



## Artists, Covid-19 and Community Sensitization in Northern Nigeria: A Thematic Analysis of Zainab A. Baba's Song 'Korona Bairos'

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**Abstract.** For many years, traditional Hausa singers of Northern Nigeria such as Alhaji Musa Dankwairo, Mamman Shata, and Dan Maraya Jos, used their artistic skills for community sensitization about diseases, pandemics, societal ills, political contestations, and economic challenges. This tradition is sustained up to the 21<sup>st</sup> century by both established and upcoming artists in the region, especially with the emergence of the Covid-19 pandemic. On this basis, therefore, this paper provides a thematic analysis of Zainab A. Baba's Song 'Korona Bairos' as a form of community sensitization in Northern Nigeria about the nature, symptoms, dangers, and preventive measures relating to the Covid-19 Pandemic. Hinging on both primary and secondary sources, as well as through the adoption of a historical methodology, this paper argues that, Zainab A. Baba, a Northern Nigerian Hausa female artist played a significant role in community sensitization about Covid-19. The paper also finds out that though other Hausa singers produced songs on a similar topic, her song is more comprehensive and chronological as it discusses the nature of the virus, its features, dangers, and preventive measures apart from the fact that it is also the most aesthetically famous one during the lockdown period.

**Keywords:** Covid-19, Lockdown, Music, Hausa Songs, Community Sensitization, Northern Nigeria.

### 1. Introduction

Since the emergence and spread of Covid-19, it has attracted the attention of many governments and institutions because of its serious threat to human existence. In an attempt to study, examine and find a solution to the disease, many scientists have published a large corpus of literature (Ciotti et al,

2020; Lone & Ahmad, 2020; Watkins, 2020; Cullen et al, 2020; Vaishya et al, 2020; Suryasa et al, 2021). Though science-based researches tend to dominate the general narrative about Covid-19, some scholars in the humanities and social sciences have also written on the role of the visual arts and music, especially on community enlightenment and sensitization about the disease across different African states (Hamaguchi et al, 2020; Kara, 2021; Kantorová et al, 2021; Hennessy et al, 2021; Sabol, 2022; Szostak, 2022).

In Nigeria, a number of scholars have also published important works on the roles of the visual and performing artists in both community sensitization about Covid-19 and for entertainment so as to reduce boredom during the lockdown period (Eze et al, 2021; Ayinla & Amenaghawon, 2021; Amenaghawon & Salawu, 2022). For instance, the torrent of artworks produced by cartoonists, many graffiti street artists, and muralists that have taken over the private and public spaces during the Covid-19 pandemic lock-down in Nigeria with the intention of expressing their skills for support and dissent about the disease are classic examples (Otonye and Eseagwu, 2021). It is surprising, however, to know that, despite the availability of works on the roles of the visual and performing artists in Nigeria, such works seem to be more generic than specific as they tend to provide a selective analysis of different areas in Nigeria, especially in the southern part of the country. Based on this submission, it became clear that there are little or no works on the role of Northern Nigerian Hausa performing artists in community sensitization about the Covid-19 pandemic. The Northern region is not only the most populous in Nigeria, but also has an overwhelmingly Muslim majority who at the beginning of the Covid-

19 pandemic have some reservations about its true existence.

During this dilemma on the true existence of the Covid-19 virus, Hausa singers played a significant role in educating the people about the true nature of the disease, its rapid spread, and its dangers. Some of these efforts include; Sani Liya Liya's *Wakar Corona Virus* (on lockdown compliance), Yamu Baba and Zainab Sambisas' *Mai Corona* (about the dangers of the Covid-19 virus), Ahmad Shanawa's *Mallam Muje* (on Covid-19 and fear-mongering), as well as Ali Nuhu, Maryam Yahaya and Ali Jitas' *Corona Gaskiyace* (justifying the true existence of the Covid-19 and the need to comply with the Nigerian Center for Disease Control). None of these songs, however, clearly explain the nature, symptoms, and impact of the Covid-19 virus. Instead, each song focuses on one aspect of the Covid-19 conundrum either its existence, threats, or the preventive measures. That is why Zainab A. Baba's song demands special scholarly attention. On this basis, therefore, this paper attempts a thematic analysis of a song titled *Korona Bairos* (Corona Virus) by Zainab Abdulkarim Baba. This also includes the effort of this female artist in community sensitization programs across Kano, which is the most populous state in Northern Nigeria. The choice of this artist is justified by the fact that she is the only Northern Nigerian Hausa singer whose song on Coronavirus is not only the most comprehensive discussing the nature of the virus, its features, dangers, and preventive measure, but also the most famous of them all. The song has also followed the old formal tradition of the way and manner prominent Hausa singers such as Alhaji Musa Dankwairo, Mamman Shata, and Dan Maraya Jos, approach their respective communities for sensitization about diseases, pandemics, societal ills, and economic challenges (Na'Allah, 1994; Onuekwe, 2015; Satatima, 2015; Nasidi and Nasiru, 2021).

