

Northern Nigerian Women's Life Writing: A Tapestry of Resilience, Tradition and Transformation

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Abstract

Northern Nigerian women's life writing, offers a unique and multifaceted glimpse, into a society, often portrayed through singular narrative, therefore, providing crucial insights into the lived experiences of women, in a region often misunderstood. By amplifying their voices, we gain a deeper understanding of social dynamics, cultural complexities, and the ongoing struggles, and triumphs of women in Northern Nigeria, where most adult women are strictly secluded, or rather invisible from participation in crucial roles, of political hierarchies, and economic activities, which focus upon males in the society. This article, present analysis from the rich tapestry of Northern Nigerian women's life writing, in the 19th and 20th centuries. Specifically, it emanates data on traditional oral histories, memoirs, travel narratives, novels, biographies, and poetry, mostly written in Hausa. The paper also, highlights key themes, genres, and challenges associated with this vibrant literary tradition and their contributions to the literary genre. The paper, therefore, is anchored on the 'New Historicism theory', which emphasizes the relationship between literature and the historical context in which it was produced. Particularly it offers insights into the power and significance of Northern Nigerian women's life writing, navigating tradition and change; how women writers negotiate societal expectations around family. Also, it challenges simplistic generalizations, and celebrates the complex realities and diverse voices, woven into this vibrant literary landscape.

Introduction

Female literary pioneers in Northern Nigeria, draw on a rich, ancient heritage of traditional storytelling, highlighting experiences in the lives of Northern Nigerian women that are worth preserving, which rarely find its way into the documented historical records. The emergence of female writers in recent decades, signifies a significant shift. Their narratives challenge traditional narratives, woven from threads of tradition, seclusion, and limited agency. Beneath this seemingly singular tapestry lies a vibrant and diverse landscape of self-expression, resilience, tradition and transformation. This richness, is unveiled through the powerful lens of Northern Nigerian women's life writing, a relatively recent phenomenon that disrupts the dominant narratives, and gives voice to previously silenced experiences.

Recalling what Tsiga (2011) said about the peculiarity of Northern Nigerian women participation in life writing, "one cannot help, but notice the almost total absence of the women, in Northern Nigerian life writing." I begin the first part of this paper, with regard to this challenge. Therefore, this paper is considered as a starting point, for further exploration on specific Northern Nigerian female authors, on life writing genres, such as novels, memoirs, autobiographies, biographies, and poetry, and how these women navigate the challenges of expressing themselves. We also use this background to gain a deeper understanding of social

dynamics, cultural complexities, the ongoing struggles, and triumphs of women in Northern Nigeria.

Methodology and Theoretical Framework

This article analyses the rich tapestry of Northern Nigerian women's life writing, from the 19th and 20th centuries. Specifically, it emanates data on traditional oral histories, memoirs, travel narratives, biographies, and poetry, mostly written in Hausa. It highlights the key themes, genres, and challenges associated with this vibrant literary tradition. It also explores research findings in academic journals and conference presentations. Specifically, chapters from the works of prominent authors like, Mary F. Smith's *'Labarin Baba Mutunyar Karo, ta Kasar Kano'*, Dadasare Abdullahi's *'It Can Now be Told,'* and Sadiya Omar's *'Wakar Hijira da Zaman Modibbo Kilo a Makka'* are transcribed and explored, and their contributions to this literary genre are highlighted.

The paper is anchored on the 'New Historicism theory', which emphasizes the relationship between, literature and the historical context, in which it was produced. Particularly, it offers insights into the power, and significance of Northern Nigerian women's life writing, navigating tradition and change, and how Northern Nigerian women writers negotiate societal expectations, around family. Also, it challenges simplistic generalisations and celebrates the complex realities and diverse voices woven into this vibrant literary landscape.

