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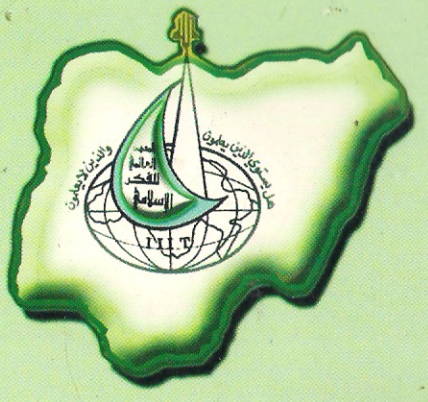

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CONTENTS

AJAMIZATION OF KNOWLEDGE:

CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS OF AN EDUCATIONAL STRATEGY[1]

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Introduction

Poverty is said to exist when people lack the means to satisfy their basic needs. In this context, the identification of poor people first requires a determination of what constitutes basic needs. These may be defined as narrowly as "those things necessary for survival" or as broadly as "those things reflecting the prevailing standard of living in the community." The first criterion would cover only those people near the borderline of starvation or death from exposure; the second would extend to people whose nutrition, housing, and clothing, though adequate to preserve life, do not measure up to those of the population as a whole. The problem of definition is further compounded by the non-economic connotations that the word poverty has acquired. Poverty has been associated, for example, with poor health, low levels of education or skills, an inability or an unwillingness to work, high rates of disruptive or disorderly behavior, and improvidence. While these attributes have often been found to exist with poverty, their inclusion in a definition of poverty would tend to obscure the relation between them and the inability to provide for one's basic needs. Whatever definition one uses, authorities and laypersons alike commonly assume that the effects of poverty are harmful to both individuals and society.

More debilitating is case poverty, which refers to the inability of an individual or family to secure basic needs even in social surroundings of general prosperity. This inability is generally related to the lack of some basic attribute that would permit the individual to maintain

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[1] The ajamization of Knowledge refers to the use of *ajami*, a modified form of Arabic letters for instructional purposes, written communication and mass education. It is not a substitute to the Islamization of Knowledge or its opposite – Editor.

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himself. Such categories of persons include the helpless aged, the blind, the physically handicapped, the chronically ill, and the mentally ill. Physical and mental handicaps are usually regarded sympathetically, as being beyond the control of the people who suffer from them. Efforts to ameliorate poverty due to physical causes focus on education, sheltered employment, and, if needed, economic maintenance.

It is clear therefore that if one wishes to reduce the level of poverty in the society, then education is one of the most effective means of doing so. Not because education provides income generation activities and jobs, but because it provides the individual with a sense of personal dignity – enough for him to seek for the means of personal poverty alleviation.

This paper argues that the victims of poverty in our society, especially Muslim Hausa northern Nigeria, are the dispossessed out-of-school youth generally and erroneously referred to as *almajirai*. Their education is almost always seen by the mainstream educational establishment as a religious concern and therefore outside the province of secular provisions. The lack of a regulatory body (and the sheer daunting impossibility of regulation) means that the mainstream educational needs of this cluster are not part of any government interventionist agenda of poverty alleviation and social service. This is reflected by the fact that so far, in about 39 years of political independence, no government policy has attempted to provide a strategy for the education of this large pool of untapped human resources. The fact that the *almajirai* graduate from being young students in their early teens to self-employed young adults in their late teens (have you ever wondered what happened to the hundreds of young *almajirai* – they seemed to simply disappear, only to be replenished by new ones of the same age!) means that they do have the capacity to succeed in life, if their basic educational needs are taken care of early enough. This paper is an attempt to provide a blueprint around which such needs can be addressed.

Literacy, Writing and Schooling

The invention of devices for representing language is inextricably related to issues of literacy; that is, to issues of who can use the script and what it can be used for. *Competence with written language, both in reading and writing, is known as literacy.* When a large number of individuals in a society are competent in using written language to serve these functions, the whole society may be referred to as a literate society.

Although the uses of writing reflect a host of religious, political, and social factors and hence are not determined simply by orthography, two dimensions of the script are important in understanding the growth of literacy: *learnability* and *expressive power.*

Learnability refers to the ease with which the script can be acquired, and expressive power refers to the resources of the script for unambiguously expressing the full range of meanings available in the oral language. These two dimensions are inversely related to each other. The ease of the acquisition of a script is an important factor in determining whether a script remains the possession of an elite or whether it can be democratized, that is, turned into a possession of ordinary people. Democratization of a script appears to have more to do with the availability of reading materials and of instruction in reading, and the perceived relevance of literacy skills to the readers. Even in a literate society, most readers learn to read only a narrow range of written materials; specialized materials, such as those pertaining to science or government, remain the domain of elites who have acquired additional education.

Historically, the rise of cities coincided with the development of a script suitable for serving bureaucratic purposes. Later, the scientific and philosophical tradition that originated in classical Greece and that prevails in the West to this day developed along with the alphabet. Some writers have argued that the alphabet was a decisive factor in the cultural development of the West, while others have claimed that the rise of literacy and the decline of "orality" in the later Middle Ages were fundamental to the cultural flowering known as the Renaissance.

