

## **Artistic and Creative Paradigms of Oral Narrative Performances: The Relevance of the Bakor Song Composer to His Contemporary Milieu**

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**Abstract:** *Performance has been recognized as the bedrock of Oral Literature thus contextual performance situations become the best avenues for the appropriate assessment and analysis of pre-literate traditions and their artistic endowments. In the past, Oral performances of the so-called pre-literate societies were erroneously classified as fossils and lacking artistic or aesthetic appeal. This paper, therefore, attempts an assessment of Bakor Song compositions within their contextual performance situations with a view, not only to bring out the artistic and creative potential of the artists but also to portray the contemporary relevance of the artists and their compositions*

**Key words:** *Artistry; Aesthetics; Creativity; Song composition; Contemporary relevance.*

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### **I. Introduction**

#### **The Place Of Performance In Oral Literature**

It is often times assumed that the oral narrator presents or recites, he does not create; that he simply narrates what has been handed down to him from generation to generation without alterations.

This supposition buttresses the erroneous postulation of lack of authorship of oral compositions. The argument is advanced further to question the right of a consideration of verbal art as literature in its own right. (Bascom, 1955), Finnegan (1970 and 1979), Okpewho (1975 and 1992), Chukwuma (1994) and Mournet (2005) Oral narratives, like any other form of artistic expression have been accepted as means of conveying truths about experiences of a people at a given point in time and space. However, their denial of analysis and consideration as literature also has deprived them of being seen as creative endeavors like all other artistic creations. The creativity of the artist is often missed or subsumed in functional or utilitarian considerations. An important difference between the oral narrative and the written forms of literature, however, lies in the fact that while the one is preserved only in the consciousness of the performer, the other is printed and read by the audience devoid of an interaction with the creator or performer. The implication of this is that the place of the performer as author or creator in verbal art becomes contentious yet more prominent than that of his counterpart in written literature e. He becomes the source of our total perception of a story on whose emphasis we rely for the effective conveyance of message to the audience. It is on his skill and ability at rendition that we rely for our perception of an oral piece during performance. The absence of or lack of performances or even mediocrity in performance consequently means a poor perception of the societal or personal values being projected. To understand the creativity that goes into verbal art, therefore, we need to know, not only the performance context and its implication to the creative impulse of the artist but also the artist's creative capacity, his social and economic status, his world view and ideological inclinations, all of which affect artistic variability during performances. The demands of the audience are also very vital in determining how much creativity goes into an artistic work. Despite the importance of the performer and his performance context in the interpretation of oral literature, the extent to which these are often neglected by all schools of thought on the study of the oral narrative activity is very glaring. (Finnegan, 1970); Okpewho (1992). This neglect is due, chiefly, to the lopsided emphasis of the different anthropological schools of thought that dominated early research into the field in the late 19<sup>th</sup> to the early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Exponents of these schools emphasized cultural relevance at the expense of artistic and aesthetic values which are the concerns of the literary critic or artist. From the functionalist's view of narratives as cultural artifacts to the psychoanalytical view of them as products of the collective unconscious and wish fulfillment, there was a consistent neglect of the performer and performances in favour of the utilitarian value of narratives in societies where they existed. The consequence was not only the neglect of the artist and his artistry and creativity but also the almost total obscurity that attended the entire oral literature of Africa. The artist or performer's skill and sensitivity were neglected yet on him lay the key to an understanding of the import of the narratives in their context of creation. The centrality of performance an the performer in oral literature is best contemplated and comprehended when one realizes that oral literature is

essentially a literature preserved and perceived in the consciousness of a performer who renders a tale or tales at different times to the same audience or different audiences on the same occasion. Oral literature has no existence without the performance and his interactive sessions with his audiences which is the performance context and its attendant influences. The performer's creative capability, his skill and resilience and his perceptiveness become invaluable assets through which our perception of the import of the oral narrative is enhanced. Performances become a creative experience in the performer's attempt to achieve aesthetic beauty and functional relevance as his society's representative in holding up its values to the outside world. Performer, Performance context with its attendant images and the histrionics of oral delivery during performance are, therefore, central to the concept of oral literature as a means by which an artist recreates his as well as society's experiences. According to Isidore Okpewho (1975) the artist assumes the position of the guiding spirit of his society's culture and

... as the truly guiding sensibility of his community he continually led the way in recreating the progressive forms of the communal myth.