Why Northern Nigerian Women's Life Writing Matters

In the Beginning: For the Northern Nigerian women, the Sokoto jihad brought more liberties, and encouraged them to enter the public sphere as successive generations of female scholars participated in literary production in the caliphate. The works of pioneer women, with unique writing styles and genres, some of which drew on classical Arabic poetic mode to compose in different styles and languages, primarily Arabic, Hausa (Ajami) and Fulfulde, inspired a whole generation (Ahmad, 2024). Henceforth, Northern Nigerian women writers have trodden many paths, in their aspirations to participate in shaping their own identities. Through their writings, they have sought to construct authentic self-representations, counter dominant narratives, explore formal possibilities, and deconstruct prevailing power dynamics.

On the State of the Craft, Poetry and Prose: We cannot discuss Northern Nigerian women's life writing, without addressing Nana Asma'u Danfodio and her literary traditions explicitly. Even though her poems weren't strictly a personal autobiography, they offer valuable insights into her life and a rare perspective into the social and religious reforms of the time, reflecting women's role in education, and the daily life, customs and traditions of the people. This provides indirect details about clothing, food, or gender roles in the precolonial Northern Nigeria (Boyd & Mack, 1997; Ahmad, 2017). In the same vein, Boyd and Mack (1997), stated that, Asma'u Danfodio's poems were mainly didactic; she composed elegies for martyrs, and supported the caliphate formation, which according to Tsigia (2017), "also explain certain matters in rhythmic form, and celebrate some outstanding personalities, and their various roles in history, while holding them up as notable examples to the present followers."

Her poem, “The Battle of Gawukake” chronicles the conflict between the Sokoto Caliphate and the Gobir, at Gawukake on the 9th of March 1836. Asma'u, being the daughter of Usman Danfodio, would have had first-hand knowledge or access to information about the battle. Her poem offers a unique perspective on the event, potentially including details not found in other historical accounts. Also, Boyd and Mack (2013) point out that, Asma'u wrote a longer, more descriptive poem about the same battle in 1858. This work is evidence that, Asma'u was part of the team, which laboured to preserve the set of ideas, and attitudes associated with the reformist campaign of the Shehu. In verses 8-10, Asma'u gives an account of the Caliph's victory, she writes:

God revealed many marvellous things in a single hour at Gawakuke, exactly at two o'clock. He overcame the enemy leaders, displaying His strength and His authority. The house of the unbelievers is down and it will not be raised again until the Day of Resurrection when they will enter the fires of Hell (Boyd & Mack, 2013).

Despite the significant contribution, of the pioneering women of the Sokoto Caliphate, literary production declined, after the British colonial intrusion, which disrupted the established social order of the Caliphate, and the loss of significant amount of literary heritage (Boyd & Mack, 2013; Ahmad, 2017).

Although, the decline wasn't absolute. New literary forms emerged during the colonial period, often incorporating elements of both Islamic and Western traditions. Therefore, writers may have been more focused on adapting to the changing social and, political landscape, than on producing traditional forms of literature (Ahmad, 2024). With the new educational system, which was largely inaccessible to the women, further restricted women's participation in literary circles. Women writers may have found it harder, to get their work recognized, and were not well documented. However, given the patriarchal nature of the society, and limited educational opportunities for women, it is reasonable to assume that they were disproportionately affected (Umar, 1997; Boyd & Mack, 2013; Ahmad, 2017).

Pinpointing the exact year Northern Nigerian girls' enrolment into the British school system began was difficult. This was because the spread of colonial schools in Northern Nigeria wasn't uniform, and the inclusion of girls in colonial schools was a gradual process that faced challenges. However, we can safely say it likely began around the 1920s to the 1930s (Boyd & Last, 1985). This, perhaps influenced all types of literary genre, particularly linked with cultural, and colonial educational activities. According to Ahmad (2024), “these were the beginning of Hausa women writings in modern times, which saw a break from the poetic tradition, and narrative treatise. The text produced by these women ignored the classical Sufi tradition that had no relation with the poems produced by women of the Sokoto Sufi heritage.”