Whereas oral language is learned quite independently of its being taught or not, literacy is largely dependent upon teaching. While some local or indigenous scripts are taught relatively informally by parents or someone who knows the script well, widespread or universal literacy is dependent upon schooling. Indeed, in many societies, schooling and literacy have been almost synonymous. Schools in such diverse places as Sumer and China developed concurrently with the development of a full writing system, and were concerned primarily with teaching adults first and children later to read and write. And it is inconceivable that modern, technological societies could survive without schools where people develop high levels of literacy.

Although schooling is critical to the development of literacy, it is not, by itself, sufficient. Historians have shown that the level of literacy produced by the schools of any society is directly tied to the functions and levels of literacy in the society as a whole. Consequently, *it is unrealistic to expect that a modern, literate society could be created simply through establishing schools and teaching children to read.* Schools tend to *reflect the society rather than to change it dramatically.* Schooling in Western societies is successful in achieving relatively high levels of literacy in part because of the literacy practices in the larger society.

When compulsory schooling was introduced in Britain, Europe, and America in the 19th century, it was nurtured by an environment of "lay" literacy in which as much as 75 percent of the population could use written materials for such informal purposes as keeping diaries, reading and writing notes and letters, and personal record keeping. Such a climate of widespread practical literacy is important to the effectiveness of schooling.

It is common to think of literacy as the simple ability to read and write. In part such thinking is a consequence of the naive assumption that alphabetic literacy is a matter simply of decoding graphs into sounds and vice versa. In fact, literacy involves competence in reading, writing, and interpreting texts of various sorts. It involves both skill in decoding and higher levels of comprehension and interpretation. These higher levels depend upon knowledge both of specialized uses of language and of specialized bodies of knowledge.

The intimate relations between language, literacy, and specialized bodies of knowledge have contributed to the identification of literacy with schooling.

As different scripts serve different functions and make different demands upon readers, it is a complex matter to define literacy in universal terms and so to judge the literacy levels of a society at different periods or to compare one society with another. Scripts that, because of incompleteness or inexplicitness, rely heavily upon the prior knowledge of reader and writer remain the domain of a specialized elite. Scripts that are relatively explicit and complete permit a reader who is unfamiliar with a text to read it in a reliable way and hence can be used for a much broader range of functions.

Rising levels of literacy in Europe were closely related to great social transformations. Partly because of the close ties between schooling and literacy, literacy levels are often defined exclusively in terms of the number of years that a person has attended school. As an alternative to simply identifying levels of literacy with years of schooling, some scholars have distinguished levels of literacy in another way.

Environmental or lay literacy is the term used to designate that form of unspecialized competence involved in generally dealing with a literate environment. Such literacy need never be taught. It is a type of literacy that is acquired through participating in a literate environment in which written signs, labels, trademarks, headlines, sports scores, and the like are ubiquitous. Such a general, if low, level of literacy, which stands somewhat apart from the particular skills of reading and writing, first arose in Europe in the later Middle Ages.

Literacy in Kasar Hausa, 1380-1500

The arrival of Muslim clerics from Mali to Kano in about 1380 paved way for the intellectual development of Kano, and served to attract yet more scholars and merchants to the territory. Formalized Islamic education therefore established itself right from the reign of Ali Yaji dan Tsamiya (1349-1358). Indeed, one could argue that the complex structure of the Islamic education system established by Zaghaite in

14th century Kano *approximated any possible definition of a university.* Further, it should be pointed out that Islam had been in the neighborhood of Kasar Hausa, in the Kanem-Bornu Empire, since the rule of Mai Humai Jilme (1085-1097) under the Sayfawa Dynasty.

This is because just like in Western Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia, the tradition of higher education in medieval Kano had followed the pattern of consistent linkages between theology and the ruling class. Education became a function of higher spiritual interpretation, and the ruling class became its conduit through whose patronage and peerage the lecturers of the antecedent universities were granted royal charters to teach, certify students and grant permission for faculties to be set up in various sections in the community.

This was particularly applicable in the case of Kano territory in the medieval ages, since Zaghaite employed education and political power to promote the Shari'ah. He maintained the group's knowledge of and commitment to the Shari'ah by teaching it to them from the text of the *Mudawwana,* one of the early compendia of the doctrines of the Maliki 'school' of law[3].

Period of Consolidation

The intellectual legacy of Zaghaite, like that of all intellectuals, survived his death, and was sustained by Dan Gurdamus Ibrahim, a companion of Zaghaite and a one time Chief Imam for *Sarki* Yaji. It was under Gurdamus Ibrahim that *Sarkin* Kano Umaru (1410-21) studied.

While in Kano, Ibrahim's choice of Madabo as a home became very significant. And according to Khan's interpretation[4], the specific aim was to make a center of learning par excellence to which would be

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[3] Chamberlain, J.W. *The Development of Islamic Education in Kano City, Nigeria, with emphasis on Legal Education in the 19th and 20th Centuries.* Unpublished Ph.D. thesis, Columbia University, 1975 p. 52.

[4]Mohammed, A., and Khan, M. B., From Cradle to Grave: The Contribution of Ulama to Education in Nigeria. *Kano Studies* Vol 2 No 2, 1981 pp. 110-145.

drawn and attracted scholars and students from all over the world. The Madabo mosque, the central focus for all the intellectual activity in Kano in the period, thus became a university, which drew people from all over the Sudan.[5]

Sustaining the intellectual tradition established by the Madabo School was a stream of visiting scholars who came to Kano in the 15th century. Visiting Fulani scholars, coming to the Madabo School intensified the study of *tawhid* and Arabic language, thus enriching the existing higher educational base of *Fiqh, Hadith* and *Mukhtasar* that had been well established by the Wangarawa at the Madabo school.

