

**Poetry & Poetics:
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**Edited by:
Saleh Abdu
Mohammed O. Bhadmus**

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**WOMANIST ETHOS AND HAUSA DOMESTIC
ECOLOGY: A STRUCTURALIST ANALYSIS OF
BARMANI CHOGE'S OPERETTA, SAKARAI BA TA DA
WAYO (USELESS WOMAN)**

By

Abdalla Uba Adamu

Introduction

An essential tension exists between Muslim Hausa public culture and popular culture. Public culture reflects the quintessential Hausa social makeup with its agreed boundaries defined by cultural specificity such as dress code, language and rules of social discourse. Popular culture, on the other hand, is seen as the realm of the un-sophisticated working class. Music, in all its forms, belongs to this class.

Hausa society, being structured on specific occupational hierarchies often considers music a low art form. Musical appreciation can however be either low or high. For instance, the existence of complete orchestras in palaces of Hausa emirs from Zaria to Damagaram indicates the acceptance of music as an entertainment genre within the conventional establishment. However, it is not acceptable for the ruling class to engage in the same music—thus a prince cannot be a musician. Thus, according to Smith (1959:249), the Hausa system of social status has

three or four 'classes'. Sometimes the higher officials and chiefs are regarded as constituting upper 'class' by themselves, sometimes they are grouped with the Mallams and wealthier merchants into a larger upper class. The lowest 'class' generally distinguished includes the musicians, butchers, house-servants and menial clients, potters, and the poorer farmers who mostly live in rural hamlets. The great majority of the farmers, traders and other craftsmen would, therefore, belong to the Hausa 'middle-class'

This categorization, as imperfect as Smith himself identified it to be, nevertheless serves as a rough guide to the position of a musician in Hausa society. The main reason for including musicians in the lower level status is the client-focused nature of Hausa music. With its main pre-occupation of appeasing specific clients, it thus becomes a non-art form – art for art’s sake – but tailored towards a specific paying-client. A song composed for one client, for instance, will not be performed to another client. What further entrenches the lower status of musicians also is the *maroki* (praise-singer) status of most Hausa traditional musicians – praising their clients for money or other material goods. A mean client gets the short-end of the musician’s stick, often with sarcastic barbs thrown in for good measure. Naturally a very generous patron gets the full-blown poetic powers of the musician (Smith 1957).

This categorization of Hausa musicians, however, excludes the poet-musicians, who often recite their poetry without any accompanying instrumentation. And as Schuh points, out

Discussion of Hausa poetry has generally distinguished *oral* poetry, which finds its roots in ancient Hausa tradition, and *written* poetry, which dates from the 19th century and whose meters can be traced to Arabic Islamic verse. Though the large and continually evolving body of Hausa poetic literature derives from these separate origins, there has now been considerable cross-fertilization between the two traditions, both thematically and metrically. Moreover, the “oral” vs. “written” distinction is misleading. Although poets working in the so-called “written” tradition generally codify their works in writing using regular stanzaic patterns, *all* Hausa poetry is composed for presentation in sung or chanted form—prose-like recitation, much less silent reading of poetic works is quite foreign to Hausa (Schuh 1994:1).

Such poets are often seen as representing Hausa oral art form, and the cultural references of quintessential Hausa higher form of entertainment. Mainly highly educated (both in Western and Islamic traditions, and in contrast to traditional “low brow” musicians who often had only Islamic education), the thematic elements of these poets tended to be either

political or religious. Aliyu Namangi's nine-volume *Imfiraji*, for instance, is a Dantesque exposition of life death, and what comes after death – all admonishing the Muslim to lead a pious life. Ahmadu Danmatawalle's *Wakar Tsuntsaye* is a blistering critique of the ruling house of one of the emirates of northern Nigeria structured in the form of an Animal Farm landscape in which the characteristics of the various courtiers were juxtaposed with specific birds and animals in a jungle in their quest for a new ruler.

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

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

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

musicians producing songs of utter philosophical and poetic quality, reflecting Hausa proverbs—rather than instrumental virtuosity.

