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Edited by
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Archetypal Patterns In The Nupe Ndakogboya Masquerade Performance

ata Fatima Ibrahim

Abstract

This chapter traces the archetypal patterns in the Nupe Ndakogboya masquerade performance. It ascertains the literary theory which emphasises the fact that archetypal re-occurrences of things, events, themes, characters are relevant to contemporary rural situations (George Frazer, 1922¹, Carl Jung, 1972², Northrop Frye, 1957³ and Maud Bodkin, 1934⁴). From the Ndakogboya masquerade performance, archetypal structures can be enumerated. The major aim of this chapter is to apply theories of literature, in particular the archetypal theory to practical Nigerian situation, using Nupe dramatic performance as a case study. This chapter therefore accentuates the fact that in contemporary Nupe society, the structurally laid out aesthetic elements, norms, customs and traditions, are archetypal representations of the land. The major finding, therefore, is that there is a linear relationship between the past, present and future Nupe society. Through the archetypal elements of the social structures meant to regenerate the Nupe world view, the Ndakogboya masquerade performance reconstructs Nupe setting, belief, ideology, myth, aspiration, hope and vision.

Introduction

The Nupes can be generally found in the present Northern part of Nigeria, specifically in Niger, Kwara and Kogi States. They also exist in Lagos municipality. They speak Nupe as their first language. The major scholars who gave extensive geographical and environmental descriptions on Nupe are S. F. Nadel⁵ and M. Mason⁶.

Ndakogboya is a Nupe masquerade that performs in all parts of Nupeland in Nigeria. The masquerade is a tall figure with neither head nor limbs. Its supposed head is a round, flat, plate-like object known by the natives as *Kanga*. This supposed head is knitted in roundish fresh palm strands... The masquerade's lack of limbs, is probably responsible for its mysterious ability to expand, contract, shorten and lengthen itself at intervals to the height of 2 – 12 feet.

Ndakogboya masquerade appears in a hill-like image. It is a material of height, taller than every human being. It is an archetype of the Nupe ancestral figure – *Tsode*. And it is this essence that it tries to renew. In the artistic design of the masquerade, carved strands got from mahogany tree, are used for the concrete layout of the masquerade's stand. It is the same type of stand which the people of the land use for supporting their household buildings. In addition, an elastic extension got from dry baobab branch and designed in from of chains is implanted into the masquerade's stand. It is this elastically implanted device that the masquerade opens for its lengthening size, closes to shorten its size, folds for its contraction and unfolds for its expansion during performance. This to the outside world is the people's magical prowess. However, when the masquerade goes totally on the ground with only its head remaining on the floor, it is believed in this instance to have used *bazhiko*; a mysterious phenomena which literally means the masquerade's moment of disappearance into darkness. It is a disappearance device that is kept secret among members of the cult who are apparent trainees of the masquerade's cult. Out of all the other kinds of Nupe masquerades, such as: *kutieya* (the lion-like masquerade of the hunters) *guguyagi* (an imitation of an European female characteristics) *vugu* (the noisy one) and *elubingi* the bird-like masquerade with two heads), *Ndako* (grand father) *gboya* (changes position) is the most popular and the most respected among Nupe people, the Ndakogboya masquerade is the only masquerade in Nupeland that plays archetypal, aesthetic, cultural and pragmatic roles within the mythological set-up of the people. Its significance to communal existence cannot be over emphasised. It is the only masquerade that fights against witchcraft and sorcery for the socio-political and economic stability of the society. In addition to the masquerade's physical appearance, its costume is a long, big and roundish garment purely made of cotton material with the said round plate like circle as the head. Its cloth is usually made of two colours of thickly built raffia threads covering the masquerade from head to toe. The masquerade's costume is infact an archetypal element that defines the nature of Nupe cultural setting on hills. The costume is not only a deliberate artistic geographical creation but a depiction of the masquerade's (ancestral) power, exalted position and splendour.