After the Beginning: Many decades have passed since the Sokoto Caliphate was dissolved by the British colonialist in 1903 (Last, 1967). Despite the status of women in public life, Northern Nigerian women's writing evolved in tandem with the modern Roman script in the region. I, therefore, find it remarkable that Northern Nigerian women's life writing make no references

in literary history, instead, these texts have been primarily interpreted as simple autobiographies, rather than analysed as textual artefacts.

It was in this climate, that “*Labarin Baba Mutuniar Karo, ta Kasar Kano*” (first written and published in English, in 1954, under the title; ‘*Baba of Karo, a Woman of the Muslim Hausa,*’) falls under the category of life writing, but with a twist. While it shares characteristics of an autobiography, it is not solely Baba Karo's own work. Mary F. Smith, the anthropologist, translated and shaped Baba's oral history into a written text. This collaboration creates a unique perspective, offering Baba's experiences, filtered through Smith's lens. The book offers a rich tapestry, of Hausa life in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, particularly from a woman's perspective. Baba's memories offer a glimpse into a disappearing way of life; Hausa society before and during British colonialism. We see details of domestic life, marriage customs, religious practices (including pre-Islamic *bori* spirits), and the impact of colonization. This first-hand account provides invaluable information about a culture often undocumented, especially regarding women's experiences (Smith, 1954).

In the mid-1970s, Dada Sare Abdullahi wrote her autobiography, “*It Can Now be Told,*” and it was published in 2019, with introduction and afterword by Aliyah Adamu. The book stands as a significant work of life writing, with historical and social commentary. It not only offers a personal narrative, but also serves as a lens through which we can understand a specific time and place in Northern Nigerian history, particularly the experience of Northern Nigerian women, during a period often dominated by colonial narratives (Abdullahi, 2019).

Modibbo Kilo's poem, “*Hijira da zaman Modibbo Kilo a Makka,*” is not limited to her migration, from Sokoto to Mecca, but it is a travel narrative that offers a unique perspective, on the life in a region known for its social conservatism, where women may have faced restriction on travel. Modibbo's poem became a powerful tool for self-discovery and challenge to those limitations (Omar, 2013).

The Argument

It might be worthwhile to pause briefly to examine the role of Northern Nigerian life writing, as the mystery of literary archives, and the importance of documenting the lives, and experiences of people physically and symbolically on the cultural scene of the region. More pointedly, Northern Nigerian women's life writing, serves as a powerful tapestry woven from threads of resilience, tradition, and transformation. It must be noted that, the emergence of life writing in Northern Nigeria, does not differ from men's. In general it was a significant event in Northern Nigerian literary history, even for women to eschew and make references to early women's life writing as one of the prominent literary genres. Here's a breakdown of the argument:

Resilience in the Face of Challenges

The concept of resilience, is central to understanding Northern Nigerian women's life writing. Northern Nigerian women, navigate a complex web of social expectations and cultural norms. These women grapple with issues like poverty, limited educational opportunities, and social pressures surrounding marriage and childbearing. Their narratives document their struggles and how they navigate these challenges, drawing strength from their cultural heritage and faith.

However, these narratives also highlight their remarkable resilience. The women demonstrate their strength in overcoming obstacles, forging their own paths, and advocating for change. The excerpt from *'Labarin Baba Mutuniar Karo, ta Kasar Kano,'* offers a poignant glimpse into the resilience of Northern Nigerian women as exemplified below:

Da na zo gidan sarki, na shiga na tafi uwargida. Ta ce "Me ya kawo ki?" Na ce "Zan kashe aure," na bayyana mata. Ta gaya wa Sarki. Da ya zo turaka, na ce "Ranka ya dade." Ya ce "Yawwa. Ta Karo me ya kawo ki?" Na ce "Zan kashe aure." Ya ce "Kai! Ki hakura ki koma. Menene laifinshi?" Sai n ace, "Ba laifin kome. Ba na son kauye, na fi son zama gari." Sai ya dube ni, ya ce "To." (Smith, 1991, p. 29).