Dell Hymes (1975) therefore, sees performance as not something "mechanical or inferior" but as something "creative, realized and achieved", through a conscious effort of ordering and re-ordering of materials and events in the narrative by the performer. The ordering and re ordering implies a creative consciousness which Hymes calls "knowledge how" as distinct from "knowledge what" which implies knowledge of the tale that can be narrated verbatim. The implication is that in "knowledge how" the artist creates and directs the consciousness of his audience with the knowledge of their expectations, while in "knowledge what", the artist is a passive beaver of tradition. Isidore Okpewho (1975) again re-iterates this distinction when he posits that

... much that has been published, I think, has neglected or confused this difference, treating tradition as something known [already and] independent of its existence as something done.

The failure to realize this difference, it seems, led to the failure to conceive of the artist in his proper perspective in oral renditions as a creator and author in his own right. The oral artist, in performance is the rightful author who is often side-lined in recording of narratives yet each performance occasion is an opportunity for the display of the creative potential of the artist within the dictates of the aesthetic norms established by the society's narrative repertoire.

Because an oral piece cannot and never exists independently of the performer and the performance context, a neglect of the performer and performances, as was always the case in the past, explains the ignorance that hitherto attended the creativity involved in oral performances. The performance's imaginative touches to an oral piece which afford his immediate audience and the outside world an insight into tale circumstances are often ignored in recordings which translates to an attempt to dwarf the originality and contemporary relevance of the artist in performance. To enhance a better view of not only oral narratives but also the skill and the creative versatility of the artists, performers should be seen, not as passive bearers of known tradition, but in the words of Dell Hymes (1975) "masters of adaptation to situation". This way they will cease to be viewed as "rote-memorizers or verbatim reporters". The creative ability of the performer or artist in his performance context, is therefore, well articulated and illustrated in the example of Bakor songsters in Ogoja, and Ikom Local Government Areas of Cross River State in Nigeria. Here the song composers rely, not on rote memorization or established patterns of song composition but rather on in-situ or on-the-spot response to the criticisms of their audiences as well as contemporary events or happenings that catalyze their imagination.

## **II. The Artistry And Creative Potential Of The Bakor Composer**

The artistic resilience of the Bakor song composer or artist is best comprehended during performance sessions. Here prior-composition or rote-memorization has very little or no appeal at all. From this researcher's observation, the Bakor composer seems to be the direct opposite of the Eskimo Lyric or song composer, who, according to Ruth Finnegan (1979), relies on

... long and careful consideration given to the composition of the words of many ... poems before their performance.

Song composition everywhere is considered an attribute of an individual artist or group. In most cases, song composers are regarded as endowed or gifted persons artistically. Giftedness notwithstanding, the process of composition is not exactly the same in all parts of the universe as it is subject to several variables. These variables can be explained in terms of either the environment i.e. the images the environment provides or conjures up in the imagination of the artist to which he responds in song; or the types of songs usually composed in certain cultures or the demands of the audiences at different occasions and stages of their development. The perception of the artist's themselves of their own role in society can determine the style and pattern of song composition. What obtains in Bakor society is on-the-spot or in-performance composition reflecting immediate occurrences. In this vein, the artist composer has no time to contemplate on the ordering of material but relies on his genius and versatility as well as the choreographic pattern to create songs that fit the situation. Sometimes the instrumentation dictates the tone and style of rendition in terms of the pace and mood of the song. Of course,

the occasion of performance also dictates the extent of the artist's resilience and response to audience interaction. The audience itself is an invaluable catalyst to the composer's creativity and relevance to his community's demands. Even during occasions or circumstances in Bakor community where rote-memorization is pre-supposed e.g. when novices or children repeat songs of accomplished artists and composers, or in the rendition of well known or long standing songs, situational variables still necessitate modifications and embellishment. The result is that there hardly exist verbatim or what can be regarded as established or accepted versions of songs in Bakor community. Each song is only relevant to and possesses a unique status as dictated by the circumstances of its composition and becomes subject to variation or extinction when the purpose it served is no longer extant. It is difficult, therefore, especially where there are no professional singers who live by that trade, to conceive of instances where composition is pre-meditated or carried out in silence and stillness or "in the dark, in deep silence" or even in some solitary place arranging words while humming a melody", as is the case with Alaskan Eskimo composition referred to by Finnegan (1979). What obtains in Bakor is in-performance-composition as recorded by Francis Ganyi (1987) where the composer responds to the dictates of his audience in keeping with mode and pattern of set choreographic styles in the community. Other instances for supposed word-for-ward reproduction of songs in Bakor song repertoire are age-set compositions where songs are believed to have been handed down by ancestral spirits and so have ritual connotations and cannot be altered, yet even here, there exist a degree of composition-in-performance dictated by the situation or occasion for the performance. This researcher has participated in several age-set dances and observed situations where the singer, aroused by public enthusiasm and comments, responds to contemporary events and immediate occurrences within the community.. A case in point was the funeral of a world war veteran who got killed in an inter-tribal land dispute. The composer/singer seized the opportunity to comment on the issue thus

