

THE AFRICA SOCIETY

PROFILE

DR. ABDUL-RASHEED NA'ALLAH

Dr. Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah was born in 1962, in multicultural Ilorin in northern Nigeria. He received Quranic education, and later attended elementary schools in Ilorin and in Sokoto. He was a Boy Scout in elementary school, and became Troop Leader of the 1st Birnin Yauri Troop in the 1979/80 session. Later, he trained as a Grade II teacher at the Government Teachers College in Birnin Yauri, where he graduated in 1981.

Dr. Na'Allah taught for the Ilorin school board from 1981 - 1984. In 1984 he attended the University of Ilorin, where he received his B.A. (Hons) in Education and English in 1988. In 1989 he completed the Nigerian Youth Service Corps at University of Ilorin, in the Department of Modern European Languages. Between 1989 and 1994, he was a teacher at the University of Ilorin in oral literature, African literature, English, and practical phonetics (Hausa). In April 1992 he received his M.A. Literature in English from the University of Ilorin. He received his Ph.D. in Comparative Literature from the University of Alberta in 1999.

Both as a student and in his professional life Dr. Na'Allah actively engaged in civic activities. He was President of the Progressive Unity Club, Ilorin, between 1980-1983. Between 1986 and 1993, Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah organized, presented and moderated a literary and current affairs discussion program on Radio Kwara, a state government short and medium-wave radio station. Among those featured were Dapo Adelugba, Zulu Sofola, Niyi Osundare, David Cook, and Olu Obafemi. Because of its critical commentary after the national election was annulled by then President Ibrahim Babangida, the radio station program was forced off the air by the Nigerian authority on the June 12, 1993. Subsequently Dr. Na'Allah came to Alberta as a graduate student. While a graduate student in the Department of Comparative Literature, he was President of Nigeria Union of Students (1997-98). He was also co-founder and the first Coordinator of the Africa Society at the University of Alberta. Abdul-Rasheed continued his pioneering practices by founding the Creative Writers' Society at Western Illinois University in 1998.

Dr. Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah has done extensive research into traditional oral forms of literature on Africa. He firmly believes that African tradition must inform any effort to mobilize the African peoples for sustainable development. He argues that most people who claim to speak for Africa do not really know Africa. However, such knowledge is needed to contextualize their yearnings for the continent. He writes of researchers into Africa oral literature:

“It is an interesting fact that despite the vibrant and varied practice of oral performance throughout Africa, scholars of oral tradition, especially Western scholars (but not excluding teachers of oral literature in African universities), insist on imposing foreign criteria on traditional African performances. Instead of allowing oral forms to speak with their own voices, academic researchers of orature are eager to show that traditional African forms observe the same laws of genre (i.e., the epic, the lyric, and panegyric) and style (i.e., narrative structure, metaphor and images) that exist in Western literature. African oral forms are gradually being forced to conform to non-oral conventions in classrooms.”(Interpretations of African Orature” (Comparative Poetics, #17, 1997, p. 125-6).

As a graduate student activist in Edmonton, Abdul-Rasheed helped mobilize the boycott of Shell Oil in Nigeria, and led demonstrations in Edmonton and Calgary demanding that Shell pull out of Nigeria. He also helped to mobilize support to get the Canadian Government to do more about human rights issues in Nigeria. In a book he edited as a response to the murder of Ken Saro-Wiwa and eight other Ogoni activists by the military government in Nigeria, he writes, “Slavery was vehemently defended for centuries by those who benefitted from it, exactly

as Shell Oil defends its atrocities in Nigeria. International trade is not an aberration. There is nothing wrong with Shell or any international company doing business in any part of the world. But when such business is being done as a game of re-enslavement, conscientious peoples of the world, as their brothers' and sisters' keepers must ask questions and insist on answers." ("Introduction" *Ogoni's Agonies*, 1998, p. 27).

Dr. Na'Allah has been nominated for and received numerous awards, including the Gold Key Recognition Award, University of Alberta Student Union, 1998; the Graduate Student Service Award, GSA, University of Alberta; The Alberta Heritage Charles S Noble Award for Student Leadership, 1998, the Province of Alberta, Canada; and the Black Achievements Award, Post-Secondary--Scholastic, 1998, the Black Achievement Awards Society of Alberta. Dr. Abdul-Rasheed Na'Allah is the author and co-author of numerous books, including: coauthor with Ladan Sulaiman and Ahmad Sambo, *Functional Literacy Primer in Hausa*, sponsored by the European Economic Commission and Federal Government of Nigeria, 1992; coauthor, *Instructors' Guide to Functional Literacy Primer in Hausa*, 1992; coauthor with Bayo Ogunjimi, *Introduction to African Oral Literature (Oral Prose)*, University of Ilorin Press, 1991; author, *Introduction to African Oral Literature* (1994); and Editor, *Ogoni's Agonies: Ken Saro-Wiwa and the Crisis in Nigeria* (Africa World Press, 1998)

A sample of Dr. Na'Allah's scholarly papers published world-wide include:

- "Interpretation of African Orature: Oral Specificity and Literary Analysis." *Journal of Comparative Poetics*. 17 (1997): 125-42. Egypt.
- "The Origin of Egungun: A Critical Literary Appraisal." *African Monographs*. 17.2 (1996): 59-68. Japan.
- "African Literature and Postcolonialism: Projections into the Twenty-First Century." *Canadian Review of Comparative Literature*. 22.3 (1995): 569-85. Canada.
- "Muslim Women and Ilorin Traditional Oral Poetry." *The Literary Griot*. 7.1 /2 (1995): 101-12. USA
- "The Influence of Traditional Oral Poetry on Modern Religions (Islam and Christianity) Among the Yoruba (Nigeria)." *Frankfurter Afrikanistische Blatter*. 6 (1994): 65-74. Germany.
- "Oral traditions, Islamic Culture and Topicality in the Songs of Mamman Shata Katsina and Omoekee Amao Ilorin." *Canadian Journal of African Studies*. 28.3 (1994): 500-15. Canada.
- "Dadakuada as One of the Oral Forms of Ilorin" *African Notes*. 1994. Nigeria.
- "Vowel Length in Hausa." *Language Learning Journal*. 3 (1991): 84-85. England.

Dr. Na'Allah is currently editing a book on the Commonwealth Poet Laureate, Niyi Osundare and teaching African and African American Literature at Western Illinois University, Macomb, Illinois, USA.

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