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Bature Tanimu Gagare: Hausa Social Activist and Writer¹

Abstract: Bature Tanimu Gagare became famous as an ardent critic of Nigerian social and political life. Due to his public engagement and unusual activities he was given various nicknames and epithets. Some people saw in him an able writer, others considered him as an adventurer. In this article an attempt has been made to present the profile of the author and to discuss his only novel *Karshen Alewa Kasa*; its genesis, content and the message.

Keywords: Bature Gagare, Northern Nigeria, novel, social life, Biafran war

Profile of the Author

The life-story of Bature Tanimu Gagare became largely known from an interview by Ibrahim Sheme, which was published online.² The reason for this long-lasting

¹ This is a reworked version of a paper published in honor of Prof. Eugeniusz Rzewuski (Piłaszewicz 2014).

² The Author granted Ibrahim Sheme this interview in his own house on August 5, 2001. Later on, it was published in „Weekly Trust” on August 17, 2001, and then placed on Internet under the title *Bature Gagare: marubuci mai yaƙin danniya da wariya* [Bature Gagare: the writer struggling with oppression and colour bar], <http://www.gumel.com/Hausa/wasiku/Bature-Gagare.htm>

conversation with the Author was the dispute of the Society of Musicians and Singers which was founded by Bature Gagare in Katsina, with the fundamental organisation of 'Yan Izala,³ developing its activity in this State. The followers of Bature were questioning some legal regulations which prohibited drumming and singing. The prohibition was introduced from the initiative of the Department of the Islamic Law [*Hukumar Shari'ar Musulunci*] in Kaduna State under the pretext that those forms of rejoicing and celebrating of festivities are contradictory to the Islamic faith. It is the Association of 'Yan Izala which insisted on introduction of this prohibition which was breaking centuries-old secular tradition.

The members of the Society of Musicians and Singers condemned the violation of the deep-rooted tradition and urged the immediate release from the detention of the well-known popular musicians Sirajo Mai Asharalle, who was captured by the Shari'a Enforcers [*Rundunar Adalci*]. Bature Tanimu Gagare, General Secretary of the Society petitioned the authorities: he described the abduction as a barbarian deed, unjust, unconstitutional, breaking the essential rights of the musicians to present their skills in any place and through any medium of their choice (*Guardian* 2001). According to him, it was regrettable that a clique of malams had illegally overtaken the prerogatives of the jurisdiction and arbitrarily carried out the interpretation of the shari'a. He demanded the immediate and unconditioned release of Mai-Asharalle from the prison; the annulment of regulations which aimed at the curtailment of freedom of the artistic self-realisation; and the disbanding of the illegal groups which were considering

[access January 27, 2005].

³ It is the Hausa name of the members of *Ġamā'at Izālat al-Bid'a wa-Iqāmat as-Sunna* [Association for the Eradication of the Innovation and the Establishment of the Sunna]. This organisation was fighting against the Muslim brotherhoods.

themselves as shari'a enforcers. Apart from these, he urged the Katsina State Government to pay compensation or to offer apology to the people whose rights have been violated (*Guardian* 2001).

The dispute ended with Bature's victory. *Hukumar Shari'ar Musulunci* has finally issued a *fatwa* which allowed the performing of praise-songs and drumming during the child birth and marriage ceremonies, and on occasion of the advancement of local notables.⁴

Bature Gagare was born on June 7, 1959 in Katsina. In the years 1965-1972 he was going to primary school Gobarau in his birth town. Next, in the years 1972-1977 he continued his education in Barewa College in Zaria and graduated from it with rather mediocre results. Having resigned from further education, he took up the duty of a teacher which was entrusted him by the school curators (*Hukumar Ilmi*) in Zaria. He was employed in a village school in Yakawada (Giwa commune) and spent there two years (1978-1979). From June to December 1979 he was going to the Nursing School in Katsina but was relegated for the participation in a students' revolt. Then he moved to Kano and in 1980 started to work in the textile industrial plant known as Bagauda Textile Mills. There he soon became trade unions' activist and due to this

