

# ISSUES IN HAUSA IMAGINATIVE LITERATURE: REFLECTING PAST AND PRESENT

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## **Abstract**

The Hausa imaginative literature, and of course the art of story-telling is well known to Hausa people, but as elsewhere it is looked upon as a pastime for the amusement of women and children. Stories have been passed for generations but never written down except, probably, at the instigations of the Europeans, who by the periods beginning from 1933 paved way for the development of imaginative prose-writing in Hausa, which subsequently followed through the years up to the present time. This paper attempts to make an intensive discussion on Hausa imaginative literature beginning from the first generation Hausa creative writings to the present 'Kano literature' texts.

## **Introduction**

Hausa imaginative literature would, probably, be seen to adopt conventional organizing principles whereby the most earliest forms would be seen as the bedrock upon which, according to Fumiss (1996), modern Hausa literature has developed. This view is widespread in the discussion of Hausa literature generally; from traditional oral indigenous genres developed modern written Hausa-type genres.

All form of Hausa written creative activities were antedated by Orature. Oral narrative is probably among the earliest items apart from vocabulary to have been written down in Romanized Hausa. Publication such as those of J.F. Schon, C. C. H. Robinson, Frank Edger, R. S. Fletcher, A. J. N. Tremgame, H. C. Harris and F.W. Newman, contained, to a larger extent, transcriptions of oral narratives along with other texts. Prior to this time, the Ajami script Hausa had been written during the pre and post Jihad period. The first Ajami writing was from a famous Kano scholar Abdullahi Suka, titled *Ruwayar Annabi Musa*, This scholar flourished during the seventeenth century. Two famous scholars from Katsina, Ibn Sabbagh (Dan Marna) and Abduljafil (Dan Masani) began to write poetry in Ajami and Arabic about the same time with Abdullahi Suka, or shortly thereafter. Poetry is considered the first written work in Ajami. The greatest impetus to the writing of Hausa came from the preaching and other activities of the Islamic reformers of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The greatest such reformers were Shehu Danfodio and his disciples. He wrote many poems in Ajami resulting in an increase in Hausa literature.

## **The Beginning of Imaginative Writing in Hausa**

The development of imaginative writing in Hausa could be linked up with the history of the institutions such as Translation Bureau (1930-34), the Literature Bureau (1934-45), and the Gaskiya Corporation (1945 to date). Other related institutions closely linked with Gaskiya were NORLA (Northern Region Literature Agency, 1959-9), and NNPC (1966 to date). These institutions were responsible for the publishing of the early Hausa written works.

## **The First Generation Imaginative Prose Writing in Hausa**

In 1933, a scheme was inaugurated by the then Director of Education, Nigeria, Dr. Rupert M. East, to produce Hausa books which would provide reading matter for those who could read, at a price which they could afford to pay, and distribute them over the Northern Provinces in such a way that

they might be brought to the notice of the native public so as to lay the foundations of a vernacular literature (East, 1936). This was the first move for creative Hausa writings. This scheme produced a number of manuscripts, which according to Sani (1999), is a proof of latent literary ability, and a hopeful sign that we may one day compound the sceptics by producing a really first class indigenous literature. Accordingly, five creative storybooks were produced in this competition which according to Mora (1986), were proved to be quite useful reading material in schools. *Ruwan Bagaja* (The water of cure) written by Abubakar Imam took the first position due to the fact that in this book, according to East, (1936) the finding of the quest provides an obvious climax, and the author was to brought his tale to a fitting conclusion. The episodic pattern of the

*Ruwan Bagaja* develops through a quest narrative. The travels of Alhaji Imam form the core of the book, and in it we see features that have been echoed time and again in those imaginative prose writing i.e. the mix of fantasy and realism permeates the book. The implausible coincidences often involve the repeated meeting between the hero of the story Alhaji Imam, and his competitor *Malam Zurke Dan Muhamman*. Pweddson (1977), sees the adversarial relationship between these two characters as part of a broader pattern of conflict in the book between appearance and reality, man and physical world, Islam and "Unconventional beliefs" as well as internal conflict with characters. The meetings of these two characters were similar, according to Ryan (1976), to Don Quixote and his Sancho Panza.

