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Proverbs: A Pack of Lies?

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Our ancestors said, it is the burial cloth that knows better the private parts of the deceased.

Abstract

A European researcher travels to a remote West African village to conduct a research on the role of proverbs in the society. In the village, he talks to a chief who happens to dislike proverbs for their indirectness. The chief informs the researcher that proverbs are a pack of lies. The latter appears to be convinced with that and writes a lengthy article on the frailty, scheming and deceit of proverbs and gets it published in the Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute called *MAN,* Vol.28.2 (1993: 225-242). This article attempts a rejoinder to the chief and the researcher. The major argument is that the chief's hatred of the proverb corpus should not be regarded as a yardstick for their social significance. The paper also reiterates the observation by Okpewho (1992), Chinweizu et al (1980) and Lo Liyong (1969) that scholars of a foreign culture should feel that they owe to the culture in which they carry out their research the duty to accord such a culture their scholarly unbiased integrity.

Definition

The definition of the proverb genre has bothered scholars of paraemiology for a long time. One of the most renowned scholars in the field, Archer Taylor, also referred to as 'Father of paraemiology', preferred to identify and describe the proverb by use of its characteristic features than by definition. To him, an attempt at a definition was a futile exercise. Another anthropologist, Ruth Finnegan, who carried out an in-depth research on the African oral literature and dominated that scene for about two decades from the seventies, admitted the difficulty, nay, the impossibility of arriving at an exact definition of the proverb. In making an attempt at one, she borrowed from James Howell (1659) and said that a proverb is a saying in more or less a fixed form marked by 'shortness, sense, and salt' and distinguished by the popular acceptance of the truth tersely expressed in it.

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Other scholars concur that a satisfactory definition of the proverb is not likely to come as each paraemiologist attempts to give a definition that best suits their purpose. At any rate, the problem of lack of satisfactory definitions is not for the concept of the proverb alone; almost all fields of study that involve elements of conjecture and subjectivity on the part of the analyst are in a similar situation. One area where this problem abounds is the field of Humanities and Social Sciences. The influx of definitions around one term, notwithstanding, there is a close mutual relationship among them.

For the purpose of this article, we wish to use Fergusson's (1983) definition which states, "that *a proverb is a succinct and memorable statement that contains advice, a warning or prediction, or an analytical observation. Its form is usually terse, figurative, rich in metaphor and most often poetic*". Although the definition is not exhaustive, we prefer it for its eclectic nature. Additionally, a proverb is an expression which contains a general truth, or what we can refer to as *universal truth.*

Classification

The exercise of categorizing the proverb genre is just as intriguing as defining it. The proverb is easily confused with other formulaic genres such as the riddle and the pun. In the case of the English proverb, it invokes a host of synonyms such as adage, maxim, aphorism, saw, gnome, saying, apophthegm, etc. It is not easy to tell the difference between them. In the African case, paraemiologists have found that in certain ethnic groups, the proverb genre shares names with the folktale, the parable, the riddle and the saying; it is not seen as an independent entity. The tendency of oral literary genres to share a name is due to their syncretic nature, i.e. they simply merge into each other, or *swallow* each other up when they are in operation.

Despite the foregoing constraint, scholars have attempted to classify the proverb corpus. Schipper (199 1), advances the view that African proverbs can be divided into two main groups, namely, 1) Clear, direct statements, i.e. moral sayings and mottoes, and 2) Proverbs in metaphorical form, e.g. *Women have no mouth,* or *The hen knows when it is morning, but she looks at the mouth of the cock.* However, Schipper immediately adds that in their application, the direct ones may also become metaphorical. There is a strong cause to agree with those who argue that a proverb text is at least double-faceted; it has an outer and inner face. The outer face can sometimes be elusive to the reader or hearer, owing to its supposedly simple (linguistic) garb. In proverbs, there are hardly clear, direct statements. Such clear statements can be experienced in the so called common, everyday language. The essence of the proverb is contained in its second face. It

is easy to see why a *clear* and *direct* becomes figurative, because its original concept, *pro-verbium* from Latin, means 'instead of word'. Also the proverbial terminologies which are found in different African ethnic groups denote a meaning in proverbs which is not easily accessible (Finnegan, 1970:390). Instead of seeking a direct, clear meaning from the proverb, Finnegan proposes *an obvious meaning* in contrast to *a deep hidden meaning.*