When I went to the king's house, I went to see the Queen. She said "What brought you here?" I said, "I'm going to get a divorce," I told her. She told the King. When he came to me, I said, "May your reign be long." He said, "Ameen. Ta Karo, what brought you?" I said, "I'm going to get a divorce." He said, "Why! Be patient and go back. What is his fault?" Then I said, "There is nothing wrong with that." I don't like the village; I prefer to live in the city." Then he looked at me and said, "Okay."

In essence, Baba of Karo's character represents a remarkable example of resilience. She confronts adversity, challenges traditional gender roles, and ultimately exercises her right to choose her own path. In a society where women's rights were severely limited, this act is a testament to her courage and determination. So, we find in, *'It Can Now be Told'*. The extracts below explore the concept of resilience through the lens of personal experience, in colonial Northern Nigeria:

I set off on the long journey to Zaria, over 500 miles. We covered between 15 and 20 miles a day, and it took about a month (Abdullahi, 2019, p. 33).

The excerpt is a powerful counter-narrative, to the often-depicted victimhood, of women in colonial Africa. It challenges stereotypes, by showcasing a woman who exercises agency, demonstrates resilience, and actively shapes her own destiny. Also, Dadasare expresses her experience in another passage, when she wrote:

Even as a child, I had not had a great reputation for doing as I was told. I had little difficulty now in saying "No!" I sent my chaperone and horse boy back home, engaged a new horse boy and continued my journey (Abdullahi, 2019, pp. 33-34).

More broadly, the above passage is a direct demonstration of resilience, of women who lived through the colonial era, in Northern Nigeria. Despite these obstacles, many women found ways

to adapt, survive, and even thrive. Dadasare asserts her independence by defying societal expectations (having a chaperone) and taking control of her situation.

Modibbo Kilo's journey from Sokoto to Mecca, as encapsulated in the provided verses, offers a poignant reflection of the resilience of Northern Nigerian women. Her narrative embedded within the broader context of women's life writings in travel narratives underscores the fortitude required to navigate arduous physical and emotional terrains. She writes:

*Mu biyu muna tafiya cikin daji baki,
Tun assalatu da azzuhur sai Rabbi shi.
Mun zo Madani kassuwak kauyawa,
Dud dut kafafunmu awa salkoki.
Sannan fa sa'a shidda jirgi ya iso,
Nin nuna wurga shigo ku zo Haramaini.
Mun kwana tafiya da hantci ya iso
Can kau fa Hartum don zuwa Haramaini
Da kafa mun ka iso fa nan Undurman,
Bisa ai kafafu namu sun yi fa kunburi. (Omar,2013:52)*

The two of us journeyed through the dark forest,
From dawn to noon with the Lord as our guardian
We arrived at the village market in Madani,
Our legs were swollen, like water-filled sheepskins.
By then the train had arrived six hours prior,
We spent the night traveling
By the time we reached the town,
The train for Khartoum had already departed bound for Haramaini
When we arrived at Undurman on foot
Our feet were swollen (Translated).

By examining these verses, within the broader context of women's life writings in travel narratives, we gain a deeper appreciation for the complexities of their experiences, and the strength required to overcome adversity.

The passages from '*Labarin Baba Mutuniyar Karo ta Kasar Kano*, '*It Can now be Told*' and the verses from *Wakar Hijira da Zaman Modibbo Kilo a Makka*, ' offer a glimpse, into the extraordinary resilience of Northern Nigerian women. Their journeys, marked by physical hardship and unforeseen obstacles, is a metaphor for the challenges they face in their daily lives. Yet, through faith, determination, and a profound sense of purpose, these women have demonstrated an unwavering spirit that continues to inspire generations.

