

**ORALITY, LITERACY AND PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS IN TRADITIONAL  
AFRICAN SOCIETIES: THE BAKOR EXPERIENCE IN CROSS RIVER STATE,  
NIGERIA.**

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**ABSTRACT:** *Knowledge acquisition, like all human interaction in the world depends on and is enhanced through verbal or written forms which, today, exist at parallels but are never dichotomous, yet oral cultures seem to be more pervasive than written cultures in many parts of the world. History and knowledge systems are located in memory, the personal lives, traditions and the mythical past of all communities in the world. Today, literature has commonly been associated with written forms yet most other cultures of the world, apart from western cultures, have produced a wide range of literary material all encoded in verbal or non-written genres. Oral discourses are, therefore, predominant in most indigenous communities all over the world and knowledge systems have as such been constructed and communicated through these oral discourses or verbal systems, with emphasis on graphic contextual performances. African verbal forms, perhaps, constitute the largest stock of literary material performed, sung or spoken in numerous social or ritualistic contexts. These enhance encoding of new meaning and knowledge through the transmission of ideas and in most contexts, oral or verbal communication surpasses all other forms of communication. Despite this importance of orality, the supposed supremacy of a scientific consciousness which is enhanced by writing has become coterminous with the relegation of verbal performances leading to the failure to understand the nature and function of oral literature and its pedagogical content amongst oral cultures. Literacy is consequently emphasized over orality and contextuality. Recent developments in the academia, however, have tended to emphasize the supremacy of orality as a preferred mode of socialization and pedagogical functions. Anthropologists, literary critics, folklorists, creative writers and even psychologists all attest to the dynamism of oral literature in the production and transmission of knowledge systems not only in Africa but generally in pre-literate societies all over the world. This paper, therefore, examines the extent to which Oral literature can serve as a base for the development of a pedagogical model for instruction of our younger generations in African knowledge systems using the Bakor experience as an example.*

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**KEYWORDS:** Orality, Literacy, Pedagogy, Traditional African Society, Performance context, Knowledge systems, Cultural context and Identity.

## **INTRODUCTION: THE PEDAGOGIC CONTENT OF ORAL PERFORMANCE CONTEXTS**

When writing and documentation of ideas through writing became the yardstick, in Western cultures, for the measurement of rationalism and intellectual capacity, the definition of rationalism and intellectualism was narrowed to include only what was written to the exclusion of what was spoken or verbalized and consequently African cultures which are predominantly oral are dubbed primitive, backward and incapable of cognitive experience. Talking about literacy and writing and the concept of culture, Prof. Ossie Enekwe, in an interview by G.M.T.Emezue observes

- *But you are dealing with a people who do not understand the power of culture... so you are alone when you are talking about culture because you are inadequate, unless you talk about modernity. The danger comes when somebody starts to pontificate that this is the way things are. If you know the way, you think along that line but also you should allow other people to think in their own way.*

Despite the shady background associated with the epistemic status of oral literature within the cultures of its production and strong reliance, however, its importance as an artistic and cultural indulgence remains incontestable. The contempt for Africa and African cultures and knowledge systems resulting to the denial of sophistication to these knowledge systems and civilization notwithstanding, oral literature's growing reputation has gradually become the cynosure and envy of many scholars in various disciplines involved in the study of African culture and value systems. Because of the complexity of oral literature and the consequent lack of understanding associated with its concept by Western scholars, oral cultures have always been thought to be inferior to literate cultures which makes it pertinent, at this point, to emphasize that the oral mindset is different from the literate because orality emphasizes communal existence as opposed to the individualism characteristic of western literate societies. For this reason Jared S. Runck(2002) asserts that

- *It is very difficult for literate persons to objectively analyze the connections and divergences between oral and written modes of perception.*

As a result of this difference between oral and written cultures and the difficulties of perception, literate cultures have found it hard to understand African concepts of life and knowledge systems particularly African philosophy. The difficulty is further compounded by the fact that Africans themselves are unable to extricate themselves from Eurocentric modes of perception of Africa. Reacting to Walter Ong by way of a critic of the book *orality and literacy*, Emevwo A. Biakolo(1999) asserts that the two modes i.e. oral and literate are both

- *Cognate concepts in the field of verbal communications... [which] embodied a change in the psychological pre-conditions of the act and process of communication. In other words, it resulted in alterations in the organization and operation of the human consciousness.*

Today, we live in a highly technological world that emphasizes modernity and globalization, two concepts which have drastically revolutionized human thought and perception. Orality is therefore being vastly replaced by literacy even in Africa; yet the majority of Africans still operate largely from an oral background. A problem arises therefore when an African child, born into an oral milieu, and operating within the confines of orality as his perception of the world and the environment, fed to his consciousness through oral modes of communication or oral pedagogic modes, is suddenly thrust into a formal or literate mode of education. The new orientation attempts to completely change his outlook on and perception of life. There is, consequently, a dissociation of sensibility when the child as a recipient of African knowledge systems from an oral background is suddenly plunged into an alien literate world with its attendant modes of thinking and perception of the world. The consequence is that the African child is made to develop a double consciousness of personality and confused identity as well as possibly a wrong interpretation of cultural ideology. Jean and John Comaroff (1993) observe that early anthropologists believed that

- *Modernizing social forces and material forms would have the universal effect of eroding local cultural differences [but] conquered and colonized societies were not made over in the European image and instead maintained their own identities. Despite colonizers attempts to give the local people European values and ideals, this was largely unsuccessful as the locals often continued with their own traditions, beliefs and ways of understanding the world. Therefore, it is evident that the world has not been reduced to sameness, but instead remains plural, with many cultural variations.*

