

The Role of ‘Ajamī in Hausa Literary Production

Jennifer J Yanco

African Studies Center, Pardee School of Global Studies, Boston University,
Boston, USA

jjyanco@bu.edu

Mustapha Hashim Kurfi

Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences, Bayero University,
Kano, Nigeria

mustapha@bu.edu

Abstract

Islamic education and literacy were present in Hausaland long before the jihad of Usman ḍan Fodio, which culminated in the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in 1804. While ‘Ajamī made its way into Hausaland with the spread of Islam, its use today is not limited to sacred or religious texts. In fact, it serves as a medium for the diffusion of information through newspapers, personal correspondence, political and advertising signage, poetry, and even currency notes. At the same time, the Islamic values that inform Hausa culture are an integral aspect of these materials. Over time, Hausa scholars adapted the Warsh-based Arabic script to the particularities of the Hausa language, resulting in Hausa ‘Ajamī’s enriched inventory of characters and diacritics. The ‘Ajamī tradition remains strong and widespread, as shown in our collection of 20 manuscripts, most from the 20th century, that highlight a range of personal qualities valued by the Hausa people.

Keywords

Hausa – ‘Ajamī – Islam – Sokoto – Usman ḍan Fodio – Nana Asma’u – livelihood – work ethic

Background and History of 'Ajamī Use Among the Hausa*

In this article, we present background on the Hausa language and its use of the 'Ajamī writing system. We include a description of the ways in which the Arabic alphabet has been adapted to write Hausa and, after a description of our corpus of 20 'Ajamī manuscripts, we provide a detailed analysis of one of them, "Mai Sana'a ba ya Tsiya" (A Person with a Livelihood Will Never Be Destitute).

Hausa belongs to the Chadic branch of the Afro-Asiatic family and is widely spoken throughout West Africa and, increasingly, elsewhere on the continent and in the world. *Ethnologue* puts the total number of Hausa speakers (L1 and L2) at just more than 77 million,¹ which puts it in the top 25 most widely spoken languages in the world. As a member of the Afro-Asiatic family, Hausa is related to Arabic and shares considerable vocabulary through the extensive borrowing that has taken place over the last several centuries. Hausa is written in both the Arabic and Latin scripts, referred to as 'Ajamī and *boko*, respectively. Unlike Arabic, Hausa is a tonal language and features both long and short vowels. While the tone is not marked in either 'Ajamī or *boko* writing systems, vowel length is marked in 'Ajamī and constitutes just one of the ways in which the Arabic script has been adapted for writing the Hausa language. This will be expanded on in the section below on the actual script.

The 'Ajamī tradition among the Hausa dates back several centuries and remains vibrant today. 'Ajamī is used in a wide range of social settings in Hausaland. As elsewhere in West Africa, 'Ajamī came into Hausaland with the spread of Islam and its scholastic tradition. It is thought that early Islamic influences in Hausaland may have come from the Kanem Empire to the east, whose ruler had converted to Islam in the 11th century CE; later, in the 13th century, Kanem-Bornu, then an Islamic state, stretched even further west.² In the 14th and 15th centuries CE, clerics, merchants, and scholars from states to the north and west where Islam had taken root (*e.g.* the Mali and Songhay Empires, Futa Toro), served as vectors for a more robust spread of Islam to Hausaland.³ Moreover, Kano's position as the terminus of a major caravan

* The article is part of the special issue "Ajamī Literacies of Africa," edited by F. Ngom, D. Rodima-Taylor, D. Robinson, and R. Shereikis.

1 David M. Eberhard, Gary F. Simons, and Charles D. Fennig (eds.), *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*, twenty-fifth edition, Dallas, Texas, SIL International, 2022. Online version: <http://www.ethnologue.com>.

2 John O. Hunwick, *West Africa, Islam, and the Arab World: Studies in Honor of Basil Davidson*, Princeton (NJ), Marcus Wiener Publishers, 2006.