Schipper touches on another category of proverbs which she calls non-verbal, i.e. proverbs which use objects (e.g. sculpture and engravings on wood, pottery, calabashes, cloth, etc) and musical sounds. This form of proverbs is mostly common in some parts of West Africa. She gives an example of the use of pot-lids among the Fiote people of Cabinda in Angola. If a woman is not pleased with her husband and she wants their misunderstanding to be resolved, she chooses a meaningful proverb potlid from her collection or orders an artist to make a new one according to her instructions. She will then cover her husband's food with it and send it to the eating place, where other men will notice it and interrogate the man about it. The misunderstanding may eventually be resolved.

Another interesting kind of non-verbal proverbs found among the Asafo people of Ghana is popularly known as *flag proverbs* and its history is believed to go back about 200 years or more. The Asafo are able to tell the history of their different places by way of decoding the pictures that are contained on the flags. Each Asafo clan has special people who keep record of important events. An event is represented by a pictogram which is knit or painted on the clan's flag. The pictograms are arranged chronologically, where each stands for a proverb or saying. As time goes the events are added onto the flag, which gets longer and longer. And it will increase in length as it passes from one generation to another. Every year, the clan celebrates its history by passing their flag around the village. The clan does its best to make the flag as colourful as possible. Some flags can measure the length of a football pitch. That means, it is born by several people. After the event, the flag is folded and kept safely by the recorder, who is its custodian.

There are also *drum proverbs* whose message is deciphered from the kind of drum-beat and its pitch. This kind of proverbs is practiced in some parts of West Africa and there is very little literature written about it. In East Africa and specifically among the Wanyakyusa, *there used to be two* kinds of drum-beats to relay a signal of danger (if a village had been invaded) or to inform of the death of an important person.

We have so far discussed two irrefutable categories of poverbs, namely, *verbal and non-verbal* proverbs. Another possibility of grouping the proverb corpus is

by way of their authorship. First, there is a category of proverbs whose author is unknown. Many of the definitions of the proverb refer explicitly or implicitly to this category that the proverbs are an *anonymous,* collective voice of the past. However, there is the second category which comprises those proverbs whose authors are known. This category is called *eponymous.* There are a couple of personalities who are known in history for their inventiveness in creating wise sayings or proverbs. In the *Holy Bible,* there is an entire book called the *Proverbs* whose authorship is attributed to King Solomon. Another person is Shuruppak (2600 BC who is claimed to have composed wise sayings for his son, Ziusudra. Yet another is Akkadian (1550 BC who wrote the *Counsels of Wisdom.* Another anthology of proverbs in this category is *the Instruction of Pta-Hotep* (whose time of authorship is not mentioned) composed by Pharaoh Isesi for his son, etc. It remains debatable, however, to establish without doubt that the mentioned eponymous proverbs were, indeed, the work of these people.

The grouping of the proverbs into *anonymous* and *eponymous* categories does not, by any means, give one room to assume that the former category came about spontaneously. Each proverb text has an author behind it. We have said that the difference between the two lies in the anonymity and eponymity of authorship. Another difference is in what Edward Westermarck (1930) referred to as the *constitutive element* of a proverb which is *not the utterance on the part of one, but the acceptance on the part of the many, whose sanction makes it a proverb.* This implies that an eponymous proverb could be an expression in a proverbial garb, but lacking a collective voice; and their dissemination does not rely on the word of mouth passed down from generation to generation as it is the case with a 'proper' proverb, but by the written word.

Kuusi (1972), a Finn, is another distinguished paraemiologist of our time who has tried to work out an international type-system of proverbs. According to him, the first attempt at a scientific systemization of proverbs was made by Grigory Permyakov (1968), who arranged the proverbs by *Logico-Semiotic Invariants* and *Logico-Thematic Groups* and claimed that any proverb from anywhere in the world could fit in. Kuusi disapproved of this method and concluded that specialists in proverbs lack a common international reference code by means of which they could be able to communicate with precision.

