

SAFARA

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UFR de Lettres et Sciences Humaines, Université Gaston Berger,
BP 234 Saint Louis, Sénégal
Tel +221 33 961 23 56 Fax +221 .. 961 1884
E-Mail : safara@ugb.sn

Directeur de Publication : Omar SOUGOU
Université Gaston Berger

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The Construction of Self (-Identity) in Hausa Verbal Art

*Chaibou Elhadji OUMAROU**

Résumé:

La construction de l'identité personnelle dans l'art verbal haoussa

Les premières études sur les traditions et littératures orales africaines ont été largement axées sur la façon dont l'environnement influence l'artiste traditionnel et son travail. S'inspirant de l'anthropologie et de la littérature médiévale, ces études étaient plus intéressées à étudier les modes de vie des peuples dits primitifs que d'analyser leurs récits oraux comme des œuvres de création littéraire individuelle. L'intérêt dans l'artiste traditionnel comme créateur d'œuvres artistiques est un développement récent dans la recherche et critique littéraire contemporaines. Conformément à ce nouvel intérêt, des chercheurs comme Isidore Okpewho (1992) ont appelé leurs collègues à travailler pour l'identification des techniques pouvant contribuer à singulariser des artistes traditionnels en accordant une attention particulière à la façon dont ces artistes créent leurs identités individuelles parfois contre les pressions des traditions locales. C'est dans cet esprit que cet article explore la construction de l'identité personnelle et artistique de certains artistes haoussa à travers l'auto-identification dans leurs chansons. En d'autres termes, l'article va examiner la création de l'identité personnelle et artistique, c'est-à-dire comment un artiste traditionnel exprime ses préoccupations privées ou individuelles distinctes des préoccupations collectives dans le contexte de la culture populaire. En utilisant des approches théoriques sur les cultures et littératures orales ou populaires, l'article va donc examiner des chansons des artistes populaires haoussa en focalisant sur les tensions entre leurs horizons d'attente sous la forme de leurs aspirations à la liberté, la réussite personnelle et le bonheur

* Enseignant-chercheur à l'Université Abou Moumouni, Niger.

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d'une part et sur les contraintes sociales et culturelles inhérentes à leurs communautés d'autre part, témoignant ainsi d'un vrai travail de création littéraire.

Mots clés

auto-identification ; identité ; art verbal ; Haoussa ; Yan Kama ; médiéval ; anthropologie ; philologie ; Niger ; Nigeria.

Introduction

Does literary creation exist in oral civilizations? What is literary creativity in oral literature? In other words, does self exist in oral literature? Or does the oral artist exist as an individual expressing or narrating his self or her self in a popular, oral culture?

Many scholars asked these same questions before, but their answers have been different or even contradictory. On my part I first intend to explore the causes of the scholars' divergence in their interpretations of literary creativity in oral civilizations in general and in oral literature in particular as well as the influence those interpretations have had on the early studies on African oral traditions and literatures. This exploration will also stand as a review of the literature in the study and criticism of oral civilization and literature in general and of African oral literatures in particular. Then in the second part I will focus on the artists Zabia Hussei and Dogon Loma, a burlesque comedian, both from Niger and others from Nigeria such as Maman Shata Katsina.

My interest in these artists lies in how they construct their identities as artists through self-identification as authorial signature in their oral songs or performances. In other words, the paper will investigate notions of self as a mark of literary creativity and identity through the creative endeavour of these oral artists in their attempt to express either their private or individual concerns as distinct from the collective ones in their traditional, community-oriented context of popular culture or to single out some individuals as major achievers or heroes. But what is literary creativity in oral literature, to begin with?

According to M. a M. Ngal (1977:336), in every work in oral tradition "...there occurs a true labor of creativity that is not the work of an anonymous community or of associations due to pure chance but is rather the product of the active dynamism of the individual genius." The question that arises, pursues Ngal, is whether the presence of the creative act is passive or active. Passive if the artist undergoes the act from society without any resistance and active if the act is personal and original. Since tradition is a communal reservoir from which everybody can draw something, creativity is the active reaction of the artist who re-expresses that given in his/her own fashion. For it is that fashion or style, argues Ngal, "that truly constitutes literary creation." (p.343) In the same line of thought, Rosalind Thomas (1992) sees the signs of self through the expression of individual feelings, the mention of one's own personal affairs and personality.

