

“Go by Appearances at Your Peril”: The Raina Kama Writers' Association in Kano, Nigeria,  
Carving out a Place for the “Popular” in the Hausa Literary Landscape

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# “Go by Appearances at Your Peril”: The Raina Kama Writers’ Association in Kano, Nigeria, Carving out a Place for the “Popular” in the Hausa Literary Landscape

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The 25th anniversary of the publication of Karin Barber’s fertile and provocative overview of the “Popular Arts in Africa” provides an occasion to turn back to the concepts and challenges she set out there and consider how useful they remain after twenty-five years. In discussing the way in which a long-established cline of the “traditional/popular/elite” had been hitherto deployed, Barber drew attention to the definitional processes at work in cultural production such that producers and consumers claim and contest affinities with other cultural forms. In addition to issues surrounding the social and political position of producers and consumers, processes of production were differentially embedded in commercial or noncommercial relations. There were many other issues raised in that original article but this is the theme that will be pursued further here.

This article considers the emergence of a new mode of popular fiction in Hausa in northern Nigeria in the late 1980s and reflects on the consciously self-definitional processes that were in play at that time among a group of emerging writers. They placed themselves on the “traditional/popular/elite” spectrum and quite self-consciously situated themselves also along alternative definitional clines, i.e., to what degree they were seen to be aligned with Islam or “Hausa customs.” In one brief experiment, they also sought to distance themselves from both Western and Middle Eastern cultures, as symbolized by the use of Roman and Arabic scripts.

The growth and spread of this literature was driven by engagement at the level of subject matter with urban youth and predominantly women’s concerns

in an Islamic society. It was occasioned by the concurrence of complementary motivations with a commonality of experience in book production with its price and market sensitivities and risks. Success with books led to an interest in the new technologies of video production, where the group of writers that form the focus of this discussion fared less well.

The emergence of a new mode of cultural creativity raises many questions surrounding the transition into action, from being in a receptive mode to a creative one, from passivity to galvanized "can do." Not only does it raise questions about how individuals transform themselves, it also throws into relief the relationships between actors in that transition and how they feed off each other, support each other, or split and go their own ways. It also shows how what may be a haphazard combination of events and personalities strike the zeitgeist in such a way that they start a trend, a movement that goes way beyond where they began. A puzzle for the observer and the participant is why one such combination of initiatives and circumstances may explode and change society while another withers on the vine. In this discussion, we will consider the beginnings of a substantial cultural endeavor within the Hausa speaking world of West Africa, one that went on to produce thousands of novels circulating in northern Nigeria with hundreds of writers and one that provided an impetus for the development of a whole other cultural phenomenon, the Hausa video film industry within Nollywood in Nigeria.<sup>1</sup>

It is tempting to suggest that success and "take-off" are the outcome of the concurrence of a particular constellation of favorable circumstances, the right economic environment, the presence of rewards and incentives, a culmination of acquired skills and experience, a supportive environment of peers, a continuity of tradition on which to draw, and a host of other propitious elements leading to a critical mass followed by cultural explosion! We will see in this discussion that quite the opposite appears to have been the case. Economic dislocation and hardship constituted the environment in which these pioneers worked; the financial risks for authors were great, control of revenue from intellectual property was extremely shaky, and the practitioners were novices who felt denigrated in society. Angry at a society that favors educational qualifications over sheer raw creative skills, they made little reference to earlier writers in the Hausa creative writing tradition, such as it was, and the most obvious facilitative foundation, a thriving publishing industry, had recently collapsed nearly completely. Women, in particular, became emboldened by the potentials of creative freedom assured by their audiences.

A more inauspicious context in which to engender an explosion of popular creative writing would be difficult to imagine than existed in northern Nigeria at the end of the 1980s. And yet, it appears that none of these obstacles was insurmountable and, in some ways, the absence of certain components had something of a liberating effect on those who were not faced by established institutions who would tell them why they couldn't do it this way or couldn't do it that. The one key thing they did have was a hard won skill that they shared with millions of other Nigerians, the ability to read and write Hausa. A decade after the introduction of Universal Primary Education (UPE) in Nigeria in September 1976, individuals who were twelve when the policy was introduced were now twenty-two, and many others had been through basic literacy classes as young adults. The degree to which UPE was effective in those years is for another discussion, but it is

abundantly clear that by 1986 the problem that had afflicted publishers and writers from the 1930s onwards, namely the lack of a substantial potential readership, was a problem of the past.

Part of this story is the emerging manner by which a group of writers began to become aware of this potential readership, how they constituted it and looked to meet its perceived needs, and how they organized themselves as a group with a manifesto for that growing audience. In some ways, the manifestation of a group identity served equally to raise the profile of the writers who were its members and to establish the notion of an audience with whom they were in correspondence, through their stories as well as directly through letters and face-to-face contact. As we shall see, a concomitant effect of its formation was not only to establish the notion of potential reader groupings, i.e., readers' clubs, but also the possibility and, very quickly, the reality of alternative, and sometimes rival, groups of writers.

In 2008, Graham Furniss was in a position to deposit over 2,000 volumes of Hausa fiction by some hundreds of writers, many of whom were women, into the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS) archives at the University of London.<sup>2</sup> This growing and continuing cultural phenomenon began in the mid-1980s and the bulk of this discussion will focus on what is acknowledged to have been the most significant early group of writers, Raina Kama, and their engagement with the issues that we have outlined above, as well as their experiences and positions.

There are many issues surrounding this mode of cultural production that we do not address other than through what these writers say about them. Nevertheless, it is important to be aware that some of these writers, and their novels, went on to become part of the video film explosion a few years later and that both these genres have been the subject of an intense, and very public, debate throughout the period. That debate has raged in the newspapers, on the radio, and in many forms of public discussion. This debate has, at certain times, tried to move a more liberal and permissive public atmosphere to one where strong criticism of both the products and the production processes culminates in the public burning of books and videos and the arrest of writers and film producers. The debates have generally been framed along two complementary axes—the degree to which the content and the people involved with these books and videos are in conformity with Islam and how well the books and videos conform to Hausa values, customs, and traditions. Although it is often difficult to separate, at least from a literary narrative perspective, what distinguishes the two. Authority of interpretation is crucial in both of these overlapping discourses and the censorship board—established in Kano in only 2001—has been one way in which the state has sought to regulate the discussions and the phenomenon itself. This paper will, however, not address this complementary and important history.

While the discussion will focus on the Raina Kama Writers' Association, they were not the first to begin self-publishing in the aftermath of the collapse of the Nigerian economy and the decline in formal publishing in the mid-1980s.<sup>3</sup> Abdalla Uba Adamu chronicles some of the early novels in this new genre and the emergence of a number of cooperative ventures in writing and publishing ("Loud Bubbles" 142–4). Some of the earliest of the books came from the pens of a group that called itself Kukan Kurciya, "the cry of a dove." A core member of this group

was Ahmed Mahmood Zahraddeen Yakasai, who produced at least three short novellas between 1988 and 1990 (*Kogin Soyayya* in 1988, *Garin Masoyi* in 1989, and *Wataran Sai Labari* in 1990). Other members of the group included Ibrahim H. Bichi (*Soyayya Gamon Jini 1 and 2*) and Balarabe Abdullahi Sani (*Son Maso Wani, Rai Dai . . .*, and *Ragayar Lawashi*).