3 Hunwick, *West Africa*.

route meant that it was an important center of exchange with scholars and merchants from the north. According to Abdala, Islam became the official religion of Kano about 1380 when Yaji, King of Kano was converted by Wanagara merchants from Mali and declared Islam the official religion of his kingdom.⁴ Islamization of the Hausa was further cemented with the jihad of Usman dan Fodio and the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate (1804–1903) at the beginning of the 19th century.⁵

With Islam came literacy in the Arabic script. This is true throughout West Africa and no less so in Hausaland. Islam puts a great emphasis on education and scholarly pursuits. Most children attend at least a few years of Qur'anic school where they learn to recite and write verses from the Qur'an (see Figure 1). Although this schooling is primarily in classical Arabic, the reading and writing skills acquired are easily transferred, with a few adaptations, to other languages. Once one has learned the sound/symbol relationships of the Arabic alphabet, it is a relatively simple matter to apply this to Hausa and to put it to use in a range of contexts. In this sense, Arabic has become, as John Hunwick so aptly puts it, "the Latin of Africa."⁶

Moreover, with the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate in the early 19th century, a particularly high premium was placed on literacy, with leaders like Usman dan Fodio (1754–1817), his daughter Nana Asma'u (1793–1864), and others devoting significant time to writing on religious topics, documenting history, and creating poetry—in both Arabic and Hausa, as well as Fulfulde, and Tamacheq.⁷ Nor was this a preoccupation limited to the palace or a group of elites; all people were encouraged to become literate, women and men alike, as well as those in less favored social groups. One of Nana Asma'u's greatest legacies was her method for educating women in their own homes and bringing them into the Islamic community. Known as the *yan-taru* movement, this "each one teach one" method consisted of intensive training of women disciples, who would then go out to rural areas to train women and girls, sharing what they had learned. This included basic Islamic precepts, the life of

4 Abdalla Uba Adamu, "Insurgency in Nigeria: The Northern Nigerian Experience," in *Complex Insurgencies in Nigeria. Proceedings of the NIPSS 2012 Eminent Persons and Experts Meeting*, ed. Olu Obafemi and Habu Galadima, Kuru, Nigeria, National Institute for Policy and Strategic Studies, 2012.

5 Hamid Bobboyi, "Ajami Literature and the Study of the Sokoto Caliphate," in *The Meanings of Timbuktu*, ed. Shamil Jeppie and Souleymane Bachir Diagne, Capetown, HSRC Press, 2008.

6 Hunwick, *West Africa*.

7 Beverly Mack and Jean Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad: Nana Asma'u, Scholar and Scribe*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2000.



FIGURE 1 Qur'ānic School Pupils, Zinder, Republic of Niger, 2014. Young students throughout Muslim West Africa and elsewhere use wooden writing boards (*allo* in Hausa) to practice their penmanship and to help them memorize Qur'ānic verses. Photo by Cynthia Becker.

the Prophet Muhammad, and the Qur'ān. A critical component of this training was learning to read and copy didactic poetry and Qur'ānic verses. While this was most often in Arabic, the writing skills transferred easily to Hausa.⁸ This outreach was an integral part of the reform movement and the consolidation of the Sokoto Empire as an Islamic state.⁹

8 For more on the works of Nana Asma'u and on the *yan-taru* movement, see Mack and Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad*.

9 Bobboyi, "Ajami Literature."

Before the British conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate, missionaries had made efforts to introduce Latin-based writing systems to Hausa.¹⁰ While these efforts had little to no effect in supplanting the use of Arabic and ‘Ajāmī, later attempts, initiated after the British take-over, did have long-lasting effects. Perceiving the use of the Arabic script to be a threat to their power, associating it with Islam and the only recently vanquished Sokoto Empire, the British imposed the use of the Latin alphabet, or *boko*, for writing Hausa. The imposition of *boko* was the British attempt to commandeer literacy in the service of their colonialist ends—in particular, the implantation of a secular administration and educational system.