Using a qualitative research methodology, this paper hinges on both primary and secondary data in the form of oral interviews with the artist and extensive published literature on issues revolving around the Covid-19 pandemic, especially in Nigeria. The paper is basically categorized into six major segments namely; introduction, the methodology, an overview of the Covid-19 Pandemic in Nigeria, a brief biography of the artist, a thematic analysis of the song under review, and the conclusion of the paper.

## 2. Methodology

This paper uses both primary and secondary data. While the former deals with face-to-face interviews

with the artist, the latter included books, journal articles, and government reports. Using gadgets such as a tape recorder, smartphones, and the computer, the authors also listened to the audio and watched the visual version of the song under review many times before its transliteration. This was subsequently followed by the English translation of the song. To ensure that the text is the same as the lyric, the authors finally juxtaposed them. The thematic analysis of the paper was also done within the context of the broader academic discourses on the Covid-19 pandemic.

## 3. Covid-19 in Nigeria: An Overview

Corona viruses are a genus of viruses that cause infections ranging from the common cold to more serious illnesses such as Middle East Respiratory Syndrome (MERS-CoV) and Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS-CoV) (Nhamo et al, 2020). The covid-19 pandemic is, therefore, one of the types of Corona Viruses that have spread worldwide influencing all spheres of life. This situation worsens by the continuous virus strain mutations that have continued to downgrade the available vaccines and vaccinations worldwide. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic and mutation, it has resulted in challenging global implications that have tilted the social, economic, and political landscape of humanity throughout the world. The fact that Africa is a part of the world community in the present globalization agenda necessitates deliberate methods for the continent to position itself in the new situation of pandemic emergence, while still preserving its political, social, and economic independence.

To properly contain the spread of the Covid-19 virus, the Nigerian government ordered the closure of all international airports, as well as its land borders. In March 2020, the government imposed a lockdown on the capital territory and two major southern Nigerian states of Lagos and Ogun. Later, around April and July 2020, the lockdown was extended to other states such as Kano, Kaduna, Sokoto, Katsina, Ekiti, Kwara, Taraba, Adamawa, etc. The state security personnel were sent to all states to ensure total compliance with the lockdown protocols (Onuoha et al, 2021; Shodunke, 2022).

Like other parts of the world, the spread of Covid-19 and the subsequent imposition of a total lockdown made Nigeria vulnerable to squalor, poverty, and other forms of social insecurities. This situation was also worsened by widespread propaganda about the existence of the virus. While many traditionalists and religious groups dispelled the reports on Covid-19 as

just fairy tales, many others were scientifically convinced, especially through the admission of many people into the isolation centers provided by the government (Olonade et al, 2021; Ndinojuo, 2020; Nche, 2022). Dodsworth (2021) while commenting on the role of the media in spreading fear about the virus argues that rather than facing an adversary halfway over the world, one would face danger from everyone they came into contact with. This is because the public was unable to determine the exact genuine truth as a result of the widespread dissemination of these fear-mongering statements in the media. The level of trust in various media outlets also decreased as a result of this circumstance.

The fear-mongering also made many Nigerians resort to herbs in preventing the spread of the Covid-19 pandemic. This development paved the way for the politics of regularizing African indigenous herbal medicines for emergency supplemental medicines to vaccines in times of pandemic, which was one of the major topics of worry surrounding the fate of African independence in the face of the Covid-19 pandemic. According to World Health Organization (WHO), any finished, labelled pharmaceutical product that incorporates aerial or underground plant parts, other plant components, or combinations thereof as its active ingredient(s), whether in the raw form or as a plant preparation, is referred to as traditional or herbal medicine (WHO, 2010). The organization estimated about 80% of the African Region's population is relying on traditional medical treatments for their healthcare requirements (WHO, 2010). Antwi-Baffour et al (2014) also supports this statistical proof with similar estimates from the International Development Research Centre (IDRC).