Kukan Kurciya listed books by their members in their early publications, an idea that was adopted also by Raina Kama, but not all their listed works were novels. *Tsalle Daya . . .* by Idris S. Imam, for example, was a treatise on Hausa marriage, including the appropriate behavior of men and women and other advice and moral commentary. Two early works by Umar I. Wudil for the group, *Me Musulunci Ya Yi Wa Mata? / What Does Islam Say about Women?* and *Wanene Mumini? / Who Is a Muslim?*, also fall into this category. Kukan Kurciya was based in the Yakasai quarter of the old city and a number of the writers belonged to, or were linked with, the Zahraddeen clan. The Zahraddeen name was used for a publishing house, Zahraddeen Publishers, and bookstore, Zahraddeen Bookshop, where a number of Kukan Kurciya books were printed and sold. Another Kukan Kurciya writer of the Zahraddeens was Hauwa Aminu (Yakasai), a woman who produced a number of books, among them *Furen Soyayya 1 and 2*, and *Kaddara Ta Riga Fata*.

The years 1987 to 1989 saw a mixture of the old and the new and a small number of new Hausa books were produced by formal publishers. HudaHuda Press, linked to Hodder and Stoughton, produced a collection of short moral tales intended for the primary school market (*Hannunka Mai Sanda* by Kamaruddin Imam). The Nigerian Triumph Publishing company, on the other hand, printed Abba Ado Dandago's *Daji Bakwai*, a take on the fantastical adventure genre that was set in far-off lands, a form that descended directly from the novels of the 1930s. *Turmi Sha Daka* (1988) by Kabiru Ibrahim Yakasai was in a similar vein, a story of battle, wondrous deeds, and wandering the world.

But among these familiar themes and styles, there were a number of novels that began to focus on the boy-girl relationship, demurely and within a framework of Islamic propriety. They were sometimes set in a far-off land, away from the practical realities of contemporary Nigeria. So there appeared Idris S. Imam's *In Da Rai . . .* in 1987 and Bashir Sanda Gusau's *Soyayya Dankon Zumunci* in 1989. *In Da Rai . . .* is the story of an orphan boy who is taken in by a couple who care for him, his eventual success as a poet brings him fame and he falls in love with, and eventually marries, a princess. *Soyayya Dankon Zumunci* is the story of the trials and tribulations of a boy, Farisu, and girl, Farisatu, on the road to true love somewhere in the imaginary Middle East. The romantic tone is set through letters from one to another. Although the previously discussed works contributed to the genre, *So Aljannar Duniya* (1980) by Hafsatu Abdulwahid is the book that really set the world alight to the love-story writing that blossomed in the 1990s. The novel, published by the NNPC, was one of the four winners of the prize for best Hausa book organized by the Ministry of Arts and Culture. It focuses on an inter-ethnic love affair and female empowerment through education, issues that caught the imagination of many.<sup>4</sup>

The origins of a writers' association are a combination of a number of individual trajectories, the dynamics of particular historical circumstance, and the relationships between the people concerned. In the discussion that follows, we explain the motivation behind the name of the association, in terms of self-perception and

the attitudes of others, and we look to cater to the somewhat differing perspectives of the participants in order to avoid an entirely monolithic narrative.<sup>5</sup>

It is clear that Raina Kama had a corporate public identity in the period from 1989 to 1994, and that many subsequent writers and groups of writers refer back to them as the “first group” in whose footsteps they have sought to tread. But the corporate identity emerges from the coming together of a number of individuals who had already begun to write and publish their books. It is not the vehicle that, for the founding members at least, brought them to the business of writing. It emerges as a mechanism for helping each other and for establishing a forum for sharing experience in facing difficulties they had individually encountered. One key moment for each of the first members of Raina Kama was the point at which they made the transition from being a passive consumer of reading, education, and books, to becoming an active creator of narrative, text, ideas, and expressed experience. In the case of three of the core members of the group, Balaraba Ramat Yakubu, Ado Ahmad, and Dan Azimi Baba, this transition occurred through interaction with a teacher in adult education classes—a teacher who responded positively to material written as part of the course or who responded with encouragement to an expressed intention to carry on writing.

For Balaraba Ramat, it was the reaction and support of a teacher in Bauchi, Mr. Garba A. Jallab, that made all the difference. She had learned to read and write at the Women’s Centre run by the Agency for Mass Education in Kano, close to the British Council offices, and had become involved in teaching other women to read there. Having taught for three years for the agency, she was offered a training course in Bauchi where she was taught by Mr. Jallab.

So when I went to Bauchi I formed a club, called Kauna Club, in the town. Our Hausa teacher made it part of our course that we should found such a club, and he saw that, in doing the project, I had been writing all sorts of things—this woman had had a fight with that woman, etc.—I wrote it all down and put it together in my project. When I showed my writings to him and asked him whether they would be useful in the project, he said I should start writing seriously. I’ll never forget his name, it was Mr. Garba A. Jallab, a Bauchi man. I said I didn’t know how I would go about it, and he said I should do it exactly the same way I went about writing the things I had seen. I said they were things that had really happened, and he told me to write precisely about things that I had seen or heard. And so within three months, I wrote the play *Kyakkyawar Rayuwa*, my first work. I took it to him and he said it was good and I should do another one. So I went and wrote another, *Ilmi Gishirin Zamani*. He looked at it, made some corrections, and told me it was good. And then he said that I had done well in writing plays, but what about writing a short story. I said I was scared of doing that. He said he would help me. And that is when I started writing *Budurwar Zuciya*, but before I could finish *Budurwar Zuciya* I had to leave the college, and I didn’t finish the course.

It is of course some way from the production of coursework to the establishment of a career as a writer. Nevertheless, the transition from feeling incapable to the confidence and pleasure of writing is one that, for Balaraba Ramat, was clearly wrapped up in the, admittedly truncated, experience of adult education, one that gave her delight in hearing the personal stories of people around her that she reworked into her own creative output.

While Balaraba Ramat was writing *Budurwar Zuciya* in Bauchi, Ado Ahmad and Dan Azimi Baba were both attending adult education evening classes in Kano. Ado Ahmad was in a more advanced group than Dan Azimi Baba in the Shahuci Adult Evening Classes, but the headmaster, Abdu Garba Babanladi Satatima, usually referred to as Babanladi, knew them both. Dan Azimi Baba told Babanladi that he was in the process of writing a book, later to be called *Kyan Alkawari*, and he was encouraged by the headmaster to carry on and try and have it published. When Ado Ahmad approached Babanladi saying he was also writing a book, which eventually became *In Da So Da Kauna*, and would value some help, Babanladi told him that while he himself didn't know anything about publishing, he knew someone who did, Dan Azimi Baba.

At that time, Dan Azimi was trading out of a stall in Kantin Kwari, in Kano, and Babanladi told Ado where he could find him. By this time, Dan Azimi had published the first part of *Rikicin Duniya*, the second book he had written but the first he had published, and Ado was looking to publish *In Da So Da Kauna*, which was also his second book, but the first he was to publish. He had decided shrewdly not to publish the first book he wrote, *Hattara Dai Masoya*, because he felt it was more than a little censorious of women and therefore would not appeal to the widest audience he could muster, which was an important issue if he was to make a splash with his first publication. As we will hear later, *Hattara Dai Masoya* actually did make a huge splash and provided him, to an extent, with fame and fortune. Similarly, Dan Azimi's first piece of writing did not appear as his first published work, but for entirely different reasons. He had passed the manuscript to another writer, Bashir Roukbah, for comment and correction and was left waiting a considerable length of time before it was returned. While he waited, he decided to start another project, which became *Rikicin Duniya*. It was inspired by his experience living in the area of the old city between the Dala and Goron Dutse hills, an area that, for someone from his lowly background, was the home not only of business people and ordinary men and women from the original pre-Fulani Hausa community, but also of the street gangs who operated in particular wards and areas of the city.

Dan Azimi Baba and Ado Ahmad would meet quite regularly during late 1989 and early 1990 and became firm friends. They were aware that Balaraba Ramat had published *Budurwar Zuciya*, first printed in 1987 and reprinted each year following, but their association with her began when she took her book to the old city booksellers in late 1989. Alhaji Musa Dan Bala of Sauki Bookshop expressed surprise that a woman was writing books and said he only knew of Dan Azimi and Ado Ahmad doing similar things. When she asked how to get in touch with them, he referred her to Baba Na Jakara of the long-established Jakara Bookshop, located near the Kurmi Market in the old city, who knew where they lived.