Tradition and Cultural Continuity

Life writing by Northern Nigerian women, is not merely about breaking free from tradition. Many narratives pay homage to cultural heritage and family history. The women depict the importance of traditions passed down through generations, highlighting the roles of mothers,

grandmothers, and other female figures in their upbringing. This focus on cultural continuity, underscores the significance of tradition in shaping their identities. Taking 'Labarin Baba Mutuniyar Karo ta Kasar Kano', as an example of perspective of a woman, while the passage primarily focuses on the event of a male slave (Allah-Magani's) freedom:

To ina shekara biyu a gidan Maigari. Sai aka 'yanta Allah- magani. Aka hada malamai aka sa mashi suna. Aka shafa Addu'a, aka yanka rago, aka yi tuwo aka yi fura, abinci iri-iri, kwana biyu muna wasan kida muna Amada (Smith, 1991: 47)

Well, I have been in Maigari's house for two years. Then Allah-Magani was freed from slavery. The Mallams were brought together, and he was given a new name. Prayers were made, ram was slaughtered, fura and all various kinds of food were served, and we rejoiced and danced the *kidan Amada* for two days (Translated).

Although the Baba's role in the narrative is limited to an observer, her presence suggests a wider world of women's lives, impacted by these events. The casual mention of Allah-Magani's "freedom from slavery," reveals the institution as a normalized part of society. It was not an exceptional occurrence but a common reality for many. The passage, though brief, hints at the power dynamics inherent in such a system. The Maigari holds the power to emancipate, a decision that is presented as an act of benevolence.

Life writing, highlights the concept of 'tradition,' as a central theme in understanding women's experiences, during colonial Northern Nigeria, as portrayed in Dadasare's 'It can Now be Told,' emphasizes the dominant role of women as homemakers:

The women were always busy with household duties, and the care of their children. The mistress of the house was normally expected to work with her servants. Many crafts were carried on. One of these was the plaiting of circular raffia mats, to be used as plates and covers for dishes, and containers (Abdullahi, 2019, p. 17).

The above passage, provided an outline of women's lives, in colonial Northern Nigeria, and how their days were consumed by household chores, and childcare. This portrayal aligns with traditional gender roles, where women were primarily responsible for domestic affairs.

Child Marriage in Colonial Northern Nigeria was very common. In the passage below, Dadasare confirms the widespread practice of marrying off girls, before they reached adulthood. This custom was deeply ingrained in the societal fabric and accepted as a norm:

By accident I learnt that I was in the marriage market. I must have been about nine at the time. Child marriage was common enough, but it must be understood that a girl did not go to her husband until she was physically ready (Abdullahi, 2019, p. 26).

The citation, offers a complex picture of the position of women, in colonial Northern Nigeria. On one hand, it shows the early and often predetermined trajectory of a girl's life, with marriage as a central milestone. On the other hand, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of the experiences of women, during this period, and the enduring impact of tradition on their lives.

The concept of tradition, and cultural continuity exists in Modibbo Kilo's poem on travel narratives, particularly from her shared experiences of staying at the Kano palace, the poet writes:

*Akushi dari fa bakwai da swahe da hantci dut,
Hakanan dare aka yin su don dai Lahiri
Babban gida na mai yawa tamkag gari,
Kofarsa arba sai ka ce kofag gari.
Kofak kudu sunanta Sakkwato kai jiya,
Shiya 'Uwaddaje ta diya ta mujaddadi. (Omar, 2013, p. 43)*

A seven hundred *akushi* (wooden bowls) served every morning and evening,
Also, served at night for the sake of the Hereafter.
It was a large family that can be compared with the city masses
With forty doors, just like the city gates
The door in the south wing is called Sakkwato,
It was dedicated to 'Uwaddaje', daughter of the Shehu Danfodio (Translated).

Her verses, rich in symbolism and imagery, encapsulate the deep-rooted traditions, and societal structures, prevalent in the region. While examining the lens of tradition, they offer a rich tapestry of the lives of Northern Nigerian women. The imagery of food, family, and naming encapsulates the core values and societal structures that shaped their experiences. Thus, Modibbo Kilo's underscores the importance of ancestry and the reverence for historical figures in Northern Nigerian society. 'Uwaddaje' (Maryamu), as the daughter of the renowned Shehu Danfodio, represents a lineage of religious and political leadership, highlighting the interweaving of family, religion, and power.

