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THE ROLE OF DRAMA IN NUPE SOCIETY OF NIGERIA

Binta F. Ibrahim

Abstract

The common notion of drama is that it is a mere entertainment device meant for the stage. This writer however deviates from this view because findings on an investigation into drama in Nigerian Nupe society reveals in totality that the concept of drama goes beyond its mere entertainment motif. Also, the didactic essence of drama within the Nigerian Nupe set-up is not as important as its pragmatic relevance to the socio-economic and political reality of Nupe culture in Nigeria. This research exposes the inseparability and union of theatre and drama and the Nupe social and religious practices in Nigeria.

The research studied the general principles, manifestoes, prophecies, rules and regulations that guide dramatic performances in Nupe land. It also weighed the historical importance and influence of this performance on the existence of Nupe people in Nigeria. Part of this research's findings were that dramatic performances among the Nupe play great historical and pragmatic roles. The artistic accomplishment especially the coordinated elements of the scenes meshed into a complete whole incorporating the Nupe performance and cultural imagination and postulates future Nupe cosmology. Hence, the function of drama in Nupe society of Nigeria is so much reflected in virtually all aspects of the people's existence that it has become a crucial oral approach to criticism of the land in past, present and future times.

Introduction

The term 'drama' has been defined variously by scholars. Of the definitions, one of the most applicable to the Nigerian Nupe cultural context is by Holman (1960:167), who stated that "Aristotle called drama "imitated human action". But since his meaning of IMITATION is in doubt, this phrase is not as simple or clear as it seems."[1] Holman (1960) alluded to three necessary elements in drama, identified by J.M. Manly; (1) a Story (2) told in Action (3) by actors who impersonate the CHARACTERS in the story. Drama arose from religious ceremonials.

Holman's definition applies to the Nupe in that it reflects the forms of drama that are evident in Nupe oral drama. This article uses the term drama to include 'theatre.' Without action and performance, Nupe drama cannot be staged and, unless staged, it remains meaningless. Nupe drama is an unwritten indigenous event, yet its play-making, actualization and realization are its major determinants. Nupe drama is a cultural event that is handed down from one generation to another. Its composition involves instant improvisation from inherited dramatic traditions, intuitive knowledge and subsequent spontaneous delivery. In the Nupe society, drama is essential to the people, who in the process, make out tradition, shape tradition and create a harmony of nature.

In Nigeria, there exist various types of dramatic performances, serving both entertainment and religious functions. Nigerian dramatic performances portray the identity of the different ethnic groups within the country. It also promotes proper understanding of the cultural heritage and image. This is because cultural idiosyncrasies, idioms, dictations, rules and expectations are carefully molded into the dramatic actions in order to socialize and coordinate members of the particular ethnic group. The Nigerian Yoruba Alarinjo theatre for instance, which is considered as a mere entertainment group still carries the Yoruba cultural image. It also presents the Yoruba mode of worship when it became bound to the Egungun cult, and through ancestral worship and participation in Egungun festival performance organized and coded by its people. So are the Nigerian Igbo Mbom-Ama and Odo festivals, which also have their ritual purities and functions. The Nigerian Hausa Bori for further example is a dramatic enactment of a circumstance from which it derives the name Bori. Bori is a spiritual medium that harbors the doings and beliefs of the Hausa people, reflected in the context,

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structure and form of the Bori drama. Also among the Nigerian Ibibio, Messenger (1962:54) observed two types of dramatic organizations; the Offiong and the Ekong. In Ebiraland, there is the Ekwechi drama with all its pomp and pageantry that forms the Ebira cultural patterns, aesthetics and worldview. In most Nigerian settings therefore, drama remains the depiction of social and cultural dynamics in art forms.[2]

The Role of the Dramatic Performer in Nupe Society

The performing figure in the Nupe society is a Nupe masquerade known as "Kuti". This section reveals how the theatrical activities during the dramatic performance of Kuti reflects and relates to the socio-cultural ideology, philosophy, beliefs, and the metaphysics of the people. In other words, for what significant purposes is the elaborate annual dramatic enactment of Kuti? On elaborate festivities in Africa, Smith (1961:x) noted:

> As experiences overlap, cultural expectations come to be integrated so that art is inevitably linked with other aspects of life, with morals, the depths of religious feelings expressed in beautiful forms, or realities of family affections, law and order. Appreciation is thus rooted in the social heritage and even fashioned in art, thus keeping social factors intact.[3]

No wonder then, that despite urbanization, colonialism and modernism the ritual activities in Nigerian drama that hold the people together are still intact and strong especially in Nupe Society.

