

**Showcasing African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Lingual Oral Texts
(Proverbs): Veritable Tools for Moral Reconstruction in Nigeria**

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Abstract

Every society has its own ethical approval of human actions which are expected to be observed and maintained by its members. Sadly enough, morality in the Nigerian society today is at the verge of collapse, because ethical observances are gradually becoming inefficacious due to lack of observance of their significance in the society. The paper adopted phenomenological approach to examine the place of Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Oral Ethics with the aim of reconstructing morality which is decaying on daily basis in the Nigerian society today. Thus, acceptable ethical values of humility, loyalty, goodness, truth and hard work formed the integral network for sustaining and maintaining the ethics of society are lamentably going into extinction due negative influence of westernization, parental negligence and lack of patriotism on the side of both youths and the elderly: verbal and written historians. Data were collected from journals, books and magazines. The study recommends the need for African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Oral Texts, (proverbs) to be salvaged for sustainable and moral reconstruction of the Nigerian society. There is need also for the revival of African Ethics by custodians in order to savage the fallen standard of morality which today is becoming eye soaring because of moral lapses. Furthermore, let there be synergy between verbal custodians and writers in

salvaging African Ethics from going into extinction for posterity sake, and parents should also try to inculcate sound moral training on their wards on the need to be hard working, honest, loyal and truthful in order to maintain a stable ethically observant society that is worth applauding now and in the futures.

Key words: Exhuming, African Ethics, Oral Texts, Proverbs, Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum

Introduction

Mumuye is a name and a language spoken by an ethnic group in Northern senatorial District in Taraba. They originated for Egypt and Settled in Kang, and later Yorro. They largely found in Yorro, Bali, Lau, Ardokola, Zing, Bali Governments in North Senatorial Zone of Taraba State, and in Adamawa State, they are found in Ganye, Jada, Mayo Belwa, Fufore and Yola Town. The Mumuye are found in Adamawa and Taraba States and those in the republic of Cameroon are known as "Mome" and are been ruled by local chiefs. Jukun too is name and a language spoken by an ethic group in living in Southern Taraba. They are mostly found in Benue, Nasarawa, Plateau, Adamawa, Gombe and North Eastern Cameroun. Wukari is the headquarters of Jukun People. Most tribes in the North Central of Nigeria trace their origin to the Jukun people. Wurkum is an ethnic group and a language spoken also in Karim Lamido Local Government Area in Northern Senatorial Zone of Taraba. Some portions of the ethnic group are residing in Gombe State all in North Eastern Nigeria. Thus, these trio ethnic groups have been in cordial relationship since the time immemorial, and they relied on oral history even before the coming of western culture to preserve African Ethics in oral proverbial repository means for the purpose of safeguarding morality which is decaying on daily basis in the society. Thus, emphasis on daily basis are been made in every conversation by verbal watchdogs using ethical proverbs in order to ensure the observance of ethical norms which are the ingredients of keeping the society going in all spheres of human endeavour, and ensure the expression of African community spirit.

It is interesting taking a cursory look indepthly on the place of Ethics in African moral life, which one cannot debunk the fact that good actions are not praised or rewarded, while bad ones are scolded and even punished. It is sad to say that, daily human values are been trampled upon as a result of the substitution of cherished moral values, which are rubbing Africans of their observance of right actions as approved by ethics (Okorji and Adalakum 21). Hence, African Ethics measured the result of human actions either right or wrong. It is worth saying also that, elements of African Ethics include good moral behaviours and good characters are justified in the spirit of hard work, loyalty, truthfulness and humility (Maduabuchi and Pilla 97). Thence, these ethical proverbs are acquired and

learnt through handing by word of mouth from custodians to next generation of people. Hence, African Ethics are expressed in oral repository on daily basis in speeches.

