

Veiled Voices: Islam, Women and Degrees of Visibility in Muslim Hausa Popular Singing

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Introduction

In 1923 Hoda Shaarawi, the founder of the Egyptian women's movement, demonstratively threw her veil into the sea—perceived right from that era as a symbol of oppression against the liberal world Egyptian society occupies. For Egyptian psychiatrist and feminist, Nawal El Saadawi the veil represents “a political symbol and has nothing to do with Islam. There is not a single verse in the Qur'an explicitly mandating it.” However, to many Muslim women, the veil offers protection from unwanted attention, creates distance, and makes it possible for women to gain access to forbidden spaces; for example, it allows them to obtain employment.

As Hillauer further argues, one thing the veil still stands for today is the division of living space, since gender separation is a reflection of how Islamic societies function. The domestic realm is the female sphere; the public realm, the male world. This traditional division also serves to keep the universe of women, mothers, sisters, wives, and daughters largely separated from Muslim men. Thus, for instance, “many women who make films use these separate worlds—as well as the veil in its various forms—as a stylistic device in their films as a metaphor for oppression and also for its opposite, emancipation.” (Hillauer 11).

The veil in Islam is more than a piece of clothing; it also represents a metaphoric boundary reflecting female visibility revolving around a core concept of modesty. Consequently, arguments about the boundaries of female body forms in the Islamic public sphere are based on the enforcement of modesty, which according to El Guindi (1999, 142) is connected to the 'awra' which classically refers to vulnerability, but commonly perceived as 'nakedness'. As an exposed part of a intensely private portion of the individual, the awra must be covered – a ruling that applies to the two Islamically recognized sexes: male and female.

Al-Qaradawi (1995, 150), quoting Hadith [sayings] of the prophet, further explains that looking at the 'awrah of another person, where of the same or opposite sex must be avoided, and 'whether with or without desire'. The 'awrah of a man is what is between his navel and his knee. With respect to a man who is not her mahram, a woman's 'awrah is her entire body excepting only her face and hands, while with respect to a mahram such as her father or brother it is different. The Mahram in Islam refers all those males whom a woman cannot marry at anytime in her life whatsoever (e.g. one's father, brother or son etc). The Qur'an is specific about this, as indicated in the following main verse that explains the relationships between a woman and her Mahram:

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 husbands' 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 (Qur'an, Sūra 24:31 – Al Nūr, or Light).

This Qur'anic injunction therefore precludes any public performance, though not appearance, of a Muslim woman in which non-Mahram males are present.

The Shari'a Moral Police and Public Visibility in Kano

My ethnographic template for the analysis of gendered public visibility in Hausa popular culture is provided by the provision of the 'moral police' in Kano, northern Nigeria. The Kano State Government, Nigeria, reinstated the Shari'a legal system in 2000 as part of a new Islamization process in a State that embraced Islam from Malian clerics in 1380. One of the instruments of the new Islamization was the establishment of Hisbah Board – a moral police force enjoined to 'promote what is good and prevent what is bad'. The announcement of the Shari'a in Kano had further dramatic effects on the Hausa popular culture industries, and the first point of such high drama was the tense relationship with suddenly emergent 'moral police', the Hisbah.

In Islam, the Hisbah is an institution under the authority of the State that appoints people to carry out the responsibility of enjoining what is right, whenever people start to neglect it, and forbidding what is wrong, whenever people start to engage in it. According to Murtuza (2002), the purpose of this is to safeguard society from deviance, protect the faith, and ensure the welfare of the people in both religious and worldly manners according to the Law of Allah. Allah has made it obligatory upon all Muslims to enjoin good and forbid wrongdoing to the extent of their knowledge and abilities. Murtuza quotes the Qur'an in which Allah says:

“Let there arise from you a group calling to all that is good, enjoining what is right and forbidding what is wrong. It is these who are successful.” (Q.3:104)

Consequently, the term Hisbah took on an institutional form by describing the institution set up to promote proper and to prevent what is improper (*'amr bil ma' ruuf wa-n-nahi' anil munkar*, to promote what is good and to prevent what is improper) in accordance with the call made in the Qur'an by an Islamic state. Although the Qur'an expects and enjoins every Muslim to play a positive role in the propagation of good (*ma'ruuf*) and suppression of evil (*munkar*), it has been made an obligation on a section of society to remain engaged in it. From the days of the Prophet Muhammad himself, the Islamic state has been enjoined to institute arrangements to oversee the implementation of this injunction (Murtuza 2002).

Since parts of the Muslim population in Kano regarded the imposition of an Islamic order as an instrument to eliminate crime, corruption and immorality, the behavior of the Nigeria Police aroused their anger. As a result of the perceived slackness of the Nigeria Police in enforcing the Shari'a, vigilante groups emerged, calling themselves *Hisbah* groups. These groups attacked places where prostitutes were said to ply their trade and where alcohol was sold. Peters (2001) suggests that they often took the law into their own hands and excesses occurred on many occasions.

