

Cultural Revalourization and Aesthetic Appraisal of The Cock Festival (Feo Kague) of The Toupuris of The Far North Region of Cameroon

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ABSTRACT

This work, entitled “Cultural Revalourization and Aesthetic Appraisal of the Cock Festival of the Toupuris of the Far North Region of Cameroon, sets out to examine issues relative to the historical background, the performance context, aesthetics and the functional focus of the Cock Festival; the (Feo Kague). This article further x-rays the form and content of the activities that culminate to this festival. This work equally takes stock of some aspects of oral tradition by exploiting some myths, rituals, incantations, legends, folktales, and symbols inherent in the Toupuri society. The article is focussed on the activities culminating to the “Feo Kague”. Particular attention is paid to song and dance that is performed during the festivities which are specifically the “Waiwa”, the “Mbaga” “Gourna” and the “Bolgue” songs and dances. Besides the aforementioned, references are made to the organisation of the festival and the themes hitherto. In view of the above, this work is predicated on the hypothesis that, the feo kague has aspects of literary aesthetics and that they are functional thus revalourizing the African identity. This work is written against the backdrop of Postcolonial Criticism and New Historicism. This work concludes that the Feo Kague possesses literary qualities and that they are functional. It is an epitome of the fact that the African past and present remain bedrocks for the shaping of a new Africa.

Key words: Cultural, Revalourization, Aesthetic, Appraisal, Cock Festival.

INTRODUCTION

Cameroon has been named “Africa in miniature” because of its diversity in all aspects of life. It has more than two hundred ethnic groupings and each has political, traditional, religious and socio-cultural uniqueness. The Far North Region has about fifty different ethnic groups that spread right to Tchad especially the South that borders with Cameroon such as Arab Shua, Fulani, Kapsiki. Mousougoum, Mundang and the Toupuri to name a few. Ffulde is the Lingua franca of this area. The Toupuri for instance occupy parts of Mayo Kani and Mayo Danay Divisions of this Region and around the south of Tchad. This means that the celebrations of the cock festival known as the “Feo Kague” always involves those in Cameroon and in Tchad. This festival has aesthetic qualities and that they are functional. The performance context, some major themes and the style will be treated in this article.

THE HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

The word “Toupuri” comes from the word “tum” which means always and of “puri” which means many. The two put together will therefore mean people who are always many.

Historically, the Toupuri people come from Sudan that is why they are called the “New Sudanese” this occurred during the Sudano wars around the 15th Century. It should be noted here that the Toupouri people then migrated from Sudan to occupy the Mayo Danay and Mayo Kani Divisions of the Far North Region of Cameroon while others settled in Tchad. It is the celebration of the Cock festival “FEO KAGUE” the most important festival amidst all other activities that marks the cultural differences amongst the Toupuri people world wide. Its uniqueness symbolizes the end of intense activities of the year and the beginning of a new one.

The history of the cock festival “feo-Kague” dates far back from the traditional and spiritual leader “Wang Dore” chosen

like a symbol or totem to call upon the ancestral spirits and gods to protect the village, sons, daughters and the entire family. “Feo” means feast while “Kague” means cock. Through the incantations Wang Dore calls for rain to fall and makes the soil fertile in preparation for a good harvest next season.

The “Wang Dore” was a warrior and commander who always led the sons and daughters to war. Each time he went to war he carried along a cock to be used for sacrifices before and after the war and to honour the spirits of the ancestors so as to be protected from any harm or adverse situations. It should be noted that the Toupuri in the Far North of Cameroon live east of Kaele Mayo Kani Division and Kar-Hay in Yagoua Mayo Danay Division. They are well known for their dance “Gourna” which is the dance of the cock danced by forming circles holding sticks.