It should be noted that the Kuti masquerade serves some religious, ritual and socio-cultural functions within the society. The functions of Kuti, the chief performer in the Nupe dramatic event, are as follows.

i. Religious-Ritualization Function (*Eyanwo)*

In Nupe land, rituals and sacrifices are needed in order to celebrate this crucial object of art through which the society is reborn. The necessary traditional rites have to be performed to ensure acceptance into the spiritual world. This religious-ritual celebration is also a forum for requesting the dead to protect the living from evil and misfortune. The Kuti masquerade appears at the central burial ground to perform the necessary rites and immediately reaffirms the acceptance or rejection of the rite by the spiritual world. This presupposes a clear-cut demarcation between the dead and the living. The idea of the living meeting the dead is transcendental. It is an indicator of African people's belief in a life after death – a communal linkage.

According to an oral source (Jung, 1972:18), the responsibility of the Kuti is to cleanse the society and prevent calamities from befalling the loyal community inhabitants.[4] For example, when there is a continuous dry season, which can affect the planting season, when there is an increased infertility and increased mortality, the masquerade is invoked in a dramatic performance to help save the situation. The Nupe believe that some evil force must be the cause of such unpalatable turn of events on the land and it is the ancestral spirits, which the masquerade symbolizes that can be propitiated to cleanse the society of all evils and to restore good health for all. Theories of 'archetypes' by Jung (1972), theories of 'rite de passage'[5] by Van Gennep (1942:77), and the 'mythic image' of Campbell (1974:552), are all useful for a proper comprehension of the phenomenon that surrounds this crucial traditional activity among the Nupe people.[6] Campbell (1974:553) describes myth as:

> A variation of a monomyth in which a hero ventures forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder, where fabulous forces are encountered and a decisive victory is associated with a mysterious adventurer who has the power to bestow booms on his fellow men. The unclear unit can be represented more simply as a process of separation, initiation and return. [7]

This process is what Priere, Richard and Karl (1974:41) further referred to as "the transcendence of the mundane, which by definition is the rite of passage recurrently pointed at in mythical observations"[8].

ii. Rites of Passage Function: (life and death cycle)

The dead man in Nupe society is prepared for the important task of meeting the ancestors. This is done by purification, propitiation, cleansing and offering of sacrifices for this purpose. This is to enable the ancestors accept his soul when he dies to join the "unknown" world. Kuti appears at burial rites, makes incantations and pours libations on the corpse before the final burial. Kuti's duty is to break the bond between the living and the dead person. Without this important rite of passage, people believe that the spirit of the dead will wonder about in the forest without rest.

Certain fixed patterns have become traditional rituals, which have to be fulfilled during dramatic worships. This is to safeguard man's sense of security, belonging and inward spiritual peace in the ritual process during which Nupe men and women collectively ask for blessing, support and succor. These repeated ritual processes have also become a source of superstitious dread because they (the processes) have acquired magical associations.

On the performance of rites of passage generally in Africa and which is also relevant to the dramatic performance in Nupe society, Benjamin Ray remarks that:

> The rite of passage creates a bond between temporal processes and archetypal patterns in order to give form and meaning to human events. And this is usually done in accordance with a three-fold ritual patterns consisting of rites of separation, transition, and reincarnation. The specific object of rituals of passage is to "create fixed and meaningful transformations in the life cycle (birth and naming ceremony, puberty, marriage, death and funerals." In the ecological and temporal cycle-planning, harvest, seasonal changes, New Year and in the ascension of individuals to high office [9].

