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**Communication through Performance: Hausa Performance
Art**

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Abstract

The human voice is a natural instrument with a natural capability. Thus, speech with the aid of performance and music has been combined since earliest times to communicate valuable insights into human nature and universal themes of life. Such themes include life, death, good and evil. This paper examined performance as a signalling system in communication and how it is deployed by a creative artist. Furthermore, the paper also examined Hausa performance arts. It was discovered that just like in any other nation or community, Hausa performances reflect the socio-geographical experiences of the Hausa people, their natural environment and how they express their world view and artistic aspirations.

Introduction

Communication touches every sphere of human activity. It informs all of man's actions because it is occasioned by his needs to interact with his fellow man. It manifests itself in symbols and verbal forms. It serves an instrument of social interaction. It is a medium which relationships are established, extended and

maintained. The universal nature of man had led to countless definitions of the term. According to Chappell and Read (1984, p.1) in James et al (1990) communication is “any means by which a thought is transferred from one person to another” (p. 2). Eyre (1983) defines the term as “not just the giving of information, it is the giving of understandable information and receiving and understanding the message. It is the transferring of a message to another party so that it may be acted upon” (p. 1). Udall and Udall (1979) define communication as “a process by which one person (or a group) shares and imparts information to another person (or group) so that both people (and groups) understand one another” (p. 5). From the foregoing definitions, we can say that communication is a process of transmitting the thought, the sharing and imparting of information, the conveying of idea, attitudes and feelings or a transmission of information between a source and a receiver using a signalling system. The signalling system of communication relevant to this study is performance.

Performance is defined as “assumption of responsibility to an audience for the display of communication competence” Olaniyan and Quason (2007, p. 384). According to Bauman (2007), performance is a “verbal art” and “species of situated human communication” (pp.383-384). The creative artist assumes this responsibility through bodily movements, gestures and spoken words to communicate to the audience. Furthermore, Hymes in Okpewho (1990, p. 04) defines performance as an activity “emergent...or arising within its social context...as something creative, realized, achieved, even transcendent of ordinary course of events”. In essence, it is not a kind of mechanical linguistic discussion but something creative that can even go beyond ordinary limit. Harding (2002, p. 2), on the other hand, describes performance as:

The evanescent cusp between the imaginary and the real ...it makes visible the unseen and present that which is past or in the future, manipulating space and time and challenging social and natural order... notions of exaggeration, condensing, highlighting, revealing, concealing, of disguise, of social, political and spiritual boundary-crossing, of transgressive behaviour.

To elaborate this, we take a look at the Yoruba *Egungun* festival which is a very serious affair. Its main function is to deal with the worship and appeasement of the dead. The masks (Those masks imitate snake, tortoise, monkey and even leopard and those wearing it must act the parts) worn are regarded as a physical representation of ancestral spirits that have both physical and sacred powers. They are also sacrosanct and to touch them could mean death. During such festivals, one should anticipate violent action or even death. Drewal (1992, p. 98) posits:

During a 1978 *Egungun* festival....one young warrior with glazed bloodshot eyes ran up....he was mounted by the spirit of a deceased warrior. Blood streamed down the side of his mouth. People scattered including myself, but the young man seemed oblivious..... The confrontation was frightening.....

Thus, Wole Soyinka in his play, *The Road*, even though it is not on the occasion of *Egungun* festival, the character of Murano becomes an *Egungun*. The actor impersonates or pretends to be an *Egungun* even though he acquires none of the sacred power of the *Egungun* ancestral spirit, performing in a way like the *Egungun* performance such as that described by Drewal.

Harding further asserts that performance as an art is quite different from sculpture, painting and plastic arts in that the art inherent in these is a material object. The art in performance however is produced in the performer or the self of the artist. The art is seen and heard through as presence, voice and movement. Performance according to Akporoboro (2006:04) is:

A speech accentuated and rendered alive by various gestures, social conventions and the unique occasion in which it is performed.... It's a speech act or discourse whose beauty and aesthetic effects derive from the process of acts of articulation.

In effect, the artistic forms emerge from a cultural environment that shape and determine the musical forms, imagery and themes. An example is, *Oriki Shango*. Akporoboro posits (2007:247) that *Oriki Shango* is:

the poetic adoration of the god *Shango*, the god of thunder in traditional Yoruba belief. A variety of conceptions and experiences of man's violence, uncertainty, vulnerability which man experience all the time and coalesced and transmogrified in *Shango* the symbol of brutal energy and violence in nature.

