

SAHARAN CROSSROADS

*Exploring Historical, Cultural,
and Artistic Linkages between
North and West Africa*



Edited by

Tara F. Deubel
Scott M. Youngstedt
Hélène Tissières

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P U B L I S H I N G

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CHAPTER TEN

THE BEGGAR'S OPERA: MUSLIM BEGGAR-MINSTRELS AND STREET ORAL POETRY THEATER IN NORTHERN NIGERIA

ABDALLA UBA ADAMU

Introduction

In my use of the expression "The Beggar's Opera," I am not actually referring to John Gray's 1728 three-act satirical ballad opera, which retains contemporary relevance and popularity. Instead, I am referring to street beggar-minstrels who perform a usually satiric opera, what I prefer to call operetta, as part of their performances, specifically in northern Nigeria—thus indeed upholding the fundamental principles of "beggar's opera." A definition of beggar-minstrels was given by authorities in old northern Nigeria (1966, 103), who interpret the term to include "all persons who shout the praises of any person whether or not they play musical instruments and sing." Such minstrels who do shout out the praises of patrons while playing a particular instrument are referred to as *maroka* (praise-singers). As a result, both in Zaria (1960) and Kano (1966) regulations were issued, entitled "Control of Beggar-Minstrels," which considerably limited the freedom of the *maroka* (Andrzejewski 1985, 200).

In medieval Europe, minstrels were usually entertainers who created the genre of minstrel performances through song lyrics that told stories, often made-up for the moment. However, while northern Nigerian Hausa beggar-minstrels are far removed from the European medieval minstrels, the minstrels I focus on nevertheless do share these same performative characteristics—alluding to the universality of the genre, regardless of era, or geographical location.

Minstrelsy as performance act in what I call spontaneous popular culture appears in many cultures—and essentially shares the same characteristics. In ancient Japan, beggar-minstrels, called *hokai*, provided entertainment and a blessing on a house in exchange for something to eat (Cranston 1993, 758). In India, Balwant Gari (1962) reports that:

As time passed...less dignified bards degenerated into wandering minstrels—half-beggar, half-singer fakirs—who practiced fortune-telling and kismet-reading, and went from house to house for bowls of rice, prescribing a pinch of "magic ashes." (208)

The minstrels in Ethiopia—*azmari*—form a distinct professional group, composing their songs and singing them at events and festivals (Leslau 1952). The central focus of their performance is on how to use the language to entertain and uplift its hearers. Indeed, their songs are not only a source of diversion, but often express public opinions (Leslau 1952, 102). Their uniqueness, however, is their possession of secret language codes that enabled them to communicate to members of their profession in an exclusive manner.

In Bangladesh, minstrelsy is performed by Bauls, mystics living in rural Bangladesh and West Bengal in India. They live near a village or most often travel from place to place to "earn their living from singing to the accompaniment of the *ektara*, the lute *dotara*, a simple one-stringed instrument, and a drum called *dubki*" (UNESCO 2005, 14). The Bauls, however, neither identify with any organized religion nor with the caste system, special deities, temples or sacred places. Their emphasis lies on the importance of a person's physical body as the place where God resides. Bauls are admired for this freedom from convention as well as their music and poetry.

In Turkey, medieval minstrels—*halk ozani*—were the travellers who entertained their audience with songs accompanied by a stringed musical instrument, the *baglama*. As Kaya (2002) states, "in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, some of these minstrels used to write and sing poems against the supremacy of the Ottoman dynasty over the peasantry" (46). This, according to Kaya (2002), served as an inspiration in the formation of contemporary Turkish hip-hop in Berlin—a tradition that is deeply historical, because earlier antecedents to Turkish *halk-ozani* were the nomadic or half-nomadic *ask* who sing their own or other minstrels' compositions and accompany themselves on a stringed instrument called a *saz* (Bağlıgöz 1952).

Even when the genre evolved into the minstrel show, or minstrelsy, as an American entertainment form consisting of comic skits, variety acts,

dancing, and music, performed by white people in blackface or, especially after the American Civil War, black people in blackface (Bean 1996), the central structure of minstrelsy in African performing groups maintain the same comedic structure. Thus, the unexpected, the swift repartee, and the ludicrous are all worked into the song and narratives of the minstrel with skill and precision (Reck 1976, 29). Subsequently, the creative freedom of the minstrel in any setting gives him the poetic license to take pot-shots at the society or social events.

Music in Hausa Social Contexts

An essential tension exists between Muslim Hausa public culture and popular culture. Public culture reflects the quintessential Hausa social makeup with its agreed boundaries defined by cultural specificity such as dress code, language, and rules of social discourse. Hausa society, being structured on specific occupational hierarchies, often considers music a low art form. As Besmer (1983, 32) pointed out:

The Hausa define musicians' work as a craft (*sana'a*) called *roko* (lit. begging), and those engaged in it—instrumentalists, vocalists, praise-singers and -shouters—are called *maroka* (s. *maroki*) and ranked in the lowest social category. The essential aspect of *roko* is the type of service performed, that is, acclamation, and its social and economic circumstances. That instruments and music may be used in this service is irrelevant for the Hausa.

