



Performance and Power: Cultural Strategies for Contesting Hierarchy and Political Authority in Maazou Dan Alalo’s Song ‘Baudot’

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Literature, music, and art are liminoid [liminal-like] genres that suspend the laws of ‘normal discourse’ and transform social actions into performances.

Gunter Lenz

Abstract

In history and literature, colonial rule is often read correctly in terms of violence, trauma, (super) structural mutations and the undermining by external forces of local endogenous authorities, cultures and ideologies. Incorrectly, however, these effects and mutations are typically considered to be induced unilaterally from the outside hence occluding the role and agency of local actors and the characteristics of internal social dynamics in the colonized space. This paper focuses precisely on aspects of these often forgotten dimensions explored through an analysis of the paradoxical ‘Baudot’ praise song by Maazou Inoussa alias Dan Alalo and his troupe. The song foregrounds the colonial administrator René Baudot both as hero and anti-hero, the artist as a powerful actor and lucid critic, the local society as reactive, ambivalent and heterogeneous. In this performance of power, panegyric/parody, empathy/satire, insider/outsider, high-status/low-status, private/public, domination/resistance, centrality/liminality power/powerlessness and low status/high status emerge as key concepts in a piece demonstrating artistic virtuosity, humour and lucidity.

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Résumé

En histoire et en littérature, la domination coloniale est souvent interprétée, à juste titre, en termes de violence, de traumatisme, de mutations (super) structurelles et d'atteinte, par des forces extérieures, aux autorités, aux cultures et aux idéologies locales endogènes. À tort, toutefois, ces effets et mutations sont généralement considérés comme induits unilatéralement de l'extérieur. Ce qui occulte le rôle et l'effet des acteurs locaux ainsi que les caractéristiques de la dynamique sociale interne dans l'espace colonisé. Cet article se concentre précisément sur les aspects de ces dimensions souvent oubliées, explorées à travers une analyse du chant laudatif paradoxal, « Baudot », de Maazou Inoussa alias Dan Alalo et sa troupe. Le chant met en relief l'administrateur colonial, René Baudot, en tant que héros et anti-héros, l'artiste comme un puissant acteur et un critique lucide, la société locale comme étant réactive, ambivalente et hétérogène. Dans cette interprétation du pouvoir, panégyrique/parodie, empathie/satire, initié/étranger, statut supérieur/statut inférieur, public/privé, domination/résistance, centralité/liminalité, puissance/impuissance et statut inférieur/statut supérieur, apparaissent comme des concepts clés témoignant de la virtuosité, l'humour et la lucidité artistiques.

In Niger, colonial rule brought into existence not one but a variety of juxtaposed authorities which served to change and to complicate social and political arenas. Here, as elsewhere, colonial rule is often read in history and literature, and rightly so, in terms of violence, trauma and (super) structural mutations. Moreover, in general, the undermining, by external forces, of local indigenous authorities, social practices, cultures and ideologies is often justly regarded as common effects of colonization. But, incorrectly, these effects and mutations are typically considered to be induced unilaterally from the outside. Such analyses, whether based on historical fact, on symbolic or ideological discourse and rhetoric, frequently focus on the public sphere and public authorities viewed as central space(s) and central actors of the power games involved. Less frequently highlighted are the internal dynamics also related to the complex dialectics linking the foreign actors of colonial power to actors of the colonized space subjected to change. The latter include traditional local powers and their central actors, the community at large with its public and private spaces of interlocking as well as its spaces of contestation and disaggregation, 'liminoid' actors, and spaces of action and interaction, as they appear both in real life situations and in imaginary (re) constructions.

This paper studies the interaction between the public and private spheres in Damagaram and its capital Zinder, in the fourth decade after colonial penetration of the region, as reflected in the praise song of Maazou Inoussa,

alias Dan Alalo, a popular singer of the times. This song foregrounds the colonial administrator René Baudot both as hero and anti-hero. In a previous paper (Tidjani Alou forthcoming), I approached the song 'Baudot' from the comparative literature perspective of humour as a powerful and complex social instrument providing catharsis, empowerment and social criticism while pointing out that this work invites analysis of the discreet folds of the power relationships that developed during the colonial era. The present paper follows up my earlier observation.

It is always possible to describe how popular grassroots culture has managed to criticize and deconstruct strategies of (state) hegemony and centrality by exploiting available interstices of resistance, agency, and empowerment. But it is much more challenging to provide broad analyses, based on literature, orature or other cultural fields, conversant with social science concepts and theories, like that of the public sphere, without misinterpretation or over-interpretation. Such pitfalls are rampant when scholars, armed with the best interdisciplinary intentions, lose sight of the transformative nature of artistic processes and actors, and of their complex, active, not necessarily documentary, often ambiguous relationships with 'real life' situations, when academic analysis disregards the back-and-forth movements between social reality and 'imaginative worlds', when it ignores the rhetorical and discursive strategies at the heart of the power games artists also play. Indeed the literary or oral text, suffused as it may be with social content, criticism and projections, is, in most cases, not to be confused with a concrete political agenda. However, managing these different, inter-lapping folds of meaning is far from obvious in actual practice.

