

HISTORICISING HAUSA URBAN LYRICAL DEVELOPMENT: CONTEXTUALISING THE HASAN WAYAM SONGS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NORTHERN NIGERIAN MUSIC CULTURE

Hashim Muhammad Suleiman, PhD

Department of Mass Communication

Faculty of Social Sciences,

Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

mshashim@abu.edu.ng

<https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5879-178X>

Abstract

This paper explored the historical trajectory of Hausa urban lyrical traditions, with particular emphasis on the sociocultural and musical contributions of Hasan Wayam to Northern Nigerian music culture. Drawing upon accounts, musicological analyses and historical documentation, the study traced the evolution of Hausa urban music from precolonial palace traditions through the colonial period and into the post-independence era. The article argued that Hasan Wayam's musical practice represented a critical juncture in the preservation and transformation of traditional Hausa kukuma (fiddle) music within urbanising contexts. By analysing Hasan Wayam's lyrical content, performance techniques and instrumental innovation, this study demonstrated how his work mediated between rural oral traditions and urban modernity, thereby establishing a template for subsequent generations of Hausa musicians. The findings contributed to broader scholarly conversations regarding the resilience of African traditional communication and indigenous Hausa musicological forms amid socio-political transformation, as well as the role of individual artistic agency in sociocultural preservation.

Keywords: Hasan-Wayam, Kukuma, Urban-lyrics, Northern-Nigeria, Sociocultural-Preservation

Introduction

The musical trajectory of Northern Nigeria constitutes a varied history of mixed traditions that have evolved through decades of socio-political transformation, religious change and cultural exchange. Among the Hausa-speaking people of northern Nigeria, music has traditionally served not only as entertainment but also as a medium for social commentary and historical documentation (Adamu, 2019). The urban centres of Northern Nigeria, particularly Kano, Zaria, and Sokoto, have served as fulcrums for musical fusion where rural traditions encounter urban modernity, thereby generating new hybrid forms of music that retained connections to indigenous aesthetic values while adapting to changing social dynamics. Within the above historical context, the figure of Hasan Wayam (1956 to 2020) emerged as an important, yet under-studied contributor to the development of Hausa urban lyrical culture. Born in *Bakin Ruwa*, Maradun, in present-day Zamfara State, Hasan Wayam's musical career spanned five decades, during which he distinguished himself as a maestro of the *kukuma* (one-stringed fiddle) and a pre-eminent practitioner of *waka* (oral song) traditions (Bashir,

2024). Hasan Wayam's death in October 2020 occasioned mourning across the Hausa music community, prompting renewed scholarly and public interest in his contributions to Northern Nigerian cultural heritage.

Therefore, this paper sought to historicise Hasan Wayam's musical practice within the broader development of Hausa urban lyrical renditions. This paper argued that Hasan Wayam's music and songs represent a significant moment of sociocultural mediation by bridging rural and urban sensibilities, preserving endangered instrumental techniques and maintaining the lyrical depth characteristic of classical Hausa orature whilst engaging with contemporary social realities. Through a detailed examination of his lyrical output, performance methodology, and cultural positioning, this paper highlighted the mechanisms by which Hausa traditional musical forms, such as the music of Hasan Wayam, adapted to and persisted within rapidly urbanising societies, including the cosmopolitan Hausa societies of Northern Nigeria.

Hasan Wayam's Biography and Artistic Development

Hasan Dan Tsito, later known as Hasan Wayam, was born in 1956 in the village of *Gwadda, Bakin Ruwa*, Maradun Local Government Area of Zamfara State (then part of Northern Region). His father, Malam Muhammadu, was a cobbler and musician who played *kotso*, a drum mostly associated with palace performances and other patronage music styles, while his mother, Halima, was of Fulbe ethnic lineage (Adamu et al., 2020). This mixed heritage, combining Hausa, music and Fulani elements, later influenced Hasan Wayam's musical portraiture, which incorporated diverse linguistic and melodic resources. The popularly known name *Wayam* itself constituted a significant element of his artistic biography. The name originated from Hasan Wayam's practice of lyrically describing ungenerous listeners who refused financial rewards for his performances as *wayam*, Hausa slang indicating nothingness, worthlessness or lack of any financial value (Jibo, 2020). This self-deprecating yet pointed nomenclature reflects the economic instability faced by many traditional Hausa musicians and the critical, satirical function that Hasan Wayam's lyrics often performed (Sunday-Kanu & Ibude, 2022).