Podstavsky (1992, 1) further elucidates that "the specializations in this craft are used by their practitioners as vehicles to elicit material gifts from the public." Binding this craft is the concept of *ubangida*—a mentor, for whom the musician either sings exclusively, or who prompts the musician to sing for other patrons or events of the mentor's choice. It is this connection to a mentor that often denies Hausa music its innate creative impetus, giving it a client-focus. Yet this becomes necessary because it is the mentors' patronage that provides income to the musician, especially in the absence of a structured music-marketing framework—which includes the absence of live concerts and club circuit gigs—in a deeply conservative society. A few international record companies such as EMI, Parlophone, Polydor had, in the 1960s, recorded extensive catalogs of Hausa music—but were all forced to quit the Nigerian market in the 1970s due to changing government economic policies, as well as increased piracy due to availability of tape-cassette recorders. Musical appreciation can however be either low or high. For instance, the existence of complete

orchestras in palaces of Hausa emirs from Zaria to Damagaram indicates the acceptance of music as an entertainment genre within the conventional establishment. Yet, it is not acceptable for the ruling class to engage in the same music—thus a prince cannot be a musician. However, to understand the “music” genre of the Hausa Muslim beggar-minstrels, it is necessary to provide deeper contextual background on the position of music as an entertainment form in Hausa culture.

The Genre of Hausa Music

Hausa music excels on its *vocal* qualities—with Hausa musicians producing songs of utter philosophical and poetic strength, reflecting Hausa proverbs—rather than instrumental virtuosity. This came about essentially because the Hausa use orality as an instrument of cultural expression. Thus the most distinctive characteristic of mainstream traditional Hausa musicians are their client-focused nature. They are generally either singing for a courtier, an emir, a wealthy person, or an infamous person. Even in what may be termed “orchestras” comprising many back-up instrumentalists, the instruments tended to be of the same category—predominantly percussion. When Hausa societies became more cosmopolitan and began to absorb influences from other cultures, mixed-mode instrumental groups started to appear, combining drums with *goge* (violins), and *kukuma* (fiddles). Rarely are there musical combos with string, percussion and wind instruments in the *same* band.

Traditional Hausa music and musicians were often divided into specific categories, just like any musical genre. In one of the most comprehensive studies of this categorization, Gusau (1996) in a biographical study of 33 Hausa classical to modernist musicians, provided at least four categories. The first was *Makadan Yaki*, or those who sang for armies and flourished from the mid-nineteenth century up to 1920. Singing for palace armies of Sokoto territories such as Gobir, Kebbi, and Argungu, these musicians included Wari Mai Zarin Gobir (d. 1800), Ata Mai Kurya (d. 1899), Kara Buzu Mai Kan Kuwa (d. 1920), etc. Their instruments included *zari* (any piece of equipment used for musical tonality, e.g. a ring beaten with a metal rod), *kurya* (a variety of drum) and *molo* (a three-stringed “guitar”) each accompanied with a backing choir.

The second category extended the musical influences from 1900, and is referred to as *Makadan Sarakuna* (palace musicians). Their musical instrumentation centered around drum orchestras in emir’s palaces. Again found predominantly around the Sokoto basin, these included Salihu Jankidi Sakkwato (1852-1973), Ibrahim Narambada Isa (1875-1960),

Muhammadu Sarkin Taushin Sarkin Katsina (1911-1990), Musa Dan Kwairo (1909-1991), Sa'idu Faru (b. 1932), and Sani Aliyu Dan Dawo Yauri (b. 1949), among others. Classicists of Hausa traditional music, their main music style was based on a variety of drumming accompanied by slow mournful and elegant vocals, as befitting one in the presence of royalty. The main drums were *kotso* (a drum with only one diaphragm), *taushi* (a conical drum with only one diaphragm, beaten softly), *kuru* (a long drum about three feet long), and *turu* (a large drum). Although predominantly court musicians, they employ their skills to sing about other issues such as political culture (mainly colonial independence), importance of traditional culture, and other themes.

The third category of traditional Hausa musicians was *Makadan Sana'a* who sing for members of specific guilds and professions. Perhaps the most famous of these was Muhammadu Bawa Dan Anace (1916-1986) whose main, although not exclusive, specialty was singing for Hausa traditional boxers, the most famous of whom was Muhammadu Shago. Dan Anace also sang for farmers and members of the aristocracy.

However, the most eclectic category was the fourth category, *Makadan Jama'a* (popular singers). Although often singing for emirs and other gentry, their predominant focus was on ordinary people and their extraordinary lives. And while the other category of musicians tended to favor the drum in its various incantations, popular singers used a variety of musical instruments, and incorporated a variety of styles and subject matter—marking a departure from a closeted traditional society to a more cosmopolitan product of the transnational flow of music influences.

These categories did not merge into each other historically, but rather developed concurrently with the last category, *Makadan Jama'a*, gaining predominance in recent years. Departing from the dominance of Sokoto musicians and the staid Emir's courts, popular folk musicians also adopted different instruments, rather than the predominantly percussion-based music of emir's courts and occupational singers. Thus percussion instruments such as *duman girke*, *ganga*, *tauje*, *bang*, *taushi*, *kotso*, *turu*, *kalangu*, and *kwaira*; as well as wind instruments like *algaita*, *kakaki*, *kubumbuwa*; stringed instruments like *garaya*, *kuntigi*, *molo*, *kwamsa*, *goge*, *kukuma* all became the vogue among Hausa street and popular folk musicians up to the 1970s.

