



## 2002 ARABIC LITERATURE AND NIGERIA SOCIETY

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### Abstact:

*Literature has been one of the major sources of scholars of history and related fields to ascertain the lifestyle of certain group of people or locality. It is a mirror, through which they determine their cultural, religious, social, economic and political systems. Arabic language with its gigantic literature is not an exceptional in this respect. However, the history of Arabic language and its literature in Nigeria is as old as far back as before the coming of Sheikh Usman Danfodio, the spiritual leader of Sokoto caliphate in Nigeria. This paper therefore, is an attempt to analyze the general concept of literature in a wider perspective and how it relates to Arabic literature in Nigerian societies and suggests more ways that Arabic literature will affect the Nigeria societies more effectively.*

### INTRODUCTION:

Literature is the mirror through which a reasonable part of life, if not all, of a particular generation or people can be identified, by the scholars of history, sociology, psychology, political sciences, and the rest of fields of human endeavor relevant. The scholars of literary criticism, both esthetics and those who held the view that literary works must have, a part from the beauty, positive impact on society, are in agreement that, no literary work that has no effect on the society, in one way or the other, is regarded as a literature worthy of study. However, Arabic literature has a long and deep history in Nigeria. It came to Nigeria, through three routes, Borno Empire, since 7<sup>th</sup> Century AD. Other routes are, Katsina and Sokoto respectively. It is therefore; categorically clear that Arabic literature was the first written literature in Nigeria, ever before the aggression of Europeans to the territory that is now called Nigeria.

The jihad of sheikh Usmanu bn Fodiyo of 1804, that brought about the establishment of Sokoto Caliphate throughout the entire Northern part of the country, together with the adaptation of Arabic language as the language of administration, commerce, religion, civilization and politics, has given Arabic literature a greater opportunity, to have tremendous effects on the Nigerian societies at that moment, and it continues successfully, up to the moment of this write-up.

This paper therefore, is going to systematically identify those areas of influences, the positive areas like, effective and good administration, spread of the faith of Islam, dissemination of knowledge to a very segment of people within the society and the promotion of women education; and negative, as a result of misconception of the literature, or misrepresentation of it, like Almajiri system of education, that brought about a serious damage to the country in 1980 and 1985 in the name of Maitastine and Boko Haram, in 2015 to date. At the end of the paper, more areas of positive impact of Arabic literature on Nigerian societies are going to be suggested and recommended, with a conclusion and references.



## **METHOD:**

The method followed in this research, because of its historical nature, is descriptive analysis, basing the discussions on factual evidences, through usage of text books written by scholars of Arabic literature in Nigeria and in some Arab countries. A manuscript was also used in the process of sighting an example.

## **DEFINITIONS OF THE KEY TERMS:**

The two key terms of this paper are: literature and society; literature has been defined as follows: literature is from Latin literae (plural; letter) is the art of a written work, and is not confined to published sources (although, under some circumstances, unpublished sources can also be exempted). The word literature literally means “letters” is sometimes used to signify “literature” as in the figures of speech “arts and letters” and “man of letter. On the other hand, literature has been defined by a Vid-Dictionary published on 29 Nov, 2012, as a noun that connotes four different definitions;-

- 1- The body of all written works
- 2- The collected creative writing of a nation, people, group, or culture.
- 3- All the papers, treaties, etc. published in academic journals in a particular subject.
- 4- Written fiction in a high standard. Literature has three forms, and each form has its own division under it, and they are as follow:
  - 1- Oral literature- literary works transmitted from one generation to another verbally
  - 2- Written literature- literary works in printed form.
  - 3- Visual literature- literary works presented in front of audience.

Literature has two division and they are;

- 1- Prose- a written document without following the rules of poetry.
- 2- Poetry-is a form of literary art which uses the aesthetic qualities of language to evoke meanings in addition to or in place of, the prosaic ostensible meaning.