⁴ In an interview published by „Weekly Trust” on August 17, 2001 Gagare said: „As the Secretary General of the Performing Artists and Artisans Association, Katsina State, I had a job to do – principally to smash the mullah dictatorship endangering our profession and, by implication, our culture. The wind that swept the false ulema and humiliated the Izala sect in Katsina was simply a reaction by the youths, the musicians, artists and other Muslims, towards a very dangerous blend of dictatorship and Sharia in the State. Now, of course, our association has stood firm and routed the false mullahs...” <http://fridaydiscourse.blogspot.com/2010/05/discourse-99-no-to-mullah.dictatorship...> [access 26.06.2013].

after three months time he was dismissed. In a similar way he ended his unionist career in the Universal Textile, a factory situated in the Bompai quarter of Kano.

After those unsuccessful efforts to find a more stable place in life, Bature Gagare returned to his former profession and one year he was teaching in Kyarama village. It was an exceptional period in his life career. He took a liking for rural life and had a high opinion of local farmers' values: their sincerity, simple-mindedness, loyalty and other features typical of an ideal Hausa man – *mutumin kirki*. He led a life of a hermit and had enough time to think over his future way of life. At the same time he was reading a lot which served his intellectual development. With time he himself decided to try his creative abilities. It is in this remote village he conceived the idea to write the novel titled *Karshen Alewa Kasa* which came into being – as he admitted himself – in a one month time.

In the years 1981-1983 Bature Gagare was studying in the Faculty of Fine Arts and English of the Kafanchan College of Education. From an announcement in „New Nigerian” he came to know of a literary competition which was run by the Federal Department of Culture, Ministry of Social Welfare and Culture. The writings in three Nigerian languages were taken into account: Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. Not looking forward to success, he sent to jury in Lagos the manuscript (even not typescript) of his novel which unexpectedly won the third prize, having been beaten only by *Turmin Danya* [The Strong Man] by Sulaiman Ibrahim Katsina⁵ and *Tsumangiyar kan Hanya* [The driving whip] by Musa Mohammed Bello.⁶

⁵ Northern Nigerian Publishing Company for Nigeria Magazine, Lagos-Zaria 1982.

⁶ Northern Nigerian Publishing Company for Nigeria Magazine, Lagos-Zaria 1982.

In the second year of the Writer's sojourn in Kafanchan he joined the students' organisation of the local College and soon was elected to the post of General Secretary. He was also a candidate to the post of Vice-President for Foreign Affairs of the National Association of Nigerian Students. Two weeks before the final examination in the College he headed a students' manifestation, and for this reason he and four his companions were relegated from the school. During his sojourn in Kafanchan he was fascinated by socialist ideas, revolutionary movements in various parts of the world, and by the great leaders like Ernesto Che Guevara, Michail Bakunin, Lenin, Mao Tse-Tung, Ho Chi Minh and others. He was studying the *Catechism of a Revolutionist* by Sergey Nechayev who was inciting to a bloody revolution in order to overthrow the capitalistic system.

Having disgracefully ended his student's career in Kafanchan, he returned to Kano and set to work of a petty trader in consumer goods. After the downfall of the Soviet Union he left his leftist deviations. He took a dislike to arms competition between the world powers which entailed a significant part of the national product and was worsening the material situation of the Soviet citizens. He was uneasy about the violation of human rights, and especially about the repression of writers and the intelligentsia. He arrived at the conclusion that the communist ideology does not favour the development and well-being of societies. Having retreated from the public life, he resigned from further studies, set up a family and became father of five children. Further vicissitudes of his life are less known. Since the beginning of 2003 he has been mentioned in some publications as *Marigayi* Tanimu Gagare which is equivalent of the English phrase „The late Tanimu Gagare”: he died in January, 2003.

These episodes of Bature Gagare's life bear witness to his unusual activity. He certainly was a social activist to the core.

