

From the Ethnography of Performance-to-Performance Ethnography: An Appraisal of the Place of Performance in Contemporary Bakor Oral Narrative Experience

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Abstract

The perceived shift of emphasis on performance studies to the contextual imperative necessitates a corresponding examination of approaches that have the potential to yield better result on contextual analysis of performances and society, (Magoulick:2014, van der Aa and Blommaert: 2015). The ethnography on performance studies has therefore emphasized either the ethnography of performance or performance ethnography, two approaches that require in-depth immersion of the researcher in the target community's life and practices to enhance "interactive" and "insider" views of performance contexts in relation to cultural practices. These two approaches, however, still have limitations as D.S. Farrer (2007) observes. The possibilities and limitations of these approaches call for a deeper understanding of cultural praxis within target communities as means for the furtherance and explication of the intricacies of performance contexts. They also raise pertinent questions as to which of these approaches best explicates a society's culture. Through an appraisal of the Bakor oral narrative repertoire, this paper attempts an examination of the tenets of both approaches and posits that an integrative and/or collaborative selection of aspects of each approach, taking into cognizance the cultural landscape of the target community, will yield more positive results on how ethno-historical antecedents affect performance contexts and how performance techniques or styles and art-based research aid the construction of culture and identity.

Introduction

Since the reorientation or shift of perspective in Folklore and ethnographic studies in the 1960s from "collecting and categorizing to synthesizing and understanding peoples and their creations in their own terms," (Magoulick, 2014), folkloristic scholarship has continually emphasized contextual approaches to the study of performance and performance contexts as apt methods for understanding societies and their cultural practices. Magoulick therefore posits that

- Such imaginings gave birth to performance theory...[while] the insights and methods of previous generations of scholars inevitably change based on new or fine-tuned theories that better fit contemporary methods, goals or insights. Aesthetic sensibilities are to be discovered according to local understanding of language, speech patterns, genre, etc. (p.1)

To underscore the place of contextual approaches to performance studies, Dell Hymes, himself an originator of the shift, asserts that folklore research can best be described as

A concern with the aesthetic and expressive aspects of culture; concern with traditions and traditional life of one's own society; enjoyment of and caring

for, what one studies; often, craftsmanship-like participation in the tradition studied, concern for accuracy and objectivity, insight and explanation, that manages by and large not to contort what one studies with procrustean methodology or to conceal it behind a mask of theoretics (Hymes,1975, p.345).

In 1983, Richard Bauman again emphasized contextual studies when he posited that to understand what folklore really is, we must go beyond its conception as a

Disembodied super-organic stuff and view it contextually in terms of individual, social and cultural factors that give it shape, meaning and existence. This reorientation requires us to broaden the scope of our fieldwork: a contextual perspective on folklore makes the enterprise much more ramified and complex than the simple butterfly-collecting approach...that often passes for fieldwork(Bauman,1983, p.362).

These precisely are the goals behind performance theory and such postulations set the pace, prepared grounds and gave birth to the now flowering discipline of contextual studies on performance which spans such scholastic disciplines as Folklore, Anthropology, Literature, Linguistics, Psychology and Theatre studies. Today, it is perceived that contextual performance studies ethnography has not only become widespread but has assumed ever increasing complexity in social life as a result of the impact of super diversity and globalizing trends “which have become highly problematic and now invite new methodological approaches.”(Van der Aa and Blommaert, 2015). The emergence of performance studies as an academic discipline has therefore revealed the indispensability of contextual approaches and consequent emphasis on the environment of production of oral material as major influences on the artist in the composition of oral literature. This has inevitably focused attention on two seemingly contending but closely interrelated concepts emanating from this approach namely

- A) The ethnography of performance and
- B) Performance ethnography

The two concepts can be said to enunciate very tenuous differences while laying emphasis, one on cultural or ethnological practices and the other on performance styles and techniques or creative potential of the communities within which a particular culture is lived and practiced and their interplay in an understanding of culture in action.

Roland Pelias(2007) therefore makes the following distinction between the two concepts not to be confused with the ethnography of performance which examines cultural performances as objects of investigation [into cultural practices], performance ethnography relies upon the embodiment of cultural others. As such, it is a method of enquiry that privileges the body as a site for knowing. [Hence] performance, for the performance Ethnographer is typically understood as an aesthetic act within a theatrical tradition.(p.2)

Brian Rusted (2012), in tracing the development of performance studies as a discipline, identified Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein as the initial scholars who, in their edited Volume, *Folklore: Performance and Communication (1975)*, were first associated with the shift in Folklore scholarship from content analysis and mere collection of oral narratives as a literary and anthropological activity to the socially more relevant emphasis on the emergent qualities of performance as an event within a narrative tradition.