Shata, for instance used the *kalangu* (an hour-glass shaped drum, or "African" drum) orchestra; Dan Maraya Jos used *kuntigi* (a small, one-stringed instrument, a kind of fiddle). Equally diverse was their subject matter. Shata was predominantly a praise singer (*maroki*) for emirs

(*Sarkin Daura Mamman Bashar*), gentry (*Garban Bichi Dan Shehu*), peoples' heroes (*Bawa Direba*), women (*Kulu Mai Tuwo*), the infamous (*Ammani Manajan Nija*), those who lived the high life (*A Sha Ruwa*), civil servants (*Abba 33*), and so on, having composed thousands of songs for all categories of people (see Sheme et al. 2004 for a sample discography).

Dan Maraya Jos practices his craft on the other side of the spectrum. A folk singer, he refused to be client-focused and thus composed songs of poetic quality and beauty that reflect the vicissitudes of life. As he stated, "all my songs convey specific messages to my audience. The majority of them are admonishments" (Malumfashi 2011, 20). Examples from his repertoire include *Wakar Sana'a* (virtues of gainful employment), *Dan Adam Mai Wuyar Gane Hali* (lamenting human nature), *Jawabin Aure* (married life), *Bob Guy* (the dude, a parody of drunkards and young urbanized males), *Ina Ruwan Wani Da Wani* (virtue of minding your own business), etc. He remained one of the few Hausa popular artists with exposure beyond the confines of Nigeria, having performed as part of cultural exchange programs in the US, the UK, Cuba, Barbados, Romania, Venezuela, Brazil and Bahrain. It is precisely because of his non-client focus that the Nigerian government found him a ready representative of Hausa performing arts when assembling Nigerian artists for international cultural exchanges.

Hausa folk musicians with youth focus such as Dan Kashi (*Safiya Kano*), Amadu Doka (*Garba Tabako*), Garba Supa (*Amarya Ango*), Hassan Wayam (*Sai Wayam*), Surajo Mai Asharalle Ali Makaho (*Wakar Mandula*—a provocative street song on marijuana)—and others provided Hausa youth with a vibrant entertainment space that remained traditional and reflected Hausa social space up to the mid-1980s.

From the same pool also developed a core of traditional *soyayya* (romantic) musicians who provided templates for singing love lyrics to youth. The most prominent were Uwani Zakirai, Dan Mani Gumel and Haruna Uje. Uje (d. 2003), a truck driver-turned-musician (playing the *gurmi*), composed a love epic, *Jummai* in the 1970s which became an anthem for dreamy-eyed youth pleased at an unashamed expression of love by a lover and boldly played over the radio, to the displeasure of the high culture establishment, confirming the significance of love themes in Hausa popular folk culture.

There were very few prominent female folk musicians. The most famous, in fact, was the late Uwaliya Mai Amada (1934-1983) a vocalist accompanied by an orchestra of women calabash musicians (led by her husband). Singing predominantly for women and especially during

women-themed ceremonies, she carved a respectful niche for herself as an energetic, if often bawdy vocalist, as reflected in this excerpt from *Malam Ya Ga Wata*.

Allah ya yi Malam ya zo/ Malam ya ga wata/ Wannan ba malami ba ne/ Ya yi katakata ya ka sa tashi/ Ya yi lumu sai ya ka sa tashi/	Malam is here! He has eyed another one! Oh no, this is certainly not a Malam He is staggering, could not get up! He is limp, could not stand up [could not get it up] Malam is down with sheer ecstasy
Dadın yaro sai ya ka da malam/	

A clear reference to some amorous Qur'anic school malams (marabouts) who used their position to exploit vulnerable women—it is almost always the women seeking psychological help from the marabouts, never the men—Uwaliya used the song to warn people of such marabouts.

Uwaliya's mantle was sustained by a female contemporary Amada musician, as the calabash music was called, Barmani Coge (b. 1945) who used similar styles—and often the same songs—as Uwaliya. Often sarcastic, Barmani used her sharp lyrics to depict the various intrigues and vicissitudes of married life. And because she reflected so many women's innate moral struggle, she became an instant celebrity. Between the two of them, Uwaliya and Barmani provided entertainment fodder for well-heeled Hausa women during ceremonies.

However, with the introduction of the vibrant Hausa video film industry from 1990 based on templates from Bollywood Hindi films, a new music industry emerged in northern Nigeria centered around attempts to copy Hindi film soundtrack musicians that use male and female voices in a dialogic form using synthesizer music. Since Hausa video films are virtually targeted at female audiences (due to their overriding focus on romantic and domestic themes), female background singers emerge, complete with high-pitched voices to mimic as much as possible, Lata Mangeskar, the hugely prolific Bollywood Hindi film soundtrack playback singer. These female singers, who became mega-stars, included Rabi Mustapha, Fati B. Muhammad, Maryam Mohammed Danfulani, Maryam "Sangandali" Abubakar, Maryam "Fantimoti" Saleh, and Fati "Nijar" Labaran—the last being from the Republic of Niger.