The Use of the Proverb: 'Traditional' and 'Outsider' Notions

The few authors of proverbs who have been mentioned, help to suggest how far back in history the wisdom of the proverb has enjoyed acknowledgment. Aristotle rated it even much older when he observed that *proverbs are remnants*

saved from the wrecks and ruins of ancient philosophy *by reason of their conciseness and cleverness.* The traditional way of seeing the proverb as a wise expression has now been disputed by some scholars, referred to as having an antiapophthegmatic approach. One of them is Jean-Louis Siran, an anthropologist, who appears to be influenced by the deconstructionist theory, a postulate from linguistics. This can be traced in his works on proverbs. A good example is the paper entitled *Rhetoric, Tradition and Communication: The Dialectics of Meaning in Proverb Use* which is based on proverbs of the Vute ethnic group of Cameroon. It is from this paper that the first part of the title of this work has been borrowed. Among others, Siran's paper refutes the structuralist argument (another linguistic postulate) that meaning is *something given from the start, or precisely by a set of contradistinctions.* These are often referred to as binary oppositions. Siran develops an argument that meaning is a potential space in which speech events occur that, in turn, modify the shape of that space. He ftu-ther contends that each utterance of a proverb is at the same time a *realization* and an *alteration* of its previous 'meaning'. From yet another linguistic postulate, Siran points out that the meaning of a word is nothing other than the totality of its uses, which stresses the significance of observing each single word in an utterance, and how it influences 'meaning' in time and space. In tracing meaning in the Vute proverbs, he reaches interesting conclusions, the following being the basic ones, that:

- The proverb genre has more to do with the rhetoric (i.e. method of expression) than with ethic (i.e. moral connotations or content) owing to the required skill in verbal know-how;
- There is no authority in proverbs, and using them is an avowal of frailty, of scheming and deceit;
- The proverb's moral connotations are secondary; they don't belong to the essence of the proverbs;
- To refer to the ancestors' words is to deny the temporarity of a process through which meaning never ceases to drift, etc.

As hinted earlier, Siran seems to be the buttress of the anti-apophthgematic critics insofar as the social function of the proverb genre is concerned. Additionally, Siran's deductions are arrived at out of proverbs collected from an African milieu with which we can claim to be more conversant. Why he resorted to African proverbs, and not to French or European proverbs, is not clear; perhaps it is because proverbs in his society are as *dead* as their Latin language.

As our point of departure we take the anti-apophthgematic approach which is inherently weakened because the analysts come from societies, where the

proverb genre is dead and inactive. This also applies to members of a proverb-owning society whose greater or whole part of their life has been spent outside their society and thus creating a distance both from their culture and their proverbs. There is a Kiswahili proverb which says *Siri ya kaburi, aijua maiti* (It is the corpse that knows better the secrecy of the grave), and another variant is *Aibu ya maiti, aijua sanda* (It is the burial cloth that knows better the hidden defects of the deceased). Let us now briefly point out where we think Siran flaws; there are three main areas:

- Poverty (emptiness) of the interdisciplinary approach;
- Problem of being an 'outsider';
- Data insufficiency.

Misuse of Interdisplinary Approach

There has been a steady growth of interaction among different academic disciplines. This has led to what is now commonly called *interdisciplinarity.* The practice has been increasingly used between Linguistics and Literature, where the scholars of the former have frantically stormed the latter field, coming up with a host of theoretical approaches. *It is under this banner* that we see Siran borrowing a linguistic postulate from Benveniste in order to apply it to proverbs. Benveniste had postulated the rule to be applied to meanings of single words, but Siran makes us assume that circumstances that govern the meaning in a single word are the same as those which govern the meaning in any given expression. But here, we are not dealing with *any expression, but* a very special one: the proverb. There is a fundamental difference between the two. The meaning of a word is usually not complete unless it is attached to other words which, together, make a complete independent expression or statement. The role the word plays in the expression will be determined by the *linguistic context. A* proverb, on the other hand, is a complete, independent expression. Its basic meaning is already there, and it is not determined by the linguistic context because it has already been procreated. What the context does to it is to determine the use of its *applied meaning* which, fundamentally neither deviates from, nor contradicts, the basic meaning. In which case, we agree to some extent with Siran's view that this has something to do with the rhetoric in the proverb use. However, the rhetoric does not overshadow what Siran calls *the ethic* because, in the final analysis, it is the ethic or homily that determines the rhetoric. Furthermore, the applied meanings do not lose the spoor of the basic meaning due to the underlying conservative nature of the proverb, both in content and form. The conservative feature can enable one to posit that the meaning of a proverb is relatively fixed and timeless; it defies forces of change.