Ben-Amos and Goldstein, therefore, added fuel to what is now being identified as the contextual approach to the study of folklore and the oral narrative activity particularly in so called “primary oral cultures.” This knowledge on the contextual approach or the ethnography of performance brought about an increased awareness of the otherwise marginalized and subjugated forms of expressive culture particularly in predominantly traditional cultures as noted by Webster and Kroskirty (2013).

From Dell Hymes (1975) to Bauman and Briggs (1990), scholars have consistently identified the potential of performance to alter relationships between performer and audience in ordinary everyday lived experiences of people and their forms of communication which sometimes involve a creative impulse or an emergent and creative relationship with tradition. Performance is therefore considered here as an aesthetic act within a narrative or theatrical tradition which implies that narrators or artists rely on their artistic styles and presentational skills to evoke emotions and sympathies in others or the perceived audience into full participation in the narrative events or experience. In such circumstances, the audience is catalyzed into participation in the narrative and made aware of their unique identity as a cultural entity that provides the aesthetic principles within the ethnographic milieu of performativity. For this reason, performance ethnography or research into performance in any culture requires deep knowledge and insight into the environment and/or performance or artistic and aesthetic traditions that dictate the patterns and styles of literary products that emanate from that culture.

Della Pollack (2006) therefore asserts that in marking possibilities for new work in performance ethnography he has identified basic contributions of performance ethnography to include among others

- a) Shifting the object of ethnography to performance and “redefining the cultural field that the ethnographer writes as broadly composed of radically contingent, Omni permeable, micro and macro performances.
- b) **shifting the “relationship of the researcher and the ostensibly “researched” (the field and the field subjects) [thereby] reconfiguring long standing subject-object relations as co-performative; beyond anything like documentary interview as the reciprocal intervention of each on the other, transforming each in turn.”**
- c) Moving the writing of culture such that “performance ethnography manifests given power relations...”

This realization is therefore the guiding interest behind this assessment of the place of performance in the Bakor narrative repertoire. Before that, however, it is pertinent to have an idea of what the two concepts of Ethnography of performance and performance Ethnography imply in ethnological parlance.

Performance Ethnography

Performance ethnography relies on the embodiment of cultural material available to the performer in keying performances and is as such considered to be a method of enquiry into performance that privileges the body as a site for knowledge (Pelias:2007). Therefore, what differentiates the performance ethnographer from the regular ethnographer is the mode of representation of culture wherein the performance ethnographer’s emphasis lies in the techniques and styles of theatrical enactments that contain deep symbolic connotations for a cultural community. Performance ethnography does not therefore only lay much emphasis on participant observation of cultural practices which is considered as insufficient for cultural

understanding but also struggles to represent cultural findings through the enactment of cultural others. This differentiates the performance ethnographer from the regular ethnographer and makes the performance ethnographer more interpretive and penetrative in his analysis of culture and performance contexts. Regular ethnographers simply record what they see and their functional import within a cultural enclave with little or no attempts at in depth interpretation of cultural practices thus making the performance ethnographer more perceptive. Performance ethnography thus thrives on field-work methods to authenticate performances and generate material for new performances.

In this way, performance ethnography combines aesthetics, artifact analysis, art-based research, ethno-drama and ethno-poetics to enhance clarification of symbolic interaction committed to the spoken presentation of cultural material. This creates a reflexive relationship between the subject matter of performance or sociological scrutiny and the modes of its representation which constitutes performance ethnography. Such innovations on performance are said to have political implications as according to Norman Denzin (2003) “such studies relate the personal, the political and the performance which become almost inseparable. Denzin also avers that

- ...for the minority and marginalized populations of race, gender, age, class etc., the emancipatory possibilities[of performance ethnography] are significant. Through re-enacted performance, the oppression of socially imposed roles is unveiled onstage and examined by both audience and actors simultaneously.(p.18)

Performance ethnography’s emphasis on art-based research is what is described by Shaun McNiff (2007) as “ethno-theatre,” which is also seen as “the systematic use of the artistic process, the actual making of artistic expressions in all of the different forms of the arts, as a primary way of understanding and examining experience by both researchers and the people that they involve in their studies.

