

*Bijochs: Dec, 2025 Vol. 3 - Issue, 2 ID No. 014 (Pg. 156-165)*

## **Oral Tradition and Collective Memory: Analyzing *Wakar Baka* as a Cultural Archive in Hausa Society**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper discusses *wakar baka* (Hausa oral songs) as a cultural repository and as a source of group memory in Hausa society. Based on the idea of cultural memory by Jan Assmann and on the oral-formulaic theory by Parry and Lord, the study examines how oral songs retain, transmit and modify cultural memory among generations. Ethnographic fieldwork methods were used to collect data; oral singers (*mawaƙa*) were interviewed and a comparison of recorded songs in archives, radio and live performances in the sampled Hausa regions was carried out. Results indicate that *wakar baka* is a historical monument containing accounts of fights, leaders, and lineages; cultural repository protecting traditions, customs, and religion; and social control mechanism that enforces the norms of behaving (*kunya*), hospitality, and collectivism. The paper also emphasizes the application of proverbs, idioms and popular sayings which allow performers to pass on thoughts, memories as well as incorporate creativity and adaptation. Moreover, *wakar baka* is a tool of resistance, a critique of social injustices and a tool of negotiation of cultural change particularly at the times of colonial encroachment and globalization. Nevertheless, issues like the loss of traditional *mawaƙa*, the domination of Western music, and prevalence of digital media pose a threat to survival of this oral tradition. The research suggests that systematic documentation, digitization, and integration of *wakar baka* in the academic and cultural conservation efforts be encouraged.*

**Keywords:** Hausa Oral Songs, Cultural Memory, Collective Identity, Oral Tradition, *Wakar Baka*

### **1. Introduction**

The paper is a review of *wakar baka* (Hausa oral songs) as a key repository of culture and source of collective memory in Hausa society. The Hausa oral songs are a system in which history, social rules, ethical standards, and experience of the community are archived and transmitted between generations. Their impact is the Hausa worldview, social structure, beliefs, and day-

to-day experiences and they give an insight into both the past and the present. Communities remember heroic deeds, lineages, major festivals and vital lessons on the society through *wakar baka* and, therefore, these songs represent a living document of Hausa culture.

In addition to holding historical information, they reinforce group identity and social cohesion since performers and audience

interact during the performance and interpretation of these oral songs. They have educational, entertaining and ritual functions, with a mix of poetic language, music, and commentary on the societal level. This is because *wakar baka* is a cultural heritage and has remained a challenge in the contemporary society because of urbanization, modern media, and the waning popularity among the young generations. These forces endanger the sustainability of oral traditions and influence the process of passing cultural knowledge to the next generations.

### **1.1 Background of the Study**

Oral tradition has been an essential tool of the preservation of cultural heritage, sharing values, and continuity of social cultures within African societies. Some scholars like Finnegan (2012) have stressed these oral forms of expression: songs, proverbs, tales, and chants are referred to as the living archives, which document the histories, philosophies, and moral codes of a community without the aid of written documents. It is especially so in Hausa society, where *wakar baka* (oral songs) play a leading role in cultural life.

Historically, the Hausa people, which is one of the largest ethnic groups in West Africa, has been using a verbal performance to express shared memory, identity and social norms (Furniss, 1996). Oral songs (*wakar baka*) are not works of art only, but are also archives of history, preserving family lines, heroic feats, and social conflicts. They serve as moving stories that embrace continuity and transformation in the society. According to Atilola (2017), oral traditions in the

Hausa society are considered as performative texts, which maintain the heritage, but also adjust to the realities of today.

The value of oral tradition as a source of cultural heritage cannot be overestimated. Oral songs represent native knowledge systems and serves to form a peoples library whereby generations of people learn about their past (Yahaya, 1999). *Wakar baka* in Hausa communities operates not just as entertainment, but also as pedagogy, moral teaching, and historical memory, and consequently as a community point of reference to identity formation and cultural resiliency.

### **1.2 Statement of the Problem**

Although they play an important role in Hausa culture, oral songs are usually not reflected in the body of literature as credible historical and cultural documents. So much has been done on written histories, colonial documents, and Islamic scholarship and *wakar baka* has been pushed to the background as a frivolous folklore instead of an intellectual treasure trove (Furniss, 1998). This underrepresentation leaves a lapse in the gap of knowledge on the way oral traditions serve as knowledge repositories, and the issue of how oral traditions define the collective identity.