THE ORGANISATION OF FEO KAGUE

The first edition of feo kague was organized in 1997 by some intellectuals of the various villages who harmonized it with that of Toupuri of other regions and now counted in editions. In 2015 the 18th edition was celebrated. The feo kague is an annual ritual and usually held after the harvest season, which in most cases it is the harvest of the red sorghum which is between September and December. This means that there is absolutely no fixed date but it depends on the harvest period and the decision of the spiritual leader. It is worthy to note that the festival is launched by the Wang Dore but prior to that there are some activities organized days before. The Wang Dore first of all sends a group of youths out around the Toupuri communities who move from one village to another to catch any stray sheep and animals kill and bring the heads to him to be used for purification of the people in a ritual ceremony called “kalkao”. The feo kague is also preceded by the “kusurbun and the jobo” feasts. The Dore is allowed to eat beans after a year of deprivation and after that they must wait for the moon before announcing the slaughter of

the cocks. During this period all the problems of the families are posed to the elders of the various groupings for attempted solutions. These ills are jointly presented to the ancestors during the sacrifices of the Wang Dore. It is only after this that some solutions and sanctions are meted out to families or individuals depending on the gravity of the crimes.

The cock festival proper begins early in the morning at the court yard of the Wang Dore who lives in Tchad around the point called "bec de canard" "bic of the duck" at Far North Region of Cameroon and Southern part of Tchad. After the Immolation of the cock done by the Wang Dore, the festival is transferred to all the family heads of the Toupuri families according to the traditional organization. This means that it is the Wang Dore who kick starts the ceremony followed by family heads with the immolation of the cock.

RITUAL SACRIFICES

During the feo kague festival, the Toupuri people sacrifice to the ancestors. At this moment the Wang Dore is dressed in sheep skin takes the cock and the bone of and animal then starts his prayer. These sacrifices consist of first of all preparing a locally distilled wine using the red sorghum and millet called "bili-bili and slaughtering of animals and the cock to offer to the ancestors.

The Wang dore pronounces words that pleads with the ancestors to protect the people, bless the soils that produce this millet and sorghum, fight diseases, curses, supplicates the spirits to punish the enemies of the land and fight for prosperity in the new year. After this prayer the Dore takes out the cock cuts it, and goes round the sacred fireplace with the dying cock. The blood of the cock is used to implore the ancestors for good harvest and rubbing the warriors as they go to war. This ritual is carried out at the court yard of the Wang Dore. The last stage here is the ritual killing of the cock which is done solely by the

Dore. It is now placed on the ground after going round. At this particular moment the people are very expectant and anxious to hear the good news. If it falls or turns on the right side it means the supplications are accepted. When it is accepted it jumps up and runs away. If it falls on the left it means it is not accepted and consequently the New Year will be very difficult for the village.

The Wang Dore thus uses the wine bili- bili pours it on the sacred fire place and the blood, utters more supplications to the divinities. After this, if the ancestors accept another cock is killed and the process repeated and as the half dead cock jumps up and runs the people shout with joy for their prayers have been accepted by the gods and thus it calls for celebration. With the success of this all the family heads now proceed in the hones to carry out the same rituals. The Dore does for the whole village while the family heads do it for the family.

SONG, DANCE AND SPECTACLE

The climax of this ceremony is attained with song, dance, eating and drinking. At this same moment there is the traditional fight by the youths. This physical battle of strength is a passage into maturity where they fight with sticks as warriors of the village who can protect the village in case of attack by enemies. Their military prowess is expressed. The festivities take place at the court arena of the Dore or an open arena which could contain the crowd. All the villagers arrive with food and drinks prepared just for this occasion. This part of the ceremony concerns feasting. This feasting consists of eating, drinking, dancing and traditional fights. The dancers are clad in loins tied round their waist with ropes tied round the body and supported by an army belt. The face is painted with white and red paint. They put on cowboy hats. They also carry along musical instruments like heavy drums "titir" and "jon", flutes animal skins on their backs and sticks brandishing them in the air. They

are usually bare bodied and partially naked exposing their strong muscular build ups. Others have only pants or trousers, while the women have only the bra and skirts.