Kum kirr  
Mmon akun go eshi mge  
Ntul ekulugbe  
Wo li mi nan tam  
Go ebim apkanghe?

Translated as

Kum kirr  
The little one who sits on the tiger's head  
King of the jungle  
How could you have gone  
in a grasshopper hunt.

This, most certainly is not part of the age-set ensemble as it was clearly an address to the dead man. The singer/composer laments the circumstances of the death of this great warrior. The inter-tribal conflict, he denigrates as a grasshopper hunt" compared to the world war in which the dead man had served and come out unscathed. This was an in-situ composition reflecting the immediate circumstances of the display.

The song is a succinct example of the Bakor composer's imagination put to action on the spur of the moment when the need arises. It also attests to the assertion of in-performance rather than contemplated composition in Bakor, all of which emphasize the creative and artistic potential of the Bakor composer. Nearly all Bakor songs come alive in this way. Another example of this creative resilience of the Bakor artist is borne out in the case of the singer responding to an inattentive drummer's performance which was out of tune with the rhythm of the performance. The singer addresses the drummer directly in song to listen to the song carefully before playing the drum so as not to distort the rhythm. He sang

Wunghu atung go eshe  
Wo kim kubu nkam enya ehe  
A li wunghu atung  
Aba kubu nkam enya  
Ka ane wak

Translated as

Listen to the song carefully  
before you play your drum ehe  
If you listen to the song  
You will play your drum  
To the admiration of people.

This address to the drummer hinges on the aesthetics of performance which is a major consideration of the Bakor artist/composer. Worried that the entire performance will be distorted by the inattentive drummer and

rendered unpleasant to the audience who are the judges of the display, he is forced to call the drummer to order. But this is achieved within the song rendition because otherwise it would have stopped the entire performance and reduced the aesthetic appeal in the conception of the audience. One notices that in most Bakor performances there is a very close rapport between the singer, the drummer and the dancer. All of these communicate very effectively to enhance aesthetic pleasure. Accomplishment and skill of the artists is therefore assessed by the audience through the synchronization of song, drum and dance steps, the absence of which renders the performance ineffective and unpleasurable. Apart from these semi-ritualistic age-set songs, which we have seen are also susceptible to alterations through the perception of the artist and situational demands, Bakor songs are basically composed and perfected during performances usually to an appropriate rhythmic accompaniment and audience performer interaction. The resultant appeal A.M. Jones (1954) notes

..... is in the complex interweaving of contrasting rhythmic patterns that he (the African) finds his greatest aesthetic satisfaction.

There is, therefore no conscious effort aimed at prior-composition of Bakor poetry or songs since they are best realized and perfected in performance as spontaneous responses to audience reaction and performer's awareness of his role as a social critic and bearer of tradition. In this vein the Bakor song composer responds to the dictates of his environment and relies primarily on the images and associations created or engendered by his interaction with his immediate audience. To the Bakor composer, only broad outlines or striking points exist at any given performance situation. The particular way of patterning or choice of words for embellishment is entirely the job of the performer or singer; the choice of words being dictated by the occasion and audience response. Since most Bakor songs are satirical and aimed at societal control through ridicule, the performer or singer often exaggerates song incidents or particular actions of an individual during a crisis that have given rise to the composition. This provides him with a framework around which he then builds up details from his imagination or already existing song repertoire. He is, thus keenly aware of and in the performance context, comments, not only on the consequences of such actions on the community, if they go unchecked, but also on society's response and reaction given such circumstances. An apt example is a song composed on sexual perversity. The immediate catalyst that informs and triggers the artist's imagination is an abortion committed by a student which almost resulted to her death. The event provides ample opportunity for the singer to comment not just on abortion but on the moral consequences of such action and plead for a stop to moral laxity in the community. In such situations, the words of the song can never be the same in any two performances. Instead it is the singer's place to improvise in each performance in response to the right audience along with the artist's own versatility. This scheme makes for the enhancement of creativity as the artist strives to create a rapport with his audience which is usually an active audience. He sings.

