The Nigerian Cinema

Reading Nigerian Motion Pictures

Editor

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Media-Mediated Urban Sexuality and Islamicate Popular Culture in Northern Nigerian

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Introduction

This chapter argues that the availability of media technologies among the Muslim Hausa youth of northern Nigeria has led to the renegotiation of boundaries of public discourse from private sphere to public space, such that what was once a passionate private domain is now becoming part of public culture. This public discourse is situated within the context of the urban environment of the city and its public culture. This public culture, itself rooted in urban space determinism, created clear areas of space territoriality that the media technologies transgressed in a traditional society. Thus, renegotiation of urban gender space allocations inevitably leads to boundary adjustments in terms of what could be discussed in public and what could not. To illustrate this boundary mediation, we analyse the incidence of a Hausa video film actress called Maryam Usman, who appeared in a privately shot cell phone porn that led to public reactions not only against Usman herself, but also against the entire Hausa video film industry which was seen by the critical public sphere as responsible for the cell phone porn.

In this incident, the media played a strong role in delineating the boundaries of gendered spaces in an Islamic environment and demonstrate how private passions become part of public furore using media networks. What was more significant, however, was the public reaction to the incident which revealed a transitional stage of acceptance of private misdemeanour made public. An analysis of the public reactions to these incidence reveals a Hausa youth society fixation on female public figures and justifications of their behaviours.

In situating this analysis within the Muslim Hausa "Islamicate" social environment, we adopt Asma Afsaruddin's (1999) usage of Marshall Hodgson's term Islamicate (1974:1:58-59), for the subsequent "modern" period (roughly from the 19th century on)

to describe societies which maintain and/or have consciously adopted at least the public symbols of adherence to traditional Islamic beliefs and practices.

Equally, the theoretical framework of cities and urban spaces is adopted, for as Henning Beck (1998) argues, there are sociological and intellectual orientations towards the discourse on the city as a life space. The formal and abstract reasonings of tradition are found in Simmel (1957) and Writh (1964), and more recently, in Lofland (1973, 1989) and Hannerz (1980). Similarly, phenomenological perspectives are given in Kraucer (1964), Benjamin (1982), as well as Sennet (1977) and Berman (1982). Inevitably, however, no matter the analytical approach taken, the construction of the idea of life in the city invariably evokes an urban freedom that blurs many boundaries – or at best accepts negotiated boundaries. And as Dilworth and Trevenen (2004:183) point out,

> Because cities are often seen as offering relative freedom to those who "deviate" from the norm, they are also frequently portrayed as a threat to those norms and traditions.

As a cosmopolitan centre with little or no social control except as those initiated and maintained by its denizens, the city culture offers unlimited freedom of expression on a whole range of desires. The heterogeneous nature of the city, therefore, creates a series of independent spaces. The anonymity of the modern city has made it a space of illicit sexualities and non-conformist gender practices. At the same time, the structures and cultures of cities inscribe normative gender and sexuality.

Such range of desires that depict the city as sites of cultural contestation are often captured in films from Islamicate societies.

For instance, in his analysis of Egyptian films, *The Yacoubian Building* (dir. Marwan Hamid, 2006) and *I Am Not With Them* (dir. A. al-Badri, 2007), Armbrust (2012) argues that the films were novel in Egypt because of their depiction of Islamically marked bodies, and the displacement of location from the old urban center to the new suburbs; narratives he perceives reflecting cultural naturalisations of neoliberalism.

Hell on Earth – Hausa Cities, Moral Authority and *Sabon Gari*

In Hausaland, the "city structure" *(birni)* tended to be enclosed within a walled enclosure, with distinct gates that had opening and closing times – at least historically. Within such enclosures, the city becomes an aggregate of carefully defined allocated theatre of mutually acceptable engagement and social intercourse. Operating under strict emiral authority and control, illicit pleasures are severely controlled not so much by moral authority, but by spatial distribution that makes it easy to see what everyone else is doing. Thus, within these enclosures, the typical icons of city life – sex, drugs, alcohol –

are officially banned. even though secretly available.

When the British colonised northern Nigeria from 1903, they established settlements outside the walled enclosures of the traditional Hausa cities. These settlements were called *Sabon Gari* (translation: new town) – residential areas for mainly non-Muslims, and later non-indigenes – and offer an urban space in which tradition is negotiated with modernity. This modernity is constructed on the platform of availability of sex and alcohol, generally in bars and hotels openly patronised by all shades of religious adherents. *Sabon Gari* then became a city at the edge of a city. Created to delineate spaces between non-indigenes and indigenous Muslims in northern Nigeria, *Sabon Gari* as a public space created its own rules and regulations governing hedonistic pleasures.

Such pleasures included screening predominantly British and American films which attracted city residents (Larkin, 2008) and provided the latter with opportunities to cross the space boundaries between the closeted nature of the inner city and the open urban spaces of *Sabon Gari*.

For the conservative Muslim enscounced in the moral safety of walled Hausa cities, the *Sabon Gari* is a "hell on earth" – a portal through which aliens ("strangers", non-indigenes) and their values filter to the moral space of Islamicate social structures. The bars, hotels, liquor houses, and later cinemas are all located within its boundaries. This attracted predominantly young patrons, who were eager to run away from the moral climates of the traditional dwelling places. In particular, for residents in Kano and Zaria, with their walled Emirate administrative structure, the *Sabon Gari* settlements provide a ready escape to experience unmediated modernity.