The popular dances performed here are the “waiwa”, danced by teenagers, the “mbaga”, the “gourna”, “dilna”, “nini” and the “sili”. The Toupuri are culturally distinct and very visible by virtue of their uniqueness as far as regalia and physical attraction is concerned. These warriors chant mythical songs and dance with a lot of dexterity symbolizing the traditional male and female Toupuri as the photographs below illustrate. As the drummers beat their drums the dancers clad in their beautiful costumes and traditional dresses; “ganduras” loins, boubous etc join in the dance where the rhythm very well articulated puts the dancers spellbound making the spectacle very visible. The lead singer intones the song and the others respond in form of a chorus. This epitomizes the traditional raconteur and response in a traditional African story telling session.

This spectacle is heightened when an elder, top or highly placed personality or an Alhadji steps in to lavish his wealth on them with clean shinny bank notes as he sprays them on the most dexterous dancer. The dancers move in a clockwise direction and in circles. The women have separate lines from the men and children. A particular style and rhythm is required depending on the song. However not every body dances at the same time, there are spectators who have been invited from outside and those who only came to witness and enjoy the spectacle. In most cases they may stand on one spot nodding the head in appreciation of the rhyme, rhythm and beautiful and colorful scenery. Their gestures express the physical strength of the people who are well known as war lords and herds men. This aspect of strength is manifested through the traditional fights that take place during this feast. This feast lasts for two days as the people continue feasting in beer parlours and bili-

bili bars. Everybody is involved as it has traditional, political, social, and religious undertones.

It should be noted that the “waiwa” is a song that is composed to describe the abnormal behaviours and attitudes of the villagers prior to the feast like infidelity, theft, witchcraft, jealousy and other ills. The intention is to satirize the society and call for change. As seen above the songs are composed by the youths since they play a very active part in the society. These songs reflect the social behaviours of the villagers thus criticizing all their ills. The “mbaga” on its part has a number of drums used different from those of waiwa. The mbaga uses two drums one big and the other small. It is danced with rapidity and rigorously while the other is danced slowly and honourably. It is mostly for the elders of the village.

Pascal E. Dang (2006) in “Tradition, les Toupuri Célèbrent le Cog” postulates that:

La fête du cog, un évènement culturel d'une ultime importance pour ce peuple guerrier du Sahel, originaire de la Province d'Extrême Nord au Cameroun....aparu comme un rassemblement de toute la richesse culturelle Toupuri en termes de chants, de danse, et de démonstration de la force à travers des épreuves de lutte traditionnels

FUNCTIONAL RELEVANCE OF THE COCK FESTIVAL.

The Feo Kague festival is first and foremost a uniting factor for the Toupuri people. It unites the Toupuri community politically, socially, culturally and religiously. The tradition of the people is revalorised through the activities carried out such as ancestral worship, the education of the youth and the rites of initiation into adulthood. The song and dance reminds them of their origins and the fact that they are the emergent generation they need to imbibe all. It is during this feast that conflicts are resolved between relatives and sanctions meted out on defaulters.

Some of the songs that are sung during feo kague are informative; some are for praise and others satiric. They bring out the function of satire in the society by means of entertainment. These songs are didactic and act as connectives to the society. As far as religion is concerned, the elders of the land in collaboration with the Wang Dore thank the ancestors for the past year, and supplicate the gods to protect the land and provide fertility, love peace abundant harvest for the new year.

MAJOR THEMES IN SONGS

Love and Hospitality

The Toupuri person just like all others of the Region profess and practice love and hospitality for one another. In the songs they sing during feo kague they want all to maintain good relationships with one another especially visitors and passersby and emulate good examples in the society. That is why there is a “canari” of water in front of all houses and that one must welcome those who visit with at least water. The heat of this Sahellian region warrants them to use water as a saver of life. The songs therefore criticize those who are not hospitable to visitors.

