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HYPERBOLE AS THE BUILDING BLOCK OF HAUSA COURT-SONGS

Abstract:

Hyperbolic expression is one of the most common and effective foregrounding expressions employed as a literary device in the form of eulogy across the literary genres. But the most common ground for its usage, among the genres, and where its usage is more effective, is poetry. Hyperbole is manifested clearly in praise-songs, which in Hausa take the form of court-songs. This paper explores the forms and effects of literary devices employed by Hausa court singers. Attention is mainly given to Salihu Jankidi and his song *Bubakar Dan Shehu Bakadire* (Bubakar, Shehu's son of Qadiriyya Sect) eulogizing Sultan Abubakar III, but also extolling Sardauna and the Sokoto Caliphate on the occasion of the durbar ceremony in 1965. The presentation includes various forms of the devices, such as irony, overstressing some facts and possibilities, cherishing both the religious and political ideals of Sultan Abubakar III, Sokoto and Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, Premier of the defunct Northern Region, for whom the durbar was organized.

The paper further highlights the ability of the artist to capture the political undertones of the durbar procession.

Keywords: Hyperbole, court song, durbar, Salihu Jankidi and the song (*Bubakar Dan Shehu Bakadire*).

1 | INTRODUCTION

The use of foregrounding features including metaphorical and other figurative expressions are common features of literary genres which make such genres colorful and interesting to the audience. The common usage among the genres however, and where its usage is more effective, is in poetry. Such devices are considered very essential in poetry, because poetry

as seen by Baldict (2004: 100) and Kolawole (1997: 4) is an expression of thoughts that are sublime through deliberate violations of the rules of grammar, as well as the use of surprising metaphors and other devices by which the language draws attention to itself. Gusau (2014:73) posits that the Hausa community has been blessed with a natural environment that gave its people opportunities to perform and communicate songs abundantly from time immemorial. It is also known that the main focus and concern of praise-songs, especially court-songs, is in combining the vilification of rivals with the characterization of the patron in terms of power, authority, lineage, prosperity, tradition and influence (Furniss, 1996: 175). Therefore, poetry is said to be the fundamental ground on which the usage and effects of such metaphorical and other figurative expressions are vividly and attentively listened and adhered to. This is why Murthy (2007: 552) opined that figures of speech are more extensively and effectively employed in poetry in order to express ideas and feelings in an impressive manner. The use of thought-provoking hyperbolic expressions belongs to literary devices widely used by oral singers.

This paper explores the forms and effects of such devices as employed by Salihu Jankidi in eulogizing Sultan Abubakar III,¹ Sardauna² and the Sokoto Caliphate, in his song *Bubakar Dan Shehu Bakadire* (Bubakar, Shehu's son of Qadiriyya Sect). Jankidi heavily vilifies and mocks the rivals of the Sultan and Sardauna, the Premier of the defunct Northern Region and uses the hyperbole to describe the influence of both the Sultan, and the Premier, and their genealogy, which is portrayed as eternal unlike that of their rivals which is temporary.

2 | COURT-SONG IN TRADITIONAL HAUSA CULTURE

According to Furniss (1996: 175) and Gusau (2003: 22; 2008: 234) the court-song is a song dedicated to royal fathers, their families, courti-

¹ Siddiq Abubakar III (1903-1988), 17th Sultan of Sokoto who was on the throne in 1938—1988. This position is gained by lineage. The two-century-old throne was founded by his ancestor, Sheikh Usman Dan Fodio.

² Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello (1909-1966) the first and the only premier of the Northern Nigeria region. He also held the title of the Sardauna of Sokoto.

ers and all those in power, especially traditional power. The tradition of court singing is as old as the Hausa States, when emirs established emirates and exercised power within their jurisdictions. Among the court singers, the most prominent include: Sa'idu Faru, Ibrahim Narambada, Salihu Jankidi, Aliyu Dandawo, Musa Dankwairo, Ibrahim Gurso, Abubakar Akwara, Buda Dantanoma Muhammadu Dodo Maitabshi and Maman Sarkin Taushin Katsina, to mention a few. Their songs, according to Furniss (1996: 175) and Gusau (2014: 73) are usually performed during public occasions, such as the appointment of a new official, a celebration in the yearly calendar, or marking the official movement of the emir from one place to another.

