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Promoting women empowerment through songs: Barmani Choge and her performances

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the oral performances of Hausa poet Hajiya Sa'adatu Barmani Choge (1945-2013). Her songs promoted the genre of music called Amada; music performed using calabash ensemble in northern Nigeria. Barmani has composed about 17 well known songs mostly targeting the female audience and family life. As such, some aspects of her songs drawn from excerpts of her recordings from CDs and YouTube highlighting her performances in Hausa language will be presented. The purpose of the analysis is to develop an understanding of her accomplishment and recognition as a traditional female singer who has played an important role in promoting women's empowerment. As the last female of her art, this article will showcase her style of performance with her calabash, chorus band members *'yan amshi*, creative exemplifications and public acceptance. Analysing some of her orally performances which include songs about women's life, women empowerment and women's sexuality will provide an insight into a woman's interpretation of Hausa society particularly in Nigeria.

KEY WORDS: oral poetry, Hausa women, women's empowerment

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1. Introduction

Oral poetry has been, and remains, part and parcel of African traditions. With or without instrumental accompaniment, language shapes melodies that are in turn enriched by the meaning language brings. Hausa oral poetry has its roots in ancient Hausa tradition (SCHUH 1994: 1). The Hausa area encompasses northern Nigeria and parts of the Republic of Niger, where Hausa oral poetry is given great significance. In northern Nigeria, during the pre-Islamic period and the Hausa dynasty under Barbushe,[1] the Maguzawa worshipped their god Tsunburbura, chanting praises as part of their rituals.

Much later, in the pre-jihad period, Hausa *haɓe*[2] rulers and warriors enjoyed praise songs of valour, bravery and power. An example is cited in CHAMO (2013). It is from a praise song for the warrior Bawa Jan Gwarzo:

> "Causer of terror, iron chieftain,
> Son of Al-Hassan, owner of the drum,
> Causer of terror, iron grates of the town.
> … Bawa it was you who began to conquer the town."
> (from CHAMO 2013: 4)

Praise songs such as this one celebrate the strength of Bawa against his enemies during a time of war.

The *jihad* period ushered in Islamic songs reflecting praise of Allah and Prophet Muhammad and promoting good deeds for a higher gain. By the time of post jihad, oral songs had a mixed dimension, as singers opened and ended songs with praise of Allah and his prophet Muhammad and, in between, their lyrics systematically lauded royals, wealthy and significant others, depending on whom – and the occasion – the song was meant for. At this time, the popular Hausa oral singers were mostly male. Alhaji Mamman Shata, Alhaji Musa Ɗanƙwairo, Ibrahim Narambaɗa, Sa'idu Faru, Aliyu Ɗandawo, Salihu Jankiɗi, to mention a few, were and remain popular Hausa singers who became household names and enriched Hausa poetics.

The influence of Islamic interpretation also, does not encourage women to make a public presence. This is because "traditionally, the woman in Hausa custom is put in seclusion through a system called *Kulle* (wife seclusion) and it is almost mandatory and expected that the woman should be invisible and inaudible"

[1] A priest of Dala Hill in Kano.

[2] "People of Hausa as opposed to Fulani ancestry, usually in political or historical context" (NEWMAN 2007: 82).

(JEGEDE and MAGAJI 2018: 27). Still, Hausa girls and women are not silent, as songs during domestic chores, weddings and naming ceremonies have women creating music with their voices, and the use of *shantu* and *kwarya* as instruments add melody to their vocalising. Also, a few female Hausa Muslim oral poets have joined with other African women oral singers, and they have created legacies of their oral artistry.

Women's voices and their musicality has resonated in African countries, serving as a type of talisman, a balm creating awareness and understanding of the social spheres surrounding women oral poets. Hogan states:

> "In Niger, Nigeria, and Guinea in particular, women have historically challenged socio-cultural norms and political formations through song, as is documented in the ethnographic works of Africanists Beverly Mack, Saidou N'Daou, Aissata Sidikou, and others. Through performative acts of resistance, these female poets, singers, and activists confront many aspects of West African life, ranging from low literacy rates amongst women, immodesty by young Muslims, and the challenges of maintaining traditional Islamic practice, to the discontents of polygamy, the patriarchal organization of Muslim society, and the large scale political mobilization of rural minorities." (HOGAN 2018: 1)

