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Symbols of leadership and conceptions of power in Hausa Literature: An intertextual reading of a Dodo folktale and a popular song

Symbols of leadership and conceptions of power in Hausa Literature

This article presents a brief exploration of the interface between the collective or ancestral archetype of the “Dodo”, symbolising destructive power in Hausa tales and the more individual interpretation and stylistic concerns of a contemporary popular singer, Ali Na Maliki, addressing, at another level, the subject of power and leadership portrayed by the traditional chief. The paper will focus on the interaction between genres, seen in the light of intertextuality as defined by Michael Riffaterre and M.H. Abrams among others. It highlights, moreover, the thematic and aesthetic contribution of the oral artist Ali Na Maliki to contemporary Hausa orature and culture. It reposes on an analysis of the manipulation of certain images and animal symbols of leadership and power borrowed from the world of tales used with a certain degree of innovation in order to evoke, symbolically, the mythical attributes of power in the artistic universe of his songs. **Key words:** Dodo folktales; popular Hausa praise songs, intertextuality; power.

Introduction

There are several challenges confronting research in oral literature in African languages. For the critic of this literature, compartmentalization of genres or categories is perhaps the most serious obstacle. Indeed, as Harold Scheub (1985: 45) underlines, most analysts have steadily neglected the interconnection between categories of oral tradition owing to this analytical compartmentalization. Scheub adds that African language literatures are “the least studied of all of Africa’s verbal art”, as fragmentation has become the sanctified norm in universities: separate African literatures (in European Languages for example) are taught in different departments with little chance of the literatures (in African languages and European languages as well) being considered as a coherent African tradition.

However, as Scheub (1985:1) contends, “there is an unbroken continuity in African verbal art forms, from interacting oral genres to such literary productions as the novel and poetry”. He therefore calls for scholarly works that address the continuum of African verbal arts in order to capitalize on the interconnections or interfaces among catego-

ries in oral traditions, between oral tradition and the written word, among literatures in African and European languages, between North African verbal arts and those of Sub-Saharan Africa. Intertextuality has the advantage of allowing us to examine such types of interconnectedness and continuity between genres.

This paper explores the intertextual relationship between the collective archetype represented by the figure of the Dodo in the tales by the same name and the more individual style and thematic concerns such as the conception of power and its representation by the contemporary popular singer, Ali Na Maliki, who hails from Mayahi, in the Maradi region of Niger. To this end, I will attempt to examine some of the ways in which this singer manipulates certain (animal) images or symbols found in the world of popular tales in order to rework ideas of power and leadership in the social universe of his praise songs.

In "Ethical criticism: theory of symbols", Northrop Frye (1990: 71) broadly defines the symbol as "any unit of any literary structure that can be isolated for critical attention. A word, a phrase, or an *image* used with some kind of special reference (...) are all symbols when they are distinguishable elements in critical analysis" (added emphasis). He also distinguishes some key types / uses of symbols motifs, signs, images, archetypes and monads.

In this paper, the focus is on the symbol as image, this is to say an approach to symbols "which begins with images of actual things like a tree and the sun and works outwards to ideas and propositions" (Frye, 1990: 89.) In fact, Ali Na Maliki starts with images of the sun, the *gamji* tree and of real animals and birds known to his audience in the elaboration of his ideas of leadership and of his discourse on power.

Important oral genres such as tales are characterized by the production of images entailing models of positively or negatively connoted human behaviour. The patterning of these images is one of the most visible artistic activities in verbal art forms, and involves the binding of the contemporary world and the world of tradition via fresh metaphors – or symbols – in this case (see Scheub, 1985: 2-3). Thanks to the process of continuation-innovation, the contemporary experience is rooted, for the audience and the society at large, in the continuum of local history.

We shall examine some aspects of this process, as regards our two texts. The first part will focus on a Hausa Dodo tale, the second on a praise song addressed to the chief Maman Abduallahi by Ali Na Maliki. This limited selection is due to various constraints: space, the need for

further investigations into tales featuring the Dodo in different situations,¹ or featuring other animal symbols of power such as “Zaki” (the lion), “Damusa” (the leopard), or “Giwa” (the elephant), all of which are evoked and reworked in Ali Na Maliki songs, in order to create more or less “personal” symbols.²

A Dodo Tale

The following story, “The boy who killed a dodo” was transcribed and translated by Glew and Babale (1993: 31-36). It presents a very typical portrayal of the Dodo figure in Hausa narratives.³

Once there was a boy and a girl who lived with their mother and father. The family was wealthy, and farmed and kept animals for a living. God had blessed the husband and wife with children. The first born child was a girl. Time passed and the wife gave birth to a son. He was the last child and they spoiled him terribly. He was given everything he wanted no matter what it was. No one stopped him from doing what he wanted to do and in this way he grew up.

