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Power, Culture, and Religion: Communicative Purpose of the Genre of the Ballads of Borno Shehus

Bulus Wayar

Abstract

The paper describes, classifies and ascertains the communicative of genre of Borno Shehus of Nigeria. The paper argues that genres of any sort originate from the totality of human endeavours as they capture all aspects of human development. Accordingly, a text written or spoken embodies the moral values of the socio cultural aspects of the users. From functionality, the paper unveils that genres serve as means of depicting communal discursive practices as against individualism. The sample population comprised the three Borno Emirates, namely: Bama, Dikwa, and Maiduguri, all in northern Nigeria. In retrieving the data, the research used interview and observation methods to draw on a conclusion. Since the primary aim was to offer empirical evidence with regard to particular linguistic occurrences, qualitative technique was deemed appropriate. The paper contends that adequate knowledge of history, religion, and social practices were essential instruments in drawing up a conclusion on the description, and classification of Borno ballads. Similarly, genres of ballads of Borno Shehu could best be described as products of invented and formulated collections of religious, political, historic, and socio-cultural practices of set of people who are rich in culture and tradition. Accordingly, linguistic knowledge alone is inadequate when classifying, describing and understanding the genre of the Borno Shehus; rather, sufficient awareness of the discursive practices of the bards' performances, which are linked to the emirates' historicity, play a significant role in the realisation of Borno ballads.

Keywords: Folklore Genre, Ballads, Communicative Practice, Performances

Introduction

Genre analysis offers an in-depth understanding on language use. Being socio - cultural cum religious practices, genre analysis can provide with precision the communicative practices of a group of people (Huckin, 2005). Accordingly, genre analysis defines what happens with texts and as the world is ever dynamic and uncertain probably due to mixture of the various kinds of texts lumped up within a single genre (Fairclough, 1995; Bhatia, 1999; Konigsberg, 2007; Berkenttoter and Huckin, 2005; Feuer, 2012; Gledhill, 2015).

Although genres may be somewhat distinct; they generally share some commonalities with each other using the following (i) cognitive elements: theme, goals, plans, (ii) situation and participants (iii) linguistic elements: phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and textuality. Thus, analysing how texts are used implies the recognition of the complex existence of genre (Tudor, 2014). This means genre analysis may be used to explain both moral and social practices of language use. In other words, a genre spoken or written of whatever length embodies social and ideological values.

Situating the discussion to folklore, which is the focus of the paper, certain questions need to be tackled. How are the communicative purposes established especially those transmitted through oral sources considering the multiple functions of texts? Can genre analysts fathom any systematic ways of identifying genres? Is there any single approach to be applied? (Todorov, (2014). While these questions are germane, they are difficulties due to the huge semblance among genres and super genres.

The literature argues that the identity of a particular genre and its communicative objectives are hard to ascertain as most genre analysts do not have the full knowledge of what is contained. This is due to the fact that most analysts are mere researchers and do not belong to the specialists' community under study (Wenger, 2008). Further, just as the purposes of communication may vary significantly so also are the cultural productions. This is usually the case partly due to the differences between certain methods or elements. Therefore, genres as defined in this paper is considered as a product of a given cultural forms of language use. Elaborating on the subject generally, in literature, for example, the genre of television may contain sub - genres of entertainment, music, sales promotions, etc. Similarly, here are genres such as politics, romance, history, feminism, etc. Within the genre of music, there are other genres such as blues, afro, etc. Furthermore, in cinema, there are genres like melodrama, realist,

feminist, Western, African, neo - colonial, among others. All these sub classifications pose a difficult situation for the analyst. Yet, it is a challenge to face.

When genres are being classified, it is based on the assumption that there are dissimilarities among linguistic forms which are used to differentiate them from one another. One way to group genres is the identification of the context of use and point of convergence with other elements. Thus, the classification of classical literature since the 19th century was primarily based on the shared commonalities among nature, literature and, society at that time. As such, literature which was generally a part of the collective life experiences and encounters does not contain authorship; rather, credence was accorded to the society as it was primarily oral and the transmission was strictly adhered to the purposes of the texts. Although genre's objectives can be better understood and identified by examining the totality of the contents, nevertheless, the linguistic and structural features of a text's shape and content might differ owing to the naturally occurring connection.