Baba Na Jakara was a little reluctant to take her book. He had apparently been hesitant to take these kinds of books because Ado and Dan Azimi wanted to be paid for their work, even though he was not sure they would sell. The relationships between authors and booksellers would remain fraught for some years to come. Nevertheless, Baba Na Jakara pointed out Dan Azimi's house, close to his shop. When she, Dan Azimi, and Ado Ahmad met, she told them of the difficulties she had with getting *Budurwar Zuciya* published. Her major frustration at that time had been with the office of Kano Educational Resources Development (KERD) in

Gandun Albasa. She had approached them in the hope that they would approve the book and include it in school syllabuses, a major boon in any attempt to guarantee continuing sales. She had retyped the manuscript five times, after a series of scrutinies by different people in the organization, and each time they rejected it. And so, Balaraba Ramat, Ado Ahmad, and Dan Azimi Baba began to meet to discuss the business of writing and of getting their books printed and sold.<sup>6</sup>

Clubs, societies, and associations of a social or civic nature are a common feature of northern Nigerian life and it was not long before Ado Ahmad suggested that this growing group of friends should form a "writers' association," or club. In late 1990, they agreed on the title "Raina Kama," which is derived from the saying, "raina kama ka ga gayya." The implications of the name are significant in understanding how these people saw themselves and the reactions they were beginning to receive in broader society. The two men were acutely aware of the social strata from which they came, and Balaraba Ramat, although from a much higher social status, had nevertheless suffered from educational constraints because of her early arranged marriage, which had created subsequent difficulties for her. All three of them shared a history in which their ability to read and write had been acquired as adults, not having benefited from formal education when they were younger.

A sense that they were looked down on by the educated formed a strong motivating force in the identity they proclaimed for themselves and in their determination to succeed. Raina Kama means, literally, "belittling the appearance" and implies not only that "appearances can be deceptive" but also that something that is disdainfully treated will one day be something of significance. While the name may have reflected something of what they felt in late 1990, it had previously been employed by Ado Ahmad, as "Raina Kama Ventures" with another writing group he began with some friends. The earlier group had disbanded because their attempts to form a credit union to cover the costs of publication had come to nought. Dan Azimi Baba's suggestion for a name had been Ramin Shuka, from the saying "ramin shuka ba tsayi sai albarka" / "the hole for the seed is not deep, but produces good things," again reflecting the insubstantial nature of their formal education but also highlighting their productiveness. The phrase had been used by their headmaster, Babanladi, about them, the products of the evening classes. In the end, the agreement was to go with Raina Kama and the first book by Dan Azimi to carry the group's name was *Amintacciyar Soyayya*.

From the beginning, however, there was ambivalence in the attitudes taken toward them and their writing. While they were sensitive to disdainful comments about their work and their educational backgrounds, they were encouraged and supported by some among the educated elite. When Dan Azimi Baba was producing his manuscript of the first part of *Rikicin Duniya*, he had struggled to get hold of an IBM typewriter but needed particular help with orthography and layout. He talked to Ali Usudu who introduced him to the poet Abdullahi Sani Makarantar Lungu, a member of the poets' circle, the Hikima Club.<sup>7</sup>

Abdullahi Sani read the book and said he would introduce him to people at Bayero University in Kano, notably Professor M. K. M. Galadanci, the Head of the Nigerian Languages Department. The response Dan Azimi received from M. K. M. Galadanci was far from dismissive. Not only did Galadanci suggest that Dan Azimi take the manuscript to a TV station so that a drama could be made out of it, but the name of the book itself came from Galadanci's first reaction on

meeting Dan Azimi, which was to say, "Goodness, but this story is a real rikicin duniya (worldly mess)."

Ali Usudu also introduced him to the late Professor Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya, who sat through the night at his home in Gwammaja, in the old city, and talked over the plot and narrative with Dan Azimi and two of his friends. On the immediate issue of solving the problems of orthography and layout, it was Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya who introduced Dan Azimi to one of the departmental secretaries at the university, Nasiru Dahiru Zage, who was to become a regular proofreader for a series of books by him and others.

In Ado Ahmad's case, he himself became proficient in the rules of Hausa orthography, a skill that became invaluable in his later commercial enterprise as Ado Ahmad Publishers. But initially, he also needed support and guidance, and got it from M. K. M. Galadanci, who read and commented on *Masoyan Zamani*, encouraging him with the remark that, while he was aware of the dismissive attitudes of some, he was sure that one day they would receive honorary degrees for their efforts. Another academic who was of central importance in supporting this group of writers, and indeed the generation that has come after them, was Professor Sa'idu Gusau, who wrote approving prefaces (including one for Ado Ahmad's book, *Masoyan Zamani*, for example), introductory comments, and provided feedback to many of them. But these were exceptions rather than the rule and the bulk of the educated elite ignored, were ignorant of, or were dismissive of this form of writing.

A source of copyediting and more general support was also provided by the Kano State History and Culture Bureau (HCB), which helped writers financially and in other ways from the end of the 1980s into the early 1990s. Adamu has discussed their role and has also charted the emergence of the Kano State branch of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA), Hausa language section, an umbrella body that linked up the various writers' clubs and societies ("Loud Bubbles" 144–5). This organization was led by Yusuf Adamu, a writer and academic at Bayero University, Kano, who has also written on the emergence of these novels and associated video films of the period (see Y. M. Adamu).

Through 1990, Raina Kama expanded to include four other writers, making a founding group of seven. The late Aminu Hassan Yakasai was the person with the greatest level of formal education, having completed a degree in history at the University of Sokoto. Before his untimely death in 2000, he also moved into video film production, as did a number of the founders of Raina Kama. When Alkhamees D. Bature's *So Tsuntsu* was still in manuscript form, he frequented Haske Bookshop in the Makwarari ward and met Ado Ahmad there. Through another bookseller, Malam Shehu, who had a stall outside the Plaza cinema, Alkhamees met Dan Azimi Baba, and he soon became a figure in the club.

Around the same time, Aminu Abdu Na'inna wrote the story *So Marurun Zuciya* to assuage the pain he felt when a girl from a high status background jilted him under pressure from her parents when they discovered that he was an orphan from a lowly upbringing. He published his book in 1991, having made the acquaintance of the other Raina Kama writers the previous year. The last of the founding members was Badamasi Shu'aibu Burji, a man who had completed a degree in mass communication at Bayero University and ran a relatively successful business dealing in air conditioning, cooking gas, and cosmetics. His early work, *In So Ya*

*Yi So*, appeared on the market in 1991 and he had earlier accepted an invitation by Raina Kama to join them.

Six of these seven writers were together one day in 1990 (Badamasi S. Burji was away on business) when they took a photograph of the group that was to appear in a number of their later publications. Their presence as a group was marked by that photograph and reinforced by a number of measures they took in relation to the marketing and publicity for their books, which will be discussed further.

The perceived need for the formation of Raina Kama derived from their common experience of the practical and intellectual difficulties of writing and getting into print. A number of the Raina Kama writers used school exercise books and ballpoint pens to draft their stories and quite a number of the more recent generation still do. A crucial issue was orthography, both with the handwritten manuscript and when arranging for it to be typed. Comprehensibility for the typist was dependent on his/her ability to decipher the text. A lesser issue was the fact that many typewriters and PC-based computer fonts (at least in the early stages) did not allow for the insertion of the three "hooked" letters marking plosive consonants in the Hausa language. The result was that "b," "k," and "d" could represent the "normal" sounds associated with them or the plosive versions marked as *ɓ*, *ƙ*, and *ɗ*. This could occasionally create ambiguity, although a number of Hausa-language publications dispensed with the additional symbols, newspapers in particular.