Mindful of such challenges, I will show how the popular singer Maazou Dan Alalo and his troupe, in their song 'dedicated' to the colonial administrator René Baudot, engaged in a 'performance of power'. The song evokes, among other things, the transformation of the local power pyramid. It also illustrates the power games that marked Damagaram and in particular the city of Zinder, seat of the sultanate, under colonial rule during the Second World War period. Portraying the colonial administrator who governed the region for one year, from 1942 to 1943, the song 'Baudot' contains at once parody and genuine panegyric. Its allusion to the ambiguous nature of colonial relationships is exemplified through a series of oppositions including: parody/panegyric; empathy/satire, insider/outsider status, low-status actors/public personalities, private sphere/public sphere, and domination/resistance. These are discernible in the text or can be gleaned from the context to which the text alludes.

In order to enter into the spirit of this song it is necessary to bear in mind its character as public performance, of song-poetry, dramatized with the aid

of music, not by an individual artist but by a group with a distinctive leader, Dan Alalo, as the uncontested *maître d'oeuvre*. But this central role organized a group performance in which the role of the other artists-musicians was crucial. While the lead singer had the privilege of composing the theme, of leading rehearsal and performance and of singing the main parts of the song, the success of the performance required the participation of a powerful chorus and of an experienced *san kira* or answerer capable of relaying the lead, and of injecting new energy into the act by echoing or reworking the theme. At points of heightened tension or drama, the entire troupe¹ would perform simultaneously, joining in the song and the musical accompaniment.

The audience, of course, did not observe a religious silence, but would participate in the chorus and in their favourite parts of the song. A special characteristic of the public performance of the 'Baudot' song was the interplay of identity and othering. The satirical treatment of Baudot created a social space of resistance to the colonial other. But othering also involved the treatment of satirized characters liked marabouts, Arabs and Sherifs, houseboys and prostitutes who were members of the local society to one degree of the other. Social identification was thus played out differentially. But let me not move ahead of myself.

The intricate motifs of calling and answering aside, the content and structure of the song seem fairly simple. Isn't this song about praising Baudot's prowess, about revealing the way in which he dominated the local society and imposed colonial economics and politics? Isn't this what the artists mime, invent and dramatize as their roving gaze moves critically from one section of the 'work camp' of Damagaram to the other, tableau after tableau, exploring the happenings in a society divided into fields according to various codes of classification: the field of the marabouts and those of the crippled, the fields of the leprous and of the blind, those of Arabs and Sherifs, formerly high-status individuals, reputed to be descendants of the Prophet Mohammed, those of married women, prostitutes, soldiers, houseboys? The final section of this paper shows that this apparent simplicity of structure and content is misleading. This said, we note that Dan Alalo used his position as an insider/outsider and his multifaceted art, wielding humour and satire as powerful cultural arms, to highlight the ambiguous character of a colonial anti-hero/hero, but also to mock, in dramatic and humoristic terms, the local mighty that fell victim to Baudot's indiscriminating rule of forced labour in the fields.

In the universe of the song, the fields, from locus of forced labour, are transformed, by the artists' performance, into a fragmented public sphere. But this heterogeneous space is also employed as a trope of subjection and

domination, of social mutation and of social conflict, perused with fleeting empathy, scathing satire or the cathartic instrument of tongue-in-cheek humour. It is related to the commanding, pervasive trope of 'work' that organizes the entire piece, readable at a variety of levels: as the panegyric of the taskmaster and master-worker Baudot, as a metaphor of the advent of a new power in the public as well as the private sphere, as the instrument of reversal of social hierarchy, as material for artistic mimesis and critique, as a mode of artistic (re)codification of society' public and private spheres, as a performative representation of change, and as an aesthetic redefinition of power (Bertellini 2005:39, 45, 57).

The singer and his group performed from a position of power: theirs was the role of showing, telling and ridiculing in unison or contrapuntally, in minute and dramatic detail. In the artistic universe of the song, they are shown as doing this without the risk of being answered or sanctioned, since the all-powerful Baudot could not speak Hausa, and demoted persons in the local arena were forced to observe a chastised silence or resort to retreat. The position of the artists as it plays out in the text is strengthened, moreover, by the amused and avenged gaze of many others in the society who had scores to settle with perceived rivals or enemies, and who thanked Baudot, God, and the Prophet for both the levelling and reversal of social hierarchy.

From these rich strata of textual discourse, rhetoric and signification, this paper will highlight three aspects of power and performance: (i) the power game of the popular artist: interplay between centrality and liminality; (ii) the strategic artistic manipulation of the genre of panegyric; (iii) the textual inscription of social change.

The Power Game of the Popular Artist: Interplay between Centrality and Liminality

Colonial rule and its everyday constraints did not eradicate the irrepressible sense of humour of ordinary Africans or of African artists. Nor did colonized society draw to a standstill or freeze from the point of view of its internal relationships including conflict and social transformation. These were, however, obviously affected at diverse levels and in different ways by the advent of a new, foreign and repressive power. Before looking at the way in which Dan Alalo and his troupe turned such interactions 'into a discursive tool of their own', reworking socio-political configurations through aesthetics, we need to take a moment to look at the biography of the popular singer, seen in the context of Zinderian society of the time.

