

Image Making in the Hausa Poetic Tradition: A Study of some Selected Oral Poems of Shāta

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Abstract

Oral poetry is part and parcel of Hausa people's social life. Empirical antecedents have shown that the oral lore in the Hausa context is typically characteristics of the myriad forms of trade-social communication, education and entertainment habit of the people. Another vital role of the oral poetry is image making. Shāta as the most celebrated and renowned Hausa oral poet of the 21st century has played a significant role of image making by developing unpopular persons' image before the public, from grass to grace. The focus of this article is to analyze some selected Shāta's oral poems that have upgraded the images of his clients to prominence in Hausa society. Reference is made to the Shāta's songs of 'Wakoƙin Mamman Sarkin Daura and Habu 'Yam Mama'. Shāta has positively (in the case of Mamman Sarkin Daura) and negatively (in the case of Habu 'Yam Mama) projected the images/personalities of his clients and made them more popular.

Keywords: Image making, poetic tradition, oral poems, prominence, Shāta

1.0 Introduction

Oral songs have existed in Hausa society long before the advent of written literary genres. It plays significant and all-encompassing roles of entertainment, education, information, character and personality building etc. in the Hausa society. Al Hāji Mamman died in 1999 in his mid-70, and was the most popular Hausa oral poet of his time and perhaps the most outstanding figure. Like most professional musicians, his main theme was praise-song, though unlike most traditional praise singers, he composed songs for both the great and the humble. He also composed songs on many other themes of social commentary. Lines from many of his songs have worked their way into Hausa as aphorisms. Shāta performed in the standard traditional praise singer's mode as a solo vocalist accompanied by drummers (in Shāta's case, playing the kalangu, the hourglass shaped "talking drum") and a chorus ('yan amshi 'answerers') who repeat a fixed refrain after each verses. The songs fall within the literary genre of oral literature known as praise songs which are meant to extoll the virtue, valour, courage and achievements of a renowned figure in the society. This type of songs are usually composed and embellished with irony, hyperbole, metonymy and exceptional level of exaggerations.

This article seeks to make preliminary comments on the contribution of late Al Hāji Mamman Shāta on the elevation of the images/personalities of his clients through the art of what is generally regarded as oral literature.

1.1 Aim and Objectives of the Article

The main aim of this article is to analyze the instances of image making and personality elevation in the songs of Shāta. Other objectives of this work are to appraise the methods used by Shāta in promoting the status of individuals in Hausa society so that even if the society knows the personalities prior to their depiction by Shāta, they tend to give them more recognition because of the poetic talents used in portraying them. Another objective of the paper is to expose the literary ingenuity of Shāta in using his personal knowledge of the society to preserve the status and history of the immediate community, and to a great extent this is the highest form of patriotism.

1.2 Statement of the Problem

Scholars working on Hausa oral poetry within and outside Nigeria have paid much attention to other themes of oral songs to the detriment of image making. There still lies a fascinating literary phenomenon that has not been fully exploited i.e. ‘the art of image making in Shāta songs’. This article discusses image making in Shāta’s songs, “Wakokin Mamman Sarkin Daura and Habu ‘Yam Mama”.

1.3 Research Methodology

The nature of this article requires the transcription and translation of the oral songs of Shāta as a method of collecting data. The researcher will use books, journals, pamphlets, dissertations, theses, and online materials on Hausa oral literature and other languages to obtain data. The researcher will also use his intuition as a native speaker of Hausa language.

2.0 Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Literary works are replete with instances of image making and personality building. A literary artist may use language to ‘open the eyes’ of his people to some important personalities within the society because of the positive or negative impact they make in their society. Sometimes, artists use their creative language to raise or attack the personalities of some individuals. These could lead to their images or personalities being respected or otherwise.

Scholars such as Ammani (2017), Radđā (2014), Yakawada (2014), Pilaszewicz (2014), and Gusau (2003) have variously discussed the themes, style, and even structure of some selected Hausa oral poets. Because of the great importance and recognition attached to Hausa oral poets; their songs cut across all aspects of human endeavors such as entertainment, education, information, image/personality building etc. Members of Hausa society to a large extent, more or less depend on oral poets to

be enlightened about government programs and modern innovations. Mukhtar (2004: 32-50) discussed the style of Hausa poetry which he argued to include the: content of the poem, lexical categorization, the morphological aspect, the changing processes, and lexical items. The only aspect that is relevant to this paper is the content of the poem, because our focus is not on the linguistic aspect, rather we are more concern about the theme of the poem.

Theoretical Framework: The theoretical framework adopted for this study is Functionalism as propounded by Auguste Comte, which sets out to interpret society as a structure with interrelated elements; namely: norms, customs, traditions and institutions. Functionalism as a theoretical framework has been applied in the study of the intricate relationship between language and society. It also refers to the study of the relationship which exists between a language or languages, the culture and tradition as well as the politics of a particular community. This theory is adapted to this study because of the function oral poetry plays in the development of Hausa society.

2.0 Wakar Mamman Bashar, Sarkin Daura (A Song Composed for the Praise of Mamman Bashar, the Emir of Daura)

Rule your people with great courage since you are their king long live the lion,
Mamman father of Galadima, son of Musa hunters you have made a mistake, you
have allowed the lion to mature Aspirants to the throne, your plans have come to
naught, the lion has come of age.