2.1. DURBAR AS COURT CEREMONY

Durbar, according to Buratai (2012: 373-4), is a processional martial art form that has theatrical qualities as well as a set of well-defined political functions.

Durbar as a theatre functions either to interrogate or re-affirm the predominant views and values of the members of a society (Buratai 2012: 375). Therefore, the main essence of durbar, according to Buratai (2010: 66), is to extol and celebrate the heroic legacies that went into the founding fathers of the society. It also serves recreational and entertainment purposes.

The political undertones of the durbar procession, as pointed out by Buratai (2012), are traditional and modern. Always connected with showing respect for the patrons, they may be divided into primary and secondary.

In Nigeria, the first durbar was organized by Lord Lugard, the imperial governor of the Northern region, in 1911 at Kaduna. In the modern era, especially since colonialism, with the cessation and transformation of old kingdoms and empires into modern states, the traditional function of durbar has also been extended and durbar is often included in ceremonies. For instance, durbar is held during the installation and coronation of a new emir or a traditional chieftaincy title holder, or even for the purpose of cultural exhibition or for the entertainment and honoring of foreign dignitaries (Buratai 2010: 383).

As a court ceremony, *durbar* is organized by a traditional as well as a spiritual leader in honour of another leader or traditional title holder. *Durbar* is also performed during Eid Fitr, Eid Kabir and Maulud celebrations (Buratai 2012: 382). As such, whenever it is staged it upholds and also cherishes the legacies of Sultan Abubakar III and Saradauna as the direct descendants of Shehu Usman Danfodiyo; both were the leaders of the only spiritual revolution in Hausaland of the 18th century (1804-1909).

Being a political event, the *durbar* of 1965 showed that Saradauna was the regional political leader, accepted and revered in Northern Nigeria. Some *darbars* organized in 1911, 1924, 1925 and 1948 by colonial masters did not perform this function, as the political leaders were non-natives and their *darbars* were full of functional inadequacies. They were only organized to serve a secondary, modern function, such as entertainment for foreign personages and to celebrate imperial events.

3 | SALIHU JANKIDI'S ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

According to Gusau (2002: 1-25) Salihu Alhassan (Jankidi) was born around 1852 at Rawayya town in the present day Kwatarkwashi Local Government of Zamfara State. He inherited the art from his father, Alhassan Giye, who was a *kalangu*³ singer; he later lived and died in Kwantagora. Alhassan Giye sang many songs to Ibrahim Sarkin Sudan Na Kwantagora. Jankidi switched to *taushi*⁴ court singing and was appointed the official singer to Sultan Abubakar III around 1923; he held this position for about 50 years, until his death in 1973. Prior to his appointment as the official singer of the court of Sultan III, he served in the same capacity in the court of 'Yandoton Tsafe and Katsinan Gusau. He lived for about 123 years. He spoke and understood Nupe, Fulfulde, Clella (Dakkarci), Gbagyi and Fakkanci languages (Gusau, 2002: 3).

The celebrity of Salihu Jankidi, especially in the present song, could be seen in his unique use of multi-faceted hyperbolic expressions which are based on various figurative troops. For instance, his multi-faceted

³ *Kalangu* – a percussian instrument, an hour-glass shaped drum.

⁴ *Taushi* – a conical drum with only one diaphragm, beaten softly.

metonymic expressions such as *Kowag ga Ssokoto ya gama kallo* ‘whoever sees Sokoto, has seen the last he could see’ is referring to whole for part and at the same time referring to part for whole. Additionally, following Agyekum (2013:187) it is a form of synecdoche, while referring to Sultan, the most important figure in the seat of the caliphate representing the whole caliphate.

The uniqueness of Jankidi could also be seen in his effective use of multi-faceted hyperbolic imagery, where he says: *Ga yanyan na ta rawa ciki* ‘here are *yanyan* (wild people) they are busy dancing in the arena’ (Gusau: 2002: 106). This is an instance when the mere presence of these wild people, *yanyan* – who used to live in isolation because of their wildness – is in itself enough to make the celebration unique. Their calm and colorful participation, dancing to entertain the public, instead of harming them, is also enough to indicate the excellence of the occasion, as well as the overwhelming prestige of the patron. And again, it further reveals the prestigious dignity of the Sultan, which brought even the wild people under control and made them toys for public entertainment; this is also enough to indicate the excellence and the uniqueness of the occasion. All of these multi-dimensional expressions embedded within an expression must emanate from a unique artist, whose artistic ability has fit into the description of a successful and effective artist by Furniss (1996:168) when he writes: “[...] the ability to put together epithetic phrases, deploy hyperbolic imagery and control a particular characterization of a patron, all within the frame work of lead and chorus accompanied by drums or other instruments, is the key to effectiveness whatever the context”.