In another light, Adebayo (2000:15) posits that:

Performance is a process in which the artiste or the work of any arts is performed to a particular audience to gradually steal their attention into his artistic work, which may go a long way to make open the inner emotions, feelings he tend to pass across the audience.

He further explains that in Nigeria, performance is highly accepted because it comes in different ways: viz through singing, dancing, music and other forms of art. He added that contemporary performance in music has tended to create its own stage in which artistes like Daddy Showkey, Baba Fryo and Shaba have tried to capture people into a new consciousness. To these artistes, performance with the aid of music

is just like any other literary work of art that aims at communicating and conscientizing people. The artistes possess highly powerful imagination which they express through commentaries on lifestyle, reminiscing on the exploits of national heroes or even invoking the might of ancestral gods. For example, Daddy Showkey's song "Fire Fire" reveals societal problems; he brings to life the picture of poverty, power outage, bad eggs in the society, bribery, corruption and other social vices that abound in present day Nigeria. In the end, the song reveals Nigeria as a building engulfed in fire that needs help from the people in the society. They need to use their imagination to quench the troubles burning the country. Adebayo (2000:19) further asserts that performance is "merely a collection of crafts, a branch of literature, collaboration of techniques or even all-encompassing art, for it is life. It is people making art out themselves". Thus, viewing performance as something that goes beyond entertainment, it is something that projects people's view about life and culture.

From the foregoing, performance is an art, a basis for communication in which the performer communicates valuable insights into human nature and universal themes of life: death, love, marriage, jealousy, greed, corruption and the problems of good and evil. It is also a tool which the performers choose to air their feelings, emotions and the pains they go through in life. Furthermore, performance achieves its communicative functions because the language spoken, the cultural style and traditions are understood by its people.

Hausa Performance Arts (Early Religious Sources)

There are a lot of inter-related factors that are responsible for the complexity of performance art in Hausa land. Such inter-related factors are religion, social orientation politics, occupational system, traditions, and language etc. According to Kofoworola (1987, p.1), religion was examined as one of the earliest sources in the manifestation of Hausa performing arts. He further asserts that man tries to understand the supremacy of nature with the view of putting it under control. The Hausa people believe in the existence of invisible power or spirit which is capable of controlling their daily affairs, lives and even their fortunes. Various forms of performance such as music, songs and dances are employed as means of communication with unforeseen forces to solve people's problems. Such problems may be those of sickness, bareness, social crises, drought etc. Tanimu (1999) is of the opinion that "Some historical data recorded that annual gathering used to be held at such ancient places as Dala and Gorondutse in Kano State; Kufena, Madarkaci and Turunku in ancient Zaria and Kwatarkwashi in Zamfara" (p. 18).

Kofoworola (1987, p. 5-11) gave an example of a ritual performance, the *Borin Fashin ruwa*- "Breaking of water". It is performed yearly at the approach of a new fishing season in Argungu, a Hausa speaking area. This ritual performance is

observed in a *special* location; referred to as *Mai fashen ruwa*, a part of the fishing area of the river. Thus, all ritual performances must take place in special locations which are considered the abodes of the 'spirits' or supernatural forces so as to ensure their intervention and response. Another example is the *gyaran gari*-ritual cleansing of town". The rituals are carried out in locations considered sacred before they are generally observed in town. Furthermore, *Shan kabewa*-“eating of pumpkin” ritual is enacted to herald the harvest season when the pumpkin is almost ripe.

Costumes and make-up are also used in these ritual performances. For example, in the ritual performance of *birkice-ta lele*, the costume used is green in colour which symbolizes rain. Thus, the green colour of the costume reflects the symbolic value of the desired objective. Kofoworola further posits that, musical instruments are used in order to produce music which in turn stimulates the emotions, feeling and sensitivity of the ritual performers. This makes them to be in a trance. Musical instruments used in *Bori* performances include the *garaya*-two stringed plucked flute and *buta*- gourd rattle.