Hogan captures the essence of oral song, especially that of women. This categorization echoes a trend in the thematic discourse found in women's orality. For example, in the Niger Republic, oral singers like Zabia Hussei use their verbal art 'to advance the cause of Hausa women' (HUNTER and OUMAROU 1998: 166). MACK's (2004) book on Muslim Hausa women discusses songs by women poets like Binta Katsina and Barmani Choge, whose voices are prominent and reflect their time, as they sing about, "current events, political issues, and social concerns" MACK's (2004: 4). One female oral poet, Uwaliya Mai Amada, set the pace that Barmani Choge would step into, both using the calabash as the instrument accompanying their orality. In northern Nigeria, Barmani Choge has become a living legend, and her resonance has reverberated throughout the Hausa-speaking regions of West Africa and across the globe wherever Hausa speakers reside. Her songs touch on different aspects of women's lives, female empowerment through education, trade and how to live 'smart' within the domain of polygyny. Rich in rhythm, inflection and tonal novelty, Barmani Choge's voice flows in a way that matches the chimes of a raised *kwarya* calabash – an active Hausa singing instrument without the additions of strings, leathers or other alterations – a valuable asset (apart from home use). Because of her popularity, notable scholars such as FURNISS (1996), MACK (2004), ADAMU (2006, 2008), GUSAU (2008), OJAIDE (2012) and BAWA (2016) have highlighted her music

in their work.

The significance of Barmani's lyrics is that it prioritises women. She has captured women in their domestic circumstances: as wives and co-wives, as mothers, as entrepreneurs. She also encourages them to access education. Her message vocalises the need for women to be independent through empowerment and education. On occasions of celebration such as marriage and naming ceremonies, her open display of women's sexuality through the use of jokes and humour glorifies the openness that exists between Hausa women in their private sphere. Barmani's poetry has mentioned several women: women attached to fame and politics, her band members and the common woman, whose presence lives on, documented by and in Barmani's poetic resonance. This paper, featuring Barmani Choge, her Amada instrument and her band, will discuss the appreciation of women in Barmani's performances.

2. Barmani Mai Choge

Barmani[3] Choge's (her birth name was Sa'adatu) exit from the world in March 2013 reawakened the people's passion and remembrance for this evocative performer (SHEME 2008). Born in 1945 in the small village of Gwaigwayi, in Katsina State in northern Nigeria, she had no background in singing (ADAMU 2008). Coming from a household of Islamic scholars, Barmani received her Islamic education through her father. Still living in a village, Barmani, along with her peer group, would participate in a late afternoon or evening play in an open air space refer to as *dandali*[4] where children gather, sing and play together (MASHI 1982).

Reminiscent of her childhood singing and dancing is the Choge[5] song, one that she remembered and that became part of her name and a chorus in her singing career (MASHI 1982: 2). Apart from this, marrying Alhaji Ali contributed immensely to her singing career taking off. At the age of nine, Alhaji Ali started singing with his father using the *garaya* two string plucked lute. Though Alhaji

[3] Barmani is a name derived from the verb *bari*, meaning to leave with an indirect object, here being *mani*, for me, which together implies 'leave (it) for me'. It is a name that has superstitious connotations and is given to a female child whose parents have lost other babies or whose mother is miscarrying her babies. So when a child is born, the name or nickname 'Barmani' is a shorter version of 'God leave this for me'.

[4] *Wasan dandali*: children's play conducted in an open area in a town centre or square.

[5] Choge was a song that children would sing to an elderly woman at the time when Barmani was young. The Choge name comes from how a woman would walk because of a lame leg. See MASHI's dissertation (1982). Later, the name stuck to Barmani because of her singing and dancing.

Ali did not become influential like his wife, his background of oral singing enabled him the hindsight to encourage his wife in her singing career, especially at a time when the voices of male oral poets overshadowed that of women (MASHI 1982: 6-7).

MACK notes that at Hausa traditional weddings they are, "women in action, professionals entertaining other women with abandon that derived from delight in what they were doing in singing and dancing to entertain audiences of other women" (2004: 3). Therefore, like other women performing at celebrations, Barmani's voice began to appear during women's occasions, such as marriages and naming ceremonies. Slowly, over the years and with the support of her husband, Barmani found herself moving in and out of Funtua to perform; she was invited to many places across the country and outside Nigeria, along with her groups of female supporters and her one-type musical instrument which is *ƙwarya*, that is the calabash (ADAMU 2008).

By the time of Barmani's death, the value of the *ƙwarya* had risen from a household item to an instrument, sometimes even without addition of strings, leather and stick, so common that women would beat the *ƙwarya* with their hands to evoke melodies and sing to events reminiscent of Barmani.

Her songs, which are analysed in the current paper, are found online and were uploaded to YouTube by Professor Abdalla Uba Adamu. These videos are found with the tag 'BarmaniChoge'.

3. The *amada* instrument and band

NEWMAN defines *amada* as "women's vocal music accompanied by calabash drums" (2007: 7). These calabash-like drums are the products of the calabash tree, which also produces big calabashes used by Hausa women for room decorations and as containers for storage and food (PLATTE 2004). As instruments, calabashes are turned upside down and are hit with hands or sometimes sticks; they can also be turned upside down in a bowl that is filled with water to create a bass-like sound.

