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Hausa Prose Fiction: Towards an Analytical Framework

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SINCE 1997, THERE HAS BEEN A GROWING BODY OF Hausa-speaking imaginative literature in Northern Nigeria. Since the emergence of a new crop of Hausa language novelists from 1980, the trickle had turned into a flood. As of last count in June 2000, there were over 600 novels written in Hausa language. This, without doubt, must rank as one of the largest concentration of indigenous fictional writing in Nigeria.

This has led to the development of reading culture among Hausa youth, and also stimulated subsidiary and related areas of youth concern. The "prayer" genre, for example, is also one of the fastest developing literature genres in the North, a process which sees the writing, printing, distribution and sale of hundreds of books and pamphlets on all aspects of Islam. The same may be said of Hausa screenplay, including home video production.

However, these have met with criticism from government agencies and the religious establishment. Many private individuals have also expressed concern about the emergence of the contemporary Hausa fiction. Indeed the most persistent argument is that these books corrupt the readers. This is a view argued by, for example, Abubakar (1999) in *Litattafan Soyayya a Ma'aunin Hankali Da Na Shari'a (The Rational and Islamic Legal*

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Status of Soyayya Novels. Claiming to have read 23 contemporary Hausa novels, the author could, however, cite only one scene (an exchange of letters between two lovers) as evidence of encouragement to unlawful sex (in *Idan Da So Da Kauna*). Abubakar never even bothered to discuss the *context* of those letters.

The result is that the charge of corruption is not substantiated or even proven. It is certainly the case that there are other more powerful sources of corruption than the Hausa novel. For example, research has shown that factors such as irresponsible parenting, peer influence, lack of personal control, account for the growing negative traits of Hausa youth culture.

Analytical Framework

In developing an analytical framework for the criticism of Hausa fiction, it is important to ask: what constitutes “*tarbiyya*” (good upbringing) in Hausa society? This is important because Hausa society is complex and rapidly changing. Nevertheless, I have not found it compelling to use variables from Religion (Hadith and the Holy Qur’an) largely because Islam as a whole is a blueprint for *tarbiyya*. To this extent, then, *Tarbiyyar Bahausha* is ideologically grounded in Islam, which is the *Weltanschauung* of the Hausa Muslim.

However, by basing the developing analytical framework on collective behaviour traits (i.e. *Tarbiyya*), it becomes possible to discern more clearly than before now the mindset of the Hausa-Fulani and the sociological function of imaginative literature in identity-formation.

Thus in the Hausa tradition, *Tarbiyya* is coded as “moral education” and “good manners”. To further refine the analytical framework, we need to identify the elements of *tarbiyya*, and determine to what extent the charge of corruption against Hausa imaginative writing is justified.

In this regard, a good starting point for the analytical framework is provided by Anthony H.M. Kirk-Greene, in

the Third Annual Hans Wolff Memorial Lecture delivered on April 11, 1973 at the University of Indiana, in the lecture which he titled "Mutumin Kirki: The Concept of the Good Man in Hausa" (Kirk-Greene 1974). In Kirk-Greene's classification, there are at least ten attributes of a classical *Mutumin Kirki* in Hausa:

1. *Gaskiya* (truth)
2. *Amana* (strictly friendliness, but used to refer to trust)
3. *Karamci* (open-handed generosity)
4. *Hakuri* (patience)
5. *Hankali* (good sense)
6. *Kunya* (bashfulness)
7. *Ladabi* (courtesy)
8. *Mutumci* (self-esteem)
9. *Hikima* (wisdom)
10. *Adalci* (scrupulous behavior)

A second source of the analytical framework is Habib Alhassan, Usman Ibrahim Musa and Rabi'u Muhammad Zarruk's *Zaman Hausawa* (1982). Their text identifies twelve behavioral characteristics of *Tarbiyyar Hausawa*:

1. *Mua'amala* (sociability; friendliness)
2. *Ladabi da biyayya* (self-respect; loyalty)
3. *Kunya da kara* (modesty; loyalty)
4. *Zumunta* (solidarity)
5. *Rikon addini* (religiosity; piety)
6. *Gaskiya* (truthfulness; fairness)
7. *Dattako* (gentle; sensitive)
8. *Adalci* (scrupulous)
9. *Kawaici* (tactfulness)
10. *Rashin tsegumi* (reserved; serious)
11. *Kama sana'a* (industrious; gainfully employment)
12. *Juriya da jarumta* (fortitude; courage; bravery)

