

The Development of Concepts of 'Author' and 'Authorship' in Hausa Culture

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Hausa literature is one of the well-studied African literatures. This paper explores Hausa creative writing, focusing both on the figure of *author*, *marubuci*, and the changes the concept of 'author' has undergone, motivated by social perceptions and demands. Modern mass media call attention in different ways to writers and their creative writing. Therefore, interviews with authors may provide valuable information, that has before now remained unexplored by the researchers, as well as some unique insights into the world of Hausa creating writing. Interviews constitute a particular genre in media industry contributing social communication and discussion. They also serve as a reliable source for understanding writer's self-perception, and the perception of creative writing and authorship in the context of social and literary change. This paper explores interviews with several prominent Hausa language authors; among them are Shu'aibu Makarfi, Bilkisu Funtuwa, Binta Salma Mohammed, Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed, Ismail Bala Garba, Rahma A. Majid, and Bashir Abubakar Umar. The study seeks to prove that the nature of interaction between a writer's self-perception and social expectations/ social perceptions for both creative writing and *marubuci* is a significant factor, that defines the development of Hausa literary movement. Moreover, that the development of Hausa literature in Northern Nigeria has been determined mostly by the self-perception of the authors, who aimed to improve literary tradition, and thus introduced new experimental trends, attitudes and forms into the literature. The study concludes that the contribution of modern Northern Nigerian writers to shaping the future development of Nigerian literature will definitely grow.

Keywords: Hausa written literature, Hausa creative writing, Hausa popular literature, *marubuci*, *soyayya* literature, *labaran soyayya*, Shu'aibu Makarfi, Bilkisu Funtuwa, Binta Salma Mohammed, Ismail Bala Garba, Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed, Rahma A. Majid, Bashir Abubakar Umar.

Introduction

Modern Northern Nigeria has its own extensive literary tradition in Hausa language. Hausa creative writing is a well-established field of research, and has generated various studies concerning multiple issues in regards to particular works, authors, and literary development in general. Different Nigerian academicians (I. Y. Yahaya, Y. M. Adamu, Ibrahim Sheme, I. Malumfashi, A. U. Adamu, among others), as well as G. Furniss, B. Larkin, N. Whittsit and others outside Nigeria are well-known for their extensive and thorough analysis on modern Hausa creative writing.

This paper explores the substance of Hausa social phenomenon *marubuci*, ‘writer’, as well as Hausa perceptions and evaluations of authors and writing. The attitude to literary work, and to people engaged in the field, can be regarded as a significant part of Hausa literary movement. Modern mass media call attention in different ways to writers and their writing. In this regard, such extensive body of evidence as interviews may provide unique insights into Hausa creative writing, that has before now remained unexplored. Interviews constitute a particular genre in media industry contributing social communication and discussion. Moreover, they serve as a reliable source for understanding writer’s self-perception and social perceptions, evaluations and demands in the context of social and literary change.

The proposed survey explores the largely unexamined source — interviews with authors. It focuses on the ways of interaction between a writer’s self-perception and social expectations/ social perceptions for both creative writing, and *marubuci* mainly based on interviews with prominent Hausa writers such as Shu’aibu Makarfi, Bilkisu Funtuwa, Binta Salma Mohammed, Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed, Ismail Bala Garba, and Rahma A. Majid. We argue that the nature of this interaction should be regarded as a significant factor, that defines the development of Hausa literary movement.

Background: Writer and writing in pre-colonial literary tradition and early Hausa popular literature

Generally speaking, Hausa writers can be divided into the following categories: those who compose poetry, and those who create imaginative prose; though many of them successfully combine different literary forms. Playwriting does not exist as an independent genre. Modern stage drama was forming amid the rapidly developing radio and video industry, which soon incorporated early drama clubs. Eventually stage drama got entirely displaced by these new species of popular culture. Hausa literary dramas always emerged sporadically, being originally created for stage, radio, or film industry.