Female entry into popular culture, particularly oral performing arts, among the Hausa of northern Nigeria was essentially negotiated through the collective and highly public arena of ceremonies.

Music and Gender in Muslim Societies

Generally music and popular entertainment are not seen as credible or acceptable career options for women in a traditionally closeted society. Nevertheless, the few women musicians exist to provide female-themed entertainment for especially married women in *purdah* (Islamic seclusion). As Kassam (1996:121) observed,

the songs that are produced by females in the Hausa culture tend to express desires that would be culturally censored under normal circumstances. In this regard therefore, songs can be seen as an expression of emotions which could be created from repressed feelings...Women's songs...seem to give voice to these repressed feelings or emotion in a cultural rather than political context.

The most notable of this category of Hausa musicians was Uwaliya Mai Amada; a female vocalist accompanied by an orchestra of women calabash musicians (led by her husband) in a music genre referred to as *amada*. The early stage sets in her career were often bawdy performances full of comedic innuendos of the sexuality of *marabouts* – Muslim religious scholars who claim to deal with supernatural forces on behalf of women, and who often, as suggested in her songs, use their position of spiritual trust to sexually abuse their women clients.

Singing predominantly for women and especially during women-themed ceremonies, she carved a respectful niche for herself as an energetic voice for women, bringing out their fantasies and cocking a snook at the conservative establishment, as reflected in this excerpt from *Malam Ya Ga Wata!* (The teacher eyes another one!)

Allah ya yi Malam ya zo	Malam is here, at last!
(Chor) Malam ya ga wata	(Chor) He has eyed another one!
Wannan ba Malami ba ne	Oh no, this is certainly not a Malam
Ya yi katakata ya kasa tashi	He (it) is staggering, could not get up!
Ya yi lumu sai ya kasa tashi	He (it) is limp, could not get up
Dadin yaro sai ya ka da malam	Malam is down with sheer ecstasy

The pronoun “he” is a euphemism for the more reproductive portion of the Mallam’s anatomy!

In other societies sharing similar cultural spaces with northern Nigeria, the female voice is seen along a poetic scale encapsulating philosophic traditions of the people. This is illustrated by the case of Sudanese poetess, where

The poems of several famous bardic women have been written down and entered the corpus of classics of Arabic literature. From the Sudan we may cite the poetess Shagaba, who lived in the Butana desert area under the Fung in about the sixteenth century, and Wad Al-Farrash of the early nineteenth century, whose lovely *dobeit* duple meter couplets are still quoted in Sudanese rural schools. At the present day, amongst the eastern nomadic Baggara, where a lively oral tradition of improvised song and text persists, women occupy no formal position in political life, but by their songs of praise or of mockery or of exhortation they can and do make or break reputations (Carlisle 1975:263).

In Azerbaijan, as in The Sudan, Inna Naroditskaya (2000) argues that the poetic imagery provides a framework for the investigation of women musicians, who prior to the beginning of the twentieth century seemed nonexistent-voiceless. Resisting and yet positioned within the gender-segregated Azerbaijanian society, female musicians performed only for female gatherings, limited to a private domestic sphere. As Naroditskaya (2000: 235) further argues,

The attitude towards both music and women, long defined by Muslim doctrine and redefined by Soviet anti-religious policy, provides the contextual basis for an investigation of the performing traditions and social status of women involved in music-making in contemporary Azerbaijan. The music-making of females in rituals and their involvement in the performance of mugam reflects historically constructed musical forms, their social functions, and gender-based performing traditions. Unifying written classical poetry and oral musical tradition, mugam expresses feelings of love.

