

The Portrayal of Hausa norms and Values in Kamal's *Hausa Girl*

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Abstract

The paper examines the perception of Hausa values, norms, and culture as presented in Kamal's Hausa Girl, in which the author distorts the nature and basic norms and values that extensively frame the socio-cultural and religious attributes of the Hausa community. This is aimed at achieving a predetermined resolution, using the actress as bait to blacken the image of the Hausa movie industry as culturally and religiously destructive. The objective of this paper is to demonstrate how the actress becomes a dupe of textual deception, rather than being created by it. The paper deploys the ideas of Cultural Materialism in its analysis of the text. It concludes that Hausa Girl is replete with over-refinement, contradictions, and misrepresentations of the socio-cultural and religious norms of traditional Hausa society, which had a preconceived objective. It also manifests how historical factors, political dynamics, and power struggles between the religious class and the Hausa film industry shaped the form and content of the text.

Keywords: culture, duping, misconception of Hausa norms and values

1.1 Introduction

Authors with large corpora enjoy a certain privilege, whereby they are given a particular image developed from general perceptions of their work. Kamal, the author of fifteen novels, is not exception. He is known for his writing in which he showcases and critiques Hausa culture. *Hausa Girl* is a novel which, on the surface, showcases a high level of moral consciousness. It depicts the negative consequences of deviating from morality.

Culture is a general term that refers to the totality of the values, beliefs, language, communication, and diverse practices shared by a particular community or society, which define it as a distinct collective. Culture is intertwined with the social structure and economic aspects of society, though distinct from them. Merriam-Webster (1999) defines culture as “the customary beliefs, social forms, and material traits of a racial, religious, or social group,” and further as “the characteristic features of everyday existence (such as diversions or a way of life) shared by people in a place or time.” In a similar vein, Tylor (1871) defines culture as “that complex whole which includes knowledge, belief, art, morals, law, custom, and any other capabilities and habits acquired by man as a member of society.”

Culture plays key roles in the social life of a people as it is crucial in molding social relationships, maintains social order, shaping worldviews, and influencing day-to-day actions and experiences of the members of society. According to Durkheim (cited in Alexander, 1992), culture has dual aspects: material and non-material. The material (tangible) aspects include cuisine, clothing, ornament, architecture, music and dance, tools and utensils, literature, etc. Non-material (intangible) aspects include rules, norms, laws, morals, speech, deportment, and expressions of class, race, gender, and sexuality, which govern how people interact depending on time, place, and audience. The material and non-material aspects are interdependent, as each can influence the other. For example, a compelling documentary film may influence people's attitudes, beliefs, values, and perceptions, can shape the content of films or works of art.

Culture is invaluable in the establishment of social order, that is the stability of society based on collective rules, norms, morals, and expectations that enable a group to live peacefully together. Notwithstanding its indispensability, culture is not without its downsides, as some practices can be stifling or oppressive to certain sections of society.

As earlier stated, this paper critically examines the stark misrepresentations of Hausa culture in Kamal's novel, in which the author distorts the nature and reality of basic norms and values that profoundly shape the socio-cultural and religious ethos of the Hausa community. The novel uses the protagonist as a pawn to condemn the Hausa movie industry as culturally and religiously

destructive. The paper deploys the ideas of Cultural Materialism as its analytical framework.

1.2 The Author

Aliyu Kamal is a professor of Applied Linguistics who hails from Kano (Saje, Mahmud and Bala, 2022). He has been teaching language and linguistics for the past 40 years at Bayero University Kano (BUK) where he was a former Head of the Department of English and Literary studies and Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Islamic Studies. Kamal has fifteen novels to his credit. His novel *Fire in My Backyard* won the ANA/Chevron Prize in 2005. In addition, his novel, *Silence and a Smile* was also shortlisted for the Spectrum Prize in 2005.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This paper deploys the ideas of Cultural-Materialism literary theory in the analysis of the text. The theory which emerged in the 1980s is a blend of leftist culturalism and Marxism popularized by Raymond Williams (1989), Dollimore and Sinfield (1985). Cultural Materialism seeks to expose the ways used by forces that control power, including the state, clergy and the academia in propagating a particular ideology or perception by exploring the historical context of the text and its political import. By close textual analysis, Cultural Materialism succeeds in exposing the preponderant hegemonic position of the text. The theory is put on the same pedestal as American New Historicism because both view texts as historical and cultural artefacts. Scrutinizing *Hausa Girl* from the lens of Cultural Materialism is informed by the resolve to show how the economic and material conditions that obtain in the society influence its production and how these factors influenced the author in the misrepresentation of Hausa culture to achieve a preconceived aim – the perpetuation of hegemony of the socio-religious status quo.

