

REVISITING HAUSA ORAL POETRY IN THE DIGITAL ERA: ANALYSING HARUNA NINGI'S *SHEGIYAR UWA* AS A TOOL FOR POLITICAL CRITIQUE IN NIGERIA

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Abstract

This study examines the role of Hausa oral poets in castigating oppositions in the Nigerian political system, with a specific focus on Haruna Ningi's poem *Shegiyar Uwa*. The primary objective of the research is to explore how oral Hausa poets employ literary techniques, satire, and socio-political commentary to criticize political opposition and shape public opinion. The study also seeks to highlight the influence of poetic discourse in fostering political awareness among the masses. The research adopts a qualitative approach, utilizing textual analysis as the primary method of data collection. The poem *Shegiyar Uwa* is analysed for its thematic content, stylistic devices, and symbolic expressions that reveal the poet's stance on political dynamics in Nigeria. The paper explores how digital archives can safeguard oral traditions, focusing on a Hausa political poem that critiques the People's Democratic Party (PDP) in Nigeria. Through Marxist literary analysis, the poem is examined as both a cultural artifact and a form of resistance literature that reflects the struggle of marginalized voices against elite political structures. By situating the poem within the broader context of Hausa oral poetry and digital archiving practices in Africa, this paper argues that digitizing oral traditions not only preserves linguistic and cultural identity but also democratizes access to historical

Keywords; Hausa Oral Poetry, Digital Era, *Shegiyar Uwa*, Political Critique, Nigeria, Haruna Ningi.

Introduction

Oral tradition has historically served as one of the most enduring pillars of African expressive culture, acting as a repository of communal wisdom, identity, and memory. Long before the advent of writing, communities used narratives, proverbs, chants, and songs to transmit ethical codes, record historical experiences, and critique social realities. Among the Hausa of West Africa, this legacy remains especially vibrant, manifested in a diverse repertoire that includes “*labarai*” (folktales), “*karin magana*” (proverbs), “*kirari*” (praise poetry), and “*waka*” (poetic performance). These forms have functioned not only as entertainment but also as instruments of social regulation, political commentary, and cultural continuity.

However, the fabric of these oral traditions has been increasingly strained by the pressures of globalization, urbanization, and the steady weakening of intergenerational transmission. While this shift poses significant threats to cultural preservation, it also presents new opportunities. The rise of digital technologies has opened fresh avenues for the documentation, reinterpretation, and circulation of indigenous expressive traditions. In this high era of technology and Nigerian cyberculture, oral genres have begun to migrate onto digital platforms, generating new forms of engagement and enabling scholars, artists, and communities to archive and reimagine their literary heritage. Digital archiving, in particular, has become a transformative tool. It enables the systematic recording of oral texts; their preservation in audio, video, and transcript formats; and their dissemination across global digital networks. Through social media, streaming platforms, and online repositories, Hausa poetry can reach audiences far beyond its local geographic and linguistic boundaries. The digital environment thus facilitates both preservation and innovation, allowing oral traditions to participate actively in contemporary cultural discourse rather than fade into obscurity.

This study explores one such instance of oral tradition's adaptation and relevance within Nigeria's digital age. It focuses on a politically charged Hausa poem directed at the People's Democratic Party (PDP), a dominant force in Nigeria's political landscape since 1999. The poem captures widespread public disillusionment, employing the familiar idioms and performance style of Hausa poetry to articulate frustrations with social inequality, failed governance, and the widening gap between political elites and ordinary citizens. Its critique resonates strongly with the Marxist understanding of literature as a site where class tensions and ideological struggles are expressed.

By approaching the poem through a Marxist literary lens, the paper reveals how Hausa oral poetry continues to function as an instrument of cultural resistance, giving voice to marginalized groups and challenging the hegemonic structures that shape political life. Furthermore, the study situates this poem within the broader framework of cyberculture, demonstrating how digital circulation amplifies its impact, transforms its audience, and embeds it within a wider conversation about accountability, governance, and cultural continuity in modern Nigeria.

In doing so, this paper positions Hausa oral poetry not as a relic of a pre-digital past but as a dynamic and adaptable literary form one that actively engages with the technological realities and political complexities of contemporary Nigeria. It underscores the continuing relevance of indigenous knowledge systems while highlighting how digital technologies are reshaping the modes, meanings, and reach of Nigerian literature today.