This precisely is the predicament of most Africans today. We remain plural, with distinct cultures and identities and cannot be merged under the umbrella of modernism or literacy and the consequent de-emphasis of orality which serves as a distinguishing mark of oral cultures. However with the emergence of consistent and sustained studies in the field of oral literature, positive attempts are being made towards a backward movement or cyclical return to the old ways. From the Ongian point of view it appears that with the development of the internet media, emphasis is fast returning to orality and oral modes of communication which tend to personalize and subjectify discourse. Literacy and writing, it is observed, has brought about excessive depersonalization of the word or idea to be expressed thus attempting to reduce the connection between forms of communication and cultural antecedents as well as consciousness of the people who create and operate these modes of communication. It is for this reason that an emphasis on oral literature becomes expedient as a pedagogical mode to serve as a grounding of African children in their own knowledge systems and stem the bastardization of their consciousnesses by a foreign culture which emphasizes literacy or writing at the detriment of orality. The appeal of oral literature, therefore,

derives from the fact that as a realized performance, it engages the human verbal facility to create, entertain and also mirror the human predicament in a pleasant manner. This active, dynamic and emergent endowment of oral literature should be protected and developed as the base for the development and sustenance of an African identity and personality. Through oral literature, a pedagogical model can be developed for the instruction and sustenance of the consciousness of young Africans of their identity rather than they being allowed to imbibe a foreign orientation that derogates their personality and cultural endowment. The challenge, therefore, is to design a pedagogical model based on oral literature that aims to highlight the merits of orality as an emergent form with all its characteristics as an efficient method of communication and instruction among African communities because of their peculiar identity and environment. In designing this pedagogical model for the impartation of African culture and knowledge systems we must be aware of and take into cognizance the defining peculiarities of orality since it is generally understood that the aim of education is to enforce a standard of moral, ethical and social awareness in the minds of the recipients of the education and which can subsequently translate to the maintenance of a cultural identity.

## **ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF PEDAGOGY**

Pedagogy, derived from the Greek words “paedag” and “agein”, literally means to lead, to bring up or guide or educate children i.e. “paidagogia”. Its history is traced to the Greek period when children, apart from their formal instructors, were attached to or assigned guides who instructed them in Greek tradition and ways of life as distinct from formal education in logic and philosophy or rhetoric. Today, pedagogy is defined as the science or methods by which knowledge is imparted during formal education or simply the study of teaching methods. From the Greek perspective, pedagogy would essentially conform to the African concept of oral literature as entertainment as well as a major means of instructing upcoming children. The primary aim of oral literature, like the Greek term “paidagogia”, is therefore to instruct by raising the consciousness of African children to their existence within their cosmic environment through pleasant and graphic illustrations. Pedagogy as a field of study encompasses a wide range of alternatives as a result of the growing number of perspectives. Nydia Gonzalez(2007) posits that in the development of pedagogical models for the preservation of African knowledge systems “scholars acknowledge the existence, influences and common traits in different approaches”, therefore, as a social phenomenon pedagogy is conditioned by sociological, historical and political or economic experiences of a community that identifies the need for a particular kind of pedagogical model that best serves their aim for education. Gonzalez argues that even the formal school system itself cannot be seen as a static entity since communal or societal interests define ideological pedagogies. Even these ideas, he observes, are subject to temporal changes within every age. What this means is that through the ages pedagogical models of education developed in Europe and the west generally have been replicated for a long time leading to a vision of the school system as a state institution that propagates the ideology of the state. This view of the formal school system along

with its pedagogical model prevails even today and is seen to be detrimental to the acquisition of African knowledge systems. There is therefore the general belief held by socialist inclined or Marxist scholars that African communities are largely coerced through religious institutions and colonial administrative statutes that establish the schools to imbibe the ideologies of the churches or government to the detriment of their own communal cultural ideologies. Today, however, there is an advocacy for flexibility in the development of pedagogical models which favors the active participation of students in the educational process. This development can be seen as a positive call for the development of an oral literature based ideological model along what Gonzalez sees and describes as the freirean popular education model named after Paulo Freire and seen as the best pedagogical model for the oppressed. This model, Gonzalez says

*Represents an educational alternative for liberation and opposes both arrogant authoritarianism as well as irresponsible spontaneity, [and] is located within the movement of critical pedagogy and is called popular education.*

For this reason, Olson and Bruner submit that it is never easy to apply theoretical knowledge to practical problems. As a comment on or an explication of the diverse and complex nature of pedagogy, Olsen and Bruner assert

- *Assumptions about the mind of the learner underlie attempts at teaching [therefore] no ascription of ignorance, no effort to teach. To say only that all humans display same understanding of other minds along with a matching disposition to teach the incompetent is to fail to take account of the variety of ways in which these matters express themselves in different cultures. The variety is stunning and we need to know much more about cultural diversity in this sphere; we need an anthropology of pedagogy... we need much more knowledge about the relation between folk psychology and folk pedagogy in different settings and in different historical periods.*

Olsen and Bruner's postulation focuses on two major points namely that we cannot assume that all cultures have the same propensity to teach those who are incompetent and that even when there is the propensity to teach, we must be aware of the differences in the pedagogical methods designed in different settings and different historical periods for the dissemination of information or knowledge systems in the different cultural backgrounds. Cultural diversity is stunning and so is the extent to which we misjudge cultures when we do not understand their ways. At the risk of being labeled Africanist, this writer feels that the lack of appreciation of cultural diversity in the development of pedagogical models for the instruction of African children is largely the predicament of African peoples today who are fast losing their cultural identities and personalities in the face of globalization and the barrage of technological advancement. Not that these concepts in themselves are undesirable but that they have been mostly structured and developed from