In Muslim Northern Nigeria, similar poetic performances by women were mainly recorded by Beverly Mack (2004). The thematic focus of Mack's study is what the author sees as the public exclusion of women from the sphere of popular culture in a conservative African Muslim society. It chronicles attempts by seven Muslim Hausa women performance artists to break the cultural barrier and engage in the creative pursuits at which they excel. Specifically, the book builds on Mack's earlier anthology by exploring in English the poetry of Hajiya Hauwa Gwaram and Hajiya 'Yar Shehu – both residents of Kano – with passing references to other popular artistes. Of the 35 poems and songs that are analyzed and transcribed in the book 24 are by Gwaram, seven by 'Yar Shehu and one each by Binta Katsina, Barmani Choge, Maizargadi and Mai Duala.

In her analysis of the social functions of Hausa women's creativity, Mack uses Gwaram's poetry repertoire as a template in determining the artistic interpretations of social life among the Hausa from 1966 to 1980. She weaves a sweeping tapestry of social transformation embroidered with glints of Gwaram's poetry to capture events (such as participation in politics) and processes (such as king lists of Fulani emirs in Kano).

Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Accepting that Structuralism, however, is not a unified school or methodology, I choose to begin this survey of Structuralist method because first of all, language is the central institution of any society and Structuralism is a peculiarly social mode of thought, and, second, because there is no question but that a preponderance of the ideas with which

Structuralists in various fields have worked are to be found most clearly formulated in structural linguistics.

However, rather than ask “What would be an example of Structuralist design methodology?” the real question is “Why would you want a Structuralist design methodology?” One of the most compelling reasons I’ve seen so far, is that Structuralist analysis can be applied to any artefact, even in the absence of the person who created it or the people who are interpreting it. This type of analysis also seems to lend itself more to generalization since a language is shared by a community and seems to exist in some objective sense (at least, more so than the subjective intentions of individuals).

Thus by combining the elements of language, culture and society within a Structuralist framework, I am seeking to provide a more anthropological interpretation of an oral artefact – an operetta – rather than querying the linguistic significance of the performance. These three variables, language, culture and society, therefore become my analytical tools in providing an interpretation of Barmani Choge’s epic operetta, *Sakarai Ba Ta Da Wayo*. *Sakarai* is a Hausa word meaning a useless person who seems mentally deficient. Thus not only is the woman in the operetta a useless person (because she has no specific occupation or trade), she is also not wise (“ba ta da wayo”), reinforcing her mental deficiency; because she would otherwise have been engaged in a useful trade.

By focusing on the narrative in the operetta, Choge forces the listener to create a mental structure – or as Structuralists, would put it explicate the materials at hand – to convey meaning and understanding of the virtues of domestic power equation in a typical Hausa household. In my analysis, I intend to go beyond the surface structure of the central storyline of the operetta by arguing that the surface structure of narrative actually hides a sub-layer of a deeper structure that is capable of generating an alternative understanding of the domestic ecology described in the narrative.

However, while my analytical methodology borrows from anthropological structuralism, I use elements of womanist critique as my conceptual framework to explore the household ecology depicted in Choge's operetta.

"Womanism" as a social concept has a more stratospherically exotic meaning than I intended to use it in this synoptic analysis Barmani Choge's operetta. According to Patricia Hill Collins (1996, 2006), the term womanist gained prominence from Alice Walker's multiple definitions of the term "womanism" in *In Search of Our Mothers' Gardens* (1983). Collins identified at least two—often contradictory—meanings of the term as used by Walker.

The first sees womanism as rooted in black women's concrete history in racial and gender oppression. Taking the term from the Southern black folk expression of mothers to female children "you acting womanish," Walker suggests that black women's concrete history fosters a womanist worldview accessible primarily and perhaps exclusively to black women. "Womanish" girls acted in outrageous, courageous, and wilful ways, attributes that freed them from the conventions long limiting white women. Womanish girls wanted to know more and in greater depth than what were considered good for them. They were responsible, in charge, and serious. (Collins 1996, 2006:59).

A second meaning of womanism as offered by Alice Walker sees a more politically radical definition of the concept. According to Patricia Hill Collins,

Walker simultaneously implies that black women are somehow superior to white women because of this black folk tradition. Defining womanish as the opposite of the "frivolous, irresponsible, not serious" girlish, Walker constructs black women's experiences in opposition to those of white women. This meaning of womanism sees it as being different from and superior to feminism, a difference allegedly stemming from black and white women's different histories with American racism."(ibid).

