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Gumakan Zamani: A Book Review

Reviewer: Mohammad Abubakar M.

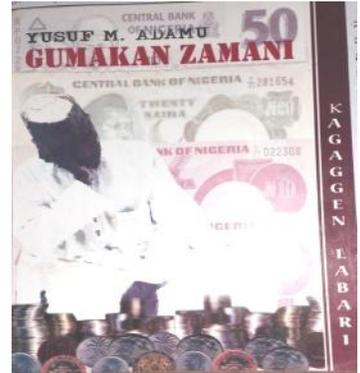
Book: Gumakan Zamani

Author: Yusuf M. Adamu

Publishers: AJ Publishers

Year: 2015

Pages: 63



The book *Gumakan Zamani* (literally translated as “The Contemporary Idols” and a metaphor for “Money Worship”) was originally meant to be an entry for a creative writing competition in 1992, but which did not join the race for reasons not disclosed by the author in the preface. It is a story of how the society embraces any means that ensures a steady flow of money, even from questionable sources. The society has jettisoned moral values and upheld any means of personal enrichment. This lust for material things, with money at the centre, has thrown the society into moral decadence of all sorts – drug trafficking, prostitution, money laundering, smuggling contraband goods, petty thefts, ritual killings and other vices highlighted in the story.

The blurb of the book lights the way into the murky waters that await the eager reader:



Ni yanzu na fahimci cewa kudi sune komai a rayuwar duniya. In baka da kudi kamar ma ba ka wanzu ba ne. don haka, Choka, ni sai na yi kudi ko ta halin kaka. Kudi ba, sai na yi su.” Murtala ya gayawa sabon abokinsa Choka.

It is now that I realised that money is everything in this world. If you’re not rich, it’s as if you’re dead. For this reason, Choka, I must get rich no matter how. Money? I must acquire it.” Murtala told his new friend, Choka.

In 1992 when the story was written, and in 2015 when the book was eventually published and even now nothing much has changed for the better. If anything we are more deeply sunk in the murky waters of materialism and its attendant devilish effects. In 1992 for example, N1000 was a lot of money with which a lot could be purchased but now it is the price of a *mudu* of garri. The flashy cars in vogue then were Volkswagen Santana, Peugeot 505 SR, while for public transport it was urban E20 that was used as commuter buses. Today, almost all of these have been phased out by Time and things have taken the turn for the worse. People have become more materialistic and many are willing to and are willing to

lay down their moral guards for money.

The story is mostly set in the fictitious Marmaro (the local government area), Sarari (the state), Marmaro and the Jamhuriya (the federal government). It was in Marmaro that the hero, Murtala, was born and raised as a good child until death came and set the stage for his indulgence in the corrupt practices that eventually led to his downfall. According to the story, Murtala was a victim of socio-economic circumstances that conspired to make him bow to their pressure. As the only son to the richest man in the local government, and an heir to stupendous wealth and assets, he had everything set for a righteous and fulfilled life. Not only was he brilliant but he also got admission to study engineering in the university. Alas, Murtala could not go beyond the first year due to the evil machinations of his avaricious uncle, Alhaji Jinga, who robbed him of his lawful inheritance and, with the connivance of a corrupt judge, framed Murtala with cooked up charges that landed him in prison twice. It was after serving the second term that he decided to migrate from the town to go and start a new life at his stepmother’s. There too, the society (in form of Alh Tulku) did not treat him well as it deprived him of Samira, the love of his life to whom he was betrothed. For reacting rashly,



Murtala was remanded for more than two weeks within which his girl got married to the usurper, the rich Alh Tulku. As this was too much for Murtala to bear, he absconded to another town, bought a wheelbarrow for the business of a porter and later became a bus conductor.

The book is written in a captivating style which glues readers' eyes to the pages until the end. It is a refreshing departure from the more popular *soyayya* (romance) genre with which the author, and hundreds of others like him, made his debut (*Idan So Cuta ne*, 1989). It is topical in its thematic concern of materialism and the vices that trail it – smuggling, money laundering, ritual killing, drug trafficking, among several other heinous crimes. The author has done very well in controlling the narrative by focussing on the two major characters and their escapades with their cohorts. Also the author has shown remarkable artistry in portraying moral decadence in a novella.