The use of *boko* for schooling and administrative matters resulted over time in a large portion of the literate public using *boko*. Thus, newspapers like *Gaskiya ta fi Kwabo* (Truth is More Valuable than Wealth), initially published only in *boko*, were established, along with others (see Figure 2). *Gaskiya*, which first appeared in 1939, is still in publication today. For many years, starting in 1941, it also included an ‘Ajāmī section. However, British attempts to replace ‘Ajāmī were only partially successful. There remained and remains a significant segment of the population who are literate in ‘Ajāmī and use it not only to literary and religious ends, but also in their day-to-day business. Writing in 2004, John Edward Philips noted that “No matter what their religious or linguistic affiliation, nearly every person in Nigeria sees and uses Hausa Ajami in his or her daily life.”¹¹

As we have noted, writing has been a key element in the spread of Islam, serving as it does, to convey Qur’ānic knowledge. While initially, ‘Ajāmī’s function was largely religious, it quickly spread out to fill other functions. Today, one sees it on currency notes (see Figures 3 and 4), campaign posters (see Figure 5) and advertisements, shopkeepers’ ledgers, personal letters, historical narratives, and poetry. Even still, its religious function remains a central one. Some of these functions are represented in our corpus.

Hausa ‘Ajāmī: Adaptation of the *Warsh*-Based Arabic Script

Like other ‘Ajāmī traditions such as those of Kanuri, Wolof, Mandinka, Fula, Yoruba, and Nupe, the classical *Warsh*-based Arabic script has undergone a number of adaptations to represent Hausa sounds that do not exist in Arabic.

10 John Edward Philips, “Hausa in the Twentieth Century: An Overview,” *Sudanic Africa*, 15 (2004), p. 55–84.

11 Ibid.



FIGURE 2 *Jaridar Alfjir* (Alfjir newspaper; this page is from the inaugural edition published on October 1, 1981). Originally a daily, *Alfjir*, published by Triumph Publishing Company in Kano, is a Hausa ‘Ajami newspaper that is currently published twice weekly. It uses the Mashriqi writing style.

For example, in addition to the three Arabic vowels ‘a’, ‘i’, and ‘u’, Hausa has ‘e’ and ‘o’. Hausa also distinguishes between short and long vowels. As in Arabic, the Hausa “a” is indicated by a *fatha* (ـَ); the long “aa” is indicated by a *fatha* and an *alif* (ـَا). The “i” is indicated by a *kasra* (ـِ); the long “ii” by a *kasra* and a *yaa* (ـِـي). The “o” and “u” are both indicated by a *damma* (ـُ) and the long “oo” and “uu” by the *damma* and *wāw* (ـُـو). For the “e” vowel, Hausa ‘Ajami employs



FIGURE 3 On each Nigerian currency bill, the denomination appears in Hausa ‘Ajami. Hausa is the only language other than English that appears on currency bills and, tellingly, is written in ‘Ajami, as on this 500 Naira note (*Naira Dari Biyar*) from 2016.



FIGURE 4 The first currency bills in independent Ghana featured Hausa ‘Ajami to denote the denomination, as on this ten shilling note (*Sulai Goma*) from 1963.

the *Imālah/Imala* (also called *Yamala* or *Yemala* in Hausa). This can take the form of a large dot under a letter or a small *alif* with a dot under it.

Hausa ‘Ajami, like most West African ‘Ajami scripts, is based on the classical Warsh Arabic script and not on the Modern Standard Arabic (MSA) script. The letter *fā* in the MSA script has the dot placed above **ف**; in the Warsh-based ‘Ajami tradition, the dot is placed below **ڤ**. While the letter *qāf* in MSA has two



FIGURE 5 Political campaign poster for A'isha Ibrahim Dan-Kani, who ran in the 2019 General Elections for a seat in the Federal House of Representatives in the Dala Federal Constituency, Kano State. Dan-Kani ran under the platform of the People's Redemption Party (PRP). A photo of the late Malam Aminu Kano, famous populist political leader, appears below A'isha's on the political poster.

dots above ق, in the Warsh-based 'Ajamī writing system it is written with only one dot above ف.

As with *boko's* adaptations of the Latin script, Hausa 'Ajamī has adapted Arabic characters to represent sounds present in Hausa, but not in Arabic. *Boko* has adapted the Latin script by introducing "hooked letters" ɓ and ɗ (laryngealized implosives), ƙ (glottalized ejective), and the laryngealized y and ƙy, a combination of the two. Phonemes represented in *boko* as kw and ts (also a glottalized ejective) have also been the subject of adaptation of the Arabic script. The *boko* ɓ is represented in 'Ajamī by (ب); the ɗ by (ط); and the ƙ by ق.