Imaginative prose writers can be considered the most influential among the writers in terms of their contribution to Hausa popular culture, particularly to literary movement itself. Modern Hausa literature, following the example of Nigerian literature in English, has flourished in the form of popular imaginative fiction, defined in literary theory as ‘market literature’. Closer comparison between Hausa literature of Kano market and English literature of Onitsha market is made for instance by N. Whittsit [1].

Regardless of its form and contents, since the early days modern Hausa literature had a distinctive feature, namely, the tendency to generate authorities and follow them. This phenomenon logically led to a respective attitude towards writing, which implied commentary, citation and compilation without any signs of author’s creative work. Written tradition of pre-colonial times, being highly religious in its essence, gave birth to a number of anonymous copyists from among local Muslim scholars, *malams*, who kept alive the texts of Islamic written heritage which fell into their hands. Published author’s names emerged rarely — they were more exceptions than the rule. Some of them came from local political and religious elite (like Usman dan Fodio, some well-known local scholars), the others were Muslim missionaries (like Muhammad Bin Abdilkareem Al-Magili), who originated from North Africa, Mali, Borno, and the Middle East.

The above mentioned text creators, owing to their different social status, gained different literary opportunities, so on the whole their contribution to the development of Hausa written culture was also very different. The works created by the authoritative writers, though, even when not being the result of mere copying was in no circumstances of imaginative kind and lay in the field of religious instruction, explanation, commentaries, polemics, and scholarship. Other representative works of this period, apart from religious literature, were historiographical documents. The court historians were obligated to keep and update official and historical records, supplementing traditional lists of kings with the details of contemporary reign. However originally these lists existed in an oral form and were written down much later.

Literature was an essential part of Islamic heritage and served as an important vehicle for Islamization. For a very long time Islamic literature kept a particularly prestigious position. Its content was often spread by oral means. Oral performances, widely practiced by *malams*, operated as transmission and interpretation system of literary works, which underwent partial modification during this process. Imaginative work was suppressed in written literature, yet flourished in oral culture. This peculiar attitude to imaginative writing was preserved till the coming of the British and was particularly striking in literary works of the 1930s. The 1930s are well-known as a turning-point in the history of Hausa literature, as a transitional period giving birth to imaginative works of Hausa 'classics'. The authors of that period became pioneers in creation of Hausa modern imaginative writing.

R. East, a colonial official, who initiated the change of literary paradigm in the 1930s, described the problem in the following way:

The influence of Islam, superimposed on the Hamitic strain in the blood of the Northern Nigerian, produces an extremely serious-minded type of person. The art of writing, moreover, being intimately connected in his mind with his religion, is not to be treated lightly... the practice of deliberately mixing truth with falsehood under the same cover appeared to some to be definitely immoral. In short, it was necessary to explain to a very conservative audience a conception which was entirely new, and of doubtful value, if not morality [2, p. 89]¹.

The first Hausa works of imaginative prose, *Ruwan Bagaja* (The water of cure) by A. A. Imam, *Gandoki* (Mr. Inquisitive) by M. B. Kagara, *Shehu Umar* (Sheikh Umar) by A. T. Balewa, *Idon Matambayi* (The eye of the enquirer) by Muhammadu Gwarzo, and *Jiki magayi* (Body language) by John Tafida and R. M. East, were published in the 1930s.

Since then new concepts such as readership, creative writing, as well as many others have been introduced and developed. Due to an active and on-going process of social change, figure of author, *marubuci*, has become an essential part of popular culture closely related to the development of radio, music, and video industry.

Literary works published in the 1930s are characterized by numerous borrowings from the outside sources. The whole stories, rather large in size, are taken from Hausa oral tradition, tales (*Ruwan Bagaja*) and historiography (*Gandoki*), from Arabian *One Thousand and One Night* (*Ruwan Bagaja*, *Gandoki*, *Shehu Umar*), and from European tales (*Ruwan Bagaja*). This fact leads us to the conclusion that these works can be regarded as more of a compilation than an act of imagination. Some of these writers, for instance A. A. Imam or A. T. Balewa, became authorities in Hausa imaginative literature,

¹ Hereinafter spelling and punctuation have been kept unchanged as in the originals.

even though their writing definitely lacks in terms of modern literary theory and was highly estimated at that time, due to its pioneering and revolutionary significance.