The major issue, however, was with word division, where elisions and inappropriate word separations could create havoc with intelligibility. Inaccuracies in the handwritten manuscripts could be repeated or magnified in the process of typing, particularly when it was taken to a "business center," of which there are many in urban Kano, where typing services were provided for a fee. Most typists were employed because of their ability to write and set letters in English, and for many, Hausa was not their first language. It quickly became apparent to Balaraba Ramat, Ado Ahmad, and the others that they were going to need someone who really knew the rules of Hausa orthography, word division in particular, to go over the typescript and make the necessary corrections. The advent of word-processing at least eliminated the possibility of introducing new and different errors, which was a common occurrence with retyping. A major development, brought about by Abdalla Uba Adamu, was the introduction of a Hausa font using the hooked letters to PC computers in Kano. Typing up and correction was only the first step on the road to the creation of a commercial product, a book to take to market. The cost of manuscript preparation was borne by the author, as were the following stages.

Commercial printing for Kano businesses has an extensive history. The government printing press, which dates from colonial times, was able to typeset in Roman and Arabic characters since the 1930s. The great revolution in printing in Kano came with the introduction of offset printing around 1960.<sup>8</sup> This allowed printers with no knowledge of Arabic characters to print books in Arabic script using the offset process, which photographs the page and etches the image onto a metal plate affixed to the press for the print run. For our writers in 1987, these processes required a series of negotiations, typescript in hand. The purchase of the necessary plates and their preparation with eight pages each was coupled with a need to understand the different weights and qualities of paper and the mechanics of printing, binding, and trimming. Dan Azimi Baba describes how his first

relationships with printers through the government printing press, where print shops were lying nearly idle during the economic decline of the late 1980s. Private jobs were welcomed by the government printers, but they were soon displaced by other smaller presses who could do the work more cheaply. Dan Azimi graphically describes the issues with which he had to contend:

The whole production process for a book, I knew nothing about at the beginning. I went round here and there, to Kaduna and other places, along with Abdu Garba Satatima, and began to find out how the whole thing worked. Little by little we found out how it works. There is a press called Jama'a Press near the Friday mosque, and a Savannah Press owned by one Bello who works at the government press, it was through them that I really found out how it works. And then the putting together of the books after the printing, I learned from someone called Sirajo Omar. He assembles the books. From the typed manuscripts we had to go to the platemakers, eight pages to the plate, four in line above and four below, so if you write 48 pages then it will make six plates and so on. And each plate at the beginning was 150 naira and by the time we stopped doing books it had gone to 850 naira, now it is a lot more expensive than that.

Then the plates had to go to the printer, and we started with the government press. They had very little work and so were happy to do our stuff to get the money to keep their machinery repaired, and a little bit of money for themselves. At the beginning there were few if any presses that could make a commercial business out of our kind of printing, we had to start with the government press where it was a little bit of business on the side for them. It was only later that the market began to open up for truly commercial operations. At the beginning you had to find a government employee who would help you out with the typesetting, the platemaking, the printing, the trimming and binding, and then finally you could take your stuff to market.

Then there were different qualities of paper, newsprint paper, bond paper. Some at 100, some at 150 a ream, some at 200, at the time. It is now much more expensive; even when we stopped writing a ream was at 1,000 naira or 1,200 and the cheapest at 700. If you cut the ream in two, that gave you 1,000 pages. And then you needed to add another half ream extra to allow for wastage and damaged sheets to get a good set of 1,000 copies. And you would print 10,000 copies of a book, or 15 or even 20. I don't know how many of *Rikicin Duniya* I had printed. *Amintacciyar Soyayya* started with a print run of 20,000, *Sakaina* also. I think *Rikicin Duniya* must have sold around 60–70,000 copies all told. *Amintacciyar Soyayya* and *Sakaina* have sold around 80,000 each. And an initial print run of 10,000 may produce greater demand for book two and so it will expand if it is popular. Like for example, Ado Ahmad's book *In Da So Da Kauna*, a romance, and the most popular of the early books. I would not disagree if he said it had sold 100,000 copies. It was like food it was so popular.

Each writer in the Raina Kama group had to negotiate the production process themselves, carrying the financial burden of each step along the way. One of them, Balaraba Ramat Yakubu, had earlier taken a rather different route. There had been one dominant player in the Hausa book market ever since colonial times, the Northern Nigerian Publishing Company (NNPC). It had been previously incorporated into the Gaskiya Corporation, and in the 1930s was called the Literature

Bureau. By the time that Balaraba Ramat was looking to publish her novella *Budurwar Zuciya*, the two sides of the operation in Zaria—NNPC, the publishers, and Gaskiya, the printers—were pretty much moribund, but the printing side was still taking commissions from the universities, from private publishers, and from government. The price charged to Balaraba Ramat was higher than local Kano printers and she hemmed and hawed over quality versus price:

I always wanted a quality product, I wanted my books to look good. I was the first woman author to take my books to Gaskiya Printers in Zaria. When my first book, *Budurwar Zuciya*, came out in 1987, it cost me 2.50 naira to produce; that is what they charged me for each copy. I printed 1,000 copies. When I took them to the market, I wanted to charge three naira each, but I had terrible difficulty finding someone who would take them, they said they were too expensive at three naira. They said, why didn't I do them like the others did and then they could sell them to the dealers for one naira or 1.50 instead of trying to charge three naira. Honestly, I made no money on the book. I was so fed-up I ended up selling it at below cost. People wanted the book but they had no money, or the dealers would ask why people wanted to buy such an expensive book, and by a woman too. So then I thought about printing *Budurwar Zuciya* part two, and *Wane Kare . . .* differently. I showed them to Dan Azimi and said I was fed-up with the all the complaints about how expensive they were and that I wanted to enter the Kano market. And so I did, but the first time the printing was done, the pages were all wrong and the trimming was all wonky. So in the end I went back to Gaskiya Printers, feeling I wanted a better rather than a worse product. Things have improved since the early days, but if you look at my books you will generally see they are better printed, they are on white bond paper, but they are a little bit more expensive in the market than others.

These experiences of the founding members of Raina Kama were fed back to others, and in this way the technical knowledge of how to go about producing “a book” spread among the group and beyond.

A number of participants attest to the usefulness of the weekly meetings held in the entrance parlor at Balaraba Ramat's house in terms of deciding on the plots and character interactions contained in their novellas, and sometimes on the titles of the books themselves. Balaraba Ramat, in an interview, indicated she always had difficulty finding a good title for her books. It was often one member of the group, Dan Azimi Baba in particular, who would come up with an appropriate phrase, saying, or proverb that would capture a kernel of the story, once Balaraba had relayed it in discussion.

The issue of titles was an important one for them. Part of the marketing or advertising strategy that Raina Kama quickly developed was to list the titles of their books in each of their publications in two lists—one to give the title and author of works already published and the other, sometimes equally long, for forthcoming works. This performed two functions in the marketplace, first it allowed readers to ask for particular works at the bookshops around the city, where little or no other forms of advertising took place, and secondly it registered ownership of a range of titles, thereby warding off others from using that same phrase as a title. It is perhaps remarkable that so few duplicate titles appeared in those years, in light of the fact that there is no central registry of titles and/or ISBN numbers.<sup>9</sup>

The listing of titles was not the only element in their marketing strategy. They also represented themselves as a corporate entity by including the photograph of six of them in a number of their early works. Balaraba Ramat indicates that members of the group were also having difficulty responding to all of the readers' letters they were receiving during the late 1980s and 1990s. Often a reader would comment on the story they had read, but also they also wanted to know about the author's life history and asked to be sent a photo of the author. The presence of the group photo in the books themselves did something to stem the demand for costly responses.