The **ky** is represented by (ق); the **kw** is represented by (ك), and the **y** is represented by (ى).

Although these modifications are employed by most Hausa 'Ajamī users, there are three varieties of Hausa 'Ajamī writing that we have termed *basilectal*, *mesolectal*, and *acrolectal* varieties. The basilectal variety refers to the one used by the masses to communicate in reading and writing. It is the variety that is at the bottom of the literacy pyramid and is used by the majority of people in their daily activities. The users of this basilectal 'Ajamī writing system do not have advanced literacy skills. Those with the *mesolectal* (intermediate level) of literacy fall between the highly literate elites and those at the bottom of the literacy pyramid. The users of the *acrolectal* variety are the literati class or the highly educated elites, who are at the top of the literacy hierarchy. These people are usually bilingual and bi-literate in classical Arabic and Hausa 'Ajamī. Their writing is generally strongly influenced by Arabic, with more consistency in the spelling of Hausa words. This group includes those whose speech and writing is sometimes described as *malamanci*, or the language of the learned.¹²

While Hausa 'Ajamī users have improvised, modifying and enriching the Arabic script to write their own language, there is also the subtle enrichment of Islam and its traditions as localized by the Hausa people, as well as other groups that use 'Ajamī. The Islamic faith, traditions, arts, and the Arabic script have been appropriated and enriched by Muslims around the world in both tangible and subtle ways since the seventh century.¹³

Presentation of the Collection

The 20 Hausa manuscripts featured in *Ajamī Literature and the Expansion of Literacy and Islam: The Case of West Africa* cover a wide range of subject areas and are drawn from a few different collections. Most of the manuscripts in the collection are in verse form. They deal with ethics and social commentary, history and historical figures, and esoteric sciences. They include Islamic praise poems and poems providing moral and practical guidance.¹⁴

12 Louis Brenner and Murray Last, "The Role of Language in West African Islam," *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute*, 55/4 (1985), p. 432–446.

13 For details on the enrichment process, see "Ajāmization of Islam in Africa," co-ed. Mustapha H. Kurfi, *Islamic Africa*, 8, 1–2 (2017), p. 1–216.

14 For the NEH project's Hausa collections, see: <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/>.

All the manuscripts have been transcribed into *boko* and translated into both English and French. Complete metadata is provided for each. Eight of the 20 manuscripts have accompanying videos that feature recitations by 'Ajamī users and their images. These provide a sense of the context in which these poems are performed orally. Many of these poems are well known and loved in Hausaland.

Twelve of our twenty manuscripts are drawn from the collection of Umar Falke (1893–1962) which is now in the Herskovits Library at Northwestern University. Falke (see Figure 6) was a 20th-century merchant-scholar from Kano, a learned Hausa man who traveled widely and amassed a sizable collection of 'Ajamī manuscripts. Although clearly an extraordinary man, Umar Falke was at the same time quite “ordinary” in that he, like many other Hausa scholars, also exercised his own livelihood.¹⁵ This is typical among the Hausa. We see it with Aminu of Kano, the author of our featured poem, *Mai Sana'a ba ya Tsiya* (A Person with a Livelihood Will Never be Destitute),¹⁶ who notes in his postscript that he is not only a poet but earns his living as a tailor. Umar Falke lived during the reign of Abdullahi Bayero, who was born in 1881, and reigned as Emir of Kano until his death in 1953. This was a time of flourishing for scholars, and Falke was among the most notable. One of our manuscripts is a praise poem for Emir Abdullahi Bayero.¹⁷

The first manuscript from the Falke collection is a personal letter to Malam Lawan Kalarawi,¹⁸ a prominent Islamic cleric in 20th-century Kano. The letter asks Malam Kalarawi a question about the proper way of proceeding in a child's naming ceremony, as well as a question regarding prayer, demonstrating the ways in which 'Ajamī is used to exchange information and seek guidance from

15 An excellent source on the life of Umar Falke is Mohammed Abdoulaye, “A Hausa Scholar-Trader and His Library Collection: The Case Study of Umar Falke of Kano, Nigeria,” PhD dissertation, Department of History, Northwestern University, 1978.