This is to say that other ceremonies such as the naming ceremony is an initiation into human community and funeral ceremony is also an initiation into the unseen spiritual community. Death therefore is regarded as a transition from one state of existence to another. This establishes two worlds, with an active interaction through drama between the human and the spiritual. It is this need for spiritual participation that calls for human rituals.

iii. Judicial and Legal Functions of Kuti

The legal function of Kuti is to enact and dispense justice. The dead (in the masquerade disguise) proclaims the laws that bind the living in a very impartial way and further passes judgments on the wrong ones. It becomes the supreme legal authority. This is why punishments are pronounced for communal offenders and are usually supervised by the cult members in the drama group.

Through the chief priest in the Kuti masquerade's cult in Nupe land, the people seek chronological records of trial using orderly principles such as the witchcraft confirmation in the public during the seasonal dramatic occurrence. The masquerade is usually the final judge of who is a witch or wizard and who is not.

iv. Moral Edification Function

Nupes believe that one's lies and bad deeds are punishable by the ancestors who are ever watching and who appear in the image of Kuti. The Nupe, as a result of this belief, try to avoid what are tagged as bad deeds and to conform to the ethics, code of conduct, and good behavior of the society. The presence of the masquerade in the annual performance drama, (physical and spiritual) therefore, molds the individual according to godly and community moral injunctions. This gives room for one's internal peace, perfect co-existence, faithfulness, uprightness and solidarity.

v. Social Communication and Integration Function

The function of any language use is to ensure effectiveness in communication and integration of the community of users. Kuti fulfils this crucial function. In its thrilling utterances, the masquerade

communicates with its audience who derives more of the masquerade's intended messages from its dramatization. Symbols are used in addition to the verbal aspects in the dramatic production in order to drive messages home. The physical appearance of the masquerade, for example, in itself identifies it as an ancestral spirit, which has been invoked mainly for the purpose of exposing (as its custom implies) the societal traitors. The Kuti masquerade in itself is symbolic of the mythical message emphasizing the theme of remembrance and man's ever-readiness to transit from this world to the unknown world - a pointer to and reminder of the belief among Africans of the inevitable principle of death after Life. This reality is communicated to the populace by the masquerade, its singers and drummers.

vi. The Performer's Function of the Selection of Title-Holders

In the selection procedure of the successors of titles and to the throne, the chief priest of the Kuti cult, who is the oracle, after consultation with the ancestors, is expected to assess and pronounce the right persons to take over the vacant political seat. The masquerade in dramatic acrobatics uses his long regalia to sweep the throne for the new ruler.

However, as observed by Idrees (1982:84):

> An image of a popular candidate can be dented if the priest pronounces that the reign, of a contestant would bring about catastrophes to the land... However, if such selections are left in the hands of the king makers, there would be fraudulent practices. Those who have been favored by an incumbent ruler are likely to favor their mentor's son or brother. [10]

The principle behind the assessment of political candidate in Nupe land by the performer is to identify through spiritual consultations, the candidate under whose reign the society would benefit more, in terms of individual progress and positive developments including good health. Idrees (1982:88) further observed that:

> In consulting the chief priest of Kuti cult, each candidate has to present a cock. After the necessary consultations and sacrifices, each cock is thrown some quantity of guinea corn to eat. The owner of the cock that ate more quantity of the corn is usually declared the successful candidate. An unpopular candidate's cock may consume more guinea corn, making the more popular candidate to loose. In this case, perhaps the successful candidate had starved his cock before it was taken to shrine while the popular candidate may have been complacent and submitted just a cock. [11]

In Nupe land, title taking is a mark of social distinction. The titles have different names and slightly vary in some Nupe cities. For example, the functions and significance of each variant types of titled office are the same with the other in social, economic and political terms. It is an assertion of self-identity, social upliftment and an obtainment of a passport into the hierarchy of the culture. Beside, this title-taking aspect of the Nupe culture is also an indication of one's possession of certain powers and prowess. This is perhaps why in contemporary Nigeria, rich Nupe men seek to be title-holders. A person, who succeeds in scaling into the social heights of the titled, is often full of happiness and pride and calls for personal celebrations. The title, which he assumes, is self-praising and reflects his past experiences, occupation and his heroic feats within and for the society of his birth. In title-taking chants during dramatic performances therefore, the individual ego is recalled to the title aspirant. His functions are enumerated and comic scenes are presented. In one of these scenes, a coward may be presented and made to loose.