The 'Outsider' Factor

Isidore Okpewho (1992:12) addresses the problem of African oral literature texts that have suffered in their literary qualities from the inadequate understanding of the language by foreign scholars and from the sociological bias of their research projects. Lo Liyong (1969) and Chinweizu et al (1980) share this opinion in their works, despite the element of ethno-cum-Afrocentrism which is preponderant in them. To paraphrase Okpewho, what is being advocated here is that, scholars of a foreign culture should feel that they owe to the culture in which they carry out their research the duty to accord them as much of their integrity as they can allow.

The proverb links well an oral society and its past, because, as we have indicated earlier on, it is the remnant saved from the wrecks and ruins of their past philosophy. In the process of using a proverb, the user has the feeling of being in the sanctuary of the collective voice of the past as it is reflected in the present. The proverb becomes analogous to the Biblical concept of the *legion* (which means 'many in one'), in that it embodies voices which speak for the user, or it even goes further than that: it transforms the user into a 'legion', depending on how it is applied. If the user utters a proverb in a *desubjectivized manner*, i.e. in third person (Schipper, 1993), the *legionary impetus will* be in the proverb; and if it is uttered in a *subjectivized manner*, i.e. in first person, that impetus will be in the user, thereby weakening him/her.

Let us take an example from the Hehe ethnic society of the Southern Highlands of Tanzania. When a Mhehe elder errs in the course of a conversation and wants to apologize, she/he can either say "avanya *katali vaatige*," *Naalulimi lwakwikuvalaga* ("those of the past said," *even the tongue stumbles)*, where the first part of the expression is an appeal of the utterer to the ancestors for their support. It is not the utterer who is saying it; it is the ancestors in their collective voice who are speaking for him/her. This is what we refer to as *desubjectivization*. Or she/he can simply drop the first part and use only the second part without the support of the ancestors. In this second method, the collective voice is kept at a distance, and is not implied. The hearer who has never heard the proverb may even not know that a proverb has been uttered. An outsider is the likely victim here. Understandably, even the feeling *of the presence of the collective voice* is not there in the outsider. It is like a Christian believer who observes a performance of, say, an offering rite ceremony in a 'non-believer' or 'heathen' society, where the former sees only *emptiness* in the exercise of the latter; the seriousness that underlies the whole matter is completely missed. In the case of proverb-owning societies, when the user

applies a proverb in a conversation, she/he understands that this is a special language as opposed to everyday language; a language which bears the truth that is not of his own making, but truth that has been tested in time and space, and eventually passed down to other generations.

The anti-apophthgematic critics, especially those from societies where the proverb genre is 'dead' or in the 'throes of death', can have a genuine reason for failing to see wisdom in the proverbs. This may be owing to the fact that each socio-economic structure corresponds to a specific category of literary genres or trends. There comes a moment in the development of a society where the genres and trends either undergo a tremendous change, or stop being routinely required in everyday use and, hence, retreat into cliches. This denotes that those which have changed into cliches, their moment of activeness in social use has become very limited. They can now be sought for and applied only seldomly. They are used as *tired horses of speech.*

The Insufficiency of Data

A researcher depends very much on informants to get the information she/he needs. In order for a piece of information to be accepted with less dispute, the researcher must not depend on only one or two informants. The information is more valid if it has been well cross checked. The indigenous people who influenced Siran's deductions are basically two: his central informant, Ndih Pierre, and Bwatcheng, the Chief of the Mangai people. The rest can be referred to as secondary and shadowy. It is one informant, the Chief, who tells the researcher that *proverbs are all lies,* because he *resented* them. The background of the resentment is not explained. There is also no other informant who cross-checks the validity of *this finding among* the Vute. This point is significant, because it cautions the researcher on the reliability or unreliability of rushed conclusions.