Negotiations of modernity by youths, using sex and alcohol and blurring gender public spatial spaces has been recorded as a trenchant modernist statement by youths in Islamic or Islamicate environments. For instance, in Egypt, Abaza (2002) notes that "the conduct of youth, together with unbridled sexual behaviour in public spaces, has become an obsession" (p. 102). The new public theatre for expressing youth identity in a modernist mould in Egypt is the shopping mall, a point of convergence for Egyptian youth to socialise and mix in groups. Further, "young lovers in Cairo find that the veil is no hindrance to kissing and holding hands as they walk along the river banks" (ibid).

And working from ethnographic data in post-revolutionary Iran, Pardis Mahdavi (2007) discovered an urban Iranian youth population imbued with the ideas of sex, designer fashion, alcohol and rock and roll as being their markers of modernist identity through which they were "attacking the fabric of morality under which the regime seeks to govern its citizens" (p. 455). These are explored within the context of socially critical post revolution films such as *Marriage of the Blessed* (dir. Mohsen Makhmalbaf, 1989), and *Time of Love* (dir. M. Makhmalbaf, 1991). The latter was strongly condemned and

banned for transgressively vindicating a woman in an adulterous relationship.

Designing and delimiting spaces for what youth see as modernist tendencies in blurring the gender divisions in *Sabon Gari* areas of Muslim northern Nigeria created scowls of official disapproval from the British colonial administration (1903-1960). As Heap (1988:32) notes, this was expressed in 1912 by Lieutenant-Governor Harry Goldsmith who laments:

> The *peto* shops help to maintain the brothel encourage Bori (traditional healing dances ceremonies of the Hausa) dancing, *chacha* and other degrading forms of amusement in our Townships and our Native Chiefs look to the Government to protect their people attending the local markets with their children from becoming contaminated by these immoral indulgences. (NAK, SNP 8/5/4/1918, Goldsmith to Lugard, 31 December 1917).

By the time the British granted Nigeria independence in 1960, *Sabon Gari* in Kano had come to epitomise unbridled hedonistic pleasure and freedom space. The early cinema theatres – Rex, Queens, and later El Dorado – were located within its precincts, and became points of attraction for young and old patrons; with women patrons who are considered to be prostitutes. As Larkin (2008:149) points out,

> Going to the cinema in Kano is a visceral event, often charged with feelings of danger, illicitness, eroticism and excitement...Because it is such a densely symbolic domain, cinema articulates the eclecticism of contemporary Hausa life. It is stereotyped as frequented by *yan daba* (hooligans), who smoke hemp and whose presence at cinemas is key to the theatres' reputation as un-Islamic and full of iskanci (illicitness)...For most Hausa, cinema is not serious, detracting youths from proper *tarbiyya* (religious training)...

The Maryam Usman cell phone porn incidence, as we hope to demonstrate later, is predicated on these Hausa concept of new town/modernity as "hell on earth" and attitude to the cinema.

Space – The Final Frontier: Hausa Atrium and Conjugal Space

Television came to northern Nigeria in 1962 with the establishment of the Radio Television Kaduna (RTK) in Kaduna. Later, a subsidiary was opened in Kano (NTA Kano). A strong feature of the NTA Kano, when it started, was domestic drama series sponsored by companies manufacturing essentially household products — detergents, food seasoning, bedding materials, various lotions. These companies included Peterson Zachonis, Lever Brothers, GBO, etc. Aimed exclusively at the female space, these drama series, in promoting the goods and services of their sponsors, merely reinforced the traditional configuration of the Hausa spatial structure — with jingles and advertisements

always showing women washing clothes and dishes, cooking meals and serving the food to the husbands who appreciatively salute the wife's excellent cooking. And in searching for storylines to emphasise the domesticity of the drama series, the producers used the same plot structure of the Hausa folktales and adopted the methodologies of their storylines.

These drama series were made by the established drama group stage actors who thus found a comfortable niche in the new medium, and soon hour-long prime time television dramas like *Kulliya Manta Sabo, Taskira Asirin Mai Daki, Kwaryar Kira, Dan Kurma, Karo Da Goma, Kowa Ya Bar Gida, Kaikayi, Ba'are, Dan Hakki, Jauro, Katantanwa* and *Dan Malam* became the popular programmes of the NTA Kano. It was from these television dramas — most focusing on the intrigues and intricacies of traditional Hausa society — that the major respected actors of the subsequent Hausa video film were to emerge.

Thus, whereas the verbal tales rely on the audience to imagine the spaces described by the narrator, the availability of electronic communication technologies now made it possible for a paradigm shift from orality to visuality. In transporting Hausa oral culture to Hausa visual culture, drama series producers faced a central problem of protecting the sacredness of the female conjugal *intimsphäre*. This actually becomes a challenge because of the structure of a typical traditional household.