2.1 Review of Literature

There has not been much critical writing on Aliyu Kamal's novels generally and *Hausa Girl* in particular. For Saje and Mahmud (2020), Kamal is among the many literary figures who has lent his pen through narrative to examine the extent to which certain cultural issues pervade social settings to the detriment of the society at large.

In similar vein, Saje, Mahmud and Bala (2022) argue that *Hausa Girl* was informed by the long standing moral clashes between the Government and

scholars of Kano on the one and the Kannywood movie industry on the other. They hold that the novel shows “in a satirical way, that the *Hausa Girl* who used to be morally sound, religiously submissive and culturally reticent is no longer that” (p.105). In essence then, their argument is that Kamal uses the protagonist and other characters in the novel, to showcase his argument about the moral decadence of the Kannywood movie industry and its consequent negative effects on lives of the people involved in it. This paper offers a contrary argument in that it suggests the author offers misconceived glimpses of the Hausa culture as a narrative tool to serve his purpose of proving his point on the negative effects of the Kannywood movie industry.

3.1 DATA ANALYSIS

Hausa Girl, the 251- page novel divided into 42 chapters is replete with distortions of Hausa culture in which Kamal twists basic cultural norms of the Hausa society aimed at conferring on Hajjo notoriety and a bad reputation to justify the intrinsic ‘evil’ of Kannywood is, echoing the virulent opposition of officials and the clerical establishment in Kano with which Kamal aligns. The distortions largely revolve around the protagonist Hajjo, a naive girl turned villain by the misrepresentations. By these distortions, Kamal joins the fray in the struggle for the soul of Kano society between the status quo and film makers, offering his intellectual tool as his contribution.

In the first few chapters of the novel, at the exposition stage, particularly from chapters three to five, Kamal does justice to Hausa culture as it relates to parental guidance and control, child discipline and education like I said earlier marital life as regards to wife - husband relationship and bridal life, peer group and relationship between the opposite sexes like above, family life and courtship. In spite of the above, notwithstanding, these innocuous chapters are partly laced with monumental distortions of the Hausa culture as it relates to family, marriage, kinship and social relations.

In a subtle way, the narrative begins by introducing the reader to the scandalous beginning of Hajjo as related to her by her wayward father Bala Gano as above:

That was Grandfather. Hajjo could still remember the story as told by her father of the old man trying to dissuade his son from marrying a prostitute. Fed up by his friends' persistent teasing and being called squeamish, Bala Gano had given in and followed them

to the Sabongari red-light district...He had been titillated by the erotic scenes in Once Upon a Time in the West and the lascivious dancing and singing in Sanyast, which had fired hormonal urges that he agreed with his friends could best be blunted by way of illicit sex.

The novel continues to narrate how Bala ended up having sex with Hajjo's mother, an innocent girl running away from a forced marriage, at a brothel where he and his friends ended up after the movies at the cinema. This is a huge misrepresentation of the Hausa culture of bashfulness and parental propriety. It is unthinkable that a Hausa father would give his daughter a vivid account of how he met and slept with her mother at a brothel at the dawn of their youth, no matter how debauch that father is. It would make sense if Grandfather regales Hajjo with the scandal in his usual hate-filled tirade against her. But for Bala to cross all boundaries of paternal propriety and decorum and tell Hajjo the darkest side of his life is too surreal and unimaginable.

Despite the remorse shown by Bala and Hajjo's mother on their youthful adventure, which is their first sexual experience, Grandfather refused to bless their marriage even after Hajjo's mother confessed to her parents of all that had transpired between her and Bala and the consent to have them married after meeting Bala's family: "Grandfather was adamant in his refusal to let the erring lovers rectify their "misdeed" even by resorting to the dictates of the Shari'ah against whose reforming conditions the devout old man dared not stand".

Portraying Hajjo's Grandfather as an implacable puritan that refuses to listen to anyone in respect of his son's marriage to Hajjo's mother whom he slept with, despite her observing the Islamic ritual of *Istibra'i* and showing remorse, is a cultural anomaly. In traditional Hausa society, courtesy is part of being cultured. It is against Hausa cultural values for a Grandfather to balk at every advice and stick to his guns on an issue like this. In Hausa, the concept of 'Amini' or bosom friend is a strong pillar of social relations that has unfathomable impact on people. Traditional institutions - the village head, the district head, the emir, the Imam and religious scholars - have far-reaching influence on individual and community life. It is therefore against Hausa socio-cultural paradigm for a Grandfather to act in the manner he does in respect of his son's marriage.