Time passed and one day the father became ill. After having been ill on and off for some time he called his wife and told her, “This illness hasn’t responded to medication and I think I’m going to die from it”. His wife began to cry and he told her, “Listen closely to the advice I’m going to give you. I don’t have a mother, father or any relatives on my father’s side of the family or my mother’s side. They’ve all died. God has given us wealth and a family. If our two children behave poorly or you give them things that ruin their lives, don’t worry because Paradise awaits us and God will judge all of us. I want you to give our son everything he asks for as I have done.” The son heard all of this conversation. Then the father laid down and died a short while later. The period of mourning lasted for three days.

Time passed and the son behaved as usual because no one was permitted to discipline him. After some time the mother became ill. The daughter wondered who would plan her marriage if her mother died. At this time the boy was about twelve years old. Although he was almost a teenager, he still acted like a child.

The mother called her daughter and told her, “Now I have the illness that killed your father. It won’t leave me. Look at you! You’ve grown into a beautiful woman. I won’t be able to see your wedding, but by the grace of God you’ll marry one day. The brother who

your father entrusted us with must be obeyed because you're a woman. No matter what terrible things he does, you must obey him." The girl agreed and her mother died. That left only the girl and her brother in the house.

As time passed the boy behaved as before, and the girl stood by and did nothing. One day he said, "Sister!" She asked, "What is it little brother?" He said, "I want to light (*sic*) our cattle and camels on fire." She said, "Little brother..." He interrupted her and said, "Before mother and father died, what did they tell you?" He took all of the animals and set them on fire. Then he burned all of their wealth and possessions except for the food.

The girl was no longer wealthy. She took some of the food and went and dug a big hole. She buried the food that she had taken in the hole.

One night he said, "Sister!" "What is it little brother?" she asked. He said, "I'm not satisfied. Now I want to set all of our granaries on fire." She said, "Little brother, don't you know that we store our millet there? You're going to burn all of our food." "It's none of your business!" he shouted. Don't you remember what mother and father told you?" And he went and burned all of their granaries.

In the morning, the girl went to where she had buried the millet. She took some of the millet, made breakfast and they ate.

One day the boy asked, "Where do you get the millet to make the fura and tuwo we eat?" "I go to town and work for it," she told him. "Okay," he said. The boy took some ash and put it in her back pocket. When she got up the next morning to get some millet she left a trail of ash leading to the place where she had buried it.

A week went by and the boy said, "Sister!" "What is it little brother?" "I want to burn the millet you buried in the hole", he told her. The girl was shocked and said, "Now..." He said, "Mother and father said..." "Go and burn it," she told him. He went and burned the millet leaving them with nothing to eat.

One day her brother said, "Sister!" "What?" she asked. "Are you going to burn me now?" "No," he told her. "We're going to leave this town." "Where are we going?" "Just get up, we're leaving," the boy said.

They travelled until they came to a large town which stretched far to the north, south, east and west. In this town there were no people on the street at night. Not even a bird was out during this time because at night a dodo entered the town and wandered around

until sunrise. After sunrise, it was safe for people to come out again because the dodo had returned home.

When they reached the town they stopped in front of an old woman's house. The girl and the old woman greeted each other. The old woman asked, "Where do you come from?" "We're strangers," the girl told her. The old woman said, "If a stranger comes to our town they'll (*sic*) have many problems. If a stranger stays at my house and something bad happens in the town, the king will blame me. Our town is nice but before nightfall everyone goes home and locks their doors." "Why?" asked the girl. "Because there's a dodo who comes to the town," the old woman explained. The girl said, "Now that I know about this dangerous thing why would I go out at that time?" "Okay, you can stay here," said the old woman. The girl said, "I have a little brother who's poorly behaved. If something happens to him I'll be happy to be rid of him."

