

Depiction of the Economic and Occupational Activities of the Hausa of Northern Nigeria through Their Proverb

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Abstract: The article examines the place of Hausa proverbs in depicting the economic and occupational activities of the people. It argues that, the people's proverbs are a mirror to the aforementioned activities. Just before that and for clarity, the literature of the people, proverb, and economic and occupational activities of the said people have been presented. The conclusion of the article is that, the people's proverbs and their economic and occupational activities are inseparable since the former serves as a guiding compass/mirror in knowing the latter.

Keywords: Hausa proverbs, economic, occupational activities

INTRODUCTION

Both the people and the language are referred to as Hausa. According to Furniss[1]; Hausa is spoken by more than fifty percent (50%) of people in the areas of Nigeria, Niger, Northern Ghana and in some communities from Senegal and Sudan. He added that the 1991 census figure s of the population is eighty-eight (88) [1].

However, the origin of the people remains a contested one amongst historians, linguists anthropologists etc. for this reason, there are various views regarding their origin, although the Bayajida legend seems to be the widely accepted view since,

The legend of Bayajidais held by the Hausa people to be a true account of their emergence as a society and the origin of the foundation of their seven states [2].

The position the language occupies [3], believes that Hausa the most widely spoken language among the Chadic branch of the Afro-Asiatic language group. It is the lingua France of northern Nigeria and the second most widely used language in Africa. It is the second to none in terms of numerical strength in Africa. This is why Hausa remains the lingua franca to many of them in these West African countries. These people use language as vehicle of communication in their daily activities. The same language serves as a unifying force among the people.

Oral Literature

Oral literature is the kind of literature which is transmitted orally from one generation to another. It exists in both the Europe and Africa. According to Thompson's [4] postulation, the whole world knew no written literature before (until after) the invention of writing in summer and Egypt. And that culture, customs and values worldwide were transmitted orally.

Hausa Literature

Hausa is very rich in oral traditions. They have fables, animal stories and myths etc. written literature began with the use of *Ajami* (Arabic script) particularly for religious readership[4]. However, the first literary work is prose using Boko script was believed to be J.F. Schon's Magana Hausa [2] other western Hausaist the followed after him include C. H. and J. A. Robinson and Dr. D. Baikie. In fact, many Hausa works derived their sources from Hausa folklore. Example include, Bello Kagara's *Gandoki* (1934) Muhammad Gwarzo *Idon Ma Tambayi* (1934) Abubakar Tafawa Balewa's *Shehu Umar* (1968).

Categories of Hausa Literature

The most notable amongst the list of Hausa literature include the following:

Fiction (Littaffanhira),
Play (wasa, pl. wasanni),
Poetry (waka, plwakoki),
Epithets (kirari),
Proverb (Karin Magana),

However, in this paper, we shall look at proverbs that reflect or portray the economic and occupational activities of the Hausa as a people [6].

Hausa Proverb and its Authorship

Proverb is known as *Karin Magana* in Hausa. The term proverb is from old French 'proverbe' (latinproverbium), from pro(put) forth + verbium = word. Proverb does not have a generally accepted definition. Therefore, for the purpose of this paper, we shall identify with the definition given by Collin Cobuild English language dictionary (1988:1156) [7] that, "a proverb is a short sentence that people often quote and that gives advice or tell you something about human life and problems in general", thus, proverb is part and parcel of Hausa oral literature which touches most aspects of the people's lives. And although most proverbs emanate from the elders of the society (in their speech), it is believed that not only proverb, but other forms of oral literature are the collective work of a people. This is why the forms are not given any author. People use it as borrowers and apply it to suit their need. O. B. Yai believes that: We cannot ascribe authorship to Nigerian oral literature because we inherit this literature from oral tradition (Yai, 1982:8) [8]

But in spite of Yai's opinion we cannot ignore the fact that some proverbs are the work of an individual or individuals. Thus, we can say to that creators or authors of some proverb are known even though the creators of proverbs or proverbial sayings are Socrates, Aristotle, Plato, Francis Bacon and Pluto.

Furthermore, Hausa proverbs as saying of wisdom cover great deal of lessons and activities of the people that use it. In short it encompasses not only the human factors but also insects, animals, objects etc. On the economic and occupational activities of the Hausa, different aspects are used to depict these activities.

Economic and Occupational Activities of the Hausa

The economy of Hausaland was and is still based on their agricultural and industrial productions. Both are based on manual operations. The output is for domestic and foreign consumptions. Some of the crops that are produced include cotton, guinea-corn, groundnut, millet, maize and rice. On the side of industrial products, Hausaland can be described to be the source of textile and leather products in West Africa. The work was done mostly by slaves and laborers. In his comments on Hausa with regards to handling their economic activities, Stride and Ifeka (1971:86) [9] confirm that, "The Hausa are also well skilled in trade and handcraft". In addition to the above, the Hausa also have an organized market structure. The people selling similar products are placed in one section of the market. There are also sales agents for both local and foreign products.