Figure 1 – A calabash in a bowl with water similar to one of Barmani Choge's ensembles (picture by Aliyu Yakubu Yusuf).

At a time when access to musical instruments such as drums and trumpets were gender dominated, Hausa women had to sing while performing their daily chores. Part of the Hausa woman's daily chores may include grinding tomatoes on a stone grinder (now more evident in rural areas), sweeping the compound, thrashing the grains or pounding the mortar with a pestle. In this case, for many Hausa women, their voices may serve as a helper in the never-ending daily chores that kept a woman busy throughout the day (MACK 2004). During periods where celebrations brought women together, the Hausa would women create spaces socially defined to meet their needs; this social space was emphasised through the voice of one of Barmani's female influences: Uwaliya mai Amada. Adamu describes Uwaliya genre of music as a "female vocalist accompanied by an orchestra of women calabash musicians (led by her husband) in a music genre referred to as *amada*." (ADAMU 2008: 96).

Nevertheless, Uwaliya, and later on Barmani, would popularise the genre of Amada, which became a symbol of Amada praises entertaining common people at weddings and ceremonies, as well as people of the high class, who would marvel at Barmani's oral performances and invite her to their events and programmes.

Barmani's 'Amada' performance entailed a lot of praising of people. One of the specialities surrounding Barmani's performances was how her praise featured her all-women band and chorus singers. Praise singing *kirari* is a genre of music that may be accompanied by instrument (not for all) but entails oral performance in which the singer praise, 'their clients for money or other material goods' (ADAMU 2008: 94). In Hausa society, variations in praise singing occurs as some oral singers use instruments like the drum, *kuntigi* single stringed-lute among others, in which they get to be known by their vocals and the special instruments they use. Also, praise singing as Adamu notes:

> "The most distinctive characteristic of subject matter of mainstream traditional Hausa musicians is their client-focused nature. The subject matter of the songs could either be a courtier, an emir, a wealthy person, an infamous person, or simply iconic interpretations of the mutability of life. Thus Hausa "music" excels on its *vocal* qualities- with Hausa musicians producing songs of utter philosophical and poetic quality, reflecting Hausa proverbs-rather than instrumental virtuosity." (ADAMU 2008: 95-96)

In Barmani's case, her clients include the wealthy and the in-famous using her song to praise those who invited her as well as capturing the less privilege. Often, musicians were known by the nature of their singing and style, as if it was a one-person effort; this left the supporting band as nameless faces. Through Barmani's singing, her band became more than just nameless faces: they became an integral part of her performance. Like her music, which she sang full of passion and emotion, Barmani's band were equally cherished because of the way she engaged them in a conversation in many of her songs. A vivid description of Barmani's calabash performance is given by Adamu:

> "Barmani Choge usually performs with what I call 'a calabash orchestra', an elegant term for a group of five or six women (definitely no men) producing music with calabashes that have been placed upside down (that is the open ends on the ground) in front of them. They produce the music by rigorously beating the calabashes with sticks and the palms of the hands in a certain rhythmic pattern. One or two of the calabashes are often upturned on a larger bowl of water — thus giving out a deep bass sound, while the other upturned calabashes produce tight dry sounds. The music is accompanied by Barmani's lyrics, and often supported by a chorus from the women musicians." (ADAMU 2008: 102)

Through Barmani's chanting's, the names or nicknames of her band members like *'Yan biyun ƙwarya*, *A-bangaji-romo*, *Ladi* among others began to appear and stick in people's minds. According to MASHI (1982: 11), Barmani's ensemble of

band leaders were already oral singers when Barmani met them. These women's names, as cited by Barmani, were the nicknames they had used in their singing careers. In his dissertation, MASHI (1982) highlights some of the nicknames as belonging to, the following band members; Rakiya's nickname is *'Yan biyun ƙwarya,* Zulai as *Kushalle,* Hajara as *Ladi mai ƙwarya;* and Aishatu is nicknamed *A-bangaji-romo.*

Barmani called out their names during her performances to show their importance and further imprint in people's minds their names and personalities. In an interview with Barmani, she was quoted as saying, "there are periods when her band members create the chorus by themselves without waiting to hear it from her" (MASHI 1982: 11).

4. Appreciating women in Choge's performances

From the start of her singing career, in numerous ways, Barmani presented the importance of women by promoting them in her lyrics; this included praises of the women she came across during her performances, those who paid for her services, the wives of people she had come across or merely generally praising women while advising women to hold onto moral traits, be empowered, stay empowered and become educated.

