

HAUSA HAGIOGRAPHIC SEXUAL IDENTITY IN CREATIVITY

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Abstract

This is an investigation into how sexual identity is explored and incorporated into Hausa hagiography in order to enrich Hausa literary space as evidence in the Hausa written poetry of the 21st Century. The Hausa customs and traditions are checked alongside the influence on geographical space and time in the entirety of Nigerian literature, African literature and world literature with a quest to unveil how this is related to the 21st Century northern poets. On the other hand, how they have successfully underscored the theme of sexual identity as a postmodernist move to explicate certain human complexes pertaining or essential to the Hausas. Examining the poet's descriptive imagery of sexual experiences, responses and how such captured the paradigms of relationships within the ambit of love, desires, belief, social practises, spiritual expectations and the freedom to thought patterns. We have engaged this argument through the selected poems of Sylvia Kankara whom is a northern poetess.

Key words: Hausa, Hagiography, Sex and Identity

Introduction

Sublimation in psychoanalytic designation refers to the act of channelling sexual energies into other directions than the primal aim of penetration. This affirms the position that sexual discharge is not done only through biological pressure, sexual intercourse, but through some conduits taking varieties of fulfilments. Writing on sexual premise is a juncture of sexuality that gives birth to creativity as self-actualisation in psychoses. Hence, making sex an instinctive parcel to our identity (Tyson 1999) which is a libidinal (erotic) urge transmogrified into writing to neutralise the erotic impulses of the poet by conversion into poetry. This may be burn out of social confinement, thus in the fight against inhibitions the poet abandons his/her sexual aims (by desexualisation) then diverts or adopts such “untreatable urge” into creativity. This is not new as over the years eroticism has been transferred to music, painting and other works of arts. The unique thing about such reflections is the possibility of reading/viewing the “unseeable” of the sexual psyche. However, an apropos question is: “Does social acceptability has a way of controlling/ affecting sexuality?” If it does, then how does the social acceptance of the Hausa people, in Nigeria, control sexuality and perceived by northern poets?

To dose out this tension, Stake (1973) posits on this about artist and creativity:

- (a) that artist’s creations fulfil a cathartic function, similar to the relief from tension produce through free association;
- (b) that the imagery in his works includes unconscious symbols, to which emotional importance is attached, so that in some cases the pictorial representations may be assimilated to dreams;
- (c) that the artist seeks to compensate himself for his inner frustrations and conflicts, including a lowered narcissistic self-esteem;
- (d) that by the way of defence against the death instinct, his aim is to achieve immortality through his art; and

(e) that the artist's constant need to create obeys the repetition-compulsion principle to the same extent as the symptoms neutralised by his artistic efforts. (101)

The escape from the dilemma of achieving such urge (sex) may result to a return to the reconstruction of sexual fulfilment. This is a panacea for the poet to exude his eroticism. Nonetheless, it is notice that environment has a way of curtailing or approving certain sexual anxieties. However, experience has shown that over the years, human sexualities are highly concealed due to the frightening realities of their environments but if such sexualities can be well studied it may serve as a case to unravel cultural ambiguities, statutory errors, parliamentary lacuna, jurisdictional shortfalls, etc. because culture/environments prescribe and proscribe rules of engagement for sexual behaviours.

Who Are the Hausas?

Geographically, the Hausas spread across Nigeria (North), Sudan, Gabon, Senegal, Cameroon, Cote d'Ivoire, Chad, Togo, Ghana, and some parts of Niger (South-eastern). However, they are densely located in northern Nigeria; especially in the Daura axis of Katsina renowned for its classical survival. Religiously, they were conquered by the Sunni Muslims as far back as the 11th century and consequently the Sunni Muslims depleted their traditional religion of Maguzawa. Conversely, it is worthy to note that not all Hausas finally become Muslims or are Muslims. According to Barkindo, Omolewa and Maduakor (1989) they have this to say about the Hausas:

Between 1805 and 1809 Katsina, Kano, Daura and Zauzzau were conquered by the Jihadist. In Kano, the Fulbe Jihadists took over complete control after the Hausa king was killed in a battle. In the other Hausa states, the kings fled into exile and established new states where they hoped to continue the fight. This was because they had the hope of regaining their lost kingdoms. The king of Katsina fled to Maradi (now in Niger Republic). The king of Zauzzau fled

southwards and established Abuja (now the Federal Capital of Nigeria). The king of Daura fled to Yakuwa (now in Niger Republic) and the king of Kebbi fled to Argungun (now in Nigeria). For a long time there were conflicts between the ousted Hausa dynasties and those Jihadists who replaced them. In the end the Hausa aristocracies were all defeated. The Jihadists took over the territories and political structure of the Hausa kingdoms. (10)

Literarily, creative writing among the Hausas is captured by Abdul-Jabbar and Abdullahi (2017) thus:

Creative writing in Northern Nigeria has a rich and long history. Origins of this can be traceable to Arabic literature which itself was greatly influenced by Islam and, most importantly, the Qur'an. According to Aliyu, (1997: 149): Unlike the large number of Nigerian languages yet to be transferred to writing, Hausa has had the benefit of alphabetization for long time. The population's early contact with Islam led to literacy in Arabic, which in turn brought about an Arabic based script called *ajami*(137).

The nature of this influence since the Islamic incursion is still reflective in the creative enterprise of Hausa creative writers revealing how an average northerner is shaped by Islamic patrilineal, andocentric and phallocentric features. Hence, a man is to be seen and heard while women are under concealment paraphernalia of a pudah system—in action and appearance. If at all the women are seen the semiotic of their appearance shed and masked them by veiling them for possible interpretations. This religious embroidery has seriously tints the Hausa culture as well as texts. This acculturation of women silence is as well as silence in sexuality which theoretically is protected under theegis of religious legality known as Sharia. This makes it prefunding for Sylvia Kankara to explore such social reality with greater openness and laissez-faire approach to the subject of sexuality in Northern Nigeria. Anyokwu (2009)

applauds such legendary effort and adduces his support as well as scholarly approval to such creative adventure:

Literary history tends to convey the impression about the poet as something of a handyman: such is his unique and peculiar office that his community seems to expect him to have a say in epochal moments in the social life of the tribe. As though his distinct gift of words or song furnishes him with a multifunctional facility of a kind, he(/she) is expected to, as occasion warrants, sing, dance, heal, counsel, harangue or satirise and, during trouble times, fight. The question then is what is the gift of poetry, with which the poet is endowed, that lifts him(/her) above the common run of men and women; such that there is the tacit belief that it is not enough for him(/her) to just write poems, but, more importantly, he(/she) must be the agent of progressive change, irrespective of the means through which he achieves this? (1)

Sylvia Kankara's *Hymns and Hymens*

Firstly, it is worth to say that it is daring and broad-minded for Sylvia to pen *Hymns and Hymens* as a collection of poems depicting the northern experience. The collection reflects a woman voicing the naked truth of love against an environment that cares little or pays deaf ears to such plights. For her stance on romance, sex and relationships are too revolutionary as she dares to engage her caged thoughts rather than reportage on love or the accentuating of her societal standpoints on the issue of love, romance, sex and relationships. Therefore, this leads to an excursion into an unapologetic sexual exploration of the libido running into erogenous excitations of femininity which helps to unravel the poetess' perspective of hagiographic sexual identity of womanhood, girlhood, motherhood and love-lust adventure in northern Nigeria.