The boy was listening to the conversation while he was playing, but acted as if he did not hear them. Then he shouted, "Sister!" "What is it?" she asked. Can we stay here?" "Yes," she told him, and they stayed at the old woman's house.

The boy went to the outskirts of town and came back dragging a stick which he left behind the old woman's house. Then he went out and picked some ripe fruit from a tree and prepared for the dodo's arrival.

Time passed but the boy did not return to the old woman's house. "Little brother, little brother! Where is my little brother?" cried the girl. He said, "Here I am outside." She said, "Come in, we're going to lock up the house." "Lock up!" he replied. "But aren't you coming in?" she asked. "It's none of your business!" he told her. She said, "If you're killed by the dodo it's not my fault." He told her, "Don't worry. If I die you won't be buried with me, and if you die you're not taking my life with you. Don't you remember what mother and father told you?" The girl said, "Old woman, let's lock up the house." And they went into the house and locked the door. Outside the boy lit a fire. The light from the fire could be seen from far away in every direction.

After some time, the dodo came into the town. At this time, not even a dog was on the street. When he entered the town the dodo asked, "Who is stronger than I in this town? Who is stronger than I, dodo?" The boy answered, "I am stronger than you in this town! I am stronger! Me, Little Brother, I am stronger than you!" The dodo

stopped and was furious. Never before had he been so angry. He thought, "Today someone in this town has answered me. Is there really someone stronger than I here?"

The dodo listened to find out where the voice was coming from. He entered the center of town and again asked, "Who is stronger than I in this town? Who is stronger than I, dodo?" The boy replied, "I am stronger than you in this town! I am stronger! Me, Little Brother, I'm stronger than you!"

The dodo walked toward the boy and asked, "Who is stronger than I in this town? Who is stronger than I, dodo?" The boy replied, "I am stronger than you in this town! I am stronger! It is I, Little Brother! I am stronger!" The dodo grabbed the boy, so the boy grabbed some fire and threw it at the dodo. But the dodo continued to hold on to him. Then the boy took some hot coals and stones and threw at the dodo. After he did this the dodo fell down and died.

The old woman called out to the girl, "Where are you?" The girl said, "I'm over here. I'm happy now because my little brother is dead."

Meanwhile the boy had taken the dodo to the doorstep of the king's palace. He took off one of his sandals and laid it on top of the dodo and left. When he reached the old woman's house he crawled in under the door and fell asleep in the entrance room.

At dawn the muezzin came out and began the call to prayer, "Allah! ..." When he saw the dodo he quickly went back into his house. The leader of the prayers said, "I heard the muezzin begin the call to prayer but he stopped. What happened?" He came out of his house from within the palace. When he opened the door of the palace he saw the dodo and quickly returned inside his house.

Women were on their way to the town well to draw water. To get to the well, they had to take the main road, which passed in front of the palace. As they passed the door of the palace, they saw the dodo, dropped their water pots and ran home.

At about eight o'clock, the king came out onto his balcony and asked, "Is all well in the town today?" He looked over the town, saw the dodo on his doorstep and said, "Things are not well! The dodo that prevents us from going out at night is now here during the day. It's no longer safe to go out at any time now!"

They summoned a brave man and told him, "There's trouble. There's a dodo at the front door of the palace, and we don't know if he's dead or just asleep. If he's alive there's nothing that we can do

to stop him from sleeping here.” The brave man was summoned and said, “Long live the king! I’ll go and see if the dodo is dead or alive.” He went and stood in front of the dodo. He inspected him and said, “Long live the king! This dodo is dead.” The king replied, “You’re lying!” The brave man said, “Long live the king! Look, he won’t wake up even when I push him. Also, someone has left a sandal on him.” Everyone was happy. The king announced, “We must find the person who has the other sandal because he is the one who killed the dodo!”

The king called all of the people of the town together. They were gathered so close together that someone could have suffocated. The king said, “I haven’t called this meeting because of any wrongdoing. The person whose foot fits this sandal perfectly is the one who killed the dodo.” Someone tried it on, but it was too big. Another tried it on, but it was too small. All of the people from the town and surrounding villages tried on the sandal, but it did not fit anyone’s foot perfectly.

