

Short-Circuited: Traditional Muslim Hausa Music and the Threats of Transnational Technopop in Northern Nigeria—Strategies for Survival and Preservation

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Paper presented at the conference, « Why safeguard our musical heritage for the future ? » an academic and cultural conference, under the auspices of the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage, Abu Dhabi, October 3rd and 4th, 2009

Introduction

Mainstream popular traditional Hausa music is divided into two distinct categories – the instrumental accompaniment, and the vocals. This division might seem trite; but it should be pointed out that vocals form the main component of the music. It is very common for Hausa musical groups to play on one type of instrument – predominantly a percussion instrument such as the *kalangu* or “African” drum, maintaining more or less the same beat throughout the song. The skills of the lead “musician” are essentially in the philosophy and poetics of his songs.

The Genre of Muslim Hausa Music

About three distinct structures typify Muslim Hausa music. In the first instance, even if it has no specific instruments, but relying on the voice, it is still called *music*. Secondly, it is predominantly a single-instrument process in which a single type of instrument, mainly a drum, is used in a variety of combinations, with the lyricist providing the focal point of the music – the words, which with some musicians such as Muhammad Dahiru Daura, a blind beggar minstrel poet, can be in the form of operetta. Third is the gender dimension of Hausa music which sees a strict separation of the sexes – in effect a reflection of the Hausa traditional society which segregates the sexes. Thus Hausa traditional music, like most musical forms around the world, is based on a single gender voice – either male or female; but rarely a combination of the two in the same composition

The most distinctive characteristic of subject matter of mainstream traditional Hausa musicians is their client-focused nature. The subject matter of the songs could either be a courtier, an emir, a wealthy person, an infamous person, or simply iconic interpretations of the mutability of life. Thus Hausa “music” excels on its *vocal* qualities—with Hausa musicians producing songs of utter philosophical and poetic quality, reflecting Hausa proverbs—rather than instrumental virtuosity.

When Hausa societies became more cosmopolitan, and began to absorb influences from other cultures, limited mixed-mode instrumental “groups” started to appear, combining the percussion instruments with predominantly stringed instruments such as *goge*, *kukuma* (fiddles) leading the orchestra, or as in the case of *koroso* music, a combination of *sarewa* (flute), *duman girke* (drums) and *lalaje* – calabash discs pierced in a stick to form a rattle. Rarely are there musical combos with string, percussion and wind instruments in the *same* band. Indeed wind instruments, such as *kakaki* (trumpet) are mainly royal palace instruments, while *sarewa* which is predominantly used in Fulani music genre, is often a solo instrument used on its own, or accompanied by voice.

Traditional Hausa music and musicians were often divided into specific categories, just like any music genre. The first was *Makadan Yaki* (war musicians) and who flourished from mid 19th century up to 1920. Singing for palace armies of Sokoto territories such as Gobir, Kebbi, and Argungu, these 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 to create a musical tone, e.g. a ring beaten with a metal rod), *kurya* (a variety of drum) and *molo* (a three-stringed “guitar” like a lute) each accompanied with a backing choir.

The second category, from 1900 were *Makadan Sarakuna* (Emir’s palace musicians) – centering their musical instrumentation around drum orchestras. Again found predominantly around Sokoto basin, these included Buda Dantanoma Argungu (1858-1933), Ibrahim Gurso Mafara (1867-1954), Salihu Jankidi Sakkwato (1852 to 1973), Aliyu Dandawo Argungu (1925 to 1966), Ibrahim Narambada Isa (1875-1960), and Muhammadu Sarkin Taushin Sarkin Katsina (1911-1990). Their main music styles 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 3 feet long), *turu* (a large drum). Although predominantly palace musicians, nevertheless they use their skills to sing about other issues such as politics, importance of traditional culture, etc. Included in this category were also Musa Dankwairo (1909-1991), Sa’idu Faru (b.1932), Sani Aliyu Dandawo Yauri (b. 1949), and Abu Dankurma Maru (b.1926), among others.

The third category of traditional Hausa musicians was *Makadan Sana’a/Maza* (those who sing for members of specific occupational guilds and professions, predominantly male occupations). Perhaps the most famous of these was Muhammadu Bawa Dan Anace (1916-1986) whose main, although not exclusive, specialty was singing for traditional wrestlers.

However, the most eclectic category was *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 incorporate a variety of styles and subject matter—marking a departure from a closeted traditional society to a more cosmopolitan product of transnational flow of media influences. These included Hassan Wayam, Ahmadu Doka, Mamman Shata, Dan Maraya Jos, and others.