vii. Offering of Prayers on Behalf of the Dead and the Society

Prayers, which form a great part of the entire worship, are offered to the ancestors. The first part of the prayers involves an invocation of the deceased back to the land of the living and as in the words of an oral source,[12] to underscore the relevance of the ancestors to the people. Some paraphernalia are provided in form of palm wine in mud pots and in gourds, red

cock, millet, rice, grains, palm oil, a python snake, kola-nut and a butchered dog, in order to come to terms with the said ancestors and seek for their protection. The rites performed are the people's collective representations derived from the principles of their social organization, from their earliest concepts of philosophy and are lifted from the socio-cultural and dramatic contents of the people's beliefs. This study also observed these socio-cultural and dramatic materials as both the visual and oral aesthetic forms incorporating religion and ritual in the Nigerian Nupe society.

viii. Divination Function (Ebasan)

Kuti invokes spirits in order to commune with man's protector and reach agreement. The elaborate divination process in Nupe land is usually loaded with symbols, allusions, mythology and complex images. The messages received by the diviner are usually interpreted to listeners by the masquerade's interpreter. Invocation is usually followed by supplication. There are a number of curing methods. At times, it is in terms of prescribed sacrifices to be offered for solutions or herbal medicine to be given for immediate action by the client in order to avert the cause of a particular problem. This is possible however, only when the demand of the living has been communicated to the supernatural forces and granted. The efficacy of some of the herbs and roots that are given to the clients however can only be assured when accompanied with incantations, chants, poetry of magic and prayers and praise epithets. The clients of Kuti are usually told how, when and where to use such medicinal cures, for effectiveness. Method, time and place are crucial factors in the successful manifestations of these traditional treatments. This is why in some cases, clients are asked to take their sacrifices and requests on their heads in the midnight and to the graveyard. The placement of the offer on the head is the method of the deliverance of the substance. Head load is at times supplemented with kneeling on the two knees and spitting after the deliverance. Midnight symbolizes the tranquility and peace of the people and hence the night timing of the deliverance of the substance used for appeasing God and ancestors.

ix. The Use of the Masquerade's Cult (Enakuti) as a Sacred Custodian.

The organization of public performance and public appearance of the Kuti are the responsibilities of its cult members. Kuti has an overall watch over the other cult members since it has a control on the spiritual power within the society. The masquerade's cult is essentially a male cult consisting mainly of the council of elders, all of whom must take a secret oath because the secrets of the cult are not supposed to be revealed by the cult members. The cult becomes an organ of Nupe government as the cult members are consulted on decision-making matters concerning the society and their say is never taken with levity. The cult is the world of the supernatural outside the natural atmosphere. Nadel (1942:100) re-affirmed that:

> ..... The legal system enforced by the Nupe overlords is introduced and confirmed by the kuti organization. The cult's other duty is the organization of the appearance of kuti masquerade as well as to keep the secret of the wearer of the masquerade's garment secret.[13]

The initiation that new cult members undergo before they can become full members of the cult involves their presentation of a red cock and sixty naira for sacrifice. There is something sacred about it. A member has to possess the qualities of self-confidence, reliability and strength in order to be able to stand the initiation rite and keep the secret of the masquerade intact. In the course of this research it was discovered that certain prayers are usually offered at the beginning and end of cult meetings. The prayers as they are recited are repetitious in nature and learnt by rote.

x. The Kuti Shrine as a House of Worship

Shrines indicate the significance of worships and common beliefs. They are sacred buildings meant to be 'the face' of the ancestors. Kuti shrine is known in Nupe language as 'disguise house'. It is a camp at the outskirts of the town usually in a secluded area of the forest. At the back of the shrine, there is a heavy banana trunk creating a dark shade for the shrine. Here, there are sculptural representations to depict power, exalted positions and splendor. The shrine itself is oval shaped with emblems of Tsoede (the Nupe ancestor) all over it. The shrine is under a mighty sacred tree that serves as its root.

xi. The Significance of the Function of Offering Sacrifices (Sadakajin).