We are also told that chiefs of the Mangai did not need being crafty in their art of speaking for fear of being misunderstood by their public. They spoke in plain language. Again, only one informant raises this fact. Chief Bwatcheng who is alleged by the fact, keeps silent on it, probably because he dislikes the proverbs. Besides, the argument that a (African) chief dislikes crafty language can be accepted with much doubt because in most African societies, the chief and his headsmen are supposed to have the skills in public speaking. That is how they win respect and awe from their people. It is in that vein, the Ga people of Ghana have the saying that *when Okyeame turns deaf, the state collapses,* which briefly

means that when the chief is not knowledgeable in wise language, he is a misfit in leadership. Another proof that proverbs are a domain which is favoured by people in leading positions are the few works we have quoted from the ancient Kings of the Middle East. It would be unrealistic and dishonest to scholarship to regard all this as merely an avowal of frailty, scheming and deceit.

To further indicate that proverbs played no part in court proceedings among the Vute society, we are told that the Mangai judges were not persuaded by the proverbs in the soundness of the litigant's arguments. But Siran does not tell us whether he ever attended a court session in order to find out how proverbs were employed or avoided. Otherwise, his argument has less to do with the soundness or meaningfulness of the proverbs than with the craftiness of the litigants both in their choice and employment of the proverbs in the court proceedings. A proverb is not a horse to ride without knowledge of horsemanship. Also, possession of many horses is not a guarantee to good horsemanship. What we wish to suggest is that Siran's research is inadequate; it only strengthens one's assumption that the researcher had his own misguided deconstructionist bias in carrying out the research.

It would only be proper to conclude this part with Schipper's (1991: 1) view that readers in the West perhaps believe that proverbs are no longer alive in their society, but the *Penguin Dictionary of Proverbs* (1986:197) reminds of the lasting impact: *Though the proverb is abandoned, it is not falsified.*

Proverb Use in Tanzania: 'Insider' Notion

Proverbs in Tanzania are very much alive and kicking, and they are found in almost every ethnic group. There have been some efforts by institutions such as the Institute of Kiswahili Research (IKR) and the Department of Kiswahili of the University of Dar es Salaam and individual people to collect as many of them as possible, translate them into Kiswahili and other languages, annotate and document them. The exercise has produced a number of monographs and, despite financial constraints, the projects continue.

In most of the proverb-owning ethnic groups in Tanzania, the proverb genre is mainly the domain of adults. It beautifies the conversation, gives advice, instructs and critises etc. The same aesthetic function of the proverb is evident elsewhere in Africa. In Nigeria, for instance, the Igbo say proverbs are the palm-wine with which words are eaten, or simply, proverb is broth of speech. The Yoruba say the proverb is the horse of conversation; when the conversation

droops, the proverb picks it up. In Somalia they say proverbs put spice into speech. In Ethiopia, the Afar say the proverb is the cream of language, and the Amharic say speech without proverb is food without salt.

Although the proverb genre in Tanzania has generally been regarded as the domain for adults, this is no longer the case now. There have been rapid social changes which have affected the traditional social structure, opening up new avenues and horizons for the genre. For instance, proverbs are already introduced in the education curricula for children to learn and use. In secondary schools, students are taught how to carry out small scale researches in oral literatures of their surroundings, which include the collection of proverbs. Nevertheless, it is not usual to hear a child using them to an elder, because it is unethical. Children can use them among their own peers, if they want; and they definitely use them in classrooms to whet their art of speaking.

