

Chapter 3

Northernism in Northern Nigerian Literature: A Study of al-Yāqūtī's '*Abarātul-Amal*'

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Introduction

Northern Nigeria as a geopolitical entity was, prior to the amalgamation, an autonomous division within what is known today as Nigeria. It was distinctly different from other parts of the country. The region had independent customs, foreign relations, educational system and security structures before it became a British protectorate between 1900 and 1913. Although the advent of Islam influenced most of the prevalent customs in this part of the country, the diverse ethnic groups coming from different socio-cultural, linguistic and religious backgrounds have what can be referred to as an identity or ideology. This identity or ideology is expressed politically, socially, economically, culturally and linguistically through various means.

However, to preserve this identity, the role of literature takes centre stage. The reason is not far-fetched, as against certain opinions that literature, like other arts, is a mere play of imagination, it preserves the ideals of people, connects individuals with the larger society and relieves writers and readers from the pressure of emotion. This paper, therefore, is an attempt to survey the expressions related to Northern sentiments, norms and values as contained in Abdul-Azeez Muhammad Salman al-Yaqūtī '*Abarātul-Amal*' (Tears of Hope): The paper also attempts to prove that literature in the North reflects the

socio-cultural and political ideology of Northern Nigeria regardless of the linguistic and religious diversities.

Northernism in Selected Literary Works

In conceptualising the term 'Northernism' one may need to ask what approach is needed to view it: political, economic, linguistic, cultural, etc. A dictionary meaning of the term, as found in *Encarta Dictionaries* (2009) comes with the linguistic dimension. It is "a pronunciation, word or other linguistic construction characteristic of the northern region of a country." Consequently, Northernism, in this context, can be defined as beliefs, norms and values characteristic of the northern part of a country or region, Nigeria in this context. By implication, Northernism is a concept that depicts the identities, beliefs, norms and values prevalent in the Northern part of Nigeria commonly referred to as 'Arewa'.

This concept has for long been expressed in different forms, such as symbols designed into facades, bright and colourful palaces since the existence of the nomenclature 'Arewa' as a geopolitical entity and value. It has culminated into the formation and founding of political, economic and socio-cultural fora to harness both human and natural resources for greater synergy among those who identify themselves with the region. The formation of Northern People's Congress (NPC) in June 1949, the successor organisation, Arewa Consultative Forum (ACF), in 2000, the forum of Northern States, the Northern Nigeria Development Company (NNDC), the Arewa Hotels, the Arewa Textile Industry etc. are attempts to actualise the Northern dream. However, the choice of 'Northernism' to represent the concept instead of 'Arewa' as used in this paper, is born out of the fact that the latter refers to North or Northern, and this might not completely portray the philosophy in the former.

Although, literary scholars and critics have shown little concern in expressing these norms and values in their writings, a few of them have consciously or unconsciously done just that. For this study, three literary works on poetry are examined. These are: *Poems of Black Africa* edited and introduced by Wole Soyinka (1981), *Khalajātun wa Nabadhāt* (Emotions and Heartbeats) by Ibrahim Saeed Ahmad al-Gambari (2012), and *Danladi's Doggerels* by Saliu Danladi Yusuf (2010).

1. *Poems of Black Africa*

This literary work is an African Writer's Series (171) book and a collection of two hundred and forty-one poems written by Africans under various titles of African perspectives. In this collection, a poem titled 'The Fulani Creation Story' is the only poem that appears to express a concept that is attributed to Northern Nigeria. It is a traditional Fulani oral poem rendered into English. It sums up the myth surrounding the creation of the world, according to the Fulani belief. Though this might not be common to all Northerners in Nigeria, it constitutes part of the Northern ideology. Below are a few lines of the poem:

At the beginning, there was a huge drop of milk.
Then Doondari came and he created the stone.
The stone created iron;
And iron created fire;
And fire created water (pp. 57-58).

It goes on in that manner to the creation of air, man, blindness, sleep, worry and death, then concludes thus:

Doondari descended for the third time,
And he came as Gueno, the eternal one,
And *Gueno* defeated death.

This poem suggests that the first thing that ever existed on earth is milk, which is associated with the Fulani cattle. With this belief, the Fulanis lay claim to *Gueno's* recognition of their profession of cattle rearing and milking the cow, which preceded the existence of man himself. The poem also explains the Fulani belief in the 'Eternal One' called *Gueno*, the first and the last.