Hausa society is deeply patriarchal where the head of the family calls the shots and everyone must submit. However, in instances where he oversteps the bounds of fairness and consideration in his relation with his family, there are people who check his excesses, whose views, advice, admonitions and suggestions he respects and follows willingly or unwillingly as mentioned in the preceding paragraph. These people are the recourse of the household - wives, children - when the patriarch goes haywire, as in the case of Grandfather. Although Grandfather "had been the richest landowner in the hamlet" (p. 7) and "generous" (p. 8) that does not confer on him absolute incorrigibility, as there have to be people who can prevail on him to do what is right. Being a retired civil servant of respectful standing in the village who leads prayers whenever the Imam and his deputy are "out of town or happen to be indisposed" (p. 6), does not portray Grandfather as the highest authority in the community to the extent that he cannot be approached and asked to do the right thing.

There is a contradiction and a disconnect between the persona of Grandfather and his adherence to the Shari'ah. Since what he is balking against is a religious issue for which Islam makes provision, Grandfather's adamant behaviour does not conform to his posture as the "devout old man" (p. 5) that the novel portrays him to be. If indeed he is the devout Muslim he is presented, then there is no way he will go against the dictates of the Shari'ah he so much respects. It is strange for a man presented as, puritanical and devout to wish ill for his son and daughter-in-law to the extent of hoping for her to give birth to his grandchild in less than six months after their wedding to prove that the child is a bastard. How can the same person who refuses to bless the marriage of his son to his daughter-in-law to preserve his honour in the eyes of the community now wish for a bastard to be born into this household? It is irrational for Grandfather to be disappointed when Hajjo was born four years into her parents' marriage to prove her being a legitimate child of a marital union the old man disapproves of. He should instead be elated that his lineage has remained untainted despite his son's earlier recklessness. For Grandfather to gloat and be joyful over the death of Hajjo's mother at childbirth (p.10) does not conform with his religious standing. It is evident that Grandfather's abhorrence toward the marriage between Bala and Hajjo's mother is not born out of piety but ego, which is explicit in

Grandfather's internal monologue thus, "Why should he be made the laughing stock of the community?" (p. 6). Indeed, it is not farfetched to suggest that these cultural distortions, religious contradictions and disconnect stem from the narrative's preconceived intent to make Hajjo the black sheep of the family from the outset.

Perhaps realizing Grandfather's limited influence in the community is such unbendable and unapproachable, Kamal confers an underserved sense of power and importance on him early in the novel to make him the alpha and omega in the community by becoming the district head, circumventing all cultural norms and procedures for ascending traditional power:

Did that give him the idea to try and secure traditional appointment as a District Head? Father knew that for a long time Grandfather had been acting as one. All that the role required for a rich landowner was simply to have a philanthropic turn of mind. That had attracted returns for Grandfather (p.8).

Kamal turns away from basic procedure of becoming a District Head or any royal official with a portfolio in Hausa culture. Wealth can fetch a man a royal title but not a royal office which is hereditary. Being a rich landowner and a retired government worker is not an enough requirement for Grandfather to be turbaned District Head. He needs to be a royal blood, having been born in the royal family which the author fails to show anywhere in the text that Grandfather is from a royal background. It is a cultural oddity for Grandfather, a hamlet dweller and retired government worker (p. 7) to buy his way into the traditional position of District Head without coming from a royal family. And the way the text presents accession to the position of District Head as a matter of paying off those who matter makes the traditional chieftaincy appear not more than a political office, where candidates with enough money to throw around clinches as shown in the text: "As father speculated, the retainers might have hoped for a richer largesse from their patron such that they easily persuaded Grandfather to curry favour and be appointed a District Head" (p. 9).

Maternal relatives are known for their love, compassion and care for the child of their relative, especially a deceased one, particularly a woman who dies at

childbirth. In Hausa kinship structure, maternal relations have precedence over paternal relations in the custody of a child, especially an infant, in the event of the death of its mother. It is questionable for the author not to make even a fleeting reference to the relatives of Hajjo's mother apart from her parents' consent to marry Bala and their being told about her bleeding and need of blood transfusion after childbirth. It is a cultural anomaly for Hajjo's maternal relations not to play any role in deciding her custody as a neonate, only for Uncle Ilu, Grandfather's younger brother, to give the new-born to his nursing wife to suckle along with her infant Gaji. Even at the naming ceremony, no mention is made of Hajjo's maternal relatives, which is unthinkable in Hausa cultural setting:

The traditional naming ceremony at his house where only a handful of women dared to show up. They were afraid of turning Grandfather against them for helping to grace an occasion they knew "like hunger in their bellies" would make him feel very resentful (p. 10)

Throughout the novel, not once is a reference made to Hajjo visiting her maternal relations or any member of her maternal family coming to see how the daughter of their deceased sister is faring. This is contrary to the culture of 'zumunci' (kinship), 'kula' (care and concern) and 'kara' (courtesy) that is deeply entrenched in the Hausa society. Making no mention of Hajjo's maternal relatives seems to be a deliberate ploy to make the plot fit into a pre-determined narrative without allowing a natural closure. It is intended to portray Hajjo as an outcast all along because succour and rescue should have come to Hajjo from her maternal side in her travails; they should have stepped in and shielded her from her predicaments and vicissitudes.