3.1. THE SONG *BUBAKAR DAN SHEHU BAKADIRE*

The song *Bubakar Dan Shehu Bakadire* (Abubakar Shehu’s Son of Qadiriyya Sect) was sung by Salihu Jankidi in honour of his patron, the Sultan of Sokoto, Abubakar III, in order to to commemorate the illustrious Kaduna Durbar of 1956⁵, and the recognition and respect which the Durbar earned for the Sultan Abubakar III from the Queen of England, Elizabeth.

⁵ Kaduna Royal Durbar organized in honor of Queen Elizabeth in 1956.

The song is a classical court song which stands the test of time, for its originality, popularity, as well as its overall aesthetic excellence. The structure of the song comprises ten clusters, including the chorus – fifty-eight lines altogether.

The language of the song is very rich and captivating especially in its use of variety and striking figures of speech. The literary devices employed are mainly those based on resemblance, which employ metaphor, personification and imagery and those expressing emphasis which include hyperbole. According to Agyekum (2013:184), they represent the most popular figures of speech. The only figure of sound identified in the song is that of anaphora which is also used for emphasis and other literary aesthetic values.

As for the norm of the language, the Sokoto dialect is the major Hausa variety employed in the song with a few Arabic loaned-words.

4 | HYPERBOLE AS A FIGURE OF EMPHASIS

Hyperbole is used to exaggerate a fact for emphasis or satirical effect. It is a figure which stretches, perhaps almost to breaking point, the communicative resources of a language. Hyperbole also serves to express personal feelings and opinions, which may be either positive or negative. In addition, it is typically used in eulogy. Hyperbole is frequently concerned with personal values and sentiments, i.e. with making subjective claims which could not be verified unless one is to rely on the general standards of society and on personal knowledge of the speaker in judging the truth of such claims (Buratai 2010; Murthy 2007:539). In poetry, hyperbole is often a means of celebrating human ideals, e.g. ideals of love, of religion, of worldly power.

According to Shelley (following Agyekum 2013: 154), poetry turns all things to loveliness; it exalts the beauty of that which is most beautiful, and adds beauty to that which is most deformed. Therefore, as further opined by Agyekum (2013: 160), a successful poet uses language not merely to express but also to communicate emotion precisely. The use of figures of speech, especially figures of emphasis like hyperbole, wholly achieved what has been described by Shelly (reported by Agyekun 2013,

as above) as the central function of poetry. It also has the capacity of persuading a hardhearted audience.

Hyperbole as defined by Abrams (2009: 149) is a bold overstatement or an extravagant exaggeration of facts or possibility. Such hyperbolic expressions were considered very essential in poetry. Court songs in Hausa are meant to please the patron, his family, and his friends and to vilify or debase his opponents. Court singers can go to any extent to archive this end, not only in Hausaland. As Jeyifo (2004: 231-233) argues, “poetry can contain such extremely contradictory intuitions and emotions because of its sheer delight in language and its semantics, phonetics and ideational resources, it often goes to the root of words and based on this, it has the capacity to hermiticize within a single episode or passage tropes, metaphors and sentiments from diverse and conflicting domains of life and experience”.

The following section of this paper explores the forms and effects of literary devices as employed by Salihu Jankidi in eulogizing Sultan Abubakar III, Sardauna and the Sokoto Caliphate. The main source of these examples is his song *Bubakar Dan Shehu Bakadire* (Bubakar, Shehu’s son of Qadiriyya Sect) which demonstrates various forms of literary devices. They are used to code irony, stressing some facts and possibilities, cherishing both the religious and political ideals of Sultan Abubakar III, Sokoto, the seat of caliphate. It also has reference to Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, the Premier of the defunct Northern Region. As *durbar* is organized for him, literary figures of emphasis can only be understood in the context of political undertones within their local and global dimensions.