Beggar-Minstrels as Oral Poets

As indicated earlier, there are at least four categories of Hausa musicians: Makadan Yaƙi (singing for armies), Makadan Fada (singing

for traditional rulers), *Makaɗan Sana'a* (singing for occupational guilds) and *Makaɗan Jama'a* (popular folk singers who can sing for anyone who can pay; or sing on topical issues). Almost all ethnomusicological studies of Hausa musicians (e.g. Besmer 1970; Ames 1973; Hill and Podstavsky 1976; Erlman 1985; Furniss 1991 and 1996) fall into one of these categories. However, I created a fifth, more universal category, which I call *Mawaka Mabarata*, essentially *oral beggar poets*. It is to this last category that beggar-minstrels belong. While studies of minstrel beggars in developing economies such as Bangladesh (Capwell 1974; Datta 1978; Urban 2003; Unesco 2005) and Ethiopia (Leslau 1952) indicate their use of musical instruments to accompany their street poetry, Hausa minstrels do not use any form of instrument. They use their voice in a call-and-response fashion to communicate their message.

Within the Hausa performing arts there are poets whose works were written and sung either by themselves or others without musical accompaniment. However, the vast majority of Hausa written poets were either social or political commentators (e.g. Sa'adu Zungur, Ali Aƙilu, Mudi Sipikin, Aliyu Namangi, Ahmadu Dan Matawalle, etc.), and are studied in specific intellectual circles. Further, as Russell Schuh (1994, 1) notes:

Discussion of Hausa poetry has generally distinguished *oral* poetry, which finds its roots in ancient Hausa tradition, and *written* poetry, which dates from the 19th century and whose meters can be traced to Arabic Islamic verse. Though the large and continually evolving body of Hausa poetic literature derives from these separate origins, there has now been considerable cross-fertilization between the two traditions, both thematically and metrically. Moreover, the "oral" vs. "written" distinction is misleading.

Hausa beggar-minstrels are oral poets, and often do not write their own poems. In the initial development of the craft, these minstrels tend to rely on poems written by others. In this, they tended to focus almost exclusively on songs praising the Prophet Muhammad (Peace be upon him) in various forms. Examples of this classical Islamic poetry recited by the Hausa beggar minstrels include *Ishriniyat* (originally composed by Abi Bakarim Muhammad bn Malikyyi bin Al Fazazi), *Hamziyya* and *Al-Burda* (Sharaf al-Din Muhammad al-Busiri).

They are not *maroka* (praise singers) as the generality of Hausa musicians are perceived because they do not sing the praises of patrons for money; but *mabarata* (indigent beggars) because they are, literally and

professionally, street-beggars. The distinction is very essential for creative purposes—and has led to this genre being ignored by mainstream Hausa scholars. Further, their choice of subject—moral poetry—can be interpreted either as a protest against the worldly-orientation of the Hausa popular singers, or a ploy to garner sympathy from listeners and ensure they are given alms. Even when departing from strictly religious or moral poetry, beggar-minstrels tend to focus on socially thematic issues. A very good example is the *Wakar Bagauda* (Hiskett 1963). Of unknown date and origin, the epic was made popular by beggar-minstrels, which attracted the attention of scholars—and thus led to the reconstruction of the history of Kano, northern Nigeria. Similarly, Aliyu Namangi's nine-volume *Imfiraji* was sustained not through publishing, but by beggar-minstrels, such as Kasimu Garba Takai "Marar Idanu"—as he describes himself in the Radio Jigawa recital of *Imfiraji 3* in November 1996—and Hajiya Hafsatu Sani Bello, a blind minstrel from Kofar Wambai, Kano.

Beggar-Minstrel Performances

The Hausa beggar-minstrels in northern Nigeria usually move in groups of three adults and one or two children who serve as their guides (*dan jagora*—"he who pulls by the stick") in a chain formation, making up a troupe of sorts. However, not all of them are blind, or adults; I have recorded women beggar-minstrels, and a gaggle of street urchins performing similar minstrel songs. They do not use any form of musical accompaniment—thus separating them from normal *maroka* who often use one instrument or other accompaniment.

The three "band members" of each troupe are made up of a Voice-Master, who is the lead narrator, and two choirs. Their initial repertoire consisted of quoting verses from the Qur'an to merchants in the shops and market stalls they come up to, and they are given alms. They later included classical Arabic poetry in their set lists. Some of them developed a strong repertoire of performances for specialist audiences with the Voice-Master telling longish stories with a variety of themes. The other two pick up a central theme of the story as a single line, and repeat it continuously as a choir—thus the background vocals provide a sonic tapestry on which the main operatic story unfolds.

Their performance can last as long as the audience wants, or end when the minstrels simply get tired and move on. They are given alms for these public performances. Besides street begging, the performances of the troupe also serve internal processes, i.e. the songs are performed only at events organized by the blind community—thus obviating the need to hire

outside entertainers. This eventually attracted the attention of *masu ido* ("the sighted") who also invite them to perform at their events. There are other occasions when some of the minstrels are often invited to perform to a particular audience or for a specific occasion (e.g. a naming ceremony or for a politician). This is more often as a novelty, rather than for creative recognition, especially as they have no music to dance to, but provide a source of laughter in their narrative, and they are paid handsomely for these performances.

Their main source of income, however, is from street begging. There is no centralized union for the minstrels, and indeed from my fieldwork with them, they do not seem to want to become organized as a trade union or a performance collective for that will bring unnecessary government attention to their more freeform creative performances. Thus each cluster of three minstrels would rather strike out independently and hope to get lucky.