Masquerades generally have been defined by Oludare as:

Masked figures in special costumes with some kind of enactment or representations of the ancestors with emphasis on music and dance. Masks resemble varieties of concepts including European satiric representation, animals such as lions, leopards, birds and fishes. They serve as important elements for social integration⁷

However, observing performance among the Nupes, Crowther and Taylor (1967) who were among the first missionaries to arrive in Nupe society of Nigeria, wrote about the big mask (*gunnuko*) of the *Ndakogboya* cult in the Rabbal/Mokwa region of Nupeland. They observed that:

This gunnuko dance about, from one village to the other and receive cowries. They exercise some tyrannical influence over the people during the time of their appearance⁸

Crowther's and Taylor's above observation is an indication and amplification of the physical and spiritual essence of the masquerade which even in modern times is believed to be the people's main stay. William Morton (1964) reviewing the functional essence of African masquerades says "they reinforce the link between man and man's ancestors. And the fact that a vital force exists before birth and after death makes man's physical presence on earth a temporary and partial realization of external forces"⁹ The dead – (the ancestors) are to the Nupes, like every African man, very much alive and around in the sense that a person's lineage is eternal. To the Nupes, there are two worlds – the seen world and the unseen world. And they feel a spiritual and powerful obligation to continually reaffirm their allegiance, honour and devotion to the ancestral members of the lineage. H. U. Bier (1958) is therefore right to have asserted that the ethical laws of any African tribe are protected by the ancestors rather than the gods¹⁰. In a recall of Nupe history before 1800, Ade Obayemi (1978) also opines that:

There were traditions which give impressions that the 'Tsodian' phase is the only successor of one other earlier system. The system during which the disciplinary institution of Ndakogboya was inaugurated¹¹

Tsode is the Nupe ancestor. Significantly too, Oludare Olajubu (1977)¹² refers to a kind of *Egungun* in Yoruba Oyo in Nigeria as *Tapa* and describes it as a Nupe *Egungun*. He adds that shouts of "onpidan" (he performs wonders) is heard from the audience during *Tapa*'s performance. Critical observations such as these are very crucial to the Nupe performance situation. They do not only recognise the existence of Nupe (*Tapa*) *Ndakogboya*, and its spiritual manifestations, they also expose the physical skills, magical ability, the technicalities and the dramatic actions inherent in the performance of this specific kind of masquerade. One major characteristic of most Nigerian masquerades, the *Ndakogboya* inclusive, is the mobile nature of the stage during performance. And this is symbolic of the mobility of life and of the ancestral representation. The *Ndakogboya* which is believed to be on a short visit to earth and to return to the spiritual world from where it emerged, is believed to be in charge of reincarnation and became the basis for the people's philosophy.

The Archetypal Patterns In Nupe Cultural and Aesthetic Formations

Archetypes are basically defined as the priori determinant of individual experiences to communal experience where the group experience in turn (which are put in symbols and imageries), shapes the individual psyche and responses. Mazizi Kunene⁵ adds that these familiar cosmic terms, symbols and references create the future possibilities of the society and fall into acceptable changing social order.

This study on the archetypal patterns in the *Ndakogboya* masquerade of Nupeland, involves watching, studying, evaluating and appreciating this cultural object of study in Nupeland. Examining the theoretical base of criticism, Michael Echeruo describes criticism generally as:

... a part of the history of culture in general, thus set in a historical and social context, deeply influenced by the general changes of

intellectual climate, the history of ideas, and even definite philosophies, though may not have produced systematic aesthetics themselves¹⁴

Criticism has been further defined in various other ways. To M. K. O. O. Amuta, it is: 'an intellectual exercise that involves a vision of history'.¹⁵ Northrop Frye¹⁶ recognises the inevitability of history in literature. To him, existence of man itself is in time and space. The archetypal essence emphasising the historical factor is clearly accommodated in any performance. This fact strengthens the general claim that man's existence is determined by the happenings around him. Apart from the apparent aesthetic reflections of the Nupe *Ndakogboya* masquerade, both thoughts of Carl Jung's individual experience¹⁷ and Sigmund Freud's collective unconsciousness¹⁸ of a set of people has been related here to Nupe peoples existence and practices. In addition to this, George Frazer observes medicine, magic and religion as the basical archetypal structures inherent in the literary aspects of any community. Frazer sees the archetypal approach in totality as constituting a monumental study of magic and religion, tracing numerous myths back to historical beginnings¹⁹. Archetypal structures should therefore be viewed as properties of socio-cultural credentials, used for communal and collective mobilization, solidarity and progress. Archetypal theory is the theory that has suitably given an objective and realistic placement of the existing Nupe oral features. This is because Nupe culture itself, like most Nigerian cultures, is a continuous reproduction of the past in the present for the achievement of continuity. Nupe religion and rituals developed from the existing patterns and procedure of worship. Hence, no meaningful production analysis of the *Ndakogboya* masquerade in Nupeland can be done unless presented and viewed not only as assemblages of human monuments, but also as cyclical patterns of human activities put together in poetic, prosaic and dramatised forms from time immemorial²⁰.