Following Adesokan (1998), ballads as discussed in this paper belong to the genres of folklore and they are peoples' heritage. The scholar states that traditional folk music is an authentic material which reflects community's values, norms and religious beliefs. On the other dimension, Funk and Wagnall (2016) see traditional folk music as a mark of the peoples 'identity as folk music contains socio – cultural values of the producers

Intersection among Tradition, Power, Music and Religion in Ballads Performances

First and foremost, it should be established that the ballads of Borno Shehus are communal practices, drawn from decades of existence of the Borno Dynasties. In fact, many people would rather associate the Dynasties with certain conventions and practices which have been in practice several decades ago. Notable among these practices is the fusion of tradition and religion. Harwood (2016, p. 529) states that traditional folklores perform a number of functions as they contain not only music but

also non-musical concepts which include unity, restoration of the past events, etc. For instance, in Borno Dynasties, the *kakaki* (3-4 meters long metal and royal ensembles) is not just a musical instrument, but also a repository of various institutions of the African society as it is used in political jingles, during religious rituals, entertainments, recreational, and communicative purposes. In fact, rarely does any African occasion such as chieftaincy installations, social and political gathering, etc. hold without the use of *kakaki*. Euba (2020) says that the didactic functions of music can be alluded through the devices of linguistics and literature. Further, Nketia (2019) observes the intersection between people, and their historical values which is conveyed through diverse channels one is musical form. In a related development, Kolawale (2019) argues that traditional folk music serves as a unifying force and assists the people to trace their origins. Socially, and historically, making recourse to heroic performances is beyond performances but a deliberate attempt by the heritage custodians to bring to fore the past to the past.

In African traditional music, creative performance, symbioses dance, drama and, costumes are inseparable as they define their existence (Nzewi, 2015). When the performances are carried out at palaces, the songs do not only perform a number of functions such as entertainments, refreshments, etc. but also, the motivational role as the bards impel, encourage royal fathers so as to emulate their predecessors. Furthermore, the songs serve as recollections of the past events as the chronicles of kings and their genealogical references are linked to the present (Olaosebikan, 2018). Thus, the bards make eulogies to the past kings, and, recount the successful past events in which the kings' forefathers had outstanding performances. In like manner, Marriem (2019) observes the connection among human, sound and behaviour and, concludes that the sound production of people is the result of their understanding of nature. Similarly, Sachs in Nettl (2014) says that the people's temperament is specifically reflected in music and dance.

Relationally, folklores and, recreations are intertwined in most Nigerian cultures. For instance, the same traditional musical performances performed for the royal fathers are equally made public for the non-royal families to participate. The dual functions are rather perceived as shared people's rich cultural heritages which must be displayed for the cherishment of everyone.

This open invitation to the 'the gates' of the palaces is a depiction of commonality of the culture as throughout the moments of celebration, everyone could contribute either directly or otherwise.

Communicative Purposes of Ballads

Are there readily available means to identify and classify purposes for communication typical of oral performances transmitted from the same source for decades with little modifications considering the multiplicity of the functions of texts? Why are the texts capable of performing several functions? How systematic and logical are the manners in which texts function? These questions set the ongoing arguments, although they are somewhat difficult to answer. Thus, the difficulty is in the area of semblance noticeable enough among genres and super genres. Therefore, identifying a particular genre specific communicative objective poses a great challenge to many researchers partly as result of the instruments used, knowledge of the researchers, and the period of study, coupled with the fact that the analysts may not necessarily be members of the communities. Accordingly, their mere linguistic competence cannot offer the required goals. As a means of providing succour, the communicative purposes must be analysed based on the context of the productions.

