “aking bo kpomor jak ngo alam”

“oil cannot be separated from cooked vegetables”

Is a proverb used to advise people against discrimination?

29 “ebgodor nenkul kpomor rin ajakhe abomor”

“an elders wardrobe never lacks old clothing”

Is a proverb employed to show abundance of an object or something that is easy to find. It simply means ‘why search for something that is everywhere’.

30 To impress upon young people the value of hard work, is like saying the way you make your bed is the way you lie on it. The Bakor however utilize their occupations to express this by using the proverb

“ali bam elu, akpa eblu, ali bam afap, akpa afap”

“if you sow a yam you’ll harvest yams, but if you sow ants you’ll harvest ants”.

31 “eblul ashu ni kpo bumu nneh ebyebe nkambe”

“it is the bitterness of bitter leaf that reminds one of the sweetness of pumpkin leaves”

This proverb is employed to impress on people the need to suffer before pleasure.

32 To articulate the strength of a man in society, the Ekajuk use the proverb

“nkal a nkok kane kane kan re efunfu ebshe, akpor shik nnum re atinghi mfam”

“No matter the extent of knowledge the hen has of the approach of morning she still waits for the cock to inform the world”.

The proverb shows the extent to which the hen respects the cock. That is the extent to which a man is important.

33 To express helplessness and inability to act when faced with a problem, the Bakor employ the proverb

“akpakolor kpiyame nne nor kikpi anyanghe”

“Scabbies have afflicted someone without finger nails”

34 In expression of remorse or regret over utterances that may have caused pain to other people, the Bakor use the proverb

“nyor ebgbor nfin”

“the mouth has stripped and fallen”

35 To warn against false claims of ability, the Bakor use the proverb

“elfunghu shang ebwaleh ni”

“it is not how early but how much cracking can be done”

The proverb is derived from the squirrel that goes out to eat palm nuts very early but may not be able to break the kernels.

36 In situations of trespass, the Ekajuk aptly remind the trespasser that

Njijel jo shu mmon ewe

Ngum a nenkal shu ebjing ebe

Meaning

When the productive woman castigates her children, the barren cannot, but castigates her own body which is a subtle warning to the trespasser to keep to his territory.

37 To impress upon or call people’s attention to the need for security consciousness, the Ekajuk rely on the proverb - Mfam ni nob, afi nobim; bam mbu kak ebt.

Whether the world is at war or at peace, fasten your door

with a secure bolt.

The proverb implies that one must be alert at all times so that he is not taken unawares by unpleasant situations.

6. Conclusion

What this paper has done is to expose the aesthetic and pedagogic content of Bakor proverbs from the contemporary point of view. The position is informed by the erroneous belief initially held that proverbs are created in the past and are relevant largely as reflections of past experiences. The contention here is that proverbs can and are often created from present experiences and reflect contemporary exigency. What we have also tried to posit is that the beauty intrinsic to proverbial lore derives from the contemporary Bakor philosophical concept or world view which is embedded in their system of values. Proverbs are therefore derived from the Bakor cultural milieu and serve as a major means of educating younger generations as they are generated from current experiences and utilized to clarify situations that help to advance society towards positive transformation. In the analysis of proverbs, however, what we have highlighted for emphasis is the contextual imperative of performance without which the meaning and relevance of the proverb is lost or its efficacy is doused. What we posit therefore is a closer contextual analysis of Bakor proverbs for their pedagogic content and contemporary relevance the beauty inherent in proverb rendition remains the central determinant of the concept of Bakor ethics, ethno-aesthetics and identity.

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