The Hausa household, or *gida*, is the fundamental unit of residence, production, distribution, transmission, and reproduction. The *gida* is essentially a family farming unit and, at its advanced stage, can contain multiple families of more than one generation with the family units of the household head, his married sons, and their children (Arnould 1984). Thus the

> Hausa vernacular architecture incorporates principles of Hausa social and spatial organisation. Walled on the outside, with a gradation of space from public on the outside to private on the inside...expressing the gendering of space — the importance of sequestering women. The result of increased concern with visual privacy was evidenced in Hausa architecture by high compound walls pierced only by doors to the *zaure* (entrance hall) (Pellow, 2002:150).

Central to this structure is the *tsakar gida*, an atrium which in other housing types would serve as a rather large living room. The *zaure* leads to a corridor that ends in the atrium. And as Prussin (1986:212) also observes, "the door openings become visual foci, and all interaction becomes concentrated around these points in space. The doorways are staggered, preventing any direct view into the entrance way". This barrier serves to protect the *tsakar gida*, from non-accredited viewing. The atrium itself is a private space, but public to accredited members of the household or those they allow; essentially female

guests. Male guests are received in the *zaure* chamber.

The Hausa TV drama series strongly reinforced this image of the Hausa family housing and living structure — with clearly delineated spaces for the genders. The filming technique not only emphasises this spatial division, but it also imposes itself on viewers — who subsequently came to approve it. Domestic scenes were mainly shot outdoors — in the *tsakar gida*, or at the frontage of the House immediately outside the *zaure* — with little emphasis on bedroom scenes. Hausa TV drama series utilise the atrium as their salons where discussions — no matter their nature — take place not only between legal occupants of the household, but also their accredited guests. The latter have no access to the conjugal family space, and the atrium is used to receive such guests. Even though the atrium is a public space — as distinct from the conjugal space of the inner chambers of bedrooms — it is still a private space in a typical Hausa Muslim household because non-accredited members of the public need special permission to access such family atrium. Indeed, for instance, even neighbours who needed to fix the roof of their own houses — and who in the process might have a direct line of sight of the family atrium of a neighbouring household — are required by cultural conventions to announce their intention of climbing the roofs of their own houses for repairs for a certain period. This will enable members of surrounding households to vacate their own atrium — retreating into the conjugal space. This way, the sanctity of the female space is maintained. In relation to this and as a result of that, new methods of filming which is based on both Hindi and American cinematic styles necessitate a reconfiguration of the female private sphere in video films, often in visual contexts that radically differ from the TV drama series. In this way, the city culture of being open and cosmopolitan is brought into the closed domestic space of a traditional atrium. This necessitated changes and inadvertently the renegotiation of public and private space in the filmic world has far reaching implication for cell phone porn incidence of Maryam Usman.

Urban Mediated-sexuality and Muslim Hausa Video Film

With the decline in cinema attendance due to availability of video films, the Hausa video film was born in 1990, and this made it possible for the illicit urban space of the cinemas to be avoided by youth. Thus, Hausa video films became massively popular, especially among young Hausa housewives in purdah who could not partake in the public experience of attending cinemas.

The Hausa video film industry slumbered for almost ten years, in which it followed the storytelling format of popular TV dramas. When the industry became a full-fledged business concern from 2000, two battle lines were drawn between two groups of Hausa

video film-makers. The first group was the *Sentimental*, and the other was *Chamama*.

The Sentimental group (locally referred to as "yan sentimental") specialises in romantic storylines with "modern" stage settings of big houses and flashy cars. They consider themselves modern because their storylines are based on outlining the central characteristics of city life – male youths in American style hip-hop wear (baggy jeans, baseball shirts, shades) and style (swaggering testosterone fuelled attitude). They situate their storylines on strong urban culture – shunning for the most part Islamic dress codes for the females.

However, the biggest trademark of the Hausa urban films were the elaborate song and dance routines that form the central focus of the video films, rather than the storylines. They also derive their central creative focus from appropriating as many newer (American-inspired) Hindi films as they could, adapting them into Hausa videos. The youth depicted in Sentimental Hausa video films are the same trans-national youths from cinema across the world where although America is loathed as a political entity, its social life and cultural mores are valued as reflecting the ultimate cool. Such video films included *Ukuba* (dir. A. Sherif, 2000) and *Jumurda* (dir. Hafizu Bello, 2001).

A further central characteristic of the Sentimental style of Hausa video filmmaking is its raw sexuality – expressed in the tight fitting dresses the female characters wear to emphasise their body shape, and in numerous scenes that accentuate this sexuality. In the same way that Iranian youth rebel against what they see as the imposition of Islamic authority on their Western-oriented lifestyles, Hausa Sentimental category of video film-makers use the canvas of the film to play out sexual fantasies and simulated sexuality in the storylines, especially in their suggestive song and dance routines.

The other group of Hausa video film-makers, the Chamama group of film-makers specialise in producing slapstick comedies based on rustic or other simple settings and revolving essentially around a central charlatan character, Dan Ibro,, played with gusto by the late Rabilu Musa Danlasan (1970-2014) through a series of slap-stick comedies under the general rubric of 'Dan Ibro' series. Neither epic nor based on tragedies, they attempt, in episodic form, to capture life in a village, as it affects ordinary folks going about their businesses. To prove they can also roll with the times, however, they often include a swath of song and dance routines, often on the same "city gals and boyz" level as the Sentimental group. Examples of such video films are *Ibro Sarkin Pawa* (dir. N. Sherif, 2000) and *Ibro Dan Chana* (dir. U. Ahmed, 2001). Thus, the Hausa video film came to embody the conception of life as metropolitan and a den of pleasure as reflected in the struggle to "Westernise" the Hausa video film to create a more youth-oriented urban culture.