The problems with labels, especially if borrowed from radically different sociological climes manifest itself in attempting to situate Barmani Choge's poetic narrative within a womanist framework. Indeed as Patricia Hill Collins notes, no term currently exists that adequately represents the substance of what diverse groups of black women alternately call "womanism" and "black feminism." However, as Nombuso Dlamini argues:

lack of possession of academic terminology such as theory, feminism, critical pedagogy, etc. does not necessarily equate to lack of theorizing about or practicing the issues that the terms embrace (online).

Working from a Zulu worldview, Nombuso Dlamini then proceeds to show how the persistent pursuit for education and self awareness within the confines of then South Africa's apartheid policies constituted a womanist struggle for self identity.

In a similar way, I argue in this paper that the economic matrix narrated by Barmani Choge approximates Alice Walker's original conception of womanist struggle for self-identity, without the ideological baggage of feminism. In this, I share Layli Phillips' view that "womanism is not feminism and that womanism and poststructuralism are compatible despite some important differences" (2006: xxxii).

Hajiya Sa'adatu Barmani Choge

Very rare, but available, there are a few women ensembles throughout Hausa northern Nigeria that provide entertainment concerts at marriages, special events (e.g. political rallies) and ceremonies. Such female ensembles also often perform at university gigs, where they are invited by students during cultural weeks. Thus, although very public, nevertheless they are only at private functions – serving exclusive patrons. For instance, they do not perform in public theatres or clubs. Hajiya Sa'adatu Barmani Choge is the only remaining performer of her generation still going the rounds. The others (notably Uwaliya Mai Amada) have either died or completely stopped performances due to old age.

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. None of the women musicians in the ensemble is less than 45 years – Barmani herself is over 60. Yet the performances are often very energetic, proving that age is not a factor in performance, even in traditionally conservative societies.

The lyrical content of Barmani’s performances is as surprising as the fact that an elderly woman is an active public performer in traditional Hausa societies. She focuses mainly on the dynamics of domestic relationships – either between a husband and a wife; or among co-wives (*kishiyoyi*) in which she assumes the role of a single wife whose husband marries another wife (*kishiya*), and who gets the barb of Barmani’s sarcasm about the newly arrived woman and those who facilitate her being brought into her hitherto cosy private world of only she and her husband.

Her lyrics are often also bawdy – often dramatising either the way women walk to attract men or downright suggesting sexual encounters – all acts that have made her immensely popular with women—paradoxical, in a society that frowns at the public displays of such behaviours. Interestingly, her old age is probably her best supporting point in that in traditional Hausa societies, old women are often the ones who dispense sexual advice to younger women (especially new brides); so an old woman singing about bawdy topics is deemed “harmless”, which would not be the case if a young woman performer sang the same lyrics.

The Operetta, *Sakarai Ba Ta Da Wayo*

Let me begin first by clarifying my understanding of the term “operetta”. This is often a light musical drama similar to opera (itself a full drama set to music), with a frivolous, sentimental story, often employing parody and satire and containing both spoken dialogue and much light, pleasant music.

The *Sakarai* operetta was sung by Barmani Choge, with call-and-response structure supported by a chorus of four women calabash musicians who accompany the oral performance with calabash drumming. The Choge Calabash orchestra remains the only surviving all-female traditional music ensemble in northern Nigeria.

Choge’s operetta started with the usual doxology of praising Allah, typical of most Hausa musicians. It then moves to conceptual summary of the core message of the drama – gainful employment, in which the opening stanzas urge women, men and children to engage in any form socially acceptable of trade or commerce. 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.