Thus the constant eddy of visiting scholars further fortified the Islamic curriculum of the Madabo school in Kano in the mid 14th century. Notable among the eddy of scholars who sojourned in medieval Kano and left intellectual legacies included Ahmad b. Umar b. Aqit, who on his way to Timbuktu from the pilgrimage to Makkah taught in Kano for some time in late 1480s. Another noted visiting scholar to Kano was the Moroccan Abdul Rahman Suqan b. Ali b. Ahmed al-Qasri who was once a mufti of Fas. And in the first half of the 16th century, the Tunisian scholar, Sheikh al-Tunis came to Kano and taught. Similarly, Bornu and Aghirmi scholars were also numerous in Kano.[6]

The Wangarawa influence was reinforced by political relationship between the *Sarkin* Kano Abdullahi Barja (1438-52) and the emperor of Borno to whom the former submitted religiously offering gifts to the latter. This diplomatic approach opened not only trade

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[5] More perspectives of the scholastic tradition in the Western Sudan and Hausaland are presented in Thomas Hodgin, "The Islamic Literary Tradition in Ghana", in I. M. Lewis (ed), *Islam in Tropical Africa*. Studies Presented and Discussed at the 5th International African Seminar, ABU, January 1964; C.C. Stewart, "Southern Saharan Scholarship and the *Bilad Al-Sudan*, *Journal of African History*, XVII, I (1976), pp. 73-93; Musa Abdul, "Literacy in ' An Illiterate' Society' *Research Bulletin* Vol 11, 1975-76, Center of Arabic Documentation, Institute of African Studies, University of Ibadan; Ivor Wilks, " The Transmission of Islamic Learning in the Western Sudan", in Jack Goody (ed), *Literacy in Traditional Societies*, Cambridge University Press, 1968.

[6] Chamberlain, J.W. *The Development of Islamic Education*... p. 60.

relationships between Kano and Borno kingdom but also opened the gate for the Borno clerics to come to Kanò in order to preach Islam and teach the Holy Qur'an.

The subsequent arrival of the Fulani *Ulama* from the Mali Empire further strengthened the Islamic hold on the people of the kingdom of Kano. The Fulani, according to the *Chronicle*[7], came with special knowledge of divinity (*Al Tauhid*) and Arabic language (*Al-Lugga*). This was in addition to what was already obtained from the Wangarawa *Ulama* concerning the knowledge of jurisprudence (*Al-Fiqh*) and the tradition of the Prophet (*Al-Hadith*), with the knowledge of the Holy Qur'an brought by the Borno *Ulama*. In a way it could be said that Kano in those days was the confluence of the two special branches of knowledge from the University of Sankore in Timbuktu, Mali empire and Al-Azhar University of Cairo through Borno. It was on the basis of this that one justifies calling the Madabo school, *the Madabo University* – for it met the criteria for the establishment and functions of any university then existing anywhere in the medieval world.

From Tripoli to Kano: Scholastic Ascendancy in Kano

Thus the Wangarawa scholastic dynasty left a legacy in the establishment of the first higher education centers in Kano all networked to the Madabo schooling system. It was to this school, which had established itself authoritatively in the fashion of its antecedent University of Sankore, that scholars from all over Sudan flocked to study *fiqh, Hadith,* and the *Mukhtasar.*

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[7]*Tarikh Arbab Hadha al-balad al-Musamma Kano*, Anon, the oft quoted *Kano Chronicles* as translated by H. R. Palmer and published in the *Journal of Royal Anthropological Institute*, Vol 38 (1908) pp. 59-98 and republished in his *Sudanese Memoirs* (3 volumes: London, 1928), 3: 92-132. Also translated as *Hausawa Da Makwabtansu* Vols I and II by Rupert A. East (Zaria, 1932 and 1933), and reprinted in 1970 (Zaria, NNPC). Henceforth referred to as the *Chronicle*.. It was adapted from the history of Kano which *sarki* Muhammad Bello (1883-1893) ordered to be collated from earlier records whose initial writing might have started as early as 1650. It was originally written in Arabic.

This tradition was strengthened by the arrival in Kano of Muhammad b. Abd al Karim al-Maghili, during the reign of *Sarki* Rumfa (1463-1499). Rumfa was perceived as the most radical and intellectual reformer among the medieval *Sarakunan* Kano, carrying, as he did, far reaching reforms in all aspects of his administration. Indeed the intellectual tradition of the present House of Rumfa in Kano can be traced directly to Rumfa's *Sarauta.*

Rumfa according to Kano tradition was also the most pious, upright, dynamic and benevolent ruler the Kano kingdom has ever had. He was a dynamic visionary and foresighted king, and his political and administrative reforms as well as the establishment of Kurmi Market are still considered by *Kanawa* as second to none in the entire political and economic growth of the kingdom since that time.

Perhaps the most eloquent testimony of al-Maghili's intellectual influence on Rumfa was the former's treatises, which contained the first Kano Emirate constitution. The treatises, being *wasiyyat* concerning the obligation of the prince (though more accurately, in this case, the Emir) to his subjects, followed the Machiavellian framework of a "wise one" providing over-the-shoulder religious guidance to a student on what was probably the first welfarist state policy in the Sudan. Incidentally, it was actually Rumfa who commissioned al-Maghili to write the books for him – revealing a desire on the part of *Sarautar* Kano to identify with classical Islam, much in the same way one of Rumfa's great-grandparents did with the Wangarawa clerics. There was no doubt that these constitutions written by al-Maghili for Rumfa provided the first recorded framework for the intellectual transformation of Kano, which subsequent *Sarakunan* Kano built upon.