The ethnography of performance

The Ethnography of performance on the other hand, while requiring an in depth understanding of cultural phenomenon and issues in the world of reality, also emphasizes a deep knowledge of the physical environment of the creators of narratives who themselves constitute the audience and critics and/or recipients of the creative process of the artists. This happens because an ethnographic approach captures everyday life and practices among local inhabitants. D. Soyini Madison(2012) therefore points out that

The ethnography of performance would refer to “the way people realize their culture through a fluid process of creating meaning of cultural praxis,” where ethnography essentially concerns communication and dialogical conversation.(p.25)

The Ethnography of performance therefore requires that the researcher stays for a length of time in the field to enhance sustained interaction with the target research community among whom he is expected to live and work in order to understand the people and learn as well as experience the culture of his new environment as distinct from his own. This brings to the fore the peculiar interests and emphasis of the two concepts; namely that while performance ethnography, like ethno-theatre or art based research, lays emphasis on the collection of large portions of qualitative field notes and interviews on performance which are judiciously arranged and scripted for staging to enhance both audience and researcher understanding of

local participant's lives and culture as Johny Saldana (1998) points out; the Ethnography of performance, according to Sarah Butler (2008) approaches an understanding of performance contexts through a knowledge of cultural practices. Says Butler,

[...] exploring performance art through ethnography provides reflexive, context dependent renderings of time-sensitive work acknowledging both artists' and visitors' perspectives (Butler, 2008, p.3).

The Ethnography of performance approach is therefore an interpretive approach to performance contexts that is not limited to an understanding of traditional formal and material culture analysis but seeks to demonstrate an ethnographic presentation of performance and performativity appreciation of both audience or researcher and the artist. Ethnography of performance considers concerns that are specific to performance because a consideration of performance that is not context or environment bound remains futile ventures as it will either not yield satisfactory results or will yield negative results about the target community under study.

To try to stem the possibility of negative results or misinterpretation of cultural practices, Ethnography of performance considers ways by which ethnography can form part and parcel of performance studies and how the study of performance can contribute to an explication of ethnographic analysis and understanding of society.

It is this integrative and interpretive approach which Brian Rusted (2012) highlights when he draws attention to the seeming metamorphosis of studies on performance from Ethnography of performance to performance Ethnography as he traces the contributions of different scholars in diverse disciplines to the field of performance. Rusted particularly notes the contributions to the contextual approach by such scholars as Dell Hymes, Dan Ben-Amos, Richard Bauman, Charles Briggs, Norman Denzin, Soyini Madison and a host of others, while noting in particular the seminal work by Richard Bauman under the rubric of "The Ethnography of Performance," which, according to him, "identified important constituents of performance contexts and developed frameworks for their analysis."

Despite these brilliant contributions to performance studies from the perspectives of both performance Ethnography and the Ethnography of performance, the field still remains enigmatic as it raises questions about the emphasis of different exponents in the field (D.S. Farrer, 2007, R.Cancel, 2009). The concerns that arise from these concerted studies on performance and contextual analysis pertain to such areas as

- a) What comes to light from the study of performance as a mirror of ethnographic research?
- b) Is performance a distinct subject from other social phenomena to deserve this level of notification?
- c) What kind of performance do we refer to in these studies; performance of everyday life or "performance as an event" in an oral narrative tradition?

These concerns still engage the attention of scholars and researchers in the field while evidence garnered from different contextual regions of study is as diverse as the cultural practices prevalent in the different cultural environments which still necessitates intensive research to gather information from different cultural backgrounds that may aid the development and sustenance of an integrative perspective on performance and contextual performance studies.

The Goals of the Ethnography of Performance

Since the publication of Dan Ben-Amos and Kenneth Goldstein's edited volume, *Folklore: Performance and Communication* (1975), performance and performance contexts have been viewed from different perspectives and from the different fields of Anthropology, Psychology, Linguistics, Literature, Theatre and Communication studies to the extent that there are claims and counter claims pertaining to the proper domain of performance studies. It is important to note, however, that performance appears to be a ubiquitous artistic indulgence which affects different spheres of human existence and so can be studied from several and diverse perspectives. It is also obvious that each discipline throws light on what performance entails as it relates to that discipline much like the various perspectives of the elephant supplied by the blind men of Hindustan.