Alhassan *et al's* classification is, of course, more comprehensive than Kirk-Greene's. Yet the variations in the codes are noteworthy for there are many conceptual overlaps between them. *Rikon Addini*, as given by Alhassan *et al*, for example, encapsulates all the other 17 categories; yet this code is not mentioned by Kirk-Greene. A summary of the two codes is given in Table 1:

Table 1: Tarbiyyar Bahaushe Mutumin Kirki: Code 1

| <i>Kirk-Greene</i> | <i>Zarruk et al</i> |
|--------------------|-----------------------|
| 1. Gaskiya | 1. Mua'amala |
| 2. Amana | 2. Ladabi da biyayya |
| 3. Karamci | 3. Kunya da kara |
| 4. Hakuri | 4. Zumunta |
| 5. Hankali | 5. Rikon addini |
| 6. Kunya | 6. Gaskiya |
| 7. Ladabi | 7. Dattako |
| 8. Mutumci | 8. Kawaici |
| 9. Hikima | 9. Adalci |
| 10. Adalci | 10. Rashin tsegumi |
| | 11. Kama sana'a |
| | 12. Juriya da jarumta |

If we combine the two frameworks, we may come up with a unified scale of measuring *Tarbiyyar Bahaushe* from these two secondary sources, as in Table 2 below:

Table 2: *Tarbiyyar Bahaushé Mutumin Kirki*

| Tarbiyyar Bahaushé Codes | | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------|---------------|
| <i>Kirk-Greene</i> | <i>Alhassan et al</i> | <i>Common</i> |
| 1. Amana | 7. Mua'amala | 15. Gaskiya |
| 2. Karamci | 8. Zumunta | 16. Kunya |
| 3. Hakuri | 9. Rikon addini | 17. Adalci |
| 4. Hankali | 10. Dattako | 18. Ladabi |
| 5. Mutumci | 11. Kawaici | |
| 6. Hikima | 12. Rashin tsegumi | |
| | 13. Kama sana'a | |
| | 14. Juriya da jarumta | |

It is interesting that at least 18 categories of behavior emerged from this loose classification. In the two categories, only Gaskiya, Kunya, Adalci and Ladabi are common.

So far, this seems to be the first instrument aimed at measuring the themes and contents of contemporary Hausa novels, and is therefore very much a work-in-progress. As we use it repeatedly we may need to refine it to include other behaviors as may evolve in the Hausa social structure in the future.

However, there are unresolved questions about those codes: although they reflect the ideology of the "courteous" Hausa, they also reflect the historically specific period in Hausa social values. For example, Kirk-Greene's framework is dependent on a colonial image of Northern Nigeria of the 1930s and 1940s. Similarly, Alhassan et al's codes are derived from the Northern Nigeria of the 1950s and 1960s. With increasing social mobility and cross-cultural influences, it could be argued that there is an understated change of behaviour in Hausa youth since the 1980s. Indeed the mere fact that Hausa literature after the 1980s seemed to have a singular focus on inter-personal

relationships would indicate an important shift in the social consciousness of Hausa youth.

Now the task is the determination a measuring scale for the analysis of Hausa novels, and for determining the extent of deviance from, or adherence to, these codes within the traditionally-certified ethical and behavioural system. Only then are we in a better position to pass judgment about the new Hausa novel.

Methodology, Results, and General Trend

The methodology involves categorizing 453 novels according to their central theme. This, of course, does not involve a detailed structural or stylistic analysis of the novels. The results of the survey are summarized in Table 3, which lists the number of the *most common themes* for the novels studied.

Table 3: Themes of Contemporary Hausa Novels

| <i>Theme</i> | <i>Number</i> |
|----------------|----------------|
| Soyayya | 160 |
| Various | 79 |
| Zaman Duniya | 77 |
| Unclassified | 56 |
| Jarumtaka | 17 |
| Fadakarwa | 15 |
| Nishadi | 8 |
| Yaudara | 7 |
| Rikici | 6 |
| Kishi | 5 |
| kaddara | 4 |
| Bin Iyaye | 4 |
| Hakuri | 4 |
| Tsagoron Batsa | 4 ¹ |
| Siyasa | 3 |
| Matsalar Aure | 4 |

The overwhelming preoccupation of the novels with *soyayya* (love) has led many critics to label such novels *soyayya*. Yet from the database, it is clear that *soyayya* constitutes only 35% of the books. The rest, 75%, deals with other aspects of life. Since there are two categories of “unclassified” and “various”, it is of course likely that more titles would fit into one or more of the other clearly defined categories. So this classification should be taken as fairly loose.

