

## Reflection of the Hausa Society in Hausa Tales

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**ABSTRACT:** *Tales are to a certain extent the mirror of life, they reflect what people do, what they think, how they live and have lived, their values, their joys and their sorrows. The tales are also a means of articulating man's response to his environment (Mbiti, 1966:31). In most traditional societies, tales served as one of the medium for understanding the societal mores and prescripts. The Hausa societies were not exceptional. In Hausa society, folktale is one of the ways of teaching societal values. It was/ is mostly presented by old women and young brides to teach children societal and moral ethics. This work aim at the study of the reflection of Hausa society in Hausa tales which critically analyses how tales depict the mode of life of the Hausa community. This covers the traditional and cultural set up which include marriage and family system, moral discipline and traditional political leadership system. The work traced some illustrations of tales relating to the above mentioned cultural norms of the Hausa society. The methods to be adopted in the research are the use of Anthology of tales of Yahaya and Usman in order to collect the data and analyses it. Structural functional approach and contextual method of translation are to be adopted as the theoretical framework. The recommendations include that the government should give emphasis on the teaching of folktales in the curriculum especially at the basic level of education.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Hausa society, Hausa tales. Reflection*

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### INTRODUCTION

Tale is one of the noblest forms of oral literature that is utilized to project and explore the socio-cultural and political milieu of societies. It presents human and non-human characters, symbolically utilized and explore themes like ambition, hatred, malice, envy, greed, love, passion, endurance and other universal human traits not particular to a place, time or gender (Akporobaro, 2011 and 2006). Tales are structured around a particular purpose or theme: either to convey a moral lesson, tell a human truth, describe an adventure or war, or point personality types or figures

Published by European Centre for Research Training and Development UK (Achebe 2008, in Mannir, 2021:7). They preserve the history of the people, in addition to their didactic inclination, the values of the society are portrayed through tales. A tale is universal and is popular in many cultures because it is used to preserve beliefs, societal values, wisdom, cultural experiences as well as in the transmission of values and histories.

A tale is one of the oldest methods of interaction and communication in human history. Before the advent of writing, historical events were transmitted through compelling tales of the significant features of a developed culture and the ability to preserve its history and heritage using narratives (Nduka, 2014). Furthermore, it is through tales that people learn about their cultures and societies around them, developed codes of behavior, and formulate meaning making mechanism in the lives. Considering the significance of tales in reflecting the society, the study intends to study Hausa tales in order to show, how they depict the cultures and traditions of the Hausa people. These include marriage and family system, moral discipline and traditional political system.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Tales are to a certain extent the mirror of life, they reflect what people do, think, how they live and have lived, their values, their joys and their sorrows; it articulates man's response to his environment. They are documents (orally and written) that transform and relate the present and past generation of the society. Although tales are being informed to the children and young generation, they are not fully understood and cannot easily be divided into categories. This study tries to divide and categories the tales based on the types of culture they reflect in the Hausa society.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study is to examine how the Hausa tales depict the mode of life of Hausa community. The work will trace some illustrations of tales relating to Hausa traditional and cultural set up. The objectives of the study are to:

1. Explore the traditional and cultural aspects of life of Hausa people the tales reflect.
2. Outline the Hausa tales that depict the selected Hausa traditional and cultural set up of the Hausa people.
3. Examine how the tales depict marriage and family life of the Hausa people.
4. Study how the tales teach moral behavior to the children.
5. Analyses how the tales mirror the traditional political leadership of the Hausa people.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **Definition of Tale**

One of the conventional definition of tale is that, it is a timeless and placeless oral form used to recount adventures of animal and human characters (Bascom, 1965). For Umar (1980:11) it is, "-- a fictional prose narrative of the traditional setting used as an instrument for training children". In another work, Yahaya, Zaria, Gusau and 'Yar'aduwa (1992:7) define tale as " a fictional

narration aimed at educating and entertaining the children”. Ahmad (1997:13) defines tale as a “traditional form of communication and entertainment that is usually perform orally, and in most cases, the performance(s) is mostly conducted by an elderly woman at night to captivate the rapt attention of the children listening”. Tale is an important aspect of Hausa society; it comprises context, traditional acting, memory, gesture and sound effect used by the performer to bring tale contents of life before an audience.

