

Arts and Africa

BBC AFRICAN SERVICE, LONDON

BBC COPYRIGHT CONTROL

ARTS AND AFRICA

First Broadcast: 18.1.81.

368G

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Welcome from Alex Tetteh-Lartey to music and poetry from Somalia and to the sound of trumpets from Zaria, Kaduna State, in Northern Nigeria.

GRAMS

MUSIC EXTRACT - KAKAKI TRUMPETS.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Those trumpets, extremely long ones (I remember seeing them at the big exhibition of Hausa culture here in London four or five years ago) those trumpets are called kakaki and they come from the Hausa-speaking part of Nigeria, and later in the programme we'll be hearing about a new publishing venture in the Hausa language.

But for the first part of today's programme I'm going to travel directly eastwards from Nigeria to Somalia. It's only in the last decade that the Somali language has had a nationally acceptable written form so that the considerable oral literature was unknown outside Somali-speaking communities. Somalis owe the international recognition of their language and literature very largely to Mousse Ismail Galaal whose death was announced recently. He was a scholar, poet and teacher and we've asked the Somali novelist Nuruddin Farah to come along and tell us a little about Galaal. Nuruddin, what made Galaal an exceptional man?.....

NURUDDIN FARAH

Galaal was unique among his generation because although he was born in the nomadic areas of the north of Somalia and although he spent the first twenty two years of his life as a pastoralist and as a nomad, herding camels, living like any nomad, he became, twenty years later, one of the most respected scholars of Somali poetry, Somali music and Somali literature. He also became the most highly listened to poet-reciter. Not only that, but he was also a poet. He taught a great number of foreign scholars to speak Somali, helped them do their research, opened many doors which might have been closed to them. He travelled a great deal; he had a poem to recite on every occasion, for every instance. If you told him a story he would say, "Wait a second, I can remember this". And then he would tell you a story and at the end of the story, he would also recite a poem to go with it. Mousse was also exceptional in that he wrote a great deal. As I said he spent the first twenty two years of his life as a pastoralist and as a nomad. Then, twenty years later he had behind him at least two to three books, some of which have remained the treasure and reference to Somali poetry and literature.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Was he educated in the normal sense of the word?

NURUDDIN FARAH

What do you mean by normal? Do you mean in the European sense?

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Yes.

NURUDDIN FARAH

If you mean by the European sense of the term, no, not until he came to England to do a course at the School of Oriental and African Studies where he took a certificate in Linguistics. Then he went, later, to America, to California, to UCLA to do part time teaching and part time studying. He was also interested in astronomy - he wrote a book on Somali astronomy which to this day hasn't been published. He's written another long and interesting pamphlet on how the Somalis cure themselves, the things they use.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Did you know him personally?

NURUDDIN FARAH

Yes, I knew him personally. We went along very well. He always treated me as though I was his son and would always tease me about what he called my foreign ways. Because sometimes when he quoted Somali poetry at me, sometimes I would quote back something else, maybe a poem by a foreigner. There are very many beautiful incidents, in fact, which were to do with the way he would narrate when he met people. The most flamboyant incident was when he went to America and was in hospital for a few months. At the end of this time, his nurse came and wished him well on his journey back to Somalia and he quoted a poem to her and then he praised her and said that she was beautiful, "like a stallion", which she did not take very well!

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

We've actually got here a recording of a recital he made of some poetry. We'll have a listen to it and then you can tell us what it means.

TAPE

EXTRACT - RECORDING OF GALAAL RECITING SAED MOHAMMED ABDULLA HASSAN.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Well, what is he talking about Nuruddin?

NURUDDIN FARAH

He is talking about the art of war, the life of the nomad, the pride of the nomad, the love of the nomad for the land on which he feeds his cattle. By the way, that was a poem by Saed Mohammed Abdulla Hassan, the greatest Somali warrior-poet.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Thanks Nuruddin, thanks for coming along.

GRAMS

MUSIC EXTRACT - RIHAHOG ASIRIKAKO

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Rihahog Asiridakoh, it means 'The caravan is resting for the night'. It is the kind of lyric that is popular rather than classical.

GRAMS

MUSIC EXTRACT - RIHAHOG ASIRIKAKO

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

And we'll be hearing more from Mohamed Ali and the Hi-Five Band at the end of the programme. The influence of Arabic is to be found in Somali as it is in most if not all languages spoken by large Moslem communities. It's certainly true of Hausa. Of course, the greatest number of Hausa live in northern Nigeria and the written form of Hausa has been standardized for long enough for it to have appeared in print for years. The Nigerian government's scheme for Universal Primary Education, UPE, sets out to teach children at primary level in their first language so the demand for school books, and, eventually, through increased literacy for general interest books is bound to increase. The best known publishing house used to be Gaskiya Corporation (they've changed their name to NNPC and work in association with Macmillans). But the University Press of Nigeria and Longman have also printed books, often textbooks, in Hausa and now it's the turn of Nelson Nigeria to start a similar venture. They've brought out twelve titles in Hausa in the last two years and one of them, a collection of moral tales by Malam Aminu Kano called "Stories to Sharpen Your Heart" has proved a best-seller. Christopher Ward was in charge of the publication of the twelve titles when, first of all he was Nelson's Regional Editor in Zaria and then Publishing Manager in Lagos. David Sweetman suggested that up to now publishing Hausa books had been rather neglected and Christopher Ward admitted that was so.