One feature of her singing that stands out is how Barmani showed the significance of her all-female band members by calling out their names in her songs. She was, by all accounts, a modest woman who made the public aware that her career was a success only because of the support of her all-female band. The public got to know the simple, yet passionate calabash drummers and the chorus team she had assembled. In songs such as *Alhazawa*, a song about performing the Islamic rites of going to Mecca, Barmani calls out band member names while singing. Gradually, her songs, such as *Gangar Ɗa'a* ('The song about good manners'), *Gwarne Ikon Allah* ('The blessings of multiple births'), *Waƙar Kishiya* ('The song about being a co-wife'), *Mai Soso Ke Wanka* ('The one with the sponge takes a bath'), *Zage Zogala* ('Strip off the moringa leaves'), *Waƙar Ɗuwaiwai* ('The song of the derrière'), *Waƙar Sakarai Ba Ta Da Wayo* ('Silly, she's not smart'), *A Kama Sana'a Mata* ('Women, engage in profitable occupations'), *Dare Allah Magani* ('Allah, the curer of night darkness') and *Sama Ruwa Kasa Ruwa* ('Water above, water below'), to mention a few, included names such as *Ta Audu*, *Ladi*, *ɗiyar Mahauta*, *Ta Ari* and *'Yar Ja*, among others, in different instances. This is seen in an excerpt of *Alhazawa*:

Barmani	
Ayye ta Audu 'yar ƙwarya	Oh ta Audu the calabash player,
ki tuna da Ramatu	you should remember Ramatu
Ladi mai ƙwarya	Ladi, the calabash player,
a tuna da Ramatu	remember Ramatu
Ɗiyar Mahauta	Ɗiyar Mahauta,
ba ma mance Ramatu	we won't forget Ramatu
'Yar Ja mai ruwa a roba je ki,	'Yar Ja with the water in a bowl, go and
ki gai da Ramatu	say hello to Ramatu
Ayye ta Audu zaƙudi ƙwarya,	Oh ta Audu, shake the calabash, who
wa kike jira	are you waiting for
'Yan amshi	Chorus
Lallai lallai mu muna zuwa	Indeed, we too are coming

As exemplified above, the names of the band members mentioned indicate how Barmani treated them as part of her whole performance. A visual image is presented of a person who performs and in a certain style. For example, "'Yar Ja plays the calabash facing down in the large bowl of water which gives the "bass" sound" (ADAMU 2008: 102). Also, the message in the chorus indicates the certitude that one day, she and her band members will go and perform the pilgrimage rites as a fulfilment of one of the five pillars of Islam. Similarly, in her song, Barmani seems to portray the impression of engaging with her band members in conversation. A good example of this conversational approach is her song *Gangar Ɗa'a*:

Ayye mai kiɗa a bangaji romo[6]	Oh the drummer a bangaji romo
Ni Jas na je na sheƙe ayata	I went to Jos and enjoyed myself
Na tad da maigida da gidanshi	I met the head of a household…

In instances like the one above, her voice becomes folkloric as she entertains in a narrative way. For example, the following lyrics have a kind of narrative:

O ɗiyar mahauta rushe-rushe	The ɗiyar mahauta,
mu je gidan Sa'i	we should go to Sa'i's house
Idan kuɗi kike nema	If you need money
Yi kwalliya ki ɗau ƙwarya	Dress up and pick the calabash
Mu je Katsina mu yi ta rawa	We go to Katsina and dance away

This style of addressing band members in her orality is one of the essential

[6] *Bangaji romo* is a nickname for Aishatu, one of her band members.

ingredients of Barmani's songs. Other songs, such as *A Hayye Yaro*, *Sama Ruwa Kasa Ruwa*, *Wakar Kishiya* and *Ɗuwaiwai,* show similar patterns of band engagement.

In Hausa society, one marked by classed distinction, there are elite houses that are known for their title, wealth and mark of respect. The importance of class status is outlined by Smith in the following excerpt:

> "One of the first things of which a stranger is told in Hausaland is the importance of the distinction between the *sarakuna* (chiefs) and *masu-sarauta* (officeholders) on the one hand, and the *talakawa* (subjects, commoners) on the other. The rulers exercise authority over the ruled and therefore have higher status." (SMITH 1959: 247)

These influential houses have matriarchs that earned respect because of the positive roles they played in society, such as by helping the poor and giving to the needy. In her song *Gwarne Ikon Allah* (Version 1), Barmani praises Mariya Sunusi Ɗantata, a philanthropist, a daughter of one of Kano's richest men, whose son – Aliko Ɗangote – was also considered one of the richest African entrepreneurs. In her praising, Barmani also features the daughter of Aliko Ɗangote, also called Mariya after her grandmother portraying Mariya as taking after the good deeds of her grandmother. Similar patterns of praising women of significance were featured across different Hausa cities, such as Katsina and Zaria among others. Apart from the chorus members, Barmani's songs show her appreciation of women in places where she had been invited to perform. Like the praise singer she was, several women would be mention either alongside their men or in other instances by mentioning their names and what she has received from them. In her song *Alhazawa,* she praises a woman by featuring her name and stating this woman is the mother of twins:

Marliya, uwar tagwaye a daɗe a duniya	Marliya, mother of twins, may you live long

In the chorus of 'Gangar Ɗa'a', Barmani mentions a groom by using the bride's name to show her happiness in the gifts she received during her performance at a wedding function:

Angon Hanne ka biya mu	Hanne's groom, you have satisfied us

This type of praising of women is presented in most of her singing, where she calls out names to show gratitude of the payment made. Barmani, even when she was paid by the husband for her performances, gave praise to the wives who

welcomed her into their homes. An example of this is also featured in *A Hayye Yaro*:

Matan Magaji Naira ba a fi ku ba	Wives of Magaji, you are richer than others

According to Bawa, several women have plied Barmani with gifts to show their appreciation of her music, including the late Maryam Babangida[7] and other prominent women. One of her songs:

> "... was the one that was tribute to her closest friend, Hajiya Maduga wife of Sarkin Magana, who is also late. Choge owned gratitude to her. The first hajj she performed, the seat was given to her by Maduga." (BAWA 2016: 187).

As presented above, praising is one of the essential elements in her singing.

Brought up in northern Nigeria during a period when women were not given the chance to obtain a modern education, several of Barmani's songs echo her love and frustrations, urging women to become empowered or educated because, as Barmani would state numerous times, a lack of education limits the chances of one's empowerment. Her active support for women's empowerment and education is seen in her song 'A Kama Sana'a Mata' (women engage in trade), where she pleads with women to become proficient in a trade skill to escape a life that would otherwise be passive and troubled. Barmani's request for women's empowerment in certain trading is not a new venture to Hausa women. COLES' (1991: 181) analysis of the Hausa women in Kaduna shows these women engage 'in income-generating activities' similar to the activities mentioned by Barmani below. This is necessary because apart from the husband's responsibility of taking care of his wife (or wives) and children, a woman's income contributes 'to a woman's own maintenance and the subsistence of her children' when necessary or to 'gifts for female friends as part of formal exchange networks' (COLES 1991: 181). Therefore, Barmani sings to encourage more women to become empowered in an effort to reduce the burden of 'modern frustrations':

Kar a raina sana'a mata	Women do not look down on any trade
A yi kuli-kuli ko a yi kosai	Sell peanut balls or beans cake
A yi furar madu ko a yi ɗanwake	Sell millet balls or dumplings
Kai a kama sana'a ya fi	It is better to engage in a trade

[7] Former first lady and wife of former Nigerian Military leader General Ibrahim Babangida (1985-1993).

Ko za a sami abin kai wa biki	To enable gifts during celebrations

Among the Hausa in northern Nigeria, marriage requires a woman to participate in her domestic duties. Within the home, the woman serves as the caretaker of her husband and children. Those who are educated and can work outside of their homes also combine their professional work lives with their household chores. For women who do not work and have no other means of trade, Barmani implores these women to not belittle any trade. Instead, these women should engage in trade, even if it is just cooking food within the confines of their homes and selling it to others. By working in a trade, the chance of being economically dependent on a husband drops, thus lessening marital frustrations because financial constraints are one of the sources of conflict among spouses in Hausa society. This is explained by Sulaiman et al. in the following:

> "The marital, financial issues, money or anything affiliated to finances can be an achievable cause of misunderstanding among many people, including spouse. Husband and wife, whether they are happy or not, many have disagreements over the little financial issues too much bigger shared financial responsibilities or unequal monetary status." (SULAIMAN et al. 2015: 1235)

And one of the reasons, among others, women demand money from their husband includes gifts to give other women during festivities, such as marriages and naming ceremonies. Hausa women are known for their ability to strengthen social relationships with their spouse's family, their own extended family and neighbours or acquaintances. One of the ways this may occur is through appreciating a woman's birthing or marriage. A gift given is always appreciated and remembered. As such, having a means of subsistence other than that of the woman's husband, as listed by Barmani, enables security, reduces tension and provides a means with which to spruce oneself up by providing oneself with trinkets and other make-up accessories. To show women how successful trade can be, Barmani praises a woman who became popular because of her in-house trade:

Wannan magana ta sana'a ce	This song is about trade
Kai ni Rimin Tsiwa[8]	Take me to Rimin Tsiwa
Uwar Ramatu Rimin Tsiwa	The mother of Ramatu Rimin Tsiwa
Ga mai tuwo da sunan Allah	One who is blessed for her fufu trade
Ko sha biyun dare kika tuƙa a saya	It gets sold even when cooked at midnight

[8] An area in Zaria.

Her message to all women is that once you pick up a trade and work at it, people will come seeking your goods.