Furthermore, Swales (1990) argues that genres are dissimilar in a number of ways which means a genre membership is not necessarily defined by particular elements but rather along a broad spectrum of family resemblances. In other words, a genre is determined based on its corresponding link with its communicative purpose. Swales explains that other things such as form, structure and the participants' serve to

determine the identity of a particular genre. In other words, the purpose of using a genre offers a crucial insight in shaping the structure of any piece of discourse. By extension, other allowable linguistic components such as syntax, lexis as well as the extent in which a text works define genre classification. Furthermore, genre is grouped in accordance with its membership with other genres bearing the generic conventions shared by the community of speakers.

Although, text-internal factors might play significant roles in this regard, on their own they offer misleading insights as textual factors themselves depend on their form-function. Nevertheless, there are linguistic forms capable of attracting a variety of discursal values. However, a particular discourse is realisable through several syntactic forms, but they cannot be regarded as ‘free-for all’ kind of situation (Swales, 1990).

While linguistic cues may aid in the realisation of specific generic values, nonetheless, making recourse to non-linguistic factors may facilitate genre description and classification. Consequently, genres can be identified either narrowly, or broadly, which is greatly influenced by the objectives of the investigation.

An interesting instance could be a study of the genre of ballads which are considered as a mixture of different genres, but only one of them is clearly identified. Yet, even the ones which are unsought for, make just a minor difference.

Borno Emirate: Religious and Political Dimension

From historical perspective as recorded centuries ago, religion began to spread across frontiers and governments whether monarchical or democratic setting as a statecraft which is used by those in power to harness authority (Mandaville, 2014; Hamid, 2017). By implication, religion is a resonant political currency and resource in Nigeria.

The State of Kanem Empire which gave rise to Borno emirates came into being during the 8th century and ruled by the Duguwa Dynasty (700-1086) through lineage of *Mai* which later changed to Shehu, (oral source). Ever since, the Kanem Borno Empire has been ruled by Islamic Sayfawa and they chose their own leaders (Barkindo, 1985). Consequently, the Islamic culture had played a crucial political function through decades of its existence. This political practice was not a complete departure from what was obtainable from other sub-Saharan African countries where Islam was and still the major religion. Accordingly, the *Mais* maintained the Islamic system of governance with special adherence to *Sharia*. Therefore, Islamic system of administration has lasted for over hundred decades. For instance, royal families were charged with the sole responsibilities of all the political systems, and the *Chiromas* (first male children of the ruling families) automatically inherited the rulership at the demise of the *Mais*, while other members of the ruling families played the functions of advisory (Cohen, 1967).

The aforementioned along with other factors were some of the factors which led to the intersection of religion, politics and tradition of the state in Nigeria, and religious language and function are routinely employed by the state as the common grammars of everyday politics (Starret, 2014). In fact, in all the 36 states of the federation in Nigeria, religion is being intertwined with the state and used as a tool deployed against opponents in a bid to control the public sphere. Furthermore, cultural attraction, values, and ideology are crucial elements of soft power, not only in Borno State, but also in the entire Nigerian states. Consequently, religion can be perceived as a custodian of power, and Islam in Borno has been actively been performing this role.

Based on narratives data obtained from some respondents and history of Kanem Borno, there used to be seventy-four *Mais* (kings). For administrative purposes, the *Mais* were centralised into Shehus who eventually became the heads of the territories. As the leader, the Shehus were mostly in the company of the *Kongunas* (palace guards/servants). They managed the Shehus' dreams, and reshaped his personality. As

humans, the Shehus had on several occasions for one reason or the other experienced all of the feelings as they ran on the life voyages. There were voyages could be moments of anger which inflamed them; fear due to the incursions of territories by enemies; disgusting feelings, etc. Yet, at some timethey were evoked by well- being, success and good fortunes. These are realities of life which the royal fathers must face as life is a mixture of sadness and joy.