The next imaginative story to take the second position in this scheme was a 45-page work carrying the name of its hero "*Gandoki*" combining historical description of the arrival of the British with fantastical exploits of stirring deeds and great victories. Skinner (1971) was of the view that an Arabic book written by Imru'ul Kais "*Atfu Laila*" (The Thousand and one Nights) was an important influence upon Malam Bello Kagara's writing of *Gandoki*. This, according to Skinner (1971), could be seen in the heroes' flights through the air, battles with Jinn, Marriages to princesses and Sojourns in India and Ceylon.

Abubakar Tafawa Balewa, who, according to Clark (1991), was a graduate of Katsina College, and a teacher of Bauchi middle school, was the author of the third position story book in this competition titled *Shaihu Umar*. This is a 50-pages book written about the hero of the title *Shaihu Umar* and his mother, who endure hardship having been taken as slaves across the desert. The fourth text was a 47-pages book entitled *Idon Matambayi* (The eye of the enquirer) written by **Muhammadu** Gwarzo. The fifth text was *Jiki Magayi* written by a co-authors John Tafida Wusasa and Dr. Rupert East. *Jiki Magayi* is a story of Thwarted Love transformed into an overwhelming desire vengeance. Retribution in the story, according to Furniss (1996), in the end, brings destruction on the wronged and the wrongdoer. This story, which involved a quest for a magic potion, but intended for destruction not cure, is, according to Pliaszewicz (1985), a story of a great and tragic love, of hatred and the growth of a thirst for a revenge.

These five texts of the first generation Hausa imaginative literary works were outstanding in both form and content. They are noteworthy in that they deploys direct speech to a very considerable extent. There is no doubt about the fact that these five texts strung together to create one of the earliest examples of imaginative prose-writing, resonate with and pick up on other forms of oral humour.

Having discovered that, Abubakar Imam has a real talent for storytelling, and is one of the few who has retained command of his education in English, he was called to bring together a collection of short stories connected by a continuous plot. A three-volume *Magana Jari Ce* published in 1938 and 1939 emerged thereupon. The three volumes contain a little over eighty stories some of which are clearly derived from the books, which R.M. East lent him (Mora 1989). The three volumes were constructed after the manner of *the Alfu Laila* (Thousand and one Nights) in which the narrator relates story after story. Westly (1986), maintained that, the author portrayed the ability to adapt his

materials not only to the characteristics of the Hausa language and the circumstances of Hausa culture, but to the context of literacy itself that made *Magana Jari Ce* a success.

### **Hausa Imaginative Literature After the 1934 Vintage**

What followed 1934 literary endeavour was an imaginative prose-writing that can be divided into the following periods: 1940s, early 1950s, late 1960s, late 1970s, and early 1980s by a new generation of writers. The early 1950s, saw, the production of imaginative prose writings, such as: *Iliya Dan Maikarfi* by Malam Ahmadu Ingawa in 1951, *Gogan Naka* by Malam Garba Funtua and *Sihirtaccen Gari* (the enchanted town) by Amadu Katsina both in 1952. These stories were followed by a series of others that came under the imprint of NORLA (Northern Region Literature Agency) such as *Da'u Fataken Dare* (Da'u traders of the Night) by Tanko Zango in 1952, and *Bayan Wuya SaiDadi* ("After pain comes pleasure") by Abdulmalik Mani in 1954.

The periods late 1960s and early 1970s witnessed a new crop of novellas, which were published by both Gaskiya Corporation and Northern Nigerian Publishing Company (NNPC). The first imaginative story to be published in this period was *Tauraruwar Hamada* (The Sahara Star) by Sa'idu Ahmad in 1965. *Tauraruwar Hamada* is an imaginative narrative that involves repeated episodic adventures. Next to this book came *NagarlNa Kowa* (Good to everyone) by Jabir Abdullahi in 1968, then *TauramwaMai Wutsiya* (The comet) by Umaru Dembo in 1969, and finally *Dare Daya* (One Night) in 1973 respectively. Novels

produced during these periods portrayed the modern Hausa Society as stories were drawn according to Yahaya (1978), from the mixture of cultural influences, from Indian Cinema to Western Science to Islamic Religious beliefs. This assumption could be taken to be real when a closer look is given to the previous texts whereby all the stories were set in a pre-modern Hausa world i.e. a Hausa society without planes, trains, telephones, etc.