Thus the Hisbah in Kano virtually created itself in the throes of the Shari'a launch from the urgings of local Islamic scholars in Kano, particularly Ustaz Yahaya Faruk Chedi, a lecturer in the Department of Arabic, Bayero University Kano. In the period before the re-implementation of the Shari'a law, the preacher was recorded (on commercially available audio tapes) at various times in sermons and radio programs urging for the establishment of a Hisbah Corp to ensure the implementation of Shari'a. Outside the courts, the Kano

Government established the Islamic Education and Social Affairs Commission by a Law of 2000 to mainly promote, develop, coordinate and generally enhance Islamic religious and cultural values. The main actors in the social field were the Hisbah groups. Youths voluntarily offered their services to make the Shari'a a success. Numbering about 11,000 and co-coordinated mostly at grass root level, the groups helped in detecting crimes, making arrests and forwarding suspects to the police for necessary investigations and possible prosecution (Yusufari 2004). These groups do not exist under one central organization, but were organized sector by sector throughout essentially Kano city.

It is interesting that despite differences in religious interpretation, orthodoxy has similar roots. This is because of the existence of a similar organ within some Christian believers, especially in the United States. This is particularly reflected, for example, in the formation of the New York Society for the Prevention of Vice (SPV)—a sort of American Hisbah—in 1873 by Anthony Comstock and his supporters in the Young Men's Christian Association. The SPV was an institution dedicated to supervising the morality of the public. Later that year, Comstock successfully influenced the United States Congress to pass the Comstock Law, which made illegal the delivery or transportation of obscene, lewd, or lascivious material. He lent his name to the term comstockery, meaning “censorship because of perceived obscenity or immorality”. Comstock's ideas of what might be “obscene, lewd, or lascivious” were quite broad. During his time of greatest power, even some anatomy textbooks were prohibited from being sent to medical students by the United States Postal Service. Comstock aroused intense support from church based groups worried about public morals and equally intense loathing from early American civil liberties groups (Gertzman 1999).

The Hisbah is essentially organized around safeguarding the limits set by Islam from being violated, protecting the honor of the people, and ensuring public safety. It also includes monitoring the marketplace, craftsmanship, and manufacturing concerns to make sure that the laws of Islam are upheld by these entities. It must also ensure that quality standards are maintained. The Hisbah carries out these responsibilities in conjunction with the appropriate government agencies and other relevant establishments.

With Shari'a at the forefront of everyone's mind, and the Hisbah corps increasingly emboldened by a sense of religious duty (or zeal)—which involved curtailing the gender-mix of many wedding ceremonies in Kano city—the film industry in Kano halted any further youth gala festivals. The Hisbah thus rapidly emerged as the moral guardians of the Islamic civil society in Kano, with particular focus on the video films, especially between March to December 2000. Before the various Hisbah groups in Kano finished consolidating under the Hisbah Committee their first assignment—preventing inter-gender mixing especially during entertainment events—was the film industry and this was demonstrated during the planned wedding “gala” activities of the then most popular Hausa actress, Fati Mohammed (*Sauran Kiris, Sangaya, Marainiya, Sartse, Mujadala*, and literally dozens of others). The gala event was planned for 14th July 2001. The Hisbah, already having constituted themselves into some form of “lord's resistance army” and in their hundreds, blocked the entrance to the venue where the event was to take place, chanting the following song¹:

| | |
|---------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Allahu Akbar | Allah is Great |
| Ba ma son a yi gala | We won't allow the gala to take place |
| In an ce za a yi | If they insist on doing it |

¹ Reproduced (and translated) from the report of the event in *Fim*, August 2001 p. 24).

| | |
|-----------------------|--------------------------------|
| Ana gwabza arangama | There will be a mightily clash |
| Ina soja? | Where are the soldiers? |
| Ina ‘yan sanda su ke? | Where are the policemen? |
| Su ma duk sun gudu! | They have all run away! |
| SSS? | SSS? (State Security Service) |
| Sun gudu! | They have run away! |

Even though the organizers of the event had made arrangements for security with the Nigeria Police, yet the religious coloration of the event was enough to make the policemen present mere onlookers. Any interference on their part might have escalated into a wider religious riot. The gala event was shifted to the local army barracks for the following day. However, the army did not allow the event to take place there either, despite initially agreeing. The reason was security reports that came to them that the Hisbah groups will attack the procession after it has left the barracks. Thus in the interests of public peace, the event was also canceled—it was subsequently held in Kaduna whose implementation of Shari’a at the time was still uncertain. The filmmakers were understandably furious with this and took time out to express their feelings to journalists. For example, Hajiya Amina “Yakumbo” Garba, who often appears in Hausa video films as matriarch, argued:

We are in a dark period. We have planned this gala to help us celebrate the marriage of one of us, yet the Hisbah corps have prevented us. Yet today we had a meeting of the PDP (People’s Democratic Party, the then ruling party in Kano) where men and women mixed in the audience, and no one prevented this. But because everyone hates film stars, the Hisbah prevented us from doing our party. What do (the government) expect us to do? Even in Makkah and Madina they have wedding parties...” (Amina Garba in an interview with Kabir Assada, *Garkuwa*, August 2001:15).

In interviews with international news agencies, the Hisbah defended their actions. According to the Hisbah Deputy Chairman, Suleiman Mohammed,

“Islam legitimizes celebrations which are exclusively organized for women or men. But it prohibits mixed parties of men and women... We have a legal right to stop anything that will affect the morals of our children (Islam Online 2001).