2. *Khalajātun wa Nabadhāt (Emotions and Heartbeats)*

Written in Arabic the work is a collection of poems written in Arabic by Ibrahim Saeed Ahmad al-Gambari (Ibrahim, 2012) on several diverse but topical issues. One of these poems expresses a blameworthy habit common to the northern part of Nigeria: the act of street begging or the *Almajiri* phenomenon. The poem is titled '*Ilā*

Maqarrish-Sheikh (To the Abode of the Sheikh), and portrays the writer's emotional reaction towards this act as these few lines make clear (pp. 40-41):

ت مينة بل وهي أبهاها	خلال رحلتنا إني أشاهد آيا
ن صورهم بالفقر شواها	على الطريق يا لعيشهم و
كانت صغيرهم تنشق رجلاها	أما الصغير فحاف ثم أكبرهم
عونا فألهم رب النفس تقواها	يعد أيديهم نحوي ويسألني
نتنا أيا أسفا فالجوع دساها	وكان ثوبهم طمرا وجلدهم

During our journey, certainly I witnessed;
 Clear proofs, yet the most magnificent.
 On the roads, how pitiful is their lives;
 And their appearance engulfed in poverty.
 As for the young (male), and the most elderly as well;
 The legs of the young (female) are tattered.
 Extending their hands towards me begging;
 For assistance, and the Lord of the soul inspired its fear.
 And their cloths rags, and their skin;
 Smelling bad, regrettably hunger instills corruption.

This writer expresses the menace of *almajiri* phenomenon which is a typical scene on streets, major and minor roads, as well as market places of Northern Nigeria. The poem was written after the writer's journey to Sokoto (the seat of Caliphate), where he experienced activities of the *almajiris*, a scene that is inimical to the whole of Northern Nigeria.

3. Danladi's Doggerels

This is yet another collection of poems composed by Saliu Danladi Yusuf (Yusuf, 2010). It contains about sixty poems under various titles. Many Northern norms and values are expressed in some of these poems, such as the use of '*Haba*'! '*Haba*'!! a Hausa word which usage is common among Northerners, sometimes to disprove or reject an action. Danladi while reflecting on Vancouver, states:

Vancouver?

Haba! Haba!!

The banality of the venality (pp. 30-31).

The word '*Magajis*' is also used in another poem under the title 'My Village Well' '*Magaji*' is a compound head and in some towns in the Northern Nigeria, represents a traditional title.

In addition to the above, while tracing the origin of Ilorin he expressed the fact that the turban is the crest of the regalia of the Emir in Ilorin, and characteristic of Northern Emirs, as opposed to the crown which is prevalent in the Southern and Eastern parts of Nigeria:

Turban is the crest of his regalia.

From the time of his forebears.

Whose head was a flag-bearer.

In the Southernmost frontier (pp. 37-38).

He also expresses a norm common among children in the Northern part of the country; that is the creation of temporary mosques with the use of stones within compounds during the months of Ramadan. This appears in his poem under the title 'Ramadan' when he says:

In thy anticipation,

Children, now deft masons.

In a frenzy.

Plant the foundation stones

Of a temporary but ethereal

House of God (pp. 46-47)

These attempts are no doubt embodiments of some aspects of the norms and values of Northern Nigeria, and a reflection on the activities of the people that distinguish them as an entity. The work '*Abarātul-ʿAmal*' by Abdul-Azeez al-Yāqūtī is another work of literature in which Northernism is expressed in different ways.

Abdul-Azeez al-Yāqūtī's Biography

The author, Abdul-Azeez Muhammad Salman al-Yāqūtī is a native of the ancient city of Ilorin, the Kwara State Capital. Born in Ilorin

to a family of repute in the 1970s, he grew up under the tutelage of his father, who later sent him to learn Qur'ānic recitation under the late Sheikh Muhammad Thānī Akanbi Olosan of Adangba area in the city. Interestingly, the combined efforts of his father and the late Sheikh developed in the young Abdul-Azeez good moral values such as sincerity, trust, good social relations and interest in learning.

His Educational Background

Abdul-Azeez started his journey towards attaining greatness in the field of Arabic and Islamic Studies at *Dārus-Sa 'ādah* for Arabic and Islamic Education, Onikijikpa, in Omoda area of Ilorin, where he obtained his Elementary School Certificate. Afterwards, he enrolled at *Dārul-Ulūm*, Ilorin, from where he bagged his *I'dādiyyah* (preparatory) and *Thānawīyyah* (secondary) certificates in 1997 and 2000, respectively with excellent performance. He was at the Faculty of Education and Humanities, Adewole, Ilorin (now al-Hikmah University) from where he obtained a Diploma Certificate in Arabic and Islamic Studies in 2001. In that same year, he gained a scholarship to study Arabic Language and Literature in Abomey-Kalavi University, Republic of Benin, from where he obtained his Bachelor of Arts degree in 2005. This scholarship did not come on a platter of gold, rather, it was a result of hard work, prayers and a great favour from the Almighty Allah, being the only successful candidate from Kwara State after the admission screening process in that year.