On the other hand, the other key term is society. The word society came from the Latin word *societas* which in turn was derived from the noun “*socius*” (: comrade, friend, ally”;adjectival form *socialis*) used to describe a bond or interaction between parties that are friendly or at least civil, without an article. The term can refer to entirety of humanity (also “society in general, “ society at large”, etc.) although those who are unfriendly or uncivil to the reminder of society in this sense may be deemed to be “antisocial”. However, Sociologist Gerhard Lenski differentiates societies based on their level of technology, communication and economy:

- 1- Hunters and gatherers. 2- Simple agricultural. 3- Advanced agricultural. 4-Industrial. 5- Special. (eg: fishing societies, or maritime societies ) It is believed, by now the dimension is clear.

## **THE IMPORTANCE OF ARABIC LITERATURE IN THE INTRNATIONAL ARENA:**



The importance of Arabic language and its literature in the world today, is worthy of mentioning, this is because it is the official language of over 22 countries and there are about 422 Million speakers of the language across the world. Arabic is one of the semantic languages like Aramaic Hebrew and syriac to mention but a few. According to Saidu (2016), Arabic language and its literature is considered to be one of the most important languages known by human race, over the passing period of time. Arabic language and literature were known since a very long period of time. People started composing songs and poetry with the language ever since the period of Jahiliyya, the period before Islam. Arabic language and its literature gained a lot attention, especially because of its connection with the holly book of Islam, the Alquran. It was because of that connection, that many researches and pamphlets were written in Arabic and people were encouraged to study the language.

The freedom Radio of America on December, 19/ 2013 broadcasted that the united nation has specified, since on 18 December, 1973, 8 December of every year to be an Arabic day of celebration as one of the official languages of work in the united nation. To celebrate the day a lot of activities were designed by the united nation. UNESCO on its side recognized the day and participates in the celebration every year. Furthermore, it is worthy of mentioning here, that a comparison was made between the four important languages of the world, in terms of number of words they have, but Arabic became ahead of them all. The four languages were: Arabic, English, French and Russian language, the result was as follows:

- 1- Arabic: 12,303,912 words.
- 2- English: 600,000 words.
- 3- French: 130,000 words.
- 4- Russian language: 750,000.

You can easily understand the supremacy of Arabic language over the rest of working languages of the United Nations. The universality of the language and its literature, uniqueness and very rich grammar is a fact that is accepted and acknowledged by the linguists at the international arena. At this juncture, it is important to actually stipulate as part of importance of Arabic language and literature at international level, reasons why people rush to learn Arabic and its literature. Sa'idu: (2015, p286.) the followings are the reasons behind the study of Arabic language and literature: He mentioned ten reasons as follows:

- 1- Religious reason :  
Muslims learn Arabic language and literature, for them to understand their religion, with the aim of protecting the religion from critics that are always attacking the religion. On the other hand, other religious groups learn Arabic language and literature for them to have say in Islamic religion and to contribute in distorting it and make propaganda to propagate their religion.
- 2- Commercial reason:  
Arabic speaking nations are a fast growing market for trade. Initiatives to integrate the Arab world into the global economy are opening up numerous potential, new business opportunities. The Arab region, with its rapid growing population provides a huge export market for goods and services. With a GDP of over 600 billion annually, the region also has much to offer the world market. In order to do business effectively, one must understand the language and culture of the people with whom one hopes to negotiate and conduct trade.