Western Cultural backgrounds and propagated and imbibed by Africans not yet ready or are ill-equipped for their inculcation. This is because the West, with their Cultural peculiarities and through the development of literacy and writing has vastly succeeded in imposing Western ideas on African societies to the detriment of the development of indigenous pedagogical models that effectively enhance the perception of African knowledge systems. Western literacy looks down on African knowledge systems describing them as primitive and unsophisticated thus leading to the classification of other cultures along lines of literate, therefore civilized and sophisticated and illiterate, therefore primitive and backward and lacking cognitive ability. Western Literacy thus becomes the yard stick for the measurement of development and sophistication in thought processes. This has however, been highly debunked by scholars like Walter Ong (1982); Jared Runck (2002); Authens Wadie (2009); Olsen and Bruner (1996); Nydia Gonzalez (2007); Biakolo (1999) and a host of others who have argued in contrast that literacy does not endow any culture with a higher mental or cognitive capacity beyond aiding the fixity and preservation of thought processes and ideas expressed in writing. Oral cultures, they argue, are equally sophisticated and complex in their thought processes and therefore also have highly developed pedagogical models for the impartation of knowledge and expression of ideas orally. Every human society is therefore capable, following from their environmental and historical experiences, of developing pedagogical models that best serve instructional purposes in their community once there is the recognition of the need to teach or educate. The importance of cultural differences in the development of pedagogical models again draws Olsen and Bruner to posit that

- *A more culturally oriented cognitive pedagogy has less of a tendency to disparage and dismiss folk psychology as mere superstition.*

These arguments have led to the development of two schools of thought on pedagogy; the one arguing that in order to fit into the technologically advanced world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century and beyond, world cultures need to shade some of their distinctive qualities and identities so as to be fully integrated into the world order known as globalization. The opposite view is that every culture has something unique to offer to other cultures therefore what the world requires is an integration of distinctive qualities in all cultures to bring about a unity in diversity. This synergy it is hoped will bring out a better understanding of human cultures and identities. Unfortunately, the West set out, through literacy and writing, to denigrate and obliterate oral cultures, under the guise of civilization. However, reinforcing the values of the classical pedagogical models of education, Dimitrios Thanasoulas Greece (2003) posits that “the classical torch” as a formal school system of learning processes

- *Is supposed to help children acquire a higher order cultural awareness of their society so that they may engage in the use of logic science and religion.*

Its main criticism, he points out, is that

- *It creates a void between literates and non-literates and if school fails to achieve these goals, they (i.e. the children) are doomed as they are incapable of participating effectively in cultural interaction and their society's high culture.*

The African child who is early exposed to Western education without adequate exposure to African knowledge systems through an oral literature based instruction is ill-equipped to operate within the rubrics of his own culture because the formal method or alien pedagogy which emphasizes writing is also alien to his traditional oral method of instruction which he may have acquired from birth. The result is that he fails to acquire any background cultural awareness of his society's values which he cannot appreciate afterwards.

### HOW PEDAGOGY IS ACHIEVED IN ORAL CULTURES

The need for an oral literature based pedagogical model for the impartation of African knowledge systems is best articulated by Authens Opong Wadie(2009) when he opines that

- *Africa has produced many outstanding knowledge systems, despite the fact that one can be led to think otherwise based on the projections of the major media... A review of the relevant literature confirms that much of what is classified as African religions, myths and art are, in fact, best understood as elements of various African knowledge systems. [My] study finds that the pedagogies of African knowledge systems offers American students a unique and in-depth understanding of the subject matter and it also gives them a better appreciation for life. This study also finds that the pedagogies of African knowledge systems have a historical legacy that reaches back into ancient Africa.*

Working from the Greek or ancient concept of pedagogy, one can rightly surmise that African communities definitely had their own traditional methods of guiding and instructing their young ones through the processes of life. This is central to the concept of orality and oral literature since it follows that before the intrusion of colonialism and its retrogressive impact on African values and practices resulting in the enthronement of western pedagogies, indigenous African communities achieved education of their young ones through the conscious exercise of oral performances. These were, however, not organized or institutionalized along the formal school system. The fact remains that whether formally organized or not, it was imperative or obligatory for every adult to teach, instill discipline and impart knowledge at all times and in all situations they found themselves with children. Oral literature i.e. lyrics, folktales, myths and legends, rituals, and dramatic festivals came handy as veritable means by which knowledge was transferred and explanations proffered for existential problems within their environment of domicile. These oral narratives, therefore, constituted the indigenous pedagogy of Africans and served the needs and requirements of African indigenous communities. Today, however, there is a different concept of life and living and different expectations as a result of the imposition of a new value system on our cultural lives. The question that arises today, therefore, is whether this so called modern way of