Archetypes are said to be reoccurrences in modern times of settings, events, themes, characters, etc that reflect some kind of their types in the past. For instance, and as in the Nupe *Ndakogboya* mythology, devilish tendencies are usually attributed to the female i.e it is a woman's attitude, the mother (a witch) of *Etsu Majindodo* that called for the institutionalization of the *Ndakogboya*

masquerade. The masquerade becomes a social regulator of behaviours and codes of conduct. Maud Bodkin in his *Archetypal Patterns in Poetry of Imaginative Psychology* also opines that: "Archetypes can be in symbols and imageries"²¹. She observes archetypes in poetry from a psychological point of view. Bodkin sees archetypal representations in poetic forms as significant diversion from Carl Jung's assertion of archetypes. Bodkin concludes that archetypes are the individual responses to communal experiences and further observes that Carl Jung's rebirth archetype examples however unconsciously negates his definition of archetypes as individual experiences, since it is a rebirth of the community and their collective renewal of existence that takes place at each performance of rites²². Emphatically, she accentuates the fact that it's the group experience that shapes the individual's psyche and responses.

Hence, in the collective experiences of man, other types of archetypes of themes for example include that of seduction, the evil, good, journeys, etc which are all traces to past events, past character types, past occurrences within the new adjusting and self regulating society.

By acceptable changing social orders, Mazisi Kunene means the archetypal representation of any society. Archetypes give myth its collective essence, although the universal essence also points at some dialectical nature of transformation and moderations in the land. From Nupe *Ndakogboya* rituals, a cohesive set of propositions about the reality of life and about man's place in the world is deduced by Nupe audience. No wonder Chinua Achebe observing a similar Nigerian situation proposes that:

*Rituals are created by man to explain the problems and mysteries of life and death – his attempt to make sense of the bewildering complexities of existence*²³

Ndakogboya is a ritual phenomenon in Nupeland and its power is especially recognised from its effective dramatic actions in the ritual

here. This mode is referred to by Wole Soyinka as "a genuine reeling in dogged secularization of the profoundly mystical"²⁴. Ritual practices in Nupeland involve the ancestor, man and the supernatural. The performance of rituals by Nupe people strengthens and safeguards their cultural values and religious ethics. In relation to modern times, the attributes of Nupe rituals include regularity, repetition, archetypes of cultural events, theme, character, specimen setting and cultural symbols. The processes of ritual involve full dedication to superordinate powers. However, the established ritual structures in Nupe society form the basis or foundation for dictating new laws, adjusting political system based on the general ideology of the society. Thereafter, the established religion and rituals became perfected in aesthetics, as exemplified in Nupe *Ndakogboya* performance.

Oath-taking phenomenon before the masquerade's cult membership is a sign of allegiance and loyalty to the society. At registration point, each new member of the cult must drink human blood concoction known as *Kutilla* (commitment to the masquerade cult) before he or she can become a bonafide member of the cult. The oath-taking device is to safeguard the secrecy of the cult. Most significantly, it creates in the individual, the archetypal spirit of togetherness established by *Tsode*. The ritual scenario exhibits the worshiper as one who has been away for a long period and has met some supernatural and spiritual forces and is back to give an account of the world beyond through a display of some magical upliftment as archetypal of *Tsode*; the powers acquired in the mystical world.

The poetry of the *Ndakogboya* masquerade is not only religious and ritualistic but mystically philosophical and reflective of life and life after death. What is cultural and traditional remains a persistent rhythm that has been the practice of the past. The performer uses icons and existing materials as weapons for depicting historical and social circumstances. The praise of past heroes in *Ndakogboya* poetry is to reinforce the importance of the archetypal characters of the society, worthy of emulation. This is perhaps why those who are still in existence and out of tune with the norms of the society, are usually fully satirized during performance. The illusions that are made to God, forefathers and heaven refers to the archetypal setting of the place where the most high resides. It is to also accentuate Nupe mythology and ritual patterns of rebirth.

The image of a 'hider' given to the masquerade in its praise indicates transcendence and mystery. The masquerade is presented as a spiritual figure full of revelations long awaited by its audience. It is the hope of its people. No wonder then that its praise also evokes a mystic environment. Apart from these, the vision of the survival of the race and the need to seek a spiritual realization of this vision are reflected in the chants recited in the ritual process during the masquerade's annual performance.