These analyses of tradition, and cultural continuity in Northern Nigerian women's life writings not only provide a glimpse into the past, but also contribute to a broader understanding of the role of women, in preserving and transmitting cultural heritage. By analysing such texts, we can gain deeper insights into the complexities of women's lives, in a society undergoing rapid change.

Transformation and Social Change

Life writing can be a powerful tool for social change. By sharing their experiences, Northern Nigerian women raise awareness about critical issues such as gender, inequality, access to education, and social justice. Their narratives advocate for a more equitable society, where women have greater agency and can participate fully in public life. As a result of these factors,

a good example of this transformation is found in Northern Nigerian Women's life writing in Smith (1991):

Da Giwa, uwa tata, ta ce, wa malam ya gina Kudandani, gidan sama irin na Larabawa, ta ce za ta ba shi sadaka (Smith, 1991, p. 45).

When Giwa, her mother, said that Mallam should build a Kudandani, a storey building like the Arabs, and she said that she would give him sadaka (charity marriage where the bride is given out as a gift to the groom) (Translated).

The request for a Kudandani by Giwa, "a storey building like the Arabs" indicates a growing awareness of the wider world and a potential desire to emulate aspects of Eastern cultures, alien to traditional Hausa architecture, which predominantly consisted of single-story mud houses. Also, Giwa's desire for a storey building highlights the complex role of women in this transitional period. While it reflects traditional practices, it also suggests a woman's agency in negotiating her social position.

In pre-colonial Northern Nigeria, slavery was deeply ingrained in the social fabric. It was a tradition, a system that had existed for centuries. The abrupt declaration of freedom for all slaves in Nigeria, in 1936 (Lovejoy, 1988), marks a stark contrast to the established order. It signifies the colonial authorities' imposition of new laws and values onto a traditional society. Taking Baba of Karo's as example (Smith, 1991):

Bayan na yi shekara uku a gidan Maigari an yi oda an ce an 'yanta bayi duka kowa ya zama da kenan (Smith, 1991, p. 49)

After I spent three years in Maigari's house, an order was made and it was said that, all the slaves had been freed and that was it (Translated).

The brevity of the statement, "an order was made and it was said that all the slaves had been freed," underscores the top-down nature, of this change. There is an implied lack of consultation with the local populace, suggesting a potential disconnect between the colonial edict and the lived realities of the people.

According to Kaura (2022), up until 1920s, when the new railway was constructed, the passage below suggests that Baba of Karo is entering a world influenced by Western modernity. Therefore, the passage offers a microcosm of the broader transformations occurring in Northern Nigeria during the early 20th century. It highlights the complexities faced by women as they navigated the intersection of traditional, and modern values, which is intricately tied to the broader context of modernization, and infrastructure development in the region.

Sai kuma ta kai ma ubanta riga da wando da rawani da kudi zambur ashirin, ta ce ta tuba. Sai ya karbi ubanta, yad aure mata aure da M. Zakari, muka yi tarewa a kamfani kusa da Maje (A lokacin ana yin sabuwar hanyar jirgi ta zuwa Gusa da Kaura Namoda) (Smith, 1991, p. 54)

Then she brought gifts of shirt, trousers, turban and money to her father, and said that she has repented. Then her father accepted the gifts and he married

her to M. Zakari. We conveyed her to her matrimonial home near a company at Maje (At that time a new rail was being constructed along Gusau- Kaura Namoda axis) (Translated).

The concept of 'transformation' in Abdullahi (2019), offers a glimpse into the transformative experiences of the colonial Northern Nigerian woman. It highlights the impact of intercultural contact on Dadasare's personal development and worldview. Mindful of the valuable, and instructive time, suggests that Dadasare recognizes the significance of this period, in her personal growth.