Of central importance is Dan Alalo's position as an insider/outsider thanks to which he had both the distance and the inside knowledge that allowed him

to provide invaluable insights into the overall mutation of the local social pyramid, to the vicarious mirth of the social underdogs and of the self-perceived avenged.

In 'Baudot', Dan Alalo's acerbic and amused gaze scrutinizes and redefines a society that was not really his own: this region of Damagaram, associated with the sultanate of Zinder, situated in the centre of eastern Niger, not far from the singer's native home in Katsina, then under British colonial rule. The origin and expansion of the sultanate of Damagram is associated with Islam, military organization and an extensive administration (Salifou 1971). While certain sultans were renowned for their military feats, others were celebrated for their religious fervour, in the image of Sultan Mustapha, who 'governed' during Baudot's administration.

Dan Alalo, who was initially trained to be a marabout, voluntarily took up the life of a griot though he was not born into this caste. After singing at the court of Katsina, as of 1930 he worked in the sultanate of Damagaram as a protégé of the sultan, attached to his court. His popularity grew despite the opposition of local panegyrist, jealous of this foreigner and usurper of the art. Hence his situation in this land of chosen exile was both privileged and uncomfortable. Popular, protected by the sultan, his artistic status was both ambiguous and challenged: he was not a griot by right of inheritance, nor a griot of the sultanate by descent, nor a singer of the aristocratic circle of the sultan's court by his cultural positioning. In fact, his favourite instrument was not the *kakaki*, instrument of the court and of princes, but the *kalangu*, instrument of the 'people'² (Niang 1999:32) with which he nonetheless performed for the sultan, for rich patrons and for the general public.

His hybrid status thus combined a unique mixture of popularity and marginality depending on the perspective of social space from which it is viewed. This said, we need to bear in mind the more or less marginal status of performers of any kind in this society (Daba 2006:33). At any rate, Dan Alalo's status and situation bear witness to the internal conflicts of the local 'public cultural arena' with its castes, rules, transgressions, rivalry and finally its relative heterogeneity, providing insight into the interstices of social life, from multiple points of view, in every sense of the term. The stakes of the actors in this arena are, of course, important to this discussion since performance in the court of the sultan represented the holy of holies, the acme of the public cultural space, itself at the cross-roads of the public and the private. But even in less exclusive spaces of public performance, popular artists like Dan Alalo and his troupe gained access to a space of symbolic power. Through and during performance they acquired the status of public personalities to be reckoned with (Habermas 1978:25³), endowed with the

power to move the public, to influence public opinion, to describe, interpret and (re)invent socio-cultural experience (Lenz 2005:71), to reveal dominant values and their subversion (ibid.), from their own point of view. They became influential in forming popular representations, in explicating social identity ... and in affirming their own. In the specific context of interrelations among artists of the cultural public space in question, it is relevant to note that Dan Alalo, challenged in the milieu, resorted to a scathing satire of his rivals and detractors as a potent and effective means of protection and counterattack and was consequently feared (Niang 1999:35).⁴

The overall cultural and political context in which the song was created and performed is important – and not just as ‘background’. Dan Alalo was invited to the court of the sultan of Zinder during the 1930s when the Damagaram region like other regions of Niger had already experienced some three decades of colonial presence. The sophisticated political and administrative system of the sultanate of Damagaram, with Zinder as capital, was a shadow of its past glory (Salifou 1971:4, 47-48, 59, 193, 199). Formerly it was occupied with military attack and defence, governing the various sectors of production, administering diverse indigenous and foreign groups and castes, and diverting the constant and active rivalry of male aristocrats by allocating chieftaincies and honorific or lucrative positions to the sons of princes and princesses. But now real power had moved elsewhere and even the reigning sultan reflected the choice of the colonial master. The sultanate, along with the rest of the ‘Hausa country’, had paid a high price for its role in colonial history, involving the ‘treacherous execution’, ordered by the sultan Amadou Kouran Daga, of the French military Captain Cazemajou and his interpreter Olive, along with some of their *tirailleurs*, and routing of the rest (Salifou 1971:102-109). It is therefore possible to imagine that Zinder was deliberately placed under the command of what leaders and the population regarded as tyrannical administrators.

Baudot was, in all likelihood, particularly severe. At any rate he became the subject/object of the ambiguous praise song composed and performed by Dan Alalo and his troupe, a song that remains popular even today, among Nigériens born just before or after independence who have never attended a live performance of the song and know it only through audio recording. First recorded in Niger in the 1960s, after independence, by the Office de Radio Télévision in Zinder, and transcribed by Abdou Majinguini, of the Institut National de Documentation et de Recherche Pédagogique (National Institute of Documentation and Pedagogical Research) INDRAP, in 1980 (Niang 1999:46), this song immortalizes what is presented as a particularly difficult period in the history of everyday life in Zinder. It went, in actual fact, from

1 February 1943 to 2 January 1944, the year in which Baudot commanded Zinder and subjected the region to forced agricultural labour, producing peanuts, cassava, sweet potato and cotton in huge fields, *gandu*, appropriated and distributed by the colonial overlord. (This both symbolized and instituted the replacement of the absolute authority of the sultan by that of the colonizers as the *gandu* surrounding Zinder in a perimeter of some 30 kilometres were formerly those of the sultan, farmed by slaves and non-aristocratic subjects (Salifou 1971:60, 147).