Thus we can say that al-Maghili set out to remove innovations in the interpretation of Islam in Kano – thereby becoming the first *Izala* advocate in the kingdom – and strengthened already existing scholastic institutions and established new ones. This was because his first act, the appointments of an Imam for the Friday prayer, and the qadi, were preceded by similar acts of the Madabo Wangarawa faculty decades earlier.

Incidentally, al-Maghili and his people settled in an area of the city now called Sharifai. When it was time for him to move on, he left his children with the remaining clerics to be brought along. One of the sons, Isa, became Sidi Fari and established a dynasty. Eventually *Sidi Fari* became a minor title reserved for *Sharifai* (descendants of Sharif, i.e. al-Maghili). The tradition has been that the *Sidi Fari* sits with the *Sarkin* Kano. He is still a feature in the court of the current ruling dynasty.

In order to boost the morale of the *Ulama* to take up the task of the educational revolution serious Rumfa paid a huge amount to every one of them on a weekly basis (*kudin laraba*), so called because the money was paid on each Wednesday (*Laraba*) of the week. Since the idea of salaries and wages was not known in Kano then, as rewards for public services offered by individuals, the remuneration given to the *Ulama* by Rumfa was called (*sadaka*) or alms from the king.

From Arabic to Hausa to Ajami

Rumfa's enthusiasm in revolutionizing the Islamic nature of Kano was matched only by that of his *Ulama* who undertook the task vigorously. *In order to make learning easier and quicker, Arabic alphabets were Hausanized* and the teaching method was divided into what seemed to be introductory and specialization stages. In the introductory stages all the students were taught the reading and the writing of the Holy Qur'an in general terms, from the very beginning to the end of sixty *hizifs* of its contents. This stage took about five years to complete depending on the learning aptitude of the individual students.

In the second stage, the students were divided in two. The first group was made up of those who revealed signs of ability and interest in the further study of the Holy Qur'an. These were sent to Borno in the east (or *gabas*) where they would study under various professors of Qur'anic education (called *gwani*). *Gwani* is an academic title somewhat equivalent to a doctorate degree given to an expert in the knowledge of the Holy Qur'an who graduated directly either from Al-Azhar University in Egypt or from the hands of its old graduates.

After the completion and graduation from Borno, the Qur'anic *Ulama* were called Bornawiyans or *Barnawa* in order to signify their specialization area. They established Qur'anic schools in various places for both children and adults.

Members of the second group, made up of those who would like to specialize in Islamic religious knowledge, apart from their Qur'anic education, were attached to what were called *Zaure* schools, which were established in various wards in the city. In turn the *Zaure* schools were opened by *Ulama* who, in some cases, studied directly from the University of Sankore in Timbuktu or from the hands of some *Ulama* who studied and graduated there. Like their counterparts from the Borno schooling system, the *Zaure* school students study and specialize in Arabic language and literature, Islamic Religious Knowledge, History, Theology, Islamic Jurisprudence and other branches of Islamic education. After completing their studies and graduation, such *Ulama* were given the name Tumbuktian or *Tumbuktawa* also to signify their area of specialization.

It was during this period and for the purposes of propagation of Islam that the Hausa language began to adopt some Arabic words. Hausa grammar relied on Arabic grammar until it became a written language in Arabic characters called *Ajami*. According to Hiskett,

> ...popular tradition has it that Hausa poetry was first composed and written down, in the *ajami* script, by Isa, the son of Usumanu [an Fodiyo, and we have an early composition by Isa, in which he states that he has rendered the Shehu's Fula verses into Hausa (*Wakar ina Gode Allah Da Yarda Tasa*). So far nothing has been discovered which leads us to question this tradition, and in the present state of knowledge we must conclude that Hausa first started to be used for formal composition at the end of the eighteenth

> or the beginning of the nineteenth century, and that this was almost entirely in verse form....[8]

Thus the mechanism of using *ajami* to spread the Islamic message so that it reaches a wider section of the Hausa society by the early jihadists clearly acknowledged the wide-spread literacy among the massive Muslim population of Kasar Hausa. It is through this that *ajami* came to be adopted as a more or less religious literary mode of expression. This strong link between *ajami* and religious literature is to confer on the genre a sacred value that makes it difficult to create other literary works in the genre, except, perhaps for religious poetry.

Ajami as a Literary Concept Worldwide

The Arabic alphabet probably originated at some time in the 4th century AD from Nabataean, a dialect of Aramaic current in northern Arabia, but the earliest extant Arabic writing is traced to AD 512. The spread of Islam from the 7th and 8th centuries AD brought the language and the script to the vast expanse of territory extending from India to the Atlantic Ocean. The Arabic alphabet was adapted, with some necessary modifications, to such diverse languages as the Slavic tongues, Spanish, Persian, Urdu, Turkish, Hebrew, Berber, Swahili, Malay, Sudanese, and others. Thus the Arabic alphabet had been adapted to the Islamic peoples' vernaculars just as the Latin alphabet had been in the Christian West. It is this vernacular usage of Arabic that gave the resultant language or literary expression the sobriquet of *Ajami*. I will look at a few of the cultures that have adopted *ajami* as a literary medium expression.