Hasan Wayam's musical education followed the traditional *bara* (apprenticeship) model. Between 1967 and 1969, he was hosted by *Mallam Jibo Dan Dandi*, who provided him with intensive instruction in the *kukuma* technique and the poetic arts of *waka* composition (Jibo, 2020). This period of formation and concentrated musical study established the foundation for Hasan Wayam's subsequent technical mastery and artistry of Hausa orature (Ames, Bellucci, Eckert, Gussow, Furniss, Erlmann, Nzewi, & Nettle, 1973). Indeed, his relocation to Zaria in 1969 marked a turning point in Hasan Wayam's career. Zaria, home to the Nigerian Army Depot and numerous educational institutions, was a centre of Hausa intellectual and cultural life. Zaria's relative freedom from cultural censorship and its diverse population, comprising soldiers, students, civil servants, artisans, traders, and traditional elites, provided a receptive audience for the young Hasan Wayam's developing music career. His stay in Zaria, a historic city with deep cultural traditions and a receptive ambience for innovations, situated him within a supportive community whilst exposing him to the competitive pressures of urban life.

The *Kukuma* Tradition and Urban Transformation

Indeed, central to understanding Hasan Wayam's musical significance is an appreciation of the *kukumagenre*, which he used as an instrument alongside the *kalangu* (drum) and backup

singers known as *yan-amshi*. The *kukuma* is a one-stringed spike fiddle constructed from a calabash gourd resonator covered with animal hide and with a wooden neck piercing the gourd to form a spike (Larkin, 2004 & The Grove Dictionary of Musical Instruments, 2015). When strung with horsehair and played with a horsehair bow, the instrument produces a distinctive timbre-sound that is vocal-like in its inflexions. Socially, the *kukuma* occupied a specific niche within Hausa musical culture distinct from the larger *goge* fiddle associated with *Bori* spiritism and possession rituals. The *kukuma* is different because it is primarily utilised for secular and commercial music, accompanying light dance music and praise songs in non-religious contexts (Adamu, 2008). This secular approach proved significant for *kukuma's* survival and adaptation in urban environments, as it was less subject to the religious controversies that periodically affected *Bori*-associated instruments amid the many religious revival movements across Hausa societies.

The urban transmutation of *Kukuma* music involved several interrelated facets. First, the migration of rural musicians like Hasan Wayam from the Hausa hinterlands to urban centres, particularly Zaria and Kano, created new performance folklore contexts outside traditional patronage systems. Second, the *kukuma* instrument underwent technical modifications to accommodate larger ensembles, such as the incorporation of the microphone and louder performance environments necessitated by urban social venues. Third, lyrical content evolved to address the experiences of urban dwellers, incorporating references to modern technologies, political developments, and the complexities of urban life (Sutton, 1979; Sani & Ibrahim, 2025). Hasan Wayam's mentor, *Mallam Jibo Dan Dandi*, represented an earlier generation of *kukuma* musicians who had begun this process of urban adaptation. Hasan Wayam's arrival in Zaria in 1969, facilitated by *Ali Barau*, a military veteran, positioned Wayam within an established network of urban performers whilst allowing him to develop distinctive musical and lyrical stylistic innovations (Jibo, 2020).

Historical Foundations of Hausa Urban Lyrical Traditions

To appreciate the significance of Hasan Wayam's musical contributions to the Hausa urban lyrical traditions, one should first understand the historical foundations upon which Hausa urban lyrical culture was constructed and maintained. The Hausa city-states, mostly established from around the 7th century onward, developed varied musical traditions intimately connected to authority, religious practice, politics, and social stratification (Ames, 1973). Music in these contexts was rarely conceived as an independent art form; rather, it functioned as an integral social component of ceremonial, religious, political, and social life (Ames, Bellucci, Eckert, Gussow, Furniss, Erlmann, Nzewi, & Nettle, 1973).