During his National Youth Service Corps programme in Zamfara State between 2006 and 2007, he continued his educational pursuit by getting himself enrolled at the Federal College of Education, Kano, for a Postgraduate Diploma in Education, which he completed in 2007. Abdul-Azeez al-Yāqūtī went further in his quest for higher education and was admitted into Nasarawa State University, Keffi, in 2010 for a Master of Arts degree in Arabic Language and Literature. This, he completed in 2013.

His Literary Works

Abdul-Azeez al-Yāqūtī is a talented and inspired literary artist who has made great and ingenious contributions to literature in both

prose and poetry. He has written occasional poems on various topics that were either presented orally or published, such as: '*Ma'as-sahābahal-Kirām*', in *Majallah at-Tarīq*, '*Ayyām al-Ijāzah*', in *Hasād al-Ma'dubah* and other poems in *al-bīnīniyyāt* (Collection of Poems by Nigerian Students in Benin Republic). His literary productions are epitome of wisdom, imagination, clarity and mastery of the Arabic language.

The work under study ('*Abarātul-'Amal*') is a remarkable achievement. In addition to this, the writer has some unpublished works that include '*Ad-da'nul-Aswad*' or 'The Black Sheep' (a story book), '*As-sadā*' or 'The Echo' (a collection of poems) and '*Wahyul-Khayāl*' or 'Inspiration of Imagination' (a collection of poems). He also has to his credit a number of scholarly articles published in reputable journals.

Synopsis of '*Abarātul-'Amal* (Tears of Hope)

The story is an artistic autobiography written in Arabic. It is a story of one hundred and forty-five pages and narrated in twenty-one parts. Major characters in the story include '*Na'īm*' (the main actor), his parents, Ayinla (an uncle to *Na'īm* and a weaver), his teachers in Arabic Language and Literature as well as Islamic Studies (Shaykh Adam al-Ilori and others), his two close friends (not named), an old devout woman, colleagues on a trip to Republic of Benin (not named) and Baba Qye.

The story commences with a beautiful description of the universe and the beautiful things it contains. This is followed immediately by glorifications and adorations to Almighty God who has subjugated other creatures for the benefit of mankind, and a brief description of the main character (*Na'īm*).

The writer attempts to give a picture of years of struggle and tribulations in the life of '*Na'īm*' who grows up under the shackles of poverty. He starts as an apprentice in the weaving industry, an occupation of some of his relatives, and later as a hawker, selling chewing sticks concurrently with his primary school and Qur'ānic Studies.

The story also portrays the life of 'Na 'īm' as a student of Arabic at *Dārus-Sa'ādah* and *Dārul-Ulūm*, Ilorin, respectively and records the encouragement received from his mentor, Shaykh Adam al-Ilori, and other teachers, and the challenges he faces (health and economic) throughout his struggle towards becoming great in life. One major challenge he faces is how to secure admission into the university which, to him, is for the rich and influential. However, hope is rekindled as he comes to know that a Libyan University situated in Abomey Kalavi, Republic of Benin, grants scholarships to students wishing to study Arabic and Islamic Studies from within and outside the country. This, of course, requires travelling to the campus to take part in both oral and written examinations which determines, whether the grant would be his. Preparing for the trip constitutes another crisis on its own, trying to raise fund, and troubles along the way. All the same, he succeeds in crossing the hurdle and returns home safely; and finally emerges to be the only candidate from Kwara State to succeed in winning the scholarship. With this, Na 'īm's dream is actualised, even though there are obstacles he has to contend with during the process. He graduates from the University in flying colours.

Meanwhile, the tears in the title of the story are a usual thing in the life of 'Na 'īm' as a distressed young man. His father is also prone to shedding tears on simple matters; and as such crying is considered to be hereditary so much that their house is called '*Ojuekun*' (weeping face). Although Na'īm's were not those of pain or grief, rather they are those of happiness and hope, born out of praise and glorification to God Almighty who see him through his *thānawiiyyah* (secondary) education in Arabic studies.