Recognizing that these Hisbah groups must be regularized if law and order were to be maintained and also aware of the apparent reluctance of the Nigeria Police Force in enforcing the Shari’a because they are Federal, rather than State law enforcement officers, the Kano State Government decided to establish its own, government-controlled Hisbah group. It therefore constituted a committee—the Hisbah Committee, which was formally inaugurated in November 2000 on the full implementation of the Shari’a in Kano State. The Committee was under the Chairmanship of Sheikh (Dr.) Aminuddeen Abubakar. This brought the entire Hisbah groups under one central control of Hisbah Corps. The rules and regulations of the Kano Hisbah committee list mainly religious duties, such as counseling and guiding Muslims who are negligent in their religious duties or do not behave as a good Muslim should. They are not authorized to deal with crime, except in co-operation with the Nigeria Police. In order to make them recognizable to the public, they wear a green uniform patterned around that worn by the Police, complete with a black beret.

It became clear later that the Hisbah in Kano was divided into two loose groups. One, predominant group is made up of former vigilante groups that metamorphosed into Hisbah, while another was made up of those same groups who subjected themselves to regulation and control under Hisbah Committee at the Shari’a implementation in November 2000. This became apparent when Dr. Aminuddeen was accosted by journalists to explain the actions of

the Hisbah in preventing the Fati Mohammed wedding gala event of 14th July 2001. In an interview with *Nishadi* reporters held on the day of the event, he insisted he was not even aware of what was then happening, nor were any Hisbah personnel authorized to carry out any attack on any civil group (*Nishadi*, No 6, August 2001:17).

The relationship between the Hisbah and not just the film industry, but also the civil society (and security agencies) eventually settled into a pattern of simmering mutual antagonism.

The Hisbah effect applies not only to the film industry but to the entire entertainment industry in Kano. Subsequently the Hisbah as well as the newly established Shari'a Commission intervene to prevent any festival of the arts in any part of the city in which it is perceived that there will be mixed gender situations. Such festivals were then often held in offices of cultural attaches of overseas mission (e.g. Alliance Française with its festival of Hausa music) and British Council (with its musical improvisations between a Hausa traditional music ensemble, Arewa, and a British Muslim rap group, Mecca2Medina).

However, the presence of Hisbah was much evident in the public sphere of entertainment. *Le Monde diplomatique* reporter, Jean-Christophe Servant (2001), provides an account of how Hisbah disrupted a concert by the famous kalangu (hour-glass drum) musician, Sani Dan Indo at Central Hotel, Kano in November 2002:

Sani Dan Indo, a Hausa *griot*...makes his money at concerts where the audience throws banknotes on the stage. He had his equipment destroyed by the *Hisbah* last summer when he was performing at Kano's Central Hotel. According to the vigilantes, his crime was that he appeared on stage. He said: "I refused to hire an attorney because if I complained, people would think I was mixing music and religion, they'd think I wasn't a true believer. Even in Arab countries like Saudi Arabia, I've never heard of musicians being as badly mistreated as they are here. I'm all for Islamic law. But the *Hisbah* were only after my money."

Musical festivals of the religious nature, however, such as the concerts offered by Islamic poet-musicians like Rabi'u Usman Baba were not only allowed, but encouraged as more acceptable alternatives of entertaining youth, than the more transnational format favored by the film industry.

In Katsina, even before the Shari'a re-launch, the *Izalatul Bidi'a Wa Ikamatus Sunna* (Izala), a fundamentalist Muslim group, under the leadership of Sheikh Yakubu Musa had been on the forefront of advocacies for moral re-alignment of the civil society, especially in the public sphere. For instance, on Friday 20th August 1999 the movement allegedly led a crusade in the State that saw the destruction of beer parlors (popular alcohol drinking places) and dwellings allegedly housing prostitutes (*The News*, Lagos, 31st August 1999).

The Shari'a law started working on 1st August 2000, and an advisory committee, the Shari'a Commission was constituted. For instance, one of the functions of the commission was to amend the penal code and bring it into conformity with Islamic law. Such amendments included the Commission passing a fatwa (Islamic ruling) against singing, dancing, drumming at any ceremony throughout the State. Soon after the Shari'a launch, the issue of who should enforce the Shari'a in the State became muddled. Beside the Shari'a Commission, there was also the Katsina State Joint Committee on the Enforcement of the Shari'a which by February 2001 had started challenging the Shari'a Commission as not being in a position to enforce the Shari'a. And in the midst of this tangle, a proto-type Hisbah emerged, carved out of the Izala movement. This created discord in the State especially as

there are three broad clusters of Muslim movements in Katsina. These are the Shiite, the Tariqa (adherents of Sufi brotherhoods) and the Izala. Although all strongly Islamic, each of the three has a unique way of interpreting and implementing Islamic injunctions. Further, while the Tariqa is dominated by the older members of the civil society, the Shiite is predominantly a youth oriented movement. The Izala cuts across the generations, but its approach to civil polity and constant clashes with civil authority makes its approaches to Islamic policing abhorrent to the other two, more or less pacifist, Islamic movements.

