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ALÓRE

Vol. 15 2005



ILORIN
JOURNAL
OF THE
HUMANITIES

ISSN 0794-455

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FUNCTIONS AND AESTHETIC CATEGORIES OF ENIKUTI: (NUPE RITUAL POETRY)

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Introduction

This article examines the aesthetic forms in *Enikuti*. *Enikuti* is the ritual poetry of the Nupe *Ndakogboya* masquerade performance; a masquerade performance that emerged as a cultural and aesthetic phenomenon among the Nupe people of Nigeria. A ritual is a display of the intrinsic systems of ideas and worldview of a people used for the indication of their modes of perception and sensibility. Rituals, of which poetry is a main part, involve worships of heroes who venture forth from the world of common day into a region of supernatural wonder. Like the Yoruba *Egungun* poetry, the Igbo *Mmonwu* and *Ezeigboezie*, masquerade, poetry, the poetry of *Ebira Ekuechi* festival, the Idoma *Alekuru*, Ibibio *Offiong*, *Ekong* and Ijaw *Egbelegebe*, *Alagba*, and Igala *Egwugwu* ritual poetry, the Nupe *Ndakogboya* masquerade content exhibits an interconnection between art and society. An interpretation of the poetry of the *Ndakogboya* exposes Nupe worldview, aspiration and vision. Nupe beliefs, ways of life and religion can be reconstructed from the poetic renditions. Images in this masquerade poetry also serve as pointers to the social, political and occupational organisation of the people.

This article, therefore, becomes a viable exposition of an aspect of Nupe masquerade, Theatre, which has not really been explored by scholars understudying Nupeland. Previous known works on Nupe are in the areas of Nupe history, sociology and anthropology. Oral interviews, audio-visual recordings, personal participations of

this writer in seasonal and arranged performance sessions of the masquerade across Nupe settings of Niger, Kwara and Kogi states, has revealed the in-depth findings on the inherent and aesthetic forms in the *Ndakogboya* ritual poetry known as 'Enikuti'.

Turner (1968:157) defines rituals as:

... prescribed formal behaviour for occasions not given over to technological routine, having reference to beliefs in mystical or non-imperial beings or powers ... a corpus of beliefs and practices performed by a specific cult association.

In the layman's perception, rituals may not be observed as formalized and mystic activities as opined by Turner. However, all over the black nations, and especially in Nigeria, there are cult associations that organize these unconsciousness and collective activities of the people, otherwise known as rituals. And with time, the activities, festivals and ceremonies of people become culturally patterned. The actions taken also become symbolic of the rites of passage phenomenon which Ray (1976:14) remarks about as follows:

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 pattern 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, naming, puberty, age, marriage, death and funeral ceremonies).

This exposes the function of rituals as embracing many other aspects of social life. Behind the importance of the ancestors being ritualised, a cohesive set of propositions about the reality of people's life, collective existence and continuity and about man's place in the world can be deduced. Hence, rituals are said to be "created by man to explain the problems and mysteries of life and

death ... man's attempt to make sense of the bewildering complexities of existence".

Killam (1969:8) explains that rituals are beliefs, culture, and religion put into practice for the purpose of ensuring some control over the ancestors that determined the circumstances that led to the people's existence. It is not a surprise then that the *Ndakogboya* masquerade ritual in the Nupeland is a week-long expressive and elaborate activities involving the following: preparation by the individuals and the masquerade cult preceding flogging sequence to make significant the occasion, welcome drumming, feasting, drinking *eyedzuru* (red palm wine) and dancing, magical displays of the different sizes and lengths of the masquerade, withdrawal to the 'Gboya shrine and communion with the supernatural and the unseen, invocations, supplications, divinations and animal blood sacrifices. All these processes are accompanied with chants, songs and poetic lines – the *enikuti*. These moments are what Jabbi (1988:131) refers to as "the sterling opportunities for mystical experience" and Soyinka (1976:46) calls it "a genuine feeling derived from the dogged secularisation of the profoundly mystical." Hence, many 'Gboya cult covenants get their membership at this ritual period as oath-taking is made part of the ritual procedure. The Nupe oath-taking ritual is an elaborate dramatic enactment referred to as *Kutila* which literally translates as *allegiance*.