Northernism as Expressed in '*Abarātul-Amal*'

As stated earlier, Northernism as a concept is the standard pattern of behaviour that is considered normal in the Northern part of the country. It is also a set of common socio-cultural beliefs about what is right and wrong and what is important in life. These are the norms and values that are typical to Northern Nigeria. The concept is

expressed by the writer, either consciously or otherwise, at different levels, going by the context of the story as discussed below:

a. *Physical Features*

The cover page of the literary work has three distinct features that are typical to the Northern part of Nigeria. These features are:

- I: The Northern symbol or logo, otherwise known as the Northern Knot, which appears at the top right hand corner of the page. The logo is found in almost every part of Northern Nigeria, placed conspicuously in public and some private buildings, on signposts and even included in the logos of some Northern States to express affinity with this part of the country.



Fig. 1: Northern Knot



Fig. 2: horsemanwith

- II: The horseman with full regalia riding on a well-dressed horse appears at the mid bottom of the cover page. This is a common characteristic of most parts of the Northern part of Nigeria, particularly during ceremonies like the 'Durbar' and other traditional celebrations. It is considered a royal right of traditional rulers, and one of the Northern identities.

b. *Norms and Values*

The Northern norms and values expressed in the story are as follows:

I - Recognition and respect for the leaders

In this part of the world, it is an accepted practice that people duly recognise and pay respect to their leaders no matter the situation. This has been expressed in the story while recognising Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello, the Sardauna of Sokoto and first Premier of Northern Nigeria, as a political leader, linking him to notable figures such Ibn Khaldūn as a model of History, al-Ghazālī as an icon of philosophy. al-Yāqūtī (2015, p. 18) stated:

وجهباز البراعة، المتخذ ابن خلدون أمثلة في التاريخ، والإمام
السيوطي أنموذجاً في التأليف، والغزالي قبلة في الفلسفة، وحسن
البناء قدوة في الجهاد، وأحمد بلو [سردونا] إماماً في السياسة.

and (hoping to be) skillful, and taking Ibn Khaldūn a model in historiography, Imām As-sayūtī an example in authorship, al-Ghazālī a target in philosophy, Hasan Albannā a model in jihād (struggle) and Ahmadu Bello [Sardauna] a leader in politics ...

Alhaji Sir Ahmadu Bello's leadership qualities made him an icon in the whole of Northern Nigeria, his legacies indelible and records unbeaten. He is therefore being immortalised by way of recognising his roles in building this part of the country and respecting his personality regardless of religious and ethnic affinity.

2 - Prayer Sessions at Palaces

It is the norm by scholars to organise and arrange prayer sessions at the palaces of Emirs and District Heads at certain periods. During these sessions, the whole of the Qur'ān is recited and supplications made for the success of the leader and for peace and tranquillity in his domain. This sometimes takes days to be completed. al-Yāqūtī (2015, p. 34) expresses this common norm in these words:

استدعى الإمام طائفة متميزين من الزملاء لجلسة دعاء في قصر
أمير المؤمنين الحادي عشر للإمارة الإسلامية بالمدينة.

and the Imam invited a selected group of colleagues for a prayer session at the palace of the 11th leader of the faithfuls of the Islamic Emirate in the city.

3. *Respect for Privacy of Women*

Women are accorded respect and are guarded against assault. Foreigners are therefore not allowed to intrude on their privacy, a norm that makes many Northerners to keep their women in seclusion. This means that any person, particularly visitors need to wait for permission to be granted before entering upon a woman. This norm is expressed in the story by al-Yāqūtī (2015, p. 40) as:

وبعد لأي من الوقت، أذن لهم بالدخول إلى الباب الأول قبل
النزول إلى محراب الشيخة.

and after sometime, they were granted permission to enter through the first door, before being allowed into the (prayer) niche of the old woman.

4 - *Traditional Security Outfit for the Emirs*

It has been the norms and values of the North that traditional rulers possess their traditional security outfit that is easily recognised through their multi-coloured dress. This group of men guard the Emir while at home and abroad. This security outfit serves as personal guards providing security afore and behind them. This is expressed by al-Yāqūtī (2015, p. 35) in the following words:

فدخل الأمير وأمامه ووراءه عدد من عساكره في أزيائهم الرسمية
المتلونة.

And the Emir entered and afore and behind him are his military dressed in their official multi-coloured dresses.

5 – Strong Belief in Predestination

It is not strange to anybody in Nigeria that people of Northern Nigeria (*Arewa*) are known for their strong belief in predestination. The Hausas are predominantly used to the words '*Allah ne yakawo*', meaning 'it's from Allah'. Therefore, the issue of attributing any misfortune or calamity to any creature would not arise. At a time '*Na'īm*' faces a health challenge and whenever he rubbed over his head during ablution for the dawn prayer, he would observe reddishness on both hands. Could it be blood gushing out of his body as an attack by demons or magicians? He develops a strong faith that whatever it is, God Almighty has the full knowledge and He would see him through the problem. This doctrine is expressed in the story by al-Yāqūtī (2015, p. 65) in this manner:

أنه متى مسح رأسه عند الوضوء لصلاة الصبح يرى أن يديه
تتلونان بلون أحمر!

and whenever he (*Na'īm*) rubs his head during ablution for the dawn prayer he sees that his hands are coloured in red!

