

## A REFLECTION OF HAUSA MORAL CONDUCT IN THEIR PROVERBS

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**Abstract:** Proverbs are wise sayings which in short, witty and loaded manner, guide, praise, or condemn human activities. This paper explores the reflection of Hausa moral conduct in their proverbs, like any other branch of Hausa oral literature, proverbs serve as the best means of instructing the society on how to adopt to and make best use of the opportunities provided by nature. They also enlighten the individual or the other. Hausa proverbs are generally used as a rhetorical strategy to induce an appropriate frame of mind to receive a moral point of view of the above. Therefore, the paper chooses proverbial discourse as the appropriate language in meeting the social needs that contain many valuable lessons for moulding the Hausa moral conduct and behaviour.

### Introduction:

**The Hausa People:** The homeland of the Hausa people is situated in the territory of present day Northern Nigeria and the Southern part of the Republic of Niger. The Hausa language is also found in some other countries like Northern Ghana and some communities from Kaolack in Senegal to Khartoum in the Sudan (Furniss, 1996). The Hausa language, which is tonal, belongs to the Chadic group of the Afro-Asiatic language family. (Greenberg, 1946: 103.) The Hausa people, being great traders, have traveled far and wide throughout Africa and beyond, as a result Hausa became a leading lingua-franca and one of the most widespread language in Africa. Hausa is spoken by approximately 65 million people, not only in Nigeria but throughout sub-saharan Africa and beyond. (Abubakar, 2014;)' Written Hausa literature did not begin to appear until the early 19<sup>th</sup> Century, but the people developed a broad gamut of literary genres which are transmitted through oral tradition. It is today broadcasted internationally in Radio stations like British Broadcasting Corporation (B.B.C), The Voice of America (VOA), the Radio Deucebelle (MuryarJamar'arJamus), The Radio France and Radio Beijing China, (Abubakar 2014.)

**Proverbs:** Proverb are regarded as a noble genre of African oral tradition that enjoys the prestige of a custodian of people's wisdom and philosophy of life. Hussain (2005:61) Daudu, et al. (2008:25) quoted in Wikipedia traces the origin of the term to latin, proverbium and further defines it as simple and concrete saying which expresses a truth, based on common sense or practical experience of humanity. The Advanced Learners Dictionary defined the proverb as a popular saying with words of advice or warning.

**What Are Hausa Proverbs?:** Proverbs are the most important fields of Hausa verbal folklore that are used as important means of communication not only among the Hausa, but also among several African groups (Bichi 1995: 76). In Hausa society, proverbs are said to contain wisdom and they reflect

the life and thought of the people using them and are used for social, educational, religious and political functions. Aliyu (2004) states that proverbs are terse utterances full of meaning expressing commonly held ideas, beliefs and value systems. They are soundly rooted and reflect the oral tradition of the people. They also added that all cultural groups in Africa have proverbs. While another scholar in his opinion defines Hausa proverbs as thus:

"Karin magana (proverbs) in Hausa language manifest the same wide range in topical interest and close attentiveness to the facts of human life. In addition, Hausa karinmagana (proverbs) display an amazing range in theme and moral perspicuity. Some deal with nature, celestial phenomenon, man, craft and trade, religious realities, human conduct, general human behaviour, greed, desire, war and indeed as aspect of everyday life" (Akporobaro 2005.)

In view of this, I argue that proverbs are applied to many valuable lessons for moulding the Hausa moral conduct and behavior. Proverbs, as an oral tradition, have continued to play important roles in their lives. Even for the westernized elite, proverbs remain a resourceful oral tradition of placing an authentic African flavour as a stamp on writings and spoken utterances. Proverbs function to aid reconstruction of traditional life through reminders of socio-cultural heritage borne by historical affiliations that some of these proverbs have. This factor necessitates their survival till date; making them effective lubricants of interlocution even in the modern world. Every language has its own proverbs that are peculiar to it, and Hausa is no exception. For the purpose of this study, a careful selection of those Hausa proverbs that reflect their moral conduct.

**Caution:** They caution against irresponsible statement; Truth; Gratitude; Patience; Women and Work.

a. Bakishikeyankawuya

It is the mouth that causes the chopping of the neck; unnecessary utterance can leadsd one to danger

b. Kafadialhairikokayishiru

If someone has nothing good to say he better keeps quiet. The moral lesson here is that people should not go around opening their mouth saying unnecessary things. So, in line with Hausa, if someone does not have a good thing to say he should keep quiet.

