

New Translations From the Hausa



Women in Kauru Village, Kaduna State, Nigeria, 2016
Photo by Anselm Sesugh Ngutsav

We're happy to feature again this year two new translations from the Hausa language: "Kitchen Song" by Laura M. Kaminski (Halima Ayuba) translated by Sada Malumfashi and "Republic of Poets" by Sada Malumfashi translated by the poet. We hope you enjoy these fresh new voices as much as we did.

Accompanying the poems are four expressive photos depicting the Nigerian way of life: "Women in Kauru Village, Kaduna State, Nigeria, 2016" by Anselm Sesugh Ngutsav (this page), "Amina" and "Amina 2" by Sada Malumfashi, and "Mirah" by Saddiq M Dzukogi.

Hausa is a Chadic language with about 39 million speakers. It is spoken mainly in northern Nigeria and Niger, and also in Benin, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, Central African Republic, Chad, Congo, Eritrea, Gabon, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Sudan, and Togo.

We'd love to hear from you! Please share widely and celebrate international literature with us during September using #NTM2017.

—Claudia Serea and Loren Kleinman



Amina
Photo by Sada Malumfashi

KITCHEN SONG

By Laura M. Kaminski (Halima Ayuba)
Translated by Sada Malumfashi

I am in the kitchen dining with the Lord.
What is it? This is it: Is the Lord a drop in space?
What is it? This is it: Is the Lord a prisoner in a room?
What is it? This is it: Is the Lord a weakling of heat?

I am in the kitchen dining with the Lord.
Hand in hand, tongues twisting with words.
What is it? This is it: Is my prayer never strong?
What is it? This is it: Is the Lord deaf to cries of my litanies?
What is it? This is it: Can't the Lord ever speak for himself?

I am in the kitchen dining with the Lord.
Hand in hand, tongues twisting with words.
I ask a question, a question, from whispers of yesterday.
What is it? This is it: Are questions forbidden fruits?
What is it? This is it: Are my ears not crumbling for answers here?
What is it? This is it: Is the Lord ignorant of events of yesterday and morrow?

I am in the kitchen dining with the Lord.
Hand in hand, tongues twisting with words.
I ask a question, a question, from whispers of yesterday.
What are your thoughts on races, of equality, of equity?
What is it? Are questions forbidden fruits?
What is it? This is just a question, a solitary question.
What is it? Didn't the palms of the Lord mould us all?

I am in the kitchen dining with the Lord.
Hand in hand, tongues twisting with words.
I ask a question, a question, from whispers of yesterday.
What are your thoughts on races, of equality, of equity?
I am washing dirt from pots waiting for a response.
What is it? Arrays of pots, are they not bounties of this servant?
What is it? Bounties of this servant, are they not bounties of the Lord?
What is it? Arrays of pots, are they not bounties of the Lord?

I am in the kitchen dining with the Lord.
I am washing dirt from pots, bounties of the Lord.
I am not washing knives alone.
I am not washing plates alone.
I am not washing spoons alone.
I am not washing bowls alone.
I am not discriminating utensils.
What is it? What am I, let's ask the Lord which utensil is shinier than the other?
I am a servant of the Lord.
I am in the kitchen dining with the Lord.
I am washing dirt from array of pots.

How can a servant of the Lord be a weakling? My dear has a look.
I am washing all utensils together.
All. Together.
Today. Now.

Translator’s Note on “Kitchen Song”:

Reading a Hausa poem for me is all about listening to a story laced with musicality, so the translation therefore comes with that too. In the “Kitchen Song” poem I do not take the liberty of translating every word as it comes, but rather, listen to the poem as a rendition and translate the story laced within it back to another reader so that the bulk of the story can be enjoyed with all its musicality.

— *Sada Malumfashi* , translator



Amina 2
Photo by Sada Malumfashi

REPUBLIC OF POETS

*By Sada Malumfashi
Translated by the poet*

Welcome! Welcome!
To the Republic of Poets
Station with passengers
Drivers and conductors
Commissioners in transit of beats and songs
Foul mouths bouncing over skies
This is the Republic of Poets

In the name of your Lord learn Alif Ba Ta
A B C, Pillars of faith, letters of poetry
An account of poetry here I synthesize:

Wine of the lord I drank and swayed
Standing under majesty of a moon
Poetry simmered within grey hairs
Masterpiece-mother, mother of all poetry
Welcome to the Republic!

Pick a slate, ink, sharpen your pen
Write this: Poetry has no rules
Poetry can be stricken with contagious polio
Poetry can be caught in a thorny net
Doctorates of music and poetry Shata and Narambada
Dankwairo holding hands of Zungur by their side
At the alley pushing and shoving, Uwaliya in front
With Barmani, Dan'anace arose, Akiliya right behind
Na-Mangi rubbing his eyes, Jankidi leading the rhymes
Kakadawa cooking poetry, Wali passing refrains
Republic surrounds them all, mindsprings of poetry abound
Now I see all the dervishes of poetry
Oh Lord of the moon answer my prayers
Give me a drum, instruments, even a calabash
Give me the strength to rise and stand
And drop my jaws to sing with a cackling voice
Master of languages, line breaks, lyric beauty
Let me recite poetry that will split the moon
Here in this gathering of the Republic of Poets
On the field of mastery!



Mirah
Photo by Saddiq M Dzukogi

Contributors:



Sada Malumfashi is a writer living in Kaduna, Nigeria. His works of fiction and non-fiction have appeared or are forthcoming in many publications including: *The Bombay Review*, *Transition Magazine*, *This Is Africa*, *Praxis Magazine* and *Saraba Magazine*.

He is interested in the intricacies of languages and works on translation bilingually in Hausa and English.



Laura M. Kaminski (Halima Ayuba) grew up in northern Nigeria, went to school in New Orleans, and currently lives in rural Missouri. She is an Editor at *Right Hand Pointing*, and also serves as Poetry Editor for *Praxis Magazine Online*, where she curates the digital chapbook / *Around This Fire* response-chapbook series. She is the author of four poetry collections and four chapbooks, most recently [*Anchorhold*](#) (2016, edited by Wale Owoade, cover art by Robert Rhodes, foreword by j. lewis, & introduction by JK Anowe). *Anchorhold* is available from AMAB Books in Nigeria, and from Amazon, Barnes & Noble, and other booksellers in the US.