Group marketing was reinforced by the inclusion of miniaturized black-and-white versions of other book covers in many of their publications. Using the reduction facility of photocopiers in business centers, they would insert up to eight reduced images on a page to advertise earlier parts of the book itself, other books by the author, or books by other Raina Kama members. The final element in their group identity marketing was the use of a reduced-size version of their logo on their book covers. Black-and-white versions of this logo were inserted in a convenient place in the three-color cover design before it went to press. Such logos became commonplace for other writers' groups also, notably Kukan Kurciya and Dan Hakin Da Ka Raina.

A further perceived need for Raina Kama came about through another early experience undergone by Balaraba Ramat and Ado Ahmad. Balaraba Ramat was waiting for Gaskiya Printers in Zaria to contact her about picking up a print run of *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* for which she had contracted them. On a trip via Kaduna, Ado Ahmad saw copies of her book for sale in a bookshop there. Upon his return, he congratulated Balaraba Ramat on the appearance of her book. Nonplussed, she indicated that she had not yet taken delivery of the book, much less sold the copies to a dealer. The group was strongly of the view that something needed to be done to stop such piracy, as it was damaging to their intellectual and commercial interests. As Ado Ahmad recalled:

It once happened when I was on my back from Abuja through Kaduna that I saw copies of *Wa Zai Auri Jahila?* by Balaraba Ramat for sale, which had gone straight to market without her knowledge. They went with a plainclothes policeman to the market in Kaduna, and the bookseller told them he could supply a thousand copies if they wanted. He was arrested along with someone in Zaria, and the case was in court here in Kano and the managers of the company were present. They came along with their big cars and their importance and they saw us arrive in our jalopies and our ordinary clothes, and they were astonished that we were the ones who had brought such a case. It turned out that it was one of their employees who had been responsible. We asked for some millions in compensation. They said they didn't have that kind of money, but they were willing to reach a settlement. And so in the end, Balaraba settled with them. Had it not been for the fact that we were in a group that looked out for each other, I wouldn't have known her and been able to tell her about what I had seen in the Kaduna market.

Having the courage and the conviction to take a case to court was to some degree the product of the solidarity and support provided by the group.

Perhaps one area above all where the writers needed to share their experiences and to band together related to their dealings, not with thieving printers as in the above example, but with the book dealers, who were the key channel for access to the wider Hausa-reading public. The relationships between the writer and dealer/bookseller had been fraught with difficulties from the beginning. Writers were coming to the business of producing books with, generally speaking, very little cash in hand and had to pick up all the costs of production. The bone of contention time and again between writers and booksellers was over who should assume the financial risk and how quickly revenue from sales would come back to the author, who needed it not only to recoup the previous outlay of money for the book's production, but also so he/she could pay additional cash for the printing of the next book or books. At first the booksellers were unsure whether these new kinds of novellas would sell. Their traditional trade had been in *Qur'ans*, in religious books, stationery, schoolbooks, English primers and readers, and Hausa works of a more traditional kind—histories, biographies, poetry, treatises, polemics, as well as the list of Hausa novels dating back to the 1930s. It was with the massive popularity of Ado Ahmad's book *In Da So Da Kauna* that they began to realize the possibilities of the more romantic type of material that was being produced.

But they were close to the buyers, hearing every day what people were looking for and what was not liked. They quickly understood the categories of novella that sold, romance prime among them, but other types—thrillers and stories of marriage, power, money, and corruption—were also beginning to emerge. They also knew that certain writers would sell well and others not. Thus each writer who would approach them with a new manuscript would receive a different kind of response and a different type of proposed financial arrangement. Where someone of Ado Ahmad's popularity might get a quick and positive response from all the booksellers, with even the possibility of an advance against sales, another less well-known writer might get a cagey response, if not a flat rejection, and be told that his/her book would be taken on a "sale or return" basis. He/she would then encounter repeated delays in securing revenue from sales or in receiving information on the level of sales achieved. In this new world of publishing, such authors were keen to share their experiences of dealing with booksellers to better understand how to advance and protect their interests. While booksellers appeared to be tardy in providing some information, they were very quick to send urgent messages to the author calling for an immediate reprint in those circumstances where they were fast running out of copies and readers were clamoring for supply.

It would appear that the banding together of Raina Kama did not give the writers a material advantage in any kind of collective bargaining with booksellers. Rather, by working as a group, they were able to try and become more "savvy" in their dealings with booksellers, who continued to work on privately negotiated arrangements with writers. It was only much later, around the turn of the millennium, that a new generation of writers from a variety of groups and societies came together to form the ANA and attempts were made to establish norms and procedures for relationships between writers and booksellers, who had often become publishers in all but name.

The final, and yet by no means least significant, need met by Raina Kama was the more diffuse and less utilitarian function of providing an arena for the

sociability of its members. Most Raina Kama members, in their interviews, were at pains to point out that they would participate in each other's celebrations and wakes and share each other's joys and woes. At naming ceremonies for children, at weddings, and funerals they would visit each other, as is the Hausa custom, to show their solidarity and their friendship. Where posts such as president or secretary in voluntary associations like Raina Kama create a framework of differentials in prestige and status, the range of daily activities reinforces the mutuality and commonality of membership.

In addition to these practical and social needs, there were issues about the intellectual project of writing a book itself. Most of the early Raina Kama writers were adults who had completed adult literacy classes. They were not people who came to writing with extensive experience of reading English language literature, whether Nigerian or international, or, indeed in some cases, with familiarity with preexisting Hausa literature. What they all had in abundance though was experience of the vicissitudes of life in a failing economy and a delight and propensity for telling and listening to stories—the narratives of other people's lives. When Ibrahim Yaro Yahaya sat up half-the-night listening to Dan Azimi Baba relating his *Rikicin Duniya*, it was the coherence of the plot that he was assessing. The driving force behind Dan Azimi Baba's writing, as with Balaraba Ramat and the others, was to get down on paper a plot sequence as it had been played out in his head. The authorial voice was present and dominant, the good, the bad, and the ugly played out their stereotypical roles and a tendency to telescope time and space was everywhere apparent.

The critics of this writing were quick to pounce on its weaknesses—occasional incoherence, lack of subtlety, or a mish-mash of writing styles. Yet at the same time, some of his best writing was vivid, real, exciting, and was tuned in to the concerns and speech styles of his young, contemporary audience. For members of Raina Kama, inclusion in the group provided them a forum for discussion of anything from how to finish a story, to how to conclude an episode on a suspenseful high, to how to weave characters and scenes together. Above all, it provided them with the opportunity to see a range of other writing and to develop their own sense of what worked and what did not and what they liked to read and what they did not.

While the practical and commercial difficulties associated with producing a book were daunting enough, far more intimidating was making the transition from passive to active, from recipient to “can do” actor, from reader to writer. Raina Kama provided the environment in which potential writers could gain the encouragement and support to “do it yourself”—to write a book. And in those early days, Ado Ahmad, Balaraba Ramat, and the others were being invited to meetings, to radio stations, and being interviewed by the press about doing it themselves. This was not just a private process for their personal gain; this was a social process that would have implications for society at large.

Motivation for writing, and thus for being in a position to join Raina Kama or one of the other writers' groups, was sometimes intensely personal. Whereas Ado Ahmad was jilted in love, Balaraba Ramat had to come to terms with an unhappy arranged marriage. For other members too, the experience of writing was of “writing out” their personal pain in a public arena. Aminu Abdu Na'inna describes the experience that was assuaged by writing in the following terms:

There was a girl in Bauchi that I was in love with, and I would write her ten-page letters, but because it would take seven days for it to get to her, I couldn't wait for a reply, I would write her thirty or forty letters in a month. She was the daughter of a very rich and well-known man from Kano and I was from an ordinary background. But when she told her family who she was in love with, their response was to ask how it could be possible to give her to an orphan and a *talaka* who owned nothing and was socially nothing, while her father was an important person, a government minister in Nigeria.