African Ethics is on gradual decay today in Nigeria because it is been suppressed by western culture in every nook and cranny of African societies. Thus, the sad damages done by western culture over traditional Ethics cannot be over emphasised because, African Ethics as expressed via proverbial medium is highly on the average of total decline (69). The Ethical proverbial sayings were meant to reawakened African ethical consciousness for the observance and maintenance of good conduct in the society as shall be seen been sampled here by Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Ethics as expressed in oral texts (proverbs). Thus, these proverbs are ingredients of moral reflection, and their efficacious content is seen on the role they play in moral formation of people in the society. It is melancholic to note that, the significant place of African Ethics as expressed in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum oral texts (proverbs) is seriously under threat of going into extinction due negative suppressive force of western values and negligence on the side of verbal custodians and tapers of wisdom (youths). Thus, this paper attempts to safeguard the place of African Ethics in Mumuye /Jukun oral texts with the aim of re-awakening their efficacy and significance in remoulding the fallen standard of Ethics in contemporary Nigerian society. Proverbial oral ethics in this work are the expression of African Ethical values of humility, loyalty, goodness and truth which formed part and parcel of African Ethical Proverbial ethics drawn from the Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum perspectives as reference point to moulding the fallen standard of ethical observances in the Nigerian society.

Proverbial Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum: The Moral Tradition of Abundance Life in Nigeria Society

The place of Ethics as express in proverbs texts are meant for the moral formation of members in African society cannot be over emphasized. Hence, proverbs serve many useful purposes, not just because of their connotation but because of their rich impacts in human life in the society. Thus, their relevance in daily usage is for didactic purpose and served as source of a people religious belief (Gaiya 5). It is worth gain saying also that, in every African community, social control is highly exercised through the use of proverbs as mechanism of ensuring that members do not engage in socio- religious and economic disorganisation or disintegration of the moral code of the society (Akerejola 9-10).

The holistic nature of ethical proverbs are of immense importance in oral discourse mostly everywhere and time, even in the absence of writing then, they serve many purposes of moral remouldelling. Thus, today oral ethical proverbs are going into extinction for lack of patronage and documentation. Furthermore, those with reputations for proverbial

wisdom are capable of stating the norms that govern a discourse, and with their demise, proverbs that are untapped go into extinction (Abraham 94). Furthermore, proverbs are made live in ethical oral texts because they constitute a rhetorical device in any discourse which enables thoughts and ideas to be communicated, exchanged or traded without any effort in formulating ones (Ashipu 92). Similarly, their usage in African societies entails moral assessment of thought as they affect the society. These proverbs are expressed morally, they also colour language and interpret principles of moral life (Gaiya 5).

In another related development, proverbs expressed ethical value that lies in strengthening and ensuring continuity of the life of any given society. Thus, social control are re-emphasized and x-rayed vividly in oral repository forms because they extol, approve and disapprove certain way of behaviour in the society. Dong and Rudanyuba reiterated similarly that Proverbs are vehicles of moral reemphasis on the approval and disapproval of certain behaviour (62). Proverbs are impregnated with morals because they are used to express praise for who conform to accepted social connotations (Ashipu10).

Sources of Proverbs as Oral Texts among Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum

African Oral Texts are codified yardsticks for expressing moral observances among Africans. However, they convey the understanding of the cosmos as people experiences are shrunk to few words which are committed to memory (Ejim 79). Proverbs originated from foster parents which are been handled down from one generation through word of mouth (Ugwu 47). Dong and Rudanyuba similarly assert that, proverbs are believed to have originated from the ancestors who are associated with moral order (62).

Thus, every person grows to know about proverbs that elders acquire it and instruct moral lessons to be adhered by members of the society. A child who listens to elders as source of proverbs, becomes a compendium of wisdom" (Ejim76). According to Onaulogho "elders or ancestors are the authentic roots of the emergence of oral text, which is still applauded in daily usage because of its ethical efficacy today" (42). Hence, the place of proverbs in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Societies cannot be over emphasized because, it translate moral ideas or statement for remoulding moral lapses in the society.