One of those who made a new step both in interpretation of *marubuci* as author, not a mere compiler, and widening the meaning of writing in itself was Shu'aibu Makarfi (1918-2008), the pioneer of Hausa drama. Trained as teacher he was also known as talented journalist, who made a brilliant career, writing scripts for radio broadcasts.

Creative work of Shu'aibu Makarfi as a script writer was naturally determined by experimental writing of his forerunners, especially of A. A. Imam. However, his concept of writing and pen style still differed greatly from that of his forerunners.

In his interview with Ibrahim Sheme Shu'aibu Makarfi stated that he considered himself to be a teacher and an observer:

I was keen in watching how the Hausa people in the city dress, how they relate with one another, with the opposite sex, their attitude to constituted authority, etc, and in all these I saw the withering away of Hausa culture. And I cherish Hausa culture to a fault. I can recollect this tradition in the past... Now selfishness, much more than the cohesive communal relationship, has overtaken such values. Therefore, I am — as I were — disgusted with these changes affecting my world, the Hausa culture. I was not a trained writer. I never read Arabic or European writers; my writings were a direct critique of that sordid social phenomenon. The changes, very negative, prompted me into writing... [3]

Unlike Abubakar Imam whose books implied the process of borrowing and coping to a great extent, Shu'aibu Makarfi relied on reality as a main source of his writing. His plays were devoted to the city life. They were addressed to city dwellers not only because he could observe them for long periods without any difficulty, but, more significantly, because it was the city culture that he saw as the threat to the traditional Hausa society. An interesting fact should be mentioned in this respect. Makarfi was a true defender of social preservation, still his critical observations and way of teaching did not involve proposing any solutions to the social problems he saw. The author viewed his plays as a mirror 'cautioning people about their behavior' [3]. His only "purpose was to jolt people, enlighten them and shock them to change for the better... I would rather conscientise, raise awareness, teach and moralise than to solve the whole problem". [3]

Defining his pen style, Shu'aibu Makarfi used such terms as 'shrewd', 'innovative', 'satiric', and 'bitter'. The writer was always very close to his audience to know it well and to be believable in his plays. He never lost the conviction that he should write for people and about people, focusing his attention on human behavior in the context of social life and stability.

The matter of language was an essential and significant aspect of his attitude to writing. Makarfi always used Hausa because he detested the 'imposition of English language over Hausa' [3] never finding any reason to write in English. In radio drama the matter of verbal expressiveness has a special meaning, since the performance exists only in verbal form. Moreover, engaging different manners of spoken communication provides a way to express Hausa identity as a complicated system of interrelated patterns considered stable by members of the society. Makarfi's scripts display diverse use of proverbs, riddles, and jokes developing a complex system of semantic levels in the form of word play and hidden meanings.

The authors of early *soyayya* literature

The next generation of Hausa writers under discussion started their writing career in the 1980s and defined a new stage of Hausa literature development.

Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed is considered to be the first female published writer in Northern Nigeria. She was born to a family of high social status being one of descendants of Usman dan Fodio. As the majority of North Nigerian women she was married as soon as she left secondary school. The fact that she was allowed to continue her studies further in Bennett College (London) was uncommon.

The first book of Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed, *So Aljannar Duniya* (Love is Heaven on Earth, 1980), was originally written in English, and then translated into Hausa for the purpose of participation in literary competition held in 1972. Later on, the text was translated into Fulfulde and Arabic. The book, being one of the first *soyayya* (romantic) stories, was the first to have a revolutionary female character, since Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed managed to portray “a brush, assertive, loud and anti-establishment heroine”, expressing this way her direct confrontation with traditional society.