Kutila involves a preceding sacrifice of 7 white kolanuts, 7 red kolanuts, 1 bag of native rice, a black python, a dog, guinea corn, maize, millet, and dry fish. This is followed by facial and abdominal mark cuts using a small-sized cutlass, and finally, the butchering of the dog provided for blood sacrifice.

Hence, religion is one of the great driving forces in Nupeland. This is why it allows for an institutional assembly of the general Nupe populace in their various towns and villages. The belief of the people is that the necessary traditional rites have to be performed to ensure individual inward spiritual peace, collective security and survivors.

The Nupe people dwell in Kwara, Niger, Kogi and Kaduna States of Nigeria. The Nupe live in riverine area and speak Nupe as

their first language. Hence, they are mainly farmers and fishermen by occupation. The Nupe are believed to have migrated from the Igalaland after fighting series of wars with *Lugwatswa*. The Nupe settled and formed boundary with the Borgu on the north and with Yoruba sub-groups on the west bank, all before the British intervention. By the year 1915, the colonial masters restructured Nupe settlements after the incursion of the Fulani into the Nupe political forum (Nadel, 1935:19 and Mason, 1975:101-111).

The Nupe *Ndakogboya* masquerade is a tall figure with no head or limbs. Its top is a round, flat, plate-like object called *Kanga*. The origin of the *Ndakogboya* masquerade differs across Nupe settings. For instance, *Ndakogboya* is said in Zambufu of Kwara State to have been inaugurated as a result of Etsu Koko Ta's mother who around 1916 (oral source; a chief priest) was said to be a witch. She used to change into a cat and spy at chieftaincy meetings where matters affecting the land were discussed by the male constituted cult. She, in turn, ill-advised her son against members of the cult. In Niger State, the story surrounding *Ndakogboya* performance is said to be for the remembrance of *Tsoede*, the Nupe ancestor who died in the process of safeguarding his people. The two circumstances explaining the reasons that led to annual *Ndakogboya* masquerade performance involving *Enikuti* can be seen to be based on the protection of the common land and the reference to the people's ancestor who is represented by the masquerade. Out of all Nupe masquerades such as *guguyagi*, *kutieya*, *vugu* and *Elubingi*, *Ndakogboya* is the only one with well-expressed functional values. Besides its entertainment motif, it has a profound use for the ritualisation of Nupeland. *Ndakogboya* literally means:

<i>Ndako</i>	<i>gboya</i>
Grand father	changes position

Other masquerades do not appear during the annual *Ndakogboya* masquerade performance except on other occasions like the entertainment of political figures, when this calls for the mixture of Nupe masquerades. And even during such occasions, *Enikuti* of the *Ndakogboya* masquerade is used to remind man of

his inequity. The masquerade has both mythical and functional essence which is overwhelmingly reflected in his poetic rendition during performance.

Today, through a recreation and regeneration of traditional forms, put in poetic parameters, *Ndakogboya* poetry reveals Nupe's worldview, aspiration and philosophy. The Nupe *Ndakogboya* poetry is a restricted poetic cult form involving chants, songs, appellations, incantations, ritualistic lines, metaphors, overstatements, hyperboles, philosophical sayings, proverbs and seasoned wits. This is due to the fact that poetry is an integral part of *Ndakogboya* performance. No wonder then that Turner (1968:158) also concludes that "African poetry is the rhythm between music and dance". The Nupe *Ndakogboya* poetry is a rhythmical form deliberately composed by the oral poet for ritual purpose. It is used to accomplish typified dancing modes, which are also an oral aspect that embodies the accumulated heritage of the people. As the tone of the music changes, the Nupe oral poet adjusts his poetic tone to the change of the musical tone. *Enikuti*, Nupe ritual poetry, is high artistic compositions of the Nupe *Ndakogboya* masquerade poetry involving aphorisms, appellations, incantations, hyperboles, rhetorics, seasoned wits, metaphors, philosophical sayings, and proverbs. Hence, it is a poetic form put in different aesthetic categories emphasizing types, function and purpose. For instance, the poetic invocations at the *Ndakogboya* shrine before sacrifices are offered (*sanaba*) is a poetic category different from warning poetic rhymes and rhythm during the 'Gboya's performance' before the general public. The former is more of prayer lines than the philosophical tone of the latter.