This is the situation that Dan Alalo, at the head of his troupe and with their active and indispensable collaboration, selectively represents and interprets, from a finite and specific point of view which was neither neutral nor unconscious of the power of the artist as eye and voice of an otherwise silenced society. Exploiting the temporally and spatially limited public cultural space of the sultan's court as of 1944⁵ for the performance of this song, the artists were able to invest, for themselves and for specific others, the influential space of 'publicity' (Habermas), in order to form public opinion and to subversively define and undermine colonial power as well as zones of local power. Later, larger sectors of the local society were able to participate through hearsay, then through less exclusive performances and thanks to recordings made during tours of Nigeria.⁶ Performance transformed these popular low-status individuals into central actors of the public sphere, endowed with the powerful aura of a public personality (Habermas).

Strategic Artistic Manipulation of the Genre of Panegyric

The title of the song, bearing Baudot's name, suggests the centrality of this representative and administrator of colonial power. However, Baudot is certainly not the only central figure here since Dan Alalo works his own persona into the song in a convincing demonstration of the power of the artist as a public personality (Habermas) and of mimesis as a 'powerful rhetorical and cultural strategy' (Bertellini 2005:57) of imaginative reconfiguration of society, capable of influencing critical reflection and social representation.

Nonetheless, from his unique position as an insider/outsider, commanding the multifaceted art of the popular song, with its chorus, musicians, answers and its dramatic verve based on social portraiture, humour, satire and mimicry, Dan Alalo and the troupe he led, sought, among other things, to highlight Baudot's ambiguous character as both a hero and a anti-hero. Satirically portrayed as a harsh and tyrannical taskmaster, totally devoid of compassion and of common decency, as a pagan fearing neither God nor humans, Baudot's aura in the song bespeaks, nonetheless, both fear and admiration. He forced esteem, thanks to the ardour he brought to the mission of forcing others to

work. This required a constant and immense output of personal physical and psychological labour, giving rise to the impression of an almost miraculous ubiquity. In fact, it could be argued that his negative characteristics did not necessarily cast him in the role of an anti-hero or, that even interpreted as such, his potentially antiheroic traits were a common feature of the personality of certain local heroes and kings, including well-known sultans of Zinder like Ibram, Tanimun and Saleman Dan Ayisa, celebrated for their astounding cruelty (Salifou 1971:49-50, 65, 86-87). Moreover, the Baudot figure, as portrayed in the song, reminds us of the ambiguous character of certain types of traditional heroes constructed on the 'Dodo' model: that of the chief as an awe-inspiring figure admired and feared like the monster Dodo, characterized in Hausa folktales as powerful, dangerous and ambiguous. This image is exploited in the panegyric of chiefs and kings as a flattering evocation of their terrifying aura (Niang 2005:68; Hunter and Oumarou 2001; Oumarou 2005:40; Tidjani Alou 2008). Hence the characterization of Baudot in Dan Alalo's song draws on classic ingredients of a local or adopted and integrated model of the panegyric of the powerful, often perceived as oppressive.

Baudot as a public personality representing French supremacy in the public sphere, benefited, moreover, from the perceived prestige of the white colonizer, which the popular imagination, in search of classificatory models, at times associated not with the banal power of arms but with an unprecedented mystical supremacy (Fuglestad 1975:211; Stoller 1995:75-90). This type of magico-religious representation was particularly strong in local societies which had little or no previous experience of an entrenched centralizing political and administrative system and which followed African traditional religious belief and practice. Thus the sudden imposition of an artificial chieftaincy serving an oppressive colonial system had led, in the 1920s, in a non-Islamized local society, to a cult of possession in which grotesque mimesis served to express resistance, to provide catharsis and capture the perceived power of the colonizer (see Jean Rouch's film, *Les Maîtres fous* 1927; Fuglestad 1975; Stoller 1995; Idrissa 1996). Humour, horror and mimesis were important elements of this cult. But in the case of Damagaram, the strong centralizing power of the sultanate, the muscular and tyrannical rules of certain sultans, the plethoric administration, the existence of the system of levying labour from non-aristocratic subjects, the use of servile manpower in the sultan's enormous fields, *gandu*, were part of the ordinary socio-political and economic landscape of a milieu that was both urban and rural, and which, as of 1850 and up until the time of colonial penetration, was in no wise a petty chieftaincy (Salifou 1971:4, 48, 59-62, 68, 78, 193). At any rate, the point is that the

cultural shock of forced labour was probably less poignant though nonetheless irksome, and the mimesis and catharsis were less dramatic but nevertheless interesting and revealing.