Ajami, literarily pidgin Arabic, seems to have originated in Spain. The dialect of Spanish used in Arab-occupied Spain prior to the 12th century and at the end of the 15th century was called *Mozarabic*, from

[8] M. Hiskett, "The Historical Background to the Naturalization of Arabic Loan-Words in Hausa", *African Language Studies*, VI, 1965, pp. 18-26.

the Arabic word for 'Arabized person,'. It is also called *ajami* ('barbarian language' according to Arabs). It was spoken in those parts of Spain under Arab occupation from the early 8th century until about 1300. An archaic form of Spanish with many borrowings from Arabic, it is known primarily from Mozarabic refrains (called *kharjahs*) added to Arabic and Hebrew poems.

It was originally the spoken language of the urban bourgeoisie, who remained Christian while the peasantry generally converted to Islam, but it appears that many Arabs also came to use it as a spoken language. The language died out with the diminishing of Arab influence in Spain at the end of the 15th century, though Mozarabic has left its mark on the dialects of southern Spain and Portugal. It was from there that it leapt to the North African countries of Tunisia, Morocco before finally winding its way to Islamized Sudanic nations. [9]

Swahili in East Africa, has also been greatly influenced by Arabic; there is an enormous number of Arabic loanwords in the language, including the word *Swahili*, from Arabic *sawahili* (a plural adjectival form of an Arabic word meaning "of the coast"). The language dates from the contacts of Arabian traders with the inhabitants of the east coast of Africa many centuries ago. Under Arab influence, Swahili originated as a lingua franca used by several closely related Bantu-speaking tribal groups. In the early 19th century, the spread of Swahili inland received a great impetus from its being the language of the Arab ivory and slave caravans, which penetrated as far north as Uganda and as far west as Zaire. Swahili was later adopted by European colonialists, especially the Germans, who used it extensively as the language of administration in Tanganyika, thus laying the foundation for its adoption as the national language of independent Tanzania. In Kenya and Uganda, other local languages also received official encouragement during the colonial period, but the tendency in these countries is now to emphasize the use of Swahili. The oldest preserved Swahili literature, which dates from the early 18th century, is written in the Arabic script. However, to break

[9] For more information on this, see W.D. Elcock, *The Romance Languages*, new and rev. ed. revised by John N. Green, 1975.

the intellectual tradition of the Muslim population in East Africa, the British colonial administration discouraged the use of Arabic script in the writing of Swahili. The language is now written in the Roman alphabet.

Similarly, the Maltese language, spoken on the island of Malta, developed from a dialect of Arabic and is closely related to the western Arabic dialects of Algeria and Tunisia. Strongly influenced by the Italian dialect spoken in Sicily, Maltese is the only form of Arabic to be written in the Latin alphabet.

Sindhi is a northwestern Indo-Aryan language spoken in the province of Sindh, Pakistan. Sindhi is closely related to the Lahnda language spoken to the north. It has a large number of Persian and Arabic loanwords (because of centuries of Muslim influence) and is written in a variety of the Persian form of the Arabic alphabet. Little Sindhi literature was printed before 1920.

The official language of Iran, Persian (or *Farsi*) is also *ajami*. It is most closely related to Middle and Old Persian, former languages of the region of *Fars* ("Persia") in southwestern Iran. Modern Persian is thus called *Farsi* by native speakers. Written in Arabic characters, modern Persian also has many Arabic loanwords and an extensive literature. Thus shaped out of the vernacular of northeastern Iranian courts and households and making skillful use of additional Arabic vocabulary, the Persian language emerged as a literary medium.[10]

But perhaps the most spectacular and extensive use of *ajami* is in the evolution of Urdu. The Urdu language, written in a modified form of the Persian Arabic alphabet, is the primary language of the Muslims of both Pakistan and northern India. With a few major exceptions, the literature is the work of Muslim writers who take their themes from the life of the Indian subcontinent. Poetry written in Urdu flourished from the 16th century, but no real prose literature developed until the 19th century, despite the fact that histories and religious prose treatises are known from the 14th century. More colloquial forms of writing gradually displaced the classically ornate literary Urdu in the

[10] See, for instance, Jan Rypka, *History of Iranian Literature*, 1968.

19th century; in the 20th century, Urdu literature was stimulated by nationalist, pan-Islamic, and socialist feeling. The language also displays wholesale acceptance of Perso-Arabic literary traditions, including genres, meters, and rhetoric; as well an increasing acceptance of Perso-Arabic grammatical devices and vocabulary.

Urdu literature began to develop in the 16th century. In the later part of the 17th century, Aurangabad became the centre of Urdu literary activities. There was much movement of the literati and the elite between Delhi and Aurangabad, and it needed only the genius of Wali Aurangabadí, in the early 18th century, to bridge the linguistic gap between Delhi and the Deccan and to persuade the poets of Delhi to take writing in Urdu seriously. In the 18th century, with the migration of poets from Delhi, Lucknow became another important centre of Urdu poetry, though Delhi never lost its prominence. The first three centuries are dominated by poetry, as displayed by Nazir Akbarabadi, who wrote in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. He was a poet of consummate skill who chose to display it in short poems (in various forms) written in the language of popular speech as well as of literature.