Someone in the crowd said, “There are two strangers staying at the old woman’s house on the outskirts of town. We saw them, a boy and girl.” They went to the old woman’s house. When the girl saw the crowd coming she was afraid. The boy asked them, “Are you going to kill us? Did we insult the king, or are we accused of killing someone? Why have you come?” The king explained, “We haven’t come because of any wrongdoing. The person whose foot fits this sandal perfectly is the one who killed the dodo. We’re looking for the owner of this sandal.”

They told the boy to try on the sandal, but he refused. The king said, “Boy, I command you to try on this sandal. If it fits you perfectly you can’t even begin to imagine the reward that will be yours.” The boy took the other sandal out of his pocket, went to the dodo and laid it on top of him. The king looked at the boy and the boy looked at the king.

The king asked him, “What town do you come from?” The boy said, “Long live the king! I’m a stranger from a faraway town.” The king asked, “A stranger from which town?” “That isn’t important,” the boy told him. “What is important is that God brought me here.” The king said, “God brought you here to rid us of this terrible thing which has been terrorizing our mothers and grandparents? This horrible thing which has prevented us from going out at night? You came and rid us of this thing! As a reward I’m going to give you half

of my kingdom to rule over. Also, you may choose one of my daughters to marry and I'll take your sister as my wife."

They returned to the old woman's house and a large celebration was held. The king married the boy's sister and she was taken to the palace. Also, the boy was given half of the town to rule over.

Dodo is an ancient deity of ante-Muslim Hausa societies and has since become a character in oral narratives (see Hunter & Oumarou, 2001). The Dodo is a male spirit who represents the dry season and dry vegetation, as opposed to his wife Damina (in Niger: Damana) who symbolises the rainy season. As a character in oral narratives, the ogre, Dodo kills and devours human beings, especially young women who refuse to marry him or to fulfil their promises, depending on the tales.

For Hunter and Oumarou (2001: 15), "Dodo is a highly ambiguous character, feared because of his capacity for destruction, but held in awe because of his potential for greatly rewarding those who meet his demands". Hence Dodo also makes pacts with potential victims: he might spare the victim's life, in the case of a woman, if she accepts to marry him or, alternatively, to give him her first-born child as a companion. This capacity to interact with human beings makes Dodo "a volatile figure, who moves between the fantasy world and the real world, definitely not human, but able to speak human language, marry human wives and conceive half-human children" (Hunter & Oumarou, 2001: 85). Because of all these characteristics, an encounter with Dodo can transform a child into an adult and a weakling into a hero, as is the case in the story "The boy who killed a Dodo". In other words, such an encounter is an initiation in its own right. In this mythical motif of an encounter with a monster, the immature youth, if he does emerge, does so as a mythical hero and redeemer.

The Dodo is often associated in tales with negative harmful figures such as co-wives, or anti-social adolescents. Its greed and ruthlessness are the very characteristics that allow its victims to defeat it. The Dodo's appearance is indeterminate, as some storytellers describe a "creature" with several heads, or horns, or a very hairy body. Other storytellers perform Dodo tales in a loud, low-pitched voice to suggest gigantic dimensions. Whatever the case may be, the Dodo is a typical monster with certain stereotypical diabolic characteristics.

However, nowadays, the figure of the Dodo as a terrifying and powerful spirit is on the decline. Dodo has become a sordid or trivial figure, found mainly in tales meant to entertain and educate children. This is

why, when Connie L. Stephens (1981: 200) asked one storyteller to describe Dodo, the old woman smiled at her ignorance and explained: "Dodo is a lie, a thing we've never seen". Zainab Ibrahim Bello (1991: 94) also reports that, during Ramadan, the Muslim holy month, Hausa children often perform *taushe* (in Niger: *tashe*), or skits and songs which are rewarded with gifts of money (and also candies and foodstuffs in Niger). The children dress in different ways to represent Dodo, and go from door to door singing about him.

So far, we have seen various representations of Dodo in oral narratives. These representations have in turn generated certain everyday associations and symbols, thus spanning the bridge between the fantastic world of a certain storytelling tradition and the contemporary world of today's audiences in Niger. In fact,

Anything which inspires fear is referred to as Dodo, including people in positions of high authority; especially during the colonial period, Europeans. Three other uses of the term Dodo are worth noting: the glint of light reflected from water or a mirror; the nickname given to anyone born with a lot of hair on his head; the traces of writing remaining on a slate that has been washed. Thus the mere term "Dodo" evokes power, fear, mystery, and elusiveness (Hunter & Oumarou, 2001: 86, added emphasis).