The main characteristic of the more popular compositions of the genre is its comedic structure. While a story is being told—complete with dialogue—comedy lines are introduced that elicit laughter from the audience—and greater appreciation and patronage. The group of three minstrels is not always a permanent arrangement. The back-up choir can follow a different Voice-Master, either due to "creative differences" or simply because a new singer offers a new way of performing and therefore more prosperity—or when the Voice-Master dies. Curiously, none of the other two choir members indicate the desire to assume the mantle of the Voice-Master.

The radio and television stations remain the only organized structures to provide minstrels with opportunities to bring the attention of the wider community to their performances. However, at the beginning—late 1970s—even this facility was denied to them, perhaps because of their unkempt and dirty appearance. Eventually, however, they were allowed to appear on TV as novelty shows, giving them initial visual status when people see them live moving from one market stall to another singing the same songs they performed on television.

Muhammad Dahiru Daura Troupe

The most prominent of the northern Nigerian Muslim Hausa beggar-minstrels was the Dahiru Daura troupe. This was led by Muhammad Dahiru Daura, who was born in 1946 in Gombak village, Zangon Daura—a border town with Niger Republic, in Katsina State, Nigeria. He died in Gawuna, Kano on 19th August 2010 at the age of 64. He started his

operatic performances as a beggar-minstrel in 1976 at the age of 30. He studied, as it were, under the tutelage of Ado Dantaraunawa, another blind minstrel in his local government of Zangon Daura in Katsina State, before eventually moving to Kano State in the early 1970s.

I became fascinated with Dahiru Daura when I watched him perform live in the streets of Kano city in 1976 while I was an undergraduate at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, with deep interests in ethnomusicology. Since he had no specific *ubangida* (mentor) to fund his craft and enable his songs to be recorded and sold, you simply had to follow the troupe as they traipsed from one shop to another to get the full taste of his performances. The operatic nature of his narrative provided a fascinating enough reason to follow them. The troupe was eventually brought to the studios of the local television stations in Kano, Nigeria, and recorded—which provided music pirates with an instant opportunity to record and sell the songs, without any benefit to the troupe. My analysis of the troupe started in 1995 and it was from a single tape recording of their songs, which I eventually converted into an MP3 format. Not satisfied with the sound quality, and wanting to meet the troupe, I took a more proactive measure to record them on stage and in the studio.

To record the troupe's catalog required three interviews with them. The first was on January 1, 2006 at the Center for Hausa Cultural Studies, Kano. This was followed by a live concert at the British Council in Kano where I recorded five performances of the troupe on video tape. One of the compositions, *Idi Wanzami*, was accompanied, for the first time in the entire career of the troupe, with musical instruments by a band, Al-Muhajirun, engaged specifically for the event. Al-Muhajirun was unusual in Hausa music history in that not only did they craft their own instruments from various types of woods and bamboo, but they were also a full band (which included two drums, flute, calabash, lute, and pierced calabash disks). Unfortunately, lack of local patronage and fierce competition from Hausa techno pop music with its generated synthesizer sampled sounds prevented their progress, and the band folded.

The second interview was on December 31, 2006 at the troupe's base in Gawuna. In both the two interviews, Dahiru Daura was present and led the interviews, providing most of the answers, with occasional interjection from Galadima AbdulWahab Sule, a consistent member of the troupe. In January 2011, I decided to formally record the troupe in a studio, dissatisfied with the condenser microphone recordings I had been doing. Regretfully, on getting to Muhammad Dahiru Daura's house, his wife informed us that he had died on August 19, 2010. We traced his "band members," locating only one, Galadima AbdulWahab Sule, who had

joined another Voice-Master, and held a third interview with the new Voice-Master, Tafida Haruna Isma'il, on January 24, 2011. Tafida knew Dahiru Daura and was very familiar with Daura's catalog, although he also has his own compositions. However, it was Galadima who provided more insight into their craft, with supporting explanations from Tafida. Galadima was in fact a civil servant, working in Gabasawa Local Government in Kano in the Special Education unit, and became part of a Voice-Master choir on a part-time basis. At the end of the discussions, I asked if they had ever sung a tribute to Dahiru Daura, which they admitted they had not; however, right there and then, Tafida led a spontaneous moving eulogy which lasted for five minutes, detailing their sadness at the passing of Muhammad Dahiru Daura, undoubtedly the most famous Voice-Master among the Hausa beggar-minstrels.

On Monday February 7, 2011, we eventually booked Golden Goose Studios, Kano, where Tafida and his choir recorded the entire known catalog of Muhammad Dahiru Daura—eight compositions, in addition to a tribute to Dahiru Daura.

The Compositions

The repertoire of the Muhammad Dahiru Daura troupe, all sung *a capella* consisted of the following compositions (with length in minutes noted in parentheses):

Idi Wanzami (21:39)	Enoch the Barber
Direba Makaho (20:37)	The Blind Driver [Driving Blindly]
Bayanin Willi (16:53)	Concerning Willi [a person who does not revere the Prophet Muhammad (SAW)]
Bayanin Girki (12:59)	Concerning Dishes
Bayanin Naira (10:32)	Concerning Wealth
Bayanin Maitatsine (08:22)	Concerning Maitatsine [religious fundamentalist],
Bayanin Goro (07:46)	Concerning Kola nut
Bayanin Da'a (06:59)	Concerning Discipline
Bayanin Soja (05:45)	Concerning the Army

A distinct characteristic of his longer narratives is a powerful doxology, which he uses to pray and introduce his "band members" as well as give a resume of the narrative to follow. I will briefly summarize the first three narratives because they are longer, more focused and structured in order to

show how comedy is used by the group to communicate a vital moral message. The poems I will be analyzing are "*Idi Wanzami*," "*Direba Makaho*," and "*Bayanin Willi*."