life adequately serves our purpose as a distinct people in thought and cosmic perception and adequately preserves our African identity and personality. If not, then it is time to place emphasis on an African pedagogical model based on our oral background that will adequately capture and transmit to posterity our unique cultural identity as contained in our African knowledge systems. Along these lines, Emevwo A. Biakolo(2010) observes that there is a major problem with African philosophy and philosophers who have allowed themselves to be caught in the web of controversy over the concept and essence of an African philosophy instead of going ahead to define the true characteristics and essence of that philosophy. Backed by this observation, I do not therefore intend herein, to dwell on the already familiar grounds of the controversy over the literariness or otherwise of oral literature which we are all aware arose out of western ignorance about the concept of African culture and literature and African analytical and cognitive ability. I propose instead, following Biakolo's warning, to explore ways and proffer reasons why an African oral literature based pedagogical model should be enunciated from an African cultural perceptive that will adequately explicate the cultural dynamics of African communities within which and for whom oral literature is created. Biakolo's position shows that we have surmounted these kinds of prejudices and should now be positioning ourselves towards the prescription of what role oral literature should play in the light of present day technological advancements coupled with the movement towards globalization. If oral literature should be made to serve African communities' needs in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, then it must be formalized in our educational systems and used as pedagogical models for the instruction of our youths and younger generations at the lower and tertiary levels of their education. The primacy of the word and its potency in oral literature as a carrier of ideas and values in all oral cultures makes oral literature a veritable indulgence of Africans among whom literacy is a second hand acquisition. The first hand acquisition is the oral medium of speech and oral expression of ideas and beliefs. The importance of oral literature therefore requires close attention and utilization in the development of pedagogical models in predominantly oral environments so as to adequately focus on oral forms that bear the culture and ethics by which information is disseminated to younger ones and consciousness about knowledge systems appropriately aroused and sustained. In the development of pedagogical models within oral cultures therefore, memory techniques and memorable forms of expression become paramount and vital as appropriate means for the graphic impartation of knowledge. For this reason, speech in oral cultures is more performance oriented: a doing act which encompasses knowledge of culture and the task of recreation and sustenance of that culture.

### **THE CULTURAL CONTEXT OF PEDAGOGY**

The development of pedagogical models should therefore naturally take into consideration the environment, failure of which accounts for the non-relevance of most formal pedagogical models that are formulated without consideration of the milieu of operation. The relevance of an Oral literature based pedagogical model can best be seen in the Kenyan experiment. In 2013, Kenyans

realized the importance of an integration of their Oral Literature into the educational curriculum. Xinhua News agency (2013) reported that

- *Kenya will integrate Oral based culture into the National education curriculum of their students to take a keen interest in art subjects, a Senior Government Official said on Friday. Education Cabinet Secretary, Professor Jacob Kaimenyi, told journalists in Nairobi that these subjects aid the propagation and preservation of indigenous culture. Oral culture will allow peoples to develop their talents and at the same time contribute to the development of the creative industries... he added that Kenya's education system is currently undergoing reforms so that students can acquire skills that are culture driven.*

This kind of policy even though riddled with hurdles e.g. the lack of teachers and interpreters can be seen as an important step in the identification of the need for an educational system that lays emphasis on a pedagogical model that will form the basis of the Nation's identity. The Education Secretary therefore argued that government recognizes the diversity of cultures in the Local communities but that these form the basis of the Kenyan identity. Kenya will therefore design development projects and invest resources in music and drama festivals "to embrace and appreciate the diversity in Local cultures." The Kenyan cultural environment forms the base for the development of a pedagogical model for the education of Kenyan children. Godwin Makaudze(2013)also sees the usefulness of folktales or oral narratives and advocates for their inclusion in the Zimbabwean formal school system and the internet because they are vibrant and serve a vital function of moral and ethical instruction of not just the children but the entire society in this ever-changing environment. Also, highlighting the importance of knowledge of the cultural environment in the development of a pedagogical model, E. Thomas (2000) posits that

- *Research which identifies different cultural pedagogies and describes the impact they may have on improving educational quality will be a welcome antidote to the possible unifying excesses that educational change in the context of modernization and globalization is likely to bring.*

We can already see the impact of these excesses of modernization and globalization in our traditional societies where respect for Elders has been replaced by home videos and GSM cultures which dominate social interaction to the exclusion of storytelling which was a veritable past time in the days gone by. It is also well known that cultural contexts determine pedagogical models that best suit the intention or goal for which the model is designed therefore Oral cultures will focus on models that enhance creativity. The usefulness of an oral literature based pedagogical model is also well articulated by B. Davies and P Corson (1999) who posit that

- Given the centrality of Literacy based practices in schools, a book focusing on talk brings quite different and important perspectives to the study of education. Talk is something that has all too often been devaluated and taken for granted.

The primacy of Orality is thus emphasized as a way of establishing identities within cultures since language or speech forms a distinguishing factor in most cultural configurations as well as sustains the Oral literatures of different cultural entities. Furthering the debate in favour of an Oral literature based pedagogical model, Wayne Iba (2010) in his review of Walter Ong's *Orality and Literacy* posits that Ong's postulation about the evanescence of Oral cultures is untenable because in Wayne's view

- *Oral utterance has "moved on," rather than disappeared; in this respect, Oral and written communication are more alike than different.*

It follows that strong as the concept of globalization is to the modern world as a potent force for the reconfiguration of human thought and action to alter social and intellectual lives of people along ideological lines, preliterate or less technologically advanced cultures are formally oblivious of its existence and so still decry its impact on traditional or cultural norms and practices while passively living with the changes they are incapable of rejecting.

**SCHOLASTIC VIEWS ON ORALITY AND PEDAGOGY:** Several scholastic views exist in favour of the relevance of an Oral literature based pedagogical model. Among them are the postulations of such scholars as Constantine Ngara (2007) who opines that

- *If a peoples' culture and values are not integrated in their communication interchange, then a sense of alienation ensues and no development can be expected. Thus, the way forward for Africa's future is to understand African ways of knowing and to embed these into a re-modernized practice of curriculum and pedagogy.*

Other scholars who hold this same view include Jennifer Owuor (2007) whose opinion tallies with Ngara's with relation to the integration of African indigenous knowledge using the Kenyan context as her base. In her view, Oral literature based pedagogy must be identified to aid a reconstruction of the educational curriculum and pedagogy in Africa and "to reflect the diverse indigenous ways of knowing, promote social change and empower [Africans] while reclaiming cultural identities rooted within the authentication of indigenous traditions."