Besides, oral traditions are becoming endangered by the rise of modern media, globalization, and the transformation of lifestyles (Finnegan, 2012). This tendency of the younger generation to use modern media, i.e. hip-hop and Afropop, can gradually undermine the power and

topicality of the *wakar baka* Visibility (Atilola, 2017). Unless this decline can be reversed, then Hausa society may lose an invaluable cultural record of historical consciousness, social values and indigenous epistemologies.

### 1.3 Research Questions

The research questions that will be addressed in this study are:

1. What are the ways of how Hausa oral songs can be repositories of collective memory?
2. How is *wakar baka* able to maintain culture and history?
3. What are the social, political and religious uses of these oral songs?

### 1.4 Objectives of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to find out how *wakar baka* can preserve Hausa collective memory and identity. Particularly, it examines how these oral songs are retaining historical knowledge, cultural values and how they maintain Hausa identity in the face of globalization and cultural change.

The research has intellectual and practical value. It places Hausa *wakar baka* within the context of oral literature, ethnomusicology and cultural studies, emphasizing oral sources as an acceptable way to transmit history and culture (Yahaya, 1999). In practice, it urges on the need to preserve oral tradition to protect cultural identity to guide community heritage projects and policies on cultural preservation in modern Africa (Furniss, 1996).

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1 Oral Tradition in African Societies

Oral tradition has been a core element to African cultures and has served as a source of entertainment, as well as a primary source of history, self-conception and cultural memory. According to Finnegan (2012) oral literature is being described as the living archive where the experiences, values, and past of people are stored and passed on through generations. Epics, chants, and praise poetry in most African societies serve as oral histories of heroic acts, as well as genealogies. As an example, the Sundiata epic is preserved as a cultural and political history by the Mande griots of Mali. On the same note, oral poetry like *oriki*, in the Yoruba community serves the role of maintaining ancestry and family lineage (Barber, 1991).

Hausa oral traditions in this sense are part of broader pan-African oral memory network, which gives communities a carry over into the present. Such traditions do not stand still, they adjust to the modern environment preserving the historical richness so that the collective identity is always reinforced studies in modern Africa (Furniss, 1996).

### 2.2 Hausa Oral Songs (*Wakar Baka*)

In Hausa culture, *wakar baka* (oral songs) is critical in influencing memory, social order and cultural values. One of the most evident ones are praise songs (*wakar yabo*). Court musicians (*maroka*) perform them in praise of kings, nobles, and rich patrons. Traditionally, historically in the Sokoto Caliphate such songs served to legitimize

rulers by associating them with heroic ancestries and the Islamic rule (Furniss, 1996). The praise songs were also applied by the contemporary performers such as Mamman Shata to glorify leaders and philanthropists so that they could be remembered in the collective memory of the society.

Another and equally significant role is played by the satirical songs (*wakar zambo*). They are social commentaries in the form of satirizing corruption, immorality or hypocrisy. According to Yahaya (1999), humor, metaphor and irony are some of the means through which satirical performances are done to challenge authority indirectly. The example is that some satirical *wakoki* was used to ridicule those who have fallen out of cultural values and followed foreign ways of life, and these served as a means of social control.

Another important genre is women songs especially lullabies (*wakar watsa*). Callaway (1987) demonstrates that Hausa women employ lullabies to calm the children as well as passing values like modesty (*kunya*), respect, and patience. Women are involved in the maintenance of the cultural identity through these minor things of mouth even though they tend to be sidelined in the public performance space.

The Islamic nature of the Hausa society is deeply rooted in religious songs. Such *wakoki*, usually performed on festivals or *Quranic* recitations, strengthen piety, community unity and moral behavior. As mentioned by Furniss (1996), Islamic devotional songs create a space between religious performance and cultural

performance and tend to incorporate faith into the beats of daily living.

The performance is not the only action of Hausa oral songs. They amuse, educate, maintain cultural identity and offer resistance to erasing culture. In the colonial times, e.g., satirical songs were used to criticize the European rule and the praise songs served to justify the viability of native leadership (Last, 2008). Therefore, *wakar baka* is a cultural heritage and flexibility.

### 2.3 Previous Studies

In his masterpiece book *Poetry, Prose and Popular Culture in Hausa*, Graham Furniss (1996) gives an extensive examination of Hausa oral literature demonstrating how oral performance cuts across politics, cultural memory and artistic creativity. His work shows that *wakar baka* is not just a type of entertainment but it is a way of negotiating social order and power.

Adamu (2007) builds up the scholarship by placing Hausa oral traditions within both the contemporary media and globalization settings. He demonstrates the effects and impact of oral forms and how Hausa popular culture and especially Kannywood films affect them and vice versa, indicating the persistence of *traditional wakoki* and modern cultural manifestations.