The precolonial Hausa musical landscape was characterised by functional specialisations, such as *Makadan fada* (palace musicians), who performed praise songs for royalty alone, utilising instruments such as the *kakaki* (long trumpet) and *ganga* (cylindrical drum), which symbolise culture, royal status, and authority (DjeDje, 2008). Religious Hausa musicians employed music in Islamic devotional contexts, whilst *Bori* musical practitioners utilised instruments such as the *goge* (fiddle) in spirit possession ceremonies (Besmer, 1983). This functional delineation established the parameters within which subsequent urban musical developments would operate in the Hausa societies of Northern Nigeria.

The advent of colonial rule in the early twentieth century brought about transformations in Northern Nigerian musical culture. British indirect rule preserved the emirate system whilst introducing new technologies, educational institutions, and urban planning models that

altered the social organisation of musical production and musical consumption (Larkin, 2008). The establishment of radio broadcasting in the 1930s, the introduction of recording technologies, and the growth of urban centres created new contexts for musical performance that existed alongside, but increasingly independently of, traditional court and religious patronage systems.

The post-independence period witnessed accelerated urbanisation and the emergence of new musical genres that reflected the aspirations and intrigues of modernising Hausa societies. The influence of Hindi romantic musicals, transmitted through cinemas and radio stations, generated the *nanaye* romantic genre, melodically driven urban songs that dominated Hausa popular music from the 1970s through the 1990s and onward (Adamu, 2019). Simultaneously, Islamic revivalist movements fostered the development of *madhu* (Islamic-themed music), which adapted modern instrumentation to religious lyrical content. These developments occurred against a backdrop of increasing marginalisation and a look-down attitude toward traditional musical forms, which were increasingly perceived as antiquated or socially and religiously inferior sociocultural activities (Sani et al., 2025).

Lyrical Content and Philosophical Orientation

Conversely, Hasan Wayam's lyrical and musical output constituted a repository of Hausa orature that merits analysis both as a musical achievement and as a sociological document of urban social life. His songs addressed a diverse range of subjects, from urban happenings and education to moral decadence in urbanity, personal tribulation, social critique, moral instruction, humorous observations of social happenstance, calls for social good, and praise-singing for drunkards and independent women. This social, thematic, and lyrical breadth, delivered with linguistic virtuosity, established Hasan Wayam as a *maroƙi* (praise singer) of exceptional capability while outgrowing the conventional limitations of that role, evolving into an icon of sociocultural and language documentation.

Several of Hasan Wayam's compositions have achieved nostalgic status in Hausa orature and popular culture and continue to receive regular airplay on conventional broadcast stations and social media. For instance:

Da bara, da bara ɗan malam

Almajiri Tsuntsu ne

With begging for alms

The migratory Qur'anic student is a bird

offered a poignant meditation on the condition (begging for alms) of *almajirai* (migrating Qur'anic students), employing metaphorical language to critique societal neglect of vulnerable youth. Furthermore:

Mamuda Bawan Allah

Wanda ba ya cewa babu

Sai dai taho in ba ka

Mamuda, servant of God

Who will never say no to those who ask him

He only beckons and gives them

This demonstrated Hasan Wayam's capacity for narrative storytelling, weaving complex tales of human frailty and divine mercy. Not only that, Hassan Wayam chorused thus:

Talala walkin maciji

Kamar ya katse

Ba zai katse ba

The use of a snake as a trouser tie (belt)

That looks like it will cut

But will not cut

Therefore, Wayam utilised animal metaphors common in Hausa oral media to explore themes of perseverance and destiny. Also, most significantly, *La lala lalalala la lala sai wayam* functioned simultaneously as a signature tune, an autobiographical statement, and a sociocultural manifesto. The song's repetitive, incantatory structure invoked the *zikiri* (devotional remembrance) traditions of Hausa Sufism Islamic order, whilst his lyrical content further chorused thus:

Mai tattalin ganin hairan

Shi ya gano hairan

Mai tattalin ganin sharran

Shi ya gano sharran

He who seeks good

Shall find good

He who seeks evil

Shall find evil

articulated a moral vision that still resonates for ages across religious and secular contexts (Azzahra & Sakinah, 2025). Also, in another breath, Hasan Wayam's lyrics chorused thus,

Ya Bismillahi

Gyara wahabu sarki

Wahabu Allah taimaki bawa

Jalla kullum bamu abinci

In the name of Allah

The restorer

Allah help your servants

May Allah provide us with our daily food.