The operetta narrates the story of three women in a house. The entire narration dwelt on the women, without any sign of the man. As narrated by Choge:

	Hausa narration	English translation
Barmani:	Don Allah maza a koyi sana’a.	For God’s sake, men, let’s learn a trade
’Y/Amshi:	<i>Sakarai ba ta da wayo.</i>	<i>Chor/ Foolish, she is not wise</i>
Barmani:	Ku mata ku zo ku koyi sana’a.	Women, come on, learn a trade
Barmani:	Da ban da sakarar mace sauna, Wadda tana wurin miji su ukku	Except the useless woman, a wastrel There are three of them in the husband’s house
Barmani:	Duk saura suna ta sana’a	The others have useful trades
Barmani:	Matan gida suna ta sana’a	The women in the house have trades
Barmani:	Yaran gida suna ta sana’a	Even the children in the house have trade

The picture of the household painted was that of intense activity where the women and the children are all busily engaged in one trade or other.

Except for the head of the household – and there is a head; because as Choge narrated, “wadda suna wurin miji su uku’ (there are three of them in the husband’s house).

Thus despite her equitable call to both sexes to engage in useful trade, Choge neatly excludes the head of the household in the dynamics of usefully contributing to the household economy. In this exclusion of the man, she changes the centre of gravity of productivity in the house to focus on the trades of the women, not even the women themselves.

Choge’s antagonist – Sakarar Mace – becomes also the protagonist, structurally redefining the division of responsibility in the house, despite the significance of the *sana’a* (trade) as an independent variable.

Barmani:	Ita ko sai gari ya waye, Ta tashi nokai-nokai, Ta leka wancan daki, “Yaya ina kwananku?”	As for her, in the morning She ambles over From room to room (greeting) “Sister, good morning)
‘Y/Amshi:	Sakarai ba ta da wayo.	<i>Chor/ Foolish, she is not wise</i>
Barmani:	“Mun kwana lafiya mun tashi.”	“Good morning to you. We’re fine”
Barmani:	“Ko za ki itace Yaya?”	“Do you plan to go wood-cutting today?”
Barmani:	Sai su ce ba za mu ice ba, Kowa yana da sana’a.	They tell her they will not go Because they are busy with their trade

The operatic nature of Choge’s narrative begins to emerge with these stanzas because she suddenly adopts a dialogic structure in the narrative where clear speech forms are recorded and used as a basis for action.

From this stage of the narrative also, two structures emerge – signalling Choge’s structuralist framework in the narrative. The first, what I call surface structure, is the clear manifest representation of women and children engaged in a trade in the house. It is significant that the trade itself is a metaphor for gainful activity—for throughout the operetta Choge did not reveal *what* kind of trade the women were engaged in. However,

the importance of the trade to them was such that they are so pre-occupied that the issue of sustaining the biological needs of the house have been relegated to the background of the commercial enterprise.

This then leads to the second, sub-layer, in which the Sakarai, without any gainful occupation, takes it upon herself to ask for the agenda of feeding the house. When she asks if there are plans to go and fetch wood for cooking, she was rebuffed with the admonition that everyone is too busy. What does not make of this situation? Is Choge cocking a snook at busy housewives who neglect the very fundamental issues of maintaining the household? Or is Choge juxtaposing the genders in the household – by using the Sakarai as the one pre-occupied with maintaining the feeding process in the house, Choge casts the Sakarai as the absent man whose job it is to feed the house—thereby actually referring to the man as “sakarai”?

Whatever interpretation one makes of this scenario, it is clear that Choge re-allocates the domestic responsibilities of the absent man to the Sakarai, making her a silly man, with no job except to feed the house; in short, a full-time house-bound husband.

Whether this could be interpreted as some form of indigenous feminism – investing economic power in women, and relegating the man to the background, Choge’s narration casts question marks on how many parts hold a typical household.

Having realized that no one is willing to fetch firewood to cook the meals in the house, the Sakarai decided to go herself. She picks up an axe, and goes into the woods and eventually fetches enough wood to carry back home. While in rustic settings Hausa women often pick up dried twigs and fallen branches as fuel for their cooking, using an axe and wood cutting require a masculine strength—as evidenced in the operetta itself. Thus again we see gender-substitution in the scene of a woman using a heavy axe to cut a very tough tree.