The gendered viewpoint is important as Callaway (1987) in her analysis of oral performances of Hausa women provides an important view. She shows that songs by women, being limited to the domestic realm, are nevertheless a way of social critique and resistance, which enables women to bargain

both with the culture and personal issues, otherwise sidelined in the mainstream.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

This provides the theoretical frameworks that help to understand and analyze *wakar baka* as a cultural storage of Hausa cultural memory. Using the existing theories of cultural studies and oral literature studies, the framework offers the conceptual resources required to grasp how the Hausa oral songs maintain the collective identity, pass values, and preserve historical consciousness between generations. Both theories presented here Assmann Culture Memory and Oral Formulaic Theory of Parry and Lord provide supplementary views that can elucidate the content and performance methods that make *waka* a dynamic cultural archive.

#### **3.1 Cultural Memory According to Jan Assmann, Concept of Cultural Memory.**

The theory of cultural memory as proposed by Assmann (2011) is very applicable to the interpretation of *wakar baka* as a cultural memory. According to him, collective memory is not based on individual memory alone but rather maintained by means of shared practices, rituals and performances. Oral songs play this role in Hausa society since they reflect the past experiences alongside the current identity. Indicatively, praise songs (*wakar yabo*) performed in the Sokoto Caliphate to honor leaders and patrons celebrated leadership, courage, and generosity, therefore, maintaining the values of the community across generations. By performing such plays, *wakar baka* becomes

a living memory that supports the Hausa culture.

#### **3.2 Oral- Formulaic Theory (Parry and Lord)**

According to Parry and Lord (1960), the oral-formulaic theory describes the way oral performers keep oral traditions alive by using formulaic phrases, stock phrases and rhythmic patterns. When composing and singing Hausa singers (*mawaka*) depend on these techniques. As an example, Mamman Shata, the mythical Hausa musician, used to repeat epithets like *mai karamci* (the generous one), or *jarumi* (the brave one) to commend patrons. Likewise, satirical songs (*wakar zambo*) use proverbial phrases to express condemnation to corruption or vice. This theory explains why Hausa oral songs are both traditional and adaptive, in such a way that continuity of memory is guaranteed, yet improvisation is possible.

### **4. Methodology**

This is a description of the step-by-step process that will be used in carrying out the research. It outlines the general research design, data collection procedures, and methods of data analysis on the collected data. The methodology is effective since, by using fieldwork and interpretive approaches, it guarantees that the study is able to effectively find the cultural context, as well as the artistic meanings within Hausa oral songs (*wakar baka*). In so doing, the research will seek to give an all-inclusive view of the way oral traditions mirror and safeguard historical and social facts among the Hausa community.

#### 4.1 Research Design

This research follows qualitative research design, which is a combination of ethnographic and textual analysis methods. Ethnography will be appropriate since it will allow the researcher to work not just with oral singers (*mawaka*) themselves but also with their listeners in real-life situations and follow the culture in which the performance takes place (Hammersley and Atkinson, 2019). The textual analysis is also important because one can systematically study the lyrics, metaphors, and proverbs scattered in the Hausa oral songs. This two-fold approach is useful in ensuring that the study takes into account both the performative and the interpretive aspects of *wakar baka*.

#### 4.2 Data Collection

The basis of this research is fieldwork. Semi-structured interviews will be carried out by *mawaka* in selected Hausa regions like Kano, Katsina and Sokoto. The strategy will make sure that the performers with different backgrounds and experience are represented. An example of how oral tradition maintains the past can be found, for instance, in a well-known oral singer such as Mamman Shata, who wrote songs that praised the leaders and spoke against the society (Furniss, 1996).

Along with face-to-face interviews, the research will also be based on the archival documents of radio stations, cultural centers, and personal collections. The oral Hausa songs have been played in various stations like Radio Kano and BBC Hausa and have been a good source of recorded performances. The use of archival

recordings is especially helpful when it comes to the comparison between older songs and the modern ones, in about how *wakar baka* adjusts itself to the changing times (Adamu, 2007). Lastly, the live performances during festivals, naming ceremonies, and political rallies will be monitored and recorded, a wide spectrum of data will be achieved.

#### 4.3 Data Analysis

The data will be coded when underlying patterns, metaphors, and motifs in the pieces of the collected data will be discovered through thematic analysis. Praise poetry (*waka*) often features such themes as bravery (*jarumta*), generosity (*karimci*), and modesty (*kunya*). Braun and Clarke (2006) stress that thematic analysis enables the researcher to take a step above the superficial meaning and understand the underlying cultural value.