Though a secular lyrical artist, Hasan Wayam still incorporated some religious themes to broaden the appeal of his craft, bringing in more clients to his musical journey.

Furthermore, Hasan Wayam's musical orientation reflected the *hikima* (wisdom) traditions of Hausa culture, which synthesised Islamic ethical teachings with indigenous Hausa values. His lyrics frequently employed *karin magana* (proverbs) and metaphorical language, demonstrating the inter-textual relationship between his compositions and the broader retinue of Hausa orature. This literary versatility distinguished Hasan Wayam from his contemporaries, who relied primarily on melodic appeal or dance rhythms, positioning him as an icon of Hausa musical traditions.

Instrumental Innovation and Performance Aesthetics

Hasan Wayam's contributions to Northern Nigerian music extended beyond lyrical composition to encompass significant innovations in instrumental technology and performance practice. His *kukuma* construction represented a unique synthesis of traditional craftsmanship and individual creativity, rendering his instrument sonically distinctive with

his own touches and cultural flavours. According to some accounts and contemporary testimony, Hasan Wayam constructed his *kukuma* himself, utilising materials and techniques he refused to disclose to others fully. This secrecy regarding construction methods, paralleled in West African fiddling traditions by figures such as *Bakka* of Niger, ensured that no other musician could precisely replicate the sound of his instrument (Jibo, 2020). The Hasan Wayam type of *kukuma* thus became an extension of his artistic identity, a material embodiment of his creative genius.

The instrument's acoustic properties facilitated Hasan Wayam's distinctive performance style. Unlike the *goge*, which is typically played vertically, the *kukuma* permits horizontal playing positions that facilitate complex bowing techniques. Hasan Wayam exploited these technical possibilities to produce melodic lines of exceptional fluidity and rhythmic sophistication. His bowing technique, described by observers as healing and soothing, generated timbral variations that mimicked the inflexions of Hausa urban speech, creating an intimate connection between instrumental and vocal expression.

Also, Hasan Wayam's ensemble arrangements similarly demonstrated innovative approaches to traditional materials. Whilst maintaining the core *kukuma*-and-*kalangu* configuration characteristic of Hausa secular music, he developed sophisticated rhythmic interactions among his fiddle, choristers, accompanying *kalangu*, and voice. His description of this interaction, *the drumbeats whenever I gave my drummers direction with my kukuma string lyrics*, reveals an improvisational methodology in which instrumental and rhythmic elements responded dynamically to lyrical content (Jibo, 2020).

Also, performance context constituted another domain of Hasan Wayam's innovation. Unlike traditional *maroka* (praise singers) who performed primarily for individual patrons, Hasan Wayam developed a repertoire suitable for diverse urban venues: wedding celebrations, naming ceremonies, political gatherings, high institutions of learning, beer parlours, *gidan karuwai* (prostitute hubs) and public concerts. This adaptability ensured his relevance across the changing social landscape of Northern Nigeria whilst maintaining the artistic versatility of his traditional foundation.

Urban Contexts and Social Commentary

Hasan Wayam's career unfolded against the backdrop of transformations in Northern Nigerian urban societies. The decades following his arrival in Zaria witnessed social ups and downs, military coups and democratic transitions, Islamic revivalist movements, educational advancements, cultural fusions and secularising influences of urban life. His lyrics engaged with these developments, offering sociocultural commentary that was simultaneously timely and rooted in enduring cultural values. For instance, in a single lyrical stanza, Hasan Wayam combined religious, secular, and urban social happenings into an easily rhyming, melodious performance. Thus:

Dan gora na mai sallah
Duk wanda baya sallah
Baya ganin malam kulum
Aljihi na mai naira ne
Duk wanda ba shi da naira
Ba ya zuwa yawo kullum
Wasu kaya na mai gammo
Duk wanda bashi da gammo

Baya son kayan nan

Yar kwalba ta mai tsotsi

Duk wanda bai tsotsi

Ba ya ganin baman.