It comes as no surprise that the term "Dodo" also means an evil spirit and can be used as a synonym of *fatalwa* ("ghost" or "goblin" in Hausa; see, Abraham, 1941 and Bargery, 1934). Ali Na Maliki's use of animal symbols such as Dodo, Zaki (the lion), Giwa (the elephant) and Damusa (the leopard) to refer to people in position of high authority highlights the fact that certain contemporary local conceptions of power are linked to long-standing social representations.

A praise song by Ali Na Maliki

The following song figures among a corpus I transcribed in *Individual Talent in Contemporary Hausa Oral Poetry* (Oumarou, 1996). Ali Na Maliki is one of the two singers whose work I studied; the other being Zabia Hussei, a female itinerant singer from Tahoua, in the north of Niger.⁴ He received me in his home and patiently contributed to my understanding of the songs. This sixty year-old court praise singer is known for his criticism of certain princes or chiefs and for his defence of vulnerable people or minority groups such as the Anna (in Nigeria: the Arna; Anne (sing.) [in Nigeria: Arne]), an animist community within

Niger's overwhelmingly Muslim population. Ali Na Maliki sings with a chorus (*Yan amshi*). So, in the songs that follow, "A" indicates the voice of the lead singer, while "C" indicates the chorus.

Maman Abdullahi

A song addressed to Chief M. Abdullahi

- A Dodo, father of men
C Son of Abdu, Who is your match?
A A hand cannot hide the light of the sun,
C Ali's son, mosquito that makes men slap themselves
A Maman, calm down
C After all, you rule over the Mayakis
A Dodo, father of men.
C Son of Abdu, who is your match?
A When Mahamadu succeeded
Abdullahi, rivals laughed. They
say since you have become chief, Allah
has refused to send rain, there will be
no sowing of seeds
Immigrants, I say, come back home,
For our land has yielded millet.
I who follow you in this world,
I know the blood of Abdullahi
C will never be fruitless
Leader of men, settler of disputes, Ado's father
A Maman, I follow you around in this world,
but even in the world to come, be my saviour.
C Leader of men, settler of disputes,
Ado's father.
A Your defeated opponents have
gone home in shame.
C One of them was too ashamed to return home.
A Dodo, father of men,
C Abdu's son, who is your match?
A You turn the *tulu*⁵ to drink water, But
who can turn the well? You, Balla
Jimrau, Son of Hima
Only a crowd can match you.
To compete with you is to face

shame, Rabi's son, Auta's son.
Founders of the chieftaincy at Gangara:
First there was Queen Rabi,
then came Barka.

- C He was a good ruler.
A Then came Jasaibi:
C He was a good ruler.
A Then came Tunde:
C He was a good ruler.
A Then came Dan Mairi:
C He was a good ruler.
A Today is Muhamadu's turn
C he will be a good ruler, Leader of men
settler of disputes; Abdo's father.
A A hand cannot hide the light of the sun
cutting will not bring a *gamji*⁶ down
So, Maman, calm down
C After all, you rule the over the Mayakis,
A Well, thank you Musa Yarima Alassan
for all Danda's grandson did for me
when I went to Niamey.
At the time of rivalry for the
Chieftaincy of Gangara,
They were all against Maman
because he is an orphan
But Allah sent angels from heaven
C to bring him to victory
A Dodo, father of men,
C Son of Abdu, who is your match?
(Oumarou, 1996: 274-277, revised, 2004)⁷

In a chapter entitled "Style and signification" in his work *Fiction and Diction* literary critic Gérard Genette (1993: 88), rightly argues that style is a "compromise between nature and culture". The compromise, in this case is related to the intertextual process, to the interaction between the Dodo tale reproduced above and Ali Na Maliki's song in praise of chief Abdullahi, entailing the creation of an "interpretant" as defined below. This process is therefore at the crossroads between individual creation and the social and cultural representations involved in collective identity. As Alison Brown (1995: 8) maintains, "The language

we use and the symbols and social practices we adopt not only structure our world but provide the means through which power is exercised. Together they form competing systems of 'representation', which are rarely neutral". This seems to be precisely the case of Ali Maliki's use of symbols of (chiefly) power.