Kakul ejabe je bake babe

Chorus: kakul ejabe je bake baabe

Leader: kakul ro mmon kak ekulugbera

Chorus: kakul ejabe je bake baabe

Leader: kakul, mmon to ko bee ndeh

Chorus: kakul, ejabe ji bake kookor

Translated as

Leader: Kakul, her village will inquire

Chorus: kakul, her village will inquire

Leader: Kakul, you willingly threw a baby in the bush

Chorus: Kakul, her village will inquire

Leader: Kakul, the village looks for children

Chorus: Kakul, the village will inquire

Leader: Kakul, if the child has no father

Chorus: Kakul, it's the village that owns it.

This composition is heavily abbreviated but still provides ample insight on society's disposition to abortion and its moral implications. Again the song is composed in performance as the immediate impetus was the wailing that emanated from the home when she fainted came to the singer during a performance organized by this researcher. The same song performed during a reception party in honour of the village chief was rendered differently. Here the singer addressed the culprit directly thus.

Kaku, aliminan kat mmon go elbing

Kaku, elkpin ena kpim nobor

Kaku, ejabe eja kpi yinna-o

Kaku, tene mmon kor udoji

Kaku, ejabe eja baka baabe

Translated as

Kakul, how did you bury a baby in a hole

Kakul, your life is a failure

Kakul, the village is watching you

Kakul, rejected a baby for udoji

Kakul, the village will inquire.

Here the singer alludes to the Jerome Udoji review commission that increased workers salaries in Nigeria and concludes that Kakul's love for money made her abort so she can prostitute. The allusion is evidence that the artists or composers are also acutely aware of contemporary developments in the country and their immediate environment. The several versions of the songs rendered by the same composer on different occasions of performance serve as ample evidence of the creative residence of the Bakor artist who is not subject to any constraints in his moral composition. His creations are in-situ and in-performance oriented thus giving credence to his artistic and creative capacity. Each occasion for performance, therefore, really offers the artist an opportunity to vent his creative talent while articulating the expectations of his society. Since the performer is under no compulsion to repeat the same thing in any two performances, he improvises in each performance occasion bearing in mind his audiences' as well as the values he upholds.

### **III. The Performance Of Songs**

Bakor songs are usually performed in a canto/refrain pattern with each line or verse serving as a canto, song by the lead singers, followed by the refrain which is rendered by the chorus of members of the audience or dance group. The canto is thus the area for the display of creativity as the performer allows his imagination to play on it through his choice of appropriate words and associations thereby giving it the desired aesthetic appeal. Bakor composers, unlike Schapera's Tswana man who early became familiar with the art of composing and memorizing praise poems, do not commit their songs to long practice sessions and memory. What matters is the artist's knowledge of contemporary events and broad outlines on which his imagination plays while the words may differ in each performance occasion as dictated by the performance exigency. The Bakor composer relies, instead on ideas which he expands during performances. His in-situ creations equate him with his Sotho counterpart who

..... On his return from hunting, recounts his exploits in a high Flown

Manner... his expressions (becoming) poetical while the memory

Of the young takes hold of the most striking point.....

as recorded by T. Casalis (1965). What obtains among the young and the accomplished Bakor performers or composers is not an inclination towards rote- memorization which limits creativity but instead a drive to acquire new associations or striking points or contemporary events in the community and beyond on which their creative imagination plays to achieve new creations. A notable aspect of Bakor songs is the repetitive nature which the performers exploit largely to create room for furtherance of associations. The cantor also resorts to ululations and humming which fill up gaps when words fail him. Such sounds include

eh eh; mm mm mm; owo, owo.

Ah, ah eh eyeh eh

Oh oh, ah aya aaa

On their own these sounds provide rhythm and melody and enhance aesthetic pleasure.