Hausa female popular singers were very few – perhaps due to the low class status often afforded to musicians in the Hausa society. Generally music and popular entertainment are not seen as credible or acceptable career options for women in a traditionally closeted society. Nevertheless, the few women musicians exist to provide female-themed entertainment for especially married women in *purdah*. The most notable of this category of Hausa musicians was Uwaliya Mai Amada, a female vocalist accompanied by an orchestra of women calabash musicians in a music genre referred to as *amada*.

The Transnational Transition—Hausa Technopop

In the early to mid 1980s, the most influential transnational music form in urban northern Nigeria —both on the radio stations and in the club circuit—was African-American electrotechno. Afrika Bambaata and Soul Sonic Force’s “Planet Rock”—itself inspired by German pioneers Kraftwerk’s “Trans-Europe Express”—led the way in 1982 to an explosion of discofied funk beats driven by the central engine of synthesizers. It was the already popular funk music (Munich Machine, Cerrone, Giorgio Moroder, Chic, Brass Construction)

reinvented. The massive popularity of Afrika Bambaata was reinforced by music from groups such as Cybotron, D-Train, Midnight Star, C+C Music Factory, Cold Crush Brothers, Gap Band, Full Force, and others.

These music forms with their transnational appeal easily displaced the local forms of music generation, particularly among urban youth who grew up listening to it on the local FM radio stations. Soon enough, urban youth across Muslim northern Nigeria felt encouraged enough to engage with the new music form not just as consumers, but also as producers initially as “robotic” dance groups which organized competitions among young people from various parts of urban northern Nigeria. However, their first break as producers, rather than consumers, came in 1985 when the Kano State History and Culture Bureau, as part of its entertainment division, acquired a Casiotone MT-140 electronic organ. Its tone bank has 210 different sounds, It has a built in speaker, 210 sound tone bank, 20 different rhythms and 20 different tones – giving it orchestral appeal. Resident performers with the Bureau started experimenting with its tones, and soon enough a catchy “modern disco” sound was created and a coterie of performers from the Bureau graced wedding ceremonies and other official functions performing the new music. This process became an instant hit because it is readily identified with “modern” music of the West, and lacks the cultural baggage associated with traditional acoustic Hausa music.

Thus the Casiotone provided aspiring Hausa instrumentalists in Kano with a multi-instrument facility, without being burdened by the necessity of learning music theory or rules of formal composition. The outcome was based on a substitute principle – i.e. providing alternatives to acoustic ethnic instruments that would not have the musical flexibility afforded by the Casiotone electronic organ. It established its credibility as a modern instrument and the lyrics by the instrumentalists were resolutely Hausa—conferring domesticity on the resultant sound. For the first time in the history of Hausa music, a new sound has arrived; for while there were bands with modern conventional instruments of guitars, saxophones and drum kits and singing in Hausa language (e.g. Bala Miller, Sonny Lionheart), the new wave of Hausa music owes its creative roots to the synthesizer chip. Further, and most significantly, it freed music from its “low class” status by conferring on the musicians a sophisticated transnational outlook which enabled them to produce “kidan Turawa” (European music).

This signaled the creation of what I call Hausa Technopop music – a genre of Hausa music rooted in urban synthesized sounds that approximate Western music forms, while retaining the vocal structure of Hausa music form. This is because the instrumentalists merely use the electronic organ to reproduce the vocal structures of Hausa music, rather than creating a complex composition. This is shown in the way the harmony of the sound by the synthesizer is molded on the vocal pattern of the singing.

In March 1990 the Hausa video film industry was born with the release of a video film titled *Turmin Danya* (dir. Salisu Galadanci). The first Hausa video films from 1990 to 1994 relied on traditional music ensembles to compose the soundtracks, with acoustic traditional *koroso* music predominating. The Hausa video film to pioneer a changeover to electronic organ music was *In Da So Da Kauna* (dir. Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino) in 1995 whose soundtrack was composed with the Casiotone MT-140. The soundtrack became extremely popular and unique in having what the audience saw as indigenized transnational sound.

Clearly seeing the future in keyboard music, a music studio was formed in Kano in 1996, Iyan-Tama Multimedia. Its first purchase was the Yamaha soft synthesizer series, starting

with PSR-220. In 1999 the studio purchased a higher Yamaha PSR-730. With a vast expanded range of Country, Jazz, Dance, Latin, Rock, Soul and Waltz, the PSR-730 opened up the doors to revolutionizing Hausa video film music—and subsequently, Hausa popular music. It was this machine that was used to compose the definitive Hausa Technopop anthem in October 1999 – “Sangaya”—the soundtrack of a film with the same name, *Sangaya* (1999, dir. Auwalu Sabo). Thus the sound in *Sangaya* heralded a departure from the African-American electrotechno beat of the early 1980s and a move towards embracing the second transnational influence on Hausa music – Hindi film soundtrack.