### **Classifications of Tales**

Scholars such as Skinner (1969), Finnegan (1970), Mukoshy (1978), Dangambo (1984), Gusau (2006) and Chamo (2008) have classified Hausa tales based on the time of tale presentation, context/theme or characters. Skinner (1969) have grouped the tatsuniya into: animal stories; caricatures (ethics and other stereotypes); moralistic stories; men, women, young men and maidens tales; dilemma tales; and other content-based categories, Dangambo (1984) also points two different classifications of the word tatsuniya as “Tatsuniya mai labari” (tale with a narrative) and the “tatsuniya ta kacici-kacici” (tale with riddle). Mukoshy (1978), Gusau (2006) and Chamo (2008) have classified tatsuniya into two: Tatsuniyar Gizo (Gizo tale) and sauran tatsuniyoyi (other tales). Mukoshy (1978) maintain that, characters in Hausa tales can either be an individual or animal or bird or other creatures, and on the other hand gizo (spider) is the character.

### **Origin of Hausa Tales**

Tale is one of the oldest methods of interaction and communication in human history. Before the advent of writing, historical events were transmitted through compelling tales of the significant features of a developed culture and the ability to preserve its history and heritage using narratives (Nduka, 2014). Scholars such as Finnegan (1970), Yahaya (1979), Dangambo (1984), Okpewho (1990), Funnis and Gurner (1995), Gusau (2006) and Okhor (2008), among others, confirmed the existence of the thriving traditions and existence of Hausa tales since the time immemorial, even before the Hausa people came into contact with Arabs and Europeans cited in Mannir, 2021:27). The tale is an old and important field of study because it is a form of art as well as an instrument of education and entertainment.

### **The Hausa Tale Form**

Tale is an important aspect of Hausa society; it encompasses context, traditional acting, mimicry, gesture and sound effect by a performer to bring contents of a life before an audience. In Hausa land, the story telling as stated by Bello (1978:10) that is a “past time of the people. Children and elderly always gathered in the night to here tales from old women or sometimes men”. Yahaya (1982), Ahmad (1981), Gusau (2006) and Chamo (2008) add that, the story telling audience among Hausa people of Nigeria usually consist of children. The narration mostly takes place in the playground and in the houses of old women and new brides’ houses. The tale are narrated mostly in the evening hours around fire after supper. The Hausa people have a hira (gist) session where tales dealing with animals, particularly the marvelous gizo (spider) are told to the children. The traditional restrictions as to the time of storytelling (mainly in the night; and for telling a story

during day time the spider must be caged) has been abandoned by the Hausas. In a modern context, the tale entails narration by a narrator or reader to the listeners. The tales are now narrated during the day to the children in schools or aired in television or radio; they are also documented in books form to rescue them from disappearance (Mannir, 2021:12).

### **A Survey Of Hausa Society and Tales**

The Hausa represent those people whose first language of communication is the Hausa language. At the moment, there is no single acceptable claim, about the origin of Hausa people. Hausa land comprises seven city-states, such as Daura, Kano, Gobir, Zazzau, Bairom, Katsina and Rano, termed as Hausa bakwai. The Hausa is cultural group of mixed origins and race united by a common language (Adamu, 1978). Although there is no widely acceptable written account on the foundation of Hausa cities, oral narrations and legends have provided a number of claims.