The study of performance, like oral literature, should therefore be more meaningful as a collaborative venture or endeavor which utilizes insights from the different fields while highlighting contextual imperatives that rely on ethnographic research or evidence to authenticate postulations, (Okpewho, 1982). It is also for this reason that R. Cancel (2009) asserts that "No verbal art exists without performance; and the techniques performers employ along with the contexts wherein the performances occur are the real dynamics of oral art," (Cancel, p.315).

Wrong interpretations of oral material therefore arise from our wrong emphasis on cultural activity and inability to perceive and understand the complexities of a particular culture coupled with the frequent impositions and generalizations about universalism particularly when it concerns African cultures. Dan Ben-Amos, however, observes and aptly too that

The simplicity of folklore is in the eyes of the foreign beholder. Culturally, a folktale, a song, and a proverb can have a complex system of meanings, connotations and significances, as any written work contemplated by a learned author. The lack of sophistication therefore is not an inherent attribute of folk literature (Ben-Amos 1982, p.7).

This assertion calls to mind an emphasis on studies and research on so called marginalized and minority cultures and their cultural enactments as a means of understanding the intricacies and complexities of their cultural practices especially as they relate to performance as an artistic and creative event.

The objective of Ethnographic research therefore, as it pertains to performance and contextual analysis, is to discover the cultural knowledge i.e. nuances and symbolic meanings of cultural praxis that lurk in the minds of people about themselves and how this is employed or comes to play in an understanding and consequent interpretation of social interaction in relationships with others. This entails what Brian Hoey (2014) has described as "qualitative research," as opposed to quantitative or statistical research.

The goals of ethnographic research therefore, are to integrate views of the insiders or producers of a particular culture with those of outsiders or researchers in the description of a social setting. This calls for an emphasis on intensive participant interactional observation which is the hallmark of the ethnography of performance. Brian Hoey (2014) in his article "What is Ethnography," posits that

- ...the term ethnography has come to be equated with virtually any qualitative research project (as distinct from a quantitative or statistically oriented endeavor) where the intent is to provide a detailed, in depth description of everyday life and practice.(p.1)

To Hoey, ethnography is simply “both a qualitative research process or method and a product...whose aim is cultural interpretation.” The Ethnography of performance therefore emphasizes qualitative research in which the researcher goes beyond mere reportage of events to an interpretation of the significance of events performed in the cultural lives of a people who live it. Clifford Geertz (1973) refers to it as “webs of meaning,” or “the cultural constructions in which we live and interact.

The contention of this writer is that whether we talk about Performance Ethnography which concentrates on the creative potential of artists in the performance process as a means of understanding cultural practices or we move from the impact of cultural praxis to an understanding of performance intricacies in any one culture which is the domain of the Ethnography of performance; we must be able to penetrate and achieve a deeper understanding of the symbolic connotations of cultural life to prevent hasty generalizations about a peoples’ culture. The two concepts therefore, seem to be interdependent as scholastic investigation has isolated and emphasized the two approaches to research on cultural praxis and the performance event as expressive and interpretative since they articulate experience.

The aim of this paper is therefore to provide what anthropologists have referred to as the “emic” perspective or the “insiders point of view” which is aimed at enhancing consistent and qualitative research into Bakor cultural praxis; in particular the Bakor performance context, to ensure the emergence of meaning in the narrative experience of the Bakor people from their ethnographic encounter and to douse the effect of impositions from our preconceived notions or knowledge of already existing models which in most cases are totally alien and misleading to researchers and scholars on Bakor cultural life especially the artistic and creative potential of the people. One such erroneous impression of the Ekajuk people, a Bakor sub-group is projected by the Seed Company, a religious /anthropological outfit who described the Ekajuk as

Ekajuk people have a close connection with the land, which their survival in rural Nigeria demands. Yet for their awe and wonder of creation, people feel disconnected and separated from their creator. Prior generations developed a traditional belief system based on fear. Over the years, traditional beliefs mixed with Christian values, created a syncretic blend of confusion.(p. 1)

From their presentation one immediately sees the intention of the group as a fund-raising Christian group that believes that unless people are “Christian” they are prone to confusion, disconnection and “separated from their creator.” This shows the extent to which a society can be misinterpreted and misrepresented. On the contrary, Ekajuk and Bakor people are very religious but one can perhaps understand them better from the perspective of African traditional religion. Only immersion, interaction and deep participant observation can reveal the true nature and characteristics of a traditional society like the Bakor.