Oral Sources of Hausa Tradition Performance Art

To kofoworola (1987, p. 25) the Hausa ritual performance is part of the oral traditional performances, and it is the root of Hausa performance art. Hausa ritual performance dates back to pre-dynastic Hausa society. It was a period when the Priest-king wielded enormous power and influence on the ground of his religious significance in the lives of the people. One of these religious performances prevalent then was the one in honor of Barbushe. Burdon (1972, p. 45) explains that “Barbushe was the Priest-King in pre-Islamic period of ancient Kano.” In the same vein, Harul (2000) states that:

Barbushe was Priest-King to the god Tsunburbura, whose shrine was a tree called Shamus, surrounded by a wall. No one could enter the shrine but Barbushe whoever entered died. Barbushe descended from Dala two days a year, when mystic rites were performed in a grove (pp. 244-246).

During this religious ritual performance, invocations are carried out and these invocations to Barbushe are ‘vocalized’, thus.

Lead: *Babban jimina aka sa mun gama*
 Kara gaya laya Tsumburbura

Great Father of Jimuna, we have come
night to thy dwelling in supplication,

Tsumburbura.

Chorus: *Dubi Tchburburai(sic) ku jama'a*
Kano dubi wajen Dala.

Look on Tchburburai(sic) ye men of
 Kano look toward Dala

At about the eleventh century, during the Habe dynasties, the dual roles of the priest-king were separated; the king became the political ruler. In Kano, the first Sarki to mark the establishment of the Sarauta system is Bagaudabe and in Katsina, it was Korau, Burdon (1972, pp. 21-45).

This separation between political and religious powers also brought out the socio-political system suppressed under the religious beliefs and practices. None –the –less, the king still worked hand in hand with the officers of the *Bori*, and their advice was also sought after. It also brought about changes, new values, concepts and traditions to the Habe dynasty, such as building of cities and palaces where the king reside in order to ensure centralized system of administration. There was also organized warfare in order to subdue other communities to the powers of the king. This warfare provided an avenue for the acquisition of human resources (slaves) and the generation of taxes.

Due to the transformation of the pre-dynastic Hausa society into organized socio-political and socio-economic administration it became necessary for the administrative system to develop a kind of specialized service and labour. There were the courtiers, the body-guards, soldiers, musicians and performing artistes. There was also occupational specialization of craftsmen such as the fishermen, blacksmiths, traders, hunters and builders.

Kofoworola (1987, p. 28) further asserts that the nature of this administration contributed a lot to the development of the Hausa traditional performance art, both in content and form. The praise-singing in the courts for the royalty and martial music of the royalty are examples. The *tambari* is a musical instrument used in communicating secret code regarding movement and warfare strategy to the soldiers. Other instruments include the *kakaki*, *kaho* and *kuge*.

The existence of different occupations in Hausa land brought about occupational performance art; it is performed in order to honour the blacksmiths, farmers, traders, cloth dyers, pot makers and leather craft practitioners among others. The aesthetic contents of such songs, dance and themes of such performances reflect the nature of their crafts and occupations.

Hausa oral songs, *wakokin Hausa na Baka* date back to the time of the pre-jihad Habe rulers. *Wakokin Hausa na Baka* have been divided into two classes, *wakokin adini*, religious song and *wakokin Duniya*, secular songs, (Seharfe and Aliyu 1976 in Daba (2006, p. 4).

Wakokin addini or religious songs started during the period of Jihad, 1804. during that time Hausa oral songs, being un-Islamic were discouraged, the religious songs replaced them. These religious songs were chanted in both the Hausa and *Fulfulde* languages, to reach the faith of Islam. According to Hiskett (1973:129) Shehu Usman Danfodiyo had mentioned in his book, *Najm al-ikhwan* (Star of the Brethren) while discussing drum beating in Islam says "...it is illegal according to Maliki rite except for military purposes."

The Hausa secular songs consist mainly of praise song and the art of praise singing called *kida, waka, or roko*. *Roko* is an old established institution in the royal courts of Western Sudan. According to Daba (2006:04) that "an eleventh century Arab geographer- Al Bakri referred to the existence of praise-sing with talking drum (*kalangu*) at the court of Goa, which he visited some time during his life time." Therefore praise-singing existed for centuries in the courts of kings of the Western Sudan in general and Hausa land up to the 1804 Jihad of Shehu Usmanu Danfodiyo.