It should also be noted that the Covid-19 pandemic has affected the poverty level index, especially on the African continent. The continuous lockdowns of 2020/2021 changed working dynamics and business activities affecting household incomes and national growth domestic product figures in Nigeria and the African continent at large. About 14% of the world's population lives in low-development nations, most of which are in Africa, and by 2020, it is anticipated that these nations would be responsible for 53% of the world's extreme poverty (Amirudin et al, 2021). With all the socio-political challenges during the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, public enlightenment remained the most important means to educate the populace on preventive measures. In achieving this, the Nigerian Centre for Disease Control (NCDC), Islamic scholars, audio-visual and print media, as well as artists, played significant roles. It is on this basis that this paper provides a thematic analysis of

the song of Zainab A. Baba on the dangers of the Corona virus so as to sensitize the people of Northern Nigeria.

#### 4. A Brief Biography of the Artist

Born in Kano on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, 1987, Zainab Abdulkarim Baba is one of the vibrant Hausa female artists following the footsteps of her elder sister, Maryam. Her father was a Hausa man from a town called Kura, which is 27 km away from the metropolitan city of Kano. Her mother, however, hailed from Kukawa, one of the oldest settlements in Borno. Upon the completion of her primary education, she was admitted into Federal Government College, Kazaure where she graduated in 2003. From 2007-2010, she attended the College of Arts, Science, and Islamic Studies for her Special Arabic program. From 2018-2019, she also obtained a Professional Diploma in Mass Communication from Bayero University, Kano. Currently, she is pursuing an Advanced Diploma program there.

According to Baba (2023), she started composing songs in her childhood days. Because of her great love for music, she also participated in music competitions during her secondary education. Her elder sister, being an accomplished artist, made it very easy for her to nurture her talent and convince her parents to allow her to pursue music as a profession (Baba, 2023). She began to compose her English songs in 2005 before she finally abandoned them for the Hausa lyrics due to their prominence within her community.

In developing her musical career, certain individuals helped her immensely, especially Abubakar Sani, who trained her in music production. This was further strengthened by her continuous participation in featuring other artists. Though the major thematic preoccupation of contemporary Hausa music is love, Zainab abhors it the most because according to her, a piece of good music should be didactic. This stand is properly justified based on the thematic focus of her songs, which include; *Iyaye* (about obedience to parents), *Abun duba a nan duniya ya yan uwa bazamu dawwamaba* (the important thing to consider in this world is that we will not live forever), to mention, but a few. It was on this basis that she was commissioned by many NGOs such as HC3 and The Challenge Initiative (TCI) to produce songs for awareness, especially on issues related to malaria and child spacing (Baba, 2023).

With the emergence and spread of the Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria, she was commissioned in 2020 by TCI to produce her song titled '*Korona Bairos*'

(Corona Virus) with the aim of enlightening the people of Northern Nigeria. This was because of the religious misinformation of many people in the region who even thought that the virus would not affect Muslims or the black race. According to the artist, she conducted serious research on the pandemic laying emphasis on its symptoms, dangers, and preventive measures (Baba, 2023).

##### 5. A Thematic Analysis of Zainab A. Baba's *Korona Bairos*

*Korona Bairos* was composed in 2020 during the famous 'Nigerian Corona Lockdown'. The song, which has ten (10) stanzas is composed in an interrogative way where some people are asking the artist in a conversational form about the Covid-19 virus, especially its existence, symptoms, preventive measures, and the development of vaccines. Through this style of presentation, the artist successfully passed her message to the people of Northern Nigeria. The rhyming pattern of the song has no doubt given it an aesthetic and lyrical rendition. Below is the thematic analysis of each stanza of the song.

*Ga kira ga mutane bai daya,  
Korona bairos cutar da ta addabi duniya,  
Mu kiyaye tsafta lafiyace jarin rayuwa.*

This is a call to everyone,  
Corona is a pandemic disease,  
Let us observe cleanliness to stay safe,  
Health is wealth.

The artist in the above stanza opens the song with an overall call to the people of Northern Nigeria with the intention of calling their attention to the fact that Covid-19 is truly a global pandemic. Through this style, the artist puts her listeners in suspense to the extent that they would like to listen to her message. She also made it clear that the only solution is personal hygiene for health is wealth.

*Wai mece ce korona?  
Ana ta fadi mu mun jiya.*

What is corona?  
The news is everywhere, we have heard about it.