The modern period in Urdu literature coincides with the mid-19th-century emergence of a middle class that saw in Western thought and science a means to needed social reform. Nazir Ahmad wrote novels about the conflicts of the Muslim middle class. Shibli, a poet and critic, wrote on the lives of great Muslims. The more famous novelists of the later period are Ratan-Nath Sharshar, 'Abd-ul-Halim Sharar, and Mirza Ruswa. The fathers of modern Urdu poetry were Hali and Muhammad Husayn Azad. However, the greatest modern poet is Iqbal. Writing in the early 20th century, he was influenced by the general sense of national purpose and the freedom movement. His poetic imagery, the power of his expression, and his philosophical outlook won the admiration of his fellow Muslims. In prose the most important writer of short stories was Prem Chand. The 1930s saw the influence of progressivism, which attempted to make literature an arm of social revolution. Among the representative writers of this period are Sajjad Zahir, Upendranath Ashk, and Ismat Chughtai, the last a woman who is considered among the best. Sir Sayyid Ahmad Khan will be best remembered for his *Essays on the Life of Mohammed*

(1870) and commentaries on the Bible and on the Qur'an – all written in Urdu. In these works he sought to harmonize the Islamic faith with the scientific and politically progressive ideas of his time.[11]

Colonial Literary Policy and Ajami in Kasar Hausa

Thus *ajami* as a literary form has been used as a vehicle for successfully transforming the intellectual mind-set of many societies where Islam rules supreme. So it has been in Kasar Hausa for centuries from as early as the 11th century with the arrival of Islam to the Borno kingdom.

However, in 1903 the British colonial forces subjugated the emirates of Kasar Hausa. To discourage any further development of an indigenous intellectual heritage – with over nine hundred years head-start – in September 1903, Wallace, the Acting High Commissioner, sent a circular letter to all residents telling them not to receive or reply to letters in Arabic sent to them by the emirs. It was after this policy came into full force that *ajami* started emerging as a literary language. Ironically, the early Kasar Hausa professors and literati found writing in *ajami* more difficult *ajami gagara mai shi*, was the battle-cry, but most likely insinuated by the colonial administration in an effort to stifle its further development) than in Arabic. And yet no forum was created by the colonial administration for the development of the *ajami* literary language; nor was such demanded by the pioneer revolutionaries who fought for Nigerian independence. There *were* half-hearted tokenisms, which were clearly not meant to go far (e.g. *Yar Gaskiya Ta Fi Kwabo* in *ajami* and published in the 1940s).

Another nail in the coffin of literary *ajami* was driven with full force in 1912 when the Director of Education, Hans Vischer, single-handedly came up with *Rules for Hausa Spelling* and created the framework for communicating with the natives. The rules, complete with little dots under b, d, and k to reflect the peculiar native "sounds" started the long, slow and wily process of the subversion of the intellectual

[11]For a deeper study of the evolution of *Urdu* as a literary form, see Muhammad Sadiq, *A History of Urdu Literature*, 1964.

heritage of the Kasar Hausa, which led to the *written Hausa* as the preferred literary medium embraced by both the colonialists and native collaborators. The deliberate attempt to stifle any further indigenous intellectual development of Kasar Hausa becomes more glaring when it is realized that the arch-missionary, Reverend Walter Miller, advised Lugard to introduce Hausa *boko* script in any schools established. Thus the suspicion of links between Christianity and *boko* in Kasar Hausa was borne out by this powerful connection between Lugard and Miller.

Further refinements of the *boko* script led to a trip to Germany in 1938 by the Svengali of Hausa literature, Dr. Rupert East, to consult Professor D. Westermann who in turn created the now standard Hausa hooked characters and their upper cases.

Since the evolution of the *ajami* as a literary language in the 17th century in Kasar Hausa, efforts had been made by its literati to create specific rules for its application. Thus just as Vischer, East and Westermann standardized the *Hausa boko* script by introducing tonal elements absent in standard English alphabets, so too *ajami* scholars managed to adapt tonal variations between Arabic and *ajami*. In the end, it was possible to produce a full set of alphabets that more or less enabled the writer to convey significant meaning – as evidenced by the massive amount of religious *ajami* works available in Kasar Hausa before the colonial interregnum. Even later, the 1951 census showed that the Northern Region figures of people literate in *ajami* were more than double those for *boko*. The first published appearance of *Imfiraji* in *ajami* signaled the spectacular success of the genre. Thus Alhaji (Dr.) Aliyu Namangi did for Hausa *ajami* what Nazir Akbarabadi did for *Urdu* literature in 19th century Pakistan.

However, sometimes in 1933 Vischer, eager to enrich colonial understanding of Hausa people and their culture, came up with the idea that the best way to encourage people to go to schools and ensure those in the schools stayed was to write a series of primers in Hausa language aimed at primary schools. The vehicle of this idea was a literary competition which yielded the first batch of now Hausa *boko* literature classics (*Ruwan Bagaja, Shehu Umar, Gandoki*, etc). It must be kept in mind that the scholastic tradition of the Hausa has

always been the preserve of the *mallam* class; consequently even in popular literature the fountainheads, being carved out of that class, reflected their antecedent pedagogic traditions.

The competition, held in *boko* rather than *ajami* for which there were more people capable of reading it, successfully put *ajami* in the backyards of any intellectual discourse. It has since become restricted to a few classes of *mallams* who struggle to keep it alive.