Incest is a dangerous act in the society, therefore when this act is committed by the youth or adults, during the waiwa dance folks find a venue to satirize the act by using the name of the actor and or victim in song and dance thus deterring others from that shameful act. The songs below epitomize this situation. This is very crucial because it is believed that one must go through the ritual passage into adulthood before marriage and marriage as the Bible says is for procreation.

The act of incest is closely linked to infidelity. These are the worst crimes in Christendom and in the Toupuri tradition. During feo kague infidelity squabbles among families are resolved at the eve of the feast proper by the elders and the

Wang Dore. It is however, during the dance that songs are sung about the cases in point to tell the people that is was a societal ill.

In the same light, songs are composed on the ills of the society that are recurrent throughout the year like hypocrisy, theft, witchcraft and hatred. These songs are sung during the waiwa dance which in some way or the other is a mockery of the perpetrators and warning to those who might fall prey. These songs go a long way to regulate the society and direct them to the right road and way of life.

ASPECTS OF AFRICAN THEATRE

As seen above in the organization of the feo kague, aspects like costume, instruments, body movement, ritual incantations, rhyme, rhythm and above all spectacle are the standpoints of the festival which in the same light are standpoints of African oral literature.

The photographs below illustrate the traditional Toupuri male and female who is not yet engaged in the most coveted feast performed at the end of the year. The photographs that follow suit illustrate the waiwa or mbaga in action. From the two one notices the dexterity with which the dancers perform the dance. The instruments include; large drums carried with long ropes attached to the drums and worn on the shoulders with the drums on the stomachs of the drummers. The drums are beaten with drum sticks made just for the purpose. Others use bells jingles and flutes which spices the songs and gives it a particular rhythm. When the rhythm changes, the dance styles have to change automatically. The costume of feo kague is peculiar to the dressing tradition of the people of the region. The photographs below once more illustrate the costume of the feast. But it is important to note here that not every body who goes to the feast must dress thus. During feo kague people are clad in their best traditional ganduras, boubous and others. Their horses are also

decorated to tell that they are in a festive mood. The dresses they put on depend on the financial capability of the person.

The Toupuri have the same seven days of the week and months of the year. Their importance in *feo kague* is to illustrate the particular days of the week mostly between Durgi, Mbesge and Iggi, that the feast could take place and that it must only be between the months of Wang, Ka'age, Duugi and Ba'are that it could be organized. The various Wang Dorees have been instrumental in the organization of the cock festival over the years from xxx to present day. Finally, the ritual incantations are performed with a lot of concentration and awe. All these put together epitomize traditional African literature.

STYLE

Stylistic qualities of any verbal expression help to differentiate the oral from everyday language and also help as a means of expressing the ideas of a people. these qualities are also known as imagery. Oyin Ogumba opines that:

Imagery in festival songs is usually concrete and tends to make a tremendous impact on the mind. this is because the singer draws his reference directly from nature or from human behaviour and the hearer is immediately struck by the depth of his perception and his ease with which it has been conveyed to him. (some are metaphysical and some are metaphorical) (p78)

Kashim Ibrahim Tala (1989) says there are three types of stylistic devices in orature which are phonic, verbal and mimetic. He however says that of the three only two, verbal and mimetic are frequently used in oral narratives. The *feo kague* festival is a solemn ceremony and the language is elevated and refined although some aspects of incongruity in language are noticed which is quite different from a daily usage. This feast deals mostly with lexico-structural repetitions where both full and partial repetitions are recurrent.

As far as full repetition is concerned, it is noticed that during waiwa in feo kague the desires of the singers are brought out, thus, emphasizing the theme of the repeated sentences for re-iteration, to draw the attention of the audience to the repeated lines. Tala further states that:

One of the main features of oral narratives is the use of repetition of words and phrases. Repetition is used to emphasize a point. For it is said that the more a thing is repeated, the more it becomes familiar. It is also used to draw attention to a particular trait in a character of one of the personages in a society.(p89)

In Toupuri festival poetry just as in Yuroba poetry there is thus repetition. Partial repetition here indicates that a structure is repeated but not all lexical items are repeated in a narrative or song as seen in the feo kague festival songs.