Why Proverbs are Respected

In Tanzania, (as is the case in a number of African countries), the greater part of the population lives in the rural area. They earn their living from peasant agriculture, pastoralism and fishing. In agriculture, the simple hand hoe and the matchet are the key instruments of labour. In pastoralism, free grazing where the animals roam about the wilds for food is the order of the day. In fishing, simple canoes and traditional traps are mostly used. All these heavily depend on nature. Such a situation is usually a good breeding domain for gods, myths, beliefs and, above all, communal togetherness. Togetherness, backed up by gods, myths and superstition, is a vital weapon in fighting against the hazards of nature, most of which they are not able to explain scientifically (e.g. sun, moon, rain, drought, floods, volcanoes, lightning and thunder, etc). They observe these phenomena with fear and awe, against which they need extra power to withstand. The extra power is sought for by means of a propitiatory medium which must be colourful in form and deep-sinking in meaning. It is in this atmosphere that proverbs rise head and shoulders above other forms of language. They are a handy device in situations which call for seriousness because they embody timeless truths and are criteria for perceiving truth. Their users believe that they imbue ancestral wisdom.

In certain societies, proverbs are said to provide a sort of moral or customary code; or they are quoted by litigants in much the same way as precedents are cited during hearings in modem courts (Christenson, 1958). The indirectness of the proverb is another quality that makes it liked by the adults as a respectable

form of address. It enables both the wrong and the wronged to *come to terms* with each other without loss of face. In short, it is something of this nature that an outsider might be missing: a people's aesthetic and emotional feelings of their cosmos.

The Domain of Proverbs

By the domain of proverbs, we mean where they are found. Before the introduction of the art of writing, the domain of the proverbs in Tanzania was mainly in the heads of the adults. After the advent of the art of writing, its domain widened. The schoolbooks, especially children's books, is one of them. The books contain folktales or poems in which the formulaic genre abound.

Another domain is the popular wear called *khanga.* The name of this wear is said to originate from India. The khanga-wear usually go in pairs called doti (another Indian nomenclature). The pair bears one proverb scribbled on them. The proverb is situated in such a way that it *appears below or about* the bottom of the wearer; it is so well positioned that it is not missed by the eyes of the admirers. The proverb version on the khangas are numerous, just like it is with greetings cards. It is upon the woman to choose which proverb shall have which devastating effect for what purpose. The proverbs on khangas range from thanking, insinuating, to general knowledge. The most common use of khanga proverbs is that of women passing a message to fellow women. For instance, if a woman thinks that her husband is having an affair with another woman, she will look for a pair of khanga with a proverb which ridicules such an act. One such a proverb could be *Usione vinaelea, vimeundwa (You* see it afloat, but you don't know what trouble it takes to manufacture it).

Public figures also use the khanga or another type of cloth called *khitenge* to advertise various events. This is very common when there is a national event such as the Independence Day celebrations. For such an event, a special design of khanga or khitenge bearing a special motto such as *Uhuru ni kazi* (Freedom is work) may be designed. When there are important conferences such as the one organized, say, by the Women's Association of Tanzania, a special khanga design bearing a certain expression in commemoration of the event will be ordered. This is done even by big football clubs, which usually order for a khanga design that bears both the emblem and colour of their flag.

The khanga has also played a central role of passing information in national and similar campaigns. In 1993, the Year of the African Child was inaugurated by the OAU. In Tanzania, the khanga was used to communicate the significance of

this day by use of proverbs and proverbial phrases. In the ongoing campaign against AIDS, the khanga has been picked as one of the appropriate devices of information dissemination. The Tanzania Media Women Association (TAMWA) made a video film on the capacity of the khanga as a device of communication. The khanga has already attracted some NGOs such as the UNICEF, who want to carry out a study on its capacity to allow communication, so that they can take it seriously as an effective local means of passing information.

All this suggests that the khanga in Tanzania is a popular bearer of messages in a form of sayings, and it is actually passing this method of communication over to other kinds of wear such as T-shirts, hats, pillow-cases, cushion cloth, hand-fans, etc. However, the khanga remains the dominant means of communication and almost an exclusive female wear.

Another common domain for proverbs is food covers called *kawa.* These are lids made from raffia on which proverbs are inscribed. In most African countries, cooking is an activity of women. So women use *kawa* to pass messages to their husbands and to their fellow women.