- 3- Personal interest in language and literature:  
Some people learn Arabic and its literature just because they have interest in them. Prof. Izik Ogumbiyi of Nigeria is a typical example of such people. He studied Arabic up to professorial level, still contributing to Arabic literature in Nigeria, and he is yet a Christian.
- 4- Political reason  
Others learn Arabic and its literature for political propaganda. In Nigeria politicians use Arabic literature and Arabic Alphabets in writing Hausa language and other Nigerian languages, to campaign for their party. Dr Olo Falaye and Malam Aminu, Kano are the typical examples of that in Nigeria. Olo Falaye did that when he was the presidential candidate of SDP.
- 5- Diplomatic reason:  
Those that have diplomatic ambition, especially, those working with foreign affairs ministries of their countries, learn Arabic and its literature.
- 6- Financial incentives:  
The US government has designated, for its citizens, Arabic language and its literature as the language of strategic importance. The National strategic language institute in 2006 promotes the learning of Arabic (and other languages deemed critical) among Americans, through numerous scholarship and supported learning opportunities. These include support for language course from beginning to advance levels, study abroad programmes, intensive instruction opportunities, teacher exchanges and professional development.
- 7- There is high demand and low supply of Arabic-speakers in the western world:  
Relatively few westerners ever venture to learn Arabic language and literature. With the growing importance of the Middle East in international affairs, there is thus an extreme shortage of workers in the west who are versed in Arabic language and culture. Those who study Arabic language and literature can find careers in a variety of fields: Journalism, business and industry, education, finance and banking, translation, consulting, foreign services and intelligence, and many others. Only 1% of the United State 12000 FBI agents have no any knowledge of Arabic at all, very few understand the language.
- 8- Arabic speaking people have made significant contribution to world civilization.  
While Europe was experiencing the relative intellectual stagnation of the middle ages, the Arab Islamic civilization was at its zenith. Arab contributed a great deal to the advancement of science, medicine and philosophy. Much learning from the Greek, Roman and Byzantine culture was preserved for the world through Arabic libraries; they also contributed in literature, mathematics, navigation, astrology and architecture.
- 9- Arabic influence is evident in many other languages  
The export concepts, products and cultural practices from Arabic speaking people is evident in the vocabulary that Arab has learnt from other languages. Algebra was invented by Arab mathematicians in medieval times. Such staple products as coffee and cotton came from the Arab world, as well as jasmine, lemon and lime. Other Arabic loanwords appearing in English language denote such diverse things as henna, mattress, lute, mattress, gerbil, sorbet, safari and



muslin. The influence of Arabic culture is apparent not only in the English language but also in Persian, Turkish, Kurdish, Spanish, Swahili, Urdu and other languages.

10- The United States has an Arab American minority:

According to US census Bureau's 2002, there are 1.2 million people of Arab heritage residing in the United States. Though relatively small population, their number is quickly growing; people of Arab ancestry in US increased by about 40% during 1990s. Intercultural understanding begins at home. Even just a basic knowledge of Arabic Language and culture can improve understanding and acceptance of this often misunderstood and misrepresented group of Americans.

### **THE IMPORTANCE OF ARABIC LITERATURE IN NIGERIA:**

Arabic literature in Nigeria has a tremendous position in literary works. This is evidently clear because, Arab merchants got contact with western Africa, including Nigeria, as far back as seventh century AD. It was through commercial contact with those merchants that the majority of people of western Africa became Muslims, not through the use of sword. A lot of literature was composed and written in Arabic at that material time. People started memorizing the Qur'an, emulating Arabs on the way they dress, the way they pray, the way they compose songs and write poetry. Arabs from Arabian nation migrated and settled in Borno, since that period of time; they are called Shuwa Arabs, and are now Nigerians. Therefore, if one looks at this historical fact, he will admit that Arabic language and literature, is highly important in Nigeria. However, Arabic literature is the literature of commerce, literature of civilization, literature of religion and literature of politics. There are a lot of prose and Arabic poetry to stand as evidence to that effect.