***Idi Wanzami* (Enoch the Barber/Enoch the Superstitious)**

Dahiru Daura's *bakandamiya* (masterpiece) was the performance of *Idi Wanzami* (Enoch the Barber). It was initially composed by another blind minstrel, Hamza Makaho (Hamza, the blind) from Damagaram, Niger Republic, who actually created the genre. The song was based on a real barber who lived in Gazawa (probably mispronounced Gagawa in the song), Damagaram. He was apparently a superstitious person—with one of his superstitions being his refusal to cut the hair of a blind person because of his belief that doing such will bring bad luck to his business. All entreaties to make him cut the hair of Hamza Makaho fell on deaf ears, as he flatly refused to cut the blind minstrel's hair. This angered the latter who then composed a *zambo* (invective) song called "*Idi Wanzami*" in which he lampooned the barber. Hamza Makaho went further and recorded the song for broadcast at Radio Damagaram, and this became a massive hit throughout Niger Republic and neighboring Nigeria. The barber's children apparently tried to get the radio station to delete the song, which the station refused to do since the song was already recorded on tapes by listeners. Thus *Idi Wanzami* was based on an already existing song by an earlier minstrel; however Dahiru Daura lengthened it considerably and introduced a series of comedy skits that accompanied the main performance, which became central motifs in all the troupe's performances. The choir refrain for this narration is "*baya batun imani*" (he has no conception of compassion).

***Direba Makaho* (The Blind Driver/Driving Blindly)**

Direba Makaho (Blind driver/driving blindly) was an original composition. It was a devastatingly comedic analysis of the recklessness of Nigerian drivers who endanger themselves and other road users. By ignoring highway codes and careful driving, they are actually driving "blindly"—thus they are "blind drivers." The song starts with a narrative by the protagonist of his desire to quit begging after consultation with his choir. The craft they decided to enter is long-distance truck driving. They faced initial problems however, of getting someone to sponsor them to buy a truck. The narrative tells how they approached various groups but were

rebuffed. They even decided to approach insurance companies because “*su ne su ka gaji asara*” (they are used to losing all the time) that eventually sponsored their purchase of a truck. The driver then narrated how he took it to the motor park, overloaded with goods and passengers, got dead drunk and drove off at top speed—leading to an accident in which only the driver escaped alive. The moral of the narrative is to caution drivers against excessive speeding and overloading, and remaining sober while driving. The choir refrain here is “*ba kiliya ba canji*” (driving carelessly).

***Bayanin Willi* (Concerning Willi a Person Who Does Not Revere the Prophet Muhammad [peace be upon him])**

“Willi” is a made up name for a person who is not particularly generous. The protagonist links this miserliness with a lack of religiosity. The performance narrates how the protagonist and his choir go to the market to beg. They eventually stop at the stall of a Willi, who becomes irritated with their recitation of classical Arabic poetry and asks them to stop. Their refusal to stop angers him and he decides to assault them. This makes them run away, with Willi in close pursuit. The performance then narrates how the protagonist seeks refuge in various places, but is instantly thrown out when Willi approaches due to his fearsome appearance and intensive cruelty. Willi eventually catches up with the protagonist who faces him and wrestles him to the ground. The moral of the narrative is on the superior strength of spirituality; for while the antagonist (Willi) is weak, the protagonist (*makaho*, the blind) is imbued with spiritual strength—thus spirituality is the superior strength in any encounter. The choir refrain here is “*ka ji bayanin Willi*” (this is the story of Willi).

Other Performances

The other performances in his repertoire are less epic, but nevertheless equally entertaining. They deal with various topics such as *Bayanin Girki*, an ode to food in which Dahiru describes various food items—giving them Hausa names—which leads to endless ribbing from mates if a person’s name is attached to an unsavory food item. *Bayanin Da’a*, a poem about discipline, was composed to support the War Against Indiscipline of Nigeria’s military regime in the mid-1980s. Indeed, the use of beggar-minstrels to promote Nigerian government policies of social re-orientation shows one effective way their skills can be used for social mobilization. *Bayanin Naira* narrates how obsession for wealth creates

mistrust and how acquisition of wealth leads to false friendship.

Muhammadu Dahiru Daura's *Idi Wanzami*

I will now briefly analyze Idi Wanzami more closely to determine the structure of the narrative that characterizes the beggar-minstrel style in northern Nigeria. A longer excerpt is translated in the Appendix. In composing, reciting and performing *Idi Wanzami*, Dahiru does not seem to have used any recognizable style or meter—just his own inimitable style, which he uses in all his other compositions.

The poem described the tribulations that Dahiru underwent under Idi's barbing razors when fate took him to Idi's house to request a haircut and facial grooming. It begins with Dahiru presenting himself as the protagonist and introducing his entire family and backing vocals. Somewhere along the line, he stresses his profession—*da bara a ka san mu* (we are better recognized as street-beggars), thus making it clear that he is requesting for alms, *fi sabillah* (for the sake of Allah), rather than payment for services. If the listener is entertained enough to give the alms, fine; if not, Dahiru simply moves on with his backing vocals to another listener. A distinct characteristic of his style was the use of distorted backing vocals containing a refrain that in effect summarizes the subject matter of the performance. The distorted vocals of the choir thus form a drone-like instrumentation in the background, on which Dahiru overlays the main song.