In her sense of writing Bilkisu Funtuwa is very similar to Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed, having also taken socially active and provocative stand. Like Shu'aibu Makarfi, she observes the ills that exist in Hausa society. Exactly as Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed she doesn't call for the revival of traditional values. Bilkisu Funtuwa regards many of these values, norms, and attitudes as resulting in social and personal problems, and considers people who follow them ignorant.

Bilkisu Funtuwa, one of the most popular female writers, supplies very comprehensive explanations about her writing. In her interview with Ibrahim Sheme she seems very concerned about social problems faced by Hausa women. She states:

I realized that through the medium of writing using the little talent God gave me, I could put into the heads of girls ideas — through entertainment and enlightenment... I have considered prose as the best medium of reaching out to women and men with my messages. Prose is the ideal way of teaching through entertainment [4].

This new trend in Hausa literature followed by the rise of popularity of *soyayya* stories, or “books of love”, implied certain opposition to traditional culture. That new trend gave an incentive to the growing numbers of literary critics, who were engaged more in debates concerning harmful influence of foreign popular culture on modern writing, then in discussions of literary theory. It has already become a matter of course for Hausa critics to examine the contents of new books in regards to their connection with traditional Hausa culture (see for details [5], [6]). The intense debate between critics and writers gave impulse to the development of writer's self-awareness and self-perception, as well as to evolution of their attitude towards writing. In this respect the following extract from interview with Bilkisu Funtuwa seems to be noteworthy:

I. Sh: Recently, a literary critic writing on the new Hausa writing in the Weekly Trust cited you as one of her examples. She said that in “Sirrin Boye” (The Hidden Secret), when Asma'u is about to meet her father for the first time, having been begotten out of wedlock, she falls into the arms of Faruk, her fiancū, out of apprehension on the encounter. The critic says that's not a Hausa cultural trait, that Asma'u should have burst into tears or something like that. Secondly, in the same book, you are charged for allowing a woman to go to her former suitor's house when her husband sends her packing at midnight instead of going to stay with the neighbours until daybreak.

B. F.: No, that is all truly Hausa culture. There is nothing confusion and apprehension could not cause, either to a Hausa, a white man or an Indian. Asma'u could have even collapsed on the ground then and faint in front of Faruk. The girl has spent twenty years of her life without ever knowing that she has a father and look at the way the father himself comes. Then she suddenly finds herself in an exotic place where she may not even be accepted. Hence her utter bewilderment. As such whatever anyone does in such a circumstance, especially since she has been considering Faruk as her elder brother is excusable. Secondly, the critic mentioned the issue of Abu, the mother of Asma'u, who leaves her husband's house and goes to her former boyfriend's house. I think she is right in going to that house because whenever she goes to her father's house he used to beat her and chase her out. She had been going to take refuge in the houses of his friends without getting the necessary succor; they send her back. She therefore goes to her boyfriend's house in order to persuade him to elope together.

I. Sh.: In Hausa culture, there may be other alternatives. Abu could have gone to her own relatives' houses no matter how far away. Didn't you consider that?

B: Abu had done all that, without getting relief. She therefore goes to her boyfriend for relief as all her travails are due to her insistence on him [4].

The quoted passage of the interview expresses literary competence and maturity of the writer. Bilkisu Funtuwa is not content to deal only with typical images, but tries to create capacious ones. While answering the question about the motivation of her heroines' behavior, she launches with the description of their emotional state applying to their personal psychological reaction.

This is Bilkisu Funtuwa's way to express the notion, that human behavior is governed not only by social values and norms. The writer transfers human behavior to the level of human relations and psychological processes within an individual. So inevitably contradiction between the writer's and the critics' perception emerges: contrary to the author's opinion, a human, especially a woman, is still interpreted by society first and foremost as a social subject. Standing firm behind the statement that her books are entirely devoted to Hausa culture, Bilkisu Funtuwa reveals cultural values and psychological patterns to be equally indispensable to human behavior. She states that human behavior is a result of emotional and psychological reaction of an individual, that is why it should be placed beyond the bounds of culture: "There is nothing confusion and apprehension could not cause, either to a Hausa, a white man or an Indian... As such whatever anyone does in such a circumstance..." [4].