Thus the sound of the Yamaha PSR-220 and its variants provided an instant appeal to the Hausa musician seeking ways to explore combination of sounds without being hampered by inability to play real traditional instruments. It also made it possible to do the impossible in Hausa music – produce a perfect blend of various instruments, thus breaking the monopoly of the single-instrument characteristic of traditional Hausa music. In so doing, it enables Hausa video film soundtrack artistes the opportunity to approximate the creative space of Hindi film music, which they avidly copy. More significantly, however, *Sangaya* introduced a female voice in a duet form with a male voice – Hindi film style. This subsequently became a template in Hausa media space, such as by 2008, even radio advertisements for products and services as diverse as airline ticket to spaghetti have to have duet form jingle in which a male and an alternating female voice sell the product or service. This in fact earned the genre the derisive tag of “Nanaye” (girlish). Even Sufi adherents, who cherished the *bandiri* (frame drum) during their performances, took to the new sound of synthesizer.

As a new genre of Hausa music, Hausa Technopop had three main advantages over the traditional music forms of the Hausa. First it appealed to urban youth and gave them the atmosphere of partaking in international “world music” scene by reproducing sounds they believed were universal. Second, its very international association gives them an air of sophistication and credibility – normally associated with educated, and respected, members of the community. Thus it confers credibility on the profession which it hitherto did not have. Third, the subject matter of their compositions – life and love – created a more acceptable general template than the traditional musicians’ focus on specific paying clients.

Conclusion

The most significant effect of media flow of influences into the Hausa popular culture is radical transformation of Hausa music. A push and pull factor is at play in the process. The Hausa traditional music seemed to have outlived its client-focus in a depressed economy where the clients cannot afford the praise singing that keeps the traditional musicians in jobs. Further, quite a few of the musicians have declared in various interviews that they do not wish their progeny to succeed them in the business. A typical example is this response by Alhaji Sani Dan Indo, a *kuntigi* musician who responded to a question of whether he wants his children to succeed him.

“I definitely don’t want my son to become a musician...I would prefer he goes to school and get good education, so that even after I die, he can sustain himself, but I don’t want him to follow my footsteps, because I really suffered in this business.” Interview with Sani Dan Indo, a Hausa popular culture *kuntigi* musician, *Annur*, Vol 1, August 2001: 48.

Thus with the reluctance of the traditional musicians to pass on their skills to their own children, or even open music “schools” to train others, and with the legendary ones dying (e.g. Mamman Shata, Haruna Oje, Musa Dankwairo), the Hausa traditional musical genre

therefore become wide open to influences that follow the path of least resistance. Hindi film culture provided this road-map, and the Yamaha soft synthesizer enabled younger Hausa “musicians” to follow the path to transnational flow of influences and create what they hope to be considered “modern” Hausa music. In so doing, they have radically altered the landscape of Hausa music and its status in the Hausa society. Consequently, by 2004 the image of the musician as a praise-singer, has been altered by a new social re-classification made possible by the popularity of using the new media to express music, even in a traditional form. Traditional Hausa music, which still appeals to the older generation, did not actually die – it just ceased to be relevant to the teen brigade.

Strategies for Sustainable Survival

In the face of the transnational onslaught of media influences, I would suggest that resurrection and preservation of Hausa traditional music lies in creation of what I call Hausa Art Music—a music genre that emphasizes the harmonic blending of different Hausa traditional instruments in a single performance, with less emphasis on vocals. This is revolutionary in two ways: first it departs from the single-instrument dominance of traditional Hausa music; second it de-emphasizes the vocal content – thus making it more accessible to wider audience. The strategies for sustainable survival of Traditional Hausa Art Music would therefore revolve around the following Plan of Action:

Objectives

- provide young Muslim Hausa youth with a clear vision of their traditional musical heritage
- facilitate a contemporary instrumental base for creating musical textures with Hausa traditional instruments in a new form
- create opportunities for young traditional Hausa musicians to expand their musical repertoire and take Hausa traditional music to the World Music level.