He used to engage in religious life. The above mentioned dispute with 'Yan Izala won him the good feeling of many followers, but increased the number of his furious enemies. Since the early youth he has become a well-known person in the Hausa society. Having interviewed him, Ibrahim SHEME (2001: 1) realised that as early as he stayed in Katsina, his birth place, Bature Tanimu Gagare was a commonly known young man but rather controversial one. He was given various nicknames and epithets. Some people saw an able writer in him but also a man who was disregarding the principles of the social life. Others considered him an adventurer. There were many who treated him as a not very pious Muslim;⁷ he was even considered as an atheist by some. In spite of all those opinions people appreciated his sharpness, craftiness and competence in accurate interpretation of various social phenomena.

The genesis of *Karshen Alewa Kasa*

Bature Tanimu Gagare had large interests. He was reading literary works and got to know Hausa customs. He was fascinated by philosophical books and interested in cinema, poetry and European music. When asked by Ibrahim SHEME about sources of his writing activities, he responded that he had no experience in that respect and that he did not inherit this ability from the school:

„I write just like this. This competence is but a gift of God for man. It is a part of all that I have learned when reading works of great writers, the living ones and those who passed away. One can say that it is God who favoured me with the talent of placing words on a sheet of paper. I do not adhere to any rule, I do not take into account any principle, I disregard all that is an obstacle

⁷ It is striking that in his anthroponim there is no Muslim name.

in revealing my pains. The words are arriving with such intensity that I am often late in capturing them by my pen.” (Sheme 2001: 3)

Having been interrogated about *Karshen Alewa Kasa*, he avowed that he started writing it under the influence of some life problems which he did not want to reveal. Quiet atmosphere of the Kyarama village, where he was working as a teacher, favoured his creative activity. He has chosen the Hausa language as a mean of literary expression. Having been a beginner (*sabon hannu*) in writing, he was not courageous enough to write in English. Moreover, he wanted to mark his presence in the history of Hausa literature as an author of the first and large (342 pages) thriller, a literary genre which was not known in the Hausa literary treasury.

Graham Furniss (1996:40) is of opinion that *Karshen Alewa Kasa* is the most substantial Hausa novel to date. It addresses one of the pressing issues of post-civil-war Nigeria: the fate of thousands of demobilised soldiers. Written in a vivid, conversational style, the story traces the central character originating from the Maguzawa people⁸ who were resisting both the Islamisation and Christianisation for a long time: they became collective hero of the novel. According to oral tradition, they originated from Rogo, a place situated between Kano and Katsina. Their enclaves were spread in the vicinity of Zaria, Katsina and Bauchi. In present times they live on the outskirts of Kano and Katsina emirates, and in the Maradi valley on the territory of Niger Republic. In the twentieth century their population considerably decreased. It

⁸ An informant of P. Krusius has defined the notion of Maguzawa in the following way: „They are authentic Hausa and authentic pagans. They are refugees who do not want to pray and are against any progress”. Cf. his *Die Maguzawa*, „Archiv für Anthropologie” XIV, 1915, p. 189.

is estimated that now only 45.000 Maguzawa were left in Hausaland (Wente-Lukas 1984: 154). In the above discussed interview Bature Gagare provides the following characteristics of the heroes of his novel:

“It is the Hausa and Fulani people who forged the ethnonim Maguzawa: in such a way they name a part of the Hausa society which they were not able to conquer. More than a hundred years ago the Hausa people and the Fulani Muslims were oppressing the Maguzawa and kept them in isolation just because they preserved their ancient customs and beliefs, although they were true Hausas. All the efforts of the jihadists of Shaykh Usman dan Fodio, who were trying to islamise them, and numerous undertakings of the Christian missionaries, became fruitless. That is why they were not recognised, both by the Hausa and the Fulani. They do not treat them in a proper way but rather avoid and despise them. The Maguzawa have no access to modern education, they are not allowed to take any employment and are devoid of a proper social care. Evil and clever people make use of the Maguzawa and they incite them to causing trouble, supporting military regimes, and to committing criminal acts. The hero of the novel chose the way of the criminal conduct.”
(Sheme 2001: 4)

The Writer became well acquainted with secrets of the Maguzawa life. He shared their company when working as a teacher in Yakawada. He was often visiting their villages spread in the Giwa district. Many times he participated in their marriage ceremonies, and in the gatherings of political nature. However, he avows that as a Muslim he was not able to learn all their customs and traditions, as the Maguzawa were not fully confident of his intentions.