The content of a praise song as Abdulkadir (1975, p. 105) says:

- A praise-line is a concise, often metaphoric
- Come-like statement accentuating the positive
- Qualities of persons, social roles, events in
- Which people participate, or objects found
- To be beautiful in the surrounding environment,
- A praise song is a compendium of praise lines.

The Hausa praise song is further divided into two: *wakar baka*-oral songs and *kirari*-short epithets. The oral songs consist of *wakar maza*-war song or song performed during a fight between two sections of a community or during a hunting expedition. *Waken bandariy-* a limerick, *wakar aiki*-work verse, *wakokin sana'a*-song for professions, *wakokin bori*-songs for spirit or bori cult, *wakar yabo*-elegy or panegyric, *wakar reno*-nursing songs *wakokin yanmata* or *gada*-girls songs, *wakokin yara* or *Tatsuniya*-children's song of folktale songs, *wakokin siyasa*-political songs and *wakokin soyayya*-love songs.

All these categories of songs are accompanied with different musical instruments and drums and are full of imagery, symbolism, satire, elegy, limerick,

flattery words and metaphors. The songs are also according to their subject matter, by the kind of instruments used or style of vocalization. Okpewho (1992) believes that:

The citizens of a community are perhaps better qualified than outsiders to determine into what aspect of their life a particular song fits in; there will be no point for instance in grouping a song under a category such as praise poetry when people who sing it would prefer to group it under funeral dirge (p. 127).

For example the work verse or song as the name implies is the song performed during working either by men or women. The songs are carried out while working in the farm or women pounding or grinding at home.

Kirari on the other hand is a short praise song. Furniss (1996, p. 74) says it “contains fixed praises displaying all the characteristics of ellipses, metaphor and internal pattering.” Mode (2005:41) further says that “short praise songs are done in order to praise, incite, flatter or encourage the target personality to do something that requires effort or one that involve danger.” An example of *kirara* invoked by and for boxers, combatants and wrestlers is:

Dan Bazamfara mai dambe!
Dan taguwa da saurin girma!
Dawan da kuttuturai; dawan da mala'iku!
Dawo Audu ci baya; mai horo da masaba!
Duna na Sakkawto, mai raba gardama!

Translation

Man from Zamfara, a boxer!
 Young he-camel of rapid growth!
 A jungle filled with stumps, a jungle filled with death angels!
 Return to us Audu, capturer of slaves who punishes with
 Blacksmith's hammer!

Fearsome man from Sokoto; settler of disputes!
 Furniss (1996, p.74)

Literary Traditions of Hausa Performance Arts

The religious and traditional oral Hausa performances art are historical, hence, recorded as more or less actual events that form the bases of Hausa performing arts. However, the literary traditions according to Kofoworola (1987, p.105) “are forms and means of documentation of the various aspects of Hausa traditions which otherwise could have remained oral and non-transitory either before or after their first performance.” He further asserts that, there is another concept of literary traditions based on materials such as poetry, folktales, folksongs, praise songs, fables, narratives, jokes and riddles which are purely creative and imaginative, than transformed into writing.

In another light, Scharfer and Aliyu in Beier (1973) posit that:

The translation from the oral to the written is thus relatively simple as Hausa categories are concerned. In many ways the literary folklorist is merely an Oral folklorist who has learned to write or who has had his songs written for him. The art of the literary folklorist is perhaps more intricate than that of the oral, but is safer to say that his art is different, and requires care in areas which the spontaneous creator can ignore (p. 36).

In essence, the concept of Hausa literary traditions was transmitted orally before being written or documented. Thus, this type of literature is known as oral literature, it is transmitted orally from generation to generation for its continuity. The oral forms includes fiction, folktales, folksongs, poetry, proverbs, epithet songs and riddles and written literature, particularly poetry which is usually written in Ajami (writing Hausa using Arabic alphabets) script. This form of writing propagates, principally, literature which is Islamic in nature such as religious poetry.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the Hausa communities through their performances project their culture, religion and social values. Furthermore, religion is one of the earliest sources of Hausa performance arts. These performances are employed as a means of communication with unseen forces to solve their daily problems. In another light, the Hausa traditional performances are employed to serve the socio-political and socio-economic administration. These performances entertain the royalty, educate the public about a certain craft and communicate a secret code regarding movement and warfare strategy to soldiers. Thus, from the foregoing performances as an act of creativity with a very large scope can be used to achieve communication to its fullest value.

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