Another prominent domain of proverbs is the music, especially the coastal music called *taarab.* Taarab consists of sung poems (most of them quatrains with a refrain or chorus) which are rich in metaphor. Proverbs find easy abode in them. Formerly, this kind of music (believed to have been introduced by the Arabs in the ninenteeth century) was played only along the coast. Today it has spread upcountry, where it is sung not anymore in Kiswahili alone, but in other ethnic languages as well.

Women are not only the celebrated singers in taarab concerts, they appear also to be the most frequenters to them. And since the central theme of taarab is love affairs, women use this art form to criticize each other. The song below is a typical example:

Alokula kala leo, kala nini mla jana;
Yasubiri matokeo, uende jifinza tena;
Sione watu na yao, ambao wameshibana;
Hilo ndilo pendo lao, kwako chuki na fitina.

Chorus:

Na mimi habari sina
Mwenyewe unajipinga
Uongo wa njia huna
Mimi bado n'natamba

Translation:

(One) who eats, eats today, what has already been eaten does not count
Just wait and see, so that you learn new tricks
Don't you see people and their private affairs
Who love each other
That's their love, which brews anger and envy in you

Chorus:

I don't mind your wicked affairs
See how you even contradict yourself
You have no leeway to lie
I still dominate.

A woman who has been wronged by another may even go to taarab artistes and ask, if not employ, them to compose a song on her rival. Sometimes, concert groups sing against one another. The indirectness of the whole exercise, which is heightened by the use of proverbs, or is all proverbially set, is what makes taarab most fascinating.

Apart from taarab, there is the *topical song* which also passes messages in a proverbial language. This is more spread than the taarab, because it is found in every village. The topical song is sung by villagers at their different functions and chores, extending from wedding, harvesting, dirge, homily, ngoma (or drum) dance, to many others. Here are a couple of examples:

1. Ngoma dance song - Kiduo

(Kiduo is a kind of *ngoma* dance which is performed by stamping the feet on the ground in accompaniment of hand-clapping, ululation and singing. It involves both men and women, adults and young).

Indembo ya kumilanzi
vayivasile heee
Indembo ya kumilanzi
vayivasil' u1upemb' uwelu

Translation:

The elephant of Milanzi forest
Why did it get killed
The elephant of Milanzi forest
got killed for its white tusk.

The song implies that there always must be a cause for someone's victimization. The cause can be just or unjust.

2. Ngoma dance song - wedding

Kwe wahumile yitony' indonya
Kwe wihelela yitony' nyagala.

Translation:

You hail from where storm reigns
You head to where it only showers.

During a wedding ceremony there is much singing. The bride's side and that of the bridegroom tease each other jokingly. In this song, for instance, the boy's side tells the girl's side that they are rescuing her from the difficult life she has been living at her parents; she should now expect only light problems, if any, at her new abode. In other words, the boy's side is bragging that they will take good care of her. To get even, the girl's side may sing the opposite of the same song, or look for another one. The words of song (2) seem to be derived from, or a variant of, a proverb which says *Kutoka kikaangoni, kuingia motoni* (From the ftying-pan into the fire).

3. Dirge song - kiduo

Nani y'adumwe, y'adumwe
Nani y'adumw 'umuyongayonga
Nani y'adumwe, dada vee
Nani y'adumw 'umuyongayonga

Translation:

Who has cut down, oh, who!
Who has cut down the *muyongayonga* tree
.....

This song was usually sung in burial ceremonies when an Hehe elderly man who was the pillar of the family and had influence on the surrounding neighbourhood for his wisdom has passed away. The song was sung to regret the lost wisdom and pillar of anchorage. The elder was likened to a *muyongayonga* tree which is very resistant to adverse weather and reliable for building fences in many places. When it eventually collapses, it leaves a yawning gap in the fence. Thus, the death of an old man equally shakes the roots of a culture. The expression is analogous to the Acholi saying that *the pumpkin plant in the old homestead is uprooted* (p'Bitek, *1985:3 7).*

4. Topical ngoma song

Na yive dada wingile wilole
Na yive dada wingile wilole
Akabandi kali muliho lyako
Akabandi kali muliho lyako

Translation:

You, too, my sister
I dare you to come to the center (of the circle)
And examine yourself
There is a piece of bark in your eye

This song oscillates around a proverb which finds its source in the Holy Bible. It says "Why do you *get surprised at seeing apiece of bark in your friend's eye, when in your own eye there is a log!* The song aims to criticize people who see only the wrongs of others, but not their own.

