

Hausa Oral Tafsir: Developments of a Religious Genre in 20th century's Kano (Nigeria)

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Previously considered as the ultimate pinnacle of the curriculum of Islamic religious learning and cultivated only in restricted Nigerian scholarly circles, tafsir (qur'anic exegesis) has experienced in 20th century's Northern Nigeria an extraordinary phenomenon of popularization. As a result, the traditional boundary of the genre has been redefined, expanding to incorporate other forms of cultural and religious expression (amulet-making; story-telling; social commentary) that were usually associated in the region with the popular Islamic preacher rather than with the senior scholar/exegete. The new, popular forms of tafsir produced by the contemporary reconfiguration of the genre in the Hausa-speaking communities of Northern Nigeria often draw on ancient models, some of which may be traced back to the early history of tafsir prior to the development of the classical exegetical tradition. Drawing on selected case-studies of Hausa public tafsir from Kano, this paper will look at the interfaces between the 'high tradition' and the 'low tradition' of Islam revealed by the genre, thereby questioning the relevance of the distinction.