In spite of the merits of the book outlined above, there are a few black spots that need to be cleaned. For example, on page 29 a discerning reader can spot three areas that need improvement, if possible. First, there is a shift in point of view from the third person of the story to the first person:

“Ga dukkan alamu maganin da malam walkiya ya ba *mu yana aiki sosai (p. 29). (From all indication, the portion given us by Malam Walkiya is very potent). The MU (us) of the source language should be SU (them).

Another blemish is that Abdulkarim, his childhood friend, has his name changed to Abdulhakim (p. 29):

“A nan suka gamu da abokinsa *Abdulhakim wanda yanzu yake aikin gwamnati...”
“There (at the fund-raising to build a central mosque), he met his friend, Abdulhakim who was now a civil servant...”

The friend referred to is Abdulkarim, a very good, morally sound and studious boy back in their days at Marmaro. Refer to page 10 where Abdulkarim was first mentioned in the story.

Another mishap is that the convention of speech presentation which requires speech turns to be expressed in paragraphs is violated on page 29 where the conversational



turns of two characters are presented in the same paragraph:

“Kai Malam Bello ka ga yaron nan Murtala yadda ya koma.”
“Kwarai kuwa Alhaji Bashir ai ka san shi arziki nufin Allah ne karba karba ne.”

“O Malam Bello, look at what Murtala has become.” “Really, Alhaji Bashir, wealth is Allah’s wish; it’s (distributed) turn-by-turn.”

On page 39, the work book escaped the eyes of the editors in the sentence, “Ya’yansa ba sa karatun *book”, meaning, “His children do not attend secular schools (boko)”

I personally consider the fictitious names of places in the book as an encumbrance. My position is that since the Nigerian currency (Naira) is used with their images adorning the cover of the book under review; then places in the book can as well be Nigerian. Thank God, the fictive names are not many. Still on mishap, on page 62, Rumusa’u is presented as Murtala’s wife while it is Nafisatu that was presented to readers (see pages 32, 33, 37, 38

among others). To buttress this, readers are invited to page 45:

Nafisa a halin ta sami ciki ya ya kai wata shida. Tunanin da take yi na Nasiru ya ragu matuka tun da aka rufe kamfanin gwamnati kuma ganin ta yi ciki, ga kuma irin dadin da Alhaji Murtala ke nuna mata ita da iyayenta. A karshe, sai ta ga Nasiru ya zama tshon labari.

Nafisa then had become pregnant for six months. Her yearning for Nasiru had considerably reduced since the closure of the government newspaper and considering that she was pregnant, coupled with the fact that Nasiru lavished her and her parents with money and gifts. Eventually, Nasiru dimmed into oblivion.

Clearly, these errors could be revised and a cleaner copy be reproduced (we have witnessed the reprinting of Ibrahim Sheme’s celebrated book, *Yartsana*, from the cover). *Gumakan Zamani* can as well benefit from this kind of revision for its contents are germane to the present existential realities. It is a book whose messages Nigerians can relate with, thus it will for a long time remain a readers’ companion.



In conclusion, Adamu has succeeded in creating an amiable character who was pushed to villainy in the course of the story by the same society he is part of, but who must be punished by the reckoning of the author. Consequently, one cannot wholly blame the author for the retributive justice he meted to the offenders. The biggest crime of the hero and his ilk is their insistence to get rich at all cost, indulging (in the process) in all sorts of heinous crimes including drug trafficking, murder and money laundering. The concluding excerpt will naturally resonate with the readers of this fascinating story,

Mutanen Marmaro sun shiga wani rudi da mawuyacin hali... . Suka yi bakin cikin abin da ya sami Alhaji Murtala da mutanensa wanda suke kauna sosai saboda yana taimakon su (p. 62).

The people of Marmaro became perplexed and miserable... . They were sunk in gloom over the fate of Alhaji Murtala and his associates, who they deeply loved because of his assistance to them (p. 62).

However, the author, as god of the fiction, has the last word as he strongly feels that characters with such tendencies as Alhaji Murtala deserve to be brought to justice no matter how ostensibly helpful they seem. In this, I side with the author.