Generally therefore, *Enikuti* poems are generated out of the cultural contents and aesthetic forms of Nupe people. And while the function and purpose of the poems across Nupeland remain the same, the types and forms of *enikuti* have changed, in some Nupe towns due to migrations, affecting geographical resettlement and also as a result of external influences of different religions and cultural adaptation and influences. On the whole, *Enikuti* poetry, in its various forms, types and functions serves in Nupeland as a sub-

genre of the performance of the *Ndakogboya*, further used to articulate and sustain communal injunctions and beliefs.

The viability of sociological approach makes it basic in the analysis on the Nupe *Enikuti* poetry. This sociological theoretical framework is more of a realistic literary analysis because it constitutes a monumental study of human artefacts, and embraces all other theoretical aspects such as the archetypal, moral, psychological and the modern approach to an extent. It is a more pragmatic approach as it assembles human past, consolidates, the present and determines the likely future existence of the people.

Frye (1957:142) in his archetypal theory recognises the inevitability of the historical factor in literature. He argues that the existence of man in time and space is determined by the happenings around him in which the metaphysical forces play a prominent role. Thus, archetypal patterns are prototypes of the past occurrences of the society, which unconsciously they bring into focus in present social times. The sociological approach is premised on the historical, mythological and cultural formations of the Nupe people of Nigeria. *Enikuti* is a Nupe cultural formation serving as a main part of the Nupe *Ndakogboya* masquerade performance.

With this approach, this article is able to acknowledge the validity of myth and history and their retention in the social memory that is upheld even in the dynamic structures of the people's contemporary oral content. These contents are presented here as vital cultural products of cyclical phenomenon. The conviction of the field research carried out here hinges on the fact that the Nupe *Enikuti* is premised on the recurrence of certain actions, images, phenomena, patterns in the different Nupe settings put in different forms. Thus, the cultural elements emphasised in *Enikuti* are dialectical components. The fact that *Enikuti* poetry rests on organizing rhythms and patterns exposes it as both cyclical and dialectical form in Nupeland.

This article has analysed *Enikuti* poetry in the context of Nupe cultural practices. The relationship between theory and practice of criticism is thus very much emphasised here. Thus, the masquerade's ritual poetry is portrayed from the sociological

perspective as a necessary and essential element of the Nupe man's origin and cultural setting. The poetic form (*Enikuti*) does not only project Nupe tradition and identity but also exposes its worldview, aspiration and vision.

The functionality of *Enikuti* ritual poetry of the *Ndakogboya* masquerade performance can be used to trace other elements of societal practice, during which the performer and the audience interact and give an output of their culture. *Enikuti* functions within the context of Nupe society to project a Nupe masquerade as the masquerade that heralds the collective consciousness of the people and recalls history. Therefore, the overall functions of *Enikuti* poetry of the *Ndakogboya* masquerade can be summed up as follows:

Ceremonial function: The poems are connected with the events of life such as birth, marriage, funerals, burials, rulers' installation, all of which are enforced by divine sanctions. Majority of the parts of *Ndakogboya* poetry are ritualized lines. The performance of the masquerade itself is the worship of god and ancestors for the purpose of purifying the community. Hence, through poetry, prayers are accentuated and requests are made. *Ndakogboya* poetry is the prime agency through which the bond between god and ancestors is reaffirmed.

Entertainment function: The entertainment role of the masquerade's poetry can be deduced from the recreational mood of the festival. Moreso, the poetic puns, lampoons and sarcasms, amuse the *Ndakogboya* audience who use it for emotional relaxation.

Social Communication function: *Ndakogboya Enikuti* is used to warn, inform, announce, invite, discuss and receive responses from its audience. This function is made more crucial by the physical appearance of the masquerade itself which reveals it as an ancestral spirit. It emphasises the inevitable principle of life after death.