Womanhood

The distinct features of womanhood are the borders between girlhood and motherhood. Hence, at girlhood there is a presumable innocence that goes with a seriously searching or waiting for womanhood. At this period, she quests to pass through the process her mother passes through, if she is confronted and the girlhood process is not well managed, she may end up having a negative womanhood. But what qualifies a girl to be a woman is greatly expressed by Sylvia in “Embattled Hymens” (11). There, in the Hymens, she meets or fights the last battle of selfhood with the “penis” (11) and afterwards no more selfhood. Next, “Manhood salutes the sight of flesh” (17) to make her becomes a woman leaving the border of girlhood. If this leads to pregnancy, then she has graduated to motherhood. But this stage is a turbulent one because it is a serious battle for the girl child since no matter how she prays or guide herself, she will eventually become a prey whether in wedlock or outside wedlock. In fact, not being a prey may be considered as evil and dejection at the latter stage of her life. But the environment can help by making this transitory process, from girlhood to womanhood, healthy by not deliberately locking up the girl child or making choice for her on whom to embattle her hymen. A critical reference can be seen in this stanza:

The day breaks, the light stays
So we can find our way to the stream where
We rehearse our dreams of embattled hymens
Now washed away by the forbidden fruit
We were coaxed to eat,
Despites our deflated resistance. (11)

This experience remains an eternal memory to every woman in womanhood: the stories of battled hymens. But the question is why must they wait to go to the river before rehearsing the stories of embattled hymens? The tone therein shows some form of resistance on the part of the victims and the fear to relate the reality of their environment on how pleasures are

frown at and cannot be made a public debate. Kamal (2017), a Professor in Bayero University attests to this:

As a literary form, the Hausa Novel (as well as other genres) tackles any serious topic or discipline in whose pursuit men and women amass knowledge and impart it to those interested to know, making the writing undertaking partly enlightenment and partly entertainment. The writer maintains a balance between the two by the choice of suitable themes that have a bearing on *mu'amalat* (or human relations) and a deft handling of the task at hand such that the reader is easily persuaded that the reading is worth their time and effort and is not done just for pleasure alone. (154)

In consequence, a lot of good stories that gingers or opens up the subject of pleasure seeking by Hausas have been hibernated from the reading public or contrivedly modified to religious didactic materials.

This is also applicable to poetry, hence making the apprehensions of the girls anthropological deducible from Kamal's comment. They have to hibernate by the stream side to tell their stories—hymens. This reveals the environmental impact factor on the girls, what they are passing through and how their sexualities are covered and not necessary absent. The poetess persona even reveals that “We were coaxed to eat” which are the sexual exigencies imposed upon them as females by the males.

Again Sylvia makes an attempt to define who a woman is in her environment. Women are universal physiologically but heterogeneous environmentally. The erroneous belief, whether as a making of religion or something else, that a woman should only be seen and not heard is debunked in the poem, “Amina” (45). Amina in the poem refers to the glorious warrior, Queen Amina of Zauzau. The poem reflects as well as explore who and what a woman stands

for, “Pearl of the north” (45). Contrary to what is erroneously assumed in some quarters that northern women should not be given the pride of place to be celebrated and glorified as their male counterpart. The poetess’ persona cautions this wrong impression among the Hausa people by reminding us about the valiant contribution of late Queen Amina of Zaria to the Hausa hagiography. Thus, womanhood is not inferiority or a pan of subjugation as some religious fanatics would paint it to be about the Hausa woman. As a matter of fact, no Emir of Zaria holds records as Queen Amina of Zauzzau, a woman.

Girlhood

The first poem in the collection, “The Wind Beneath My Wings” happens to be on girlhood. Silvia explores how a girl child suffers the burden of day-dreaming on the subject of love. This is actually true to most females when they are passing through girlhood. But this becomes prominent and painful when the environment of such girl child stiffens her to express her feelings and innate desires. She described this as “It hits the air first as/ The gargling of water/On its way to the sea” (2). There is no other passionate way to describe the irresistible surge that nurtures the desire to love which comes with girlhood. The end of such passion, at times when there is no opportunity to be expressed; Silvia concludes that “Then settles as the rustling/Of leaves on a breezy sunny day.” (2) This description of how finally this unfulfilled love settles can only be compared to a plane that crashes through the hands of a pilot that tries to save those on board. Although the plane finally crashes, but the pilot “should not” be held responsible as this is just a rustling that is made possible by the breeze that removes the leaves from the tree and has no alternative than to crash it to the ground. So, in an environment where rigidity is the system of regulating sexuality, violations are inevitable.