### **IV. The Contemporary Relevance Of The Bakor Composer**

The relevance of the Bakor songster to his contemporary milieu, like all other African artistic endeavors, has never really been given prominence in artistic analysis. The obscurity is not surprising since orality has often been associated with primitivism and hence oral creations are often dubbed inferior and worthless in artistic circles. Charles Keil in his Tiv song (1979), however, argues that embedded in Tiv language, or any other language for that matter, "is an aesthetic or ideology of expression to be discovered and proclaimed" (p. 26). To the Bakor and many Africans, music becomes the language for the proclamation of this embedded ideology or aesthetic. The Bakor song is, as such, an invaluable medium of communication through which the cultural values, norms and practices of the people are imparted and impacted on generation after generation as well as the outside world. The Bakor song is a veritable communicative medium for the description of the intention of the artist and the community. The artistic and technical skills involved in song composition and rendition reveal the intricacies of Bakor culture and are borne out in the artist composer's manipulation of linguistic recourses available to him. In fact, the totality of language is utilized in song composition and the composer becomes not just the encyclopedia but current dictionary of Bakor in particular and Ejagham language generally. Because Bakor songs are topical, contemporary and satiric in content, they are indirect, allusive and cryptic, a point often missed, not only in the analysis of African songs but also other forms

of verbal art or African Oral Literature. The paramountcy of the song is evident in its ubiquitous utilization in all facets of life and even in folktale rendition to emphasize the themes as well as add aesthetic pleasure to the narration. Despite this prominence, songs and song composers, like the entire gamut of oral narratives, are conceived of as coming from the remote past, lacking aesthetic appeal, or simply a confused jumble of sounds.

The Bakor artist/composer is a critic of society who utilizes ridicule to obliquely take jibes at deviant behaviour in society. Since he cannot afford to be direct so as not to anger his audience, the performer employs short descriptive epithets along with other stylistic features like idiophones, allusions, similes, metaphors, and irony etc to enhance the expansion of the idea or message of the song, all of which bother on in-performance-composition since the audience is immediate. When A. B Friedman (1961) contends that

... Composers are simply passive bearers of tradition  
Who rely solely on memorization to deliver oral  
Material to contemporary audiences.

and as well that

... Memorization is, in fact the basic vehicle of oral tradition,

he does not seem to take into consideration the fact that the performer always responds to the challenges of the moment of performance and that tradition never remains static. Societies develop, values change and so does the performer reflect these changes in his creations. He is, therefore, always discarding his old material for new ones depending on contemporary exigency of performance. Since tastes change with changing circumstances, the performer, who is always responsive to his community's desires, cannot afford to hold onto material which no longer has any aesthetic or utilitarian appeal to his new audience. A case in point is that of the Malian traditional griot who has lost his hold over his traditional clientele and been forced to relocate into the city where he has found new sponsors. Mamadou Diawara (1994) recounts that the Malian griot, having lost his hold on traditional society, no longer played the role of advisor, spokesman, historian, story teller, or private musician for their descendants<sup>7</sup>. But the griot does not lose out completely. He is resilient so Diawara continues.

... The new artist communicates with his [new] listeners and his public by recording or sound waves and still refers back to the show business environment.

This movement to the city and exposure to new sponsors has its own repercussions because as Diawara notes

... The direct personal contact the artist formerly had with his peers and the accompanying responsibility and restraint have faded in favour of new relationships and responsibilities.

But the artist is still relevant, though, this time to a new audience and with new responsibilities. What the artist does, therefore, is to acquire a new stock or modify the old through his creative genius and this is most effective during performances as a direct response to his immediate audience's criticisms and comments. The Bakor performer cannot, as such, be conceived of a passive bearer of tradition, for like most African traditional artists, he is as O.R. Dathorne (1974) points out

... at once inheritor and donor of the literature, its custodian and its liberator. He is a spokesman for the society in which he lives sharing its prejudices and directing its dislikes  
(in a limited form of satire) against what is discountenanced. He is the continuous expression of a living art.

The relevance of the artist to the modern milieu is enhanced by his resilience which affords him the skill of depending on broad outlines which he embellishes in performance with new elements thus reflecting peculiar experiences of the society. He decides on the mode of embellishment appropriate for specific occasions of performance and introduces necessary thematic variations to the songs. Ruth Finnegan (1970) observes that

... even with a familiar song there is room for variations on words or tune in actual delivery so that each performance, in a sense, may be a new song.

Despite this notable concession to the skills of the composer, Finnegan still doubts the usefulness of improvisation when she says

... but one must not be so impressed by the excellence of African improvisation that everything is attributed to spontaneous creation.