Media, Westernisation and Hausa Female Film Star

The urbanisation of the Hausa video film is especially more apparent in dress modes of the song and dance sequences, and occasionally, the filmic setting. In Islam, the female herself is a private sphere, since there are strict rules governing her dressing — which has a range depending on the cultural climate of the community. The most commercially successful Hausa video film-makers see their success reflected in the Westernisation of their craft; and therefore use such device to attract youth to their films. Ali Nuhu, is a Hausa-speaking actor (and later producer and director) who pioneered Hindi-to-Hausa appropriation technique justifies Westernisation of Hausa video film on the basis of progress and modernity. In an interview granted in Niger Republic, he justifies appropriating American and Hindi films into Hausa by arguing that:

> The political systems in Nigeria and Niger Republic are based on Western models. Why didn't these countries create their own unique political systems? The Western society is the most progressive in the world, and everyone is trying to copy them. Even Arabs, who are strongly attached to their religion and culture, are now aping Americans, in their mode of dress and other things. It is modernity, and you must go with the times, or you will be left behind. (Interview with Ali Nuhu, *Ra'ayi*, Vol 1 No 1, February 2005, p. 7).

To reflect this "Westernisation is modernisation" paradigm, Hausa video film-makers require the female stars to appear in erotically stimulating Western dresses of tight revealing jeans and blouses during song and dance routines. Thus, even if the main storyline has what is referred to as *"ma'ana"* (meaningful) indicating that it might have a serious message, the film-makers have to use sex to sell the film through dressing the female stars in revealing Western dresses.

This preferred mode of dressing for the female stars in Hausa video films has led to criticisms from the Islamicate establishment. A typical example is shown in the following comment:

> The biggest problem of the films is the types of dresses worn by the stars...You will see a girl during a song wearing "dude" clothing typical of Westerners, with shirt and trousers. It is wrong for a pure Hausa girl, with her rich cultural heritage, to appear in non-Islamic clothing...We should not borrow mode of dressing from any other ethnic group because we have our own...Why can't we use ours? We should promote our culture in Hausa films. Suleiman Ishaq, Farmer, Katsina, in *Annur*, June/July 2002, p. 25

In 2001, the core Muslim States in northern Nigeria re-introduced the Islamic Shari'a as a legal code. The first contact of clash between the new public sphere of Shari'a and popular culture was in the video film industry. What triggered the concern was the

increasing perceived violation of the sacredness of the female private sphere as visually depicted in the new crop of Hausa video films that started to emerge from 2000. In this, the civil society — as representatives of the public sphere — drew on various core Islamic injunctions against such perceived trespass. The sources quoted to support the injunctions are the following Qur'anic verses and Hadith (sayings of the Prophet Muhammad) from Sunan Abu Dawood collection. The Qur'anic sources include:

> ***Surat Al-Nur (24:31)***
> And say to the believing women that they should lower their gaze and guard their modesty; that they should not display their beauty and ornaments except what (must ordinarily) appear thereof; that they should draw their veils over their bosoms and not display their beauty except to their husbands, their fathers, their husband's fathers, their sons, their husbands' sons, their brothers or their brothers' sons, or their sisters' sons, or their women, or the slaves whom their right hands possess, or male servants free of physical needs, or small children who have no sense of the shame of sex; and that they should not strike their feet in order to draw attention to their hidden ornaments. And O ye Believers! turn ye all together towards Allah, that ye may attain Bliss.
>
> ***Surat Al-Ahzaab, (33:59)***
> O Prophet! Tell thy wives and daughters, and the believing women, that they should cast their outer garments over their persons (when abroad): that is most convenient, that they should be known (as such) and not molested. And Allah is Oft- Forgiving, Most Merciful.

And the Hadith sources from the Sunan Abu Dawood Hadith Collection, *Clothing (Kitab Al-Libas)* include:

> ***Book 32, Number 4087***
> Narrated by Abu Hurayrah: The Apostle of Allah (Peace_Be_Upon_Him) cursed the man who dressed like a woman and the woman who dressed like a man.
>
> ***Book 32, Number 4092***
> Narrated by Aisha, Ummul Mu'minin: Asma, daughter of AbuBakr, entered upon the Apostle of Allah (Peace_Be_Upon_Him) wearing thin clothes. The Apostle of Allah (Peace_Be_Upon_Him) turned his attention from her. He said: O Asma', when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of body except this and this, and he pointed to her face and hands.

It becomes obvious, therefore, that experimental film-making – especially those depicting urban lifestyles – among Muslim Hausa would have to negotiate these core prohibitions about the sacredness of the private, and often, conjugal sphere, and particularly as it affects the appearance of the female body and its imaging.