Every social being in Nupe society is dependent on his or her past and this past is the essential metaphor revealed presently in *Ndakogboya* chants. *Gboyameijimi* (owner of human blood) is a divine metaphor of the archetypal link between man and the spirit being. The *Ndakogboya*, like the people's ancestor is believed to be in possession of power and magic and in control of witchcraft. The masquerade is therefore an ancestral archetype. And its ancestral role is dual in nature – the father of all in support of the well – behaved individuals and the scourge of evil – doers. *Ndakogboya* functions as the people's seer, a visionary personage. Like all praise tradition across Nigeria, the aesthetic strategy of *Ndakogboya* performance is the creation of archetypes from the ecology (the physical environment).

The image of the 'hill' in which the *Ndakogboya* appears is a reflection of the people's archetypal setting. From this, the Nupe image can be deduced. The greatness of *Ndakogboya* is also revealed in the metaphors of the hill, river, fish, roots of trees, streams, canoe, crocodiles, hoe, chicken, duck etc. These ecological icons have immediate appeal and in the masquerade's context. They presuppose elevated aspiration and hope for the people. Therefore, in as much as the hill can be said to be a geographical symbol of the people's ancestor, the hill is a seat of blessedness. It is a place, where *Tsode*, the ancestral figure of the people hid when he was pursued by his enemies during inter-cultural wars that led to the freedom and subsequent establishment of Nupe kingdom. This same hill in present times serves as a source of inspiration to the people. It is an archetype that re-incarnates the vision and ancestral significance of the *Ndakogboya* masquerade. It has become one of the sacred objects of the economy. The spiritual acumen for divination by the *Ndakogboya* is gathered on the hill and not on the mere ground of the ordinary man. The hill is the people's citadel i.e their place of refuge and safety.

The masquerades praise poetry retains the system of ality and reinforces the character of the *Ndakogboya*. References to its personality allow us to recognise the major message for the need for a man's might and attainment height in his cultural struggle i.e the need for man to aspire towards archetypal heights. This is perhaps why the presentation of the *Ndakogboya* masquerade is an archetypal one. It is a figure worthy of emulation. Emphasis is on character behaviour of man. Man is expected to be faithful and to also abide by the rules, regulations, norms, customs and code of conduct of the society manifested out of this habitual practice. The masquerade's performance system carries along the Nupe moral codes as well as the authority of the ancestral representative, the *Ndakogboya*. For instance, hear this:

Ndakogboya Yedziboo
Ala eli gboya wu gbata
Dzamaibo wo ja, zaa dza bagio?
Ekongi aduwa
Ebe kuwa logbe
Ena danbo!
Da bo din to imin
Wa lay naa
Ba na wo da be na o
Zan doro man lo bo
Ye man elatu zuman o
Oku kuti gun

Ndakogboya, you are saluted!
Let them use 'Gboya's character to judge him
Cut millets, cut it well, who will cut man?
Small thorn of prayers
Come and carry snake for hunting
There is fire!
One who enters house through the back door
Have you not driven them?
Road which you came?
Nobody goes there
Gauge is what you use for the back
Well-done! mud masquerade

Millet is a staple food of the Nupes and is believed to be a gift of the land from the gods and ancestors, as it is the easiest to be got from the farms. Millet, though a staple food of the people, is compared with the concept of man on land. A man, according to the Nupes is one who has one way or the other got to certain heights and has possession of power and magic like the ancestors. He must also have made one contribution or the other to the society. Millet is a symbol of stability, fertility and progress of the land. It is a buried wheat which has to germinate if the gods, the deities, ancestors so approve. In this segment, the ritual poet relates glory to history thereby stressing the importance of the past. Millet further relates man to earth.

The female figure in Nupe world is better appreciated through the *Ndakogboya* masquerade performance. From its performance, various sigmas of the female archetype, typical of other African settings can be deduced. Women in Nupeland are believed to be gossips, and actual archetypes of King *Majidodo's* mother who always interrupted her son during his council of chiefs meetings. Hence, the *Ndakogboya* masquerade was instituted to check female excesses and practices became associated with women thereafter. The female became gender disadvantageous in Nupeland. We should also note that the reference to *Ndakogboya* as 'man' further indicates the double existence of the masquerade. At one point, it is an ancestral spirit, at another, it assumes human or terrestrial status. The natural elements such as the 'mud' in the last line of the above poetry of *Ndakogboya* in '*Okukutigun*' is a signifier of the natural transition of man.