The constitution of the Izala Movement in Katsina did provide for a *da'awa* (call to Islam) and *'Yan Agaji* (Aid Group). The Movement noted with keen interest that the Hisbah in Kano spontaneously emerged out of the civil society in the throes of Shari'a launch in June 2000, and was later backed by specific government policies. Thus borrowing a leaf, the Izala Aid Group transformed itself into Katsina Hisbah, and although lacking any specific government legislation, the Hisbah undertook the process of enforcement of the Shari'a within the public sphere in Katsina. However, although focusing on all aspects of moral behavior—of both Muslims and non-Muslims—their most widely-reported clashes was with the entertainment industry. Katsina does not have a well-developed film industry as in Kano, so the clashes with Katsina Hisbah were with traditional musicians who entertain guests during weddings. Again, as in Kano, the main reason for the clashes were the gender-mix of wedding ceremonies, rather than the actual concept of merriment itself. However, within a year, and wishing to dissociate itself from the tag Hisbah, the Katsina Hisbah transformed in *Rundunar Adalci* (Army of Justice), but continued the Hisbah's task of moral policing in the State.

The continuing series of clashes between the *Rundunar Adalci* in Katsina and party goers—essentially wedding ceremonies which, understandably were entertained by traditional musicians—lead to the formation of Performing Artistes and Artisans Association (PAAA) in Katsina on 7th May 2001 by Bature Tanimu Gagare who became is Secretary-General. This was a gesture of defiance by a writer whose critically acclaimed first—and only published—novel, *{arshen Alewa {asa* (1980) was a wake-up call to the Muslim Hausa society about its injustices on the indigenous Hausa, the Maguzawa (see interview with Bature Tanimu Gagare in *Weekly Trust* of Friday, August 17, 2001). The clashes between the civil society and *Rundunar Adalci* attracted the attention of the Katsina State Government and led to a clear warning to the group that they are not above the law. As stated by the Governor in a press conference,

“If you see anybody committing an offence against the law, you have a civil responsibility to arrest the person and hand him or her over to the police...when you take it upon yourself to administer punishment or effect arrest and take offender to court for prosecution, then you are stepping beyond the law and this not helping the system.” Report in New Nigerian newspaper, Monday 4th June 2001 p. 1).

The statement reiterated the fact that the State Government has not officially sanctioned the activities of the *Rundunar Adalci* or those of any group apart from the law enforcement agents. However, when it became clear that there will be a continuing stand-off between performance artistes and *Rundunar Adalci*, despite the Government disowning the latter group publicly, Bature Gagare as the Secretary General of PAAA of Katsina decided to hold a world press conference on the issue. Gagare's protest was not so much against the Shari'a itself, but against the strategies of its enforcement, and he made his Association's views very clear during the conference he convened on 27th June 2001 in which he stated,

“...utter doom had befallen our trade since some clerics from the Izala sect declared our trade i.e. singing, dancing, drumming un-Islamic, and illegal under Shari'a law. Without proper codification,

definition and interpretation of such phantom stature by the House of Assembly, the Shari'a Courts started to inflict punishment against us, overzealous fanatics started to attack us with physical violence, our patronage overnight evaporated because of fear. The over all effect of this perversion was that our art suffered, our economic fortune plummeted and our future shortened. (Bature Tanimu Gagare, "We shall make Shari'a inoperable in Katsina State unless the rights of the Artists to self-expression is guaranteed", being the text of a Press Conference speech by the Performing Artistes and Artisans Association of Katsina State, Katsina, 27th June 2001).

Gagare cited examples of such denial of artistic freedom within the context of *Rundunar Adalci's* interpretation of the implementation of Shari'a in the following case studies:

- On 9th April 2001 the Izala activists arraigned a popular Hausa musician, Alhaji Sirajo Mai Asharalle before the Katsina Shari'a Court. According to *Weekly Triumph of Saturday April 14th 2001*, the man and his group were 'caught red-handed in the act of entertaining the crowds with locally made instruments which is a violation of Shari'a'
Sirajo Mai Asharalle was held in prison custody for seven days with a view to soften his hard stance against what he perceived as a denial of his right to practice his art. The court released him only after he signed a submission to stop his entertainment business in the whole State
- Another popular traditional violin player, Alhaji Waziri Mai Kukuma was similarly arraigned and a written pledge to stop his business was extracted from his under pains of incarceration were he to refuse (ibid)
- On 2nd June 2001 a group of brutal maniacs attacked and wounded Alhaji Ahmadu (Monkey) and his band of Kotso musicians at Dutsin-Ma during the occasion of the wedding fatiha of the ex-governor of Katsina State...The musician's instruments were smashed by these zealots and the Police later detained both parties on charges of public disturbances.

The threat given by the new Association was that unless the decision to rescind the ban on performing arts in the State, as well as the cessation of incessant harassment of performing artistes in the State are made,

We shall therefore no longer tolerate the violation of our rights as guaranteed in Chapter iv Section 39 of the Federal Constitution. We shall fight any group or government that strives to deny us the means of earning our livelihood through a legitimate enterprise, a natural talent sanctioned by God and the Nigerian constitution. From this day hence, we have promised to make the operation of Shari'a in Katsina State very difficult or impossible, until our right to self-expression is fully restored. (ibid).

Right about the same time the leadership of the *Rundunar Adalci*—which attracted international attention particularly with regards to how it prevents musicians from playing in Katsina, gave an interview on BBC Hausa Service on 30th June 2001 in which the leader of the group defended the activities of the group by insisting his on his understanding that the Shari'a law does not recognize a Police force, and that they will continue with their task.