Also, for those who have progressed in life because of their educational background, Barmani shows clear fascination for these women and feels the need to extol them. In *Gangar Ɗa'a*, when invited to perform by a Katsina traditional titleholder, Barmani praised Fadila, another woman, and the wives of a Sa'i:[9]

Sannan Fadila na da ilimi	Also Fadila is educated
Ai matan Sa'i na da ilimi	The wives of Sa'i are educated

Also, her love for education made her praise Murja in her song *Ɗuwaiwai*:

Ki yi taƙamarki sosai	You should swagger proudly
Ke Murja yi rangaɗinki sosai	Murja, swagger very well
Ai ilimi gare ki Murja	Murja, you are educated
Ai ilimi gare ki sosai	Murja, you are very well educated

Apart from women the Barmani became acquainted with in her singing career, Barmani connected with women in her songs by imploring young girls to become empowered. In one of her songs, *Sama Ruwa Kasa Ruwa,* she implores young girls to seek an education:

Yarinya matso ki nemo ilimi	Girl, move closer and seek education

Perhaps her intention was to create awareness by showing that the essence of education lies with women, which shown in the following:

Da ilimi yana wurin mata	Education is with women

The above line connects with Islamic beliefs and traditions that call for women to be educated (ABUKARI 2014). Here, the idea is that a mother is a school, and the mother is the person who serves as the home's main caretaker. If she is educated, then all of society will become enlightened as well.

Barmani understood the setback facing women when it came to education in northern Nigeria, especially during her childhood, a time when most girls were not able to go to modern schools and instead were forced to marry around the

[9] A traditional title that emerged after the emergence of Islam. The title is for someone who is responsible for collecting *zakka*, the compulsory religious tithe. In this case, the song addresses the Sa'i of Funtua, that is, Alhaji Ahmadu na Funtua.

age of thirteen or thereabout to "fulfill a rite of passage early in their lives" (MACK 2004: 6). Even by:

> "... Nigerian independence (1960), statistics have constantly demonstrated that Hausa Muslim women's literacy levels are far lower than those of men, but these statistics are based on measures of Western educational programmes without accounting for levels of Qur'anic education." (MACK 2004: 6)

1960 was the year when Barmani became fifteen and married. Also, Mack's assessment is accurate as most women though not western educated have like Barmani undertaken Islamic literacy knowledge.

Nevertheless, it was important for a girl to be independent of her husband, especially when thrusted into a polygamous home where living with co-wives would be unavoidable; Barmani chants the following in *Mai Soso ke Wanka*:

Don Ya Rasulillahi mata	For the sake of the Prophet, women
Duk wanda bai yi ilimi ba	Whoever is not educated
Ya lallaɓa ya koyi sana'a	You should move and learn a trade
Don yanzu duniya ta canza	Because the world has changed
Ai sai da kwalliya ake gaye	With education, one can show off
Idan babu kwalliya wane gayen za a yi?	Without education, what would you show?

The above lyrics were a live performance in 2006 in Kano, where Barmani clearly stated that education is the key, begging women to become educated; if they couldn't get an education, then Barmani said they should seek empowerment through trade.

Similarly, in *Waƙar Kishiya,* a song about a co-wife, Barmani bares it all when it comes to having leverage among one's co-wives, portraying that what makes a woman independent must include having a sustainable trade, thus earning respect among co-mates:

Kai kowa ya kama sana'a mata	Every woman should have a trade
Duk macen da ba ta sana'a ta ba ni	A woman without a trade is in a dilemma
Duk macen da ba ta sana'a godîya	A woman without trade is like a mare
Mace da ba ta sana'a sakarai	A woman without a trade is useless

In Sakarai Ba Ta Da Wayo, Adamu describes the song as follows:

> "In advocating for gainful commerce by Muslim women in purdah, Choge uses the protagonist as a woman who does not engage in any form of trade and yet lives in the house. This woman, who is a *sakarai,* becomes the focus of Choge's operetta, where

she lambasts her as being less than useless because she has no trade." (ADAMU 2008: 103)

To buttress her point on the importance of women empowerment through trade, in *Sakarai Ba Ta Da Wayo* (useless, she is not smart), Barmani says the following:

Da na yi gargaɗi na ƙara	I have warned repeatedly
Kowa ya kama sana'a	Everyone should pick a trade

To show how significant her message is to fellow women, Barmani stresses the point in 'Sakarai Ba Ta Da Wayo' by listing the different cities she had visited and telling of how she encouraged the women of each city to pick up a trade:

Sai na je garin Daura,	I went to Daura
Kuma Zariya Birnin Shehu.	Also to Zaria, the city of Shehu
Kuma Zariya Birnin Shehu.	Women, I prefer you pick up a trade
Da ke ta Audu na zo Legas,	Ta Audu, I went to Lagos
Na gaya ma matan Legas,	I told the women in Lagos
Na yi gargadi na ƙara.	I have repeatedly warned
Don Allah a kama sana'a.	For God's sake, pick up a trade