But scholars on medieval Europe who are influenced by the nineteenth century schools of thought like Evolutionism and Romanticism argued that the self or individual did not exist in the Middle Ages in general and before the Renaissance in particular. In a discussion on epic poetry in Finland, for example, Lauri Honko (1990:3) relates the prevailing idea that epic poetry is the creation of the collectivity to the influence of the romantic period. As a result, Honko concludes, "The moment a single author could be singled out, the product ceased to be folklore, because collectivity was the dividing line between folk poetry and art poetry." It follows from Honko's argument that the birth of art poetry is concomitant with the birth of the individual author, which in turn implies a break with the ancient notion of collective authorship mostly symbolized by the Troubadour in Europe.

This break is also the argument of Gregory B. Stone in the book entitled *The Death of the Troubadours: the Late Medieval Resistance to the Renaissance* (1994). As a matter of fact, Stone supports the notion of collective authorship by describing medieval Europe as a period in which "the singular, individual subject is in fact *plural*, or I is essentially identical to the *they*. The medieval I can only think what *they* think, can only say what *they* have already said. (Stone: 2-3; emphasis in the original) In other words, the concept of the individual or self as an independent entity and identity did not exist

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in the pre-renaissance or medieval world (see also Peter Haidu 1974:7).

Both Honko and Stone equate individualism or selfhood with Renaissance, which means a break between the medieval and modern worlds. While Honko speaks of the moment a single author could be identified as the birth of art poetry, Stone speaks of Renaissance as the beginning of the subjective self. This is why for Stone, the Renaissance or modern world is characterized by an “unprecedented birth of the concept and possibility of the individual, subjective self, the private, self-determining, unique, autonomous ego.” (Stone1994: 1)

Lee Patterson (1990:92) also sees the Renaissance as the beginning of the modern world along with its humanism, nationalism, the proliferation of competing value systems, the secure grasp of a historical consciousness, aesthetic production as an end in itself, and the emergence of the idea of the individual. But what were the real obstacles, if there was any, to the emergence of self before the late medieval period?

For scholars like A. J. Minnis (1984) the most important obstacle to the emergence of self in that period was the influence of the Christian religion. This is because in the eyes of the medieval Christians, the Bible was the most authoritative text par excellence and God was its Supreme author. Next to God as the primary author came the ancient pagan “author” whose experience and style were needed for the interpretation of certain biblical texts. Moreover, because the pagan “author” was not Christian, he could claim the authorship of his texts, which is the reason why he was considered *arrogant* at the time in contrast to the *humble* “author”, the one reluctant to claim the authority of his ideas and style. It was therefore the existence of humble authors in a greater number that led to the emergence of the medieval notion of a collective authorship as described by Gregory B Stone (1994) and others above. For that reason, comments Minnis, the twelfth century exegetes (and also early literary critics) were mostly interested in human authors as vessels of God’s authority and as such important only to the extent that they uncovered the Biblical truth. It was therefore this pattern that the exegetes strove to describe, not the specific quality or creativity of any human author.

As for Stephen G. Nichols (1977:88), the influence of philology on medieval studies is responsible for the neglect of the human author's creativity and stylistic originality. In fact, Nichols has noted that philology limited the role of the artist, the poet in particular, to that of "a discoverer, an unveiler." (idem.) It comes as no surprise that for Nichols, modern theories like formalism and structuralism that have attempted to kill the author found their origin in this medieval practice.

Other obstacles came from theories based on limited areas of study and consciously avoiding the creative effort of the oral artist. In *Troubadours and Eloquence* (1975), Linda M. Paterson disputes one example of those theories that attribute the lack of individuality to the troubadour artist on the ground that the theory in question is mainly concerned with the lyric poetry of the trouvères oral artists in northern France. Paterson concludes that such a theory, "consciously avoiding individuality" (2), is inadequate to account for every literary production from different contexts through space and time.