Barmani:	Haka sai ta leka wancan daki.	She looked into their rooms
'Y/Amshi:	Sakarai ba ta da wayo.	<i>Chor/ Foolish, she is not wise</i>
Barmani:	"Kai Yaya ba kwi komai ba?"	"Yaya, didn't you cook anything"
Barmani:	"Na dawo gidan da yunwar daji."	"I am back from wood cutting really hungry"
Barmani:	"Yo ai muna ta sana'a, Kin san ba ma yi tuwo ba."	"Oh, but we are too busy"
Barmani:	"To ba ki da saurar dawa?"	"We can't afford time off to cook"
Barmani:	"Sai ki je ki duba falo, Akwai ragowar dawa."	"Alright, do you have any remaining grain?"
Barmani:	Ballagaza bazar-bazar ta barza.	"Check in the living room, there is some"
Barmani:	"Ke Kwari ina Tallenki?"	Ungainly, unsightly, she grinds the grain
Barmani:	"Ai Tallenki ya fi saurin tafasa."	"Kwari, where is your metal pot?"
		"It cooks things faster"

She then goes to the grain storage, grinds some into flour and using other women's pots – she apparently has none of her own, since she has no means of purchasing pots, and apparently also the husband has not provided any – she cooks the meal.

Choge uses language to depict a cultural process. For instance, the expression, "ballagaza bazar-bazar ta barza" reflects an intermedial narrative that seeks to combine visual act of grinding the grain with a word that approximates the pronunciation of the process – the word itself,

ballagaza (ungainly, unsightly) further used to reinforce the narrator's aversion to her protagonist. This onomatopoeian strategy is well acquainted with Hausa shamanistic practices (tsibbu) in which word sound-alikes from the Holy Qur'an to the Hausa language are used as oral amulets (e.g. as recorded by Sa'id 1997).

The Sakarai then proceeds to distribute the food to the members of the house

Barmani:	“Yaran gida ku kawo kwano.”	Kids, bring your plates
‘Y/Amshi:	Sakarai ba ta da wayo.	
Barmani:	“Ke Uwar miji ga naki.”	Mother in law, here's your (food)

In this way, the Sakarai provided food to the whole house. It is instructive that although she was the one who was hungry, she was also the one who cooked the food, while the other members of the household were too happy to accept her cooking.

If the Sakarai provides such a useful, and vital, function such as acting as a cook for the household, then surely she cannot be a Sakarai – for she carries out her task with a mediated focus and serves a function others cannot.

Conclusion

In this paper, I argue that in Barmani Choge's operetta, *Sakarai*, we see a juxtaposition of structuralist elements in a narrative poem in which the sub-layer of the structure of the narration becomes more forceful than the main surface layer. This latter layer is ostensibly the glorification of economic activities by *purdah* housewives in traditional Muslim Hausa household. Indeed locating the women in a fixed spatial space of the household served as a further basis for drawing attention to the significance of their economic activities in the house. This places them within the womanist matrix of being serious enough about their lives, even without a clearly visible husband. This same womanist matrix also invests in them considerable freedom – including freedom not to feed the household; not because of a feminist drive to prove equality with the

absent male—who has to be gainfully employed to have three wives—but a womanist drive to become self-sufficient.

The Sakarai, on the other hand, has considerable freedom to move out of the house – and engage in family support activities – much in the same way as the absent husband would have such freedom. Yet for all her efforts, she is related to the background of relevance and labelled “useless”. She probably symbolizes the absent male who job seems to be to feed the house—a non-cerebral process—while the women fixed in a space and time and immobile, engage in a more productive economic process; thus outlining Choge’s womanist tendencies.