The threats of further public disturbance between the *Rundunar Adalci* and PAAA of Katsina seemed to have created a re-think on the ban on music and entertainment in the State because on Tuesday 7th August 2001, the Katsina State Shari'a Commission called for a press conference in which the Chairman of the Commission Alhaji Aminu Ibrahim informed journalists that

"...the Commission directed that singing and drumming were desirable at wedding, Id prayers and circumcision ceremonies, and could also take place during wars or while welcoming a fellow Moslem from a trip...(the) body considered it necessary to wade into the ensuing controversy in order to lay the matter to rest...the commission had conducted a deep research into Islamic books and came up with the conclusion that the two performances were legal at the occasions listed but explained that the musical instruments should not be used to abuse or slight anybody." (*The Guardian* (Lagos) 10th August 2001).

In the meantime, the Izala Movement itself imploded on 8th October 2001 when the Executive Council of Katsina State branch of the Izala was dissolved by the Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Izala, Alhaji Sanda Kaita, who accused the deposed leadership of steering the organization off its designated mandate in addition to failure to move it forward. According to the news report,

“Specifically, the Trustees Chairman accused the erstwhile leadership of pitching the religious organisation in a perpetual war of attrition with those in authority notably the state government saying that such a course of action is diametrically opposed to the injunctions of Allah and the practices of Prophet Mohammad (PBUH) which enjoin respect and obedience to those in authority...He said the introduction of “Hizba” which acts as the enforcement agency of the Izala movement replacing the Aid Group (Yan Agaji) was a contravention of the Izala's constitution as there is no provision for or mention of the “Hizba” but only the Aid Group in the constitution.” *Daily Trust*, 9th October 2001 online edition.

This was a pointed reference to the illegality of the *Rundunar Adalci* which had hitherto sought cover under the broad umbrella of the Izala Movement in Katsina State. With this development, the *Rundunar Adalci* was officially disowned by both the Government and its parent organization. If anything this development demonstrates the need for dialogue in understanding the role of entertainment in an Islamic polity.

The Muslim Female Body Form in the Male Public Gaze

Thus a contentious issue in the discourses in Muslim societies deals with the degree of visibility of the female form in the public sphere – and subsequently, the subjectivities of the ‘male gaze’. It is this subjectedness to the gaze that Islam prohibits with strict dress codes for the female body form in the public sphere. This is to avoid the ‘male gaze’.

The concept of the male gaze was brought to the fore by Laura Mulvey (who argued that the cinematic apparatus of classical Hollywood cinema inevitably put the spectator in a masculine subject position, with the figure of the woman on screen as the object of desire and "the male gaze." In the era of classical Hollywood cinema, viewers were encouraged to identify with the protagonist of the film, who were and still are overwhelmingly male. Meanwhile, Hollywood women characters of the 1950s and '60s were, according to Mulvey, coded with "to-be-looked-at-ness" while the camera positioning and the male viewer constituted the "bearer of the look." Mulvey suggests two distinct modes of the male gaze of this era: "voyeuristic" (i.e. seeing woman as image "to be looked at") and "fetishistic" (i.e. seeing woman as a substitute for "the lack," the underlying psychoanalytic fear of castration).

Laura Mulvey did not undertake empirical studies of actual filmgoers, but declared her intention to make ‘political use’ of Freudian psychoanalytic theory (in a version influenced by Jacques Lacan) using the agency of cinematic *spectatorship*. Such psychoanalytically-inspired studies of 'spectatorship' focus on how 'subject positions' are constructed by media texts rather than investigating the viewing practices of individuals in specific social contexts. Mulvey notes that Freud had referred to (infantile) *scopophilia* - the pleasure involved in looking at other people's bodies as (particularly, erotic) objects. In the darkness of the cinema auditorium—or the context of private viewership at home—it is notable that one may look without being seen either by those on screen by other members of the audience.

The concept of the gaze therefore deals with how an audience views those represented either on the screen or on stage in the theater. Feminist arguments break down this gaze into three

perspectives – how men look at women, how women look at themselves, and how women look at other women.

In projecting the woman on a screen (as in a film), the camera lingers on the curves of the female body, and the subsequent events are presented largely in the context of male reaction to these events. The female herself, relegated to the status of an object, experiences the narration by identifying with the male. As Schroeder (1998: 208) noted, “to gaze implies more than to look at – it signifies a psychological relationship of power, in which the gazer is superior to the object of the gaze.”

Veiling the Faith, Unveiling the Body

Taking the Mulvian ‘male gaze’ notion higher, contemporary notions of feminist liberalism among Muslim women, both living in the West and those with attachment to the West, has created new form of expressive visibility for the Muslim woman. In Islam the first point of visibility of the female form is her physical appearance as reflected in her clothing choices. The standard components of Islamic clothing requirements for women are a head covering and loose-fitting, non-transparent clothing that covers the whole body, maybe with the exception of the hands and face. Cultures differ in their implementation of these basic requirement. For instance, in Egypt, Muslim ‘women wear full-length *gallabiyyas* (*jilbab* in standard Arabic), loose-fitting to conceal body contours, in solid austere colours made out of opaque fabric’ (El Guindi 1999:143). Malaysian women wear a Malay dress with long skirt, long sleeves and tight neck, with the head covered with a scarf or headress, the *mini-telekung*’ (Lie 2000:33), or to wear ‘loose-fitting long tunics over *sarongs*’ (Ong 1990:261).