Literature Review

Oral Tradition and Political Commentary in Hausa Society

Hausa oral poetry has long served as a medium for social and political discourse, functioning as a powerful tool for critique, praise, and the expression of communal sentiments. Scholars such as Furniss (1996) and Yahaya (1988) have documented the integral role of oral poetry—especially in the form of songs in shaping public opinion and

interrogating political authority. Through the satirical tone and metaphorical richness of oral poetry, poets like Haruna Ningi articulate political grievances and mobilize collective consciousness against perceived injustices. This resonates with Barber's (1991) assertion that African oral art is both performative and political, using symbolism to navigate the complex relationships between rulers and the governed.

Haruna Ningi and Political Satire

Haruna Ningi is a relatively less-documented figure in formal academic literature compared to canonical Hausa oral poets such as Abubakar Ladan, Sa'adu Zungur, Aminu Ladan (Alan Waka) and other widely studied performers. Much of what is known about him comes from circulating performances, local recognition, and references within contemporary Hausa oral and popular media rather than from sustained scholarly biographical studies. He is associated with Ningi in present-day Bauchi State, Nigeria, and his poetic style reflects the enduring Hausa tradition of oral poetry as a medium for social commentary, satire, and moral instruction. In Shegiyar Uwa, he employs biting satire, ridicule, and humour to engage with political realities, often targeting opposition figures, corrupt practices, and broader societal decline in ways that resonate with grassroots audiences.

To the best of the researcher's knowledge there is little to no dedicated, peer-reviewed academic research that focuses specifically on Haruna Ningi as an individual poet. As a result, his creativity is best understood through broader studies of Hausa oral literature and African oral traditions. Furniss (2000) examines Hausa oral poetry as a dynamic performative art used for social critique, highlighting how poets deploy satire and indirect language to challenge authority. Similarly, Gusau (2010) discusses the thematic concerns and structural features of Hausa poetry, emphasizing its role in moral guidance and political engagement within society. Okpewho (1992), from a wider

African perspective, underscores the importance of oral literature as a tool for resistance, social control, and the negotiation of power. Although these studies do not specifically analyse Haruna Ningi, his work clearly aligns with the traditions and functions they describe.

The limited scholarly attention given to Haruna Ningi can be attributed to several factors. First, the oral nature of his performances means that much of his work circulates informally through live recitations, recordings, and digital sharing, often without systematic documentation or archiving. Second, academic research has historically focused on canonical or institutionally recognized figures, leaving contemporary or regionally influential poets underexplored. Third, the growing presence of Hausa poetry in digital spaces is a relatively recent development, and scholarship has not yet fully caught up with these emerging forms and performers. Additionally, issues of transcription, translation, and accessibility further limit the inclusion of such poets in mainstream academic discourse.

Oral Traditions in the Digital Age

The digitization of oral traditions has opened new avenues for the preservation and dissemination of oral poetry. Scholars such as Ebron (2002) and Afolayan (2018) argue that digital technologies, including audio-visual archives and online repositories, have transformed oral traditions into accessible cultural records, ensuring their survival for future generations. This trend is evident in Hausa-speaking regions, where platforms like YouTube and social media serve as modern stages for poets like Haruna Ningi, amplifying their voices and widening their audience reach.

Digital Archives as Cultural Memory

Digital archives act as a bridge between traditional oral performance and contemporary scholarship. As noted by Ketelaar (2001), archives are not merely repositories of data but active constructs of cultural memory. For Hausa oral poetry, digital archiving facilitates both academic study and the continued relevance of oral traditions

within political discourse. Recent works (Adeyemi & Salawu, 2020) have explored how the preservation of oral performances in digital form aids in documenting socio-political narratives, thereby extending their influence beyond the temporal and spatial constraints of live performance.

Intersections of Oral Tradition and Political Discourse

Studies on African oral literature (Finnegan, 2012; Olatunji, 1984) highlight its dynamic nature, as it adapts to changing socio-political contexts while maintaining its core performative elements. Haruna Ningi's *Shegiyar Uwa* demonstrates how oral poetry continues to thrive in political commentary, particularly when digitized for broader consumption. The digital turn ensures that oral poets not only preserve historical memory but also engage with contemporary issues in ways that resonate with both local and global audiences.

Hausa Oral Poetry and Political Discourse

The Hausa people, spread across Nigeria, Niger have a long tradition of oral artistry. Historically, oral poets (*mawaka*) have functioned as social critics, historians, and entertainers. In pre-colonial times, court poets were responsible for praising rulers while also subtly cautioning them against injustice.