Since the Ethnographic approach to performance is only considered relevant and valid from the perspective of long term engagement with the target community which, in turn, enhances intense participant observation as an outcome of long term immersion in the target culture, this writer’s extensive fieldwork and publications on the Bakor oral narrative processes is expected to serve as authentication of the observations recorded herein as the authentic views of a participant observer/researcher and an insider on the Bakor narrative experience.

Furthermore, it is well known that the aim of ethnographic research is to “present a descriptive account of social life and culture within a defined social system [which is why

ethnographic research] is thought of as a portrait of a people with a holistic view of culture, its shared meanings, patterns and experiences” (Bauman, 1983). Again, it is established that the major sustenance factor of oral literature is the dynamism of the performance context which easily adapts to situations and the vagaries of modern-day technological advancements epitomized in the concepts of globalization and transcultural postulations. Being derived and sustained in the ethnology of communal existence, it thrives on the community’s identity and cosmic belief system. Possa (2012) argues that

- [...]oral literature, being part and parcel of modes of social expression survives over time as a genre that aptly adapts to changes and challenges. These include creation, transmission, usage, preservation and emergent orientations that require expression and commentary.(p. 2)

This would serve as a succinct explanation for the diversity of performance styles and patterns or techniques from different cultures as well as disciplinary approaches to the study of performance. It would also justify the need for Ethnography of performance that illuminates these diversities while taking into cognizance communal identity and cosmic belief systems of societies that provide the aesthetic principles for the sustenance of the performance experience. It is also for this reason that a brief assessment of the Bakor narrative experience is provided here in the bid to position the researcher on Bakor literature and culture in a better light and redefine his significance as a participant observer in the performance experience of the Bakor people.

This is very pertinent because in this process of interpreting culture (Hartmann, 2005) identifies two interpretive levels that converge to generate meaning out of cultural products; (a) the audience or members of the target community under study who constitute the judges and interpreters of their culture and experiences through their narratives, and (b) the researchers who interpret these performances as culture to enhance an understanding for other researchers and the outside world. Bauman and Briggs (1990), Briggs (1985) and Langdon (1999) therefore perceive ethnography of performance as privileged access to the interpretation of what members of these cultures or target communities under study make of themselves and their relationship with others.

The Bakor Oral Narrative Repertoire: An Appraisal

An appraisal of Creativity and the Bakor oral narrative experience from the natural contexts of performances, which in themselves are becoming rare as a result of the impact of technological advancements particularly home videos on traditional society, reveals their unity of purpose as reflections of Bakor cultural heritage. This is because performance contexts or narrative traditions enable experience to be shared and interpreted while giving form and meaning to these experiences. Performance contexts and narratives articulate experience into units of analysis established by a people or a cultural community for the interpretation of their culture. Therefore, each performance context and each narrative or ethnographical piece is related to a determined cultural context and its meaning may only be understood within the context of that culture, (Hartmann, 2005). To this extent, in Bakor narrative parlance, both textual and contextual analysis show that artists are versed in the ethno-historical and cosmic belief systems of the Bakor people. Creative performances therefore portray emotions, desires and motives that are dictated by given socio-cultural and ethno-historical antecedents for the realization of their objectives. Ganyi (2013) argues that

- The Bakor society identifies with the[folktale] protagonist as hero and as villain because he represents the complexities of human life [and idiosyncrasies] and as such is perceived of as an archetypal representative of humanity in Bakor world view(Ganyi,p.19).

The contention here is that artists create in accordance with traditions and aesthetic principles dictated by the ethno-historical antecedents or cultural practices prevalent in a particular performance environment. They create in reaction to immediate realities. Genre classifications can therefore be determined or are dependent on cultural dictates. Artists are as such fully aware or take into cognizance creative processes in reaction to cultural realities. In Bakor narrative experience also, the place of performance is paramount as the context, the artist and the audience work in consonance in an interactive session for the realization of emotional intensity and explication of cultural nuances and symbols. Richard Bauman (1986) therefore quotes Johann Gottfried von Herder as having asserted that

- ...the oral literature of a people was both the highest and truest expression of its authentic national culture and the appropriate foundation of its national literature.(p.12)

Performance in Bakorcommunity therefore implies an involvement with nature and a relationship with physical space as well as personal contact with the audience and participants in the environment of production of the narratives. Performance codes make it possible for knowledge systems to be produced and encoded through culture as well as ensuring the enhancement of deep reflection on that culture. Esther Langdon (1999) posits that generally, “performances engage participants in a “multi-sensorial” way, while Lawrence Sullivan (1986) argues that in performance contexts, “symbolic expressions converge in a unity of the senses that enables culture to entertain itself with unified meaning, (Sullivan, p. 6). This is also applicable to the Bakor narrative repertoire.