The Hausa people have a diverse range of oral creations, such “tatsuniya” (tale), “take and kirari” (praise-epithets and praise song), “waqar baka” (oral song), “karin Magana” (proverb) etc. (Bello, 2013). The Hausa refer folktale as “tatsuniya or tatsuniyoyi”. In Hausa land, tales are mostly narrated in the evening hours around the fire after supper. Tales are now narrated during the day to the children in schools or aired on television or radio.

Every society makes efforts to transmit certain aspects of its history, identity, culture and beliefs to its younger generation in an attempt to uphold and preserve its culture. Folktales are most common means of expressing the values. According to Mbiti (1966:31) “Tales are to certain extent the mirror of life, they reflect what people do, what they think, how they live or have lived, their values, their joys and their sorrows. Tales are also means of articulating man’s response to his environment”. Speaking on the role of tales as an aspect of oral literature in the preservation of cultures, Okpewho (1992:110) maintains that, “tales offer a society a collective sense of identity and help them in defining and comprehending the world at large in terms of both familiar and positive to them”.

The importance of tale telling in Hausa land to the moral education cannot be over emphasized, tale is a medium through which children are informed of their culture and history. Different forms of Hausa tales do reflect numerous aspects of the Hausa people life, peace, war, adventure, courage, disaster, love, hatred, values (social and/or political), weakness, strength and humor and marriage. The aim of this paper is to study and analyses some selected Hausa tales and thereby show that they reflect some aspects of Hausa tradition and culture which include: marriage and family system, moral discipline and traditional leadership system.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The structural functional approach to the study of oral literature would be used to demonstrate the role of folktales in reflecting the traditional and cultural aspects of life of Hausa society. This is a study of folklore which lays emphasis on the significance of folklore in the light of its contextual

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Published by European Centre for Research Training and Development UK background (Yahaya, 1979:19). The extracts from the selected tales are to be given in English translation. In translating the extracts of the tales into English, contextual method of translation is employed. This method allows the basic principle of creativity taking into consideration verbal elements and linguistic cultures of the two languages are involved. It therefore “provides a translator with all the chances of rendering the meaning which is relatively equivalent to the source language” (Sarvi, 2008, p.96). This way the listeners or readers can easily understand the message without distortion.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The study is basically qualitative in nature, and so relies on the Anthology of Tales of Yahaya and Usman for the analysis. The analysis is limited to the depiction of certain traditional and cultural aspects of life of the Hausa people which include: marriage and family system, moral discipline and traditional political leadership system. In all, fifteen (13) tales have been selected for detailed analysis. These tales, written in Hausa language, the extracts will be translated into the English language using contextual method of translation and structural functional approach for the analysis.

### **Analysis of the Selected Hausa Tales Depicting Some Aspects of Life of The Hausa People**

In Hausa society, folktale is one of the ways for teaching societal values and served as a medium through which children are informed of their culture and history. They are also intended for education and entertainment, discipline and wisdom. Different forms of Hausa tales do reflect numerous aspects of Hausa people life. The study focused on a contextual analysis of some selected Hausa tales in order to show that tales are not only to entertain but also teach moral and informs the reader or audience how the Hausa people are, as they entail the way they live, their environment, their food, their leadership etc. The work traced illustrations of tales relating to marriage and family life, highlight moral lesson derived from the tales and the traditional leadership style of the Hausa people.

### **Hausa Marriage Ceremony and Family System in Hausa Tales**

Hausa tales do reflect the traditional marriage and the family system of the Hausa people. Where certain tales reflect processes involved in seeking for marriage in the Hausa culture and customs regarding marriage rites. While some tales depict the socio divisions of roles in the Hausa family system.

### **Hausa Marriage Ceremony in the Hausa Tales**

Alhassan, Musa and Zarruq (1982:8) define marriage as “a union of living together between man and woman as husband and wife”. Adamu (1998:4) sees marriage as “an agreement between man and woman to live together on religious and cultural bases”. The Hausa traditional marriage is mostly based on cultural and religious rites. The processes involve in seeking for marriage in Hausa culture is parents to seek marriage for their son or he seeks marriage for himself. In Hausa

community some parents seek marriage for their son, when both the boy and girl are young. Parents of the boy will be presenting gifts (toshi) to the girl on behalf of their son. In most cases this way of marriage seeking happens between relatives or friends. The Hausa tale “Pregnant Woman” shows an instance where parents seek marriage of a girl for their son.