Elucidation of Key words: Ethics, Lingual, Oral Text, African Ethics and proverbs Ethics

Ethics refers to the sense of right and wrong actions. Ethics is a derivative of the Greek word "Ethos" which refers to inmost frequent use as a code or set of principles which people live (Popkin and Stroll 1). Omoregbe also captures that, "Ethics is a derivation of the Greek word "Ethos" It deals with the study of morality of human actions, or as the

branch of philosophy which studies human behaviour (6-7). In another succinct manner, Fairchild defines Ethics too to mean the study of values and their relations to action patterns and actions programs it also refers to the philosophy of right and wrong conduct (or studies of human behaviours (108).

Lingual

Lingual is related to speech or language one speaks. According to Hornby, Lingual is related to speech or language (Hornby866).

Oral Texts

Oral Texts are those verbal coordinated wisdom transmitted out through writing for reference sake in relation to man and society as handed down by verbal custodians and puts down in written forms. In another word, these are verbal systematic statements made or written down. Or they are systematic wisdom voiced and recorded or written on surfaces of papers (Ejim 78).

Proverbs

Proverbs are in-depth wise saying often uttered for moral lessons. They are referred to as wise sayings of our fathers used for pedagogical purpose to enhance the education of the developing minds (79). In another manner, Gaiya puts proverbs are important source of a people religious belief. They are also an interpretation of a people's principle of life (5). Shishima similarly asserts that, proverbs are short saying with semiotic relationship to African religious life (Shishima 29).

African Ethics:

African Ethics is the African wholistic sense of right and wrong as they affect the community. In another assertion, Africa Ethics describes the person as a process of becoming into existence in the reproach relatedness of individual and community, where the later includes not only the deceased but also God (Bujo20).

Avenues for the Showcase of African Ethics in Oral Texts (Proverbs)

African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Oral Texts are expressed at preferred locations by their repositories. Thus, these proverbs are displaced at home during moonlight show or relaxation on before or after supper. While some are also displayed on the farm, at meetings, while walking, social arenas, village squares or at schools. However, wherever people found themselves, the paramount use of proverbs featured there.

Samples of Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Ethical Proverbs in Oral Texts

In this paper various types of proverbs as expressed in Mumuye and Jukun oral texts would be examine below:

- ❖ Proverbs on Humility
- ❖ Proverbs on Loyalty
- ❖ Proverbs on Goodness
- ❖ Proverbs on Truth
- ❖ Proverbs on Hard work

Proverbs on Humility: Humility means to be humble. Hornby further puts it as the Quality of not thinking that you are better than other people, the Quality of being humble (586).

Mumuye : *Museni shong a bii wuko dorong ting waani*

English: Humility is the fruit of all success

Jukun: *Mkanmi afu wa tata yi a ba wa ra*

English: Belittle yourself for every dick, Jack and Harry to ride over you

Wurkum: *Amban sijiguttiji kuni, angulo minji jauro*

English: strong people stand up for themselves, but stronger people stand for others.

Proverbs on Loyalty: Means the act of someone being loyal and to be loyal means constant and faithful in any relation implying trust or confidence (Olatunbosun 2).

Mumuye: *Shongbe ni wee shoo a shongboro nya, wujaa yun king do doo biko.*

English: He who is obedient to elders receives the blessings of age

Jukun: *Nwautiche wa nde cin najini du so ngya*

English: Obedience is rewarding

Wurkum : *Angum-gumo dego curi gwediji amuli*

English: Loyalty is the strongest glue which makes relationship last for a life Time

3. **Truth:** It simply means a thought or true Statement conforming to reality or to a person inner conviction and knowledge (Karl353).

Mumuye : *Shong shing gn ba a shong nya jinniba ko wu a nya sto voo.*

English: Truth is good because it rejects lies

Jukun: *Ba wa wengyi ri dzua pyo ba*

English: People whose hands are not clean should not accuse others

Wurkum: *Magagaji jaba wujiragana cugulli tayi poro*

English: *Once you eliminate the impossible, whatever remains must be the truth*

5. **Hard work:** The ability to be industrious

Mumuye : *Kpara a mong vi peleni nun shong voo ba*

English: Hard work does not kill a person

Jukun: *Avo pam anu vyenvoyon, avo magbedi anu kan hin*

English: If you work, you eat, if you don't work, you don't eat.