Didactic function: The poetry of the masquerade is used for regulating the social ills in the society such as witchcraft, enforcing conformity to social norms and values. The moral lesson in this case can be considered as informal education. It can also be seen as a society's formalized system of instruction. A person's wrong deeds is known by the Nupe to be who is ever-watching and who is present in the people's midst. Its spiritual and physical presence gives room for people's faithfulness, uprightness and solidarity.

Therapeutic function: *Ndakogboya* poetry involves invocations connected with various curative intentions. Disorder, for example, is restored through poetic renditions and chants. Poetic prescriptions are made by the priests and used by affected clients. It sanitizes the people. The masquerade's ritual seems to be medicinal. This probably explains the reason for the air of joy during its performance.

Cultural restoration function: *Ndakogboya* poetry is a medium for restoring and promoting Nupe culture. The poetry puts on record all cultural idiosyncrasies, idioms, icons, nuances, emphasizes their importance and use by the people and contrasts their values with other intruding cultural formations. And this helps to enhance the naturalness of the original Nupe culture. The ingredients inherent in the *Ndakogboya* masquerade poetry make its poetry artistic and aesthetic cultural element. *Enikuti* in particular is a linguistic masterpiece that helps to promote Nupe identity.

Preservation of History: *Ndakogboya* poetry is a series of historical chants on the deeds of past heroes and genealogical records of lineages, in remembrance of those who have contributed in one way or the other to the progress, worldview and stability of the society. As experiences overlap, cultural expectations are to be integrated within the people's art. However, the use of the masquerade and its *Enikuti* is an expression of the salient religious and cultural feelings in beautiful forms.

The Aesthetic Categories of Enikuti Ritual Poetry

Enikuti's aesthetic categories include warning chants journey of the search for the unknown, cultural implements and iconic records, praises and epithets, recast of legendary images and slave/master symbols. *Enikuti* (*Ndakogboya* ritual poetry) remains an integral part of masquerade performance. Culturally selected icons such as the river, canoe, hoe, hill, crocodile, fish, fish net, frog, cutlass are used by the chanter to depict historical and social circumstance, for instance. Performance in the Nupe oral literary situation brings in experience into the poetic compositions. The ritualist exemplifies situations and objectifies events using strong cultural nuances.

Warning Chants

This category of Nupe ritual poetry is deliberately designed to educate and introduce, by way acculturation, the young ones of the society into the complexities of the world and warn them against the challenges ahead. This functional category of *Enikuti* puts its message across through a careful selection of riverine cold blooded animals all living in the water but some are stronger than the others. Examine this, for instance:

Egungi a dewun be elangi.
Dzia kan wun o?
Tankpoloe lele para a
Eya nuwon dze vun a
Kansa dan nuwon, edu kudu

Spiky fish fights tumbling one
 Who will settle them?
 Frog does not sleep on its back
 Canoe is not driven cover down
 It is the crocodile that makes river noisy.
 (From Lalagi (Niger State) March, 2002).

Native metaphors and symbols are carefully selected by the poet to express the vastness of Nupeland. A kind of scene is presented and meant to represent a connection between what is human and what is divine. Apart from the syntactic arrangement of words anyway, there is the contextual use of the selected diction. The selection of words also points at the geographical inclination and the ecological situation. The various images of hill, fish, river, crocodile, frog, canoe among other riverine objects, implements and food, are meant to reflect Nupe's settlement and the connection between these and Nupe art vision. The two fishes *egungi*, (spiky fish) and *elangi* (tumbling fish) in the first line of the above poem, are cold-blooded animals.

However, the nature of each is used to introduce a confusing situation and state of emergency. The two kinds of fishes have dangerous scales, yet, they are contrasted for the fact that the *egungi* tries to spike the *elangi* (the tumbler) which by nature is like the eel, quite slippery to catch. The *egungi* fish symbolizes witches and enemies of the land who are believed in the community to aim at averting the progress of the society; while the *elangi* fish symbolizes the *Ndakogboya* masquerade, which is ever ready to guide its people. And this is why the masquerade tumbles when angry. This action of the *Ndakogboya* is synonymous with the nature of *elangi* fish. Lyne (1986) observing similar performance situation, remarks that "some of the delights we get from oral poetry are the qualities that are contained in the songs and chants". The performers' vocal tone in each scene and the use of chorus, accompanies the poetic songs, in an atmosphere that can be described as a society-oriented masque theatre.