An appraisal of the nature of the creative process in Bakor community reveals that creativity takes place on the spur of the moment during performances particularly during work sessions or in funeral settings, (Ganyi, 1987). There is as such no contemplation on prior composition which makes performances immediate reactions to issues and events in context. Performance contexts therefore reflect the level of linguistic manipulation and variability inherent in Bakor society as exemplified in everyday entertainment and in ritual contexts which are often prone to the use of esoteric or ritualisticchants believed to have emanated from ancestral worship.

What this entails is that performance techniques aid the discernment of creative essence and the creative impulse that is in consonance with nature, environmental mannerisms and cultural practices as well as roles in the characterization of narratives in the Bakorsociety.Researchers therefore need to be well versed in the nuances of language use to be able to detect the changes that occur in language use during performance sessions. This is aptly portrayed in (Ganyi, 2015), where the author shows that at certain specified moments of performance interaction, artists and elders operate on different linguistic levels ofritual on the one hand, and ordinary everyday entertainment, on the other (Ganyi, 2015).

The relationship between the artist and his audience in the Bakor narrative experience is very fluid and allows for on-the-spur-of-the-moment criticism, also seen as in-performance criticism, which, like in-performance composition, is prevalent in Bakor society and enhances artist/ audience interactions that enlivens performances and makes them more relevant as cultural indicators. The Bakor performance context is so fluid that it easily accommodates

critical participant observation that sometimes negates cherished values e.g. when Christian adherents challenge ritual priests during traditional cleansing ceremonies. The fluidity and flexibility of these methods and techniques of presentation of material however assist the explication of creative realities and experiences. Through this interactive process, the Bakor oral text becomes an invaluable asset and a document for cultural authentication in several ramifications namely

- a) Serving as a vehicle of communication
- b) Serving as a tool of creative expressiveness
- c) Serving as a mediator of social realities
- d) Serving as a vehicle for identity formation and construction, power relations and gender performativity.

Performances therefore aid the interpretation and analysis of oral narratives while ensuring additions to texts as a direct outcome of fluidity.

In Bakor in particular and traditional African society generally, production, delivery and preservation of folk narratives and culture is the prerogative of accomplished artists or griots who utilize the context of performance to recreate societal norms and values for universal perception. The performance context and narrative repertoire are as such the major pedagogical modes of instruction on Bakor knowledge systems. For this reason, Ganyi (2013b) has observed that

- Performance sessions, which are paramount in every traditional African society, are usually organized at twilight or even night time.... Most Nigerian communities...prefer night time when the days chores are done with for obvious reasons that no one lives by story-telling principally[and that] darkness helps to mystify or sustain the air of esotericism or wonder often associated with the renditions(2013b, p.2)

Finally, and still on the Bakor narrative experiences he, Ganyi, also asserts that

- In these narrative sessions, the traditional artist assumes responsibility for communal cultural authentication and maintenance of cherished values. Perception of society's cosmic, social and political life is through the consciousness of storytellers and the narrative protagonists they create as embodiments of social norms and values (Ganyi, 2013b, p.2).

The Bakor narrative repertoire emphasizes the sustenance of collective experiences as the individual is inconsequential or irrelevant in the society. People only derive importance and relevance by belonging to the larger communal ethos which is correspondingly recognized in narrative parlance. The individual either fits in and is recognized as a member of society or becomes a deviant and outcast in society which character traits are taken care of in the creation of the archetypal character of the Bakor folktale hero-protagonist(Ganyi 2013a). This moral philosophy is also expressed by Alasdair Macintyre (1984) who posits,

I am born with a past and to try to cut myself off from that past in the individualist mode is to deform my present relationships [...] The self has to find its moral identity in and through its membership in communities such as those of the family, the neighborhood, the city, and the tribe....without those moral particularities to begin from, there would never be anywhere to begin(Macintyre, p.221).