In contemporary times, Hausa oral poetry often addresses politics, corruption, and social decay. The poem under discussion, which critiques the PDP, exemplifies this tradition metaphorically with vivid imagery. The poet likens the party to a mother who kills her own children, an evocative metaphor for betrayal and self-destruction:

> “*Shegiyar Uwa mai kasha ‘ya’yanta*” She is a mother who kills her own children PDP.

“*Mun yi addu’a jalla ka gya PDP*” We prayed, ‘Oh God, reform PDP.’

“*To! Ta ki gyaruwa, bari mu barta tunda ta tsarga*” But she refused to change, so we left her since she has split.”

Such lines show the poet’s deep disappointment with a political system that has failed to serve the common people. The poem expresses strong dissatisfaction with a political system perceived as failing the masses. It explicitly mentions political figures such as Audu Ogbe, Alex Ekwueme, and Ngige, while also referring to internal conflicts and corruption within a political party. The content reflects real political events and personalities, presenting them through a critical and satirical lens. It further portrays the role of the oral poet as a recorder of societal and political developments, emphasizing their function as custodians of collective memory.

These elements illustrate how the poet channels public frustration into artistic expression, using direct naming and narrative detail to ground the poem in lived political realities. By invoking recognizable figures and events, the poem enhances its credibility and immediacy, making its critique more impactful. This approach aligns with the broader tradition of Hausa oral poetry, where poets serve as “the people’s historians,” preserving alternative accounts of political happenings and challenging official or dominant narratives.

Digital Archives and the Preservation of Oral Tradition

The rise of digital technologies offers an unprecedented opportunity to preserve oral traditions. Unlike written texts, oral works are ephemeral and risk being lost if not recorded. Digital archives allow for multimodal preservation text, audio, and video thus capturing the richness of oral performance, including tone, rhythm, and gestures.

Benefits of Digital Archiving

- (a) Linguistic Preservation: Digitizing oral poetry ensures the survival of indigenous languages like Hausa, which are often marginalized in official discourse.

- (b) Global Accessibility: Digital platforms allow scholars, students, and diaspora communities worldwide to access oral texts.
- (c) Cultural Continuity: Digital archives bridge generational gaps by enabling younger audiences to engage with cultural heritage in modern formats (apps, websites, or podcasts).

Projects such as the African Oral Narratives Project and UNESCO's Memory of the World initiative have demonstrated how digital tools can safeguard intangible heritage. In Nigeria, efforts to digitize folktales and oral histories have begun, but the preservation of contemporary political poetry remains limited.

Challenges

Despite its advantages, digital archiving faces challenges:

1. Technological Barriers: Limited internet access and digital infrastructure in rural areas can hinder preservation efforts.
2. Cultural Sensitivity: Digitization risks stripping oral traditions of their performative context tone, audience interaction, and spontaneity.
3. Ownership and Ethics: Questions of intellectual property and community consent arise when oral works are uploaded to global platforms.

Marxist Literary Analysis of the Poem

Marxist literary theory, developed by Karl Marx (1818–1883) and Friedrich Engels (1820–1895), views literature as inseparable from the material and economic conditions of society, emphasizing the conflict between the bourgeoisie (ruling class) and the proletariat (working class) (Marx & Engels, 1970). Marxist analysis examines how texts reveal class struggle, power dynamics, and social inequalities,

highlighting exploitation, oppression, and ideological control (Eagleton, 1976).

Applying this framework to Haruna Ningi's Shegiyar Uwa, the poem critiques political leadership in Nigeria, portraying the PDP as a corrupt "mother" representing the bourgeoisie, while the suffering masses represent the proletariat. Marxist analysis enables a deeper understanding of the poem as a political commentary, a form of resistance, and a reflection of societal inequalities, connecting literary expression to real-world issues of power, exploitation, and social change.

Class Struggle

The poem portrays PDP as a predatory "mother" who "kills her own children," symbolizing how the ruling elite exploits and destroys the very people they claim to represent.

Lines like

Ta sayar da dukkan kaddarar qasarmu "She has sold all the wealth of our country"

Gashi ba ruwan sha a maqogwaronmu. "We lack drinking water in our throats,

Babu magani don jama'ar qasarmu. «No medicine for our people" highlight the economic suffering of the masses due to the mismanagement of resources by those in power.

Marxist Interpretation

This reflects the Marxist idea of the bourgeoisie (political elites) enriching themselves at the expense of the proletariat (the masses). The reference to borrowing from America and killing education also shows how global capitalism and neo-colonial economic policies worsen local inequalities.