Hence, in its characteristic manner, the *Ndakogboya* comes on stage by humming the rhythm of the poems aided with destructive steps to presuppose the spiritual essence of the environment. The masquerade's presence is a divine intervention moment during which people of the land can get spiritually touched. The intermittent thin, serene voice on its own is the masquerade itself. Interestingly enough, the poetic lines used to accentuate this thematic basis are varied. For more examples, the existing belief of the Nupe is further expressed in the phrase, *donbashi* meaning one

with innumerable praises. This reference to *Ndakoghoya's* personality conceives a community in continuous existence and the cyclical nature of man. *Donbashi* gives an endless image of man and presupposes a timeless vision. The poet is deeply experienced and reveals the nature of the belief of the people in formative poetic thought. He or she communicates not only through demonstrations, but also through poetic inspiration. This is perhaps why *Enikuti* poetry is a spontaneous rendition. Furthermore, we have in the above poem other lines as discussed below:

Da bodin lomin.

One who enters the house through the back door.

Here, the house is a symbol of the grave. The image of a house is also synonymous and indicative of the might, prowess, power and splendour of this ancestral figure the *Ndakoghoya*. Other signifiers of human transition are natural elements such as mud, river, road, sun, in many parts of the poem. The link between man and the earth is in the reflection of millet, which stands as a symbol of instability of man, fertility of crops and sustenance of the society by nature and the powers that be. The line extends into:

Dzamaiwo, woja.

Cut millets well, to avoid being cut.

(Rusogi, Patigi Local Government Area of
Kwara State, June. 2003)

Millet is a staple food believed to be a blessing for the land by god, and therefore has to be handled with care during its harvest. In as much as poetic reflections are sustained during *Ndakoghoya* performance, to ascertain the continuity of the race, they are also used to indicate complexity and hopelessness of life. Ironically, human problems according to the poems can be solved via an escape root to the world beyond, where eternal rest is assured.

Journey of The Search for the Unknown

The journey referred to here by the people is a spiritual journey to the unknown land where nobody goes and returns. The poet says in the lines below that it is a journey that needs a python to lead the way. Python symbolizes death in this journey motif. It is also a pointer at the recycling pattern in the nature of human existence. Here this for instance:

Ebe Kuwa lo gbe
Ena danbo
Zan Doro ewan kuwalogbe a
Ewa fib o
Ama yiga kuwalogbe

Pack snake for hunting
 There is fire
 Nobody likes to pack snake for hunting
 There is python!
 We shall carry snake for hunting one day, it's definite!
 (Lokoja, Kogi State; May 2001).

Hunting is one of the occupations of the Nupe. Serpents and fire are among the sacred elements of rituals during performance. Here, the poet uses combative words and ideas to represent the battle of settlement of the people. Dangerous equipments are what are needed for a struggle in the unknown journey to an unknown destination. The poems range from plea for mercy to philosophy. Some poems lament and regret the manner of human existence. The later stanza of the poem is meant to keep the young in tune with societal expectations. The tone of this type of poem is therefore advisory and the summary is in the following moral quip:

Kinin giegawundu

Good standing, safeguards insult.

Okpewho (1979:128) is therefore right to have emphasized that the traditional poet whether in mask or not is:

... a man with a pressing sense of real and concrete presence, enjoying the closest intimacy with the physical and metaphysical environment ... He tries in all sorts of combinations with linguistic as well as plastic resources to give tangible meaning to those visible and spiritual presence that gives context to his daily life and thought. And as the guiding sensibility of his community, he communally leads the way in re-creating the progressive forms of communal myth.

Cultural Implements and Iconic Records

Iconic materials, in relation to the geographical setting and occupational pre-occupation of the Nupe people, are put into poetic records in order to explain the functional basis of the land. Farming and fishing implements are the major focus of this category of *Enikuti* (Nupe ritual poetry). The practice of the people cannot be divorced from the geographical and economic origin. Hence, the people's practice is very much accentuated in this part as references are made to hoes, cutlass, molded pots, calabash, duck, goats, river, crocodile, etc.