Thus while traditions across the Muslim world varies, a general social binding force of female presence in the public sphere is the physical boundary between her features as a female and the appearance of those features to general public. The hijab, a covering of the head, although allowing the face to be seen, becomes a common symbol of identity for the Muslim woman, regardless of her race. Increasingly liberalization of Islamic identities, particularly for Muslim women living in the West, or living with the West, has created new contexts of visibility of the Muslim woman either living the West or in engagement with the West. These new visibilities were expressed within the platform of adherence to the core concept of Islamic ‘tauheed’ (oneness of God) despite their seeming contradictory stance. There are four case studies of Muslim women who attempt to redefine the very notion of female visibility by substracting the body invisibility.

Golshifteh Farahani Madame Le Figaro January 12, 2012

In her recent interview with *Madame* - a magazine supplement to the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, covering fashion and feminist topics - Golshifteh Farahani says she decided to leave Iran the day the Iranian Ministry of Islamic Guidance banned her from leaving Iran to audition for a film in London: "Iranian authorities did not like my acting in the Ridley Scott's *Body of Lies*. I was condemned for not wearing Hijab on the screen and being part of an American production." She used the first opportunity to escape, taking advantage of a loophole in Iran's border control system. Further, as she stated:

"If you wanted to swim naked, you entered the water fully dressed and then undressed once you are submerged. I've done that a hundred times. I just needed a friend to bring me dry clothes... And Hijab? Just wear it but it does not hide all the hair. It also sometimes falls! It is a traditional costume for many women like me who are not believers. I know it is difficult to understand. My country is full of contradictions...I could have stayed but I would not have been allowed to work the way I wanted.

When a regime asks an actress to hide her hair and body, I think she should leave." (Farahani 2013, par. 4).

What makes it easier to accept Farahani's explanation is her alluded statement that she is not a 'believer'. Having removed herself from the fundamental tenets of Islam then gives her greater leeway to behave in anyway she deems fit.

Golshifteh Farahani, an Iranian actress whose nude photos were published in a magazine called *Madame Le Figaro*, has been banned from entering her native country, following a decision by the Iranian government. Farahani, who played a pivotal role in the Hollywood film "Body of Lies", opposite Leonardo Di Caprio, was then also condemned by the Iranian regime for violating Islamic law by appearing without a hijab in a few scenes.

Meanwhile, Farahani was already living outside of Iran; she left the country to protect the strict rules mandated by Islamic law and President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad on Iranian cinema.

Veena Malik, born Zahida Malik, is a Pakistani actress, model, singer, and comedienne. Over a span of ten years, she has worked with news serials and films. In 2011, Malik crossed the border from Pakistan to India and took part in a nude shoot for December 2011 edition of *FHM India* magazine. Crossing over the border to a country in virtual perpetual war with her own was nothing new—as she had collaborated in a few projects with Indian filmmakers. Appearing nude, in a popular magazine oriented at male audience, however, is new on two fronts. Not only was the first for a Pakistani female, it was the first public display of nudity by a woman who professes Islam. While defending her roles in the Indian entertainment media, Malik insisted that she was an entertainer. In a heated debate with a Muslim cleric broadcast live on Pakistani TV, she reversed the moral compass of the argument by insisting the public Shari'a should focus on more fundamental issues of good governance and personal accountability, rather than picking on Veena Malik because she is a 'soft target'. The controversy of her appearance nude – which denied, since her hand covered her breasts in the picture – trailed her and raised the issue of public visibility of women in one of the most fundamentalist Islamic states in Asia.

From the UK, Saeeda Vorajee aka Sahara Knite rapidly established herself as the first openly Muslim female pornographic star – casting a whole new perspective on 'visibility'. Although a British citizen, she has Indian roots, being brought up by strict parents from the Indian State of Gujarat. In her formative years she conformed to public visibility of the female form by wearing the hijab in conformity to both Islam and family traditions. While no particular reason was given for her involvement in the pornographic industry, which she kept away from her strict parents, it was ironically her cousin who noticed her while he was watching a UK porn channel – and Sahara's parents were informed. They subsequently disowned her. Despite her colorful choice of career, Sahara maintains she is deeply Islamic, reading the Qur'an and praying regularly.

The final female Muslim seeking to reinterpret the concept of visibility within the Islamic fold is

Islam has made it obligatory on Muslim to cover their private parts, which everyone naturally feels a sense of shame at exposing, in order that they may be distinguished from the naked animals; in fact it instructs them to avoid uncovering these parts of their bodies even when they are alone so that they may attain perfection in morals and religion. Al-Qadarawi. P. 77

In all these cases, Muslim women attempt to radically redefine their perception of Islamic rules concerning the visibility of the female. In all the interviews each gave concerning her new interpretation of the visibility of the female body form in the public sphere, none was able to cite an Islamic basis for her action—except to reaffirm the ownership of her body and in some cases, still reaffirm their faith in Islam.

These Muslim women therefore offer a whole new perspective on the gaze in the public sphere. With the exception of the Iranian Farahani who openly declared her ‘unbeliever’ status (or at least aligned herself with Iranian ‘unbelievers’) the rest cling to the veil of Islam as professed identity and platform of their faith. Disconnecting their body from their faith seems to provide them residency in a parallel world in which ‘iman’ (Islamic faith) does not seem to clash with the display of their ‘awrah’ (nakedness). This means they are attempting to reinterpret the Islamic visibility rules—a task for which Islamic scholars would argue they are not in a position to do so; for to reject or revise a rule requires understanding and accepting its context in the first place and providing a more acceptable alternative.