The introduction of the song focuses on the presentation of Baudot, the white Dodo. The introit defines itself (and the song) as a *kidi* or praise theme, one, we are told, that necessarily resonates in the heart of every resident of Damagaram, for in every gathering however great or small, 'there is always a former prisoner of Baudot' in its midst. And Dan Alalo, no doubt fallaciously, also presents himself as one of the lot, an African story-telling technique using the 'dramatic I' continued by Caribbean popular singers like the Mighty Sparrow in his *kaisoes*. From the outset, Baudot's oppressive presence is represented as having been universally felt, making him to be an emblem of the widespread impact of colonial rule in this locality and casting the community as a dominated space. In the same breath, Dan Alalo's persona, imposed on the audience throughout the song, exploits the fictitious omnipresence of the storyteller who proclaims his eyewitness status with the 'willing suspension of disbelief' of the audience. But here the artist pushes this strategy one notch higher by inventing for himself the privileged, central position of Baudot's envoy and overseer, an authorized and powerful presence critically walking through Zinder and reinventing its public and private spheres as a literary geography of political significance (Maffi 2005:276, 277).

Obviously, the praise song of a chief or important official, or indeed of any person, is impossible without the evocation of his genealogy. Baudot's genealogy as sung by Dan Alalo is contrived and fragmented, in keeping with his status of a foreigner about whom little or no information on lineage and social origin is available. He is: 'the relative of Ichère, kin of Gaumont (two French administrators)', 'the father of Abdou' (an indigenous youth⁷), 'the friend of the Sultan Mustapha of Damagaram'. This is very meagre, but it is important to respect the rules of the genre and thus to situate the great man in the social network (in which he emerges as having few ties). Upon examination, this minimal genealogy highlights Baudot's status as marginal though powerful person, an outsider, an illegitimate being with limited claims to personhood, which is not a biological given (Wiredu 2009). Additionally, his status, beyond his personal power, is one of representation of the French colonial power since his classificatory 'kin' are other colonial administrators and his only local 'kin' are a social junior and the sultan. This last 'relationship' marks the 'cooperation' of the sultan with colonial rule and, in the mouth of his 'protégé' Dan Alalo, enhances the status of the sultan no matter how we take it.

But the crux of the matter resides elsewhere, for what interests Dan Alalo above all is the introduction of the European 'chief', of the big white wolf

that managed to disrupt the social hierarchy. This new (dis) order, involving the shift from Islamized ruler to European rule allows the underprivileged of yesterday to show and tell through song, drama and mime, how the mighty, fallen from their thrones, have become the object of public mockery. Hence the singer makes short work of presenting Baudot's praise names: 'the taskmaster', 'the Master worker', 'the White Man', 'the man with the whip', 'the man with the bludgeon'. This foreigner is presented as being obsessed with work, as the enemy of rest, of his own and of that of the whole of Damagaram and these attributes are in turn linked to his status as a foreigner/White Man (Nasara) while his lack of discernment and compassion are linked to his status as an 'unbeliever' (*kafiri*), i.e. non-Muslim and as a pagan (*arne*, meaning animist), a blame theme that reflects a Muslim worldview. Baudot is, moreover, the supreme authority despite the earlier polite reference to his relationship with the sultan for 'if the man with the whip strikes you/you can only turn to God' (Niang 1999:162, my trans.), meaning that he is the only master after God, thus implying the degree of the sultan's power in the colonial public sphere. What is also evident is the equation between colonial rule and violence, on one hand, and a new obsessive constraining approach to work, on the other, indicating a change of social ethic. Work, formerly understood as degrading for persons of noble origin, as the sad lot of low-status individuals, becomes an almost universal obligation, an end in itself; an enforced effort operating outside the familiar laws of status, profession, and social modes of production. Indeed, marabouts and Arabs did not perform agricultural labour. Both were high-status individuals. The first had a large field given to them by the sultan, worked by slaves (Salifou 1971:168); the second controlled the very lucrative trans-Saharan trade and lent money to the sultan (ibid. 132). Moreover, the *gaya*, or invitation to collective labour in an individual's field was a matter of consented collective work among neighbours from a village or from neighbouring villages and answered to rules of social exchange and relationships. The workers were fed by the owner of the field. Young men came to show off their strength and compete with one another. Young women came to sing encouragements and pick out a future mate. These dynamics had nothing to do with the conception of work in Baudot's *gaya*. For here work becomes synonymous with foreign domination, with a specific foreigner, with the disruption of every area of social interaction and of socially regulated prerogatives. Work, in the new dispensation ultimately signifies the 'banishment of rest from the city', the eradication of leisure, privilege, privacy and peace of mind.

It rapidly becomes obvious that while Baudot is an important discursive instrument in the song, the colonial official is not really the subject. At the

same time, he is not totally the object of the song either. For the main thrust here is not actually, or not merely, the denunciation of colonial oppression, which is nonetheless revealed as real, pervasive and humiliating in its everyday reality. Nor is the song simply one of resistance, though resistance is in fact performed through satire of the colonial administrator. Particular aspects of Baudot's cruelty, of his arbitrary use of imprisonment, lack of compassion for the old, the handicapped, for women, his disrespect of the local domestic order, of the sanctity of the home, are stressed throughout the song. It is clear: Baudot fears no one, feels pity for no one, respects no one, and answers to no one in the local society. Disrespecting local tradition through ignorance as well as prejudice, Baudot is shown up as a barbarian. Yet, despite all this, despite the fact that his menacing shadow hovers over the social drama performed, we get the impression that the flesh-and-blood Baudot is instrumentalized by the singers, blown out of proportion, transformed into something larger than life: a Dodo projected at will in order to arouse mock terror, to exorcise fear, to regain control of the situation by naming it, and to mediate and settle a few community scores.