During the reign of Mai Dunama Dabbalemi the 17th Mai of Kanem Borno, having noticed the Mai's mood the *Konguna* were required to compose songs to appease him which marked the beginning of ballad of Borno Shehu. After realising the workability of songs, the bards continued with the strategy. For instance, when a war broke out between the Kanem Borno Empire and the Bulala fighters of Arab origin from Libya, the bards sang the ballads.

Methodology

Research Design

The nature of this research calls for a special method of data retrieval as suggested by (Huckin and Olsen, 2014; Bhatia 1993). They advised researchers to seek information through specialists' consultation as authentic information may be obtained from every well experienced informant. Thus, the main purpose of this paper was to get to know more about the discursive processes and practices of specialist communities – Borno emirates.

Bhatia (1993) recommended the following three demands,

First [the person must] be vast and knowledgeable in the disciplinary culture in which the genre under investigation. Second, [the person must] have a positive attitude towards the specialist's language and be ready to respond appropriately when required to do especially on questions related to the genre under investigation. Third [the person must] be ready to explain and clarify basic answers with regards to the beliefs of the expert members of the disciplinary culture when they exploit language in order to

accomplish their generic goals” (Bhatia, 1993, p. 35-36). The above suggestions were importantly considered while working on this paper. This task was challenging as it required adequate time to be able to accomplish it. Nonetheless, the researcher was able to establish a cordial relationship with the informants. One quality genre analyst must possess include diligence. Retrieving data required a gradual and a deliberate step taken by the researcher as he was the one seeking for information. While this is germane, on the other hand, the current researcher’s knowledge on the data was crucial. Based on aforementioned expert’s suggestions, the current researcher came up with a reasonable specialist list, along with some observable practices.

Research Sample

All the three Borno Emirates have been selected for the study. Palace guards, secretaries, to the Shehus, elder statesmen within the emirates, veteran broadcasters, bards, and scribes, instrumentalists, were the categories of people who constituted the population. These people responded to the interviews of the open-ended questions. The respondents were asked, ‘for how long do you think these songs have been sung? What musical instruments are used by the bards? Do you think the songs are religious or cultural? To what extent has religion influenced power? Does music play a role in the traditional life of the Shehus?

These questions are not only restricted to the interviewees; they also served as the basic search light for the secondary information. On several occasions, the researcher engaged in a number of activities which included observations of speech during interactions with respondents as well as watching video clips of Borno ballads. The videos were watched several times and both the performers’ actions and the audiences constituted some of the observable things. This technique was facilitated through the use of field notes. The essence was to recall with clarity what were retrieved during the course of observations and interactions. This method was the hallmark for sociolinguistic and genre analysis researches.

Date Analysis and Discussions

This section contains the data which are indeed displayed in tables. Two sources of data helped in the analysis. First, the songs were produced by elder statesmen in Borno Emirate, and confirmed through archives safely kept in Borno State Library, while the pictures were retrieved from Borno State Museum.

Table 1

Original text in Kanuri	Literal translation in English
1. <i>Mai tada Mai be</i>	1. King, the son of a king
2. <i>Mai Dunama, nymade'a</i>	2. Mai Dunama you are the One
3. <i>Dabbalemi Adom awanzzbe</i>	3. Dabbalemimorer resilient than his father
4. <i>Dabbalemikonnurozauwo</i>	4. Dabbalemi never gives up in life
5. <i>Dabbalemingaltengawawuzzenyi</i>	5. Dabbalemi who relies on Allah
6. <i>Dabbalemi, Allahshwonezewo</i>	6. Dabbalemi whose tool is Islam
7. <i>Dabbalemiadinkashimomanzewo</i>	