In his contribution, Pearl Hunt identifies an Oral literature based pedagogical model derived from the Ugandan experience as an antidote to the acquisition of Western epistemologies. He argues that the content of the discourses of Western epistemologies

- **reveals the subtle dominance of Western culture and Western misunderstanding of the African.**

To reintegrate and achieve progression, Hunt advocates cultural studies that will involve the construction of a collective African identity after the Philosophy of "Ubuntu." This advocacy, she argues, can best be sustained in the Oral literatures of African communities which espouse total

participation of the community members who constitute the audience as well as the critics that foster unity in traditional contexts.

What emerges from these scholastic views is an advocacy for an Oral literature based pedagogical model rooted in African Oral traditions that will account for peculiarities and differences in African cultural experiences. To this extent, our educational institutions should start with emphasis on the Oral literature of the various cultural units which can progressively be taught through Oral performances in Primary schools using indigenous languages while Secondary and Tertiary institutions can make use of English. Language should not constitute a barrier because well directed performances can cut across language barriers and achieve sensitization and mobilization for cultural awareness and development of the African identity and personality. Walter Ong aptly summarizes the point when he asserts that

- *Orality speaks to pedagogy of participation and any distinction between the experiences of the story and of the world are extinguished. The story is the world. The human is enveloped within a dynamic and un-going "story- text," a text in "process," a text which is perennially re-occurring.*

Furthermore, the utilization of an Oral literature based pedagogical model is aimed at the elimination of Western formal school or traditional education which is viewed to be oppressive of traditional norms and values but which is desirable to the oppressive class. Formal school and traditional education, to the oppressive class, is desirable. Therefore, we should expect resistance from pedagogues because an advocacy for a pedagogical model that is perceived to be able to raise the consciousness of people towards liberation will be resisted, played down upon or completely discredited. Paulo Freire (2000) therefore, warns that

- *It would be naive for us to hope that the dominant classes for whom school is perceived as an institution that serves to perpetuate their system and secure their power will adopt a critical, consciousness-raising methodology that unmask their limits. For them to do so would be the same as digging their own graves.*

On his part, Stephen Hicks posits that

- *In Education, post modernism rejects the notion that the purpose of education is primarily to train a child's cognitive capacity for reason in order to produce an adult capable of functioning independently in the world. That view of education is replaced with the view that education is to take an essentially indeterminate being and give it a social identity. Education's method of moulding is Linguistic, and so the language to be used is that which will create a human being sensitive to its racial, sexual and class identity.*

Application of this to the African cultural environment leaves a wide gap between what is and what should be. The question that remains uppermost in the minds of dedicated Africanists is “are the present pedagogical models beneficial to the individual African racially, sexually and in the creation of an African identity and personality?” Hicks again posits that

- *Our current social context, however, is characterized by oppression that benefits whites, males and the rich at the expense of everyone else.*

### **THE BAKOR EXPERIENCE**

Marcus Munenge, relying on the African proverb that says “it takes the whole village to raise a child,” comments on traditional pedagogical models as follows

- *Children were taught the history and ancestral responsibilities of their clans and such knowledge was passed from generation to generation. African children were taught the names of some plants and animals and parents had the obligation to test their children from time to time to see if they were able to memorize those names. Children were taught the medicinal usages of each of these plants especially in the treatment of ailments. In some African communities, young people came together from different parts of the villages to compete in singing, dancing, racing and all things around what they were taught.*

He then summarizes the effects of all these on the moulding of consciousness by positing that

- *The fundamental precept of indigenous education was that it brought happiness to parents especially when their children behaved well in society whilst it brought along shame and disgrace to parents whose children misbehaved in society. At the time the whites came to Africa, the system of indigenous education was quite adequate and met the requirements of the people and of the spirit. African educational systems encompass richness of strong human relations.*

Munenge aptly underscores the place of indigenous pedagogies in traditional African societies where inter personal relationships are fostered and foisted on contextual performances of Oral narratives and these experiences are shared, thus, ameliorating strife and conflict within the society. The 21<sup>st</sup> century technologically compliant world, typified by the development of sophisticated multimedia equipment, however, encourages material acquisition, thus, opening up traditional African societies to violence and unwholesome practices that no longer impact positively on or favor societal growth based on traditional knowledge systems. This, notwithstanding, the Bakor people rely extensively on their repertoire of Oral narratives particularly story-telling for the instruction of their younger generations. This example may well serve as an incentive for the reintroduction of storytelling into the National school curriculum for the same attainment of pedagogical purposes. In this regard, video tapes of contextualized Oral

performances can be prepared for replay in television stations and formal class room sessions for the enhancement of effective teaching and the attainment of an African cultural identity. The Bakor performance context approximates to what Meghan Perry refers to as “performance poetry,” which according to him is

- *Sometimes known as the “spoken word” [and] is connected to oral traditions that date back to ancient times before the written word... the poet’s use of gestures or body language while performing the poem is also important. This can be connected to an earlier form of performance poetry in which theatrical events were the venue for this type of art. Music may also be part of performance poetry; for example, beat poet Allen Ginsberg often incorporated the spoken word with Jazz. While performance poetry cannot be captured for the mass audience in the same way that a written poem can, audio recordings have made it more assessable to a larger number of people.*

In this interactive context, the word becomes communal property and operates as a given continuum of knowledge available to everyone in the narrative repertory of the community that depends on orality as the primary medium of communication. Elinor Ochs and Lisa Capps (2009) therefore opine that