Next, we have the complexity of the girl child and the stage of puberty. The process commences at genital maturation, development of sexual signs to genital maturation then follows menstruation to clock the puberty stage. Before this stage, the girl child has suffered

Oedipus complex, emotional attachment to her father/father-figure. Little do we have it that Sylvia titles the poem on this issue as “Goodbye Daddy” (48). This is on the subject of how hormones hype girlhood beyond the sense of reason. Here, often, they experience the first kiss, crush and possible the breaking of the hymens. Dismissively to any way out, the poetess persona in the first line of “Goodbye Daddy” effuses, “Every generation may not escape the/ Complexities of puberty”. Now for the environment which strongly supports the marriage of the girl-child, how will the girl-child be able to handle such sexual experience in matrimony? Because this is still a formation stage while she can be married off after attaining womanhood. But since there is a distortion due to the environment of the poetess’s persona then there is a need to pay attention to sexual identity for feasibly exploration.

The engine-room of girlhood is a powerful one—the mind. Her mind is always full of equation yet unsolved. Some will be solved later but many will go down as day-dreams. But exploring her repository through life could be quiet instructive and therefore helps to sharp our views on girlhood perceptions. The mind of the girl is full of fantasy and this can be attributed to her naivety and quest to know. It becomes spectacular when a girl is denied the opportunity to air or express her choking desires. Sylvia relates this in “Thoughts of You”, which captures the peculiarity the girl-child passes through in her environment. The girl-child is not given the opportunity to meet her desired lovers (9). Perhaps for certain reason; in her recession, she keeps thinking and worries about how she wasn’t given the opportunity to express herself. This is psychotic: the poetess persona day-dreams to the extent of her “pelvic walls contract”. This is close to masturbation as a result of inflammation of buried psychoses. This can be regarded as an unhealthy restrain which may affect her sexuality in the future. The poetess persona moves to a state of dissolution in ‘Shatered Dream’ (10) when the love she exhibits becomes lust due to restrains. She regrets, “Yet I long to reach way out and/Speak so gently to his soul” But what happens, “But he walked through my valley, /Refusing to take refuge in the deluge of my gifts” (10). This is a classic example of how unhealthy restrain can affect the sexual life of a girl-child in womanhood. Because of this

restrain, she easily falls for anyone that comes her way because she is no longer operating within the confined of love but lust and thus it can lead to marriage where she will later discover the love-lust syndrome she suffers earlier. Sylvia (2005) agrees to this assertion:

In the middle of my desperation
I can barely find solace in the
Words that soothed me in time past.
And like a worn-out celerity,
I am left with an emptiness that gnaws
At companionship-
To have and to hold
To know you will always be there. (19)

This is a psychological trauma a girl-child passes through amidst her wanting to express herself. If this is restraint, it may become an implosion to the detriment of her personology.

Girlhood also comes with interest in the opposite sex except there is an abnormally or deformation in growth. This crystallises that fulfilment of girlhood may not be attainable without proper understanding of the opposite sex, boyhood. Both of them are like binary and they both work simultaneously in a complete being. This accounts for why it is argued that “Female chromosome may play unexpected role in male biology” to sustain the argument that in every female there is maleness, vice versa. Sylvia concurs to this in the following lines: “I kiss the sight of boys and girls/Walking home hand-in-hand from school” (12). This accounts for why certain religion doesn’t allow the mixing up of boys and girls in classrooms and other social gathering. Contrary, there should be a correction to this because this is a binary process that any complete man/woman pass must through. Failure to attain this may cause personality problem at womanhood.