16 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. “A Person with a Livelihood Will Never Be Destitute.” <http://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/paden-438-mai-sanaa-ba-ya-tsiya/>.

17 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. “A Poem in Honor of the Emir of Kano.” <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/falke-2729-wakar-sarkin-kano/>.

18 Fallou Ngom, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. “A Letter to Malam Kalarawi.” <http://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/falke-0718-wasika-zuwa-ga-malam-lawan-kalarawi/>.

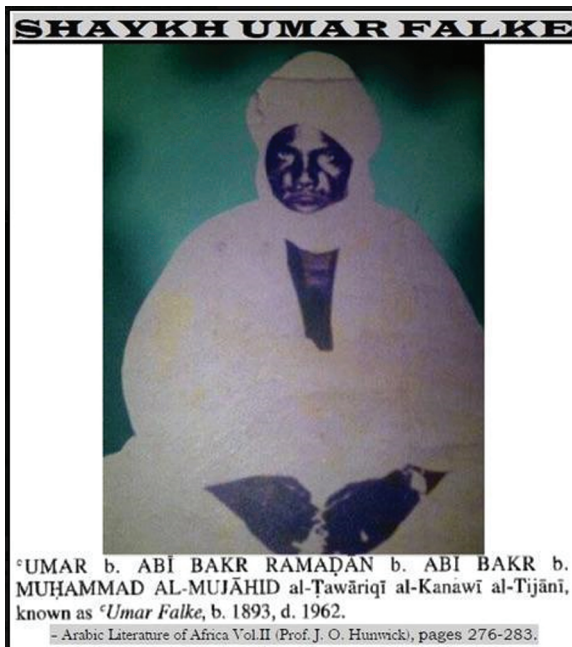


FIGURE 6 Umar Falke (1893–1962).

teachers. Among the other manuscripts from the Falke collection are poems commenting on contemporary social problems: the practice of offering pre-nuptial gifts to the bride and her family; the dangers of adultery; the importance of supportive relationships with friends and family; the wily nature of the prostitute; and the generally declining character of our times. The manuscript *Wattan Ajamawa* (The Months in Hausa ‘Ajami)¹⁹ lays out the four seasons and the seven planets associated with each, while *Hisabi ya Saukake* (Numerology Made Simple)²⁰ provides us with an introductory course on Hausa numerology.

Two of our manuscripts are lithographed texts from the collection of John Paden (also now in the Herskovits Library). The first, *Mutum Cuta Ne, Marar*

19 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, Babacar Dieng, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. “The Months and Seasons.” <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/falke-1107-wattanin-ajamawa/>.

20 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. “Numerology Made Simple.” <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/falke-1284-hisabi-a-saukake/>.

Magani (The Human Being Is an Incurable Disease),²¹ is a morality lesson that takes the form of an amusing but pointed conversation between the author and Sir Hawk, who shares his own and other birds' observations about humankind. He interrogates the poet about the inconsistencies, meanness, vanity, duplicity, and hypocrisy that the birds have observed in humans. Finally, the poet is obliged to concede that the Hawk has a point and urges his readers/listeners to take heed. The second poem from the Paden collection, described in detail below, is *Mai Sana'a ba ya Tsiya*, a poem that extolls the virtues of hard work, entreating the listener to take up an occupation.

Our 20 manuscripts also include a number of specifically Islamic texts. The three poems by Nana Asma'u, the daughter of Usman dan Fodio, as well as one by dan Fodio himself are poems that inform listeners of the precepts of pious life and entreat them to adhere to these precepts so as to attain salvation. Nana Asma'u, like her father, was a prolific writer. She is also famous for her work educating women and girls. The *'yan-taru* movement, a popular education model developed by Nana Asma'u that remains in use in Nigeria and among groups of African American Muslim women, consists of training women as teachers who in turn teach other women and girls basic precepts of Muslim life.²²