The Textual Inscription of Social Change

The final part of this paper looks at the representation of social change. Representation covers a range of meanings including performance in the 'public cultural arena', its influential role in forming public opinion, and its contribution to the definition of social identity as presented in the song. This performance refers to a specific and significant space-time. But it also projects an imaginary social space with its public and private borderlines. It highlights and comments upon, through the use of humour, drama and satire, the transgressions of the frontiers of the private and the public operated by the overzealous French colonial administrator, Baudot, and his interpretation and exercise of the prerogatives of France's power in the colonial public sphere. Exaggeration is of course an ordinary mode of the mixed genre of this performance, combining elements of epic, mock epic, humour and satire. But, even then, certain details of the trespassing of the public authority remain evocative and meaningful. The imaginary social space projected by the performance also suggests social codes of status, caste, ethnicity and gender (Boelhower 2005:11). These make reference to the new professions created by colonial rule and their impact on the renewal of Zinder's cosmopolitan social sphere. Last but not least, they evoke certain types of social conflict and rivalry begging the researcher to probe their relationship with the real-life situation.

Dan Alalo and his troupe first performed this song soon after Baudot's departure from Zinder, in early 1944. This initial performance took place in

the sultan's court,⁸ which represents an exclusive cultural arena, at the frontier between the public and the private (see Habermas). Other more public performances were to follow as mentioned. Other performances took place in the courtyards of nobles and rich patrons, for whom Dan Alalo and his troupe also performed with a more or less important gathering, representing a more ideal 'public cultural arena', regarding the formation of public opinion, than the sultan's court. It is quite possible that no matter how 'open' the gathering, certain members of the society did not repeat the mistake of being part of the audience at a performance of this song and others probably left as discreetly as possible on their first experience. Others yet might not have gone to such a performance in the first place but were bound to receive some unwelcome information of its content, style and reception. At any rate, it is more than likely that the audience was not homogenous regarding point of view and stakes and consequently participation and reception. What is sure is that throughout the space-time of performance Dan Alalo and his troupe were centres and purveyors of socio-cultural power. Their mimesis of colonial domination displaced and captured power by naming and manipulating reality through their representation of the self and of the other. Humorously casting himself as the mouthpiece and eye of the colonial overlord, it is Dan Alalo, along with his troupe, who lords it over the entire society by giving utterance to its redefinitions in progress. How are these redefinitions perceived and expressed in the composition and performance of the song? What do they signify?

In order to respond to the first question, we need to examine certain elements of the content and form of the song which, taken together, will help us to answer the second question. Two leading characters emerge in the song: Baudot and Dan Alalo. We have examined the superficial and deeper meanings of these two protagonists and their imaginary interrelation as performed in the song. In this narrative Dan Alalo is fictitiously but meaningfully (re)positioned as socially close to Baudot. This strategy poses the artist as a high-status individual, a convenient vantage point from which to gaze upon every aspect of society. This (re) positioning allows the lyrics to deal with the viewpoints of both men, one representing the foreign oppressor; the other the local oppressed, much more easily that if they were presented in their 'correct' social reality as distant from each other. This juxtaposition also enables Dan Alalo to assume a poetic credibility that would have been impossible in his 'correct' social station – distant from the colonial oppressor. The song's symbolic reconfiguration of society places all the other characters of the piece in the position of figures in a public arena, figures forcibly deprived of the privileges of private space by the eruption of

the public power of the colonial administrator and of the foreign power he represents. The action of the former operates various forms of ‘publicizing’ (Habermas) beginning with his performance of power by proxy. It is in Baudot’s name that Dan Alalo requisitions a rounding up almost every *body* in Damagaram for labour in the fields. (Exemption applied in the case of the ruling class, related by blood or other close ties to the sultanate). Baudot is therefore portrayed as a public figure mandated by an overlord with prerogatives including the right to requisition labour or to order requisition. Colonial rule is shown in the act of redefining and reconfiguring social space and of controlling social bodies (Stoller 1995). As represented in the song, the entire Damagaram becomes an agricultural work camp. The able body is redefined as almost *any* body that is not dead, as specified near the beginning of the piece: ‘Whether you are an Arab/Whether you are a marabout/The Nazarene says/Even soldiers, even gobis/ No one is exempted’. Now these are important people, big men, local and foreign, as defined by pre-colonial social values and by new social values influenced by the colonial system since the *gobi* was a white soldier. Other military men were Africans from neighbouring regions of the French West Africa (Afrique Occidentale Française – AOF) of the time. They added to Zinder’s cosmopolitan character and fed the local economy to some degree since they had money to spend. Prostitutes, military wives or concubines and houseboys were among their clients. The list of persons who could be requisitioned lengthens, descending the rungs of the social ladder. Other requisitioned bodies include: ‘prostitutes’, ‘young female vendors’, ‘butchers’, ‘sellers of odds and ends’, ‘the impotent, the blind, the leprous’, and ‘the old woman who sells peanuts’, ‘even if she has to drag herself on her behind’ to get to the fields. All are decreed to be ‘able-bodied’, be they villagers or town dwellers residing in the shadow of the sultan’s palace, men or women, married or single. Village chiefs are warned to make sure they provide the quota of workers stipulated. Workers had better finish in one morning the work that takes them one week in the sultan’s fields (Niang 1999:160). Dan Alalo as protagonist in the song is the town crier publishing these labour laws of colonial rule, a function the character accomplishes and the singer performs with great relish.