This was a valuable and instructive time for me. Living with British people taught me about their customs and ways of life. Talking with them and listening to them helped me to understand their attitudes and outlook (Abdullahi, 2019, p. 36).

This also, implies that she is not merely passively absorbing information, but actively processing, and integrating new knowledge. In the same vein, she adds:

The wonderful thing is how the education of women and girls has spread like a bush fire. The veil of purdah is beginning to blow high in the breeze because of the number of educated Moslem women doing all sorts of jobs and holding posts of great responsibility (Abdullahi, 2019, p. 72).

This highlights a significant paradigm shift, in the lives of Northern Nigerian women during the colonial era. Education is portrayed as a catalyst for breaking down traditional barriers, and empowering women. The decline of purdah, a symbol of women's seclusion, is attributed to the growing number of educated women, who are taking on diverse roles in society. This passage underscores the transformative potential of education, in challenging patriarchal structures, and creating new opportunities for women.

Modibbo Kilo's poem, exemplify the transformative potential of travel for Northern Nigerian women. Her journey from Sokoto to Mecca was not merely a physical displacement, but a spiritual and intellectual odyssey. Through her narrative, she invites readers to witness her personal evolution, a process that mirrors the broader societal changes, taking place in Northern Nigeria. In the verses below she writes:

*Na kare labarin fita ta Sakkwato,
Na ba ku labarin zaman Haramaini
Kuwa hakikan ad da nashi cikin wuri,
A shi sami labarin fita kauyanci
Na baku labari kadanna hakikani,
Domin ku yo harama fita kauyanci* (Omar, 2013:78)

I've come to the end of the story of my exit from Sokoto,

Now I tell you about my stay in Haramaini.
It is a fact where ever one came from,
He should be informed.
I can only shade a little light,
I urge you to be sophisticated and stay away from ignorance (Translated).

The verses presented, encapsulate a pivotal shift in Modibbo Kilo's narrative. They mark the transition from one phase of her life to another, a passage from the familiar to the unknown. This shift is symbolic of the transformative journey undertaken by many women in Northern Nigeria. The concept of transformation, is central to understanding the lives of Northern Nigerian women. This often serves as a catalyst for personal growth, and empowerment. By sharing their experiences, women like Baba of Karo, Dadasare and Modibbo Kilo, contribute to the creation of a rich and diverse literary tradition that challenges stereotypes and expands our understanding of women's lives in the region.

Conclusion

Northern Nigerian women have contributed to literature since the establishment of the Sokoto Caliphate. While the most prominent early writers hailed from the Fodio clan and primarily produced poetry, autobiography and memoir have emerged as crucial documentary forms. These genres illuminate the experiences of Northern Nigerian women, offering invaluable insights worthy of preservation. Recently, women in the region have produced works that align seamlessly with life writing genre. As a tapestry woven with threads of resilience, tradition, and transformation, life writing provides profound understanding of these women's lives, experiences and contributions to society. Through these texts, we gain a deeper appreciation of Northern Nigeria's cultural landscape and its ongoing journey toward social change. Therefore, this paper provides a starting point for exploring the rich and diverse field of Northern Nigerian women's life writing. Further research can delve deeper into specific themes, analyse the use of language and narrative techniques, and explore the impact of these narratives on contemporary society.

Furthermore, in this paper, we have explored the role of tradition in Northern Nigerian women's life writing. These narratives celebrate cultural practices and customs, offering insights into the lives and values of Northern Nigerian women. However, they also challenge certain traditions that limit women's opportunities or freedoms. By examining how women writers negotiate tradition, this paper has shed light on the evolving social landscape of Northern Nigeria womanhood. The paper has investigated the transformative potential of Northern Nigerian women's life writing, with representative examples of prominent works from, Mary F. Smith, Dadasare Abdullahi and Modibbo Kilo. These narratives not only document experiences but also inspire and empower others. By sharing their stories, these women challenge stereotypes and contribute to a broader understanding of womanhood in Northern Nigeria.

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