And so it was that I was not in a position to ask for her hand in marriage. They went through all sorts of machinations to marry her off to another. And the day they told her it had been done, she wrote to me to tell me. When I received that letter, I couldn't sleep and I was so distressed, that even as I was dressed only in my underpants, I went out without even locking the door and set off on the road to their place. I was going along completely taken-up with my problem when I saw police in front of me, about thirty paces away. I looked down and suddenly realized the state I was in and so I pretended to be crazy, a madman. I was swearing and hitting a tin, cursing and swearing. I was trying to protect myself from them arresting me. Seeing me in just my underpants they would think I was someone who had just gone completely crazy. When they saw me they kept saying, "Lord preserve us!" One of them asked me what I was doing and I picked up a stone and made as if to throw it and he dodged aside. I stayed there for a bit and then headed home, but didn't get there until about 3:45 in the morning. When I got home, I thanked God and said my prayers. And that day I started writing *So Marurun Zuciya*, my first book, and wanted to tell people about my experience and teach them something.

In the case of Dan Azimi Baba, the issues that prodded him into writing were less directly personal, but were more features of the social environment in which he found himself. When he was first casting around for what to write about, Dan Azimi was friends with a police officer, known as Bala DPO (Divisional Police Officer). In his misspent youth, Bala had been a member of one of the gangs that controlled the area around Dala Hill and Goron Dutse Hill in the old city of Kano. Bala suggested that Dan Azimi write about the gangs and that he, Bala, would help him get any information he would need for the book from his colleagues in the police. So Dan Azimi started with a story about a man with two wives and two sons. After one wife dies, her son is mistreated and rejected by the surviving wife and he is thrown out. The rejected boy is taken in and looked after by a *malam* who provides for him and educates him. Meanwhile, the surviving wife's son goes thoroughly to the bad, getting involved with drugs and joining the company of gang members and criminals. And so the story of *Rikicin Duniya* begins, and continues over three volumes. The backdrop of the story is the terrorizing violence by gang members on ordinary people. Dan Azimi describes his experience with the Kano gangs below.

We have people called '*yan daba* who are from when the Maguzawa lived around Dala. '*Yan daba* were the people who took what they wanted by force. Later they became '*yan tauri* and in each ward there would be its own gang. And these gangs would sometimes fall out with each other and there would be a challenge to meet in the bush, mob-handed and spoiling for a fight. Not an immediate fight, but a dispute over whose hunting dog it was that had captured a rabbit, or duiker, or whatever, and then a fight would break out. That was how it used

to be, but in more recent times, these drug takers would just go out and rob people. Cutting people with machetes, injuring them, and so it would happen all round the Jakara, Goron Dutse, Dala areas where the Maguzawa used to live.

The behavior of the gangs was not simply the peg on which Dan Azimi hung a story; he had strong views that it was the vehicle for a message. As he put it himself, "Writing is for me a gift, I always want to write to convey a message, not just any old nonsense. And even if love is a theme, it is not romance that is the aim of the book, there is always another message in the story. When we realized that the readers wanted romance then we tried to provide it, but with some other purpose slipped in alongside that will come out by the end." In the case of Dan Azimi's first book, *Rikicin Duniya*, the message related to popular attitudes to the police and policing. His express intention in writing was to present a picture of the struggles and difficulties faced by the police in apprehending criminals, who were often armed and dangerous. His book was seen as helpful by senior police officers in Kano, and Dan Azimi was incorporated into community liaison work, spreading the message and acting as a link between the community and the police to encourage others to cooperate. In Dan Azimi's own words:

As a result of publishing the books *Rikicin Duniya*, the Commissioner of Police, Hashimu, who is now dead, said to Bala DPO that they should enlist me as someone who would help with police work, because my writing always had the police in it in one way or another. I have often thought that, with all the problems in this world, it is always the police who are the first step, the first in line. If someone has committed a crime then it is the police who have to arrest him. And I have always thought that the reason why people don't like the police is because they don't understand what police work entails. So I feel I must educate people about it. All my books have the police in them. And the reason why people hate the police is because they will be the first to arrest you if you have committed a crime. People will say the police are oppressors, but I don't take the police to be oppressors. In this day and age there are those who do damage and create ill and there are the honest citizens. People say that the police only come after the riot has happened or the damage has been done and they are against the police, saying it is their fault the damage was caused. But it is not the case. The police are not just there like you and I would be, they have their procedures and systems that they have to stick by. So, for example, if you were the DPO and someone comes and says there is a fight going on in Sabon Gari, you won't rush out unprepared. You will call your assistant to assemble the available men in the police station, and maybe they are not sufficient to be able to deal with the incident and you have to call for reinforcements. And then when they come, will they be facing people who are armed or is it fighting with fists that is going on? You won't just send them out. You will need to know what caliber of weapon they will be facing and to ensure that your men can protect themselves. And you have to write down the number of men you send, the number of weapons, and the amount of ammunition, so that when they come back you know if you have men missing, kidnapped or killed by gangsters, or weapons gone. And if you then send a detachment and the people involved in the incident have gone, people will say the police are rubbish and only arrive after everything is over, not knowing that there are procedures that have to be followed. And while the criminals have planned the thing in advance, the police are supposed to react with no warning.

People don't understand the difficulties that the police face. So I try to explain these things in my books, and people even begin to wonder whether I work for the CID! Indeed the police gave me a piece of paper authorizing me to assist them and ask my advice on certain things, and I have become the leader of the group that assists the police in the exercise of their duties. Bashir ensured that I was given an ID card that indicates I work with Police—Community Liaison. All because of these books. And I have brought a lot of people into the same thing. These things affect the whole community.

What concerns people a great deal in this country is that people want to commit crimes but they don't want to be judged. And if one person takes a complaint against another to the police, the one complained against assumes that the one hates the other and will never forgive and forget, whereas the reason why a complaint is made can be to prevent a clash taking place. If I confront you and take the law into my own hands, I may kill you, whereas it is better to have a policeman come and investigate the case and perhaps make peace or find out the facts of the case, see who is right and who is wrong and a judgment be made. But civilians assume that a complaint is made in order to get you in trouble and that you hate the person. I know that is not the way it is but people generally don't. The problem for the police is that there are some evil, corrupt people among them who will extort and indulge in corrupt practices. But there are many who are honest and trying to do a good job. And in my writing I try to educate people about all these things, and that is why the police have put a certain trust in me to help them.

A sense of civic responsibility and expressed belief in the rule of law comes across very directly in the book and in this interview extract. They reinforce the sense of didactic intent that permeates much of the writing, not only by Dan Azimi Baba, but of others as well. Nevertheless, he acknowledges that didacticism is not necessarily what the readers want, when he implies that the author has to hide the message and slip it in "by the end." For many readers who wrote to the authors of *Raina Kama*, it was the way the tensions and conflicts were worked out and the disappointments and the successes of the characters that gripped them.

Dan Azimi's civic sense provided a motivation that realized endorsement from authority figures in Hausa society, despite the fact that he was describing criminality and violence in the pages of his books. Another member of *Raina Kama*, Alkhamees D. Bature, came up against the boundaries of what was acceptable to describe or discuss and, rather than endorsement, found himself pushed into withdrawing a book he had just begun to sell, which he then had to destroy at a considerable financial loss. An avid reader both of Hausa novels and English authors—such as Harold Robbins, James Hadley Chase, and Sydney Sheldon—Alkhamees Bature was enjoying the fruits of the popularity of his novels:

*So Tsuntsu* took me three months, working through the nights. I would start writing about twelve midnight through to dawn, then pray and carry on, then sleep some during the day and then carry on again. Maybe I would give it a rest for a couple of days and return to it fresh again. With my experience of writing *So Tsuntsu*, and all the trouble I had there, I didn't have the same difficulty with *So Jinin Jiki*. I learned from experience, and it all came more easily. And also what you write as a youth, in a few years you are a more mature person and you will write differently. As you get stronger, your writing gets stronger.