### **THE INFLUENCE OF ARABIC LITERATURE ON NIGERIAN SOCIETY:**

The followings are some of the areas that Arabic literature is able to touch the life of Nigerians:

1- **Religion::**

1- Arabic literature was used in propagation of Islam, and a lot of poetry on praise to Prophet Muhammad saying:

*I, prayed to get opportunity to go to Taiba,( Madina) purposely to visit the grave of Muhammad (Peace be upon Him). When his good odor spread in all its nock and corner, I gained from the blessings of Prophet Muhammad. I was left shading tires in love with Prophet Muhammad. The whole environment of Madina became full of good odor and brightness, and the pilgrims headed to Muhammad (Peace be Upon Him).*

However, the negative influence appeared as a result of misconception or misrepresentation of the literature in at least:

2- The unfortunate incidence of Maitatsine: This incidence claimed a lot of lives and destroyed properties. A man called Muhammad Marwa Maitatsine appeared in Kano in 1980, as a controversial preacher, he preached contrary to the teaching of Islam, among his teachings are:

1- Quran is the only source of Islamic jurisprudence.



- 2- That any person who believes contrary to this is an infidel.
- 3- That infidel deserves to be killed.
- 4- Western education is prohibited.
- 5- No limit to the number of wives a Muslim can marry.

He was killed By Nigerian Army, after a serious fight between the army and his followers, in December, 1980. However a lot of insurgencies after his death were experienced by Nigerians in many towns of the country, especially in Kano and Maiduguri.

- 3- The unfortunate incidence of Boko Haram: This is more severe than Maitatsine in all ramifications of destruction and vandalism. Under the leadership of one Mal. Muhammad Yusuf, who was later killed by police, Abubakar Shikkau, who is more dangerous, took over the leadership till today. The insurgencies began in 2009, when the jihadist group Boko Haram that started an armed rebellion against the government. Many innocent civilians, military personal and police were killed by Boko Haram militants, and they are still killing innocent people. Even on the day of presidential elections of 2019, they launched a serious attack on a village in Yobe State called Gaidam. In short, the problem of Boko Haram in northern Nigeria continues to the level that some political analysts are of the view that some politicians and senior military officers has hand in the insurgencies, because of the huge amount of money involved in the saga.
- 4- The Almajiri system of education, Almajiri in Hausa language means a beggar. There are many Muslims who believe that their children must pass through Almajiri system of education before they engage in anything meaningful in there lives. A father will take his son to Malam, who is a teacher and give token of money, then the Malam will take the children he is able to gather to another town, they will engage in what is called (BARA) begging for food to feed themselves and their scholar. The system has a lot of negative impact to the children, the society and the scholars themselves. This is, in short how Arabic literature influenced Nigerians religiously,

## 2- Political and Administration:

Arabic literature was used in politics, administration and communication. When Mustapha Goni challenged the mixture of men and women, attributed to Sheikh Usman bn Fodio, by some bad elements, he challenged Sheikh using poetry, and later Sheikh directed his *junior* brother to send a rejoinder to him. Mustapha Goni says:

*Blessed greetings from us to you, those who meat them will inhale misk and sukka both name of perfume. O you bn Fodiyo stand and teach ignorant, maybe they will understand both religion and this world, therefore, stop women from visiting Blessed greetings from us to you, those who meat them will inhale misk and sukka both name of perfume. O you bn Fodiyo stand and teach ignorant, maybe they will understand both religion and this world, therefore, stop women your preaching place, this is because, mixing men and women is enough bad thing. Don't do what will lead to bad things, this is because, Allah did not allow that, and it will harm us.*

Abdullahi, the brother to Sheikh, on the other hand, wrote the rejoinder to that poetry of Mustapha Goni on the same design and manner, and he says:



*O you who came to give us guidance, we heard what you said; you should hear what we say. You advice us as you could, but you did not excuse us. You should have said to those who brought the information to you this is lie. Those who are spreading bad information about us are the Demons that visit our preaching places. We don't mix men and women in our preaching places, why? It was what we preach against; but you said it and we reluctantly accepted it like that, if that was the case, but we don't accept to leave them ignorant, even if differentiation between the two sexes is good.*