To this, one can only state that we have already noted the preponderance of improvisation bothering on spontaneous creativity which is enhanced by the topicality of the songs making it impossible for performers to keep to verbatim rendition of material. Spontaneous creativity is thus achieved when a performer, responding to diverse occasions and demands of the performance contexts and audiences, is forced to improvise on the spur of the moment thus affording each performance a unique status as a new creation or a new work of art in its own right. The particular way the performer does this can best be explained in terms of the Parry/Lord oral Formulaic theory which sees the performer as a composer – in – performance who depends on the performance

context for the actualization of his creative genius. This researcher notes, in particular, the ease and resilience with which the composers transit from praise to ridicule in their renditions. e.g

Ba wele ba wele  
Ebagv be wele  
Akankul kpi wele abake  
Amrr nyiam kpi wele abake

Translated as  
Stilthily he comes, stilthily  
The monkey comes stilthily  
The forest poacher comes  
The eye that never misses comes.

This song is originally composed in praise of a great hunter but in performance the singer quirkily transposes the character of the hunter for a thief and sings.

Ba wele ba wele  
ebagy be wele  
eshom mbaang kpi wele abake  
nyen abo indi kpi wele abake

Translated as  
Ba wele ba wele  
Monkey comes stealthily  
The kernel squirrel comes  
Whose hands never leave the earth.

The praise song changes from praise to ridicule and abuse of a supposed thief. The sudden changes were necessitated by the entrance of a man suspected of stealing yam tubers from his neighbor's farm, a very shameful and reprehensible act in Bakor community. What is obvious is that the Bakor composer is not restricted to any group of epithets in a given performance. He is, rather, informed by a large stock of epithetic phrases to which he resorts as occasion demands. The Bakor performer is thus seen to improvise verses reflecting the events of a particular occasion while commenting, in the progress of the song, on societal values' and contemporary happenings within the society. He is never a slave to verbatim rendition of material. In another song the performer laments his person thus

Ejabe mam ten eh  
Meh njijanhe nyi kili tah  
Nnang atah nkon atah  
Ejumji ki tah njijanghe nyi

Translated as  
I am the reject of the town  
I am the fly that doesn't sting  
The scorpion stings, the bee stings what does not sting is the fly.

Few days later, this researcher met the songster in another performance and the song had completely changed both in tune and wording but the subject was still his lamentation of his poverty thus

Abonanaya fonghor elang alukarera  
Abananya nobim elbobo  
Nobim elkongho  
Ntongho re me obananya nya.

Translated as  
Abananya resembles overnight cassava foofoo when it has crumbs,  
you throw it away  
Abananya is not good for dressing  
its not good for covering  
I say I am abananya.

Here the artist compares himself to “abananya” which is the name for second hand clothing that easily tears off when under stress of usage. The performer is acutely aware of the need for aesthetic pleasure and so varies the songs to prevent boredom and achieve a high degree of originally aesthetically rewarding to his listeners.

## **V. Conclusion**

In conclusion, this researcher asserts that we should see the Bakor songster in this context, not as verbatim reporter or a passive beaver of tradition but instead as a skillful manipulator of sounds and ideas that suggest themselves to his mind. He is an originator, a versatile creator, aware of communal expectations and depending on his audiences’ interaction to recreate and articulate his society’s norms and values. His greatest asset is the performance context which James Porter (1976) describes as a model in traditional society because in performance.

... the standards of taste, the aesthetic values of a performer and the community can be seen to be reflected; in addition, the performers’ own attitudes can be observed, his or her manner and purpose perceived and assessed.

We cannot, therefore, continue to judge artistic performance based on old societal conventions which we assume never change. By so doing, we fail to acknowledge and to give due credence to the functioning mind of the oral artist whose originality is always visible in all performances. Society is never static; it is dynamic and subject to change which places onerous demands on the imagination of the artist. When we insist on old conventions, it becomes impossible for us to recognize individual talent and creative potential since we continuously look upon performances as artistic products of the “folk” or “primitive” people devoid of the performers’ personality and individuality. For this reason Gregory Gizelis (1973) has argued that when we

... look into convention-governed situations which have well defined boundaries that very often present (so called) ideal conditions for the study of the communicative act...

We miss the opportunity for a better perception of an oral piece which depends on the memory, imagination and artistic skill of the performer who reworks it at any given performance context. When we insist on static conventions in oral literature we fail to perceive the degree of artistry and creativity in performance and fail to conceive of the artist’s involvement in the creative process in the performance context. On the other hand, if we divest ourselves of fixity and see performance as active and alive in the hands of the performer, we can share in his creative experience. What we advocate therefore is shift of emphasis from a utilitarian or functional view of oral literature to an artistic and/or performance oriented view which rightly places the performer and his performance in the centre of the oral narrative scheme. This way, the value of oral narratives will better be appreciated.

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