



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

### TRACES OF SUPERNATURAL IN HAUSA ORAL SONGS: A SPECIAL REFERENCE TO DR. MAMMANSHATA

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#### ABSTRACT

The history of Africa is full of magic and supernatural activities. However, in all the sections of Hausa performing arts, oral songs are the most exalted arts that dominate many folkloric activities and control very great significant aspects of religious, political and socio-cultural consciousness in the Hausa community. The singers employ different methods and techniques of injecting poetic ideas into the minds of audience. The songs are sung with either melancholic, charming, or tranquil expressions so that their content messages are of deep impact to listeners. Therefore, the songs are entertaining, charming, educating or touching. In the struggle to create an attractive method or style, the use of supernatural is traced, which this paper intends to demonstrate. It is discovered that most of popular oral singers, MammanShata inclusive, employ supernatural activities in demonstrating hyperbolism, heroism, medical or fetishism, and so on. Malam Baba Na QofarGabas, SarkinBoriSule and Hassan SarkinDogarai to mention but few of the masterpieces of the prominent Hausa oral singer (Shata) comprised of supernatural powers in thematic and stylistic structures. By employing any one of these adornments in any oral songs, the zenith of stylistics is being reached, as per as Hausa culture is concerned. This paper therefore traces instances of use of supernatural in Shata's songs.

#### INTRODUCTION

Scholars and researchers i.e. Furniss (1996), Gusau (2009, 2014); Sani, (2016) and Sani and Tsaure (2016) among others, have testified that from the time immemorial, oral songs had become an instinctive attitude in the minds of the Hausa people. The influence of such songs is indispensable in the humans' minds (A'azamiyyun, 1962; CNRS in Science Daily, 2014; Sani, 2016). The songs are traceable in many aspects of the Hausa performing arts, which include storytelling, histories, legends, as well as cultural and religious ceremonies. The songs were also initially composed orally in gatherings and in public functions or in individual houses. This was what portrayed the professionalism in the arts. The professional singers are the very few individuals in the society that are blessed with wisdom in their masterpiece. In their struggle to convey these messages, the rhetoric singers employ supernaturalism in their art, which this paper intends to demonstrate. Therefore, the paper strives to present instances of use of supernatural in Shata's songs.

#### The Phenomenon of Supernatural Beings in the Hausa-folk

The Hausas strongly believed in supernatural interference in the natural community affairs, behaviors as well as culture (Jayeola-Omoyeni *et al.*, 2015). An evident of this is traceable in their (Hausas') customs and literature both before and after

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the advent of Islam. However, the advent of Islam into the Hausa-folk is estimated to be around the 15<sup>th</sup> century. Though, notwithstanding, there exist opinions, which claim that, Islam has reached the Hausas much earlier than these ages. Whatever the case might be, evidence has proved that, Islam was in the Hausa-folk as far back as during the time of the royal king of Kano, Ali Yaji. That was 1349 to 1385 (Habibu, 2001; Birnin-Tudu, 2002). Moreover, the Hausas employ the use of supernatural in most of their heroic customs, such as wrestling, hunting and theft among others. Also, the issue is the same in the Hausas' traditional crafts occupations such as *qira* (blacksmithing), *wanzanci* (barbing) and *noma* (farming), *sarkanci* (fishing) and *fatauci* (itinerant trading) to mention but few. They use supernatural in exhibiting amazing supernatural displays especially in relation to their various fields. That is mostly done during periodic ceremonies of such craft-sects (Emeka *et al.*, 2010; Gummi, 2014; Usman, 2014; Muhammad, 2015). The supernatural practices among the Hausas includes; the *bori-cult*, witchcraft, spirit worship, sorcery and trances among others (Hunwick, 1975; George and Amusan, 2009; Emeka *et al.*, 2010; Usman, 2014; Abubakar; 2017). Supernatural practices as conceived by the Hausas are possible by the help of spirits. On the other hand, spirits are nondescript, immortal and invisible entities. This is because they do not possess material body through which they could be seen but they may incarnate into any material thing in order to make themselves visible for a particular reason. They are therefore, considered powers, which are almost abstract, as shades. Perhaps, they are immaterial and incorporeal beings, which take

on human shapes. As immaterial and incorporeal beings however, it is possible for them to assume various dimensions whenever they wish to be seen (Emeka *et al.*, 2010; Bala, 2015).