Ali Na Maliki's knowledge of tradition is displayed in his bird and animal symbols not only to suit different occasions but also to compare and contrast chiefs or princes according to their achievements, generosity and popularity. In this respect, a chief or king compared to Dodo is feared and respected for his natural as well as supernatural powers, both positive and negative. Similarly, a chief or a king compared to Zaki (the lion) has also power and more prestige because symbolically it is the king of all animals. So, in another song entitled "Mayahi Sabo" (the new chief of Mayahi) the newly enturbated chief is addressed as *Zaki: Zaki ka ci yan maza* (Lion, eater of men). As the first line of the song, it foregrounds the power of chief Mayahi in relation to the singer's rating or ranking of chiefs. It is interesting to note that out of the eleven songs I collected in 1995, only three of the chiefs evoked were addressed as *Zaki* (pl. *Zakoki* or *Zakuna*). Bargery (1934: 1124) defines *Zaki* as a term of address to a ruling chief. But since the other chiefs in question were all ruling at the time of the singing I wonder why Ali does not address them all as *Zakoki*. I think it is because he reserves the term *Zaki* to suggest prestige and inordinate dignity as opposed to Dodo, for example, which suggests horror and supernatural power. Both Zaki and Dodo can suggest a difference in power and prestige in leadership as well as in the way they both influence their entourage and how the latter sees them.

In light of the above, one can safely argue that through these symbols, Na Maliki creates what the formalist Michael Riffaterre (1980) calls an *intertextualité obligatoire* or a compulsory intertextuality. For Riffaterre, there is a compulsory intertextuality "when the signification of certain words (of symbols in our case) of the text is neither the one allowed by the language nor the one imposed by the context, but the meaning of these words (or symbols) in the intertext".⁸

For example, the signification of the Dodo (image) symbol in our intertext or Ali Na Maliki's songs neither corresponds solely to the type of image of Dodo in the story of "The boy who killed a dodo" nor to the image of Dodo in the Hausa peoples' collective imagination. Ali Na Maliki's Dodo symbol is rather the result of the singer's attempt to combine both images of Dodo to suggest power and attributes of leadership.

In fact, for Riffaterre (1980: 9), the new meaning of the words or symbols in the intertext “is no longer linguistic or lexical, if not the reader would not need the intertext to grasp it: this meaning is already the result of a stylistic endeavour.”⁹ He concludes that signification (*la signifiante*), “that is to say, the literariness of the meaning is therefore neither in the text nor in the intertext, but in between the two, in the interpretant which dictates to the reader the way to see them, to compare them, to interpret them.”¹⁰ According to Peirce (in Riffaterre 1979: 148), the interpretant is the idea to which a sign or symbol gives rise. In the case of Ali Na Maliki, the idea is related to the shifting and coalescing of two different conceptions of Dodo: the chief he admires is not to be considered as a destructive, fear-inspiring monster but as an awe-inspiring leader of men.

Riffaterre (1979: 146) defines the interpretant as “the link between the already-said of the intertext and the rewriting which is the text, (whose) function is therefore to engender the manner of the rewriting and to dictate the rules for its deciphering.”¹¹ Thus by creating (through re-interpretation and co-ordination) certain symbols, Ali Na Maliki forces the reader or the audience into an intertextual deciphering or reading of two symbols of power, or of the two faces of the (ambiguous) power of the chief.

In fact, in various other songs, Ali Na Maliki addresses certain chiefs such as Sarkin Balbaje as *mai nassara* (the victorious) and *gogarma* (energetic or powerful leader), with no animal symbols involved. But chief Lawali Kashe Issa is praised as a *gwanki* (a roan antelope); another prince is compared to *Zakara* (a rooster); Chief Gangara Tambari Issa is addressed as *bauna* (a buffalo) and *giwa* (an elephant), while sarkin Noma Majikai (the compassionate Master of agriculture, the highest title among farmers), is addressed as *giwa mai kare ma danniya baya* (the elephant which breaks big *danniya* trees). Now, *Giwa* is a ravenous animal who wreaks havoc on a farm. But, once again, this negative trait is converted into a positive attribute: the great master of agriculture (*sarkin noma*: literally, chief of farming) is a destroyer or eater of weeds, a metaphor for farming and hard work. As *giwa*, the *sarkin noma* fells huge trees, a symbol of the achievement required before one can acquire the *sarkin noma* title or position among the non-Muslim Anna of the region of Maradi.