In the forest there is a lion
In the forest there is a leopard
So children should keep away
The fishermen should change tactics
Crocodile has taken control of their river
Master of Baushe, son of Musa
Whenever the owner of the big fishing-net is present
Let those with smaller nets walk away
In the river there is a big fisherman
The small fishermen should look for a new river
I plead with you the people of Daura
To respect your emir and in return live a prosperous life
Whoever opposes you is doomed to failure, son of Musa
For God is on your side, son Musa
You are blessed you are invulnerable, father of Galadima, son of Musa
Long live the lion, Mamman, father of Galadima, son of Musa
The present world is yours, so is hereafter
No one disputes your possession of the two worlds
Since you have sown good deeds and they have sprouted
Bashar, an excellent administrator

His heart is pregnant with the fear of God
In religious matter he is exemplary
Love for brotherhood emanates from him
The whole of Daura is under your authority, son of Musa
(Abdulkadir 1975:296-7 in Furniss 1996:151-152)

2.1 Comment

Historically, Daura is one of the most important cities of Hausa land because of the Bayajida legend in the formation of political/administration of Hausa society; and many other economic, political, and social factors. As such, all emirs of Daura were and still are highly regarded and popular, but Mamman Bashar was more popular, among them courtesy of eulogies from Mamman Shāta's songs. Mamman Bashar was considered as one of the renowned kings of Daura Kingdom, the like of whom had not been seen since the glory days of Bayajida. His enigma, skillful leadership and achievement have helped to turn the Kingdom of Daura into an outstandingly exceptional emirate among the City States of Hausa Bakwai. The way Shāta depicted Mamman Bashar in this song has really elevated the image/personality of his client and made him outstanding among Nigeria's emirs. Moreover, Shāta has also shown and foregrounded five primary attributes of Mamman Bashar that distinguishes him from other rulers. These attributes are: generosity, religiousness/piety, military achievement and administrative expertise. In this way, we can easily understand that Shāta has projected the image/personality of Mamman Bashar to be more popular because of Shāta's ingenuity in composing the praise song in respect of the emir.

Some stanzas in the song are metaphoric exaggeration of the king's characters which are courage, fearlessness and daring boldness. According to Shāta, emir Bashar possess the strength of a lion, the skills of a leopard and control of river as crocodile which made him stronger and more experienced than his enemies. Hence the enemies "children" are advised to keep away because no amount of their "tactics" would lure the king to fall as their prey. This metaphor of a crocodile in the river shows that Mamman Bashar controls his domain without any threat from within or without. At the close end of the stanzas, Shāta makes a clarion call to all the subjects of Daura Kingdom to love, respect and obey their king to ensure their return to prosperity. Finally, the song concludes by portraying the emir as an exemplary leader not only on the matters of administration, but also religious affairs.

3.0 Habu'Yam Mama (A Song Composed for the Praise of Habu 'Yam Mama)

When he sought this world, and got it,
He sought for the next world, and got it.
He built a mosque so that people could pray,
Then he built a nightclub close to the mosque,
There, close to the road, at the edge of the tarmac.

If you enter the city and say your prayers,
When you come out, there is a little night club,
There is a beer to drink and tobacco to smoke,
There are voluptuous women too.

There are so many women there we have to choose you take the hold of them like chickens to See which are the best which one is it, which one isn't it?
Is it the next world that should be strong be sought for or this world?
(Abdulkadir 1975:321 in Furniss 1996:152)

3.1 Comment

In this song, Shāta takes a contrary position to the dominant cultural/religious values promulgated by the proponents of Hausa/Islamic norms. Shāta says drinking is not a crime. Habu ‘Yam Mama was a very successful businessman and a close associate of Shāta. Even from the wordings of this song, one can easily deduct the closeness of Shāta with Habu ‘Yam Mama. The most important aspect of this song that negatively projected the image/personality of Habu ‘Yam Mama was how Shāta lured him to drink beer during Ramadan fasting. Drinking of beer whether during the day or night is prohibited in Islam; not to talk of during Ramadan fasting. The song is satire, a behavioral satire which ridicule the pretentious behavior of presumably religious and socially honest members of the society. Shāta in the song Habu ‘Yan Mama painted a different picture devoid of usually irony and metaphor, but agogged with direct literal interpretation of social reality. In Northern Nigeria where majority are practicing Muslims, the religion forbids alcohol and adultery. But Shāta paradoxically, shows the character of Habu ‘Yan Mama where he built mosque for people to worship and at the same time built a night club where all sort of irreligious behaviors flourish which is tantamount to trying to deceive God by appearing very religious in the eyes of the people. This song has really made Habu ‘Yam Mama very popular in Hausa land.

4.0 Conclusion

Shāta was one of the most popular Hausa oral singers of our times. He used his talent to positively (in the case of Mamman Bashir) and negatively (in the case of Habu ‘Yam Mama) in projecting the images/personalities of his clients. Our examples have shown that Shāta’s use of either of the two (positive or negative projections) would still make the image/personality of his client outstanding and popular. The paper has made it clear that Hausa society gives special recognition to oral singers to the extent that the society looks upon them for entertainment, information and education/enlightenment of government policies.

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