A small kettle is for the goer of the mosque

Whoever does not pray

Will not be seeing the imam

Pockets are for the rich

Whoever does not have money

Cannot go on, willing away his time

The bottle is for the drunkards

Whoever does not drink

Cannot see the bartender

This was not only a show of Hasan Wayam's lyrical versatility but also his instinct to sing for anyone who would give him money without segregating the sensibilities of other potential client bases.

The social dimensions of Hasan Wayam's work became particularly pronounced in his later career. The death of his son, Aliyu (Danladi) Hassan Wayam, in 2015 through a stray bullet from gunfire during social violence in Zaria, affected the musician and informed his subsequent compositions (Jibo, 2020). His public expressions of grief and anger demonstrated the continued capacity of traditional musical forms to accommodate social dissent and personal trauma within different contexts. Hasan Wayam's response to this tragedy also illustrated the therapeutic functions of Hausa musical culture. His continued emphasis on peace in subsequent performances, despite personal loss, reflected the *nishadi* (improvisation in happiness) ethos described by Professor Abdalla Uba Adamu, who characterised Hasan Wayam as contributing "improvisation in happiness" to the musical world (Jibo, 2020). This capacity to generate joyamid suffering represents a distinctive feature of Hausa musical orature that Hasan Wayam embodied and transmitted throughout his active performance life.

The urban environments in which Hasan Wayam lived presented both opportunities and challenges for traditional musicians. On the one hand, cities provided larger, more concentrated audiences, technological infrastructure (radio, recording studios), and economic opportunities unavailable in rural areas. On the other hand, urbanisation threatened the social structures that had traditionally supported musical apprenticeship and patronage. Hasan Wayam's career demonstrated successful navigation of these contradictions. He maintained traditional educational methods (training his own children and selected apprentices) while utilising modern media and a very wide patronage system to extend his reach. This itself was a sociocultural feat that modern and upcoming Hausa musical artists can imbibe to succeed in their trade.

Hasan Wayam in the Landscape of Hausa Music

Understanding Hasan Wayam's significance requires situating his work within the broader spectrum of Hausa musical traditions during his lifetime. The latter half of the twentieth century witnessed the emergence of diverse musical genres that competed for audience attention and sociocultural legitimacy. The *nanaye* tradition, derived from Hindi romantic film music and domesticated within Hausa video film production, represented the dominant

commercial force in Hausa popular music from the 1990s onward (Adamu, 2019). Characterised by synthesised instrumentation, romantic themes, and choreographed performances of love between young adult males and females, the *nanaye* musical tradition particularly appealed to urban youth and achieved massive commercial success. Hasan Wayam's traditional acoustic instrumentation of *kukuma*, *kalangu*, lead singer, backup choristers, and social lyrics positioned him a step away from the mainstream. However, his popularity demonstrated the continued appetite for cultural lyrical content among Hausa audiences in both villages and urban centres.

Also, the *Madhu* (Islamic-themed music) movement similarly represented a significant development in Northern Nigerian musical trajectory, utilising modern instrumentation to disseminate religious messages. Whilst sharing with Hasan Wayam an emphasis on ethical content, *Madhu* musicians operated within explicitly religious frameworks that differed from Wayam's more secular and social orientation. These distinctions illustrate the pluralism of Northern Nigerian musical culture, wherein religious and secular traditions coexist and occasionally intersect.

Hasan Wayam's relationship to these contemporary musical genres was complex. On one hand, he represented a conservative tendency, preserving instrumental and poetic traditions that modernising forces threatened to extinguish. On the other hand, his urban performance contexts, engagement with modern media, addressing contemporary social issues, and his cultivation of a wide patronage base for his musical performances demonstrated adaptability rather than social conservatism. Adamu's characterisation of Wayam as "one of the last Mohicans" captures this status, simultaneously a terminal figure and an enduring influence (Adamu, 2019).

Comparative analysis with other West African fiddling traditions illuminates Hasan Wayam's distinctive contributions. The *goge* traditions of the Niger Republic, particularly as practised by the renowned *Bakka*, share technical and social dimensions with Hasan Wayam's *kukuma* sound (DjeDje, 2008). Both musicians constructed personal instruments with unique sonic signatures; both combined secular and spiritual elements in their performance; both achieved international recognition whilst maintaining local roots. However, Wayam's ensemble-based approach and lyrical focus on social commentary distinguished his work from *Bakka*'s more solitary, spiritually-focused practice.