Writing the Rites to Right the Wrongs

In this paper I propose a simple argument. The vast majority of *makarantun allo* youth aged 4-18 or so can *read*. They can read the Qur'an. Maybe they cannot *speak* Arabic or translate the Qur'an, but they can read the Holy Book. Thus they have a complete grasp of an alphabet and sentence formation. The number of these children available in northern societies is far much more than the number of children attending conventional primary schools. But because the state machinery does not recognize the existence or the usefulness of *makarantun allo*, or their pupils, there are no educational provisions for these children. The nearest the Government has come to acknowledging their existence is in the failed *Islamiyya Primary Education* project which was started sometimes in 1994 by the defunct National Primary Education Commission (NPEC).

Thus the fundamental weakness of any Nigerian Policy on Education over the years is the non-recognition of the Islamiyya and Qur'anic Education systems especially as they relate to the Muslim Communities in this country. This non-recognition might be partly responsible for the educational imbalance across the country, and unless the Government recognizes this short-coming and accepts it as an obstacle to bridging the educational gap in the country, the educational imbalance will continue to become wider and wider for a long time to come.

It should be stressed that the current system of education in which the Islamiyya and Qur'anic education have not been fully recognized has not been very effective particularly in the Northern part of the country because the ways of life of the people have not been fully

incorporated into the school system. The system seems to have relegated to the background the people's traditional values and norms and imposed on them the so-called "Western Education".

As noted earlier, since October 1994 efforts were made to produce an acceptable and a balanced *Islamiyya Primary Education Syllabus* with the following objectives:

1. to ensure the integration of Islamic Education with the Western system;
2. to enable the products of Islamiyya Education to be self reliant;
3. to enable the products compete favourably with conventional primary schools products for places in junior secondary schools;
4. to boost the enrolment of pupils into the Primary Education System;
5. to provide education along the lines that will be acceptable to some Muslim parents.

This is with the view that if a concerted effort is made, the two school systems can be integrated to serve the general societal needs for educating the youth. If this is achieved, it will further improve pupil enrolment and retention in primary schools. According to NPEC figures, there were about 10,465 *Islamiyya Primary Schools* in 1994 with a total enrolment of about 1,780,948. One can easily estimate about four times that number of pupils attending *makarantun allo*. Again, according to NPEC figures, as many as *six million* children in Muslim northern Nigeria were not attending conventional primary schools, but were mostly attending either *Islamiyya Primary Schools* or *makarantun allo*.

Now imagine what life would have been if we have *Magana Jari Ce* written in *ajami*, so that our *makarantar allo* pupil could have access to it. Then imagine further the social revolution that would have happened if other materials – fiction, geography, environmental studies, etc – were also all written in *ajami*. If there are fewer *almajirai* among the *boko schoolboys* (due to their education) then it follows that *there would be much fewer almajirai* among the *makarantun allo*

schoolboys! Thus would have begun a mass literacy process on a grand scale.

Stretch this imagination further. Let us see if government can perform its duties of service to the people by labelling its major establishments in *ajami*. Buildings such as hospitals, Local Government Secretariat, NEPA, Water Boards, Housing Estates, major roads, etc could all become more than mere buildings to the teeming population of *ajami literati* by having their names in *ajami* as well as in the *boko* script. Drive (or walk!) along Niger Street in Kano, one of the earliest colonial layouts, and the *Gidan Goldie* building stares at you with its name boldly and proudly embossed *in ajami*. As a thriving commercial centre in the early 1920s involved in the peanut trade, clearly the owners of the building wanted to attract more peanut farmers and agents to their building by advertising what it was. The Dantata dynasty has also done this with inscriptions labelling some of their buildings in *ajami*.

The most important function of education is that of giving the student a sense of dignity and self-respect. The *makarantun allo* schoolboys have been given the erroneous assumption that attending such schools in an *almajiri* status (for many of them) means being a scholar-beggar. If they had an enriched *non-formal* curriculum, which supplements their Islamic learning, then they will value their scholarship the more, just as it is any primary school pupil will find begging disdainful. *Ajami* therefore provides a possible escape route from illiteracy, and consequently, poverty.

Roses and Thorns

The picture is not all rosy. Of course there are bound to be problems. But they continued to be problems because no one wanted to solve them. The first deals with the standardization of *ajami*. Almost every *ajami* scholar will harp on the fact that there is no standard form of writing in the genre. So how come there is a massive jihadist literature in *ajami*? A counter argument is that the jihadist literature, being religiously inspired, would find it easy to express thoughts using vocabulary common to Arabic and *ajami*.

The second problem deals with the fact that *ajami* uses alphabets associated with the Arabic language, and consequently the Qur'an. Any writing in the language is therefore seen as religious, and not meant for leisure – which contributed to ignoring any specific rules for writing in *ajami*. And yet now it is becoming clear that not all things written in Arabic are Islamic. This is despite the ignorant and empty sober-rattling rhetoric of the critics of Islam, for instance on the alleged Islamization of Nigeria through printing "Arabic characters on the Nigerian naira currency notes" – critics from an empty bankrupt intellectual void who lack the acumen to appreciate the true scholastic tradition and the function of education. The simple *fact* that *ajami* readers constitute the *largest* majority of the literary cluster in this country is justification enough for catering to their needs in our economy.