But, to get back to Chief Abdullahi of Gangara, he is one of three chiefs addressed as *zaki*. In another song, Abdullahi is also *inuwa* (the shade). As such, he combines the royal aura and leadership of *zaki* with the protection and power implied in *inuwa*:

- A You are a shade, kin of Garba.
 You need not invite anybody to come to you.
- C But he who is threatened by the sun will come to you.
 Lion, you cherish the truth.
 (Oumarou, 1996: 135-136).

Zaki and *inuwa*¹² are powerful images and symbols associated with exceptional chiefs. Similarly, *Dodo* is a powerful symbol, sometimes associated with trees as well. In the song for Maman Abdullahi quoted *in extenso* above, chief Abdullahi is not only *Dodo uban maza* (*Dodo*, father of men) but also a *gamji* (a big and shady, rubber tree often considered as a den for various spirits):

A hand cannot hide the sun,
 Cutting will not bring a *gamji* down.
 (Oumarou, 1996: 143-144).

The sun is, of course, a well-known symbol of power in Niger and elsewhere. As used in the first line it has become a stock proverb of the local epic register to suggest overwhelming pre-eminence. In the present case, the reference made is to Abdullahi's popularity which outshines that of other chiefs. And as popularity breeds rivalry, the cutting of the *gamji* tree is a metaphorical reference to Abdullahi's enemies attempt to harm him or to tarnish his image. The association with a *gamji* tree may suggest that the enemies are actually close to chief Abdullahi since they have to be under the tree (chief Abdullahi) to be able to cut it down. Ali Na Maliki's indirect criticism castigates the chief's opponents while alerting the attention of the latter.

Conclusion

This paper has thrown light on some of the ways in which the images of power and leadership structure various contemporary oral arts in Hausa-speaking societies in Niger. These conceptions influence in turn the construction of local identities. It would appear that they continue to evolve along re-interpreted and re-actualised mythical paths. Not only are leaders identified with symbols of the chieftaincy, whether they be traditional chiefs or not, but the archetypes of the chief reveal apparently ambiguous conceptions of power and leadership linked to a longstanding spiritual heritage.