This becomes more apparent by 2000, and under a global media snowstorm, and encouraged by internal migration of essentially non-ethnic Hausa to major popular culture production centers in the north, especially Kano, a new media hybridity started emerging. Alarm bells started ringing about the possible influence of new media technologies and behavioural modification. This is reflected in a few comments made either in public or in popular culture magazines — in essence, also reflecting an aspect of the Habermasian salons — in northern Nigeria. A typical example was:

> We the fans of Hausa video films have come to realise that it is the producers and the directors that are responsible for the corruption of culture and religion in these films. You know very well that every section of a woman is private. For instance, they are fond of allowing actresses without head covering, and straightening their hair; also making them wear skimpy Western dresses which reveal their body shapes, etc. In our awareness and education, we know these behaviours are immensely contrary to Islam. Don't such actresses ever think of the Day of Judgment? Don't forget their claims that they educating [sic] or delivering vital social message. Is this how you educate – by corrupting Islamic injunctions? Please look into this and take remediate [sic] measures immediately (Aisha D. Muhammad Gamawa, Bauchi, *Fim*, Letter Page, March 2004, p. 6).

These views and perspectives clearly indicate the chasm that separates the private and public spheres in Hausa popular culture. The insistence on Islamisation of video film by culturalist establishment merely reflects Qur'anic injunctions as consistently pointed out by the critical public authority. The Islamicate culture establishment was soon to have what it considered as evidence of what they had suspected all along – that visual culture as reflected in films (whether cinematic or small-theatre of video film) is a gateway to moral corruption of youth through media technologies. This was illustrated in the case of Maryam Usman (Hiyana), a popular Hausa video film actress who appeared in many films, but especially in song and dance routines. Her main film was *Hiyana* – after which she was nicknamed, as typical in the film industry. She belonged to the Sentimental category of Hausa film-making which the media uses to project the ultimate urban cool and sexuality.

Sex and the City Girl – Maryam "Hiyana" Usman Phone Porn

In July 2007, a cell phone video clip privately recorded on Nokia NSeries GSM mobile phone surfaced among the Hausa film industry practitioners in Kano, northern Nigeria, transmitted via bluetooth – a mechanism that came to reflect the ultimate urban cool among youth, titled "Hiyana". Though, it only runs for 8 minutes 37 seconds but its impact lasted for much longer. The clip shows "Hiyana", a very popular Hausa video film

actress, engaged in raw penetrative sex with her boyfriend, later identified as a "currency dealer" (some kind of local bureau de change personnel) called Usman. The actual clip was recorded towards the end of 2005, and kept private within the handset of the owner. It allegedly became public when the owner took it for repairs. For almost a year after its public discovery, it remained restricted within a small group of voyeuristic fans of cell porn, predominantly the currency dealers in Lagos where the event took place and where Usman lived, and later, Kano. A Hausa video film actress who apparently was at odds with Maryam Usman became aware of its existence and having obtained a copy, brought the clip to the attention of the Hausa video film industry – from whence it became a public property.

The phone porn clip – what became known as "Hiyana Scandal" – entered into Nigerian Hausa media history as the first publicly available pornographic moving image involving "ethnic" Hausa-Fulani. In a bizarre Freudian instance of display of the Electra Complex, the male in the sex clip shared the same name as the girl's father. In traditional Hausa societies, the mere fact of sharing the same name as one's father or mother creates a "bashful relationship" between the two.

What made its appearance so electric was that it came at a time when the Hausa film industry was accused by the Hausa public and critical space as getting increasingly Westernised and immoral. The Hiyana clip provided a perfect ground for reactions and backlash against not only Hausa film-makers, but also the entire industry itself which, with its direct appeal to youth, is seen as a surefire way of getting into Hellfire.

Focusing on, and accusing actresses as sexual conduits, however, was not an exclusively Islamicate knee-jerk reaction. Tracy Davis (1989:295) quoting a British Victorian era research on actresses and Victorian pornography, notes:

> Ryan exclusively identifies actresses (not actors) as the sexually evocative components of performance and explicitly compares them to illustrated erotica. Women were the bait, and men the appointed victims.

As equally argued in a series of articles on "Tempted London" in 1888:

> The youth . . . becomes more or less enamoured of a "singing chambermaid" or the "leading lady," both of whom display their personal attractions with more regard to them being fully comprehended than to any old-fashioned ideas of modesty; and when the latter appears in some thrilling scene clad in a white robe, her hair flowing loosely in extravagant luxuriance down her back, her white arms bared to the shoulder, her neck and bosom by no means jealously guarded from the vulgar gaze, he loses his head in the enchantment of her presence, and carries away a mental impression of her which can do him no good and may do him much harm.

Thus, as in the case of Victorian era British pornography, the Hiyana case became a pointed display of how Hausa women in the typically urban public theatre – film, in this case, are seen as baits. Further, the youth fascinating with the "singing chambermaid" in prudish Victorian era Britain translates as the same youth fascination with the "singing Hausa video film actress" in Shari'a state of Kano in 2007. The moral prudence of both societies merely seem to escalate the desire for the illicit, such that the stage fantasy of the actresses became ultimately their fundamental realities – as evidenced in the way the Hausa video film industry banned about 18 of its members from appearing in any film for some months because of their "immoral behaviours" (*Fim* Hausa magazine, September 2007, Kaduna, Nigeria).