And so that is how we went on, and people would come and ask us for advice about how to do it. And even those who think our writing is rubbish are astonished when it comes out. And some are proud to say they know you. There was someone from Makwarari ward who was asked when he said he was from Makwarari, "Do you know Al-khamees Bature?" So we became famous through writing and our name spread. There was a woman whose boyfriend refused to bring her to see me for fear that I would take her because she loved my writing so much. She was a fan but he refused to bring her because she was so beautiful. He was afraid I would snatch her away from him!

Alkhamees, a man who likes to live a little dangerously, demonstrated a desire to explore the boundaries of what was socially acceptable to a Hausa-reading public when he began to write *Matsayin Lover*, a story about lesbian love set in a girls' boarding school. In an interview, he described what happened:

Writing elevates you and it can knock you down. And it can kill you too. What you write can provoke revolution and you might have to flee, like Ken Saro-Wiwa, or be accused of sedition, your pen can kill you. When I wrote *Matsayin Lover* it caused a storm, the theme was lesbian love, and people said "Why write on that?" and I said I was going to, whatever. It was in 1998 during Abacha's time. I lost over 20,000 naira, think what that would be in today's currency.

They said it was too vulgar, there was bad language in it. My friends came round—Bala Anas, Ado, Dan Azimi—and they said there was too much bad language in it and people were complaining, that if it came out it would cause damage to people, it was too Western. The style of writing was too Western and that it did not read as if I was issuing a warning. I said that was not the way I had written it. They told me not to write it, but it was printed and it started to be sold in the market, then it was stopped in the market before fifty were sold. It was my friends who stopped it, among them Bala, Sanusi Shehu, Yusuf Adamu, and Balaraba. I had given them copies and they convinced me to put the book aside. Rather than try and cut out bits, the whole book was withdrawn, that was what they wanted.

So you see writing can kill. . . . There were some that were sold in the market and began to circulate before it was withdrawn and the word spread. And then I withdrew them from the market and took them home. It is possible you might find someone who has a copy. But the pages were destroyed. I did reuse the covers for something else, but the plates and the text were destroyed. If you take up your pen and describe something that is going on in your society, it can be like an atom bomb in your society, like a bombshell. . . . But I say wait until I am dead before you bury me. That was only book one of *Matsayin Lover*, you need to know the outcome of the story, the end of book two, before you condemn the story. You need to know the outcome before you can judge me justly, now you are judging me unfairly. That book was infamous, but I thought it was good. Some of my fellow writers supported me. They said I should keep writing about the issue.

Alkhamees pointed to others whose writing had attracted similar criticisms:

And of course what happens to others can be a lesson to you, others may well take a lesson from my experience. And there were other novels that were condemned as containing bad language. *Kyan dan Maciji* by Bilkiyu Yusuf Futuwa

was also criticized. *Dan Gwajin Takalmi* was another said to be too vulgar, and *Dufana* was another, they all came out about the same time as *Matsayin Lover*. And there are books on homosexuals, but not too overt.

The motivation behind his writing was to expose the realities in Hausa society as he believed them to be and in this he was determined to expose what he saw as a form of corruption. But for his friends, the issue of what position he was taking on the subject was immaterial, the subject itself was inappropriate for the public medium of a book.

There was a journalist from Kaduna, Sumaila Isah Umaisha, from *New Nigerian Weekly* who did an interview with me and published it in the 17th June 2000 edition of the newspaper and headlined it "A Bad Boy?" And he said there were things in my story that he could not write, the book was too strong. No one had written on lesbian love at the time. The story was about boarding schools and the activities of some women in them. And these things are still happening, mature women and some of the things they do, but you can't come and talk about it. I had written a book that was capable of going out and making an impression among the people, and people would learn what was going on with their daughters in their secondary schools, things that were happening that they know nothing about. And then they said to me that no it can't be said, it is too open. I was opening up things in society about which things should not be said. The way I was describing a woman touching another woman with lust, they said it was too much and they convinced me not to do it. Ibrahim Sheme told me it would be literary suicide when I showed him. They were all removed from the market and destroyed. They told me not to give them away because they would still get passed on. And the day it came out there were women queuing to get a copy, they loved it. But people said there was evil in it.

Faced with pressure from his friends and fellow writers, Alkhamees bowed to their demands but remained defiant.

I am a writer who can write on anything, that is what a writer should be able to do. Some people say they can pressure me into not doing these things, but Alkhamees will not bend to pressure, you have to make your arguments and convince him to do something different. Some have come to me calmly and argued with me and I have responded. Others have come and insisted I must stop and to them I refuse. But I lost a lot on that book.

If the topic is corruption or politics then it is only when you go deeply into it and provide extensive elucidation that they will come and tell you to put on the brakes, "this is too much"; everything in moderation is the answer they want. But I say writing is not like that, you are a social commentator, you see what is happening, you are not from another world, you are here in this one, and you see and you hear and you write. So how is it that you write what you see and hear and then they come and say to you, "No." And they say that when you describe something as if there is pleasure in it, then people will say they want to go and try it, and you have led them astray.

The criticism faced by Alkhamees was not only of the subject matter he had chosen for his book. Other issues about style, that have raged across all of the writing produced since 1987, were also leveled at him.

Others condemned the book not because it was incorrect, but because it was too modern, too Western, not like local writing. Each of us has a different perspective on things, we see things differently, so why should we write the same? Graham Furniss writes in one way and Alkhamees D. Bature writes in another. And even Abubakar Imam, who wrote in 1933, the critics want us to write like Abubakar Imam—even if he were here now he would not write like he did in 1933; talking of riding on donkeys and horses, now it is motorbikes and cars. Some people don't understand this and others understand but reject it. How am I going to write like 60 years ago, was I there? I am here now and I will write in today's way and on today's issues. In ten years' time they will look back and say how old that way of doing things was, and their time has passed, there is a new thing now. But some of the academics want us to turn the clock back, but we say to those coming up after us to write the way they see things now and in the language of the moment. Some people say my writing has *kaushi*, it is "rough," the way I write is shocking, it is strong language.

While the motivation for Alkhamees D. Bature involved a determination to address topics that were risqué, to say the least, others had agendas relating to legitimate public debate and were adopting particular positions with regard to notions of Hausa customs and the requirements of Islam. A core motivation for Balaraba Ramat was to distinguish between practices and habits of daily life. She was particularly interested in the interplay between the relationships of husbands and wives, who are joined by Islam and whose relationships therefore are to be respected, protected, and maintained, and practices that have developed that are known as "Hausa customs," that can be and, she would argue, should be changed. In this respect, Balaraba Ramat was moving into an area where the authority of the speaker is a central issue.

Hausa society has seen centuries of scholarship on religious interpretation. Furthermore, an entire Hausa social class is dedicated to the interpretation of religious writings and the teaching of the *Qur'an*, the *ulama*, or "cleric class." That world of interpretation depends, to a large extent, on structures of spiritual authority to maintain the strength of the injunctions placed on society at large. It is not any old cleric (*malam*) who can provide the authoritative interpretation of religious texts; they come from people within the authority structures of the various religious organizations of Islam, the Sufi brotherhoods, the anti-Sufi movement, and even the more radical Shi'ites. And there may be competing interpretations under discussion at any one time. The positions taken by Balaraba Ramat in her writings engage with qur'anic interpretation, but are not presented in an arena or form in the conventional modes of religious interpretative discourse.<sup>10</sup> Her "interpretations" do not appear on the radar of the *ulama*, but they are for their daughters, sons, and wives, in a non-religious format—the novella.