### **3-Spinning:**

Arabic literature influenced Nigerians in the area of spinning in women. The difference is that Arab, especially during Jailiyya period, used to spinning in women generally without limitation, but, scholars of Arabic literature in Nigeria, usually spine in their proposed wives, or already wives. The son of Sheikh Usman, Muhammadu Albukhari is a typical example for that: he says:

You were suddenly abandoned by Ummul Fadl , and left among people like drunkard. I imagine as if there is cinder in my heart and my stomach. Since she took me away from her close reap. She stood where she could be seen up stirs, with combed black hair and the eyes of a thirsty puzzle, with her long neck like the neck of puzzle and like a Legit leg.

### **5- Complaint on the situation of the country:**

The writer of this paper has Poetry in Arabic, in which he complained on the changing situation of the country Nigeria, the poetry is called Wailatul Waqani: the poetry is in Arabic and he says:

*My eyes are shading ties.Have you said what is bothering us?. Change of time and a calamity that is disturbing us. Our bad characters of today, is disheartening us. Our leaders in the country are our lions, they are wounding us. Too much of armed robbers is bringing set back to the nation, and too much adulterers is spoiling the country. Hike in prices is bringing the nation back ward. It makes marriages very few, and makes devil happy.*

### **6- Showing brevity during war(Jihad):**

The influence of Arabic literature on Nigerians can be practically seen in the area of showing brevity at the time of war. The example of this is in the poetry of Muhammadu Bello, the son of Shiekh Usmanu Bn Fdio, where he says:

*I started in the name of Allah, followed by His thanks on curbing the attacks of the infidels that gathered on us, with the intention of removing Islam and Muslims from their homes, but the bounties of Allah are in the wider perspective. They are Twariq and Gobir, with Yunfa, the foolish among them that was instigating them but Allah was seeing and protecting us. When they reach KUNKUGI, they destroyed by burning and demolition and capturing so many captives. Until he says: there are many braves that our swords cut them in pieces, and birds and wild animals use to follow our sword to eat the dead bodies.*

Arabic literature has influenced Nigerians in so many ways, such as descriptive poetry, poetry of abuse of somebody and poetry that is concern with social life of people. And many more, but this paper cannot comprise them all.



## **RESULTS:**

The results of this paper are: The paper was able to prove that literature is actually the mirror through which we can study the life of people. The life of people from Northern part of Nigeria is being identified, through Arabic poetry of Nigerians. The Arabic poetry was able to throw some light on how some poets were influenced by Arabic literature in some area of the life. It paves way for researchers to understand that there are a lot of literatures of Arabic that need further research and documentation in the country Nigeria. The paper suggests that most of religious crises in Nigeria are as a result of misconception of Arabic literature.

## **DISCUSSIONS:**

This research is significant in gingering researchers to prepare and study Arabic literature from a lot of manuscripts and written books of Arabic in Nigeria, with the aim of writing well researched papers for future generation researchers in literature and history. The paper was able to present an issue, which is religious crises in Nigeria, and mentioned solution to the problem in a systematic way. Integration of Almajiri system of education is the only major way of resolving the problem.

**CONCLUSION:** In conclusion, this paper was able to give a clear picture of Nigerian society with special reference to the Northern part of the country. The reader of the paper, can easily trace the genesis of the Islamic religious crises in Nigeria, and attribute it to negligence of government towards the Almajiri system of education. The mistake was realized by the former President Dr. Goodluck Jonathan, by integrating Almajiri system of education to the main stream of the system of education of the nation. This will bring about peace and development to the nation. It is hoped that the incumbent president of Nigeria, Alhaji Muhammadu Buhari, is going to continue with the process of integrating Almajiri system of education into the main stream of education. That will make it easier for the government to have total control of the system, to prevent future occurrence of any religious crises in the country.

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### **Declaration**

I do hereby declare that the paper titled: Arabic literature and Nigeria Society is original and the

Author's Name is

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