Hasan Wayam's Legacy and Contemporary Relevance

Hasan Wayam's death in October 2020 prompted widespread recognition of his contributions to Northern Nigerian lyrical culture, which had not been fully acknowledged during his lifetime. Tributes from academic institutions, traditional bodies, and local and international media highlighted the significance of his artistic achievement and the urgency of preserving his legacy. The question of his legacy extends beyond commemoration after death to encompass the continued reality of the traditions Hasan Wayam represented. His son, Bello Hassan Wayam, has, to some extent, assumed responsibility for continuing his father's musical lineage, while other apprentices trained by Hasan Wayam maintain active performance careers, though without the optimal musical achievements of their benefactor. The Foundation for Hausa Performing Arts, established by Professor Abdalla Uba Adamu, has worked to document and archive traditional performances, ensuring that future generations can access the repertoire and techniques developed by Hasan Wayam and his contemporaries.

However, the challenges facing traditional Hausa music in the twenty-first century remain formidable. The dominance of digital production, the influence of globalised popular music forms and the continued stigmatisation of musical professions within conservative Afro-Islamic contexts threaten the transmission of instrumental knowledge and lyrical sophistry. Hasan Wayam's musical career offers a model for addressing these challenges through rigorous apprenticeship, adaptation to modern contexts, cultivation of a wide patronage system and maintenance of unique lyrical standards that command respect across generational and ideological divides. Hasan Wayam can be seen as a sociocultural Hausa lyrical icon.

The scholarly implications of Hasan Wayam's work extend to broader concerns regarding the relationship between tradition and modernity in African and Nigerian sociocultural production and sustenance of cultural artefacts. His career demonstrated that the categorisation of music into *traditional* and *modern* is not mutually exclusive but can be productively negotiated by skilled practitioners like Hasan Wayam. The *kukuma* tradition, far from being a static, bygone relic of precolonial Hausa culture, has proved capable of addressing contemporary social concerns while maintaining formal fluidity with historical precedents, cultural documentation and an avenue for the continuation of Hausa ora-media culture and its derivative studies.

Conclusion

This paper traced the historical development of Hausa urban lyrical traditions and situated Hasan Wayam's contributions within that trajectory. From the palace musicians of the precolonial Hausa city-states to the transformations of the colonial and post-colonial periods, Hasan Wayam's music has demonstrated a remarkable capacity for adaptation while maintaining distinctive lyrical and sociocultural characteristics. Hasan Wayam's career represented a significant moment in the Hausa sociocultural history, a point at which traditional instrumental technique, lyrical sophistication and urban modernity converged to produce an artistic melting point of enduring musicological value.

Furthermore, Hasan Wayam's significance extended beyond his individual achievement, illuminating broader processes of cultural preservation and transformation. His construction of a unique *kukuma* instrument, his development of socially relatable and resonant lyrics, his navigation of urban performance contexts, and his transmission of Hausa lyrical knowledge to subsequent generations all constituted strategies through which traditional cultural forms maintain their utility within rapidly modernising societies. The *Wayam* concept, originally signifying economic marginalisation, ultimately came to represent artistic longevity, agency integrity and sociocultural resilience of musical icons.

For scholars of African sociocultural, traditional communication, musicology and culture, Hasan Wayam's career offers a case study in the agency of individual artists within structurally embedded constraints. For practitioners of modern Hausa music, Hasan Wayam's work provided a repertoire of techniques, client-base cultivation, compositions, and performance strategies that remain relevant to contemporary African musical practice. For Northern Nigerian society, Hasan Wayam's legacy represented a cultural resource of inestimable value, a repository of linguistic artistry, a musical innovation and a sociocultural reflection that enriches the region's history and social heritage.

The continued study and celebration of Hasan Wayam's lyrical contributions serves multiple purposes: historical documentation, artistic inspiration and cultural preservation. As Northern

Nigerian music continues to evolve in response to globalising influences and technological change, the example of Hasan Wayam, a maestro of the *kukkuma*, a poet of the people, and an icon of tradition, offers guidance for maintaining the depth and distinctiveness that have characterised Hausa musical culture across centuries of transformation.

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