For Barmani, being a professional praise singer empowered her by helping supplement her husband's income. This function can be glimpsed within the lines of her song *Allah Ka Ba Mu Nairori* (God give us money), where she talks of buying useful items for her children:

Sai nai ƙasa-ƙasa na kwashi kuɗi	Then, I bent so low to pack the money
Har na tsaya Kano na sai kaya	As far as stopping in Kano to buy stuffs
Na sai wani atamfa don gayu	I bought a textile material to spruce up
Na sai kwalla mai masallaci	I bought a basin with a mosque pattern
Na je na rarraba wa 'ya'yana	I went and shared it amongst my children

This 'classical style' room is described by PLATTE (2004: 175) in her analysis of the Kanuri women's room decor. Platte uses the words 'shelving of the pots' to describe one pot placed over the other. These pots, especially in Platte's assessment of 1990s room decor, were common Hausa women's room design; one pot is called *kwalla,* and several of these *kwalla* are an 'arrangement of enamel dishes decorated with' different patterns. Thus, for Barmani, providing her children with delicate and fashionable objects such as *kwalla*, especially for her daughters, was a way to provide them with trendy furniture. At this time, fashion for women was portrayed in the room and also on the body. When the room was fitted with decorated with items such as *kwalla* and the body was well

taken care of, especially in relation to cleanliness and wearing fashionable clothing, according to Barmani, this would give the woman a positive substance when she went to relate with her husband and other people. In other words, when well-furnished, a woman's room will appear beautiful to her husband and visitors, and her smart appearance will boost her positive image. And how would a woman achieve this? Barmani was clear in her vivid expression of women and how they must understand and appreciate their sexuality; she accomplished this by delving into the private homes of Hausa married women and what they must do to maintain their status, as seen in the following:

Ai mai muƙami ke wankan dare	It is the one with a position who baths at night
Wadda ba ta da muƙami ko sussuka tai dami tai wanka sai badî...	The one without a position even when night she threshed the corn, can stay without a bath until next year

The above song, *Mai Soso Ke Wanka,* describes the typical role of Hausa married women, the importance of marriage and how these women spruce up in the evening to appreciate their nights with their husbands. During the day, while the man is out providing for the family, the woman keeps the home and takes care of the children. When the evening meal is over, the woman takes a bath, dresses up and assumes her role of being with her husband. The one who does not fulfil this role is the one who does not have a man, and that woman can go to bed in her smelly outfit, and nobody will care.

Providing another insight into the effects of multiple birth, in her song *Gwarne Ikon Allah*, Barmani feels the need to offer support to women who easily become pregnant without the required spacing between a child and subsequent pregnancy. In traditional Hausa society, natural spacing methods include prolonged breast feeding (i.e., *lactational amenorrhoea*) and *coitus interruptus* (withdrawal method). For women who were not using artificial planning methods, there were cases where the natural method failed, and a suddenly pregnant woman would become the centre of gossip. The woman was said to be giving birth to *kunika*, a term applied to a child born within a period that is very close to the former one. Barmani's song ridicules those mocking these women instead of showing love and providing support to them. To show her support for them, she says the following:

Kun ji zan gaya muku yaran mata	Let me tell you young women
Haihuwa malkar faru ce	Procreation has a time limit
Ayye ran da ta ƙare sai warisa	When it ends one starts dressing up

To kuma rigar mama Salama Alaikum	And here comes wearing the brassiere
Ayye ni idan na fara sai nai dozin	Oh, I won't stop until I reach dozen

Barmani's message is that when a woman finds herself pregnant while still feeding a small child, she should not despair. She should, instead stay strong and carry on. A woman's fertile period has a term limit. And to support these women, Barmani celebrates procreation when she mentions she will give birth until she reaches a dozen children. Overall, *Gwarne Ikon Allah* exposes the double standard of the culture at the time. A woman (mostly in women's social circles) is forced to take the brunt of births spaced close together while the man experiences nothing of the sort.

Perhaps the biggest contribution made to women's voices lies in Barmani's ability to touch the core of the Hausa woman's dilemma: polygyny. Barmani brings out the emotional feelings most women have experienced by rebelling against the issue of polygyny. For the Hausa of northern Nigeria, it is standard for a man to marry several wives, and because of the Islamic injunction from the Quran, this number can reach up to four wives. In the chapter *Nisa'i* ('women'), there is the following passage:

> "[...] marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]." (QUR'AN 4:3).