The efficient cause or creative individual artist, notes A. J. Minnis (1981), started to emerge in the thirteenth century with John Spencer who was one of the first artists to accept personal authorship or responsibility of their texts. As a matter of fact, Spencer refused to follow the convention of his time by accepting "full responsibility for the sinful material that he wrote, and hopes that Christ in his mercy will forgive his sins." (Minnis 1981:379)

Like the authors mentioned before, Minnis (1977) also considers the late Medieval period as the moment when the human author started to receive critical attention and interest. In the light of this change in attitude in the late Medieval period, scriptural exegetes started to be more interested in the adornments of language or style of the works under their consideration. Thus they stressed the fact that the human authors could manipulate "their styles with full awareness of the power of rhetorical figures." (Minnis 1977:56) What is more, the thirteenth century commentators went even further as they started to use style as "the basis of an argument about another literary point, for example, about the authorship of a text." (Minnis: idem.)

But if the change in attitude in favour of the adornment of language or style of the artist started in the thirteenth century, why did it take long to be accounted for in the study of African literature in general, and of oral literature in particular? One important reason has been the influence of movements like Romanticism and Evolutionism on the early studies on African oral traditions and literatures (see also Emilio Jorge Rodriguez (1994). Drawing from anthropological and medieval written discourses, these studies were in fact more interested in seeing oral narratives as records of a people's way of life than as works of individual literary creation, making the interest in the oral performer as an individual artist a recent development.

No wonder that while analyzing the new trends in oral tradition research in Africa, Ruth Finnegan (1991:111) notes "more interest in questions of artistry and individual expression than before when the stereotypes of 'communal' culture and lack of change within cultures or contexts defined as 'traditional' often precluded the apparent relevance of such questions." Finnegan also notices a second interest developing in the oral-written interaction and the process of change in general. Change is now granted to all cultures, not just to western ones. For all cultures do change and not necessarily in the evolutionist or linear way as thought by some western-centred intellectuals. In line with this new interest, scholars like Isidore Okpewho (1992) called on their colleagues to look for the particular techniques and references in the African oral performances that could point to a particular composer in a community, paying attention to ways in which the personality of the oral artist emerges and is sometimes forcefully asserted against the pressure of local tradition. An important objective of this article is to take up that call by examining the processes by which Hausa popular artists construct their artistic identities. As a result, the article is an attempt to explore how the Hausa oral artists below struggle to construct their artistic and personal identities through techniques of their own.

Some Hausa Oral Artists and their Struggle to Construct Artistic and personal Identities

Zabia Hussei

As I attempted to show elsewhere (Elhadji Oumarou 2010), Hussei's songs are influenced by her personal experience. Married off by her father to one of her cousins she does not love, the young singer promised to comply with her father's decision as a way to show her respect for both her father and tradition. Happy and honored to see his daughter comply with his wishes and demands, Zabia's father gave her his blessings and authorized her to resume her singing, free to go anywhere to perform.

To avoid conflicts with her father, Zabia uses a style of disguise to veil the tensions between her ambition of self-expression, self-reliance, self-confidence and economic independence on the one hand and her community's cultural norms and family restrictions or pressures on the other hand. Examples of those tensions and conflicts are expressed through the young singer's regrets concerning her promise to her father that she will never leave her unloved husband. She voices the regrets by not encouraging other girls to follow her steps in making that kind of promise. Instead, she advises them to marry the boys they love because 'the promise of a young girl is to love the boy who loves her', (*alkawalin gomma ta so mai son ta*).

Likewise, in the following excerpt that sounds like a synopsis of her bitter experience in marriage, the mature singer encourages the young girls to love the boys who love them rather than accept a forced marriage:

**Domin na kaya ta huje salka,
in don ni gomma ki so mai son ki**
I don't mind a thorn piercing a waterskin

I don't mind a girl loving the man who loves her.