### Brief on Dr. Mamman Shata

Alhaji Dr. Mamman Shata of Katsina was a famous Hausa oral singer whose stories have circulated all over the Hausa-folk and beyond. Numerous literatures have accounted for his detailed history, that this paper considers revisiting the history of Shata as mere repetition. As such, the paper considers it better acknowledging such literatures in which the detailed history of Shata is documented. Shemeet *al.*, (2000) has discussed in details the history of Shata in their book titled; *Shata Ikon Allah*, thus ‘*Shata the God’s Mystery*’ to roughly translate. However, the history of Shata is detailly compiled by Kankara (2013) in his book titled; *Mahadi Mai Dogon Zamani: Shata da Kundin Waqoqinsa*. The history includes Shata’s origin and family, mysteries and forecasts as well as his songs among others. Other literatures that contain information about Shata include: Xangambo, (1973); Gusau, (1996) and Gusau,(ed) (2003).

### Supernatural in Shata’s Songs

Not only Shata employs the use of supernatural in his songs, but other Hausa oral singers. Example of such singers include; Gambo, i.e. in his *TsohoTudu*, Xan’anacei.e in his *Shago*, BagaXansala i.e. in his ‘*Yarkala*, GarbaXanwasa i.e. in his *Gojirgo* and Sani Xanbalxo i.e. in his *CiranRogo* among others. However, the use of supernatural in Hausa oral songs is made upon depicting either of the numerous phenomena among which some are hyperbolism, heroism, medicinal and fetishism, to mention but few. For instance, Gambo in his *TsohoTudu* shows how heroic TsohoTudu is. In doing so, he employs hyperbolism thus if his drink had poured on the ground, not even an insect could touch it. He says:

“*Don dukmaikuji a Arewa  
Kowayahaihwai Jangaton’uwa  
Babukamargudamai }u}uwatTudu  
Sai dai a gwadamaitarajalli  
Duk da hura tai tat tu]e }asa  
Tabbata }waro bai ta~in ta  
Sabodamugunyar }u}uwa tai”.*

Any wealthy individual in the North,  
From which ever background,  
Nobody has Tudu’s sorcery,  
He could only be inferior in wealth,  
If his drink shall pour onto the ground,  
Not even an insect could touch it,  
Because of his prodigious sorcery.

Indeed, the above stanza has shown Gambo’s use of supernatural hyperbolically to show how heroic TsohoTudu is (Gobir, 2009).

### Heroism

Douglas and Mathew (2012) noted that the recent literatures contain conflicting definitions of the term ‘hero’. Franco, Blauand Zimbaro (2011) considered heroism as physical and dangerous act, which also has to do with widervariety of

physical and dangerous acts. Similarly, Becker and Eagly, (2004) considered heroism to involves; engagement in voluntary services and recognition of possible risk. However, heroism is not limited, only, to positive actions as held by Becker and Eagly (2004) and Douglas and Mathew (2012) among others. It rather refers to any activity, which involves voluntariness of risk of life, recognition of the risk as well as accepting the risk (Franco, Blauand Zimbaro, 2011). However, there are instances where Shata uses supernatural to showcase heroism. Shata’s *Malam Babba Na Qofar Gabas*, is indeed a good example of heroism. Malam Babba is depicted as a hero in the field of fortune-tell. He says:

Bugiqasa ka dubamusu,  
Shiddashidda ka xaukeuku,  
Ka gaidan ka haxasu sun zamataru,  
Kowa aka ganicikintaraxin nan,  
Yaisha’aninaishi ta rufa ...  
Ka je Baba yadubamaka.  
Idanyazanaqasayadubamaka,  
Yaxaga kai yashaidamaka,  
Ka gakamar da shi ne a kai.

Tab the ground and check it out for them,  
Plus six with six, minus three,  
If you add them up, it equals nine,  
Whoever falls under this nine,  
The person is at the liberty to do whatever he likes,  
Go to Babba to check it out for you,  
He will draw on the floor to check it out...  
As he raises his head to tell you,  
It will appear as if he had partaken in its planning.