In her books, Bilkisu Funtuwa creates various difficult circumstances that her characters operate in, aiming to reveal the idea of personal choice. Thus, the writer ignores the main technique inherent to Hausa didactic literature, the portrayal of social conduct and actions, either social or asocial ones.

Literary thought in progress

Contemporary Hausa literature, often identified as Kano market literature, gave birth to a great number of writers. The majority of these writers are very similar in their writing style, extensively borrowing their characters and topics from popular Indian films. These books, very cheap in their price and poor in quality, offered mainly entertainment to their reader. However, the situation has changed and nowadays authors tend to focus on social issues. N. Whitsitt underlines the social role of Hausa writer as intermediary between modernity and tradition: 'Kano market literature, maligned by its society for its failure

to perpetuate traditional Hausa ways, has assumed the thankless task of suturing diverse social attitudes' [7, p.135].

For many Hausa authors creative writing is subsidiary since they are also engaged in politics, journalism, social work, or teaching. Being well-educated these people represent the intellectual elite of Northern Nigeria. Apart from fiction they produce religious (Nuraddeen Gezawa, Bashir Oyhman Tofa, Abdullahi Mukhtar Yaron Malam), academic (Yusuf Muhammad Adamu), and educational literature (Nuraddeen Gezawa, Abdullahi Mukhtar Yaron Malam, Yusuf Muhammad Adamu). Female authors still constitute a majority. As a rule, they are as well educated as male writers. Still recently, the number of better-educated female writers has increased.

As an author, who has gained extensive writing experience and is now one of those who has watched both the beginnings of Kano market literature or *soyayya* books and its recent development, Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed indicates positive change of attitude in relation to *marubuci*: "In my opinion, North Nigerians have started to realize the importance of the writers. Formerly people didn't care for writers, especially female ones, ... they believed that our writing had been foolish, only concentrated into love matters" [8]. Hafsatu Abdulwaheed explained the notion of creative writing, taking a religious approach: if Allah gave someone insight (*basira*), ignoring this gift means ingratitude (*butulci*).

Binta Salma Mohammed in her interview with Muhammad Kabir Yusuf expresses an opinion that writing is a way to convey the views of the writer. Writer is someone who people really need: 'Once you are a writer and you have the talent, you have a responsibility to tell people what you think about life as well as saying for them what they would rather say but they cannot.' [9] Binta sees writing as a responsibility, but her interpretation is very different from that of Hafsatu Ahmad Abdulwaheed, who, as stated above, is taking a religious approach: if Allah gave someone insight (*basira*) ignoring this gift means ingratitude (*butulci*) [8].

Author's identity, in Binta Salma Mohammed's mind, is shaped by society within a certain cultural environment:

As Ngugi said, "Writers never exist in a vacuum". You write out of experiences. You must belong to a society. The society in turn shapes your thinking, experiences and so on. So, as a writer, as a woman and a person from the North, all these forces shape my thinking and my writing. I have to, first of all, see myself as a woman, then as a northerner, a Muslim, a Hausa and so on. All those things will come to play when I am writing [9].

Contemporary authors introduce their own attitude to writing, which is partly formed by experience accumulated by previous writers' generations. The attitude towards writing nowadays can be either conservative or progressive. Bashir Abubakar Umar, and Abdullahi Mukhtar Yaron Malam, for instance, express a rather conservative attitude: they aim to propagate Hausa customs and religion and to enlighten people by means of entertainment (see, for instance, [10]). Many contemporary Hausa writers, on the contrary, show quite independent position regarding their writing. They prefer to write both in English and in Hausa trying to engage wider audience. Binta Salma Mohammed points out that the majority of people in Northern Nigeria don't read in English. Poetry can not compete against novel. Contemporary state of Hausa culture imposes a limit on the writers who desire to get more freedom of creativity. Inevitably many of them associate themselves more with Nigerian literature (in English) than with the Hausa one. Such writers as Rahma A. Majid

[11; 12] and Ibrahim Sheme aim to improve the quality of their writing. As Sheme mentioned: “on my own part I felt that I should also improve on what I write. I should introduce new styles in my writing in Hausa...” [13].