A further limitation of this categorization is that the determination of the central theme is purely personal; another researcher may place more emphasis on one theme than another. For example, Bala Anas Babinlata's *Da Ko Jika?* is, on the surface, a *soyayya* story. Yet a closer analysis reveals it as a deeply moralizing novel that warns of the consequences of monetary greed.

Of the over 400 novels in the database, only four have overtly sexual overtones. Of the four, *Matsayin Lover* is the most controversial because it deals with lesbian relationships – the first Hausa-language novel to dwell on such theme. The furore that greeted the novel was so enormous that the author, Alkhamees Bature Makwarari (now a Hausa home video actor and singer) was forced to withdraw the book and issue a re-print without the offending pages.

Perhaps the biggest accusation against the Hausa *soyayya* novel, and which manifests in many of the odd 160 *soyayya* novels, is it gives a voice to girls and young women in the choice of suitors. This is seen as *rashin kunya*, or *rashin kawaici*, and therefore alien to *tarbiyyar Bahausha*. In the archetypal Hausa society, girls are forced to marry a man they do not love, are expected to show *hakuri* until they eventually get used to their husbands (or the wives, as the case may be, since there are cases of boys being forced to marry girls they do not love).

Conclusion

It would be admitted, first of all, that works of literature can teach valuable moral lessons through explicit presentation: the genre that has this as its aim is didactic literature, as exemplified by Bello Kagara's *Gandoki* (1933) and Tafawa Balewa's *Shehu Umar* (1933).

But most works of literature do not exist to teach a moral lesson: the moral lessons, as it were, in *Jiki Magayi* and *Kitsen Rogo* are so completely transparent that they do not exist. J. Tafida and R. East's *Jiki Magayi* (1933) preaches intolerance and encourages 'the bloodthirsty revenge. Abdulkadir Dangambo's *Kitsen Rogo* (1979) proposes that anyone who leaves his or her environment (in this case, a village) for another is doomed. It evokes powerful comparison with Alan Patton's *Cry, the Beloved Country*.

Perhaps the most instructive thing about the new Hausa novel is that it participates like all good literature in the exercise of the sympathetic imagination: far more than preaching or moralizing, more even than the descriptive and scientific discourses of psychology or sociology, the new Hausa novel strives to reveal the common human nature that exists in everyone behind the facade of divisive doctrines, political ideologies, and religious beliefs.

Notes

1. The four novels relevant here are: *Matsayin Lover* (Alkhamees Bature Makwarari), *Wane Kare Ne Ba Bare Ba?* (Balaraba Ramat Yakubu), *Kyan Dan Maciji* (Bilkisu Ahmad Funtuwa), and *Dufana* (Ashab Gamji). *Matsayin Lover* and *Kyan Dan Maciji* were re-written to remove the sexual bits, while *Dufana* was banned by the Hausa section of the Association of Nigerian Authors, Kano Branch in 1999 when the book first appeared. The novel, *Wane Kare Ne Ba Bare Ba?*, is out of print, although has not been banned.
2. Other themes of contemporary Hausa novels are:

- Kabilanci
Karya
Karyar Samari
Kin Gaskiya
Kissar mata
Kiyayya
Kwadayi
Makircin Mata
Abokantaka
Aikata Laifi
Aiki da hankali
Aikin 'yan sanda
Alkawari
Aljanu
Almara
Amfanin Ilimi
Auratayya
Auren zamani
Bandariya
Butulci
Cin Amana
Dangin miji
Fansa
Gargadi
Gaskiya
Gulma
Halin mutane
Hankalta
Hannunka mai sanda
Tarbiya
Hassada
Hatsari
Iya Zance
Jan girma
Wa'azi
Tsibbu
Tsoratarwa
Wakoki
Wariyar Launin Fata
- Jarumtaka
Karatun Zamani
Kuskure
Laifi
Lalacewa
Makirci
Makircin mata
- Matsalar aure
Miyagun Halaye
Mu'amula
Mugunta
Muhimmancin Ilimi
Munafunci
Rashin Akawari
Rashin Gaskiya
Rashin Sani
Rashin Tunani
Rayuwa
Rayuwar 'Yanmata
Rayuwar aure
Rayuwar aure
Rayuwar Bahausha
Ruwan ido
Sarauta
Satar yara
Son Duniya
Son Kudi
- Tarbiyya
Tarihin Kano
Tauhidi
- Zaluncin Sarakuna

Wasa Da Aure
Wulakanci
Yakin Zamani

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