Malam Babba is well known in the field of fortunetelling. He also was good in issuing traditional medicines within Kano metropolis and beyond. Therefore, Shata tried to demonstrate how famous Malam Babba was. Similarly, supernatural heroism is found in Shata’s *Sarkin Bori Sule*. He affirms that, no matter how critically sick a person is, the person will surely get relief if taken to SarkinBoriSule. In fact the title SarkinBori means *the King of Bori-Cult*. Shata says:

Yauwannanzamani,  
Wannanlokaci,  
Kowanikezazzavi,  
Ka gaana gai da shi,  
Yana amsawajika-jika,  
Ku kai maiborinSule,  
SarkinBoriSule.

Yanzusai ka ga sun warware,  
Sunayawonduniya.

Today, in this era,  
This time around,  
If someone is sick,  
(that) if people talk to him,  
He answers uneasily,  
Take to him Sule’sbori.

They will instantly be alright,  
They will go on with their worldly businesses.

SarkinBoriSule is indeed a hero, well known for his *bori-cult* and cure patients. Shata thus, tries to affirm it in the above

stanza. Furthermore, describing the popularity of Sarkin BoriSule, Shata says:

WurinrangadiSule,  
Ya zo birnin Kano,  
Na Kazaure sun sani,  
Katsinawa sun sani,  
YajeKukarBauxeShixe,  
Ya nemo boriduka.

During his exploration, the Sule,  
He went to Kano,  
He is known in Kazaure,  
The Katsina people know him,  
He went to KukarBaudeShide,  
He explored bori-cult.

The above stanza vividly indicates how popular SarkinBoriSule was during his life time. Shata continue to mention important personalities that know SarkinBoriSule on this act. He says:

Sarkiyasani,  
Alqaliyasani,  
Magajingariyasani,  
Kantomayasani,  
D.P.O. yasani,  
Kuma Razdanyasani,  
Kuma gwamna sun sani,  
Duka sun san borinSule.

King knows,  
Judge knows,  
MagajinGari<sup>1</sup> knows,  
Sole administrator knows,  
D.P.O. knows,  
And resident knows,  
Governors also know,  
They all know Sule's *bori-cult*.

Indeed, the above stanza affirms the popularity of Sarkin Bori Sule. Thus, he was known by all and sundry ranging from traditional to political leaders. However, heroism, which has to do with supernatural, is also found in other Hausa oral songs. For instance, Dan'anace in his *Shago Mai Hagun Mai Dama*, associates Shago's heroism with supernatural. He says:

Xan Aududuk da idanunkabaawanamutumba,  
Xan Auduyahauboriborin da bashi da girka,  
...ba a gyaramakaisokiba.

Son of Audu even your eyes differ from humans',  
Son of Audu exhibits the sorcery without *girka cult*,<sup>2</sup>  
Your jinn are not settled.

Shago had been an outstanding hero in boxing. History had it that, he was never won during any boxing competition. More so, he used to kill his opponents with just a blow or two (Bunza, 2017)<sup>3</sup>. Therefore, Dan'anace associates Shago's heroism with supernatural. He explains that his, i.e. Shago's styles aren't human. He even concludes Shago's actions during boxing to be acts of sorcery. Yet, he says, Shago's jinn are not settled (he

hadn't undergone *girka*), which means his sorcery would be more rough.

### Medicinal

Medicine refers to anything, which if used provides cure or precaution to a disease(s). Medicines therefore include herbs, drugs, injections and modern vaccine processes (Bunza, 1995). The Hausas, especially in the olden days, used also; sorcery, bori-cult as well as supernatural as forms of medicines. More so, medicines serve number of purposes to the Hausas. They include; curing, self-defense, precaution and self-actualization among others (Bunza, 1995; Sarkin Sudan, 2008; Gobir, 2012). However, in trying to show medicine and its effects, Shata employs supernatural. An instance of this is traceable in the Shata's song; *Sannu Muhammad SakkwatoKyaftin*. He says:

In dai an cebakindaga,  
Muddin an jebakinfama,  
Ga harsashinawarici,  
Ga harsashinayawonai,  
Malam MammanSakkwatoKyaftin,  
Bai kwantawa,  
Bai duqawa,  
Yariquesanda,  
Kuigabayaran SakkwatoMamman.