Wurkum: *Wari Anatoly ajiyi cidorim, amilela kungromon*

English: What comes easy won't last, what last won't come easy

Obstacles Facing the Expressions of African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Oral Text (Proverbs)

In the expression of African Ethics in Mumuye/Jukun Oral Texts (Proverbs), there are related obstacles, which this paper seeks to examine below:

- i. Non written – moral code existed along ago in Traditional Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Societies for some reasons like due to lack of literacy and documentations. These moral values as expressed in oral text go into extinction with the demised of verbal watch dogs without some of them transmitted or written down for future reference. Hence, there is the complex constrains of convictional and specific legislations, which were made to cater instead of being documented (Onyeocha 64). Also, there is in adequate documentation of these ethical sayings for future reference, which has posed serious challenge in preserving oral text till date.
- ii. The attitudes of some youths today is indeed very disheartening towards coming closer to verbal custodians to tap from their think tank of proverbial ethical wisdom. However, these youths see nothing relevant in ethical wisdom as expressed in proverbial medium. Thus, they prefer to cling to western values instead romancing with their own. Thence, customary oral Ethics are faced with the challenges for lack of been regurgitated and documented for daily use. Hence, Oral Ethics are termed derogatorily by these modern youths as old 'fashion' and belonging to the old milieu. Often a times, these youths show less interest in staying close the elderly in order to tap from their wisdom because they belong to the modern milieu as urban migrants.
- iii. The coming and influence of western culture in particular has affected the expression of African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Oral Texts. It is worth gain saying that, in the past, African Traditional Ethics is being apparently adopted leave little time for such cultural heritage to be fully understood, but sadly enough western values are substituting the old for the new (Anene and Brown 47). Most ethical literatures written and read by Africans have western background in the expression of alien values than purely humanistic African Ethics via proverbial medium.
- iv. The Mass media has changed facets of the fabric of expressing African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Oral Texts for moral formation of the fallen standard of judging right and wrong human actions. Hence, it is no doubt also

that the memory is subjected to decline or go into extinction because of lack of imprint of African ethical values as expressed in proverbial medium for posterity use. Furthermore, Africans today prefer using mass media such as electronic cable, television, internet, Face book, twitter, which are at the fore front championing and promoting western values over humanistic African ethical code of conducts. Hence, proverbs which express moral values are eroding because of distortion in meaning and over reliance on media channels as anchored by culturally adulterated minds, who distort authentic nature of oral expressions using modern communication devices than relied on verbal watch dogs.

- v. The family is the microsm of any living society. Thus, for any society that wants to thrive, she must see the need to take cognizance of the place of oral Ethics as standard for rights and wrong actions to be inculcated on people. Hence, the failure on the part of some families to recognise and promote the relevance of oral ethics is responsible for African Ethics as expressed in oral texts going into extinction. Sadly enough to say that most failures experienced in the expression of African Ethics in proverbial oral texts are due to the lackadaisical attitudes of some families who failed to nurture and inculcate in their wards sound moral training against dehumanization, which will throw such families into the abyss of Confusion. (Gwame 27). Furthermore, some families failed to issue out moral discipline using proverbs with high value nature, and this attitude has posed a challenge in safeguarding the code of moral standard of conformity with the code of the society (Onuh and Tsakpa19).

Recommendations

Amidst the related obstacles facing the use of African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum oral texts for reconstructing the fallen standard of morality in contemporary Nigerian society, the paper has the following recommendations:

- i. There should be adequate customary patriotism on the use of oral ethics for moral sustainability and development of Nigeria using Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum and similar ethnic Oral texts (proverbs). Hence, by so doing African cardinal values would be safeguarded and the meaning of life in the community would also be realised. Furthermore, there is needed to go back to our roots and cherish our world view which is expressed in various facets of moral religious world view. Thus, the use of proverbs should highly be cherished and encouraged so as to boast the promotion of the place of African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Oral texts, which constitute an ethical code foe moral rejuvenating and safeguarding the fallen standard of ethical observance in the Nigeria society.