Comparison will be used as well, which will make the comparison of the various types of *waka* including praise songs, satirical songs, lullabies and religious songs. An example here is that praise songs (*wakar yabo*) can glorify leaders, the opposite is true of satirical songs (*wakar zambo*), and lullabies (*wakar wasa*) can pass on moral teachings to children (Callaway, 1987). This comparative treatment will reveal that oral songs have many roles in the Hausa society.

The paper relates *wakar baka* to historical and cultural occurrences and this shows the way these oral songs are used as historical records when put in their contexts. The songs written in the colonial era tend to protest against the foreign occupation

indirectly, whereas the songs written in modern times talk about globalization, politics, and morals (Last, 2008). The analysis is done by concentrating on particular Hausa areas, especially Kano, Katsina, and Sokoto, due to the rich oral performance history and the existence of some of the most renowned *mawaka*. Relying on the written or available songs is, however, a weakness, due to the fact that most oral songs are in ephemeral, orally transmitted forms, and are therefore hard to capture and analyze. Oral traditions are at risk in being lost without documentation just as was witnessed by Finnegan (2012). Moreover, since oral performances are based on particular cultural circumstances, they have different meanings depending on their locations and audience, which makes it difficult to interpret them correctly.

## **5. Analysis and Discussion**

This part is a critical analysis of the role and importance of the Hausa oral songs (*wakar baka*) in Hausa society. It examines the role that these songs play in addition to serving as entertainment, as instruments of historical recording, cultural continuity, social identity construction and group memory. It also considers the issues of oral traditions in the world of modernization and globalization. This examination brings out important dynamic roles of *wakar baka* as to the sociocultural survival of Hausa people.

### **5.1 *Wakar Baka* as Historical Record**

Oral Hausa songs (*wakar baka*) also serve as a way of history and can include battles, kings, and social conflicts. According to Furniss (1996), oral singers have been used

throughout as reporters of events particularly in the pre-colonial Hausa societies where literacy was not prevalent. As an example, *mawaka* glorified the actions of leaders such as Sarkin Kano Muhammadu Rumfa whose reign was commemorated in songs that talked about his reforms and rule. Equally, the legendary oral singer Mamman Shata had to sing about political leaders, including his oral praise of Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto, which would secure their legacies to their future generations (Adamu, 2007).

Oral songs are also useful in supporting genealogy and legitimacy of leadership. According to Callaway (1987), *mawaka* establish ties of royalty, through naming ceremonies and performances, to distance the performance from the royal lineage. Through it, oral songs are served as more than entertainment, they are essential to the political and social recollection of Hausa communities

### **5.2 *Wakar Baka* as a Cultural Archive**

The idea of cultural memory by Jan Assmann (2011) discusses how cultures maintain their cultural heritage across generations, and Hausa oral songs can be an example of that. Value, traditions and culture are maintained and passed on through the *wakar baka*. Even such things as praise songs (*wakar yabo*), which often glorify virtues such as generosity (*karimci*) and bravery (*jarumta*) strengthen desirable aspects of the community.

This role is further reinforced by the usage of proverbs, idioms and symbolism.

According to Finnegan, African oral literature is encoded with wisdom that is rich in culture using symbolic language (Finnegan, 2012). Communal values are expressed in Hausa songs, which feature metaphors about a generous man being likened to a tree that shelters a large number of people (*bishiyar daji*). These songs are a kind of cultural storehouse, where the worldview and moral code of Hausa people is preserved.

### **5.3 *Wakar Baka* and Social Identity.**

Songs can also be used to create social identity and cultural socialization. Values such as *kunya* (modesty), the respect of the elders and hospitality are strengthened through *wakar baka*. In this case, lullabies (*wkar watsa*) being sung to the kids not only pacified them but also inculcated lessons about obedience and conduct (Callaway, 1987).

Gender wise, oral songs usually define the expected roles of men and women. Whereas men are hailed as the most courageous and most breadwinners, women are touted as the most modest, the most nurturing, and the most housewife. These cultural roles have remained visible in Hausa identity even with modern forces working against traditional forms as noted by Adamu (2007).

### **5.4 *Wakar Baka* and Group Memory.**

Assmann (2011) says that collective memory connects the experiences of the past with the identity of the present and House oral songs present a living example of this. *Mawaka* are commonly used during festivals, weddings or political rallies to

remind the audience about their common heritage by reminding them of past heroes or great communal struggles. As an illustration, anti-colonial songs are still being spread and they have formed a sense of pride and strength among the people (Last, 2008).