Since individualism is alien to most traditional African cultures who, instead, emphasize collectivism as enshrined in the philosophy of “Ubuntu”, the artist is morally subject to audience sanction through approval or disapproval of his creations as either appropriate or inappropriate reflections of societal values and the collective ethos of Bakorpeople. The artist also depends on appropriate performance contexts to effectively utilize traditional resources of improvisation and mimicry for the establishment of rapport between artist and society. All of these depend on the artistic excellence of the artist who is responsible for the manipulation of linguistic and para-linguistic resources within the context of performance. The audience or spectators (including researchers) remain the judges of the final outcome of the performance event.

In the Bakor oral narrative repertoire therefore, the meaning and significance of an oral text is largely determined by the interactive outcome between the artist and the audience who, themselves, are often aware of the incidents that catalyze the creative sensibilities of the artists. To the researcher who is unaware of this interactive process, the performance or its meaning may be very disjointed. For this reason, the researcher must rely on intense participant observation and interaction which is vital to an in depth understanding of narrative events and their relevance to society as cultural artifacts or signifiers. It is as such very pertinent for researchers to pay close attention to the Ethnography of performance which emphasizes performance field-work that focuses on live performances in a variety of contexts as a reflection of “culture in action.”

An example of this type of revealing and rewarding participant observation, recommended for a better perception of the Bakor narrative experience is the type recorded by Joni L. Jones (2002) about his experience with the installation of the Yoruba deity, Osun, where he observes that

During February 2001, I created a performance installation based on my research in Nigeria on the Yoruba deity, Osun. The installation “searching for Osun,” was performance ethnography that charted my overtly subjective and selective meditation on Nigeria. The audience who came interacted with the aspects of Yoruba life that moved me most- dance and music, divination, Osun’s relationship to children, “women’s work” and food preparation. I was deeply aware of the ways that my African Americanness at times converged with Yoruba realities and at other times sharply veered away from them... I felt simultaneously foreign and indigenous, welcome and invisible, comfortable and utterly disoriented.... The performance ethnography sought to disrupt notions of “the real” by encouraging the participants to question what they accept as truth, and to examine how their truths are shaped by their perspectives.

The circumstances of this entire narration depict the extent of immersion of the narrator/researcher and the intense observation that are functions of total immersion resulting to the deep feeling of both belonging and un-belonging. My own experience of working with an accomplished Bakor storyteller and visionary song composer NshorrMowang Moshe of blessed memory always transported me out of this physical world of reality to the fictional world as attestation of the power of performance to completely erode cognitive distinctions between reality and fantasy and between nature, animals and human beings in folktale

performances. This is the ecstasy that pervades a typical Bakor oral narrative session which joins the physical world of reality to the fictional in the reconstruction of life and human experiences that constitute a unique culture and identity for the Bakor people. Milton Singer (1959) therefore opines that after all, a given performance is a “particularization of the structure of tradition complementary to its social organization.

Conclusion

The profundity of scholarship on contextual performance studies bears testimony to the diversity of cultural praxis the world over. Contemporary scholastic emphasis as is attested to by Mary Magoulick(2014) however points to attempts at synthesizing and understanding world cultures that could translate to the envisaged vision of turning the world into a global village of high technological and multi-media advancement. If this is to be achieved, cognizance must be taken of the multifarious diversity of cultures and cultural traits in the world with each cultural entity maneuvering for political, social and ethnic identity and supremacy or autonomy. Cognizance must also be taken of the complex migratory patterns that tend to favor the birth of the “network society,” where “individual and group networks have become intense and diverse,” (Van der Aa and Blommaert,2015).

These diversities call for even newer approaches to the study of culture and performativity than the present approaches which emphasize participant observation and contextual studies for the explication of cultural practices. Today, the ethnographic focus on immersion and interactive fieldwork sessions seems unsatisfactory as society is developing more and more complex and diverse structural phenomena occasioned by multi-cultural denotations. However, what one continues to advocate is sustained emphasis on intense fieldwork and participant observation particularly in African societies to stem the effect of impositions of Western models with their negative impact on African values and instead enhance a better diaspora understanding of African societies. This is what this paper tries to achieve with the brief appraisal of the Bakor narrative repertoire against the background of an emphasis on the ethnography of performance. This is because as Brian Rusted (2012) points out

“Performance implies understanding performance as a lived relationship between performer and audience,one that involves a creative, emergent and critical relation with tradition” (Rusted, p.4).

Until newer and better approaches are enunciated to cater for the “network society” and its accompanying diversity and complexity, we must continue to emphasize intense fieldwork as a function of the ethnography of performance that can assist a better understanding of people and their complex cultural systems.

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