5 | LITERARY DEVICES IN COURT-SONGS AND THEIR POLITICAL UNDERTONES

Durbar is performed to extol and celebrate the heroic legacies but it is also aimed at recreation and entertainment. Thus, it serves primary and secondary functions. According to Buratai (2012: 386), “it may further be seen as a site and opportunity for the ruler ship to re-affirm their

supremacy over their domain and to legitimize their continued relevance in changing social and political processes”.

- (1) *Ba a yi taro irin Kaduna ba*
 ‘There has never been a durbar like that of Kaduna’

The above statement connotes that there has never been a durbar organized by such a leader as Sultan Abubakar III in honour of such a personality as the Sardauna. In this verse, Jankidi was stressing the fact that durbar convened by Sultan Abubakar fulfils the traditional as well as the modern functions that durbars are designed to serve.

In the second instance, Jankidi applauds the eminence of the Sultan Abubakar III via a metonymical statement as he says:

- (2) *Kowag ga Sakwato ya gama kallo*
 ‘Sokoto, the end of adventures’

Politically, here Jankidi was affirming the fact that Sokoto doubled up as the centerpiece of Hausaland. This is because Sokoto was the first spiritual and political headquarters of the Northern Region. Both Zungeru and later Kaduna could not be compared to Sokoto. Therefore, the Kaduna durbar marked the end of true durbars.

However, the artist further justifies his claim of the supremacy of the Kaduna durbar over all others, for even the Queen of England admitted the supremacy of this durbar. He states:

- (3) *Zuwan Kaduna da anka yi taro,*
Sarauniya ta gode ma kwarai,
Ta yi murna ta sara maka.
 ‘Journey to Kaduna when durbar holds
 The British Princess thanks you so much
 She was so happy and saluted (surrendered) to you’

The song *Bubakar Dan Shehu Bakadire* is a praise-song which is to show that the Sultan Abubakar III is above all emirs and whoever has the opportunity to see the Sultan, symbolically sees all of the emirs and chiefs of the region. This position is marked by metonymic expressions

which refer to Sokoto first. To underscore the everlasting influence of Sokoto as the nucleus of Hausaland, Jankidi says:

- (4) *Kayan Masar birnin Hausa*
Wannan irin haske sai alfjir
 ‘The treasure (influence) of Egypt in Hausaland
 This illumination, the like is only the dawn’

In his effort to stress and affirm the political position enjoyed by the Sultan he makes reference to Egypt. Here, the artist refers to the everlasting influence of Egypt for more than five millennia, following H. W. Fairman (1965: 72) who proclaimed that in Egypt we have the longest continuous culture that is also literate – not merely in Africa but in the world. It is this that makes Egypt a veritable and unique laboratory for the study of early man and above all of early Africa. Metonymically, also *birnin Hausa* alludes to the family of Sultan Abubakar III, which exerts everlasting influence.

In these aspects, also Sultan Abubakar III is here being referred to as *Sokoto*, (the seat of the caliphate), with the statement *kowag ga Sultan ya gama kallo* ‘whoever sees Sultan ends adventure’ which is to mark him as being the high-ranking traditional ruler of the Northern Region. Here, Jankidi was stressing as well as affirming the supremacy and legitimacy of his social and political relevance in all aspects of life in the Northern Region.

He further emphasized that the only thing comparable to this prestigious political ascendancy is the position of prophethood. Jankidi further reaffirms the supremacy of the lineage of his patron, the Sultan, because it was the source of the spiritual as well as the political leadership of the Northern region. The artist further supports his claims in the song of Sardauna, *Allah Taimaki Mai Gaskiya* ‘Oh Allah, support the truthful’, where he says:

- (5) *Dab bisa Borno har bisa Gwanja*
Shi ka kiran kowa ya taho nan
An san abin ku na yad dawo
Ko dole sun saki a bar ma.

‘From Borno to Gonja,
 he (Sardauna) is the only one to summon all to respond here
 it is your legacy that re-manifests
 and they must leave it for you’

The artist, in his effort to affirm the success and good living of his patron, Sultan Abubakar III, describes him as the possessor of nine powers:

(6) *Wa ka hwada da mai karhi tara?*
 ‘Who can face the possessor of nine powers?’