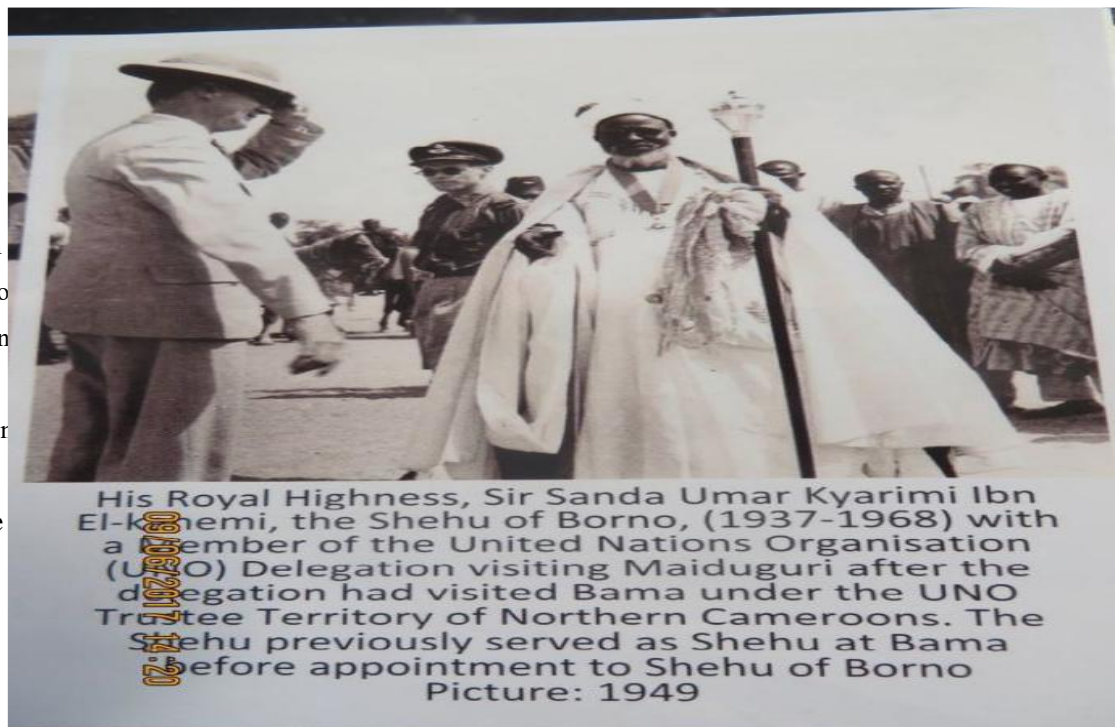
According to the narrator, after the poet finished reciting the poem, the *Mai* immediately re - strategised his armies within a few weeks, faced the Bulala fighters and won the battle within three days of intense fighting. During Shehu Sanda Kyari Ibn Muhammad El –Amin El-Kanemi, 1937-1967, a similar incident occurred when the British demoted him to the rank of District Head of Dikwa, a remote village under the former Borno Empire, but an independent emirate in Borno Emirate. He was succeeded by Mai Chiroma who eventually became the Shehu of Borno. This sudden change affected the dethroned ruler. Again, an *algaita* (traditional musical instrument) was used to produce sweet melodies and recited in the following poem:

Table 2

Original text from Kanuri Language	Literal translation into English
1. <i>Sanda Kyari Sheurramnanami be</i>	1. Sanda, the son of Shehu Kyari Sanda
2. <i>Sanda Kyari fer charalan de kadim</i>	2. Sanda, the son of a prince
3. <i>Wande yiremi Alayendalilla</i>	3. He arrived on a white horse
4. <i>Maina kode Sanda</i>	4. Donot ever cry or worry as Allah has ways for you
5. <i>Kam chijinbawo</i>	5. Ask the Prince because Sanda is a man of purity

Picture of Mai Sanda Umar Kyarimi Ibn El -Kanemi

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Picture



Although all the Shehus have always been Muslims, and, music is not being accorded prestige in Islam, the Borno emperors have managed to combine music and Islam together. Thus, in most of the traditional African and the Kanuri cultures, music is inseparable from social practices. Despite calls and conviction on Kanuri by modern Islamic clerics to retract from using music which is an unislamic practice, (oral sources) celebrations especially those typical of royal enthronement are incomplete without traditional music. This implies that the dynasties of Kanem Borno have maintained a long mutual dependence on both social and, physical universe as life is not a fragmented component of daily encounter; rather, festivals such as *Eid - al- Fitr*, *Ed el- Kabir*, *Eid el Mauloud* and coronations of royal fathers are celebrated with music in stylish manners.