Content and message of the novel

The novel is composed of eleven chapters and can be divided in two thematic parts. The first two chapters present an idyllic life in a Maguzawa village *Tsaunin Gwano* [The Hill of Stink-Ant]. In a vivid and conversational style the Author depicts the local customs, organisation of the villagers, their occupations, and especially their ancient magical and religious beliefs.⁹ In that village Mailoma (*alias* Kanzunzum, *alias* Maguzi), the main character of the novel, was born. Having experienced different life vicissitudes, he decides to create a terrorist organisation and manages to make his plans real. His actions change the character of a story making it more sensational.

Bature Gagare deals with one of the most sensitive problems of Nigeria which arose after the bloody Civil War (1967-1970). The war broke out as a result of the Biafra secession. After the signing of the peace agreement, the reduction in the Nigerian army became unavoidable. Mailoma is not ready to await for the end of war. He betrays the soldiers' oath soon after the declaration of the surrender of Biafra. Having gathered around him some desperate soldiers, he forms a marauding band that kills politicians, indulges in robbery and mayhem, seeks to control the drug trade, and eventually tries to overthrow successive governments and take over the country:

„I am a person who will keep Nigeria under fingernails. I will keep the whole of Africa in my fingers. In due time, we shall have the whole world in

⁹ Religion and magic of Maguzawa were presented by Olga Blumczyńska in her M.A. thesis titled: „The image of the religious life of Maguzawa in the novel *Karshen Alewa Kasa* by Bature Gagare”, Department of African Languages and Cultures, University of Warsaw 2010.

the palm of our hand. We shall prosper in the black world just like the Mafia is prospering elsewhere. We shall govern ourselves in the same way as Cosa Nostra does. We shall proceed just like the CIA is proceeding. We shall act just like KGB is acting. We shall become great armed robbers, chief smugglers of arms and modern war equipment. We shall sow Indian hemp and grow hallucinogenic plants, which people will take and get intoxicated by their strength. If we do so, we can be sure that nobody will be courageous enough to challenge us unless he wants a bullet in his head. Finally, we will make sure that all the warehouses in the country are under our control". (Gagare 1982: 191)

Reminiscences of the Civil War are numerous and have various connotations. In Chapter II the reader witnesses a scene of recruitment into the Nigerian army. The *Sarkin Arna* [Chief of the Pagans] from Tsaunin Gwano is asked to supply thirty young men urgently. He is quick to do so, not because he is sensitive to the slogan „One Nigeria”, but rather because he discerns a very good opportunity to get rid of the Christians who have tried to settle in his ‘kingdom’. The political awareness of the villagers is almost nil: the names of Tafawa Balewa, Ahmadu Bello, Aguiyi Ironsi and even Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu have no significance for them. The young boys go off to fight for something they cannot understand:

They were travelling in a lorry towards Zaria. Suddenly, one of the young men, who was weeping terribly for having been taken into the army, touched the hand of Corporal Danko and asked: „What is that Nigeria you were talking about?” (Gagare 1982: 54)

The expected end of the war causes the soldiers to think about their future. Some of them, for instance Mailoma, the

novel's main character, have entered the army to avoid punishment for crimes committed earlier. When organising his gang, Mailoma convinces the bewildered boys in a following way:

„As you see, the war is almost over. Our soldiers have captured nearly all the important Igbo towns. In six months time Ojukwu will calm down. And then the soldiers will become useless. And what are you going to do after the war is over?”