At the same time, Choge uses Irony as a narrative device in relating the story of a woman is apparently useless, and yet at the same time the most functional member of the household – thus redefining the role of the Sakarai as a indeed the most vital member of the household. This is more so because, as Claire Colebrook (2004: 18) argued:

When the American New Critics of the 1940s used irony and paradox as the hallmark of literary and poetic discourse they did so by regarding the text as a self-contained organism. Poems are ironic because they take the words we use in everyday language and give them a richness of meaning. It is not by referring to the world and its conflicts that texts are ironic; the irony lies in the tensions of language.

Thus in the operetta *Sakarai Ba Ta Da Wayo*, Barmani Choge displays, perhaps unconsciously, situational, dramatic, and verbal irony in Hausa poetics.

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Appendix – Transcription of the Operetta

SAKARAI BA TA DA WAYO

Barmani Choge

Audio Cassette, Kano, Northern Nigeria. Approx. 10 minutes

- Barmani:** La' laha Illallahu.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
Barmani: Wata sakarar mace sauna.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
Barmani: Ku kama sana'a,
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ku lallaba ku kama sana'a,
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Na yi gargadi ku mata a zo a kama sana'a,
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ku maza a koyi sana'a,
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Na yi gargadi ga maza,
 Har na zagaya gun mata,
 Mi wa Ma'aikin Allah,
 Don ya Rasulallahi,
 Duk wanda bai ilimi ba,
 Ya je ya koyi sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Don Allah maza a koyi sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ku mata ku zo ku koyi sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

- Barmani:** Da ban da sakarar mace sauna,
Wadda tana wurin miji su ukku.
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Duk saura suna ta sana'a
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Matan gida suna ta sana'a.
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Yaran gida suna ta sana'a.
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ita ko sai gari ya waye,
Ta tashi nokai-nokai,
Ta leka wancan kaki,
"Yaya ina kwananku?"
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** "Mun kwana lafiya mun tashi."
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** "Ko za ki itace Yaya?"
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Sai su ce ba za mu ice ba,
Kowa yana da sana'a.
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ita ko sai ta tashi nokai-nokai.
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza ta kama hanyar daji.
- 'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

- Barmani:** Sai ta dauki gatari shirgege.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Kana sai ta kama leken doka.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Haka nan ta hangi babban kwaure.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Kai alo alo nai sa’a.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Allah ka taimake ni na sare.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Na sare wannan kwaure.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza ta kama datsar kwaure.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Sai kawai kwatan gwaran yaf fadi.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Kai alo alo nai sa’a”.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Kuma Allah ka taimake ni na dora.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Sai Allah ya taimake ta ta dora.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza buzur-buzur ta dawo.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

- Barmani:** Sai kwatan gwaran ta yada.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Haka sai ta leka wancan daki.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Kai Yaya ba kwi komai ba?”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Na dawo gidan da yunwar daji.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Yo ai muna ta sana’a,
 Kin san ba ma yi tuwo ba.”
- Barmani:** “To ba ki da saurar dawa?”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Sai ki je ki duba falo,
 Akwai ragowar dawa.”
- ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza bazar-bazar ta barza.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Ke Kwari ina Tallenki?”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Ai Tallenki ya fi saurin tafasa.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Tana kan ta tausa har ta talga.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

- Barmani:** Tana kan ta forge har ta tuka.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Yaran gida ku kawo kwano.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Ke Uwar miji ga naki.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza ta kama lankwasa loma.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Subahana halikud dayyanu.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Na gano abin mamaki,
 Ta Audu mai roko,
 Da an yi haihuwa a garinsu,
 Ana ta gayyar barka,
 Uwar gida ta tashi ta je ta debi ruwa,
 Sai ta je ta rangada wanka,
 Sai ta dauro Leshi.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Daya kuma sai ta je ta dauro *Super*,
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Sai ta kusa da su ta je ta Dauro Joji.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Sai ta kusa da su ta yo adon sakakke.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Kuma ga eligwaggwaronsa ga murjani.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