A tabi egba nab a dzukunna
Ama tabi dzukunna ba eghamina

No hoe can cut the cutlass
 And no cutlass can cut the hoe.

(In Bida (Niger State), January, 2004).

Both cutlass and hoe are farming implements. Hence, most lines are pictorial of the farming occupation of the people. The usefulness of the two implements for maintenance is stressed in the two poetic renditions. It is the masquerade's poetry that foregrounds the performance mode. Without poetic rendition for

instance, the masquerade's performance would remain undeveloped plot-wise. The rhythms lead to chants, dance and other activities that follow, aiding a full realization of the intended motif for the institutionalization of this mystic figure.

It becomes glaring that the poetry of the *Ndakogboya* masquerade is not just a mere compilation of poetic lines and choruses, but a poetry with multi-functional contextual purposes meant to record, restore and project societal norms and codes of conduct and also to promote cultural togetherness, uphold societal survival, continuity and progress. *Ndakogboya* performance is the heart beat of the Nupe people and the performance makes graphic description of events and people especially at the point when social satire becomes desirable. And the most reliable means of description within Nupe linguistic context are idiophones. Hence, to Dorson (1979), "An idiophone is poetic; it is the surest sense of imagery. It is sensual, creates a picture, enabling the listener to feel and identify". To understand Nupe *Ndakogboya* poetry, it must be placed in their contexts of performance. This is further confirmed by Bowers (1965). In his study of "Nupe singers" Bowers (1965:5) laments that:

As far as Nupe oral tradition is concerned, we cannot properly understand Nupe poetry unless we direct our minds towards the actual performance of it. In this circumstance, emphasis should be on what the poetry employed tries to do, since dramatic development begin in Nupe religion and much of the stuff of religion can be found in pure poetic rendition.

Enikuti, the ritual poetry of the Nupe *Ndakogboya* incorporated in the masquerade's performance, brings both secular and the sacred together in the same socio-aesthetic context. It fuses culture and aesthetics, to objectify and demonstrate an unconscious collective existence. The poetic formation for instance, carries a lot of coded messages to evildoers as it actually satirizes spiritual and moral decadence.

As *Ndakogbaya* makes an inspection movement, so to say, it proclaims law and order and enforces these laws. The proverbial sayings, witty lines, poetic forms generally are listened to attentively as utterances concerning this most reverend image of the ancestors are not taken with levity. The masquerade, on behalf of the ancestors therefore, uses poetry during its performing to assume not only the legislative role but also the judicial control of the community.

The main purpose of the reincarnated masquerade is to communicate with its people and at the same time amplify and affirm traditional norms and values which must be upheld for collective survival. These communication and amplification motives are achieved through the use of poetry, a poetry based on the community nuances.

Also in the categorization of the types, function and use of *Ndakogbaya* poetry, there is an aspect one can clearly deduce as the masquerade's panegyric or praise poetry.

Ndakogbaya Praises and Epithets

Ndakogbaya poems are interpretation of events and acknowledgments of the passage of time. The examples given here are on words juxtaposition of similar lexical terms or of functional equipments having different features, but used for the same purpose. This is in order to reproduce certain dexterous effects on the audience, as in:

Gboya faru?
Gboya mejini
Ta patio le yan dodziye
Dabo din lomi
Gbururu Gba tundun

Hidden one, of problem solving?
 Owner of human blood
 One who foresees the future from the hill-top
 One with innumerable praises

One who enters the house through the back door
 A mighty house that moves with great force
 (Lafiagi Edu Local Government Area of Kwara
 State, June, 2003)

This praise-poetry presents tradition and ritual patterns of rebirth in Nupeland. It is based on Nupe mythology. It is a poem of one stanza, but reveals the function of the masquerade itself. This is perhaps why the first line is put in rhetoric form, as if to say that 'Gboya's appearance negates the envisaged communal calamities. Its appearance is therefore, a reassurance of human psyche and communal progress. The *hidden* image is a visual reference to mystery and the death phenomenon. The vision of the race and the need to seek spiritual realization of this vision has to be reflected in this chant especially because this mythical figure is the hope of its people.