رأى أن سداد التخطيط أمام هذه المشكلة ملازمة الأذكار،
مزاوجا بالصيام.

he decided that the only plan against this problem is to be in constant supplication supported with fasting.

6 - The Language

The Hausa language, considered as language of *Arewa*, is common in usage among the people of Northern Nigeria. Some languages are already endangered at the expense of Hausa, which has influenced and continues to influence many other languages in the region. Cases of Hausa interference has been documented in most of these languages. Regardless of religious and ethnic differences, the language has become an identity. It has been noticed that some traditional titles of Hausa

background are not limited to Hausa/Muslim communities but rather, extend to non-Hausas outside the core Hausa States and even within some Christian dominated areas in the Northern Nigeria. For instance, in Nasarawa state, the Wakilin Agwatashi (Solomon Adokwe) and the MutawallinLafia (Daudakigbu) are non-Hausas and non-Muslims. Similarly, Jeremiah Oseni doubles as the Sardauna of Plateau and Wakilin Lantang, while Professor Jerry Gana is KakakinNupe. And in Adamawa State, the titles of Magatakardan Adamawa, Masanin Adamawa and Talban Adamawa are currently held by James Barka, Andrew P. Sawa and Emmanuel Mbuala respectively. This is an indication that a great importance is attached to the language in this part of the country. Such importance is manifested in the story, as scores of Hausa words are used in it. These include:

- [تو] 'to' (A word of acceptance and approval, meaning 'ok')

This word in Hausa is mostly used in Northern Nigeria to express one's acceptance of an issue, particularly during conversations, to mean 'ok'. In *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (2005), 'ok' could mean 'alright; acceptable; permission etc. It is also used to check that somebody agrees with you or understands you, or to stop people arguing or criticising you, or used to attract somebody's attention or as an exclamation. Basically, all these connotations of this word apply to the Hausa 'to'. The word is used in the story by an old devout woman to whom *Na'im* and his school friends present a symbolic gift for her concern over their future and prayers for their success in life. She says: "'to', may God reward you in abundance" (p. 62), showing her acceptance of the present. Sometimes, it is lengthened as 'toooo' just as 'ok'.

- [سَرِكِين مَالَمِي] 'sarikin malami' (Head of Islamic scholars)

The use of this expression in Hausa language is common in cities, towns and villages of Northern Nigeria, particularly among the Muslim communities, where it is a title given to the head of the learned in Islam as a mark of honour.

- [تُوُو] 'A meal made of maize/corn flour'

This is a kind of meal that is prepared from corn flour or from rice. It is a staple food in most parts of Northern Nigeria. Even though the meal is now known in other parts of the country, it is most common among Northern communities. The writer uses this word at the premises of *Na 'īm's* school (*Dārul-Ulūm*, Isale Koto, Ilorin) on a day the students voluntarily contributed for a new block of classrooms, including those that had already registered at the 'tuwo' restaurant (p. 62).

- [بَا لَيْفِي] 'baa laifi' (No problem)

This expression is typical with people of the northern part of Nigeria. It is used to express satisfaction about an issue or to express unhappiness over an issue, though this largely depends on the context. The expression is used in the story by the sheikh who teaches *Na 'īm* the Qur'ān when he informs the former of his plan to travel to the Republic of Benin for admission screening (p. 78).

Conclusion

Northernism as a concept and ideology has been the focus of this paper, with particular reference to the way it is expressed by literary writers, and using *'Abarātul-'Amal* (Tears of Hope) by Abdul-Azeez Muhammad Salman al-Yāqūtī as a case study. The paper attempted to survey how Northern ideology in terms of norms and values are expressed in this literary work. In this process, the concepts of ideology and Northernism are briefly discussed. Also discussed are expressions of Northernism in some literary works. Our findings in this direction have revealed that the writer – consciously or unconsciously – expressed the concept of Northernism in two ways: the physical features that are characteristic of Northern Nigeria on the cover page, and the norms and values prevalent in this part of the country. We thereby recommend to the teaming Northern Nigerian writers to use their God given abilities to further capture the norms and values of Northern Nigeria through different literary genres to preserve them.

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