*The pregnant yelled out, “Please help me to carry the bucket on my head”. The man gives her condition unless she agrees to marry the baby to his son when she grows up if she delivers a baby girl. Upon hearing this, the woman agreed and the man saddled it on her head.*  
(Usman, 2005a:39)

The tale tells a story of a pregnant woman who went to fetch water and seek the help of a man. The man agrees to help her only when she will marry the baby she is going to deliver if the child is a girl of his son. The woman agreed with condition and the man helped to put the pot on her head. This tales shows a situation where a father seeks marriage for his son.

Most of the time boys seek the marriage of a girl for themselves, where a boy may meet a girl he likes at a playground (dandali) or house of a new bride or market place or during traditional ceremony. For instance the “Yar Gamsheqa” tale shows a situation where a boy seeks marriage of a girl at playground.

*The approaching of Zina to the playground gorgeously made Yarima to stand up and asked the remaining ladies to pare way for her. He falls love with her immediately. Their dating and gives a ring and some token gifts when she intends to return home.*  
(Vabura, 2002:204)

The tale narrates an instance where girls were asked to gather at the playground so that the Prince will choose a spouse. All the girls gathered and the Prince dated a beautiful girl called Zina and later marry her.

In some instance, ceremonial places serve as a place where boys and girls met and fall in love with one another. For example the tale of ‘Yan matan Fagam” depicts:

*Once upon a time, there was a guy whose star was Shining who saw a girl and admired her; he asked asked her hand in marriage and she agreed. She went home and informed her parents. Other girls mates later got their suitors and married, too.*

The tale tells story of a handsome and rich boy who sees a girl he admires at the ceremonial place and asked her hand in marriage and she agreed.

The tale of “Prince of Agadas” illustrates an instance, where the Prince met with Daughter of Bora when she was coming back from bush and they became lovers:

*Yarima said. “Good day dear”. I want to buy this bunch of firewood”. The lady responded, “What are going to do with it? He insisted that he is going to buy it, she later agreed and collected the money.  
(Yahaya, 1972a:2-3)*

Here the prince ironically expresses his love for daughter of Mowa by showing his on the bunch of fire wood she is carrying.

When the girl accepts the intention of the boy seeking her marriage, then the boy informs his parents. The parents of the groom-to-be will then conduct an investigation on girl’s character and her family background and later consult the family of bride-to-be seeking their approval for accepting their son’s intention. The family of the bride-to-be make similar investigation. The groom-to-be if approved by the woman’s family is allowed to see her briefly from time to time and sometimes presents gifts to her for the purpose of winning her love.

In the Hausa land there are certain customs regarding marriage rites, though there some differences among the Hausa communities. The common Hausa marriage customs include “lefe. sa-rana, sa-lale, gara” etc.

### **Lefe**

Lefe refers to items the family of the groom-to-be take along to the family of the bride-to-be when each party approved the offer of marriage. Lefe is basket made from palm fronds (Bargery, 1993:725). The basket serve as container where the items to be taken to the family of the bride-to-be are put inside. The items put inside lefe are called “kayan lefe” which consist of clothes, jewelries, cosmetics, shoes etc. The Hausa tale “Four Girls with Surprising Habits” illustrate this custom:

*Four young ladies settled in the emir’s palace. The eldest lyrically enchanted that had it been the Emir bring the marriage trousseaus. She could have married him and give birth to twins which in crape with gold and diamond to him.  
(Yahaya, 1977:32)*

The tale figure out life as one of custom of Hausa marriage where the eldest among the girls mentioned “lefe” as a condition if fulfilled by the Emir, she will marry him.