On the occupational activities of the Hausa it is important to know that apart from being agriculturalists, they are also traders, couriers, blacksmiths, hunters, and craftsmen etc. they are good domestic and foreign traders. Kano, the biggest Hausacity, and Katsinawere the largest centres of commerce in Hausaland. In Hausastates, industries, though used manual labour, produced for internal and external consumptions. Some of these industries were dying, tailoring and weaving. The wealthy among the people embarked on foreign trade. It was reported that the Hausa were having trade relationship with Arab countries since 11th century. They were exporting hides and skins, and slaves, and importing clothes and weapons. And to the parts of Yoruba and Ashanti, the Hausa were exporting potash and importing kolanuts and salt (al-Hassan et al, 1988:4) [10].

Proverbs on Economic and Occupational Activities of the Hausa

The economic activities of the Hausa are well reflected in their proverbs. We can see how they show the importance of money in business transaction instead of mere verbal or written arrangement. They believe that, *Kudike Magana bafatarbakiba* It is money that talks (and) not, Mere verbal utterances, The Hausa also believe that, *Zuwa da wuriya fi zuwa da wuri-wuri*, Going (for business) late with money is , Better than going early (but) without money. This is because, no matter how early one goes for a business without money, one with money at hand, even if he goes late can transact successfully and leave the 'empty handed' early goer.

They also have the belief that, *Da rashintayikan bar arha* With no bargain, one misses cheap products. In addition to the above, they also mirror some of their economic activities in their proverbs when they say, *Kakarki/ka ta yankesaka* Your grandmother has finished her weaving Also, we come across proverbs such as *Na duke tsohonciniki*, One of bending, an old trading Or, *Bawandamina, attajirin rani* The servant of rainy season, the wealthy of dry season. The above proverbs portray or point out of economic activities of the Hausa such as farming, weaving, fishing and trading. In fact, the Hausa believe that, *Da zamanbanza, garaaikinkishiya* It is better doing a co-wife's work than doing nothing.

This concludes the position of the Hausa on living idle. This is because; in Hausa society co-wives are known for their misunderstanding and hatred for one another. Yet they prefer to do a co-wife's work to staying idle. Since the Hausa are involved in different economic activities, they see the need to value truthfulness. They warn that, *Karyafure ta kaibatadiya*, Lie can only produce flowers and not fruits and that, *Gaskiyadokinkarfece* Truth is an iron horse

Thus, these and many others, help in guiding their day-to-day economic activities.

The attitude of the Hausa to their occupations is reflected in many of their proverbs. For instance, although the Hausa are mainly farmers, they believe that the occupation is not an easy going one. This is why they believe that, Aikingona da wuya, idanankare da dadin chi (whitting, 1940:106)[11] Farming is hard (but) when it comes to an end eating is sweet.

The proverb makes reference to the difficult nature of farming; although, like honey, sweet comes after hardship. Another proverb that reflects another occupational activity of the Hausa is. Su babutsarakawanka ne (whitting, 1940:54) [11] Fishing without net is bathing

The proverb portrays fishing as an activity of the Hausa. It is similar to the English "what is a workman without his tools" which shows the importance of tools in carrying out an activity and not bare hands. Again the Hausa reflect this occupation in another proverb which says, Dominkifinbadi, akesakahomabana For fishing against next year a net is weaved this year

Furthermore, Agricultural occupation mirrored in many other proverbs which include Gerobawarindawa bane, Millet is not the age mate of guinea-corn, Chin kwanmakauniya, Eating of a blind woman's, egg, Dai ranatsawo, One day is (like) a rope (lengthy), Ba a fafegoranartafiya, Gourd is not open (to be used) on the day of journey

The four proverbs above portray agriculture as an occupation of the Hausa. This is why there is the mentioning of agricultural terms in the proverbs. These are (millet), dawa (guinea-corn), kwai (egg), tsawo (rope), gora (gourd).

Another occupational activity of the Hausa which is portrayed in their proverbs is drumming. They maintain that, Kowayashakidaabinaiyabbai Whoever gets drumming must have paid for it Indawaniyayirawa aka bashikudiidanwaniyayi kasha zaisha Where one person dances and gets money, if another one dance will be beaten Kadakabatarawarka da tsalle Do not spoil your dance with jumping, The next proverb emphasis the need for hard work as means to achieving a remarkable success. Thus, Zomobayakamuwadagazaune (whitting, 1940:107)[11] A hare is not caught be sitting down.

The proverb is trying to show that just as hare cannot be caught while sitting down no matter how clever or wise a person is, so also success in business cannot be achieved while sitting down.

CONCLUSION

The paper has examined some Hausa proverbs that portray the economic and occupational activities of the Hausa. It has been proved that the Hausa are not detached from their verbal art. This is why their proverbs and economic/occupational activities remain inseparable. The proverbs can serve as a guiding compass to a curious or inquisitive mind in knowing the economic and occupational activities of Hausa people. However, it is important to know that the interpretations of the proverbs are not exhaustive because of the scope of the paper. Hence they can carry other meanings to suit other situations since same proverb can be interpreted differently depending on the situation.

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