Here, the artist has seriously exaggerated the bounties ‘powers’ bestowed on the Sultan, thereby ‘understating’ every other person in attendance at the durbar, especially colonial dignitaries who lack most of the Sultan’s powers, yet they regard themselves as the most powerful. Rhetorically, no one can be equal to Sultan Abubakar III and his brother, Sardauna of Sokoto, to speak nothing of competing with them or subjecting them to any other power. Among the Hausa, *nine* signifies so many things. It is regarded as a sign of success through service. It was along this line that *Dan Anace*⁶ applauded the uttermost success of *Gundumi na Karime* (one of the famous boxers of the time) in his famous song, where he says:

(7) *Ya bugge ukku, ya kashe ukku, ga ukku na magagi,*
In an hada tara ke nan.
 ‘He defeated three, kills three; here are three on their death bed,
 all together is nine’

It also serves as a sign of ultimate bliss. In other words, it signifies the enjoyment, influence and prestige of a personality in Hausa society. This may be the reason why ‘nine’ is placed early in the learning process of the language as in the following tongue-twister:

⁶ Alhaji Muhammadu Bawa Dan Anace popularly known as Dan Anace was a famous court singer of Sokoto aristocratic figures, whose fame exalted most when he attached himself to the songs of combatant (boxers), especially when he associated himself with the most famous boxer, *Shago*. Dan Anace was born between 1915 and 1921; died around 1986 (Tsoho 2010:173, Gusau 2005:216, Furniss 1996:166).

- (8) *Tantabara tara, kwai tara, dauki guda tara, sa baka sau tara.*
 'Nine pigeons, nine eggs, take nine, eat nine times'

Eating pigeons signifies the ultimate level of influence in Hausa society. The artist here applauds the success of the Sultan on the throne succeeding his forefathers and the success of Sardauna on the political throne of the North, as well as the influence they both exert on the region as a whole.

In another part of the song, the artist proclaims:

- (9) *Na Bello sai madi ko ba a so*
 'The son of Bello, forever, even if detested'

This is also a way of reminding the Sultan's opponents about their own mortality. Ascribing immortality to a person is a form of flattery. It is therefore a form of exaggerating the qualities of their patrons and by so doing denigrating their opponents which is a staple of court songs. Here also the artist highlighted the solidification of the powers of his patron: how long he remained on the throne and which was the significance of his leadership. All these praises and bringing up of the history of the patron are pleasure driving instruments and at the same time frustrating instruments to the opponents.

Another paradoxical statement in the effort of the artist to stress the position of the Sultan III, not only in the material world, but even in the spiritual world is where he says:

- (10) *Mai bidar shi ga Manzon Allah,*
Bai sakin hanyag ga ta bi shi kai
 'Whoever desires to see the Messenger of Allah (SAW)
 Should maintain your path (the Sultan)'

The descendants of the Sultan are the leaders of the jihad movement, who sanctify Islam and keep it away from all of the traditional beliefs and other pagan-Hausa practices, an act which must be adopted and adhered to, before any sort of spiritual prosperity. The artist paradoxically tried to overstress the fact by equating the following of the Prophet of Islam, with the following of his patron (the Sultan). In other words, the artist,

paradoxically, regards his patron as the symbol of the prophet of Islam; therefore, what is also due for the Prophet is due for his patron.

The same ironic allusion and affirmation was made by Jankidi in the song of Sardauna, *Allah Taimaki Mai Gaskiya* 'Oh Allah, support the truthful' where he proclaims:

- (11) *Gidan Shehu sun rika har abada*
Sai madi ka gamewa da su.
 (Lit: the descendants of Shehu have ascended forever
 They can only be met in the Hereafter).

Here, the emphasis was on the genealogy, stressing and affirming that, both traditional and political powers were vested on the two descendants of the Caliphate, Sultan Abubakar III, his chief patron, and Sardauna, who was the premier of the Northern Region.

6 | CONCLUSION

The paper tries to explain the political undertones of the Kaduna durbar organized in honour of the then premier of the Northern region, Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, in 1965. It also analyses how Jankidi used a lot of hyperbolic expressions in order to subsume and stress both the traditional and modern functions of durbar, in respect to the Sultan and Sardauna.

Finally, the paper argues that the style of the song was typical of court-praise songs with features like those outlined by Furniss (1996: 180). Considering the effective usage of hyperbolic expression in all of its ramifications and so many other skillful features, Jankidi is considered one of the most celebrated court singers ever produced in the Northern region of Nigeria as portrayed in the song discussed.

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