### **Sa-rana**

This refers to fixing possible date for marriage. After some time the groom-to-be parents consult the parents of the bride-to-be on a possible date of the marriage. The date fixed may be months ahead and in order to give the suitors time to make the necessary preparations of the event. The Hausa tale “Kurciya and Sheda” depicts this marriage custom:

*All the suitors wants marry Shede. They were all gathered in one place. The one that brings the marriage trousseau is granted. They were married the following day and after seven days she is taken to his house.*

*(Yahaya, 1974:33)*

### **Sa-lalle**

This is one of the major custom that shows a suitors are been dated to be married. A mixture of henna or perfume is rub on the hands or body of the groom and bride. The tale “Daughter of Bora and Mowa” depicts this marriage custom:

*Both the two girls were dated to be married in the same day. One of them (‘Yarmowa) is been given to the Emir and the other (‘Yarbora) is auctioned to anyone who wish to marry her.*

*(Yahaya, 1979:262)*

The tale tells a story of a man with two wives and two daughters, who were dated to be married in the same day and were rubbed with henna before taking them to the grooms’ houses.

### **Gara**

This is a gifts of food items and clothes which the parents of the bride presented to the family of the groom. Gara is one of the important aspect of Hausa traditional marriage customs, where the parents of the bride rich or poor will present it to the groom’s family. The Hausa tale “Gizo da Vaure” illustrates this custom:

*The spider (Gizo) is asked by the Emir to be prepared more for the arrival of the bride. Where the bride is brought together items with food items, clothes etc. (gara).*

*(Yahaya, 1971a:8-9)*

The tale illustrates an important Hausa marriage custom that is “gara” when Gizo marry the Princess, where food items, clothes and other items were brought to his house as “gara”.

### **Hausa Family System in Hausa Tales**

Family consist of husband, wife and their children (Bargery, 1933: ). In the traditional Hausa Gandu System, family consist of grandparents, sons and their wives and children. The family life



begins after the marriage ceremony ended. The husband and the wife continue their matrimonial life to the time they will have child. Hausa people like other Africans, have certain obligations or duties expected of the family members for the running of the household. Hausa tales do reflect these duties of the members of the family. For instance Hausa tale “The Pregnant Woman” illustrates certain roles of the husband and wife:

*The boy tight his wife with a rope and goes to farm.  
surprisingly whenever he returns from farm, he will  
find the house is swept, the food is cooked and a  
hot water is served for him in the toilet for his birth.  
(Usman, 2005a:39)*

This tale states one major role of the husband as a food provider, where he goes to go farm to get food for his family. Also the tale states certain duties expected of wife in the house such as sweeping the compound, cooking food and serving the husband with hot water in the toilet for his bath.

While the ‘Ta-kitse’ tale depicts roles of the children in the family, especially the female children :

*The female children will come out when she is absent  
(Oldwoman) ; some of them will sweep the house, some  
will wash the plates and utensils, some will wash the  
wrappers, others cook the food. So that when comes back  
she will eat and rest.  
(Yahaya, 1974:17-18)*

Here the tale states duties of the female children in running of the house hold which include sweeping house, washing plates, washing clothes and cooking food.

### **Moral Discipline in Hausa Tales**

Folktale serves as traditional medium for moral education ; and a nudge to maintain comfomity to accepted behavior. The moral tales tell stories in which good behavior is rewarded and bad behavior is punished (Paul, 1992). Hausa tales like other African tales often contain moral or life lessons that can be used to educate children. They can teach valuable lessons about right and wrong, the consequence of actions. For istance, in the popular Hausa tale on ‘The daughter of Bora and daughter of Mowa’, we were taught the reward of good behavior and the consequences of bad behavior. In the tale, the daughter of Mowa bed wet a mat and was directed to go Bagaja river and wash it, but she didn’t obey the directives and accused the daughter Bora for the bed wetting. Then daughter of Bora was directed to take the mat to Bagaja river, where she took the mat and obey all the directives given during her trip to Bagaja river. In the end she was rewarded for her good deeds. While reverse is the case on the side of Daughter of Mowa recieved punishment as a result of her bad behavior. In essence, the tale is told to educate the children moral lessons and consequence of actions.