Veiling the Voice

Female visibility in Islam, however, is not restricted only to the body form – it also includes the voice; for the voice is a component of the body. However, whereas the visible female body form sets out to satisfy the male gaze, there are ambivalent interpretations of the same function regarding the female voice. This is because there are two forms of the voice. The first is conversational tone, while the other was the sexualized expression of the voice in musical performances. Subsequently, the ruling on appearance before a mahram for a Muslim woman applies not only to her body, but also to her voice. As Al-Qadarawi stated”

An Islamic principle is that if something is prohibited, anything which leads to it is likewise prohibited. By this it means Islam intends to block all avenues to what is *haram* (prohibited). For example, as Islam has prohibited sex outside marriage, it has also prohibited anything which leads to it or makes it attractive, such as seductive clothing, private meetings and casual mixing between men and women, the depiction of nudity, pornographic literature, *obscene songs and so on*. (Al-Qaradawi 1995, 28, emphasis added)

The inclusion of female voice as part of repertoire of prohibited performance is in fact derived from a Qur’anic verse:

O Consorts of the Prophet! Ye are not like any of the (other) women: if ye do fear (Allah), be not too complacent of speech, lest one in whose heart is a disease should be moved with desire: but speak ye a speech (that is) just (Surat Al-Ahzab: 32).

This verse is interpreted by Muslim scholars to mean that men and women should not talk unnecessarily and when they do so, both the content and manner of conversation must be appropriate, and free of anything inciting. This interpretation extends even to religious narrative. The Hanbali scholars – one of the four juristic schools of Islam² – do not allow women to recite the call to the prayer in public. Indeed other Islamic commentators recorded that after the revelation of this verse, when the need arose for women to converse with a non-

Mahram male, they would do so by placing their hands over their mouths. This was to prevent any softness or incitement in their voices. Further, the Hanafi scholar Imam Abu Bakr al-Jassas says in his *Ahkam al-Qur’an*:

² For more on Islamic schools of jurisprudence, see Weeramantry (1988) and Motzki (2002).

“This verse (above-mentioned) indicates the impermissibility of women raising their voices in the presence of non-Mahram males, as this may lead to Fitna. This is why our (Hanafi) scholars have declared the reciting of Adhan for women as Makruh, as she will need to raise her voice, which is not permissible.” (Ahkam al-Qur’an, 5/229; Adam 2004, par 12)

Similarly, Allama Murtadha al-Zabidi, the Hanafi Sufi and linguistic writes in his commentary of the *Ihya* of Imam al-Ghazali, *Ithaf al-Sadat al-Muttaqin*:

“A group of Scholars have distinguished between the singing of males and females. Listening to the singing of non-Mahram women has been declared by them as Haram, and the listening to the singing of Mahram women is deferred upon. Qadi Abu Tayyib al-Tabari said: If the singer is a non-Mahram female, then it will not be permissible for men to listen to her. This ruling will apply, regardless of whether the woman is with or without Hijab.” (Vol: 6, P: 501; Adam 2004, par 16)

The female voice, according to the the Hanafi School, is not considered to be part of her nakedness (awrah). However, if there is a fear of Fitna then, the female should not raise it and the male should avoid listening to it. The point of contention is the timbre and pitch of the voice – it must not be done in any alluring manner which might lead to sexualized thoughts. However, a different interpretation is given by Ibn Humam, another Hanafi scholar, who states in his *Fath al-Qadir*, quoting from 'al-Nawazil':

“The melodious voice of a female and her singing will be considered as Awra. This is the reason why it is better for her to learn the Qur’an from a female teacher rather than a male who is blind, as her recitation in tune is Awra. The Prophet (Allah bless him and give him peace) said: “The reciting of Tasbih is for men and clapping is for women.” (meaning if the Imam makes a mistake in Salat , the males will invite his attention by reciting Subhan Allah and women, by clapping their hands). (Fath al-Qadir, 1/260; Adam 2004, par 21)

Imam Ibn Abidin, after quoting the same from al-Nawazil writes in *Radd al-Muhtar*:

“It is permissible for women to converse with non-Mahram men at the time of need (and visa versa). However, what is not permissible is that they stretch, soften and raise their voice in a melodious way.” (*Radd al-Muhtar*, 1/406; Adam 2004, par 23).

Thus according to some jurists of Islam, a woman’s voice is not necessarily part of what can be considered her ‘nakedness’. However, the form and delivery of her voice can lead to thoughts that Islam consider ‘indecent’. Subsequently, the female voice remains veiled. This presents a challenge to the participation of women in public Islam, and is illustrated by the case of female muezzins—those who call the Muslim faithful to prayer at the appointed times—from Bahrain.

The Muslim call to prayer has traditionally been done by men. The schools of Islamic jurisprudence concur that the conditions for the validity of *adhan* (the call to prayer) are: maintaining continuity of its recital and the sequence of its different parts, and that the *mu'adhdhin* (the person calling the prayer) be a sane Muslim man. This automatically disqualifies women from issuing out the call to the prayer for at least two additional reasons. The first was the sonic quality of the call to the prayer – which invokes the prohibition of the woman raising her voice in public. Secondly, the act of its publicity makes the audience of the call to the prayer non-Mahram to the caller.