Furthermore, Oral Ethics are code of rule which can be inculcated by parents as the first teacher of the child (Opoku153) for its sustainability and efficacy.

- ii. Education should be encouraged at all levels so as to liberate proverbial oral texts from going into extinction for lack of reading and writing. Hence, educational enrolment of wards into schools will help to fill in the vacuum for lack of literacy and documentary, which is a serious challenge, today most survival of ethnic value. s. Furthermore, elimination of intellectual and moral poverty can as well be achieved only if stake holders, family heads, traditional rulers and religious leaders come as a team to encourage enrolment of people in schools and the use of African Ethics in oral repository of proverbs in order to reinvigorate the ethical decay of morality in the society. Thus, means of expressing African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum and other ethnicities should be encouraged so as to serve spring board for moral reconstruction of the fallen standard of ethical norm in the society. It is worth gain saying also that, oral repository ethics needs to be salvaged for future reference through documentations. In same manner, these proverbs are composed and memorized in forms of ethical code, which are handed down from time immemorial and are certainly more reliable in speeches and they needed to be written down for continual usage by our people (Ikenga-Metuh 20).
- iii. Government should encourage the study of linguistics in various institutions, and provision should be made in the curriculum for the study of African languages and values in order to salvage Nigeria ethical values from going into extinction. Furthermore, the use of African ethics to be expressed in speeches so as to salvage ethical values from going into extinction. Hence, sponsorship of various customary programmes should be anchored on media plat forms so as to help in salvaging the extinction of African ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum and other ethnic oral texts. Furthermore, morality as we all know is the spring board of African way of living in a sacralised cosmos. Thus, oral custodians should be employed to showcase various oral ethical sayings so as to keep alive the relevance of oral ethical texts as expressed in proverbial tapestry in reconstructing the fallen standard of ethical living in contemporary Nigeria society.
- iv. Government should also give priority in the provision of basic infrastructure like road, electricity schools, industries, employment opportunities so as to curtail the massive immigration of youths in search of better conditions life to the urban. Hence, when these provisions are made, African Ethics in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum Oral texts would be safeguarded from eroding. Similarly, Non Government organisations can as well make provision of basic amenities for the survival of indigenous thought system which are been swallowed up in the cities as youths move in search for greener pasture.

V. All hands must be on deck to support the survival of ethical proverbs for moral didactic lessons, which are of great significance in the character and moral formation of people in the society. African ethics is not individualistic but communitarian which solely depends on verbal narration from custodians for its sustainability and contribution to moral peace and development of the society, realisable in the expression of African community spirit.

Conclusion

Prior to the emergence and introduction of Western education to Africa, traditional ethical statements were highly applauded to bring about moral observance and sanity in the lives of people living in their various communities. Hence, African oral ethics as expressed in Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum proverbial medium has been a pivotal force in maintaining the sense of right and wrong living in the society. It is lamenting today that African oral proverbial Ethics are dying due lack of documentations. Also, there is lapses in moral formation in the family which are responsible the gradually eroding ethical statements. Thus, with the high presence of verbal watch dogs in African societies, the use of proverbs in moral formation of members in the family and community was in recognition among the rural dwellers, which helps to remodel ethical lives of the people in the communities for greater proficiency.

Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum proverbs are ethical in nature and they need to be revitalized for greater ethical efficiency in the Nigerian society. Thus, African Ethics as expressed in oral text using proverbs serve as the basic spring board for moral resustation and code live wire that sustain moral observance in the society. Hence, Mumuye, Jukun and Wurkum oral ethical code would be lost if no urgent means of preserving them are not adopted morality will continue to be mourn as it prepares to go to the graved in the society.

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