In this stanza, the artist is asked to shed more light on what is Covi-19 pandemic because people have heard a lot about it without a clear explanation. This important question gives the artist the latitude to properly explain Covid-19 in the following stanza.  
*Cuta ce 'yan'uwa ga shi nan ta addabi duniya,*

*Ba dabba ba mutane ana iya dauka bai daya,  
Hanyoyin numfashi take bi ba ta barin daya,  
Bayyanarta jikin mutum sati biyu ba ta yin daya,  
Amma kuma na ji wadansu mutane na ta hayaniya,  
Sun ce cutarma wai karya ce ba ita duniya,  
Wasu sun ce wai bakar fata ba ya yi gaskiya,  
Na ji an ce ba ta kama Musulmi, an saki gaskiya,  
Ita annoba idan har ta zo ba ta yin wariya,  
Kai mu dauki matakin kare kai magana kan gaskiya.*

My people it is a disease that fights the whole world,  
Which infects both animals and humans,  
It generally affects all the respiratory system,  
In humans, it takes two weeks not one to be detected,  
I heard some people debating about it,  
That there is no such disease in existence worldwide,  
Some said that blacks cannot be infected with the disease,  
I heard that it does not infect the Muslims,  
But a pandemic does not differentiate race,  
Let's take preventive measures to stay safe.

In this stanza, the artist answers by debunking the major misconceptions trending amongst the people of Northern Nigeria about the Covid-19 pandemic. She explains beyond a reasonable doubt that the virus exists and that pandemics or diseases do not differentiate whether one is a Muslim or not, a black or white. Though an artist, she is able in this stanza to project the larger perceptions of people in the region about the disease. After clarifying the misconceptions, she lays a foundation by informing the people that the best way to combat the pandemic is to take drastic measures, which would be explained in the following stanza.

*Ta yaya ake dauka ki fada mana 'yar'uwa?  
Da mai ita idan ka hada jiki za ka iya kamuwa,  
Ko a atishawa in kana gun sai ka yi kamuwa,  
Ko da tari ne mai ita in ya yi sai tai yaduwa,*

How can one be infected, please educate us sister?  
One can be infected having body contact with an infected person,  
Or when he sneezes, while you are near him,  
Cough is also another way of speedy spread of the virus.

This stanza begins with a question addressed to the artist about the ways one can contact the Covid-19 virus. The artist replies by stating the various channels through which the disease can be transmitted from one person to another, which included, but not limited to coming into close contact with an infected person, or when he sneezes while one is close to him, and coughing that is one of the

fastest ways to spread the virus. Through this means, the artist educates the audience about some of the ways facilitating the rapid spread of the virus. By knowing the channels of transmission, the people will find it easy to protect themselves.

*To mene ne alamu na cutar tun da kina gani?  
Likitoci sun ce da akwai ciwon kai kun gani,  
Da akwai kuma zazzabi har mura in tai tsanani,  
Ciwon kirji da limoniya har koda na jini.*

What are the symptoms of the disease, as you have observed?

Doctors said among the symptoms is severe headache, beware!

There is also a fever with a cold, chest pain, pneumonia, and a kidney bleed.

In the above stanza, another question about the symptoms of the Covid-19 virus is addressed to the artist in a conversational way. The artist explains that medical practitioners have itemized severe head-ache, fever, flu, chest pain, pneumonic attacks, and kidney bleeding as the major symptoms of the virus. Providing the symptoms in clear terms is one of the major differences between Zainab's song and the ones composed by other Northern Nigerian Hausa artists. This is because, apart from adopting a chronological presentation, she also pays attention to details about the nature, means of transmitting the virus, its symptoms, as well as impacts on human life generally.

*Ta yaya za mu kare kanmu wurin yin kamuwa?  
To farko tsafta ita ce jigo kuma garkuwa,  
Wanke hannunka da sabulu cuda kuma sa ruwa,  
Atishawa tari sanya tishu don kare 'yan'uwa,  
A kiyaye kai hannu abaki da idanuwa,  
Da akwai takunkumin rufe hanci kusa don garkuwa,  
A nemi abinci mai kyau da 'ya'ya na itatuwa,  
A tsaftace duk abin da ake taba shi da hannuwa,  
Matattakala ta bene da kofa har da abin hawa,  
Hada da tebur, kujera na ofis kafin kai hawa.*

How do we protect ourselves from being infected?

First and foremost cleanliness is number one,  
Wash hands with soap under running water and squeeze both hands,

While sneezing, cover your mouth with tissue paper to prevent others,

Using a facemask is another preventive measure,

Eat a balanced diet with fruits,

Clean all surfaces that can be reached with hands,

These include staircases, doors, and lifts

Office furniture should always be wiped before use.