The tale ‘The Prince who turned to Snake’ portrays the importance of patience and endurance in life. The tale tells a story of a man with three wives and three daughters. Where he loves the two wives and their daughters and hates the other wife (Bora) and her daughter. Both Bora and her daughter ‘Gwi-da-yara’ were maltreated and faced hardship at the hands of the cowives and their daughters. Later they succeeded in life to the extent that Gwi-da-yara married the prince and helping her parents with money, clothes and food. Here the story is narrated to teach the young that patience and endurance are key to success in life.

### **Hausa Traditional Leadership in Hausa Tales**

Before the advent of colonialism, Hausa community was blessed with a well-enshrined political anchored by monarch; emirs were the major traditional rulers that determine how the communities were administered and how they relate with one another. Each emir was assisted in the administration by the council members, district heads, village heads, ward heads and palace wards. There titles such as waziri, galadima, madaki, wali, sarkin yaqi and others for the advisors. Hausa tales do reflect the structures of the traditional leadership of the Hausa community. For instance, in the Hausa tale ‘Mugun Bafade’ we were told of the two major rulers in the Hausa traditional leadership system, these are emir and waziri:

*There was a town called Katano. The Emir and his Adviser ---.  
(Usman, 2005d: 61)*

The tale ‘An Old woman and Witch’ come out with another important counsellor under the traditional leadership administration, who is ‘madawaki’ the commander of the army:

*We shall write a letter which you going to take it  
to our high authority, you should not give the letter  
to anybody except The Commander of the Army.  
(Yahaya, 1977:9)*

In the Hausa tale ‘Gwi-da-yara’ palace wards both males females were reflected serving the king and his family. For example when Prince and “Gwi-da-yara” returned home they met the king and his wards/guards in the palace. Also it reflects the female wards “barori” serving the queen in the house works. The tale “Old woman and Witch” depicts traditional way of appointing a new king. When a king dies his successor is chosen by the king makers who consider certain qualities. Here the new king in the tale was selected being powerful and brave man. This is because the society needs a leader who can defend his people from attacks of the neighboring communities and kingdoms. It also shows that after a new king was appointed date for the crowning ceremony is fixed. Preparations are made and invitations are distributed to the relatives, friends and neighboring kingdoms. The tale further depicts the ceremony:

*A date of the crowning was fixed. Many were gathered  
for Na Allah’s crowning. Later he is crowned and a feast*

## CONCLUSION

The study focused on contextual analysis of some selected Hausa tales depicting marriage and family life, highlight moral lesson derived from the tales and the traditional leadership style of the Hausa people. The study observes that simple techniques are used in the tales to make children easily understand their lessons. Also the study reveals that tales are not only to entertain but also to teach moral lessons and informs the reader or audience how Hausa people are as they entail the way they live, their environment, their leadership etc. There are tales which clearly depict procedures involved when seeking for marriage in the Hausa society and customs regarding marriage rites. And also there are tales which reflect the social division of roles in the Hausa family system. Furthermore, certain tales were destined to educate the children and show them good behavior and its benefits. This was done through narrations of stories which ends in rewards for good deeds and punishment for evil deeds. Other tales depict the structure of the Hausa traditional political leadership system.

## Recommendations

In the light of the above findings, the study recommends that, the teaching of folktales cannot be underestimated. It should start right from the parents of the children. They should tell them stories that teach high moral and other cultural traditions. Also government should give emphasis on the teaching of folktales in the curriculum especially at the basic level of education. Media stations should be organizing programs on Hausa tales and their lessons to the children.

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