While the music is organised to mark the enthronement of royal leaders and religious ceremonies, the community members who may not be part of procession share and, partake in the ceremonies. This means the social, political and religious structures of the people of Borno especially the royal families are built upon on the notion of the similarities between the spiritual mind and, the political setting with the perception of music as sacred ingredient of social cohesion. As such, the element of collective participation is generally the characteristics of the entire exercise. Therefore, music and, dance are two inseparable instruments of cultural transmissions and the audience's participation is rather a communal responsibility. Nevertheless, certain group of people is considered more responsive and obliged by the tradition to perform special functions. These are the royal bards. Their duties are to constantly organise concerts which take place in multiple ways with the audiences especially the little children being part of the whole exercises. Immediately the show starts the members of the audience can be seen actively engaging in informal arrangements. As the whole exercise progresses, the participating audience intermittently applaud which is also ritualised, but the actions are completely restricted to stylised expressions. This sort of emotional behaviour makes the whole exercise entertaining in that its associated components such as calling of the best performer's names, is tolerated and, considered as signs of ardent approval. In response, the artists concerned become more impelled and try to outplay others.

Like parliamentary deliberations which must hold within a parliamentary building, the ballads occur at recreational spheres, usually at the Shehus' Palaces. From the beginning to the termination of the exercises, the instances of both verbal and nonverbal expressions are not only noticeable but appreciated, while refusing to act accordingly may not attract a punishment, but alienates one from the societal expectation.

One of the characteristics of the ballads is the distinctiveness in terms of the large number of colourful instruments used by individual performer. Even the players of simple instruments such as *kakaaki*, *ganga kura* and *algaita* take delight in

manipulating the instruments in such ways to produce simultaneous sounds while body movements are determined by rhythms and, melodious combinations of many factors: personal disposition, cultural obligation, etc.

As it is the case with all formal settings, there is a sort of order among the performers which is often referred to as leader-chorus relationships, generally structured into group of vocalists or instrumentalists. The question which bothers the current researcher's mind is the continued replication of the performances of traditional standards and disciplines. The representatives of this tradition have maintained their historical works, and their poetry and, religion with a strong mechanism which defies modernity in northern Nigeria, the people's culture, and tradition have resisted transformation.

The instrumentalists are a group of non-commercial musicians recognised by the society as significant with technical skills in their own rights. The *algaita* is usually the lead poet, while the mimic and, unspoken words of the drums respond accordingly. The discernment of the meaning conveyed is left for the specialists who may not necessarily be the performers, but any ardent supporter and culturally inclined personality. From the inception of ballads, successive Shehus have indicated interest as they enjoy the tradition, which is a mixture of Islam, politics, and culture. Consequently, it should be noted that the ballads are not only sources of entertainments to the monarchs, audiences, and passers – by, but they also represent rich dynastic euphony of the African folk tradition. Without any form of reservation, these kinds of music contain the capacity to revitalise the much-threatened tradition as the ballads are emblematic in that they reflect the cultural identities of a rigid society whose adoption of modernity remains sluggish. Therefore, the Kanuri culture in this regard has not only overcome the romanticised twenty first century ideas of traditional music, but also demonstrated the rigidity of the people's customs.

Specifically, there is a reason for the preservation of the tradition – inability to identify the lines between religion and culture by the people. Although the preserved traditional

ballads are from antiquated or oral sources, they are not regarded with the same fetishistic purity as it is the case in time past. The slight differences are more suggestive of alterations introduced by the dancers than of the wordings. Yet, these mild changes go unnoticed. Of course, this inference equally means it is easy to argue that the current ballads are not mere replications of the earlier ones or simply the resultant effect of corrupted version as ballads are nobody's property. Furthermore, there is no promotion of nonentity or carelessness is expected as all the singers or performers have no 'right' to introduce uncultured practices in the performances which means the actors are not merely poets, but people with specialty, intuitive skills and, moral obligation to abide by. Undoubtedly, this communal composition may remain unchanged for a long period of time. For instance, the use of *algaita* which is a double reed wind instrument and, the *ganga*, a wide hollow, double-faced drum made of wood and animal skin have not been modified. Also, the colorations of the costumes which comprise long gowns, ropes, swords, the dancing steps, rhymes etc. are being sustained.