- c. In zakaginaraminmugunta, ginashigajere  
If you are going to dig a hole (ditch?) of wickedness dig a shallow one
- d. Murnarkyautatanagatuiki  
Gratitude is what shows whether a gift is appreciated. It is a moralistic cautioning against wickedness, and gratitude to a present lies in the appreciation.
- e. Abin da babbayahango, yarokoyahaurimibazaiganiba  
What an adult sees from the ground, a boy cannot see even if he climbs a silk-cotton tree.  
Above shows the adult should be consulted on important matters in the society because they have the experience and the knowledge than the younger ones.

**Honourable Earning:** They inculcate the idea of honourable earning and condemn the state of being idle. Examples of lessons from these include:

- a. Himmaba ta garage  
The industrious always excel
- b. Duniyaba ta aurenrago  
World does not marry the indolent. This is based on the Hausa belief that the first step of moral responsibility is honourable earning. The above proverbs show that hardworker also excels and so it should be encouraged. So Hausa people disregard idling and they believe that life is not very easy.
- c. Kowayagayamakarowa, ya so abinka ne  
It is only the lazy person that wants for nothing. The lazy ones always want to be assisted or given something, so laziness should be discouraged.
- d. Hannunbayarwaya fi hannunkarba  
i.e. However good receiving may be giving is better. It is important to discourage begging and promote the spirit of giving.
- e. Kowayahaudokinkwadayi, yasauka a tasharwulakanci  
He who ride the horse of greed at a gallop, will end up at the door of shame The moral lesson is that it is not good to be greedy, greedy individuals have no moral conduct and are bound to be embarrassed anytime

**Cooperation:** Proverbs encourage the idea of cooperation, that is to say being kind and affectionate especially to one's own relations. The proverbs that depict cooperation include:

- a. Dan Uwarigar kaya  
A brother is a coat of thorn
- b. Hannunkabayarubewakayanke, kayar

- You cannot cut off your rotten hands
- c. Abin dayatabahanci, shikesaidoyayiruwa  
Whatever affects the nose, affects the eyes also
- d. Dadingoyoshikanjawozunkudani  
Friendship induces yearnings
- e. Albarkacinwani, yakanshafiwani  
Someone's good fortune is someone else's fortune. Thus, proverbs teach us that whatever affects one's family members or close friends also affects the other. So, one rejoices with them when they are happy and commensurates with them when they are sad. Therefore, "rigar kaya" is seen as something that, if one wears, it will hurt his body and he cannot remove because he will not go naked, this shows the kind of co-operation. The second proverb demonstrates that one cannot forfeit his relatives or his people no matter how bad they treat him. The third proverb teaches us to be human, compassionate and to have flow-feeling. The moral lesson to be learnt in the above proverbs is that, people should cooperate with one another.

**Character:** Proverbs emphasize stability of character, that is proper or good conduct which is virtually good behaviour and good characters and all other matters which are good according to the Hausa tradition, include the following:

- a. Hakurimaganinzamanduniya  
Patience is the key to worldly living
- b. Mai hakuriyakandafadutse, yasharomonsa  
The patient man will boil a stone and drink the brew
- c. Shimfidarfuska, ta fi shimfidartabarma  
Better spread out your face than spreading out a mat.
- d. Dukawawadabayahanakatashi da tsawonka  
Bending down to a dwarf does not prevent you from rising afterwards to your full height.
- e. Mutuncimadara ne, idanyazubeba a kwasheshi  
Dignity is like milk, once spill it cannot be gathered
- f. Kadakogiyahangiranda  
Do not let river set eyes on the water pot.  
The above proverbs (a & b) teaches us that whatever difficulty we may face, there will be relief in the end, if only we have perseverance. It is expected in the tradition of Hausa to display a high degree of perseverance. In (c & d) above, the proverbs indicates one should give a guest a warm reception and show happiness i.e. "Shimfidarfuska" (spread out face), is better than to "shimfidartabarma" (spread out a mat). This suggests that, based on good character and level of tolerance, a person shall give a warm reception to his guest. The (d) above teaches us that forfeiting one's chance to others does not mean one will not have another chance, but rather, he can even be at a better position than the person he

forfeited to. This is because what determine position in Hausa society was not by stature or wealth but by maturity as well as wisdom and knowledge posturing. In (e & f), above, the moral lesson to be learnt is that people should learn to be contented with what they have rightly, then dignity is something that must be protected. People should avoid any act that can degrade individual dignity, so all form of bad behaviour should be avoided by the Hausa people.

**Conclusion:** What has been discussed in this paper shows that, proverbs are deeply rooted in the social

setting of Hausa people. At the same time, it has a promising potential to mould the moral conduct and behaviour of Hausa people. The paper identifies four major roles of Hausa proverbs (Karin Magana) in moulding sound character and genuine identity as a Hausa person. A sound knowledge of the proverbs serve as a guide and rule of law according to the dictates of what it means to be a Hausa. It also means that once somebody behaves contrary to the rules of Hausa, a proverb is used to alert him.

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