The discrete references to local traditional leaders like chiefs and the sultan are, of course, quite revealing as regards their status under colonial rule and their role in the general system of forced labour. It is clear, moreover, that conscripted local workers are not considered as persons, as social beings with a specific social status and personal agendas, by the colonial administrator. Neither the physical limitations of the handicapped and the aged nor ‘normal’ exemptions of big men, masters of households and their

protégés – beginning with their wives – are taken into consideration. Hence, it is the entire pyramidal social system of the local society that is disregarded and abrogated, leaving two groups: workers who could be conscripted and a small exempted class which functioned as a provider of working bodies. But is also the right to privacy, private space and private prerogatives of free subjects that is annulled with important implications for the local definition of colonial rule.

In fact, Baudot, admired and feared for his aura and power, is also satirized for this total lack of respect of persons and of local social norms. He is decried as a heartless pagan for forcing lepers to sow among thorns, using the two remaining fingers on a hand incapable of holding a tool. In the same way, his underhand tactics for undermining the status of the head of household and the privacy and sanctity of the local home are condemned. In both these cases, Dan Alalo reverts to the use of minute description, exaggeration and focus on a specific case to make his point. Baudot is shown as integrating local social modes of behaviour in order to undermine social norms. Thus he rides a horse instead of driving a car so that the *mai gida*, the Zinderian *oikosdespotes* will remain unaware of his presence until the last moment. Besides, the character Baudot does not enter into a house through the front door, does not respect the rule requiring that strangers, especially males, limit their presence to the *zaure* or public reception area of the house. He enters through the backdoor, violating the intimacy of the entire household and disrespecting the master of the house. Caught by surprise, the latter is whipped in the presence of his wives, children and dependents. Other violated or abolished spaces of privacy or leisure evoked include the cosy rooms of prostitutes, the local pleasure spot of the bar, selling liquor and fried meat, catering to local and other males employed as colonial auxiliaries, with money to spend, the spaces of courting that brought together unmarried young men and women and their friends in keeping with the social norms of the time.

Shocking references to colonial violence focus on intimate social spaces, with the body as the paramount among them, often ignored by certain studies of colonization, but pinpointed by authors like Césaire (*Discourse on colonialism*) and Fanon (*Black Skin, White Masks*). While these are worthy of note, they should not blind us to other interstitial social relationships which also existed under colonial rule. I am referring to how Dan Alalo's universally critical gaze also places in the limelight the internal social rivalries of the local society under the influence of change, spurred by colonial rule. To this end, the artist remains faithful to the dramatic use of minute, exaggerated description, social portraiture, humour, satire and mime. His technique also involves an interesting encoding of public space. As mentioned earlier, the

entire society of Damagaram is represented as a vast agricultural work camp, divided into zones represented by the fields allotted to broken, demoted and constrained bodies. Recalling the ambiguous personal status of Dan Alalo and of public entertainers mentioned earlier, it is important to stress that his scrutiny of social action does not necessarily spare members of the local society. Though pity and outrage are not absent from certain evocations of the violation of social norms of respect and decency, Dan Alalo and his troupe also mock and disparage certain victims belonging to the local society to some degree or the other.

Dan Alalo as a main character in the song is portrayed as an alert, mobile and critical observer roaming the region, zone after zone, taking advantage of his in-between identity, transforming real 'social action into performance', demonstrating the ambiguous position of the artist as a non-neutral witness and interpreter of everyday life which, with hindsight, becomes history in the making. His song as a memory archive offers a porthole glimpse into intimate interstices of social change and conflict under colonial rule interpreted from a particular, relatively marginal, informed and stake-laden point of view. Two pairs of contrasting scenes from the song will serve as illustration: on one hand the reaction of local Arabs and Sherifs opposed to that of marabouts, on the other, the response of the soldiers' wives and that of the prostitutes.

In response to Baudot's requisition, the marabouts, habitually early risers, who watch and pray at night and awake at dawn for the call to prayer, especially in the case of muezzins, are up well before the cock, before the crack of dawn. When Dan Alalo arrives on the spot, they are there waiting, a thousand strong. But the marabout is a man of knowledge, unskilled in handling the hoe, enveloped in garb befitting his dignity but unsuited to work in the fields: superimposed boubous, 'an enormous turban', flowing trousers. The narrator observes the distress of the marabouts, the incongruity of their dress and offers practical advice to a marabout singled out from the group. As usual the focus on a single individual serves the end of a dramatic one-to-one interaction: 'I said "plough, marabout, plough"/The marabout stood there silent/I insisted: "Plough, marabout!/The pagan does not know Allah"...' The humble servant of God, who can do nothing with his hands except pray, accepts all of the advice offered, strips off his ceremonial attire and buckles down to work. But the irony of the situation is not lost on the narrator who watches this transformation of these formerly high-status individuals, once influential in government and politics, recipients of rich gifts from the sultan and nobles, of *sadaka*, tithes, who were beneficiaries of slave labour in their own fields. He cannot resist poking fun at the men of God: 'Maybe he will have mercy on you when he comes', he offers as a mock consolation while