Every communal social being is dependent on his or her past, present and future. And this is reflected in the divine metaphor of 'Gboya meigini (owner of human blood). This metaphoric use indicates the link between man and the spiritual world. It also accentuates the recycling life pattern which the *Ndakogboya* signifies.

The symbol of the hill in the *Ndakogboya* praise poetry reflects the visionary personage of the masquerade and also its dual role – the father of all in support of the well-behaved individuals of the society and the scourge of evildoers. The aesthetic strategy of creating symbols from the ecology, i.e. physical environment is therefore purposeful. And this technique is typical of praise tradition across Africa. In many of Emperor Shaka's panegyrics found in Mazisi Kunene's epic, for example, the greatness of king Shaka of South Africa is revealed in the metaphors of huge mountains, lions and palm tree. These ecological icons have immediate appeal. This is why the hill metaphor in the Nupe *Ndakogboya* context, earlier on referred to, reflects both archetypal symbol of the people's ancestor and at the same time serves as a geographical indicator of the people's settlement. The hill is a seat of blessedness and a source of inspiration to the people.

* *Yandozhiye* in the same *Ndakogbaya* praise literally means *next year*, an expression of the timeless orderliness of the people. The existing truth, belief and fact are further revealed in the praise *Donbashi*. The word *innumerable* is used by the oral poet who reveals the nature of the belief of the people in formative poetic thought. He communicates through inspiration and responds to the spontaneous poetry in the process of rendition. Hence, he refers to the masquerade as *gharuru gbatundun*. This reference is onomatopoeic as the force of the masquerade's movement is synonymous with the word itself. There is a further comparison of the manner of appearance of the masquerade to an unmovable object – a house, as in:

Da bodin to min

One who enters the house, through the back door

The house is the symbol of the grave – an indication of the might and mystery of the ancestral figure. Hence, the masquerade's poetry systems of the Nupe codifies and use heavenly ascents and invocative tones.

Recast of Legendary Images

Another category of Nupe *Ndakogbaya* poetry is used to advocate for love and good relationship between the members of the society. The poet solicits for a collective consciousness and makes a historical recast of the image of the Nupe legendary heroes.

Geological records are put into poetic category in order to remind the entire populace about the passage of time and the necessity for the continuity and progress in communal ritualism. Legends are recounted in order to locate history and preserve same for orderliness.

Ikere da be, elu lo a'
 Zan doro ga danbo danbo wan be danbobe
Babo Etsu saba dano
Madutete su kun
Kiya gan do zhi o
 Ejwa ya gan do zhi o

Harmattan is gone, yet the sparrow
 bird refuses to disappear.
 Life is short for everyone
 Where is Etsu saba?
 What of Madutete?
 What makes man senior to the other
 Hands are bigger than each other.
 (Rifun (Kwara State), February 2004).

Man is likened to the sparrow bird which comes on temporary settlement on the Nupe farmlands and leaves after a short while. There is a further signifier of the rite of passage and transition. Man is presented as a being in passage, in transition, since a bird is a seasonal agricultural and riverside prey, which the poet uses to accentuate the inevitability of death. Birds frequently peck and disappear to unknown destination. This visual image symbolizes death. In addition, there is the satiric poetry of the *Ndakogbaya*. As the masquerade is welcome into the performance arena, certain coded satiric lines are uttered. And these lines are for public amusement. The lines are used to depict the figure of a 'nosy poker' and gossip. Women are the main subjects of the satiric poetry in *Ndakogbaya* performance perhaps because a king's mother initiated the circumstances that led to the inauguration of the masquerade's cult. Hence, Nupe women are told sarcastically:

Woga man lukongi fe
Wa de nanta gu twaba

If you know how to catch a dove
 You need to master seven types of catching methods.

This type of the masquerade's poetry retains the system of code of conduct and reinforces the character of the masquerade. Sarcastic poems are used to entertain and educate the audience at the same time. This is why some lines are proverbial with underlying meaning, mood, tone, and pauses, all aimed at pronouncing the intended message.

Ndakogboya masquerade poetry also involves some philosophical lines, predicting future occurrences on the land. One of such lines can be translated as *you reap what you sow*. It exhibits a fluctuation of vital rhythms, common and spiritual images such as:

Kiya gan dodzio?
Egwa ya gan dodzio

What makes man greater than man?
Hand is greater than hand

Repeated visual images of *hand*, *head* and *shoulder* are indications of man's frequent sacrificial allegiance to the forces above. The more reverence you have for the super-ordinate, the greater your *hand*.