When her paternal family is rash toward her after the scandal of playing husband and wife with her friend Fatahiyya (p. 95 – p. 98) the natural sanctuary for Hajjo is her maternal family. The fact that they live far away is an advantage to her since she will be away from the scandal and her hostile paternal family. Instead, she returns to the house of her widower father who has remained single since the passing of his wife, and whose lowly reputation only adds to Hajjo's opprobrium and sets the stage for the tragedy that the author plans for her - racy video of "6 dance sequences" SK made of her in the state of hypnosis and

subsequently raping her. Even after being possessed by the spirit *Sambuqa* along with several of her colleagues during their get-together in the school dormitory on the eve of their departure after their final year examination and her subsequent exorcism by Mullah Amin, Hajjo returns to her father's house where she mostly lives alone because he mostly stays outdoors and returns home late. Furthermore, for her maternal family to agree to marry the widowed younger sister of Hajjo's late mother to her father with whom they have had no contact for almost two decades, while showing no concern for the condition of Hajjo all these years, flies in the face of reason: "Father had been offered a woman to marry... It was his late wife's sister whose husband's death made it possible for her to remarry" (p. 228). The reason for Hajjo's maternal family agreeing to marry her aunt to her father reveals a glaring contradiction:

The widow's parents thought of making a favour to their former son-in-law and bowed to Hausa tradition by offering their daughter to him...People said the in-laws did so to encourage Bala Gano to turn a new leaf, but his daughter knew that the old people did so because they didn't want her to marry without married woman around to preside over the ceremony in Bala Gano's House (p229).

Nothing stops Hajjo's maternal family from taking her into their fold since they also don't like her staying in her widower father's house all by herself. It is culturally illogical that they allow her to remain in her father's house without their intervention. Kamal seems to have realized this disconnect that he provides a flimsy excuse through Gaji when Hajjo pays her a visit while discussing about her father's impending marriage:

"Our family disapproved of your mother's marriage; that is why you don't know her sister."

"Have they approved this one?"

"My father said they have. That means he and your father will be reconciled with their own parents" (p. 231).

This turns logic on its head. All along, it is Grandfather that was against the marriage of Bala Gano and Hajjo's mother. Uncle Ilu and Grandmother used all

entreaties to make him bless the union but he remained unswayed. If there was any problem, it was with Grandfather. Uncle Ilu has never had problems with Hajjo's maternal family because from the beginning, he supported Bala Gano in his marriage to Hajjo's mother. For Uncle Ilu and his wife to donate blood in the failed attempt to save Hajjo's bleeding mother after childbirth shows they had no problem with her family. In fact, it is Uncle Ilu who has been in "bad terms" (p. 5) with Grandfather, his elder brother for fritting away his inheritance on "dissolute women and cheap beer" (p. 6) before his repentance.

The fact that Uncle Ilu took in Hajjo as a neonate after the mother's death should not have prevented Hajjo's maternal family from visiting their sister's daughter or from Uncle Ilu arranging for Hajjo to visit them between holidays while she was growing up. Even if the whole family disapproved of the marriage, it makes no sense for the paternal family to hold on to a fruit of a union they did not approve. It makes more sense if the maternal side took custody of the infant. If Hajjo is as rebellious as Kamal projects her, nothing could have stopped her from visiting her maternal aunt since they live in the same town, allowing her father to be visiting her on courtship. Now that she is in her father's house, away from Grandfather's strict control, nothing stands between Hajjo and her maternal family. In whatever way one looks at it, the author of *Hausa Girl* commits a monumental cultural distortion with regards to Hajjo's relationship with her maternal family from the beginning, in suddenly, when it serves a narrative purpose.