Indeed as Kassam (1996:112) points out, Hausa women had always dabbled in expressions of sexuality at the popular culture level as either producers or performers. This is because

> This expression of sexuality is observable in the content as per the language use as well as the performance of the art itself, especially in the songs composed by women, some of which can be regarded as 'protest' literature or performance art. I use the word 'protest' here, because contemporary popular culture from northern Nigeria shows a shift from the more conservative traditional form to the one which incorporates some elements of radicalism especially in the content and performance or presentation. The innovation added to Nigerian popular culture by women from northern Nigeria indicates an aesthetic accomplishment on their own part.

This medial shift – from protest literature to the sexuality expressed in the Hausa video film medium – thus resulted in experimentations with other forms of "media radicalism" – especially in a traditional society.

The reaction to the Hiyana video clip – expressed mainly in the media in northern Nigeria – took three different dimensions. The first reaction was expected – from a civil society not used to hanging out its dirty laundry. Soon after the appearance of the clip, urban male youth in Kano took to threatening Hausa female video film stars – such that quite a few of them, who are not indigenes of Kano – relocated to their states. Hiyana herself went into hiding. The local newspapers and radio stations became awash with comments condemning not only the appearance of the porn clip, but also the entire film industry.

The second was a knee-jerk reaction from the government policy makers on popular culture as well as the film industry practitoners. The film industry's banning of film-makers as well as the government of Kano's banning of Maryam Usman from any film (or to be precise, the government will not give license to any film in which she appeared for the next five years from the date of the public appearance of her phone porn clip)

were moves aimed at showing public support – even before such support was measured – at moral cleansing of the Hausa video film of its urban-sexual image. The Kano State Censorship Board – responsible for censoring video films and other creative works to ensure compliance with the Shari'a legal code – was immediately re-organised with newer, tougher mandate and guidelines on Hausa video film-making at least within the borders of Kano.

The third reaction was the most unusual. While there were voices in popular Hausa-language newspapers of predominantly *Hausa Leadership* and *Aminiya* in support of the banning of the actress and general condemnation of the Hausa video film industry as being immoral, gradually, voices started appearing showing support and sympathy for the actress over her situation. A typical reaction is from the "Letters Page" of a local newspaper:

Ina Tare Da *Hiyana*

Ka ba ni dama in furta ra'ayi na game da halin da Maryam Hiyana ta tsinci kan ta. A Gaskiya babu mai hankalin da ya san mutuncin halittar Allah da zai so ya ci mutuncin masoyiyar sa ko masoyin sa, sai dai idan da wani dalili na daban, kamar ɓatanci, zalunci, cin mutunci da ha'inci. To, ni dai ga tawa hudubar: Bobo ka yi nasarar cimma burin ka; saura da me? Ke kuwa Maryam ni dai Ina tare da ke. Da fatan jama'a za mu yi mata afuwa.

Daga [illegible]
Gayuk, Jihar Adamawa

Translation: I am with Hiyana (Headline)
Give me opportunity to express my views concerning the situation of Maryam Hiyana. To tell the truth, no one who values humanity would wish to humiliate his lover, except for a deliberate purpose of tarnishing their image. In my call to Bobo (the male lover in the video clip), you have achieved your objective, what remains? As for you Maryam, I am with you. With the hope that people will forgive her.

At the same time, media technologies available to Hausa urban youth created a literary space on the Web for Hausa youth to open blogs to defend Maryam Usman. Within a few weeks of the appearance of the porn clip in July 2007, quite a few blogs appeared on the Web on the issue – most sympathising with Maryam. One of the first was simply called

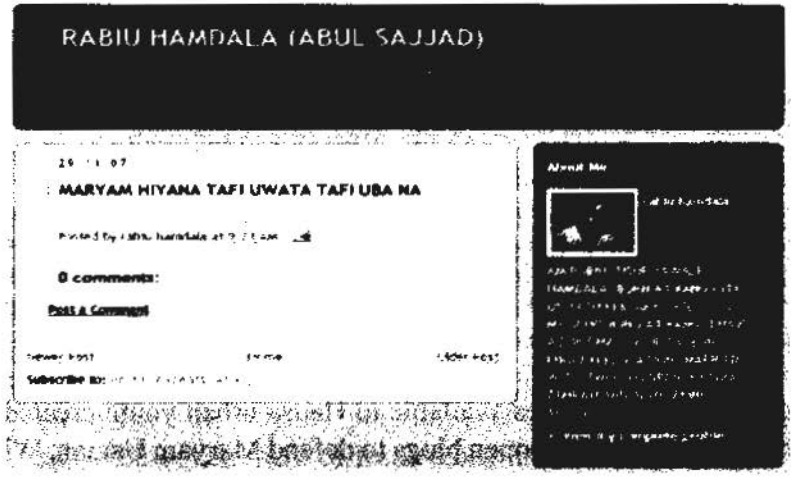
"Maryam Hiyana" – and written by an unidentified author who called himself Waliyyi" (Hausa, the saint) at http://waliyi.blogspot.com/2007/08/baiwar-allah-maryam-hiyana-yaba-maki.html

In the Waliyyi Blog, the author's posting made it clear that he supported her and shows a surprising reaction contrary to the one in the civil society in Kano. A translation of the entry says:

> *Baiwar Allah Maryam na yaba maki*
> Gentle lady Maryam, I praise you.
> Don't worry about the reactions to this video porn you appeared in and which is all over the world. There are equally women with bastard children in their homes and living wards. Yours is not as terrible as that of a woman with a bastard child in the home.