CHRISTOPHER WARD

I think it has, from Nelson's point of view, because our strength hitherto has been in Yoruba and in Igbo but I think from other publishers, that's not the case.

DAVID SWEETMAN

When you decided to go into Hausa publishing, what did you decide to do if other publishers were already in there? Did you decide to do something that wasn't being covered?

CHRISTOPHER WARD

We looked at the emergence of the need for primary material. We realised that we couldn't break in with a brand new primary course and therefore we looked at supplementary material in the social studies field which hitherto hadn't been covered by the publishers.

DAVID SWEETMAN

But this is nevertheless basically educational material. Do you envisage any general publishing in Hausa?

CHRISTOPHER WARD

Not at the moment. You could say that a lot of the poetry that we are producing is of more general interest than for school text books and certainly that would continue.

DAVID SWEETMAN

You've described in general terms the first source of books that you are publishing, could you be a little more specific? What are the first titles and how many are there?

CHRISTOPHER WARD

There are five Hausa titles, three of them belong to a series of Hausa life and customs with the titles 'Wakokin Bikin Aure' (forgive my pronunciation if it's wrong) which is a collection of wedding songs; 'Hikayoyin Kaifafa Zukata' which is perhaps the most outstanding title of these three by Malam Aminu Kano which has already reprinted within six months of publication; and a collection of Hausa customs with the title 'Ciniki da Sana'o'i a Kasar Hausa'.

DAVID SWEETMAN

What problems are there with Hausa as a written and printed language? Has it standardized its orthography, its modes of communication, its spelling and so on, or did you have to take advice on that?

CHRISTOPHER WARD

We had to take advice on that, naturally, from experts but we were fortunate in that our general editors for many of the series were from the Centre for Study of Nigerian Languages in Kano. We also had close contact with the Institute of Education in Zaria who were also working on standardizing the orthography and I think that it is safe to say that of all the Nigerian languages, perhaps Hausa is the most standardized.

DAVID SWEETMAN

Who were the people you worked with in Nigeria, the Nigerian experts you've talked about?

CHRISTOPHER WARD

At the Centre for the Study of Nigerian Languages, Malam Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya who is a senior research fellow and the Director of the Institute Dr. Dandatti Abdulkadir, and in Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria Malam Zaruk and other members of the Languages Faculty.

DAVID SWEETMAN

Do you see this as part of a general move in Nigeria, as well as other places, towards encouraging local languages as opposed to relying on English?

CHRISTOPHER WARD

Definitely. And this is in keeping with the Federal Government's own policy which is to encourage local language publishing and they, in fact, spread the net much wider than Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba and are looking at Efik for which Nelson has already published and Fufulde and other, can I say, minority languages.

DAVID SWEETMAN

It has been said that there are people outside Nigeria and outside of Hausa speaking areas who would like to be able to get Hausa books - people who study Hausa or who study customs of Nigeria and the other places where Hausa is spoken. Will they be able to get hold of these books?

CHRISTOPHER WARD

They will be able to get them through Nigeria.

DAVID SWEETMAN

Nelson (Nigeria) is now an independent company, isn't it, principally owned by Nigerians as companies must be in the country? What do you think the next big steps will be towards localisation of the publishing industry in Nigeria?

CHRISTOPHER WARD

I think there will be an increasing emphasis on educational material for Nigeria being produced in Nigeria. Certainly in the Federal Government's Development Plan they do state that in the five year period all primary and secondary educational publishing should be produced within the country.

GRAMS

MUSIC EXTRACT - KAKAKI TRUMPETS.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

The other stirring voice of the Hausa, the kakaki. And before that Christopher Ward, talking to David Sweetman. I promised more of Mohamed Ali and the Hi-Five Band and here they are.

GRAMS

MUSIC EXTRACT -- BAL SOORPT OBAH LAMOTYIY.

ALEX TETTEH-LARTEY

Bal Soorpt Obah Lamotiyiy and it means 'May you sleep well beautiful little flower' and with it we've come to the end of Arts and Africa for today, but I'll be back at this time next week. For now, from Alex Tetteh-Lartey, it's goodbye.

GRAMS

MUSIC EXTRACT -- BAL SOORPT OBAH LAMOTYIY.