Motherhood

To say every mother is an incurable prostitute is to assert that every father is a gigolo. They are involved in the sexual trade of procreation that is why they are “fathers” or “mothers” in the first place. Slivia refers to this in her poem, ‘Guilty’. The persona is a mother; hence she expresses the philosophy peculiar to motherhood in her environment—the northern part of Nigeria. The persona puts the accusation on herself, “Search me I am not innocent”. This introduces us to the level of corruption and infelicities going on in motherhood. From the outside it seems clean and perpendicular, like a sepulchre, but inside there are terrible issues not to be questioned as expected by her society. Nonetheless, the poetess persona in the poem disregards this show of sacredness to motherhood by telling her audience that some gainful romantic adventures do take place, although, often without love but just a means of fulfilling motherhood. She refers to this absence of love as “Tussling with the tides of desires” This makes her “bowels” to “tingle” and she rest the case by narrating what the organ of her victim, her husband, does to her:

In endless salute, I strike an altitude
Nurture the vibrato in my torso,
Even the rhythm of this gusto of lust.

In the above, although in a legitimate relationship, she refers to this love excitation as lust. She re-echoes the fact that womanhood is not pleasurable in “Quest of Womanhood” (6). She really doesn’t see the why she is called a woman and not a girl. For girlhood goes with responsibility/loyalty to her parents; now serving as a woman to her husband and as a mother to her child. This implies how the revealed woman suffers from the phollocentric bondage of her environment. This is a critical CT scan of the legalities in the Northern Nigeria Penal Code and a simplified case study is that of Amina Lawa saga (Ezeigbo 2012).

To be objective, it will be good to turn our critical eyes to male character? The man—why is he not responsible to the woman? The truth to this reality is not far fetch. She says, “Around

me is shame and disgrace,” “...the images that oppress godly thinking?”, “Separation and cries for affection”, “...the bills we have to pay” and lastly the “Ignorance and ignominy.”(6) which breaks the heart of the poetess persona. The picture in this poem is quiet horrific about womanhood. If indeed, this is how womanhood is a lot of girls would take excuses from womanhood. However, we perceive that this is peculiar to the poetess’ environment and she uses the voice of the poetess’ persona to raise this issues bedevilling womanhood/motherhood in northern Nigeria and elsewhere in some African countries as well.

A girl again may not be able to handle/enter motherhood because of what goes wrong with motherhood regionally in the north. In “Mama: Agony of Motherhood” (47) the stress of motherhood is expressed as “Pang of labour”, “Tides of turmoil” and “Sweat of peril” all these vicissitudes of life go with motherhood.

Love-lust Adventure

I am set on the edge of extinction

From wanting You, oh my love.

Swing low! Let Your chariot of compassion

Descend at the cascade of my plea (3)

The greatest tragedy of the laws governing matrimony and the relationship between opposite sex is the inability to define/separate lust and love distinctly. Not even the dictionary has done justice to this in semantics. The poetess also suffers same because of where she finds herself. Sometimes, it is wrongly defined that love can only be in matrimony but we beg to disagree with this as most matrimonies are bedrocks of conveniences sordid in lust. A love can be genuine between opposite sex without marriage but this is hard to believe by our society. The poetess persona in the above lines cries for the returning of her lover who leaves for unknown reasons. In the same poem, she refers to how “a dozen-score” of valiant men may not mean much to her as her lovers. But through the poem the lover never returns. Then she is forced to marry someone whom she loves not. This is similar to the kind of love between Senator Ahmed Sani Yerima, a Federal Government Senator, from the northern

Nigeria who married a thirteen years-old girl. Ezeigbo (2012) reports that this was highly condemned by all except some religious fundamentalists from the north (4).