It is instructive that in Waliyyi's judgement appearing in the porn clip and having an illegal sex is less offensive than a woman who enters a matrimonial space with an undeclared outside pregnancy ("shege" or bastard). Not only does this seem to show tolerance among the Hausa blog literati for Maryam's behaviour, but also an intolerance to hypocrisy among some Hausa women who were sexually active before entering into matrimonial ecology.

Another Blogger, who identified himself as *Rabi'u Hamdala* went a step further with a headline *Maryam Hiyana Tafi Uwata Tafi Uba Na* (Maryam Hiyana is more valuable to me than both my parents). The opening page of the blog is shown in Fig. 1 (the page has been removed since then).



http://hamdala.blogspot.com/2007/11/maryam-hiyana-tafi-uwata-tafi-uba-na_29.html

Fig 1 – Hamdala Blog – Hiyana "more valuable" than his parents

Hamdala's posting on the issue on his blog lacks further explanation for the stand he took in the matter. Other pages, however, revealed that the author had earlier made a posting in which he explained that Hausa video film stars are superior to Islamic scholars. He then listed about seven categories of errant Islamic practices performed by some Islamic scholars and insisted that anyone distorting Islam the way they do has no right to condemn a porn video film star.

This again reveals a public discourse concerning the non-representative behaviour of individuals within an Islamicate space, and the author wanted to use the argument to defend Maryam Usman; consequently, if she's one bad apple, judge her only, not the film industry, because there are errant elements in the very fabric of the Islamic scholastic establishment who do not represent Islam.

A third Blog, *Yau Da Gobe Sai Allah*, attempted to provide a balanced analysis of the event, although blaming society rather than Maryam Usman, whom he perceived as a victim of society at http://hadejiawa.blogspot.com/2007/09/maryam-hiyana.html

The furor that greeted the public appearance of the clip – which eventually found its way into a blog where links are posted, as well as Rapidshare file download – eventually died. However, the association between youth sexuality and media technologies continued to be explored, and the Hausa film industry became comatose as a result of the Hiyana incidence, especially from 2007 to 2009.

It is important to note that Muslim Hausa youths are not the only cluster of youth using media technologies to express illicit sexuality. For example, using cell phone to spread pornography seemed to have caught on among the youth in Saudi Arabia, despite the strict Islamic regime imposed on social behaviour. The following is one of the many incidences of cell phone pornography reports from the archives of Arab News:

> Cell Phone Porn Causes Proposal Rejection
> *Arab News*
> Thursday 6 July 2006 (09 Jumada al-Thani 1427)
>
> MADINAH, 6 July 2006 – A Saudi youth was left in an extremely embarrassing situation when the girl he had proposed to rejected him because of what was on his mobile phone, reported the Okaz daily. The Saudi youth had come to the girl's home and was flashing around his cell phone when the girl sent her younger brother to secretly pinch the cell phone. As the girl went through the phone, she was shocked to find pictures and video clips of naked women involved in all types of lewd behaviour. The girl rejected the youth's proposal saying a man's cell phone represents the mind of the owner.
> http://www.arabnews.com/?page=1&section=0&article=84900&d=6&m=7&y=2006

Maryam Usman eventually got married – she had quite a few offers – and like all Hausa

actresses, quitely dropped out of the Hausa video film industry totally. But the echo of her video clip continued to reverberate throughout the Hausa video film industry. The State censorship mechanism kept drawing consisting links between media technology and expressions of urban sexuality, such that in all statements issued by the censorship board, there were constant references to the protection of "culture and religion of our society".

Conclusion

The critical theory propounded by Jürgen Habermas in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1961/89) provides a convenient framework for understanding the division between the private and public spaces, and most especially in Muslim communities where the distance imposed by space between genders in public is strongly enforced. The "public sphere" to which Habermas refers encompasses the various venues where citizens communicate freely with each other through democratic forums (including newspapers and magazines, assemblies, salons, coffee houses, etc.), which emerged with the formation of a free society out of the nation-state in 18th century Europe. The public sphere in its original form functioned ideally as a mediator between the private sphere of the people (including family and work) and the national authority, which engaged in arbitrary politics, although in our application dealing specifically with the sub-national issue of Muslim laws of female identity in northern Nigeria.

The public sphere exists between the private sphere and the public authority. The participants are privatised individuals, who are independent from the public authority, enjoying cultural products and discussing about them. As the institutionalised places for discussion such as salon, coffee house and theatre increased, the places for family became more privatised and the consciousness about privacy becomes strengthened. Thus

> as soon as privatised individuals in their capacity as human beings ceased to communicate merely about their subjectivity but rather in their capacity as property-owners desired to influence public power in their common interest, the humanity of the literary public sphere served to increase the effectiveness of the public sphere in the political realm. (Habermas, 1989:56).

Public opinion produced in the public sphere started to have an influence on legislating law, which overarched the monarchic power and became the universalised. Thus in the case of the Hiyana phone porn scandal in Kano, new legislature was instituted to curtail what was seen as a violation of the private sphere of female identity using

media technologies that mediated such violation. This was caused by the public furor generated by the appearance of the clip, the Shari'a government of Kano felt it needed to demonstrate its resolve in reinforcing public morals through legislation.