Lines such as:

"Ta sayar da dukkan kaddarar qasarmu. "She sold the entire destiny of our country.

Gashi ba ruwan sha a maqogwaronmu. We lack even drinking water.

Babu magani don jama'ar qasarmu. There is no healthcare for the people.
Ga abinci tsada ya gagaremu. Food has become unbearably expensive.
Ga baqin talauci da kasa qasarmu. Crushing poverty has overwhelmed the land.”

These lines expose economic exploitation and unequal distribution of resources, a central Marxist concern. While the ruling elite enrich themselves, the proletariat faces:

Hunger,
 Lack of basic amenities,
 Collapse of social welfare.

The state, controlled by the political bourgeoisie, serves elite interests, not the masses. The song thus reveals the material conditions of oppression under capitalist-political misrule.

Political Corruption and Betrayal

The poem lists various political leaders who have either been ousted or betrayed by the party. This demonstrates the power struggles and internal conflicts among the ruling class, which according to Marxism, is a distraction from the real issue the oppression of the working class.

The line “*Rigingimu sun yi yawa cikinta, an zubar da tsarin manufar fitanta*” “Too many conflicts within her... The guiding principles of her foundation are gone” indicates the party’s shift from any ideological purpose to sheer self-interest. In Marxist terms, this is evidence of the bourgeoisie’s inability to maintain unity while continuing to exploit the masses.

A dominant Marxist theme in the song is the betrayal of party members and citizens by the ruling political structure. The PDP is portrayed as eliminating its own loyalists once they cease to serve elite interests.

"Shegiyar uwa mai kasha 'ya'yanta PDP. The wicked mother who kills her own children, PDP."

"Ta kashe Alex Baba Ikweme namu She destroyed Alex Ekwueme.

Ta kashe Rimi, ta sa shi a ayarimu. She eliminated Rimi and disgraced him.

Ta zubar da su Musa-Musawa namu. She discarded the Musa-Musawas."

Marxist Interpretation

Here, Marxist theory interprets "killing" as political elimination and exclusion. The ruling elite:

Betray comrades,

Remove ideological rivals,

Consolidate power through repression.

The party becomes a tool of class domination, not collective progress. Loyalty is meaningless unless it aligns with elite economic and political interests.

Awakening and Resistance

"Wayewar Kai da Gwabza Gwagwarmaya." Self-awareness and engaging in struggle.

A crucial Marxist moment in the song is the awakening of class consciousness. The singer repeatedly uses "*mun farga*" "we have realized", signalling ideological clarity and rejection of false promises.

"Mun yi addu'a Jallah ka sa gyara PDP" We prayed for God to reform PDP.

To! Ta qi gyaruwa, bari mu barta tunda ta tsaga. But it refused to change; let us abandon it since it has broken apart.

Don anyi kuskure, karmu daxa shi, tunda mun farga. A mistake has been made; let us not repeat it, for we are now aware."

Marxist Interpretation

This reflects class awakening, where the masses recognize:

The futility of reforming a corrupt system,

The need to abandon oppressive structures.

The rejection of reconciliation further emphasizes resistance:

“To, babu sulhu bamai daxe sansani da ke kurga. “There will be no reconciliation with a poisonous camp.”

In Marxist terms, this is revolutionary consciousness, a refusal to be re-absorbed into a system of exploitation.

Ideological Manipulation and False Promises

The ruling class attempts to maintain control through deception, bribery, and propaganda.

“*Sun taho da goron toshi a huhu.* “They came with bribes disguised as peace offerings.”

“*Wanda zai caka maka kibiya jikinka* The one who stabs you with an arrow.

Yayi kiranka wai zai taimakeka. Calls you, claiming he wants to help.”

Marxist Interpretation

This mirrors Marx’s idea of false consciousness, where elites manipulate the masses using ideology, incentives, and empty promises to maintain dominance.

From a Marxist standpoint, “Shegiyar Uwa” is a revolutionary protest song that: Exposes class exploitation, Condemns political corruption and betrayal, Documents mass suffering under elite rule, Celebrates awakening and resistance.

By personifying the PDP as a murderous mother, the song dramatizes how ruling political structures consume both their loyalists and the masses. Ultimately, the song aligns with Marxist ideology by advocating ideological clarity, rejection of oppressive systems, and collective resistance.