This is one of the scenes of the religion of the Nupes. Sacrifice is a kind of gift offering to the unseen forces above human beings. It helps the Nupe to maintain peaceful relationship with God. And the aim is to appease the powers that be and to ensure that what is offered should be accepted by God. Kola-nuts, money, foods, drinks, and animals are usually the objects of sacrifice. Everything offered is placed on or before the shrine as a token to be either burnt or buried. It is the responsibility of the Kuti masquerade to offer the sacrifice following certain dramatic and ritual procedures. In addition, it has to receive signals for the acceptance of the sacrifice offer when it dismisses its people. Sacrificial items are cultural and local items, usually seen at the space provided for them at the shrine. Such items include a bowl of whitewashed rice, kegs of red wine, a bottle of red oil, dry fish, rabbits, red cock and seven white kola-nuts among others. These are expressions of the culture as these items to the people are the staple and the most favorite dishes of the ancestors when they were alive and which they are believed to have been missing. The red oil is a representation of human blood for the consumption of the witches and wizards of the society. Each of the seven kola-nuts represents each day of the week. According to an informant,[14] the animal sacrificial victims are goats and black python. These displays are partly to instill a feeling of fear during dramatic festivities The living animal mentioned here are used as scapegoats for sacrifice and serve as symbols of the burial of the sin of the people and for the success of the land during the year.

xii. The Use of the Masquerader's Taboos for Social Regulations

The oath taking or swearing stage of the masquerade's performance is used to prove allegiance to the supernatural who are in control of the peoples' lives and such an oath is not to be violated. Any member who violates the oath is said to have instant sores all over his body; the body swells up afterwards and he eventually dies. When he dies, his body is not to be buried but thrown into the "evil forest" for vultures to consume. The shrine is a very sacred place for entry and worship by the leading believers.

One of the taboos is that women are not allowed to enter the cult's shrine. Even the women soloist that sings for the masquerades as it performs does not know its secret. The mystery behind the whole thing is not revealed to them. The only woman who ever went into Kuti's shrine out of inquisitiveness is said to have menstruated all through the remaining days of her life until death and felt it was better for her to join the ancestors than remain a disgrace to womanhood.

Also, when Kuti is in action in Nupe drama, its cloth is not supposed to touch 'ordinary' persons. Once its cloth touches anyone such a person falls into unconsciousness and can only be revived through instant sacrifice by one's family members. This taboo instills fear into the minds of both elders who are not cult members and into children in particular. This is why people are seen running helter-skelter and raising alarm on the

into houses only to emerge and watch the masquerade perform. The tension in the atmosphere during the masquerade's festival is positive proof of its cultural power and social significance. Every year the people come out en mass to celebrate and pray for guidance, protection and benevolence. The spirits of the ancestors are invoked, acknowledged, worshipped and appeased. The systematic processes or forms of worship in the dramatic celebrations are what is referred to as the rituals in Nupe society.

Religious worship, which is an imperative urge in the Nupe, is what actually leads to the performance of ritual acts. Nupes believe that there are powers that are greater than them. Such powers they believe control and dominate the unseen world in which they envelop themselves. Such powers are believed to be the ultimate determiners of man's destiny. Beliefs became formulated, and formulations led to patterns of worship or set of orders characterized by frequent repetitions for conformity sake. These beliefs however have to be first and foremost approved and agreed upon by the established cults, whose function is to ensure that the societal codes of conduct are observed.

xiii. The Mask's Function as a Cultural Artifact

The mask is the artifact used to disguise the identity of the wearers. It is a cultural artifact of the Nupe generally. It is a long garment covering the entire body of the Kuti from head to toes. Out of all identified forms and types of masquerades in Nigeria, the plastic mask, the wooden mask, grass or vegetable masks and cloth masks, the Kuti falls into the last category. It performs barefooted. The concealment of the identity of the real person behind the mask gives the masquerade its secret quality and it is this air of secrecy that gives room for belief, sanity and orderliness.