CONCLUSION

The cock festival is celebrated by the Toupuri community once a year usually between the months of September and December. The organizing committee may decide to kick start or launch it either in Tchad or in Cameroon depending on their rotation calendar dictated by the Wang Dore. When it is time all those who matter must be present to make it a success. Once it is launched all the other cities and villages take the queue. During the feast traditional, socio-cultural, and religious activities are performed. The ritual killing of the cock, the sacrifices, song, dance and the traditional fights go a long way to revalorize the culture of the people. It is of great importance to the Toupuri people because it brings a breakthrough in all their endeavours. The youths play a vital part in the festivities as they are opportune to be initiated into maturity through special rites. The spectacle generated during the celebration makes it a must watch event. The ceremony teaches, pleases and moves the people and this is what it takes to make literature literature, thus the feo kague is a valourization of African literature.

<i>CORPUS</i>	
<i>Song 1 (Toupouri)</i>	<i>Translation (English version)</i>
Aranoo leeeh!!!! Ai eeeh !!!! Fen soore po yan tagla Ma sen de dam baa payaw Godwe haa may ben ne yar Benin do soore May bon na nen de woore Nen bo de dan manga Pa yaw la Godwe su de mon ben sen Mo kay la mbay da Nen kingi gay ga holo hay Haa ne war la? Sen den se a wo gay la Mayren fer slag nen Pare bara wo dogoh.	Aronoo leeeh!!!! Ai eeeh!!!! There is a shame situation This year worst than others Godwe gives his daughter to people Of Benin because of shame. His daughter is more beautiful to him Than his wife. Listen to that? Godwe slept his daughter, How many years you gave Her to marriage? How is that? Girls become so Pretty to their own parents.

<i>Song 2 (Toupouri)</i>	<i>Song 2 (English version)</i>
Mayre wo ra Nday day ga lay Haa meini me Nday day ga lay A day ge soore regode Kod kod ma mayso lay Nday day ga lay Mayre wo ra	Girls!!! You refuse to give it to me. After that it will be eaten by the earth for nothing. Better give it to me. Girls-----x3

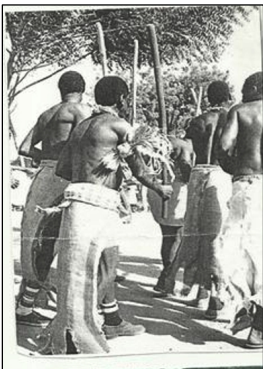
Days of the Week

English	Toupuri
Monday	Fare
Tuesday	Halge
Wednesday	Fuggi
Thursday	Sele
Friday	Durgi
Saturday	Mbesge
Sunday	Iggi

Geneological Chart of Dore Souvregnty

Sphere of Influence being Tchad and Cameroon

<i>Dates</i>	<i>Title Holder</i>
From xxx to xxx	Tuburi, Wan Son Kulu
From xxx to xxx	Gnawe, Wan Son Kulu
From xxx to xxx	Jongwe, Wan Son Kulu
From xxx to xxx	Dia, Wan Son Kulu
From xxx to xxx	Yobara, Wan Son Kulu
From xxx to xxx	Sirandi, Wan Son Kulu
From xxx to 1872	Wang Moching, Wan Son Kulu
From 1872 to 1928	Gologe, Wan Son Kulu
From 1928 to 1931	Tiyo, Wan Son Kulu
From 1931 to 1957	Furiwen, Wan Son Kulu
From 1957 to 1959	Damsala, Wan Son Kulu
From 1959 till date	Gongbele, Wan Son Kulu



Traditional Toupuri woman and man, The waiwa dance in action. (photo culled from Douala Feo-Kague internet 2015)

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