The expression is allusive: a waterskin is a very handy domestic utensil in the Sahel region where water is a rare commodity and where carrying a waterskin is a marker of identity. Here a thorn piercing a waterskin can be interpreted as an attack on

tradition, a call for destruction of the old system, a call for change, particularly where marriage is concerned. The maturing singer signals her engagement to the cause of female liberation and her opposition to abusive paternal authority.

Hussei extends her rebellious message to the male audience, especially young men on whom she calls to resist forced marriage by securing the means to pay the dowry for the young women they love: 'young men, he who loves a girl should marry at his own expense', [*Samari ma duk mai son gomma shi armi ta kai nai*] (Elhadji Oumarou 1996:80-81; revised 2010). This call for independence derives in part from the singer's dissatisfaction with "zumunta" or blood relations, often strengthened by the added bonds of marriages, regardless of the partners' willingness or unwillingness. Hussei's anger with this situation leads her to virulent attacks on "zumunta". She laments in one song that "Family isn't worth a thing nowadays," [*yobi sakare zumuntar yanzu*] (Elhadji Oumarou 1996: 82-83; revised in 2010).

The theme of regret of unnatural submission to paternal authority surfaces constantly in metaphorical terms in the songs of maturity:

**Zamman alwashi cikkar rabo shika sawa:
alwashin kara a sha shi da ɗanye.**

Living by a pledge is risky;
the pledge of sugar-cane is to give juice when it is fresh.
(Elhadji Oumarou 1996:58-59; revised in 2010)

Another risk is to become pregnant by the husband she does not love. After the experience of motherhood, the female persona in one of Zabia Hussei's later songs, who as we now understand is clearly an autobiographical voice, compares herself to dry sugar-cane which can no longer produce juice. Added to the notion of regret is a sense of lost opportunity, deeply felt with the increase in years and the waning of beauty:

**Alwashin kara a sha shi da ɗanye,
in ya kekashe ku damre darni**

The pledge of a fresh stalk of sugar-cane is to give up its juice;
when old and dry, it is only good for fencing.

(Elhadji Oumarou 1996:61-62; revised in 2010)

With the passage of time and the experiences of motherhood in less than ideal conditions, the artist has no illusions about being delightful fresh, young sugarcane. Regretted vows tie her to her marital home so new love is out of the question. Like dried sugarcane, she is just good for the yard.

Dogon Loma

Dogon Loma is a Dan Kama from the Republic of Niger. According to Mahaman Garba (1997: 212), we can translate Dan Kama as "the one who catches." Furniss (1996: 96) also reports that the term Dan Kama originates from the fact that the Yan Kama (pl.) steal food from the market which is the framework by excellence of their artistic performances. In addition, notes Garba, the Dan Kama juggles and catches the food that the public throws at him. However, says Garba, the word juggler does not cover all the semantics of Dan Kama. The performance of the latter consists of acrobatics, dance and play on words that pepper his speech whose critical and subversive aim is disguised in his spicy style based on various food ingredients.

For all these reasons, Garba compares him with the troubadour. As a singer and drummer, Dan Kama covers popular topics. He addresses *everyone* without exception and his favorite subject is food. Neither the king's griot, nor the griot of a very specific social stratum, as is often the case in Niger (see Garba 1992), the performance of Dan Kama is addressed mainly to the population. In Hausa, notes Garba, the Dan Kama is the symbol of the comedian par excellence. He is the man who at any time and any place is haunted by food preoccupations (see also Gidley 1967, Furniss 1995). He proclaims himself the hero of food as well as its poet or herald.

Dan Kama is particularly obsessed with food. Since each of us likes the good things, not to mention good food, but has some decency to tell it, the Dan Kama proclaims his love for food openly, thus transgressing the social convention about food. C. G. B. Gidley (1967: 59) also qualifies Dan Kama as an actor. Gidley notes however that Dan Kama often targets pedantic Islamic scholars (the

marabouts) who are the representatives of Islam, the dominant religion in the Hausa land. Gidley specifies that parody and satire are the figures of speech used extensively by the **Dan Kama** in his artistic performances.