Hausa imaginative literature continued to developed as a result of two major creative-writing competitions. One was organised by NNPC in 1979, and other by Nigerian Federal Department of Culture in 1980. The result of these competitions produced a new crop of novels, different in many ways from that which had gone before. (Furniss, 1996). Kudan (1987) reported that the first competition which was organised in 1979 witnessed twenty two entries. Four of the entries were translations, eleven manuscripts were rejected, and three were declared winners and therefore went for publication. Four were kept for further publication. The winner of the 1979 competition was *Mai/akin Zuciyata* (Power over my heart) by Suleiman Katsina, and the other two were *So Aljannar Duniya* (Love is Heaven on Earth) by Hafsat Abdulwaheed, and *Amadi na Malam Amah* by Magaji Danbatta. All the three books appeared together in 1980. However, Furniss (1996) reported that two years previously the NNPC had published a novel entitled *Kitsen Rogo* (Illusion) by Abdulkadir Dangambo. The novel is a mixture of fantasy and realism and has taken a contemporary social and political issue as its central theme.

In 1.980, the Nigerian Federal Department of Culture organized the second competition for creative writing in Nigerian languages. Using the Gaskiya Corporation, they published a number of books in Hausa language. Four imagination stories emerged under this competition and the winner *Turmin Danya* (The strong man) by Suleiman Katsina was recognized. The other three novels were *Tsummagiya Kan Hanya* (The driving whip) by Musa Muhammad Bello, *Karshen Alewa Kasa* (The discarded left over) by Bature Gagare and *Zabi Naka* (Choose yours) by Mannir Mamman Katsina, all published in 1982, In 1983, NNPC published a book entitled *Tura ta Kai Bango* (pushed to the limit) by Suleiman Katsina. This book is regarded by many as a radical departure of recent years.

### **Emergence of Kano Market Literature**

Beginning from 1984 to the present time, a new theme developed in the art of prose-writing. Love, passion and the power relations between men and women became the dominant features in prose-writing heretofore. Clubs were formed which provided their members with a way to get into print without the intermediary of a formal publisher. These clubs of writers collectively formed what is called 'Kano Market Literature'. Their books are privately printed and often contain, in addition to the story, photocopies of the covers of previous titles, lists of traders and bookshops from whom their books can be obtained. A romantic theme in prose-writing at this time made a remarkable intact in the Hausa society. The first texts produced under this contest according to Isa (2002), were *Rabin Raina* (My Half Life) by Talatu Wada Ahmed, in 1984, *Soyayya Gamon Jini* by Ibrahim, Hamza Abdullahi in 1986, *In Da Rai*, by Idris Imam in 1987 *Budurwar Zuciya* by Balaraba Ramat Yakubu in 1987 *Kogin Soyayya* by A. M. Zaharaddeen in 1988, *Idan So Cuta Ne*, by Yusuf M. Adamu in 1989. Numerous Hausa novels continues to fill the market. Majority of the writers, according to Isa (2004), were literature illiterates. There major customers were women and Hausa films industries who always cherishes Love stories. Majority of the writers view Indian films on domestic television screens and transform what they saw into writing. This sum up the inappropriateness and unsuitability of these novels to be used in schools and colleges for studies like the early Hausa texts.

### **Conclusion**

The quest for creative indigenous stories in Hausa made it necessary in the early 1930s to provide a scheme that will require the indigenes to go into creative writing competition. Prior to this competition, which resulted to the publication of five books in 1934, there had been a number of publications but only on translated materials as well as anthologies of tales and other narrators. The publication of the first generation Hausa imaginative writing in 1934 facilitated for the production of a number of prose works in the early 1950s. Late 1960s and early 1970s saw a new crop of novellas published by Gaskiya Corporation and the NNPC. Late 1970s and early 1980s witnessed the publication of a number of Hausa creative stories as a result of two competition organised by NNPC in 1979 and the Nigeria Federal Department of Culture in 1980. Beginning from 1984 to date various clubs of writers emerged. This pave way for the production of

numerous imaginative stories sometimes from relevant to even irrelevant texts that deviate from the natural tradition of the initial objective for creating imaginative stories in Hausa.

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