Tradition in the Digital Era

Digitizing oral traditions such as this poem transforms how they are consumed and interpreted. Historically, oral poetry depended on live performances to achieve its full impact. Today, digital archives can combine audio recordings of performances with textual translations and annotations, creating hybrid experiences that preserve both meaning and performance.

Platforms like YouTube, podcasting, and digital repositories (e.g., JSTOR or African Oral Traditions Online) provide opportunities for multilingual accessibility and cross-cultural engagement. For example, this Hausa poem can be archived alongside English translations and audio files, ensuring that both the local and global audience can appreciate its content.

Findings of the Study

Hausa oral poetry remains a vital medium of political expression, serving as a tool through which communities articulate grievances, criticize leadership, and document socio-political realities. The analysed poem demonstrates that oral poets continue to function as societal commentators and “people’s historians.”

The poem provides strong evidence of public disillusionment with Nigeria’s political elite, particularly the PDP. Through metaphor, satire, and naming of political figures, the poem reflects widespread frustration with corruption, internal party conflicts, and governance failures.

A Marxist reading of the poem reveals recurring themes of class struggle, showing how the ruling class (bourgeoisie) exploits and neglects the masses (proletariat). The poet highlights material suffering poverty, insecurity, poor infrastructure, and unemployment as direct consequences of elite mismanagement.

The poem reflects rising class consciousness, expressed in the repeated refrain “mun farga” (we have awakened). This indicates a collective realization among the oppressed about their socio-economic conditions, aligning with Marxist theories of resistance and awakening.

Digital archiving plays a crucial role in preserving politically charged oral traditions. Digitization ensures that oral performances, which are traditionally transient, are documented and safeguarded for academic research, cultural transmission, and global accessibility.

Digital technologies enhance the reach and impact of oral traditions, allowing Hausa oral poetry to transcend geographic boundaries. Platforms like YouTube and online repositories amplify the voices of poets and make their works available to wider audiences. Despite its benefits, digital archiving faces challenges such as technological limitations, cultural sensitivity concerns, and issues around intellectual property. These factors can affect the authenticity and sustainability of preservation efforts.

The study finds that digitizing oral traditions is both a cultural and political act, as it preserves marginalized voices and ensures that critiques of political power remain accessible for future generations. This reinforces the role of oral literature as a form of cultural resistance.

Summary

This paper examined the intersection of oral tradition and digital archiving using a Hausa political poem that critiques the People's Democratic Party (PDP) as a case study. The poem, rich in metaphor and political commentary, highlights the failures of the ruling elite and the struggles of ordinary Nigerians. Through Marxist literary analysis, the poem was interpreted as a reflection of class struggle, economic injustice, and the awakening of collective consciousness (*mun farga*). The study emphasized that digital archives offer an effective means of preserving oral traditions, ensuring their accessibility to global audiences while safeguarding linguistic and cultural heritage. However, the paper also noted that digitization must be done with care to preserve the performative aspects and cultural integrity of oral works.

Conclusion

Oral traditions remain a powerful medium for socio-political critique and historical documentation in Africa. The Hausa poem analysed in this paper is not just a work of art but also a historical and political document that encapsulates public sentiment against political corruption and betrayal.

Digital archiving presents a vital solution to the decline of oral traditions in the face of modernization and globalization. By recording, transcribing, and translating such oral texts, we ensure that they remain relevant, accessible, and impactful for future generations. Moreover, digital archives allow oral traditions to transcend geographical boundaries, giving marginalized voices a platform in global discourse. The Marxist reading of the poem underscores how oral literature can expose the contradictions of the ruling class and inspire resistance among the oppressed. Therefore, the digitization of oral traditions is not merely a technical necessity but also a political act of preservation and empowerment.

Recommendations

Digital Archiving Projects: Governments, universities, and cultural organizations should invest in large-scale projects to digitize Hausa oral traditions and other African oral literatures, combining text, audio, and video recordings.

Community Collaboration: Local communities and traditional poets (mawaka) should be involved in digital archiving efforts to ensure cultural authenticity and intellectual property rights.

Translation and Accessibility: Oral poems should be translated into global languages (e.g., English, French) while maintaining the original texts, to allow both local and international audiences to engage with the material.

Integration into Education: Schools and universities should incorporate digitized oral traditions into their curricula to teach cultural heritage, political history, and African literary forms.

Cultural Sensitivity in Archiving: Archival projects should not strip oral works of their performative qualities. Platforms should include video or audio recordings alongside transcriptions and annotations to capture the full experience.

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