The use of masks by the Kuti in Nupe drama is similar with the West African Mandingo masquerade, which Moore (1952:81) described as follows:

> Mumbo Jumbo as a thing invented by men to keep their wives in awe, who are so ignorant or at least obliged to pretend to be so. Hence, one would take the dismal noise the masquerade makes which but few of the natives can manage as a spiritual message. This mask is undoubtedly the commonest concept of character and identity and proper analysis of the West African Mandigos. [15]

Hence, there is no drama in traditional African societies, which does not accentuate the social morality and cultural conventions of the individual and the general society, the degree of people's response notwithstanding. The appreciation of the socio-cultural context of the Nigerian art in particular constitutes the dramatic performance. As V. Plakhanov (1983:24) noted:

> Only that, which promotes communion between man and supernatural and between men, can be the basis of a work of art. Drama in traditional Africa are not only a means of asserting the union between man, the mortal and immortal powers, a testimony of the continuity of life but also the means through which man provides himself with entertainment and relaxation thereby achieving a balance between known material world and the unknown supernatural world.[16]

xiv. The Kuti's Costume as a Cultural Signifier

Costuming in Nupe drama is also unique to each of the performers who are costumed variously. The singer wears her wrapper slightly above her knee, perhaps to allow for free leg, movement and shifts in dancing in case the masquerade swerves to her side. The singer is usually in a short-sleeved 'buba' blouse, made of cotton material and a multi-colored scarf with a heavy neck bead on the chest. The men wear black and dirty looking singlets with leaves strapped around the waist. All these help to enrich the visual aspect of communication. This is as if to say that all is well and the need for progress has arrived.

The young cult members wear black singlets on top of trousers with dark and white colored combined cotton material which they tie on their waists and knot in front of their waists. On their chests are artistic drawings of scorpion, python, dog, alligator and other fearful reptiles as symbols and indications of a possession of medicine and magical power. A further indication of their good communion with spiritual forces is the way they slightly raise their right leg and hold it in that position while they vigorously shake their scapular shoulder girdle and, also vibrate as fast as possible. In rhythmic fast movements, they shake their hands with the palm leaves knitted into straight lined sticks. With the use of these various materials, leaves, cotton and clothes, Nupe drama brings on record their ecology and practices.

The Functional Elements in Nupe Drama

The praise poetry on Kuti (as in the attached appendix) helps to accentuate the above functions and reveal some other functions of Kuti. Kuti's praise during performance retains the system of morality of Nupe people.

Kuti's acclaimed personality explains the need for man to attain might in his cultural struggle. The urgency in its emergence as a corresponding pattern of positive ad negative vital feelings of its people becomes glaring on its arrival. Hence, the accents given to Kuti is a heavenly one in which the different activities of Nupe life are fused.

Kuti is praised as one who protects the lives of the members of the society and as a fortune-teller. Since it disallows the harm of the incumbent ruler by his enemies, it acts as a check and balance on the society. As an ancestor, he is referred to as a 'quiet disappearer'. This image of a disappearer presupposes transcendence and mysterious ability of the masquerade, who is the chief performer in Nupe drama. Kuti is further presented as a spiritual figure full of revelations long awaited by its audience. He is said to be the controller of life and death, the determinant of man's survival. The symbol of the 'hill' in Kuti's description is to indicate the seat of blessedness. It is the hill of vision. Apart from being a geographical reference, it is a pointer at the archetypal essence of the dramatic performance.

This hill is a source of inspiration to the Nupe people. This is perhaps why it has a spiritual aura and has become a sacred object of the community. It is on the hill that the masquerade gathers its spiritual acumen for divination and communicates through inspirational traditions.