Poetry is one of the most conservative literary spheres originating mainly from pre-colonial religious literature. Modern poets are restricted greatly by an absolute requirement to give up writing emotionally colored poetry in favor of religiously, politically or socially loaded poetry. One of the most creative and provocative modern poets is Ismail Bala Garba, who publishes poetry on football and love. Garba says:

Poetry shouldn't necessarily be about the so-called important issues; it could be about mundane issues like football. If someone writes a poem about football, he's not only showcasing his love for football, a particular player, club or brand of football, he is also making a statement that art could be serious. It could be high art and at the same time, it could be about mundane issues like football [14].

For Garba love and strong emotional reactions are important ‘ways of seeing’ in his imaginative writing [15].

Conclusions

The concepts of ‘author’ and ‘creative writing’ have evolved deeply since the 1930s. Literary process in Northern Nigeria has been an influential social factor, providing an arena for the disputes on sensitive topics. The figure of the author, *marubuci*, therefore, has always been recognized to be of great importance and significance. For this reason, social restrictions and criticism have so far had a strong effect on the development of creativity in writing. The creative development of Hausa literature in Northern Nigeria was always determined by the writers’ self-perception who aimed to improve literary tradition, and thus introduced new experimental trends, attitudes and forms into the literature. Consequently, the contribution of modern Northern Nigerian writers to shaping the future development of Nigerian literature will definitely grow.

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Концепция *tarubuci* и развитие представлений о художественном творчестве в литературе на языке хауса

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Современная северонигерийская литература представлена двумя направлениями, различающимися в первую очередь по языковому принципу, — литературой на хауса и сравнительно недавно появившейся литературой на английском языке. Словесная традиция языка хауса сравнительно хорошо изучена (М. Хискетт, С. Пилашевич, Г. Фернисс, Б. Ларкин, Ю. К. Щеглов, Н. А. Добронравин, Ю. М. Адаму, И. Шеме, И. Малумфаши, А. У. Адаму и др.). Настоящее исследование обращается к малоизученной теме — формированию и развитию у северонигерийских писателей представлений о художественном творчестве. Основным источником выступили интервью с писателями, которые довольно часто встречаются в современных СМИ и содержат ценные сведения о том, что формирует содержание авторского творчества, какие задачи для писателей являются первостепенными, как они оценивают свое творчество и состояние современной северонигерийской литературы. Представлены творческие концепции различных северонигерийских авторов: Шу'аibu Макаrfи, Ибраhима Бала Гарба, Хафсату Ахмад Абдулвахид, Билкису Фунтува, Бинты Салма Мохаммед и др. Литература выступает в качестве важного социального фактора на территории современной Се-

верной Нигерии, поскольку представляет собой одну из сфер, где происходит активное обсуждение актуальных социальных вопросов. По этой причине в глазах общества фигура писателя (*marubuci*) имеет большую значимость. Подобная «функциональность» писателя и авторского творчества привела к тому, что содержание произведений во многом определяется необходимостью получить одобрение социальной среды. В подобных условиях формирование и развитие представлений о художественном творчестве, творческая самореализация писателей сопряжены с трудностями, столкновение с которыми заставляет большую часть авторов оставаться в рамках консервативных взглядов. Ряд писателей тем не менее придерживаются прогрессивных взглядов и предпринимают попытки создать собственное видение художественного творчества, привнести новые идеи, литературные формы, художественные средства.

Ключевые слова: литература хауса, литература Северной Нигерии, *marubuci*, *labarun soyaуаа*, Шу'аибу Макарфи, Исмаил Бала Гарба, Хафсату Ахмад Абдулвахид, Билкису Фунтува, Бинта Салма Мохаммед, Рахма А. Маджид, Башир Абубакар Умар.

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