Further *ajamization* is seen, for instance, on bottles of spring water (e.g. the Swan brand), which often carry an *ajamized* information box stating its contents. Even if it is argued that the typical *ajami literati* is not prone to quaffing bottled spring water, at least an effort is being made by some companies to revive a *betrayed* tradition.

Finally, the *ajami literati* community suffers from one or two peculiar superstitions concerning the use of certain alphabets in *ajami*, which were apparently used in Hausa shamanism. Thus they are avoided in everyday discourse – further restricting the vocabulary of any *ajami* text. If this superstition is still in force, then how come *Alfijir*, the only surviving *ajami* newspaper (established in 1982) from Kano, refuses to quit?

Despite all these problems, if we wish to lead our people into the new millennium, we must break the paralysis of guilt and indifference, and begin to start to write the rites to right the wrongs inflicted on our society by our intellectual fountainheads in active collaboration with their colonial and missionary evangelists. Mass literacy is the only light that will banish ignorance and subsequently poverty. Such literacy cannot be attained through fancy government projects, centres, agencies and other white elephants – which, in any event, are mainly focused on the adult learner. It must start from the informal medium, through individual patriotic contributions to the

literary emancipation of Kasar Hausa. I propose the *Ajamization of Knowledge* as one possible way of mass educating at least six million *makarantun allo* pupils. It is their only hope of participating in an economy, which sets out to deliberately marginalize and alienate them.

The Principles of the Ajamization of Knowledge

Some of the practical ways we can adopt to begin the *Ajamization of Knowledge* would involve institutions, resources and private initiatives. I propose the following steps as starting points:

- Immediate establishment of a *Center for Ajami Studies* or the *Department of Ajami Studies* in any patriotic university whose purpose will be to refine the study of *ajami* as a literary language. After all, we spend millions supporting the study of the French Language in Nigerian universities – when probably the number of French language speakers in Kasar Hausa would not exceed the total number of pupils in one *makarantar allo*. Further, *ajami* is inherently more functional to this society than French. If the National Universities Commission will not support the establishment of such a department or centre, then the patriotic philanthropists of Kasar Hausa should club together and do so. In the United States, many philanthropists and organizations sponsor the establishment of whole departments, and indeed universities, in the pursuit of knowledge. For instance, Trinity College, North Carolina became, under an endowment from the tobacco magnate James B. Duke, Duke University in 1924. Similarly, Harvard University was one of the most abundantly endowed academic institutions, with a capital outlay of more than $120 million dollars in 1929.

- A variation of the institutional approach could be the introduction of *Ajami Subject Methodology* in the Education curriculum of Departments of Education, and Colleges of Education, which will provide an experimental basis for the full development of *Ajami Study Skills* at an advanced stage.

- Publishing of books in all genres aimed at increasing and enhancing a mass reading habit among *makarantun allo* youth. This will have to rely on the private initiative of writers. The *fact* that young, bold and innovative Hausa language novelists (e.g. Yusuf Adamu, Ado Ahmad Gidan Dabino, Bala Anas Babinlata, and Balaraba Ramat Yakubu) have succeeded in awakening the society through the private publishing of new Hausa novels means that a network of printing, distribution and absorption of books written in *ajami* exists. For instance, In East Africa, *Swahili*-language translations now include works by African as well as Western writers. *Swahili* authors who have received local and international acclaim include the novelists Euphrase Kezilahabi and Mohammed S. Mohammed and the dramatists Ebrahim Hussein and Penina O. Mlama of Tanzania, as well as the Kenyan novelists Ali Jemaadar Amir, Katama Mkangi, and P.M. Kareithi. What will make this process easier in *ajami* is the fact that *ajami*, unlike say *Urdu* or *Swahili*, is not really a totally different language from conventional Hausa; its strength and character come from its *written* rather than spoken form.

- Translating classic Hausa literature books into *ajami*. Instances that come to mind here include *Magana Jari Ce, Karamin Sani Kukjumi, Da'u Fataken Dare, Ilya Dan Mai Karfi, Ikon Allah* etc. Noted contemporary *ajami* scholars such as M. S. Ibrahim, R. M. Zarruk, and B. Sa'id can be sponsored by NNPC to do this. After all, NNPC sponsored a competition in 1978 to boost creative reading habits among Hausa youth. Well they now have about six million more Hausa youth from the *makarantun allo* streams – which means a larger market! Both the 1933, 1978 and 1980 literary competitions ignored the creative reading habits of millions of our youth. This would be an opportunity for NNPC to attempt to redeem itself

- Publishing classic *ajami* literary materials in all aspects of history, sociology and political affairs in Kasar Hausa. These could eventually be housed in a special *Ajami* library, which will be under the Library Board and serve as a resource centre for the *mallams*, their pupils and numerous researchers. This will also

rely on private initiatives. After all, the huge amounts of money they splash at book launchings could better be utilized in this way.

- Creating *ajami* study centres in scholastic communities that provide support group and discussion clusters for the advancement of literary works in *ajami*. In Kano, for instance, *Madabo* would be an ideal starting point, as it was the site of the first university in Kasar Hausa. *Ajamawa* devotees could start this, and subsequently, with support from many people, it could evolve fully into an intellectual movement.

- Incorporating *ajami* in signboards, road posts and other buildings, both by the Government and individuals.

Let the *Ajamization of Knowledge* be the educational gift we bequeath to the millions of our *makarantun allo* neophytes in this new millennium.

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