These performances are used as living memory that preserves the traditions by means of rituals and ceremonies. As shown by Furniss (1996), repeated performance keeps memory intact and evolves it so that *wakar baka* could be of interest to the modern audience as well. So Hausa songs are not fixed but dynamic agents of memory that develop each time they are performed.

### **5.5 Opponents of Oral Tradition.**

Even though their importance is eternal, *wakar baka* is severely challenged in the contemporary world. Oral performances have been eclipsed by globalization and the distribution of western music and digital media. The younger generation also listens to hip-hop, Afrobeat, or Hausa film soundtracks instead of traditional oral songs, which results in the loss of popularity of *mawaka* (Adamu, 2007).

Also, the deterioration of the traditional transmission practices threatens. Unlike in the past where oral songs were transmitted through an apprenticeship and community performance, this system is slowly fading away (Finnegan, 2012). Numerous traditional *mawaka* have died without heirs and this has led to the loss of rich cultural memory. Without some conscious efforts to record and preserve these traditions, Hausa oral songs may lose their relevance in future.

## 6. Conclusion and Recommendations

This unites the main arguments presented in the study and how *wakokin baka* will remain to support and maintain Hausa cultures. It is an overview of the critical findings on the historical, social, and cultural value of Hausa oral songs, and an emphasis of the dynamic nature of oral songs as living cultural archives. Besides, this segment will offer viable suggestions on how to perpetuate and improve the culture of *wakar baka* in the contemporary society, and more so suggest areas that need additional research on to guarantee continuity in research and conservation of this significant cultural heritage.

### 6.1 Summary of Findings

The paper has shown that *wakar baka* (Hausa oral songs) are important cultural archives that distill the memory of the Hausa people in history, social values, and collective identity. Furniss (1996) confirms that oral performances in the past existed as storehouses of shared experiences by holding onto events like political struggles, change of leadership and genealogies. Not only these songs narrate the historical events, but also place them into the context of the lived experiences of the people.

Moreover, the oral songs are dynamic means of passing on the memory of previous generations. They maintain cultural continuity through their constant performance in the festivals, naming ceremonies and political events. According to Assmann (2011), the cultural memory is not a fixed remembrance of the past but rather dynamic reinterpretation of the past in

terms of contemporary needs. Hausa oral songs represent this process, which changes over time but still has a strong adherence to tradition frameworks. They are not just a reflection of the past, but how communities interpret their present and build the vision of their future.

### 6.2 Recommendations

Since they have long-standing importance, special efforts should be made to preserve and restore *wakar baka*, and to respond to contemporary pressures. The digitization and documentation of oral songs is one of the crucial steps. Finnegan (2012) asserts that oral traditions can be preserved using audio, video and written records to ensure that future generations can appreciate the tradition. Proprietary projects oriented at documenting performances by prominent *mawaƙa* like Mamman Shata or Aliyu Dan Maraya Jos would make sure their work would not be lost in digital libraries and cultural centers.

Also, the inclusion of *waka* in academic programs, starting in primary schools, and all the way through to the university, would institutionalize the learning of Hausa oral heritage. Oral songs should be analyzed as historical texts in courses on African oral literature, folklore, and cultural history. This would not only create academic interest but also cultural pride among the younger generations (Adamu, 2007).

Furthermore, it is important to promote intergenerational transmission by means of festivals, competitions, and cultural programs. According to Callaway (1987), oral performance and learning have always

been a part of community events. Restoration of the spaces would enable the older *mawaka* to guide the younger generations in performing this art, thus continuity of the art form. Such events can be organized with the collaboration of Government cultural agencies, NGOs, and educational institutions, making them vibrant cultural conservation and innovation spaces.

Despite the valuable insights that this work has given into the role of *wakar baka* within Hausa society, there are still a number of areas to be explored further by scholars. A comparative analysis of Hausa oral traditions and other African cultures might illuminate similar themes, stylistic devices and cultural roles. This cross-cultural examination would enhance our knowledge of oral performance as a pan-African form of historical and cultural expression.

Moreover, how modern technology affects the existence and the evolution of oral songs is an exciting area of investigation. With social media, music streaming services, and digital archives becoming more influential in cultural consumption, one would wonder how *wakar baka* is adjusting to these media. These dynamics are going to provide an insight into how oral traditions can be maintained in a rapidly evolving world (Last, 2008).

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