The linguistic richness of the poem is also reflected in the way Dahiru uses Arabic-sounding words—as if invoking a particularly hellish litany on the barber:

Askar wanzami/	The barber's razor?
Ka ji ma sunan ta:/	Hear to its name:
"warbabiyati burbat/	"warbabiyati burbat,
Summa barridi kal!"/	Summa barridi kal!"

Dahiru uses an Arabic onomatopoeic meter in the expression, *warbabiyati burbat*, which has no specific meaning, but when spoken sounded sufficiently sadistic enough to evoke an image of tissue destruction, or bones being broken (*kal* is the sound of something being broken). The Arabic language has provided the Hausa language with extensive loan words, mainly due to the influences of scholastic Islam.

The narrative begins with a doxology that praises God, and then introduces the other band members. The protagonist then spends about five minutes describing Idi Wanzami's operational procedures, which shows the uncompassionate nature of the barber (hence the refrain, "baya batun imani"—he is not compassionate). The Hausa barber in normal circumstances is a person feared by young boys—who are delighted with modern barbing saloons—due to his strength and the vice-like grip with which he holds a client's head while cutting the hair with a razor that makes a rasping sound as it sweeps across the cranium. Thus what the protagonist did was to take this imagery of childhood fear for barbing, and embellish it with real-life story of a barber who lacks any form of compassion for the suffering of his client.

After the openings, the protagonist then moves on to narrate how he arrives at the town of Gagawa (Gazawa, Damagram, Niger Republic).

Ni ne wataran da na tashi/	One day I got up
Wataran da na sauka garin su/	One day I landed in his town
Ina yin yawo/	I was just wandering
Sai na sauka Faranshi/	I arrived in France (Niger Republic)
Inna yin yawo/	I was wandering
Sai na je tashar Gagawa/	Then I arrived at the Gagawa (Gazawa bus station)

His narrative further emphasizes the wandering nature of his craft, since it even involved cross-border movement. Interestingly, he retained the general Hausa name given to Niger Republic—"Faranshi" (France)—since it was a former French colonial territory. On arrival in the town, he asks if there is a barber, because he needs a haircut and facial grooming. The people he asks tell him there is indeed a barber in the town, but even the residents are afraid to go to him. The protagonist insists and he is taken to the barber's house. He announces himself with the usual greetings of "Assalamu Alaykum" (peace be upon you) in front of the house. The barber ignores him. He calls out the greeting again, and still the barber ignores it. On the third call, the barber becomes annoyed and shouts at the protagonist who becomes so scared and confused that his chorus members run back to Nigeria. As the lyrics go:

Idi Wanzami/	Idi Wanzami
To daga can da ya motsa/	Then moved swiftly
Sai ya daka mini tsawa/	And shouted at me
Rannan da na ruƙe/	I got scared
Rannan da ya daka mani tsawa/	When he shouted at me

Yo ni da na rufe/ Har igiyar wando ta tsinke!/ *Yan amshi suka tsorata/ Kan a jima sun je Dambatta!/ Suka bar mu muna ta atanda/	I become disoriented The belt of my trouser broke My choir became frightened Before long had escaped to Dambatta [town in Nigeria] Abandoning me with him!
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With a quaking voice, the protagonist informs the barber he wants a haircut. The barber refuses due to his superstitious belief that he always gets unlucky when cutting the hair of blind persons.

Na ce, "Wanzami/ Mai ne ne ya yi zafi/ Har ba kai wa makaho aski?"/	I asked, "Barber Why are you so extreme That you will cut a blind man's hair?"
---	--

Ya ce, "Ai akwai dalili"/ In ya yi wa makaho aski/ Rannan baya samun sa'a/	He said, "there is a reason" If he cuts the hair of blind He runs out of luck that day
--	--

Na ce, "Wanzami/ Amma ka cika camfi/ Ka san'a gun Allah/ Tabaraka Allah/ Shi ne mai kowa mai komai/ Sai Ya ba ka ka samu/ In Ya hanaka ba mai ba ka"/	I said, "Barber, You are too superstitious Seek for luck with Allah The most Blessed Allah He who owns everyone and everything If He gives, you get If He denies, no one can give
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Ya ce, "Kai Malam/ Wai ka zo aski ne/ Ko kuma ka zo kai wa'azi ne?/ In ma wa'azin ne za kai/ Zauna ga turmi a gaban ka/ Kai ta yin wa'azin ka/ Mata su ba guntun tsaba"/ Amma tun da ya rantse/ Shi bai wa makaho aski/	He said, "Listen, Mister Have you come for barbing For to preach? If you want to preach Sit down, here's a pestle and mortar Do your preaching Women will reward you" But since he has sworn He will not cut a blind person's hair
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This segment records full dialogues of the interaction between the protagonist and the antagonist. Yet the protagonist himself reveals his superstitious side in the narrative. This is reflected in the way he switches the point-of-view narration from first-person to third-person when the dialogue involves uttering something spiritually unpalatable to him. An example is shown below:

Original narrative	Third Person	First-person transposition
Ya ce, "Ai akwai dalili"/	He said, "there is a reason"	He said, "there is a reason"
In ya yi wa makaho aski/	If <i>he</i> cuts the hair of blind	If <i>I</i> cut the hair of blind
Rannan ba ya samun sa'a/	<i>He</i> runs out of luck that day	<i>I</i> will run out of luck that day

In the first-person transposition, the protagonist shifts the characters' focus from the protagonist to the antagonist—because the dialogue of the antagonist is morally abhorrent to the protagonist, who will not accept uttering the expression "ba na samun sa'a" (I don't get lucky), as if such an utterance would translate into real-time lack of luck for the protagonist. The protagonist eventually persuades the barber to cut his hair, but not without making him go through an unsavory experience during which the barbing becomes so painful that the protagonist starts to beg the barber to stop until he reluctantly agrees.