5. Topical song - kiduo

Fwat' umukeya vee
Ku Mangalali
Fwat' umukeya vee
Ku mangalali
Umwan'ivemba
Mulek' avembe mundagil' ing'asi ya mukato

Ingod' inyenge
Ngaya wubito
Ingod' inyenge
Ngaya wubito
Umwan'ivemba...

Translation:

Where do I find the soldier?
Go to Mangalali
Where do I find the soldier?
Go to Mangalali
But your baby is crying
Oh, let her cry, show me the short-cut
to Mangalali!

Felled wood
Has nowhere to go
Felled wood
Has nowhere to go
But your baby is crying...

This song was composed during or after the Second World War. The main character in the song is a woman who has got a baby by a soldier, and has been deserted. She has now set out to look for him. On the way, she keeps asking where the soldiers are camping; she is told they are in Mangalali. When people remind her of her crying baby, she just asks them to show her the shortest possible way to the soldiers. However, people discourage her by referring her to the felled wood which cannot move. They tell her to stay back and not to go on her futile adventure.

6. Dance song -modern jazz music
(second stanza only)

Ukiona ving'aavyo jihadhari
Usije jikuta katika hatari
Kwani vyote ving'aavyo si dhahabu
Matunda sumu hufanana na zabibu
We wanipa wakati wa dhiki
Wakati wa shida sisalimiki
Unanitesa, unaniumiza,
Unanichoma nikuki moyoni...

Translation:
Beware of seeing things that glitter
You may find yourself in danger
'Cause not all that glitter is gold
Even poisonous fruit resemble grape-fruit
You give me a hard time (now)
In difficult times I won't survive

You persecute me, you hurt me
You pierce my heart with a spear...

This song is called *Mkuki Moyoni* (Spear in my heart). It was sang by a then young artiste, Marijani Shaaban, with his Jazz Band, the Safari Trippers, which was among the top hits of the early seventies. It is a love song in which a lover is complaining of desertion.

There are many such songs and poems that contain lines which are either proverbs or deriving from proverbs. The songs and poems are usually pointed, so that even if they don't contain proverbs, they have an epigrammatic feature. It is sometimes not easy for an outsider to notice the presence of a proverb, if not an epigram, in a song or poem of people who are not from his/her descent.

Yet another domain of proverbs and other sayings are motor-vehicles, especially commercial ones, bicycles, carts, buses, centres of small scale trade, etc. Here, one comes across proverbs or sayings nicely or awkwardly jotted down by their owners for the purpose of either advertising their trade, making an unfulfilled wish, or merely showing off. In this way, proverbs are, indeed, very alive and kicking.

Permanency of Proverbs and Conclusion

By permanency, we mean the *retainability of the quality of activeness in an object* (in this case, in a proverb). As hinted earlier on, we think there comes a moment when a society undergoes social transformation where the social structure and its relations cannot be guided by *universal truth* any more, because of the expanded ability of the human being to control nature. Man does not even need togetherness because it has been overtaken by technology. A man with a machine does the work of many people, thus symbolically defeating the collective concept of the proverb. But the proverb, like the Latin language, never really dies. It may manifest itself in a different form. In its present form, it shall exist in the society and with the society, for a long time to come, because one of its constitutive elements, *social acceptance,* is a long-lasting imprint. The truth of a proverb, its simplicity notwithstanding, is what accords it its acceptance even among the so-called developed societies today. Since proverbs still enjoy ownership and activeness in some of the societies, it will be only logical to say that, whether proverbs are a pack of lies or not, the right decision should be sought for from the societies among whom the proverb genre is still alive and kicking.

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