The interpretation of this text gives many Muslims in northern Nigeria the opportunity to marry more than one wife. It is also right to say that polygyny in Hausa society did not start with Islam. Even before the coming of Islam, some Hausa men were thought to have had more than one wife, and in some cases, they had up to four because having a big family created the ability to have many children who would help take care of the farm (BARKOW 1973). Despite the fact that polygynous marriages come with some difficulties, there are many recorded cases of amiable relationships between co-wives, and it is rare to see an open emotional display on the part of the Uwargida (first wife) when a second wife is brought into the home. Of course, in SMITH (1991), Baba of Karo narrates the skirmishes taking place in the house of Malam Zakari, which reflects the polygynous rivalries in some Hausa homes. Barmani's song, *Wakar Kishiya*, which is also titled *Dare Allah Magani*, delves deeper. Though having lived without a co-wife all her married life, the message in Barmani's song echoes the feelings of many wives who find themselves in this situation. She narrates a peaceful atmosphere – one that soon vanishes with the mention of a co-wife –

between couples, with her as the first-person narrator, as follows:

'Yan Amshi: Dare Allah Magani	Chorus: Allah, the curer of night darkness
Barmani: *Muna zaman mu da Malam*	We are leaving together with Malam
Ba fushi ba tashin hankali	No fight or problems
Da sai na ce masa Malam Malami	Then I say to Malam
Da ni ina so ka yi mini kishiya	I want you to marry again
Da sai ya ce mini, 'ke ɗai kin isa'	Then he said, 'You are enough'
Ina ta ƙwambo, wai ni na isa	I am boasting that its only me
Da tsufa ya tabaibaye ni	As I begin to grow older
Sai ya ce mini wai aure za ya yi	Then he said, 'He wants to add a wife'
Sai na ce masa Malam Malami wa za ka dama wa salalan tsiya	Then I say, 'Malam who do you intend to confuse'

Barmani's song presents a scenario of Hausa women's expectations and fears after marriage. The first wife does not rule out the chance that her husband will add another wife. Behind the façade of happiness lies the reminder that a husband may add another wife. Not to be caught unaware, in her song, Barmani, as the narrator, suggests the husband should marry again, and his response that she suffices made her proud and boastful. Several years later, the narrator is shocked when her husband informs her of his intention to add another wife. Echoing the distress of many wives, Barmani's song curses the people who facilitate the entry of a co-wife:

Duk wanda ya yi maka hanyar kishiya	Whoever facilitates the coming of another wife
Ka yi wata tara ba ka gai da shi	Spend nine months not talking to him
Dare da rana Allah Ya isa	Curse him day and night
Wanda ya yi maka hanyar kishiya	Whoever facilitates the coming of another wife
Ana rabon ajali zai ba ka ne	Will also cause your death

Her attacks continue as she vents directly at the co-wife:

Kai ku tsaya ku ji sunan kishiya	Hey wait and hear the name of a co-wife
Bakar kunama mai halbin tsiya	Black scorpion with the venomous sting
Bakin maciji mai sarin tsiya	Black snake with the venomous strike
Ta ƙwandaririya mai ƙarfin gaba	Skinny, yet a nymphomaniac

What is interesting about Barmani's repertoire is how it brings out the feelings of many Hausa women. Her song is about acknowledging the existence of a woman's pain in a polygynous marriage taking place in a society that makes visible expressions of jealousy a serious sign of weakness. As such, Hausa women who are expecting a co-wife must hide their sorrow behind a veneer of calmness.

Surrounded by family and friends, a wife pretends she is fine by smiling and welcoming guests in preparation for the co-wife, even if in her heart she hates the co-wife. Barmani's song spits on the matchmakers, among which are also men, by informing women to turn their back on anyone who made their husbands bring in another co-wife. In the case where the marriage is enacted, Barmani's offer to women is the following:

Ku yi kishin birni mata	Women, play smart in co-wife situations
Kishin faɗa sai durwar kare[10]	Do not fight like mad dogs

The song opens up on the emotional trauma faced by women; Barmani's courageous song offers insight and advice to women on how to deal with a life in a polygynous setting.

5. Conclusions

The paper highlighted Barmani Choge's achievements as an oral artist. As an artist, her songs are a process of her life achievements. Her songs have a depth that are deeply engaging and thought provoking. Her songs provide insight into the socio-cultural aspects of Hausa society. In one of her songs, *A Kama Sana'a Mata*, Barmani portrays the significance of praise songs by saying, *Kowa ya ba ka don ka faɗi ne*, meaning 'whoever gives you, wants you to mention it'. This is why mentioning the names of people and extolling their virtues are part of Barmani's singing method. The significance of her praise songs is not limited to 'praise', but also serves as a documentation of significant people within Hausa society. Her songs take a journey through places she has visited, influential people of power in the past, royal households, her cherished band members, her association with other women in Hausa society and her travels through Nigerian cities. Barmani's songs serve as entertainment and admonishment to others, especially women. Her greatest message to women, as highlighted throughout this article, is women's empowerment through education and trade. Here, one very important note in MACK's (2004) discussion about Hausa women is that 'every woman sings', which portrays the significance of oral poetry among Hausa women.

[10] *Durwar kare* 'black and white dog'.

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