Indeed, in the battle field,  
Definitely when in the battle field,  
When bullets are circulating,  
When bullets are mingling,  
Malam MammanSakkwato the Captain –  
Would not go down,  
He would not bend down,  
He would hold a stick,  
More on the Army of Sakkwato Mamman.

Here, Shata presents MammanSakkwato as a person who had possessed *Kau-da-bara* (a precaution and self-defense). Therefore, even in the battle field, he could not be shot. Thus, and he doesn't bend down to avoid bullets, rather he picks his stick and move on with his army. The phenomenon of such medicines is in fact real and obvious among the Hausas. As such, similar examples are traceable in other Hausa oral songs. For instance, Gambo, in his *Waqar Jibril MugunTsoho*, takes the listeners through an event. Jibril walks in front of people without been harmed, due to his supernatural medicinal power, despite the fact that they recognized him as a thief. Gambo says:

SaigaHausawairinmu,  
Ihuvarawo,  
Nicce, an yi varna,  
Wangabawabakaiwazaiba,  
Tunwadanahangahakanga,  
Sai yanatahiya tai yanga-yanga,  
Ba maijihakobugawa,  
Sai dainunisai a vatai.

Then came fellow Hausas,  
They shouted, thief!  
I said, what a danger!  
This fellow can't escape,  
But when I looked at him from far,  
He walking majestically,

<sup>1</sup>Magajingari is a traditional Hausa title found especially in Kano and Sakkwato (Bello, *et al*, 2006).

<sup>2</sup>Girka is a sorcery acts done to individuals to settle their jinn in preparation to join the bori-cultism (Bunza, 1995; Gobir, 2012).

<sup>3</sup>An interview with Aliyu Muhammad Bunza, a professor of Hausa culture.

No one stoned or beat him,

They only abused or pointed at him from a distance. Indeed, Gambo in the above stanza presents Jibril MugunTsoho as having a powerful supernatural medicinal power (Maiyama, 2008).

### Sorcery

Sorcerer is a conscious individual endowed with evil intentions, malice and hatred, having magical powers (Samaram, 2008). However Marriam Webster (2017), an online dictionary defined sorcery as the use of power gained from the assistance or control of evil spirits especially for divining. Therefore, sorcery could otherwise be referred as magic. Instances of use of sorcery are traceable in Shata's songs. In his song; *Mamman Sakkwato Kyaftin*, he portrays Captain Mamman as someone capable of changing form when in the battle field. He says:

Ko ka san shimutumkaucemashi,  
KiyayiMammanSakkwatodaji ...  
Yace min, Shatamaiwaqa,  
Sarkinwaqa,  
Iallai a dajiSakkwatoKyaftin,  
Wannanabintsoroyakoma.

Even if you knew him as a human, keep away from him,  
Keep away from him in the bush ...  
He told me, Shata, the singer,  
The king singer,  
Indeed, Sakkwato the Captain in the bush-  
Transformed into a terror.

Indeed, there is element of sorcery in Shata's description of Captain Mamman. Shata shows that, Captain Mamman transforms into something terrifying whenever he is in the bush, the battle field. He says therefore, even if an individual knew him (Captain Mamman) as a human being, that person should keep away from him when in the battle field. In another, *Malam Babba Na QofarGabas*, he says:

Malam naga kana yin yaushi,  
Je ka Babbayadubamaka.  
Yazanaqasayadubamaka...  
Yaxaga kai yashaidamaka,  
Ka gakamar da shi ne akai.

Malam I observed that you are reluctant,  
Go to Babba to check it out for you,  
He will draw on the floor to check it out...  
As he raises his head to tell you,  
It will appear as if he had partaken in its planning.