The first poem, *Godaben Gaskiya* (The Authentic Path),²³ is essentially a praise poem to the Prophet Muhammad, describing his many excellent qualities, including compassion and trustworthiness. The poem warns readers to abstain from sin and notes the specific punishments for various types of sins. The poem closes with a description of the wonders of paradise. The second poem in this collection, *Tabbat Hakika* (The Absolute Truth),²⁴ is another poem about the Prophet Muhammad and details various aspects of his character that warrant emulation. The poem emphasizes the importance of knowledge and urges listeners to seek after it and to practice justice. The

21 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "The Human Being Is an Incurable Disease." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/paden-047-mutum-cuta-ne-mamar-magani>.

22 For more on this, see Mack and Boyd, *One Woman's Jihad*, particularly chapter 6.

23 Fallou Ngom, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "The Authentic Path." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/hunwick-95-1-godaben-gaskiya/>.

24 Fallou Ngom, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "The Absolute Truth 1." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/hunwick-95-2-tabbat-haqiqan-1/>.

third and final poem in this collection, *Wa'azi* (Admonition),²⁵ is a short poem that outlines the good deeds that will pave the way to salvation.

Infiraji (Consolation) is among the religious texts in our collection. It is a three-part poem by the famous 20th-century blind poet Malam Aliyu Namangi, a native of Zaria, in Northern Nigeria. Greatly influenced by his study of Sufism and asceticism, Dr. Namangi felt he had a duty to impart the knowledge he had acquired to others. Among the many poems he composed, *Infiraji* is the most famous. Originally written in Hausa 'Ajami, it was later transcribed into *boko* and published by the Gaskiya Corporation. Since the poet was himself blind, various scribes transcribed his recitations, so a number of versions exist. The version we are using was transcribed by Yaqubu Gusau. The poem was distributed by Alhaji Ahmad At-Tijjani. *Infiraji* is comprised of three parts: *Majidu* (The Glorious),²⁶ *Gargadi* (Warning),²⁷ and *Tsaida Sunna* (Following the Sunna).²⁸ The first extolls the virtues of the Prophet, the second warns of what awaits sinners in the hereafter, and the third exhorts listeners to hold fast to the teachings of the Prophet.

Analysis of "Mai Sana'a ba ya Tsiya"

As part of the description of our corpus, we provide a close analysis of one of our favorites, *Mai Sana'a ba ya Tsiya* (A Person with a Livelihood Will Never Be Destitute). This is also among those for which we provide video recitations.

This poem, composed by Malam Aminu Na Baban-Inda, Yalwa-Kano, underlines a central Hausa value: hard work and doing one's part in society. The poem is especially directed at youth and portrays the character of a person without a livelihood very negatively. The poet uses a range of narrative devices to demonstrate that having a livelihood (a job) is necessary for a meaningful life in a competitive and dynamic Hausa society. The poet encourages everyone to have an occupation, highlighting its benefits. He refers to prominent

25 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "Nana Asmā'u: Admonition." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/hunwick-95-3-nana-asmaa-u-waazi/>.

26 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "The Glorious (Majidu)." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/infiraji-1-majidu/>.

27 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "Warning (Gargadi)." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/infiraji-2-gargadi/>.

28 Ngom *et al.*, "Warning (Gargadi)."



FIGURE 7 Abdurrashid Mai Asayyaro, whose recitation of “Mai Sana’a ba ya Tsiya” is included in our collection. Photo by Mustapha H. Kurfi.

people, including prophets, as models worthy of emulation. The poet also offers a variety of examples of negative traits common among those without a livelihood, traits that keep them in perpetual destitution. As with almost all Hausa ‘Ajamī poems, Aminu’s *Mai Sana’a* opens and closes with a doxology. The poem starts out by invoking the name of Allah, followed by a prayer for Prophet Muhammad.

In essence, according to the poet, a person without a livelihood is lazy, hopeless, famished, envious, guilty, impecunious, petrified, and without ambition. Conversely, a person with a livelihood is hardworking, industrious, smart, confident, celebrated, notable, eminent, and distinguished. This person stands out, is revered, has high self-esteem, and is worthy of emulation. To emphasize this point, the poet cites several examples of prominent people that society looks up to as pious, humble, and indefatigable—each of whom had a livelihood. These include Prophets Muhammad, Abraham, David, and Zachariah. It is interesting that the poet cites the names of some prophets with their specific livelihoods in order to urge his audience to engage in some form of livelihood so as to be self-reliant and contribute to society.