Nupe drama so much particularizes the major focus of performance in terms of the historical figures and moments with a relatively high proportion of the poetic elements picked from the physical environment and from experience. Hence, in the Kuti masquerade poetry, the Nupe world is redefined. The performance process itself is mythopoetic. Knipp (1975:127) affirmed that: "In African poetry, the dimension of the collective mind reflects every aspect of the society, political, social, religious, economic, scientific and this itself is myth." [17]

Poetry is inculcated in virtually all aspects of Nupe drama. Kuti's utterances especially blessings during performance are brief, coined, loaded and effective. Its personality and function depicts a characterization of a ruler and its subjects as mutual para-types, and these modes of integration in itself have dramatic effects. Hence, the oral poet signifies her faith and the faith of her kinship in this urgent renewal of self. She does this by presenting a very functional social structure. This decision of renewal is however not as a result of the wordy utterances but is dependent on prior processes in which different kinds of life have become fused, aided by heavenly tones and intonations.

Hunting is one of the occupations of the Nupes, serpent and fire are among the sacred elements of ritual. The poet uses militant words and ideas to represent the battle of settlement that is reflected through the image of snake, fire and subsequently in sleeplessness, back door, thorn of prayers etc.

The equipment needed for the struggles in the journey into the unknown are symbolic elements meant for the maintenance of Nupe social order. The unpredictability of the Kuti and life itself is further expressed in the poetry of this Nupe masquerade rendered during dramatic performance. The role of the masquerade is mostly poeticized in its praise as the dramatic episodes unfold. The masquerade's praise is at times chanted by the cult members. Hence, there is a full ancestral worship in the performance of the Kuti festival. In the process of performance, the entire societal function of the masquerade is recounted in the masquerade drama. Man is therefore juxtaposed with the superior. There is also an indication of the practical concern by the masquerade performer on the aspects of the social livelihood. One may conclude, therefore, that drama in Nupe land reflects the functional value of its use in the community. And apart from the use of natural images such as that of 'mud' in Kuti's praise, the image of a house in the last line of the masquerade's praise is an indication of the might and power of this mysterious figure. And at each point, the masquerade acknowledges its praise. It may make sudden shouts or move in thrilling manner or fall and lie on the ground for some time to be resuscitated through incantations, chants, charms, praises, songs and allusions. The audiences' rounds of applause normally follow these swift actions.

In one of the songs, which are used to entertain and educate Nupe audiences in dramatic performances, the performer in the middle of a narration tells a story of a man who wrestled with his wife and fell down in the process. This imaginative conception by the singer reminds the public about a particular taboo in the society and the consequence the offender in this already known story faces is concluded in a proverbial form.

Conclusion

This article showed that drama among the Nupes has diverse uses. The formal presentation of wine in a wedding ceremony, for example, is dramatized with songs and dance. All the celebrants join in singing and dancing, as typical of all Nigerian cultures. However, the role of drama in Nupe society is more functional than ceremonial.

Nupe drama songs, the rhythm, lyric, harmony of sounds and even the pronunciation of the wordings are all pleasure giving devices. The underlying meaning, mood, tone, noisy confusions, shaking of the voice followed by the suspense pause, nasality, resonance, yells, breathy guttural voice, screams, grunts, warnings, words in the song also add more pleasure to the mind and more meaning to the dramatic piece. These elements therefore serve didactic purposes. At the abstract level and like all arts, the message given to the Nupes through dramatic presentations such as the ones cited above is beyond the surface meaning. The songs function as refreshment to the inner being in different dimensions. That is why there are joyful expressions that are meant to enumerate all that the Nupe culture entails.

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Appendix

The Praise Poetry of the Nupe Kuti Masquerade in Dramatic Performances

Kuti faru
Kuti meijini
Ta patioleyandodziye
Donbashi
Ala eli kuti wugbata
Dzamaiwo woja, zaa dzabagio?
Ekangi aduwa
Ebe kawu logbe
Ena danbo
The quiet disappearer, what is it?
Owner of human blood
One who foresees the future from the top of the hill
One of a numberless praise
Use Kuti's character to judge him
Cut millets and be a man
A thorn of prayers
Carry snake for hunting
There is fire in there.