The author commits a monumental distortion of Hausa culture of courtship in respect of a widow which is tied to the Islamic prescription that a widow observes 128 days 'waiting period' to mourn her husband before she can remarry. A widow, by Hausa culture, is not permitted to engage in courtship until after her 'waiting period' of four months and 10 days after the death of her husband. But here, Bala Gano commits this cultural and religious sacrilege: "He began to spend more time at home and only left to go and pay court to his intended wife" (p. 228). It sounds innocuous on the face of it, but Kamal belies his distortion at the end of chapter 39 where Gaji responds to Hajjo's inquiry about her father's planned wedding to her widowed aunt: "In two weeks the widow will finish her idda mourning period and then the wedding will take place" (p. 231).

This shows that Bala Gano has been courting a woman in her mourning period, a cultural and religious transgression. What is more obfuscating being that he receives the blessing of her family to be seeing her while observing her mourning period? "The widow's parents thought of making a favour to their former son-in-law and bowed to Hausa tradition by offering their daughter to him" (p. 229).

Hajjo's married friend, Fatahiyya's, willingness to allow Hajjo to act out a matrimonial scene with her husband in her own house is a distortion of the cultural reality of the Hausa society (p. 95 – p. 98), which is highly implausible in the cultural reality of Hausa society. Women generally, and Hausa women in particular, jealously guard their men from other women, including female relations of their husbands to whom they are related by marriage. It is culturally unthinkable for a traditional Hausa woman to propose to a friend to play "bride" with her husband, leaving them all alone. Cultural propriety and the innate feminine jealousy do not make such a scenario highly improbable. Fatahiyya's hysteric reaction when she finds her husband and Hajjo in her bedroom demonstrate that no Hausa woman would make such a perilous proposition.

Although Hausa society is generally polygamous, Hausa women's detestation of *Kishiya* (co-wife) is legendary. Hausa women go out of their way to ensure their husband does not bring in another wife through various means such as sheer chicanery, black magic, outright violence which includes physical assault and even murder. When the husband succeeds in having his way, the woman of the house or *Uwargida* (senior wife) employs various stratagems to retain control or terminate the co-wife's influence, ensuring she leaves the household.

Rape is the worst nightmare any woman can experience. The way Kamal trivializes SK's rape of Hajjo particularly in how she reacts after discovering what has happened, defies human nature and specifically Hausa feminine cultural values:

The moment she woke up, she understood that she had been sexually molested. But more strangely, she realized that SK was

washing her down...As she got up from the floor, SK picked up a towel and went out whistling one of the music tracks he had earlier recorded with her. She tidied herself up and tried to collect her wits together (p. 222).

Hajjo may be adventurous, mischievous, rebellious and tomboyish, yet she preserves her chastity until violated by SK. But for Hajjo not to show emotional distress and trauma, which every violated woman would experience, and to continue having contact with the rapist, delves into the realm of the impossible. Apart from fleeting anger “at being used” (p. 222). Hajjo shows no significant emotion response. She even admits admiration for her rapist, more than KB, her level-headed and morally upright boyfriend. The least expected reaction from Hajjo in her situation would include emotional disturbance, shame, guilt and the fear of pregnancy or contracting a sexually-transmitted disease (STD), especially HIV.

Even if Hajjo were promiscuous, rape is a redline no woman would ignore, regardless of her behaviour. It constitutes a severe violation of a woman's dignity, leading to psychological problems including shame, guilt, depression, anger, hate, trauma, isolation, as documented by Washington Coalition of Sexual Assault Programs (WCSAP). Even for a licentious woman, rape is the worst assault on her being, the violation of her sanctity that can lead to tragic consequences due to its gravity. It is more disturbing if perpetrated by someone the woman trusts. In Hajjo's case, it is compounded by the seductive music video created by her assaulter and circulated widely, destroying any vestiges of reputation she has left. Despite all these, Hajjo continues her relationship with SK, paying nocturnal visits to his house and even inviting him to her home for further hypnotized encounters, suggesting that the narrative deliberately demonise Hajjo's character, ultimately leading to the tragic death of her father while protecting her.

The author of *Hausa Girl* misrepresents many Hausa cultural norms to suits the plot and the denouement, portraying Hajjo as a failure and the Hausa film industry as a cesspit of corruption. These cultural distortions unfairly confer notoriety on a naïve and deluded young girl.

Conclusion

From the foregoing, it can be clearly seen that *Hausa Girl* is replete with distortions, contradictions and misrepresentation of the socio-cultural and religious norms of traditional Hausa society, used as a narrative strategy to achieve a preconceived objective. In other words, it was meant to serve the particular purpose of portraying the main character of the novel, Hajjo, as a failure, the direct consequence of her foray into the Hausa film industry. This narrative strategy ultimately frames the Hausa film industry as a corrupting force, detrimental to girls in particular Hausa society in general. It also highlights how historical factors, the politics and power struggles between the religious class and the Hausa film industry, shaped the form and content of the text.

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