For Balaraba Ramat, the agenda was to define the limits of religious obligation. For other women writers, this agenda has ranged from a more conservative set of illustrations concerning how to come to terms with the status quo to a more radical rejection of the manifestations of apparent racism and sexism.<sup>11</sup> Balaraba

Ramat illustrated the issues by focusing on questions of daily life within marriage and the actions that can lead to divorce.

There have been many influences on me, particularly in regard to the position of women in our society. There are many things that derive from customary practices and have nothing to do with religion, but because they come from strong habits that pre-date the coming of religion, and religion has not managed to prohibit them entirely, they still persist. According to religion, for example, a man could cook food and give it to his wife to eat. But custom says that the woman should cook for her husband and everyone else in the household. But if a woman should once say, "today I'm not going to cook for others, I want someone else to cook and give me food," then her husband can divorce her there and then on those grounds. It is not religion that says she has to do these things—for example, that we have to feed our children; it is custom that says we must do it. You could be there with your husband and children and you don't want to breastfeed a child—maybe you have some kind of problem—religion doesn't say you have to breastfeed, you could find someone else to feed the child, but if you refuse, it is custom that says you can be divorced for that. Your parents will abuse you and society will turn its back on you and say you are crazy. And so I have tried to show women, and that is perhaps why I have become popular, what is demanded by religion and what is a matter of customs that can be changed.

The issue of relationships within marriage is a recurring motivation for a number of writers. Of the founding members of *Raina Kama*, Aminu Abdu Na'inna, whose first effort had been provoked by his lost love, indicated in an interview that the high rate of divorce and the problems occurring in marriage were his prime concern in continuing to write.

My main theme at the moment is the relationships between married people. There was romance and love, then there was marriage, and then there was divorce. What is it that is bringing about divorce? That is what I am investigating. Why so much separation? Why did you divorce her? Why did she leave you? I want to investigate these things so that the community can make use of what I say. . . . It is important that people know about what goes on because sometimes you don't know why a divorce has happened. These are the kinds of things that I want to bring out into the open and tell people so that we reduce the amount of divorce that is happening. And divorce rates and remarriage can be a problem. There can be a disease, like AIDS, which has appeared in town, that has killed a husband and then the woman, who is infected, remarries, and then they all die, the new husband too. All these things are happening and I want to see what I can do to write and enlighten people, to awaken them to the dangers we face.

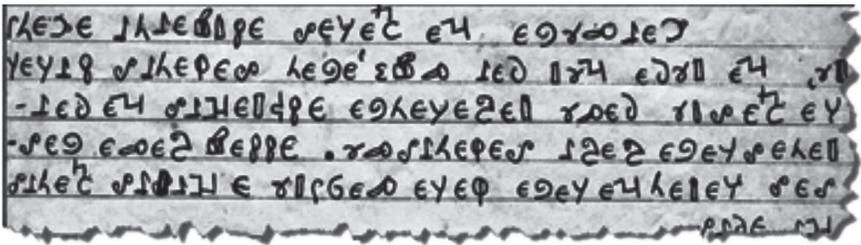
While marriage was an important issue for a lot of these writers, lying behind many of the specific issues was the broader question of how to live life as a Muslim in the modern world. Another of the founding members of *Raina Kama*, Badamasi Burji, put it like this:

We met at Alhajiya Balaraba's house and we would discuss the difficulties that we as writers faced, how we would strengthen the Hausa language, reform our customs in order to remove those things that were bad, and teach people about the proper way. There were people concerned with working out how to act

properly in the modern world and there were those who wanted to turn entirely to religion for the way forward. We wanted to find the right way in this modern world. And we wanted to find a way to support those who had the intelligence to write good things but who didn't have the wherewithal to pay for publication.

The sense that they could, as writers, begin to forge their own way of living in a fast modernizing world primarily involved finding a way to accommodate religious principles, particularly at a time when Shari'a law was being extended into both criminal law and other areas of public life. But one rather curious element in the early thinking of Raina Kama related to a form of proto-cultural nationalism that was manifest in an attempt to create a form of Hausa writing that was separate from the supposed external cultural influences symbolized by the Roman script on the one hand, and the Arabic script on the other.

While in the evening adult education classes at Shahuci, Dan Azimi Baba had heard his teacher talking about great civilizations and the scripts associated with them—Egyptian hieroglyphics and Chinese characters, among others—and pointed out that Nigeria, and the Hausa language in particular, had borrowed from Arabic initially and later from English. Dan Azimi said that he would invent a new script for Hausa, which he duly did. He took it to a Raina Kama meeting where Ado Ahmad said he should write something in it, explain how it worked, and that they should put the examples of this new script in their books, along with the lists of bookshops, other available titles, and the group photograph. They then began to do this. After the script appeared, it became fashionable to use it and some hundreds of people wrote in to Dan Azimi and Raina Kama using it, as shown in the example below from a fan, written on January 24, 1994.



But soon the fashion faded and the item was removed from later books. An extract from the explanation of the purpose of the script ran as follows:

These characters have been created through pride in the Hausa language, and they are called, "Hausa writing." These characters are not taken from any other people in the world, they have been created by the Raina Kama group in order to enrich and strengthen the Hausa language. (Azimi Baba, *Sakaina* 70)

Whereas Balaraba Ramat had been concerned with defining positions in relationship to Islamic norms and prescriptions and Alkhamees Bature had pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable in Hausa public discourse, this script from Dan Azimi Baba was an attempt to locate Hausa-ness between the cultural poles of the Arabic-speaking Middle East (as represented by Ajami script Hausa) and

the Western world (as represented by the Roman script Hausa that was introduced in the colonial period). Although Azimi Baba's position was rejectionist in sentiment, it was also positivist in that it was claiming an alternative position. In one sense, the failure of the initiative demonstrated that the cultural movement that had founded this new genre of popular fiction was quite the opposite of rejectionist and purist. It was rather mightily engaged with the appropriation of a wide range of other cultural sources and artifacts into its discourse; a bricolage that burst into a plethora of other media—radio, TV, video film, music, and magazines, among others.

In taking up Karin Barber's challenge to consider the explosion of popular forms of culture in Africa, we have seen in this writers' club, at the heart of a wider movement of popular fiction, the formation of a self-conscious group with a manifesto for the people, a proclamation of their worth in the face of apparent denigration by the elite, and an engagement with the immediate issues facing the young, the dispossessed, the city dwellers, and, overwhelmingly, young women—issues of marriage, romance, suffering, forbearance, and hope. To a striking extent, the writers were aware of what their readers liked and wanted, and what they did not. Market sensitivities were relayed to them by dealers and booksellers and often directly by the flood of letters that came in to the authors from their readers. The entrepreneurial, activist experience provided by writing books translated, in some cases, into moves to other areas of active, commercial cultural activity, particularly video film.

## NOTES

1. For more on this topic, see Larkin; Adamu "Media parenting"; and Adamu et al.
  2. For a listing of these some 730 titles, see Furniss et al.
  3. For an overview of Hausa literary forms see Furniss, *Poetry, Prose*.
  4. For further discussion of the novel, see A. U. Adamu, "Loud Bubbles" 125–6.
- For a discussion of aspects of women's writing in Hausa, see Alidou.
5. All translations are by Furniss unless otherwise indicated.
  6. Dan Azimi Baba's recollection is that it was through their common interest in KERD that they met, this time introduced by a mutual friend, another writer, Zubairu Galadanchi.
  7. See Furniss, *Ideology in Practice*.
  8. For a discussion of Kano printing and printers in the early 1970s, see Furniss, *Ideology in Practice*.
  9. See Furniss et al. for a list of some 730 titles.
  10. For an extensive discussion of this aspect of her writings, see Whittsit, "Islamic-Hausa Feminism and Kano Market Literature."
  11. See, for example, the discussion of the writings of Bilkisu Yusuf Funtuwa in Whittsit, "Islamic-Hausa Feminism Meets Northern Nigerian Romance."

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