As for Graham Furniss (1995: 143), he describes the **Dan Kama** as "burlesque players". But behind the **Dan Kama's** concern for food lies a criticism of society through the questioning of the pretension to superiority of the dominant culture and ideology. In the light of the various assessments by different critics mentioned above, it appears that the **Dan Kama** is also an artist who wears many masks: the minstrel, troubadour, or burlesque comedian.

Another important feature of the **Dan Kama** is his preoccupation with himself to the detriment of the others in contradiction to the traditional norm of collective interest. In a parody of a sermon, which cannot be reproduced here in its entirety for lack of space, Dogon Loma, faithful to his concern with food, explains how a head of a family should distribute meals among the members of his family:

Wa tsama kuna tsama akuna¹

Tsaki na sahe mai tsami, idan sahiya ta waye,

The left-over of (your) sour fura, in the early morning

Da hurar matar ka, da hurar iyalin ka,

With the fura of your wife and of the rest of the family

Dauke ka gangama ga gidauniyak ka.

Take and mix them all in your calabash

Kahwa kai shanye su duka,

Put your lips to the calabash and drink it all

Ka komo bakin gida kai zamanin ka.

And come back to the front (of the door of your house) and sit down

Kak ka ji matarka tana hwaɗa,

Do not pay attention to your wife in anger

¹ This sentence is meant to represent a verse from the Quran, as an imitation of preachers who read and interpret the Quranic verses. The following sentence(s) is/are the interpretation of the verse.

Kiyale ta can, ka barta da kumya, ita anka jiya.

Ignore her in her corner, leave her with her shame, she will be the only one to be heard

Kai dai ka yi maganin tsamukar ciki.

You, in any case, you treated your stomach spasms

Wa tsamakuna tsama akun²

Tsamen nama ya halitta ga mai gida,

Taking pieces of meat from the (cooking) pot is lawful for the head of family

Don kau shi ya sai abinai.

For it is he who bought it

Domin ga wasaltawa, in za ka rabon nama,

Because according to tradition, when you share the meat

Kai mai gida, kashi talatin ka kai

You, the family head, thou shalt make thirty parts

Ka debi kashi gomma sha daya, maganin mantuwa na,

You take eleven parts, *to guard against self-forgetfulness*

Ka mika ma iyali kashi tara,

Nine parts you give to your family

Ka tashi da kashi ashirin da dai.

And you find yourself with twenty-one parts

.....

Idan ka yi tuwo makwabci bai yi ba,

If you prepared food to eat and your neighbor did not

Makwabci hito bidi naka,

So neighbor go out and try buying some for you

Ba haka niyi ba?

Is not that what I did?

It is clear from the above excerpt that for the Dan Kama, the self should come before the others, in his case even before his family which is the basis of the social structure. So it comes as no surprise that through this parody of a sermon by a Malam, who is a representative of the Muslim scholar and of Islam, the Dan Kama reverses the order of things: the tradition of sharing and mutual

² See note # 8.

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assistance, usually considered as central in the context of the traditional Hausa people, comes second to the self of the artist and reinforces his identity as a Dan Kama.

In another parody of the *Bakandamiya* (master song) by Alhaji Maman Shata Katsina, Dogon Loma also *praises himself as unique and best in his profession*. Listen to him:

Dan Kama: **Ya ahadu don girman zati.**

Oh the Almighty, by the greatness of the
(divine) essence

Allah ya yarda.

God gave me his agreement

Yara har yau ni ke ci

Children (chorus), up to now it is *I* who so far am
really eating my food

Koko ba a samo rogo na ba?

Did you not bring me my cassava?

Ballanta in kwalba, in dai samu in dahwa shi;

So that I can peel it, cook it

Har in ce ma in canye.

And I can also say that I'm going to eat it?

Ku taya muna ku yan kosai

Help us, you bean cake vendors

Yaran Dan Kama:

Alo, alo mai ganga ya yi damu;

Alo, alo the singer prepared (his *fura*³)

yaran mai ganga sun shanye.