The civilian laughed, sipped the drink, then took out a small card and said: „Look at it, Gadu. It is proof that I am a Nigerian soldier of the rank of second lieutenant. But I have deserted and taken a new occupation which will provide me with food”. (Gagare 1982: 85ff)

The core of the band is formed during the Civil War on the ethnic principle. Mailoma contacts his fellow Maguzawa and wins them over. One is Lieutenant Mati, who has retained his position after the Civil War, and is now stationed in Kano. Having access to the military storehouse, he becomes the main arms supplier for the terrorist organisation that Mailoma decides to create. Breaking trust, betrayal and macabre death frequently appear on pages of the novel. Finally, the main character loses his life having been bitten by a snake or shot down by the machine gun.

Graham Furniss (1966: 40) is right to notice that the novel *Karshen alewa kasa* marks a major departure from previous Hausa writing. It shows the most characteristic features of a modern Nigerian city: speedy cars, drunkenness, hazardous undertakings, sex and violence. The characters of the novel represent different layers of the Nigerian society: emancipated girls, soldiers from different ethnic groups, Maguzawa farmers, Christian converts and many other social groups typical of Northern Nigeria.

Short after the book had been published, it enjoyed great popularity among the readers. It became an obligatory reading for the college and university students. When in December, 1983 General Muhammad Buhari in a coup d'état overtook the power from the civilian President Shehu Shagari, the cultural policy of the military authorities underwent a substantial change. Censorship activities became a serious obstacle in the public life. The printing of the novel was prohibited, as a result of an action called "War against Indiscipline". Since that time it is hopeless to look for it on the book-shop shelves, although it is obtainable online.

Final remarks

In an interview conducted by Ibrahim Sheme, the Writer revealed that he harbours in his desk a large (450 pages) novel titled *Tsuliyar Kowa da Kashi* [Everyone is guilty]. He wrote the novel long ago and it was supposed to be published by Gaskiya Corporation. However, the publisher has fallen into serious financial difficulties and could not take the risk of editing the book. After two years of delay, Bature Gagare started to translate the novel into English. This time the Writer felt that his English was quite satisfactory and he could compete with the experienced and well-known writers from Southern Nigeria. It seems, however, that the change of language as the vehicle of literary expression would be a great disadvantage for the development of Hausa literature. We consider him the master of word and an unquestioned reviver of the cultural life in Northern Nigeria. The Writer understands his mission in the following way:

The aim of writing for people is to provoke discussion which would support an idea or reject it. If they say that my writing provokes discussion and makes some persons to have their neck veins swollen, it would

indicate that I do my job in a proper way. (Sheme 2001: 7)

The Author touches upon unjust opinions concerning him, which were often formulated on the basis of the features of characters who appear in his novel:

„They say I am quarrelsome. Then I ask them whether all that has been written by an author points to the features of his character? If so, then I am quarrelsome because with every kicking of my pen I see how many readers die out of fear. Many people adorn me with false patches. They say that I do not worship God, that I am a wizard, that I provoke conflicts, and so on. These features, that they impute to me, are all lies. People say that God granted me intelligence. But it is not so. I am not more educated than others. I do not have a brighter brain. Maybe I am different from others because I do not undergo any influence of outside pressure, and I am consistent in realisation of my plans”. (Sheme 2001: 7)

Further on, the Writer took his position towards the intrigues in Katsina, where he played a leading role. As the Secretary General of the Society of Musicians and Singers he aimed at the belittling of the false malams who were threatening the customs and traditional occupation of the Hausa community. He used to repeat that the wind of change, which made damage to those malams and which embarrassed *Yan Izala* in Katsina, was a very effective tool of fighting a false interpretation of shari'a in the Katsina region. The Society took a firm position and those malams disappeared in disgrace:

„If for that reason some believe I am an adventurer, that is all right. I agree with this opinion”. (Sheme 2001: 7)

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