- Barmani:** Sai kwatan gwaran ta yada.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Haka sai ta leka wancan daki.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Kai Yaya ba kwi komai ba?”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Na dawo gidan da yunwar daji.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Yo ai muna ta sana’a,
 Kin san ba ma yi tuwo ba.”
- Barmani:** “To ba ki da saurar dawa?”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Sai ki je ki duba falo,
 Akwai ragowar dawa.”
- ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza bazar-bazar ta barza.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Ke Kwari ina Tallenki?”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Ai Tallenki ya fi saurin tafasa.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Tana kan ta tausa har ta talga.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

- Barmani:** Tana kan ta forge har ta tuka.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Yaran gida ku kawo kwano.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Ke Uwar miji ga naki.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza ta kama lankwasa loma.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Subahana halikud dayyanu.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Na gano abin mamaki,
 Ta Audu mai roko,
 Da an yi haihuwa a garinsu,
 Ana ta gayyar barka,
 Uwar gida ta tashi ta je ta debi ruwa,
 Sai ta je ta rangada wanka,
 Sai ta dauro Leshi.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Daya kuma sai ta je ta dauro *Super*,
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Sai ta kusa da su ta je ta Dauro Joji.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Sai ta kusa da su ta yo adon sakakke.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Kuma ga eligwaggwaronsa ga murjani.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

- Barmani:** Kuma sannan ga agogo ga takalma.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “Oh, Yaya ni na bi ku?”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza ta tashi nokai-nokai.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ta dauki dan kaskonta.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ta je ta debi ruwa,
 Sai ta zagaya gun Kwari,
 “Yaya da sauran soda?”
- Barmani:** “Akwai a wurin wanke-wanke kya san soda.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza ta kama neman soda.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Har Allah Ya taimake ta ta gane.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Shashasaha buzur-buzur sai wanka.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** “To Yaya ina gyauton nan,
 Wanda kike yin cincin?
 In Jan tsane shi in bi ku.”
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza ta je ta kama sukola.
 ‘Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Allah Ya taimake ta ta wanke.

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: "Ya Allah Ka taimake ni na samu,
Na samu babbar hira ko da zanin ya bushe."

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Allah Ya taimake ta ya bushe.

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Ballagaza ta bi su no }ai-no }ai.

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Ballagaza ta bi su no }ai-no }ai.

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Kuma an je wurin barka ga uwar gida bisa wundi,
dayar a kan 'yar kanti,
Ballagaza Bankaura,
Da wadda ba ta sana'a,
Ta dauki guntun keso ta kakkabe shi ta zauna.

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Ana ta "ga tuwo 'yan barka."

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Uwar gida ta ce "Allah raya."

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Ita ma dayar ta ce "mun koshi."

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: "Yaya a ki ci a kyale?"

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: "Wannan Tuwo abin Allah raya"

- 'Y/Amshi:** Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** "Kai Yaya a miko yaji."
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Ballagaza ta kama kantara loma.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Haka ta kama kyankyadarsa na gado.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** "Kai za a gida ko a'a?"
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** "Kai ko a bari sai Azahar?"
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** "Kai rana ko ta take."
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Da na ya gargadi na kara,
 Kowa ya kama sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Da na yi gargadi na kara,
 Kowa ya kama sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Da kun ji zan gaya muku mata,
 Duk wanda bai ilimi ba ya je ya koyi sanda!
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.
- Barmani:** Da ko'ina Kanawan Dabo.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Ku lallaba ku kama sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Sai na je garin Daura,
Na Bashar a koyi sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Kuma Zariya Birnin Shehu.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Mata na fi so ku kama sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Da ke ta Audu na zo Legas,
Na ce a kama sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Na gaya ma matan Legas,
Kowa ya kama sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Da na gaya ma matan Kurmi,
Kowa ya kama sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Kin ji Ladi nai Shagamu,
Na ce a koyi sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Na yi gargadi na kara.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Don Allah a kama sana'a.
'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Ladi kar a raina sana'a.

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Da na yi godiya,
Allah ya wa ragin albarka.

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.

Barmani: Kuma sannan ya kai Makan da Madina,

'Y/Amshi: Sakarai ba ta da wayo.