Other archetypal patterns can be realised from the variety of chants which explore the image of hunting, the sun, fire, serpent. Thus, hunting is the occupation of the Nupes, serpents and fire are among the sacred elements of ritual. The battle of settlement is represented through the choice of militant words. These symbolic elements are needed for the maintenance of social order. The idea of hunting expresses man's search for eternal rest. There are two worlds, the human world and the spiritual world which is the 'hunting' world. The *Ndakogboya* performance process is therefore mythopoetic and defining. It defines invocations meant to awaken the presence of the ancestors in the midst of the people – the soliciting audience. The belief is that the presence of the spirits of the ancestors will first and foremost help to drive away the unseen

spirits and cleanse the environment in readiness for sacrifices, exemplified in the following chant. Let us listen to this for another example:

Ebe kuwa lo gbe
Ena danbo
Zan doroe kuwa logbe a
Ewa fibo
Yiga ku wa lo gbe
Etun chi bo
Ekube ye sae
Dzidzi dzidzi nan dzi
Yanyan nan
Eyagabe ayewonajin
Eluya ki jin wo yo
Ki jin wo yo Gboya
Yan zuman ga be
Aye wona jin

Chorus: Aye aye

Ega na gabenan
Ayewon a gan e
Ya da babe Sokoe
Soko wunawu yi ba
Yi lakpe bana ya da
Yi chi de yan a a
Egwa nan yi ye ya nan
Ebo Muhamman duo
Ezan nan yiyae danan
Ebo Mhammadu
Allahula ila ila ilanla
La ila ila.

Come and carry snake for hunting
There is fire
Nobody carries snake for hunting
There is python in there
We shall carry snake for hunting
There is work in there
Sorry for the long term
People's usual collective yearly gathering.

When year comes round it should be repeated.
Gboya what is the problem?
What is wrong with you Gboya?
When past events comes
They should be repeated

Chorus: Yes, yes

When new talks come
They should be said again
We would go and plead with God
God, let him show us the road
I don't know on which path to thread
To have something
The hands that we swing at will
Is because of God
The way we walk
It is because of Prophet Mohammed

As can be deduced from the above poetic stanza, for a total archetypal representations, therefore there is a further extensive fluctuation of vital rhythms, common and spiritual image such as in:

Kiya gan dozio?
Egwa ya gan dodzio

What makes one greater than the others?
Hand is greater than hand.

Visual images of the hand, head and shoulder are indications of man as a mere element of existence. Man must be so called only if he struggles to be like the historical heroes. Hence, "it is the hands and palms of man that makes man a man". In this masquerade poetry, the principle of unity is solicited too as a pointer to the power tussle between men and women on the land. In addition, the tempo technique is used to indicate the timelessness in human existence. This image is that of hunters in Nupeland who are fond of going about on the land with hunting dogs. The use of domestic sources of animals like dog and elephant are symbolic. Man is metaphoric of the elephant and the woman of the dog. Hence, the masquerade is welcomed into the performance arena in a satiric tone. The poet asks the *Ndakogboya* to do exactly what his mother used to do and reminds the audience and masquerade about existing myth and history. The satiric poems are puns and lampoons

Nupe women folk. This poetic part exposes women activities and depicts the figure of a gossip and a spy for public amusement. The poems are meant for the purification of the land in readiness for the ancestral outrage. The poet, using repetitive lines in "San Gboya, egwa midan", "San Gboya, egwa midan" gives an insight into the story that led to the establishment of the masquerade in the community and by so doing, a collective sensibility is objectified.

Conclusion

On the whole, the songs, chants, prayers, rituals and poetry in the Ndakogboya masquerade performed serve as a way of articulating and sustaining communal injunctions and beliefs. The existence of the supernatural in the environment implies that man is at the archetypal centre of existence. The traditional poetry of the Nupe people in its various forms, is related to the Nupe belief system associated with myth, legend and archetypal forms. The life rhythms of the Nupes are provided by this crucial announcements meant to reinforce certain values, ethics and taboos within the social system. The existing Nupe forms are reconstructed and regenerated in the performance mode of the Ndakogboya masquerade. Ndakogboya is both a traditional performer and an archetypal representation. It is a phenomenon for the important religious philosophical concepts which binds the society together. This study ascertained and underpinned the significance of archetypal criticism in African literature as exemplified in the Ndakogboya Masquerade ensemble. It confirms among others, Bannison Gray's (1975), Northrop Frye's (1957) Maud Bodkin's (1945), Carl Jung's (1967) George Frazer's (1922) Isidore Okpewho's Masizi Kumene's (1970) among others' postulation that myth and history are retained in the social memory of a society and that dynamic structures are archetypal reflections of man in the past, in present age and in future expectations. Evident in the Nupe performances is the conviction of these scholars, that there are recurring nature of certain actions, images, phenomena and patterns in the course of human history.

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