The poet refers to herself as *wudzi* (slave) and the Supreme Being as the slave owner. She advances by selecting other contrastive words such as father and son. The father image is used to emphasize God as man's protector.

Slave/Master Symbols

The symbolization of the slave/master demarcation is to indicate the supreme and the ordinary. In this category of poem, man is juxtaposed with God, the most high. And in this image, God is presented as the father and man as the son. The son makes his demands through ritual proceedings and recitations to the father, in order to get what he wants. Demands are made through the ancestors who are represented by the *Ndakogboya* masquerade in

attendance. Let us examine the following poetic composition, for instance:

*Chika lele zo yin san
Za man samnan be wawa
Egan dede dede
Zan do roe gan wona*

*Wo gan wo a lo magajin a
Eyo nanan, wo ga woa lo magajin a
Tupa o tenan, wo gan woaagajin a
Eba o ta nan wo chia lo magajin a*

Pretence sleep is difficult to wake
The waker, a fool
Bad, bad talk
Nobody brags over it.

Refusal of herbal village
At blindness, he refuses (magajin) herbal village
In deafness, he refuses (magajin) herbal village
But, as his manhood fails, he longs for the herbal village
(Muo in Mokwa area of Niger State,
November, 2003)

Sleep is personified in one of the lines as an indication of man's helpless situation in the hands of the divine. Sleep is a natural and unpreventable phenomenon. The last line of this poetic segment is however a warning to the arrogant noisemakers of the land. The poet at each point gives the cause-and-effect analysis of situations and perfects this by introducing the story-telling technique. In the story of the poetic narration, the poet depicts the man's true nature in the plot of the story of the journey to *magajin* village. Though the ideas in the story appear simple, varied, straightforward and rich, the poet exposes actions of great significance for the people's co-existence.

The lines of the narration – implanted poetry are lyrical. In these lines, the poet screens nature in a subjective manner using wide range of themes. The mood of the poet is both meditative and philosophical and is reflected in the thinking process of the poet. All the characters in the story narrated have completed their life circles because of arrogances and as a result have ceased to be. Hence, the story ends in grief and sorrow emphasizing human extremities with a note of finality. The poet thus uses historical experience to express the transmission of culture. Triumph is expressed at the later part of *Ndakogboya* poetry because the poetry of the masquerade itself serves certain functional ritualistic purpose. No wonder then, the poet takes permission from the audience and addresses the masquerade for affirmation. A succession of prayer lines follows. One of such prayer lines is:

Mungoro wo chin dzin!
Min de wun la mu.

Mangoes come down
For me to lick.

The mango fruit is meant to indicate the opening of the harvest session of the farmers of the land. On the whole, the *Ndakogboya* poetry is an articulation of communal injunctions, beliefs, practices, law and order.

Conclusion

Poetry is one of the oral literary aspects in Nupe masquerade performance. The verse formula is effective for the manipulation of spirits, man, animal and things within and beyond the natural realm. This article concludes that through the use of poetic forms, cultural expectations are neatly integrated in such a way that the poetic art itself is inevitably linked with other aspects of Nupe life. The masquerade's poetry expresses society morals, law and order.

The poetic appreciation in this article is rooted in the social heritage of the Nupe *Ndakogboya* masquerade festival as this is

pronounced in its poetry. Other poetic themes range from perfect brotherly co-existence, faithfulness, loyalty, uprightness, religious commitment, man's gratitude to the supernatural being and his ancestors and the reality and principle of death. These motifs are communicated at each poetic point with change of tone and mood to commensurate with the appropriate image and idea. Apart from the offering of prayers through poetry, spirits are invoked through poetic chants as well in order to commune with man's protector and reach agreement. It is discovered that each of these elaborate poetic processes is loaded with symbols, allusions and complex images. Invocations and supplications are also glaring in the poetic renditions. During sacrifices, clients have to also make certain poetic utterances before and after the placement of their offer on their heads before the deliverance of the substance.

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