Research

- to acquire a methodological knowledge base on field recording strategies for the documentation of Hausa traditional music
- to collect and display music data by classifying repertoires, music instruments and ensemble arrangements in Hausa experimental music
- to create a public space where Hausa experimental music is displayed

Training

- to motivate and train specialized local staff to continue the culturally vital task of documenting and preserving Muslim Hausa traditional music
- to facilitate focused training on music theory. Currently Hausa musicians play everything by ear. They need to understand how music is composed, and the various real instruments used in music production.
- explore collaborations with similar youth clusters – for instance, Lahore in Pakistan (or similar) can liaise with local agencies to see what can come up from a cross-national but similar-cultured musical collaboration.
- train young musicians on concert production, packaging and presentation.
- encourage local collaboration among local traditional musicians.
- source for grants to purchase real musical instruments with which they can use to produce music according to their taste.

- hold music competitions that can produce the most promising young musicians in participating countries, and enable such to benefit from a short exposure to folk musical experiences in other collaborating countries and communities.

Development

- facilitate the expansion of musical repertoire of the target youth to other genres of world music to enable young local musicians to collaborate with other musicians producing different genres of music (e.g. jazz, classical, Qawwali, etc).
- advocate for the creation of policy framework that recognize young musicians as part of the popular culture mainstream.
- encourage the formation of horizontal networks among the artists that leads to musical improvisations and collaborations between different genres that can be perfected to world standard.
- explore avenues in which facilitate the participation of Muslim Hausa female musicians in the music industry.

Outcomes

- to create a systematic musicological data based on various media (sound tapes, video, photo, transcriptions) to be used for further research and for educational and public purposes
- to make accessible for public appreciation the rich and unique Musical tradition of the Muslim Hausa

Preserving traditional music keeps open a window into how a particular culture experiences life and the land, and how they live (or lived) on it. It's like saving human diversity. Financing and a development strategy are very important in order for the artists to work effectively and respect tradition, the artists have to know they are preserving a national, as well as world heritage.

Proactive Measures

In order to be proactive in the preservation of Hausa music, there is a need to provide the genre with a new direction. This new direction is attempted with an experimented I tried called *Improvisations in Hausa Traditional Music* in which I organized three soloists – Suleiman (flute), Auwal (duman girke bongo drums) and Aliyu (gurmi lute) to record a CD, which we did. The result is a CD called Gari Ya Waye (morning). and we named the band Alfijir (dawn).

There are four tracks in the CD – all instrumental. No piano synthesizers or vocals! The tracks are Alfijir (15.11), Karen Mota (14.33), Arziki (14.39) da kuma Shauki (3.00). The main idea behind producing the CD, for which I was the Music Director, is to showcase the individual instrumental talents of Hausa traditional musicians – for too often Hausa traditional music is too vocal-oriented at the expense of the musical instrument. Further, I created long tracks of over 14 minutes each to enable each instrument to be heard in all its glory – difficult to do in a short musical composition. The album covers are shown.



The new innovation in Hausa music – Alfijir.

The names of the band and the album are all in Ajami script – the Hausa domesticated Arabic script. This is to further increase awareness of ajami as a literary tool, and introduce it in non-religious discourse and thus make it more popular.

The CD was “launched” on Sunday 4th October at the conference in Abu Dhabi as an example of a proactive measure that could be taken to preserve Hausa music in a new World Music form. I took along 10 copies of the CD, and within two minutes they were all gone, and people were asking for more! I have not released the CD in Nigeria, nor do I particularly wish to – however, I am looking for sponsorship to enable me to produce it in large quantities so that it can either be given *free*, or be sold so cheaply that it won’t be worthwhile pirating it (e.g. 50NGN per copy).

The Abu Dhabi conference has motivated me to explore another proactive measure in preserving traditional Hausa music, and that is by forming an NGO, the Foundation for Hausa Performance Arts. This is an independent agency which will serve as a collaborative partner to Al Ain Center for Music in the World of Islam when it takes off in 2011, as well as form partnerships with similar centers around the world dedicated to the preservation of traditional musics of the Muslim peoples. The Foundation will have less academicians and more field ethnomusicologists – the idea is not to engage on empty dialogues about music, but to actually capture and preserve traditional musics. For this reason, I deliberately chose only those I know are committed to concept, rather than seeking “high table” kind of individuals. The journey is long; but a Chinese sage was claimed to have said, “the journey of one thousand miles begins with a single step.” It is my hope that recording Alfijir is our first step towards revitalizing the richness, glory and beauty of Hausa traditional musics that are in danger of being swept away by tuneless “fiyano” synthesizers.