- *The word cannot be assigned to a single speaker. The author (speaker) has his own inalienable rights to the word, but the listener also has his rights, and those whose voices are heard in the word before the author comes upon it also have their rights (after all, they are no words that belong to no one)*

Ochs and Capps therefore present a narrative situation which is aptly described in the Amazon review of their book in which Tara Goodreads posits that the authors

- *Develop a way of understanding the seemingly contradictory nature of every day narrative... as a genre that is not necessarily homogenous and as an activity that is not always consistent but consistently serves our need to create selves and communities.*

Like most other oral societies, the Bakor people rely largely on storytelling as a means of educating their young ones and keeping younger generations abreast of their knowledge systems. Bakor culture, cosmology and ethical values are all encoded in their stories and the oral narrative repertoire is a rich and veritable means of Bakor linguistic development over the years. Being essentially an agricultural community, the ecology of the environment provides the rich imagery from the landscape that catalyses the imagination of the narrators whose responsibility it is to construct the identity and personality of the Bakor people through appropriate manipulation of the linguistic resources available to them. Story telling as an art form is, therefore, challenging and exacting as the narrator’s imagination runs through the Bakor landscape as he judges the expectations of his audience in his bid to entertain and educate the citizens and authenticate their

culture and experiences. Story telling becomes an aesthetic enterprise which demands knowledge and retention of what was, attention to what is ie present action and then appropriate projection or anticipation of what the future holds for the community. The narrator or traditional artist is what Isidore Okpewho calls “the guiding sensibility of the communal myth of his people,” who is the conglomerate of different voices as he acts out dialogue; speaking in a variety of accents and registers. He interacts and addresses his audience while communicating through arguments for or against various positions that are representative of the ideological standpoint of the community. Active and dynamic story telling performance contexts provide the Bakor child the opportunity to learn about his environment, identity and culture and proffer solutions to practical problems in life. The Bakor story teller is therefore expected to be articulate, resilient, imaginative, foresighted and subtle in his ability to arouse and sustain the interest of his audience members particularly as everyone is expected to play a role in the education of children. In Bakor community, therefore, everyone is a potential story teller while there are those regarded as “accomplished artists,” and those considered to be novices. Accomplished artists are versatile story tellers whose narrative repertory encompasses the entire gamut of Bakor cultural life. Most elders in Bakor community possess a stock of stories which they constantly rely on in the process of child upbringing but accomplishment as a story teller goes beyond the immediate family cycle. The accomplished artist also performs outside his family cycle and holds his audience’s interest through aesthetically pleasant performances that enhance audience understanding and knowledge of the message of the tale or story. He subtly transports his audience into the fictional worlds and convinces or leads them to suspend disbelief and accept the validity of his narrative. To effectively achieve this, the Bakor narrator relies on his skill and resilience which he brings to bear on narrative openings to attract and hold audience interest. Narrative openings of story sessions often start with either hand clapping or running round the potential audience who sit in a semi circle while the narrator calls out

Narrator: tuv tuv wa wan eeh

Audience: mboong

Narrator: tuv tuv wa wan eeh

Audience: mboong,mboong.

This opening formula is repeated several times until the audience’s attention is guaranteed and the narrator now takes his position in-front of them at the open end of the semi-circle. Bakor performance sessions usually take place in late evening preferably under moonlight when the day’s farm chores are done with. Elderly men and women then gather children from various homesteads together for narrative sessions. In most cases women tell the stories while men sit quietly, smoking pipes and listening and intermittently interjecting corrections or prompting the story teller when there is a seeming mix-up or loss of memory on the part of the female narrator. Female narrators

do not perform in the community playground but are restricted to family cycles while male accomplished artists can traverse the community and perform wherever they choose to. Sustained narrative sessions are only rampant during the harvest and early planting seasons between the months of December to February when accomplished story tellers appear on village playgrounds where children and even elders come out to admire the gusto and rhetorical or narrative competence and accomplishments of some story tellers. Such narrative sessions are usually very vibrant as the narrator prances about from side to side imitative of all the animal characters in the narrative: the elephant with his heavy guttural voice; the dishonest hare, with his babyish pronunciation; the deaf and stupid iguana; the fetish spider; the nimble and deceitful monkey; the brutish tiger and the tricky, crooked footed tortoise; all appear in the personality of the story teller as he weaves his way through the intricate narrative thread. The playground also comes alive with song and dance as the narrator keeps the audience afloat with participatory folktale songs, dances and dramatization which also enable him to comment on the themes of the narratives. Narrators also take jibes at audience members by juxtaposing any audience member of their choice with an animal character to facilitate illumination of ideas while objectifying experience. Bakor folktale songs are numerous and varied and directly reinforce the thematic thrust of the narratives. The songs also offer good opportunities for interactive dialogue between the narrator and his audience. Good folktale songs provide grounds for formal orderly and extended expression of thought on the subject of narrative and aids organization of knowledge, ideas and experience embedded in the language being utilized within the context of delivery. A good example of dramatic dialogue in an interactive discourse occurs in the folktale song where crab is intentionally cheated by his hunting colleagues and to pay them back, he drains water from all rivers and streams into his deep-hole home. On their return from the hunt, the colleagues have no water to drink after food. They realize what crab has done and send several emissaries to him to plead for water. When they knock on crab's door, this dialogic song ensues

Crab: Yinne wor katim ke mbu?

kare mgbeh ka mgbeh

Emissary: Mmewor kata ke mbu

Crab: Woji baa jen kor?

Emissary: Me ji baa alap kor

Crab: Wor ji shong kare yinnae?