And his children (the chorus) drank it all

Dan Kama:

Sararin masa ban san tsoro ba;

At the space (for millet cake frying) I do not know fear

In na hito Dan Kama

Once out I'm really me Dan Kama

Dan Kama da Yaran Dan Kama:

³*Fura*: a popular Hausa drink made of ball (*Dawo*) of millet cooked and kneaded with or without curdled milk. Note that the milk gives a better taste to the *Fura*

Dodo ka ci waina, kai na.

Dodo⁴ you eat the millet cake, it befits you,

Sannan mu ci hwanke, mune.

We, hwanké (wheat cake) we eat, it befits us

Balle mai kosan rogo

And what about the vendor of the cassava cakes?

Ta san ni, na san ta

She knows me (and) I know her

Ko yaya, he?

So what do you think?

Alo, alo mai ganga ya yi damu,

Alo, alo the singer prepared his fura

yanan mai ganga sun shanye.

And his children (chorus) drank it all

Dan Kama:

Na yi zama rafen tanda,

I settled next to the millet-cake frying pot

Na huta da sayen masa.

I no longer have to buy (the cake)

In biyo, in warta in wuce,

I come, I pilfer (some) and I continue my way

ko yaya?

So what do you think?

To better understand the parody by Dogon Loma, it is important to examine the *Bakandamiya* of Shata Katsina which is the object of the parody.

Alhaji Maman Shata Katsina

Da ga can na fito sarari,

⁴ *Dodo* (the ogre) is a mythical creature of the Hausa imagination. *Dodo* is much feared in Hausa collective imaginations and some popular artists use it to symbolize aspects of power. (See Linda and Oumarou 2001; Oumarou 2005)

And then I went out into the open,
Na ce musu kun ga rashin Shata mai waka
 I told them: you felt the absence of Shata, the singer.
Dan ba rabo da gwani ba,
 For it is not parting with the best (singer) that is painful
Kafin a maida gwani shi a mai ciwo
 But filling in the gap which his absence created
Ko da goro akwai marsa,
 Even among the cola nuts there are *marsa*
Ko da a cikin mawaka akwai su,
 Well much more so among the singers.
Ni ke shuri dare guda yaka girma.
 I'm shuri the mound that sprouts and grows the same night.
Allah ya yarda
 God gave me his agreement
Har yau ni ke yi
 So far *I am the best*
ku ko ba [ku] samo canji na ba,
 And you have not found my replacement
Bare in zauna, wai har in ce zan huta,
 So that I can stop, have a rest,
In dai samu in sarara,
 Breathe a little air
Wane hutu Shata, ai kai ne
 No rest, Shata, you're still on the saddle
Idan na fara Bakandamiya
 When I start Bakandamiya,
Ji nake kamar malami gwanin tafsiri,
 I feel like a marabout expert in Koranic exegesis
Malam amma fa gwani,
 A marabout but really expert
Ya ja baki ya fasara ba tare da jin tsoro ba
 That reads and interprets the verses without fear
Don ba'a gwaninta da tsoro, malam,
 For, Mister, greatness cannot be achieved with timidity
Mai tsoro ba shi Gwaninta
 The timid person cannot ever achieve greatness,
Ko wa ne, ko kuma dan wa.

Whoever he is, whatever his lineage

Alo, alo mai ganga ya gode,

Alo, alo the singer expresses his gratitude

Yaran mai ganga sun gode. (Hunter et Oumarou 2001:127; revised in 2011)

His children (the chorus) express their gratitude (my translation)

Elsewhere in the same song Shata says:

Yanzu ma kamar mu ake so

Even now they are looking for someone like me

An ko kasa (Hunter et Oumarou 2001: 125; revised in 2011)

But they can not find any (my translation).