Reforming the Genre of Hausa Beggar-Minstrel Oral Poetry

The craft of the beggar-minstrels in Nigeria has not shown much development from when it started in the 1970s. Indeed, with current transnational flows of media influences creating new genres of Hausa techno pop and rap music, minstrelsy is definitely a genre on its way out. While ignored by mainstream Hausa scholars and marketers, it provides a critical perspective on the preservation of community theater.

There are many ways in which this creative performance art form can be "globalized" and oriented towards sustainable development—both to restore the dignity of the beggar-minstrels as performing artists, and also create dynamic employment opportunities which harness their skills. These strategies may include the following:

1. Form a musician's collective that recognizes minstrel music as an art form. This will involve "regularizing" the minstrel performing arts as a form of art in its own right, motivated by the creative impulse of the artist, whether minstrel or not.
2. Re-orient minstrel music to focus on concepts and issues. This can be done by re-contextualizing the religious orientation of the minstrel songs; as well as by encouraging the minstrels to use the meter of their conventional songs.

3. Provide institutional empowerment for the minstrels, by treating their craft as an art form.
4. Create linkages between the beggar-minstrels and structured language study centers to further enrich their popular usage and spread of Hausa language.
5. Suggest more thematic subject matter for the beggar-minstrels, as can be done, for instance, in the case of Muhammadu Dahiru Daura.
6. Organize regular workshops and seminars for the beggar-minstrels where they can share their experiences with each other, and form their own internal linkages.
7. Promote beggar-minstrel music through structured marketing strategies such as tapes, CDs, Internet online stores, etc.
8. Professionalize the craft of beggar-minstrel oral poetry by making them structured performing artists.
9. Provide short term training for the beggar-minstrels to further sharpen their skills, and thus gradually wean them away from street begging and orienting them to seeing oral poetry as an employment option.

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Excerpts from *Idi Wanzami*

- Ni ne fa Muhammadu Dahiru I am Muhammad Dahiru Daura
Daura/
Ni ne na Binta baban Audu/ I am Binta's husband and Audu's father
Da bara aka san mu/ We're renowned as street beggars
Ga kuma Audu da Audu/ And here're Abdu and Abdul (choir)
.....
Maganar Idi Wanzami/ This is about Idi Wanzami [the barber]
Na tashar Gagawa/ Of Gagawa motor park
Askin sa ya fi fiɗa ciwo!/ Whose barbing is worse than being skinned
Idi Wanzami,/ Idi Wanzami
Ka ji yana yin askin/ When he is barbing
Kamar ana fidar dan taure!/ As if they are cutting up a goat
- Idi Wanzami,/ Idi Wanzami
Aska da tausayi, shi babu/ The knife is more merciful [than he is]
- Wai wanzaman kirki,/ You see, normal barbers
Su na yawo da zabira/ Keep their razors in [zabira] duffel satchel
Idi Wanzami,/ Idi Wanzami
Sai ya zubo su a sanho/ Keeps his razors in a scabbard
- Askan sa guda huɗu/ He has four razors
Ko wacce aska ga sunan ta:/ Each has its own identity and name
Daya 'kura kya ci da gashi',/ One is 'hyena, eat all'
Daya 'ladan ki na jikin ki',/ Another is 'your cut your own payment'
Akwai wata 'wa aka samu?'/ There is another, 'who we do have here?'
Sannan ga 'kare dangi'/ Then there's 'weapon of mass destruction'
Amma ita 'kare dangi',/ This weapon of mass destruction
Idan ta fito daga sanho/ If ever it comes out of the scabbard
Rannan mutum dubu sa kare!/ It will do away with over 1,000 people
.....
Idi na tashar Gagawa/ Idi, of tashar Gagawa
Akwai wata aska ta sa,/ There is another one of his razors
Ka ji ta na daga sanho/ While still in the scabbard
Amma ta cinye tsokar kai!/ It will remove a person's scalp!
- Askar wanzami,/ And the razor?
Ka ji ma sunan ta: / Listen to its name
'warɓaɓiyati burbat,/ 'warɓaɓiyati burbat,
Summa barridi kal'!/ Summa barridi kal'!
Daya 'Kuljama'u jamila'/ Another is called 'Kuljama'u Jamila'

'Kuljama'u jamila?','
 Wannan ba a biya mata lada/
 Da kanta ma ta dɓiba!/
 Idan ana yin askin./
 Rabi ta kwaso suma/
 Sannan rabi ta dɛbo nama!/'

Kulmaja jamila?
 Does not need any payment [when used]
 It will take its payment itself!
 When the razor is used in barbing
 It will remove half of the hair
 And half of the scalp!