reporting their prayerful chanting: ‘Soubhanaallahi Walhamdou lillahi/Wa la illa illaho, Allah Akbar’ (Niang 1999:116; Niang 2005:74). These are revealed to be vain supplications, for, as he dispassionately reminds the marabouts: ‘The pagan does not know Allah/When he comes you will be beaten to death’. He shares his ambiguous reaction with the audience: ‘I felt sorry for the marabouts/But after a while, I found them ridiculous’. But this ironic treatment of marabouts, despite their status as religious leaders in an Islamized society, is almost kind in comparison to the satire of the ‘Arabs and Sherifs’. The singer and his group disparage the pathetic state of these rich, high-status individuals, reputed to be not just learned Muslims but the very descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. Mockingly honoured and recognized through the use of the respectful Arabic title ‘Sidi’, the artists vengefully mime their self-pitying reaction to their fall from glory, as they declare their total ignorance of farming and exhibit their soft hands covered with blisters.

In the same way, the song opposes the group of the soldiers’ hardworking wives to prostitutes they perceive as rivals who steal their husbands. The first group is presented as composed of women of various regions and ethnic groups: ‘Zarmas’ and ‘Bambaras’; women of ‘Maradi’, ‘Gobir’, Zanfara, ‘Adar’, all reputed to be hardworking. To the contrary, the prostitutes are shown to be coquettish, lazy and enamoured of comfort and luxury. While the first group is inured to hard labour, the second group suffers horribly from exposure to the hot sun and a drastic initiation to toil. Interestingly, this is a day of rejoicing for the wives: ‘they exulted/the prostitutes had been brought to the fields/They were fainting from the heat/Those who had stolen their husbands one by one/Baudot the taskmaster/Has banished bedroom rest/They were bent double, and said, rejoicing/Baudot, we thank you./For the prostitutes are in this as well![repeat]/God, we thank you./Prophet, we thank you [repeat x 2]’ (Niang 1999:170-172, my trans.).

Hence, angelic inventions aside, solidarity/empathy is not illustrated here as an automatic social reflex. As mentioned in the introduction, the song portrays *communitas* as a mobile agglomerate of heterogeneous social networks with points of cohesion as well as relationships marked by conflict and feelings of ill-will.

Conclusion

Working with both text and context in the song ‘Baudot’, created and performed by Maazou Inoussa alias Dan Alalo and his troupe, this paper has attempted to examine the ambiguous nature of the public and private spheres portrayed in this artistic (re)invention of and commentary on a social reality. Indeed, the paper pinpoints various types of ambivalence including those of the characters and that of the artistic genre itself containing both parody and

genuine panegyric of the colonial administrator Baudot. The artistic motivation behind this song, which is both praise and parody, seems to go well beyond the simple scope of lauding or disparaging colonial power as other individual and social power games are also brought into the limelight in satiric detail. The paper moreover suggests that ambivalence, at the heart of social interactions, seems to have been exacerbated under colonial rule. Other ambivalences/oppositions alluded to in the analysis of this song, interpreted as a complex performance of power and commentary on social change, include the notions of centrality/liminality and power/powerlessness or low status/high status. These are shown to be reversed during performance through which artists are empowered for their own benefit but also for that of an otherwise silenced society. Artistic creation and performance reveal this society to be living, reactive and heterogeneous, with its relationships of conflict and its networks of solidarity.

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Notes

1. Information provided by Alhassane Amadou during an interview carried out 26/08/08.
2. However, Habid Hamed Daba (2006:4) in his book on the Nigerian Hausa poet, Danmaraya Jos notes that the use of the kalangu or 'talking drum' is documented for the courts of Gao as of the fourth century by the Arabic geographer al-Bakri.
3. All references here are to the French translation of *The Public Sphere* by Marc de Launay. See *L'Espace public*, Paris, Payot, 1978.
4. Daba (2006:25) notes concerning Hausa poet-singers in Nigeria: 'It seems that only *malamai* [marabouts] among the Hausa social stratification can escape the critical mouth of a singer before his audience'. In the case of Dan Alalo, this high-status group is not exempted from satirical treatment.
5. Information provided by Abdou Salam Niang, a Nigérien specialist of Hausa song-poetry and of Dan Alalo.
6. Ibid. Niang cites a 1951-1952 recording made by the Tabarsi recording company of Kano which no longer exists. This information on early audio recordings in Nigeria of Dan Alalo and his troupe was corroborated by the griot Alhassane, a member of Dan Alalo's choir, during my interview with him, with the assistance of Hamidou Ibrahim, Niamey, 26/08/08, during the writing of this paper.
7. In my interview with him (26/08/08), Alhassane informed me that that Abdou was the groom of Baudot's horse and that this servant was held in great affection by the colonial administrator.

8. Information provided by Abdou Salam Niang. Interview with Alhassane, 26/8/08, a griot from Dan Alalo's troupe, confirms that the song was performed long before independence and before the first audio recordings in Nigeria and Niger.

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