In this *Bakandamiya*, images of greatness and self-importance are pervasive as Shata portrays himself as the greatest singer who is unrivaled by any other. That is why he compares himself to *Marsa*, the largest kola nut, so large that his absence (Shata's) creates a gap too big to fill. According to Abdulkadir (qtd in Hunter and Oumarou 2001: 46) Shata likes his *Bakandamiya* too much because in it *he praises himself and expresses his own feelings, thus giving the master song an autobiographical dimension.*

Self-praise is indeed central to *Bakandamiya*, a term used to describe a Hausa poetic masterpiece often by the poets themselves. Muhammed (qtd in Hunter and Oumarou 2001:36) has noted the tradition of composing *Bakandamiya* in Hausa popular literature with well-known praise singers from Nigeria. For example, a composition by the poet Dan Anace entitled *Shago*, in praise of a famous wrestler of the same name, is referred to by Dan Anace as *uwar wakoki*, 'mother of all songs.' It is significant that Dan Anace compares his patron's (shago's) power in wrestling with his (Dan Anace's) own greatness and popularity in praise-singing:

Arne ya ci moriyak kullinai

Ni kau na ci moriyab bakina

The Pagan has enjoyed the fruits of his clenched fist

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And I too have enjoyed the fruits of my tongue. (Hunter and Oumarou 2001:35)

Self-praise is also central in Naranbada's *Bakandamiya* which he also calls '*uwam mayyan wakoki*, 'mother of great songs.' It follows from the above examples of *Bakandamiya* that it is indeed a master piece, a favorite of the praise-singers, composed mostly for their self-praise and the construction of their artistic identities.

Shata sums up *Bakandamiya*'s most outstanding characteristics when he defines it as a composition that includes "*expressions which show how satisfied the poet is with himself, with his art, and with his world, as well as how defiant he [she] is of contrary expectations in his [her] life as a praise-singer.*" (qtd from Muhammed in Hunter and Oumarou 2001:35; emphasis added)

Conclusion

We have seen how Zabia Hussei uses her style of disguise to sing the tensions that characterize her relationships with her father and society at large. Dogon Loma also uses satire and parody to create a subversive style in disguise. Through their respective styles, both are critical of their communities, partly as the result of their personal experiences. In fact, the two artists often use the first person *I* as *autobiographical persona* to express their individual concerns and artistic identities. In this sense, they differ from the medieval "*humble*" authors described by Minnis (1984) and the plural *I* by Stone (1994).

As a matter of fact, the arrogance of Dogon Loma's style is close to the one of the pagan author of the Middle Ages described by Minnis (1984). It shows through his parody of some marabouts and Quranic verses as well as some songs by famous artists like Maman Shata Katsina. In any case, Dogon Loma's style is subversive and individual in the sense of Ngal (1977). In his analysis of the style of a Dan Kama from Nigeria, Graham Furniss (1996:99) rightly affirms that

...the selection for the purpose of parody
of registers of language appropriate to 'serious'

stylized public utterances is in itself significant. The content of the parody does not constitute a counter-argument to the content of the original, but the very fact that inappropriate content is forced upon the imitated style highlights the features of that style such that they themselves become a part of the comedy and thus are perhaps never to be seen in quite the same light again.

The style of Maman Shata Katsina is as arrogant as Dogon Loma's, especially in their defiance of some traditional social conventions:

Where Shata's freedom of approach and attitude most directly manifest itself is in his willingness to take, on occasion, a contrary position to the dominant cultural values promulgated by the proponents of Islamic behavioural norms. Where poets may expiate at length on drink and other evils, Shata says that drinking [alcoholic drinks like beer] is no crime....It is this intriguing mixture of the risqué and the conventional which makes him so popular (Furniss 1996:151).

As shown earlier, Dogon Loma's parody is equally directed against the dominant culture and ideology of Islam in Niger. Speaking of another Dan Kama from Nigeria, Furniss (1995:142) also notes that,

Dominant culture is the world of Islamic learning [which is the case of Dogon Loma], of poetry-writing, of praise-song [which is the case of Dogon Loma parodying Shata Katsina], and of the use of English [in Nigeria]. Burlesque is part of a counter-culture... defining itself in part as having its own subject matter and in part in opposition to dominant cultural forms.

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