Here, Shata takes the listener through a scene in which Malam Babba is a fortuneteller. He draws on the floor and tells what will happen as if he was there during the planning of the happening. Indeed, fortunetelling is supernatural, being it a situation whereby, a fortuneteller discloses what will happen in the future. Shata's use of sorcery is also evident in his *Hassan SarkinDogarai*. In the song, he laments a sorcery supernatural performance by Hassan during Dorayi Ceremony<sup>4</sup>. He employs imagery to describe the happening. Thus, on the day of the ceremony, the king and his people were out, together with

Hassan Sarkin Dogarai. Clouds then formed and it started raining. Hassan moved forward and rains stop falling at the sport he stood. Shata thought it was a canopy for the king to take cover, and that he moved forward into the area. Alas! He saw hoofs on the floor and a human eye. He says:

Nan nagaal'ajabi,  
RanartafiyaDorayi,  
RanarhawanDorayi,  
In sarki yah hawo,  
Hasan kuwayayohawa,  
Kohadariyataho,  
Ana ta ruwayaf-da-yaf,  
Hassan ya ja yaigaba,  
Yaigabasaiyatsaya,  
Na xaukodokiguje,  
Na zo cikinarakuve,  
Zatonarumfa a kai,  
Wanda sarkizaishiga,  
A qasasainagakofatai,  
Kuma sainagaidonmutum,  
Sai narugajuje.

I witnessed a mystery,  
The day we went to Dorayi,  
The day of Dorayi's ceremony,  
The king was out,  
Hassan was also out,  
Clouds formed,  
It was raining,  
Hassan moved forward,  
He moved forward and stood,  
I run forward with my horse,  
I went in and took cover,  
I thought it was a canopy,  
For the king to take cover,  
I then saw hoofs on the floor,  
And I saw a human eye,  
I took to my hills.

### Hyperbolism

Hyperbolism as a figure of speech, which employs extreme or excessive exaggeration (Ahmad, 2010; Fitri, 2010). Hyperbolic statements are therefore conscious exaggerations or overstatements, which are made without the intent of literal persuasion. Rather, to produce heightened or comic effect (Omosowoneand Nelson, 2003; Amaechi, 2010). There are instances where Shata uses supernatural to create hyperbolism. One of such instances is found in his *Hassan SarkinDogarai*. Describing the *Sarkin Dogarai*. Hassan Sarkin Dogarai was very popular throughout the Kano kingdom and beyond. He was well known for his supernatural displays. Yet, Shata exaggerated his size when describing him. He says:

Mutuum huxu da rabinmutum,  
Mutuum huxu da rabin mutuum.

Four men and half a man,  
Four men and half a man.

Indeed, Hassan SarkinDogarai is never as big as such description. Rather, Shata uses the hyperbolic representation to create an effect. Similarly however, Shata employed supernatural hyperbolish in his *SarkinBoriSule*.

<sup>4</sup>Xorayi Ceremony is a traditional ceremony in which the king and his people ride horses and go along the streets with traditional band.

He says:

Shi kekwanabakwai,  
Ba ci bashaSule,  
Kullumboriyake.

He is used to spending seven days,  
Without taking food or water,  
He is always possessed by the bori-cult.

This is indeed a hyperbolic representation by Shata. He exaggerates the *bori-cult* of SarkinBoriSule. It is a fact that, an individual cannot live beyond four days without water, not to talk of a week.

### Conclusion

Indeed, there are numerous instances where Shata employs supernatural in his songs. He does so to show heroism, hyperbolism, sorcery and or supernatural medicine among others. This paper has explored such instances from various Shata's songs. The songs include, *Sarkin Bori Sule*, *Hassan Sarkin Dogorai*, *Mamman Sakkwato Kyafin* and *Malam Babba Na Kofar Gabas*. The paper also cited relevant examples from the songs of different singers as to add light to the topic. However, the implications of this study is that, the Hausas are of the perception thus, outstanding heroism is connected to supernatural powers. In addition, the paper proves that, exaggerations are usually made by comparing an individual with supernatural forces, or describing the individual as one who possessed supernatural powers. In both the situations nevertheless, the influence of supernatural among Hausas is emphasized. The paper finally observed that, the Hausas have a strong believe on the fact that medicines have strong connections with supernatural powers. These are all evident in the instances given above as deduced from Shata's songs.

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