This stanza begins with a question about the preventive measures to be adopted so as not to be infected by the virus. Here, the artist mentions all the major preventive measures as advertised by the Nigerian Center for Disease Control, which include; personal hygiene, washing hands with soap under running water, covering the mouth while sneezing, eating a balanced diet, as well as cleaning house or office utensils and furniture using a sanitizer. Using a conversational lyrical performance, the artist enlightens the people about personal and collective prevention of the Covid-19 virus.

*Daga kun ji alamominmu na baya na wanzuwa,  
Garzaya gun likitoci fada masu me ke faruwa.  
Shin wai akwai maganinta ne ki fada mana  
'yar'uwa?*

As soon as you notice the symptoms mentioned,  
Rush to medical doctors and inform them,  
Is the virus curable? Please, let us know.

Here, the artist calls on people to quickly seek medical attention when they detect symptoms of the Covid-19 virus. In so doing, they would be informed about their health status because the symptoms of the flu are almost the same as the Corona virus. Though the artist gives a convincing explanation about what to do when a person has noticed the symptoms, she fails to start by advising people to first isolate themselves until the condition is critical. Another question about the presence of a cure for the virus is addressed to the artist, which she explains in the next stanza.

*A'a, ba maganinta a halin yanzu ko ban ji ba,  
Amma ba karya don hukumomi ba su gaji ba,  
Daga kun ga alamar mai ita ku kai shi ko bai yarda ba,  
Wurin likitoci akwai kwararru tun ba yanzu ba.*

No, I have not heard of the cure yet,

But medical practitioners are working tirelessly for the cure,

As soon as you notice an infected person, rush him to the hospital even when he refuses,

Because in such health facilities, there are professional doctors ever since.

In this stanza, the artist responds by saying that to the best of her knowledge, a cure was not developed when the song was composed. However, she adds that she knows that medical practitioners were tirelessly working on developing one. Meanwhile, if any person is confirmed to be positive, he should be taken to the hospital even against his will for proper

treatment. Here, the artist refers to the services that could be provided by the then-established isolation centers, which many people were afraid of. If the fear comes from the fact that one would die there, she is confirming to people that there are professionals who can handle any case.

*Da rigakafi za suyi masa sai kuga cutar beyiba,  
Da akwai maganin alamominta idan ba'a kamuba,  
Mun gode 'yar'uwa, Allah ba mu tsawon rayuwa,  
Zainab A. Baba nace mu kara kula da rayuwa.*

There is a vaccine for a person that has not contacted the disease,

There is a cure for its symptoms when one is free from it,

Thank you, may we live long,

I am Zainab A. Baba, let us be more careful with life.

In the above stanza, the artist further informs her audience that there are available vaccines for those who have not been infected by the virus. She concludes the song by thanking her audience, praying for a long life for all and personally advising people to be careful with life, especially during a pandemic like Covid-19. Mentioning her name at the end of the stanza is no doubt an endorsement of the contents of the song and to also claim copyright through a verbal signature.

## 6. Conclusion

This paper provided a thematic analysis of Zainab A. Baba's song on Covid-19 entitled '*Korona Bairos*'. The paper argued that though many other Hausa artists have composed songs about Covid-19, none of the songs gives a clear analysis of the Corona virus, particularly its symptoms, preventive measures, and alarming dangers. On this basis, therefore, Baba's song stands out, which is one of the reasons why it attracts academic attention of this nature. Apart from the aesthetic, musical, and communicative value of the song, it is concluded that many people patronized it. This has also raised a level of sensitization about the threats of the Covid-19 pandemic in Northern Nigeria. Most interestingly, however, is the artist's ability to adequately provide convincing answers to the fears and concerns of the people about the pandemic. Though the artist tried immensely in explaining the virus, its symptoms, preventive measures and impact in a chronological manner, it is observed that some steps are missing such as isolation before going to the hospital when the symptoms are critical. Another preventive steps missing included social distancing and the use of hand sanitizer.

In the video version of the song, the artist explained in gestures the way and manner the virus can be contacted. The dramatic representation of the artist visiting to the nooks and crannies of cities in the North is also commendable. She is also seen embarking on community sensitization. Besides, the representation of both sexes in the video also ensures gender sensitivity.

The paper also revealed that artists play significant roles in community sensitization and enlightenment, especially during pandemics or other social problems such as war, famine, and fire outbreaks, to mention, but just a few. This development also shows the need to further have in-depth studies on the role of individual artists in community sensitization about at least, the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly in Northern Nigeria.

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