The non-adaptation to the modern styles or methods of performance does not imply savageness of the performances; rather, it depicts the mystery and rigidity of the Kanuri tradition. Indeed, a great many of the performers, although disguised in war dresses and carry weapons, they represent origin of the ancient Borno Emperors which had fought several wars with their neighbours. The Kanem Borno Empire being the centre of Islamic revolution in 5th and 6th centuries in the Western Sudan, the Borno Empire has sustained an Islamic emblem which is the sword. This symbolism portrays the ruler ships, victories and powers of the Borno dynasties as leaders in the past were successful warriors, although they lost on many occasions to more superior fighters from rebels from Chad and Libya.

From the social viewpoint, wars usually come alone with unpleasant experiences, which mean ballads invariably relief tension in social relations and they provide intellectual capacity to the trouble mind. This function is not only applicable to Kanem

Borno Empire but to virtually all African cultures as bards engage in the noble duty of entertainment and esoteric education. In case of Borno Shehus, the ballads are also used to welcome the Shehus' visitors; to provide entertainments during religious festivals, etc. It is therefore cardinal to note that the ballads have enjoyed a long history of edification through entertainment. However, the contemporary Kanuri youth have seen ballads performing only the role of entertainment during festive periods. This has some consequences.

Findings

The ballads of Borno Shehus are rich cultural performances. While linguistics is a crucial tool of analysis, there are a number of practices which are external and spoken language adequately account for. Thus, the genre of Borno Shehus cannot only be seen as responses to recurring situations but admixture of actions which are socially, religiously and politically defined. In other words, the genres are collections of forms and structures of people bound by rich cultural milieu.

Accordingly, this paper considers genre of the Borno Shehus as collective communicative resources, with complex networks of various kinds. Furthermore, the ballads of Borno Shehus are narrative compositions in rhythmic verses suitable for singing as they tell stories with a refrain, and short repeated melodies. Although the ballads may have other functions, their key characteristics are storytelling, entertainments and encouragements. They achieve these through a careful selection of words which depict heroism and lineages.

Traditionally, they are products of specific group with great value placed on collective participation, without any trace of improvisation, or personalisation. They are sung to suit the contextual demands of specific performances. Although the ballads are used for dance, but they also celebrate characters as in praise poems, and used allusions, filling the songs with commentaries and attitudes towards events, rather than describing events.

Debatably, the defining feature of the ballads' tradition is the cultural connection they embed as a vestige of the society, enjoyed by religious leaders. In other words, the emphasis is upon a symbiotic connection between the poets and the community. Thus, ballads are communal compositions, which must be ascribed in the first instance to the functioning of the society.

Conclusion

The sub-genres of the ballads of Borno Shehu can be ascribed to the interconnectivity between history, religion, politics and culture. On the other hand, the genres are somewhat related to every day conversations which are characterised by back lashes, and interruptions from the audiences and the ballads' address is to specific individuals in a specific setting. Thus, structured songs like the ones under investigation could be described as a formal discussion/interaction on a particular topic which is strictly controlled by an institutional set of rules presided over by professional bards – members of the Shehus palace musicians. The style of the songs is characterised by the leading vocalists: *algaita* men, *gaga kura* (big drums) followed by smaller drums and the communication process generally involves using ecology as a source with the body, the instruments and paralinguistic cues all playing vital functions. In other words, language among bards is an embodiment of communication, but there are many other things which can be explicated from the viewpoint of contexts and socio - culture.

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