Nevertheless, the poet does not recommend just any means of earning a livelihood. The youth, especially, are warned against theft, gossip, hypocrisy, and envy. According to the poet, the get-rich-quick approach adopted by some does not lead to reliable sources of livelihood. Instead, those who choose such approaches will end up running errands for politicians and going to the media to fabricate lies in order to make money. Such people, he argues, earn a

living from gossiping and acts of hypocrisy. Although composed many decades ago, what the poem describes is happening in contemporary Hausaland, and especially in Kano, where the poet was living. To crown it all, the poet cited himself as a good reference as someone who has a livelihood. He said, "I am a tailor—I have a livelihood."

The poet also discourages sympathizing with lazy people who refuse to engage in any legitimate livelihood. "If they come to you begging, do not give to them! A person without good character is not to be assisted; On behalf of Allah, one gives to the destitute; And to the poor who have good character." This word of caveat is crucial because if those who are hardworking and have a livelihood patronize those who are lazy and without a livelihood, this is tantamount to endorsement, approval, and condoning the behaviors of the destitute.

The poet draws our attention to core Hausa values: self-reliance, engaging in a legitimate livelihood, and doing one's part in society. He asks his audience to refrain from idleness and laziness and to model their behavior after virtuous and eminent people such as the prophets, all of whom had livelihoods. He warns the youth against engaging in certain acts that are outside of what can be considered a reasonable means of earning one's livelihood.

Conclusion

Having access to these 'Ajami manuscripts and their *boko* versions, as well as English and French translations, gives us a window into Hausa society otherwise unavailable to those who are not literate in 'Ajami. Being able to see the manuscripts and to hear some of them recited adds another dimension to our understanding of the texts. Through these texts, we are able to experience the rhythms of Hausa poetic forms, of which we have several examples throughout the corpus.

We are also exposed to the exquisite Hausa sense of humor, as in *Mutum Cuta Ne*²⁹ or *Wakar Karuwa*,³⁰ where we see the ways in which the Hausa approach human foibles. We meet three historical figures revered by the Hausa who have played key roles in different aspects of Hausa life and

29 Ngom *et al.*, "The Human Being Is an Incurable Disease."

30 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "The Harlot's Song." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/falke-1486-wakar-karuwa/>.

history: Ahmad Tijani (1735–1815), founder of the Tijaniyya Sufi order (in *Yabo ga Ahmad Tijani*³¹); Sultan Attahiru I, who reigned as the twelfth and final caliph of the Sokoto Empire before its take-over by the British (in *Wakar Nasara*³²); and Abdullahi Bayero who reigned as Emir of Kano from 1926 to 1953 (in *Wakar Sarkin Kano*³³). And we see each of these figures in their historical and international context.

Core Hausa values like hard work, sharing one's goods and good fortune with the less fortunate, looking after one's family and friends, and living a pious life are recurring subjects in our corpus. These intersect with poems on Islamic life and values. The poems by Nana Asma'u, as well as *Infiraji*, provide roadmaps for a virtuous life that will be rewarded in the hereafter. These manuscripts are just a small sample of the universe of Hausa 'Ajamī writing. It is our hope that it will spark interest and further research into this rich tradition.

-
- 31 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "Eulogy for Ahmad Tijani." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/falke-0695-yabo-ga-ahmad-tijani/>.
 - 32 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "A Poem on the British." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/falke-1569-wakar-nasara/>.
 - 33 Fallou Ngom, Jennifer Yanco, Mustapha Hashim Kurfi, Garba Zakari, Babacar Dieng, Daivi Rodima-Taylor, and Rebecca Shereikis. 2022. "A Poem in Honor of the Emir of Kano." <https://sites.bu.edu/nehajami/the-four-languages/hausa/hausa-manuscripts/falke-2729-wakar-sarkin-kano/>.