The above action informs us to pay attention to the title of the poem, 'Evergreen'. Love is evergreen but lust is ever-dry. This argues the importance why ladies need to be allowed to make choices in the area of love-lust definition. Men buying ladies into marriage without a proper courtship or ladies' approval denigrates the essence of individual liberty in the guise of wedlock. Again, it spells out that marriage is not a definition to joy or acceptance. It can be regarded as "The symphony of love at its making," (17). Marriage sometimes could be defined as the end product of lust which first shadows as love.

Love-lust adventure is also portrayed among married couples, for love and lust are not a syndrome only among girls and ladies or boys' and guys' syndrome; married women as well suffer same. This is exemplified in Sylvia's "Treasured Memories" (8). At first in most marriages it usually starts with love but later lust. It is also obvious that when a woman becomes pregnant, there is this sudden neglect or psychological avowal from her husband who is responsible for the pregnancy; sometimes, husbands prefer to travel and come back to meet the new-born-baby or pretentiously go along irrespective of their psychological irritation. This accounts for why pregnant women are mostly sighted walking alone with little assistance from those who impregnated them while unmarried ladies and men already feel comfortable walking together as lovers. Sylvia captures such love-lust adventure in the North thus:

But my future is a precipice
Of yesterday's love—a love I nurtured
To full bloom.
But somewhere in the wake of dawn,
It withered like a stillborn
From an unsuspecting fallopian tube.

To call the dearth of this love “a stillborn” shows the lustful nature of the love *ab initio*. Hence, this is a treasured memory which adds little or no value to the lover who is the poetess persona. This clarifies the wrong notion that lust can only be associated to victims outside marriage. For lust can also be in matrimony.

To conduct a funeral for love, Sylvia explores the connectivity between the dead and the living. It is highly portrayed in “Oh Deep Sleep” (50). “Check out the Lourge” (51) and “An Ode to Man” (52). This expresses how love often turns lust. No matter how anyone loves the world the world will eventually do away with the person in the long run. No one falls in love with the earth so much that the earth braces him/her with eternity. So, there is a call to caution because the love between the living and the dead is loaded with pain, anxiety and separation. If this can be perfectly related to love, no matter how far love goes it will eventually become lust. Hence, there is never a clear separation between love and lust just as life and death are inseparable. The effort of either religion or society to separate this duo may lead to further limbo and catastrophe. In Sylvia’s environment which is northern Nigeria efforts are always made to separate religion from the sexual hankering of life but the more effort is made the more inseparable it becomes.

Conclusion

It is glaring that sexuality is a distinction that forms an aspect of our identity; and to understand or investigate such distinct view, a major recourse ought to be taken on where our humanity stands. Then the question is: “Who are we without our sexualities?” “What are we without sexualities?” In creativity, especially in northern Nigeria, the understanding of these questions is seriously lagging exploration. This is due to the densely patriarchal features of the magazuwa tradition, etymologically; couple with Islamic religion which frowns at sexual exploration of any kind. Thus, affecting the values of literary essentialism which is to bring to the fore the avoidable, unavoidable, detestable and the suitable of any social system to the bearing of readership for possibly improvement and amendment. However, on the sexual

identity of the Hausas in northern Nigeria, Silvia poetically voices that there is a need to improve as well advance the conceptualisation of sexuality in this region. Silvia does this through her poetic persona in *Hymns and Hymens* who quest for sexual identity and laments on how the hagiographic nature of the Hausas affects them historically, culturally and now ideologically. It is pertinent to note that sexuality is part and parcel of identity and if anyone wants to have an all-inclusive interpretation or study of identity then the place of sexuality cannot be left out. Similarly, in this paper, we have seen that culture prescribes and proscribes sexual rules and social acceptability relating to sex than giving room to the creative study and understand of sexuality; and how it relates to humanity which is not a question of morality versus immorality but a conjecture of best practices irrespective of religion or people. Thus, bringing to the attention of the society what they failed to realise about sexuality *ab initio*.

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