In cautioning the use of this theoretical framework in contemporary analysis of gender spaces particularly in the Muslim world, Brand (2003:84-85) argues that the very dichotomy between the public and the private spheres needs some modification. This is because in between the public and the private are several layers of society that are more private than public but contain elements of both. These layers are especially pertinent with regard to women, as they may turn out to be the only extra-private, or semi-public, spheres that women occupy.

In using the private/public theoretical construct, this chapter uses the application of the theory empirically in a study of women and spaces in Sudan as developed in the concept of Salma Nageeb's Neo-harem (Nageeb, 2002; Nageeb, 2004), which explains the gender specific ways in which women experience the process of Islamisation. Nageeb developed this theoretical concept — essentially an extension of Habermasian private/public dichotomy — in studying how two, quite contrasting, groups of women restructure the use of female space in Sudan. While Salma Nageeb's study is rooted in re-mapping the use of physical gender space, this study focuses on the virtual space segregation of the genders, which indeed in Muslim societies, translates into physical space delineations, and its consequences for the critical public sphere.

Consequently, in Muslim Hausa societies, as in the Middle Eastern societies Brand referred to, the participation of women in public affairs is governed by two layers. The first layer refers to their biological bodies which in Islam is *al'aura (intimisphäre)*, including their voices. When going abroad, such *intimisphäre* should be well covered, although with a varying degree of interpretations of the extent of the coverage. The second layer of female space is her virtual lair, or inner apartment *(hujrat)*, which again is not a public space and is non-representational in any form, reflecting, as it does, the scenario created by Hanita Brand in her description of the physical dwellings of Middle-Eastern societies. The transgressions of these layers by Hausa video film-makers seemed to have created a tension between media globalisation and tradition in Muslim popular culture.

This view has been roundly criticised, mostly for narrowness as sexist, classist, Eurocentric, and illiberal by modern standards (see Calhoun, 1992). These critiques pertain more to how Habermas tied this conception of a public sphere so tightly and specifically to modernisation, and that to rationality, than to the essential identification of the emergence of new public spheres around communications relatively freed from demands of ritual representation, particularly of mystical authority. Nevertheless, in

broader comparative terms, Habermas draws attention to communication freed from status and its ritual representation; his key insight is that this is not limited to private spheres of conscience, the market, or intimacy but can take on a public life characteristic of a bourgeois public sphere (Anderson, 2003).

Further introduced by Hanna Papanek (1973) and Cynthia Nelson (1974) to place a sociological ground under discussions of honour and shame in traditional settings, the public/private distinction opened up the private world of sentiment and expression, particularly women's, but to the relative neglect of the public sphere that new media make increasingly permeable to the circulation of messages from more restricted realms, diluting and in some cases challenging the authority to represent. What demarcates the public from the private undoubtedly depends on a complex set of cultural, political, and economic factors, and as a result of the interaction between such factors the line of demarcation inevitably has had to shift. From among the cultural factors, religion stands out as one of the most decisive components in delimiting the two spheres. Religions distinctly recognise and sanction a sphere of private action for individuals. In Western religions — that is, the Abrahamic traditions — human identity and individuality are emphasised through the recognition and sanctioning of private life (Kadivar, 2003).

Thus it is significant that the categories of the public and private derived from Western discourse often mean different things. Discussing Islamic discourse in the Arab context, Ayubi (1995) argues that public space or the public sphere is not conventionally equivalent to the political civic realm of public debate, conscious collective action and citizenship as understood in Western democratic theory. Rather, Islamic authorities have historically interpreted the public not in contrast to a "free" privatised realm of conscience and religion, but instead as the space for "symbolic display, of interaction rituals and personal ties, of physical proximity coexisting with social distance" in contrast to a private sphere that is in effect defined as a residual — what is left over after the public is defined. For Tajbakhsh (2003), the public sphere is above all a space for the "collective enforcement of public morals" rather than necessarily political.

Similarly, Anderson (2003) argues that for well over a generation, the public sphere of Islam has been an arena of contest in which activists and militants brought forth challenges to traditional interpretative practices and authority to speak for Islam, especially to articulate its social interests and political agenda. Further, as Gaffney (1994) also notes in analysing Islamic preaching in Egypt, opening the social field to new spokespeople — in our case, Hausa film-makers and new discursive practices – not only challenges authority long since thought settled to interpret what religion requires, but also blurs boundaries between public and private discourse and fosters new habits of production.

Media figure in this process in several crucial respects: for one, they devolve access to consumption by more people on more occasions. Passage into media conveys previously "private" or highly situated discourses from interactive contexts to public display, where they are reattached to a public world and return as information conveyed through new media technologies with different habits of reception. Detached from traditional modes of production, they become messages in a world of messages (Anderson 2003).

Islamic jurisprudence fully acknowledges the sanctity of the private domain: there is ample admonition against prying into the affairs of others; preventive measures can be found that guarantee the privacy of personal information and positively support individual rights to property and promote freedom in determining one's course of life. Thus, there can be no doubt that Islamic law can fully accommodate the notion of the private domain. The challenge lies at enabling youth purveyors of entertainment industries and users of media technologies to delimit the private domain from what is regarded as public in Islamicate environments.

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