Notes

1. While writing *Aspects of the Aesthetics of Hausa Verbal Art* (2001), Hunter and I consulted an unpublished catalogue of Dodo's characteristics gathered from over fifty narratives by Joanna Dudley Sullivan, a text that was not available at the time of writing of this article. I also did not have access to the Hausa original of the Dodo tale as transcribed and translated by Glew and Babale (1993), which I am using here. Therefore, I cannot know whether the boy in Glew and Babale's transcription is the same Auta, the youngest child, of a version I used to listen to as a child; or whether it is simply another of the numerous variants of the Dodo tale.
2. Abrams (1988: 184) is indeed of the opinion that, in addition to the "conventional" or "public" symbols, many artists such as poets "use 'private' or 'personal' symbols. Often they do so by exploiting widely shared associations of an object or event or action with a particular concept; for example, the general association of a peacock with pride and of an eagle with heroic endeavor." In this case, Ali Na Malilki also uses a *gamji* tree and the sun as symbols of leadership and power in traditional Hausa society.
3. I wish to thank Robert Glew, Associate Director of the Center for Advanced Study of International Development, of Michigan State University, for his permission to use this version of the Dodo tale in this article.
4. Ali Na Maliki and Zabia Hussei had already been recorded by the ORTN, the national broadcasting radio and television of the Republic of Niger, prior to my study. Chaibou Chekarou helped me to collect recorded songs in 1995 at ORTN, Zinder station. All the translations from the original are mine, unless stated otherwise.
5. The *tulu* is a traditional water container used to keep water for domestic use.
6. The *gamji* (*ficus platyphylla* del. *Moraceae*), also written *gangiy* or *ganji* is a very huge, shady tree [eds.].
7. "A Dodo uban maza,/ C yaron Abdu mai wuyar gaba./ A Hannu ba shi kauda hasken rana,/ C na Ali sabro mai sa maza da gabejewa/ A Maman rage hushi,/ C tunda gadon Mayaki ya samu./ A Dodo uban maza,/ C yaron Abdu mai wuyar gaba./ A Mahamadu da ya gaji Tambari Abdullahi,/ ma'kiya na ta dariya:/ sun ce tunda ka ci sarki,/ Allah ya 'ki yin ruwa nan ba za a 'kara shipka ba./ 'Yan tashi ku zo gida tunda hatsi 'kasam mu/ ya samu, ni da na bi ka duniya, na san ni jinin/ C Abdullahi ba ya ta 'bewa./ Maganin maza mai raba gardama uban Abdo./ A Maman da na bi ka duniya,/ ba duniya ba Maman har lahira ka hidda ni./ C Maganin maza mai raba gardama uban Abdo./ A Dadahwa 'yan gudun/ kumiya an taho gida an zamna./ C mutun guda kumiya ta hana shi komowa./ A Dodo uban maza,/ C yaron Abdu mai wuyar gaba./ A Karkace karkacen da a kan ma tulu a sha ruwa,/ a ka ma rijiya ba ta juya ba,/ ya Balla Jimrau na Hima sai taro./ da kai rishin kumiya ce na Rabi 'dan/ Auta, Ma hwarkacin sarauta ta Gangara:/ Hwarko Rabi ta yi,/ yannan Barka ya yi:/ C ba yi sarauta ta cin amana ba./ A Ja Saibi ya yi:/ C bai yi sarauta ta cin amana ba./ A Yannan Tunde ya yi:/ C bai yi sarauta ta cin amana ba./ A Yanna 'Dan Mairi ya yi:/ C bai yi sarauta ta cin amana ba./ A Yau ta zo wurin Mahamadu:/ C ba za cin amana ba,/ maganin maza mai raba gardama uban Abdo./ A Hannu ba shi kauda hasken rana,/ na Ali sara ba za ya kada gamji ba./ Maman rage hushi,/ C tunda gidan Maya'ki ya samu./ A Madalla Musa Yarima Alassan, na yi godiya:/ da na je Yamai jikan Danda na yaba ma sa,/ ba za ni rena hairan ba./ Jayaya ta Gangara, kokowa ta Gangara,/ jayaya a ke da shi/ Ali wai don sun ga shi maraye ne./ Daga can samaniya Allah Ya sako mali'iku:/ C in ya'ki ake su kama mai./ A Dodo uban maza,/ C yaron Abdu mai wuyar gaba" (Oumarou, 1996: 241-244).
8. "Lorsque la signification de certains mots [de symboles dans notre cas] du texte n'est ni celle que permet la langue ni celle que demande le contexte, mais le sens qu'ont les mots [ou symboles] dans l'intertexte" (Riffatere, 1980: 9).
9. "n'est plus celui de la langue, du dictionnaire, sinon le lecteur n'aurait pas besoin de passer par l'intertexte pour le saisir: il résulte déjà d'un travail sur le langage" (Riffatere, 1980: 9).
10. "c'est à dire la littérarité du sens, n'est donc ni dans le texte ni dans l'intertexte, mais à mi-chemin des deux, dans l'interprétant, qui dicte au lecteur la manière de les voir, de les comparer, de les interpréter" (Riffatere, 1980: 15).
11. "Le lien entre le déjà-dit de l'intertexte et la réécriture qui est le texte, [qui] a donc pour fonction d'engendrer la manière de cette réécriture, et d'en dicter les règles de déchiffrement" (Riffatere, 1979: 146).
12. The symbolism of the tree in African folktales, to which *inuwa* (shade / shadow) belongs, is at the centre of a very interesting interdisciplinary teamwork conducted by the SELAF (Société Pour l'Etude des Langues Africaines = Society for the Study of African Languages), under the direction

of Geneviève Calame-Griaule. The project brought together scholars from Africa and Europe and three volumes were published. Only a few Hausa tales are discussed in these volumes. What is more, the symbolism of the tree and *inuwa* in Niger has not been discussed as most of the scholars did their field research elsewhere in Africa, the Caribbean or Europe (see Calame-Griaule, 1969, 1970, 1974). Moulin (1984: 43) reports from the Hausa context of Dogon Doutchi in the province (*Département*) of Dosso (south-west Niger), that *inuwa* (shade / shadow) is the enclosed space where the queen (Sarraounia) offers her sacrifices. *Inuwa* or *l'ombre* is also associated with the traditional rulers (*chefferie*). Nicolas (1975: 332) indicates that *inuwa* means, in the language of the sorcerers, the *kurwa* or soul (*l'âme*).

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