Emissary: Me ji shong kare njokeh

Crab: Alap korr njok, nyiam korr ekal

Translated as

Crab: Who knocks on my door?

Emissary: I knock on your door

Crab: You, who came for what?

Emissary: I, who came for water

Crab: You, who'll give to who?

Emissary: I, who'll give to elephant.

Crab: Elephant thirsts for water; crab thirsts for meat.

To the entire dialogic song, the audience response is simply KARE MGBEH, KA MGBEH.

While the song focuses on the themes of injustice as intricate human experiences, it also portrays a graphic picture of the Bakor landscape which comes alive through the methodic descriptions presented by the narrator through the several emissaries sent to crab culminating finally in the cheetah who captures crab and restores water back to the rivers and streams. Worthy of note about Bakor community is that story telling is strictly forbidden during the daytime because, as an elder informed this writer, it retards the growth, both physical and mental, of the story teller. It is, however, obvious that as a predominantly agricultural community, farm hands are valuable during the day and no one encourages anybody to laze about telling stories during work hours while others are at work. Such leisure engagements are reserved for night-time or festive periods which explains why even sex in the day is sometimes considered abominable. A typical Bakor performance session is sustained with riddles and jokes after opening which solicits brainstorming to keep the audience alert after which they are followed with long narratives, song and dance. Since the Bakor narrator always has a clear purpose of entertainment and education, his folktales are often structured in three parts; the introduction, the body of the narration and the conclusion. The introduction solicits audience attention, the body of the narration is an interactive or participatory encounter between artist and audience with the artist as lead performer and audience as interlocutory or active participants to encourage and spur the narrator into creativity. The conclusion is usually a didactic interface which admonishes the audience and draws a moral lesson for their edification. In all these, the narrator is at liberty to choose between several methods of delivery of his material either through song or dance, through dramatic dialogue or plain verbal utterances which may or may not be poetic. Apart from the introductory formulas, narrative commencement also has several opening formulas some of which include:-

a) Ngor mane, mane, mane, mane

--meaning, Since a long long long time ago

b) Ngor ngare nyi mfam kpeke li mfam

--meaning, In the past when the world was the world

c) emonghor jamebomo go ala njok

--meaning, My story commences from the elephant's belly.

d) emonghor jame long gor njini a njini

--meaning, My story commences at the beginning of time.

e) emonghor jame li bade----

--meaning, My story is about ----

f) Wunghin atung wan wuk nshol emonghor jame

- Meaning, Listen carefully to the happenings of my story.

These and more opening formulas can come handy as the narrator's imagination roams the Bakor landscape to come up with new improvised and exciting opening formulas that can arouse and hold audience interest. In narrative or performance sessions the artist's main concern is often to validate the events of the narrative while enhancing aesthetic appeal. Dramatic dialogue, gestures and facial contortions assist the narrator to succinctly build up his imagery to the audiences' appreciation. In some cases even digressions become part of the narration as was the case with this writer who was welcomed into a narrative session by a narrator who referred to the writer as another "ashang" or hare, the hero-protagonist of most Bakor folktales. Without interrupting the progress of the narrative, the narrator, on sighting this writer, uninterestedly digressed from the main strand of narration with this observation

"ashang jikor kpi bakhe,yeji kpo kpili amonghor ngor awerr nya nnen

- Meaning, the other hare is approaching, the one who teaches stories in big schools.

The digression effectively blended into the narrative and so went unnoticed by most audience members and so the audience accepted the narrator's view that this writer was as tricky as the hare and always lured them into performances, sometimes against their wish. Narrative conclusions offer the narrator the opportunity to moralize or to teach lessons to his audience particularly the children. There is, therefore, a vastly used stock-ending to which most narrators resort even though, again, they are at liberty to improvise their own endings. The stock phrase only serves to draw audience attention to the narrator and allows him to say what he wishes to impart to his audience. The stock-ending phrase often runs like this:- O-lel lel lel lel lel, which utterance

really has no meaning beyond a ululation, but allows the narrator to draw a moral or offer an explanation for a phenomenon at the end of the narrative e.g.

O,lel lel lel, the hare has a red buttocks

O,lel lel lel the chicken cannot urinate

O,lel lel lel elephant felled a palm tree etc

Story endings are often highly prone to debate as the morals drawn at the end may be controversial and may not be entirely acceptable to every member of the audience who may then decide to challenge the narrator and spark off a long debate while other audience members take sides. Resolution of such debates teaches young ones the rubrics of Bakor cultural life and values. Improvised story endings are sometimes more interesting than stock-endings because they come impromptu and comment on contemporary happenings in the community. This writer was opportuned to witness one such improvised ending which addressed the audience thus

Emonghor jame ebkolo,emonghor lifere yebin gbaleh,kam wan nyiam a mfung meh nli.

Meaning: My story has ended but if my story was interesting, give me buffalo flesh to eat.

This writer was at pains to find out the relationship of buffalo flesh to the narrative or events of the narration which seemed unconnected and then learnt that buffaloes were attacking the community and one had been killed but several were still at large and they required brave hunters to hunt them down. This was, therefore, an indirect charge to young hunters to rise up to a communal responsibility.

Story telling sessions sometimes become tense and the artist is forced to introduce anxiety reduction techniques to relocate his audience from the fictional to the realistic world. Several methods are again available to the Bakor narrator to douse tension some of which include

a) Song and dance sessions usually in relation to the narrative content.

b) Direct jibes at audience members whom the narrator compares with his fictional characters e.g. the hare went and carried a pumpkin pod that was as fat as Gaga's head, all of which cause laughter and relax the tense narrative atmosphere to allow the narrator build up the story.

c) Direct comparison of tale events and actions with real life situations and occurrences in the community, eg then hare picked an apple and threw it as far as Esham for spider to run and pick it up. Esham is a real Bakor village which is interposed with the narrative events. The story teller deliberately creates realistic physical distances which he then juxtaposes with the fictional events of the narrative. Bakor stories centre principally on animal characters leading to the often erroneous assumption that African stories generally lack serious import. This play only aids

objectification of experience and allows narrators to comment on human foibles dispassionately and without repercussions from audience members who may feel hurt by the narrative events. The body of the narration centers on events and exploits surrounding these animals around which human foibles and idiosyncrasies are built for objective view and criticism. For this reason folktale analysts have argued that

*for many indigenous people, experience has no separation between the physical world and the spiritual world. Thus, indigenous people communicate to their children through ritual, storytelling, or dialogue for everything comes from the “great spirit” or creator and is one. Everything, including inanimate objects, has a soul and is to be respected. These values, learned through storytelling, help to guide future generations and aid identity formation.*

In the course of narration, the narrator is alert to audience active participation and criticism because such an audience tasks his imagination and consciousness to respond appropriately to societal expectations in the creation of a viable image of society. In this way the Bakor artist maintains a close interactive link with his audience since his narrative is, in any case, meant for them. Good performances, therefore, imply that the narrator presents his characters and events in appropriate and compelling language with powerful imagery such that the audience identifies with his presentation. The audience is equally expected to interact and to judge the character portraits the narrator has presented because they are the final assessors or arbiters in this exercise of cultural authentication or personality profile development. They judge the characters and what they stand for or represent in the society or cultural milieu. Thus, given the appropriate physical, intellectual, emotional and social context, the Bakor story teller and his story telling context can be described as the event in oral discourse which utilizes the word to create a world of perfection for the audience to emulate. The importance of the performance context in Bakor society, therefore, lies in the fact that it provides a milieu with stories that create a world of entertainment, a world of education, a world that develops our imagination and memory, a world that presents society with morals and social standards and a world that authenticates historical, cultural and linguistic developments of communities for critical assessment. The Bakor performance context creates a complex fictional protagonist who is a representation of similar qualities and behavior as human beings. The protagonist is a cunning trickster, a liar and a cheat, but he is equally an embodiment of Bakor heroic qualities and all that is cherished and valued in Bakor society. The Bakor performance context is thus an embodiment of cultural life, with appropriate props and linguistic accompaniment. This kind of story telling context sustains a narrative, illuminates ideas and highlights images thus eliciting and illustrating new ideas and associations and enhancing knowledge rather than distractions. The histrionics of performance also help to focus attention and allows the narrator to make contact with the word in oral discourse, to vocalize it and to enliven it with gesture in order to communicate effectively and successfully with that word. This is the

importance the Bakor attach to storytelling in performance contexts which is, as well, the goal of ethnopoetics ie

to show how the techniques of unique oral performers [can] enhance the aesthetic value of their performances within their specific cultural contexts.

The importance and uniqueness of performance contexts for the realization of verbal folklore, particularly in traditional societies, is further elaborated by Catherine S. Quick, who argues that the study of performance was accentuated by Jerome Gothenberg who

Had recognized that “most translations of native American oral traditions...failed to capture the power and beauty of the oral performances on the written page,” especially when “Western poetic styles” were imposed upon these written texts

## CONCLUSION

Most African communities will, therefore, continue to depend on the strength of the word in oral discourse as a most succinct way of authenticating experience and educating younger generations on African knowledge systems even in the face of the current global emphasis on literacy and writing and its consequent interface with orality. As a Bakor proverb succinctly puts it, “it is attendants of a sick person who know the name of the ailment or disease the sick man suffers from” which follows that it is only Africans who are intimately involved in an experience that know how that experience emanated, how it functions, and how it impacts on their lives and only they can own the sole right of naming that experience. Westerners who claim knowledge of Africans and their culture and knowledge systems, therefore, do so in arrogance and utter disregard and disrespect for Africans and their ways of life and cognitive capacity. We need to go back to the origins to emphasize the culture and identity of the African and Oral literature can best provide that opportunity for the development of pedagogical models that centre on the re-inculcation of African values in our younger generations as they progress through the formal school system. It is for this reason that J.A.Onuekwusi eulogizes the place of women in the scheme of African oral literature when he posits that “in traditional times, women kept the word, around the hearth, under the bright moon-light and even while supper is on, they told folktales, riddles, legends and sometimes myths to children. They also sang songs and ballads to keep alive a collective heritage. Through these aspects of oral literature they educated, entertained and informed one generation after another and kept the society stable.”

Finally, commenting on Comaroff’s *Modernity and its Malcontents*, Talia Levitt observes that in defining modernity certain terms have been concentrated on such as “tradition” and “culture”

- *which only contribute to pigeon-holing societies and compartmentalizing groups of people. And what this does is actually create an “us and them,” or a feeling of, “otherness” as*

*these ideas of what culture and tradition are, are Western ideals. So it is the West that has the ability to modernize less developed nations, yet on the most basic linguistic level, in doing so those nations are squashed underneath a Western definition of what it means to be "modernized," not to mention the lack of independence and neo-colonial links to the West that this creates.*

Perhaps it is pertinent here, to note that this kind of subjugation of other cultures, is an attribute of literacy and writing and is not restricted to the linguistic level only but pervades all facets of cultural, political, economic and literary lives of the so called under-developed cultures thus relegating the potency of oral literature and any pedagogical model that is based on it. This trap is what we must resist.

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