This interpretation, however, applies only to Sunni schools of jurisprudence. The Shi'a, a second denomination of Islam³ have a totally different understanding of the role of female voice in the public sphere. This was the interpretation given by Shi'a Islamic jurists in Bahrain when on 2nd November 2009 when the Bahraini Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs granted three muezzins permission to call to the prayer in two different mosques in Bahrain. This caused a furor in the Bahraini parliament where it was revealed that the three women working as muezzins in the mosques belong to the Ja'afariyah (Twelvers) Shi'a group. The first female muezzin was Mariam Hasan Ali. She worked at the Shaykh Muhammad Mu`min Mosque, which was one of the large mosques of the capital, Manama. The other two muezzin were Fawziyah Ali Hasan Rustum and Salwa Ahmad Sultan. They work at the Shaykh Darwish Mosque, in the area of Al-Diyah, near Al-Badi district, also in the capital Manama. Reacting to this, a Bahraini Islamic scholar was noted as argued that such a development

is a dangerous, reprehensible innovation that no one in the world introduced before us. All the Islamic doctrines agree that it is impermissible for a woman to occupy this post, and therefore the question is: How dare the Ja'afariyah Religious Endowments Administration employ three women as muezzin? And, does the Imamate Shiite jurisprudence authorize women to perform the function of muezzin? How come that these women have continued to receive their salaries all throughout the previous period of time? This proves that there is clear administrative corruption at the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Affairs, and the minister is politically responsible for this." (Dossari 2009, par 11).

In Egypt similar furor was almost created, although avoided, by attempts to get women to recite the Qur'an in public. This again raised the arguments of non-Mahram males in the audience and created condemnation from scholars of Al-Azhar University, whose regular judgements on Islamic matters confer a Sunni authority on their rulings. According to one of them,

"Such calls echo a Western agenda," said Mohammad Al Barri, a cleric at Al Azhar, Sunni Islam's influential seat of learning. "There is no clear text in the Quran or the Prophet Mohammad's [PBUH] sunna [traditions and sayings] that women recited the Holy Quran in front of men. Should this happen, there would be a big sedition, which we should avoid by all means... Letting a woman read in front of men would tempt them, thereby earning her and them God's wrath instead of His contentment."" (Al Sherbini 2010, par 2).

Thus despite the immense significance of learning and reciting the Qur'an for all Muslims, a Muslim female would not recite it in front of non-Mahram males, although she could recite it—and also issue call to prayer and lead the prayer—to an all-female audience.

Subversion and Religiosity in Hausa Female Public Performances

My discussion so far has created a closed circle and preculsion of female Muslim public performances—in any form: whether religious or secular. The availability of as much as eight different schools of jurisprudence in Islam, however, provides rooms for alternative interpretation on at least basic structures of what Islamic considers decency in female Muslim public visibility. Thus while H

³ For more on historical development of Shi'a Islam, see Jafri (1999).

While applicable to most male-dominated communities, in Islamic communities women are considered more enticing—at least outwardly—than men; with the male gaze perceiving a more powerful sensual stimulus from the female body than from her voice. This, therefore, has consequences in the way women perform in public—with sensuality of the performance being the main criteria of determining the motive of the performance. As Nieuwkerk (1995, 12) pointed out,

The fact that excitement is most strongly aroused by the eye rather than by the ear also affects the various categories of female performers. Female musicians are mainly listened to; female singers are both listened to and, at least at present, observed; while female dancers are solely eye-catchers. Female dancing is accordingly considered the most shameful form of entertainment. Yet if female dancing is performed in front of a female audience and no temptation is feared and the performance is in keeping with the limits of proper time, place, and company, it is probably permissible.

Islamic scholars in Kano studiously refuse to be drawn into the permissibility of public performance of women in the popular arts. Yet, and significantly, more than half of the musical performances in Kano and Hausa popular culture is performed by women—from behind microphones and studios; thus hiding their vocal as well as body expressive visibility. The furor generated by Muslim women dressing in Western clothing and dancing sensually on the screen in Hausa video films created a prohibition of stage public stage performances for women. Consequently, women do not perform in clubs, theaters or concert halls.

This does not, however, include participation in closed ‘female only’ groups, with either mahram males or male preteens. Thus a common form of Hausa women’s visibility is in ceremonies in which popular singers of either the traditional or modern musical genres are invited to sing and dance before women. This, in fact, is done right in the palace of the Emir—usually seen as a custodian of Hausa religious culture.

The creation of song and dance subtexts—fashioned along Hindi film structure—enabled a viable music industry and a new genre of Hausa music referred to as *Nanaye*. Its distinct feature is the male and female call-and-response narrative structure of the lyrics. Thus while remaining invisible, the consistency of the lyrical delivery of the female portion of the songs in Hausa video films give Hausa women entertainers a higher aural profile than visible. When the Hausa video films became extremely popular especially for Hausa women in purdah, women then moved to the center stage of the entertainment process by subverting the ‘moral police’ through release of what came to be termed ‘video albums’. Thus while not participating in the visible public sphere of concert arena, Hausa women use their voices as a form of engagement with public culture.

Thus releasing ‘video albums’ became one way of subverting Islamic criticism about female performance in public space and to non-Mahram males. Within this context, the popular culture industries devised two additional subvertive strategies to encounter public criticism of alluring female voices.

The first was overwhelming focus on what I call Hausa Muslim Gospel song repertoires. When criticism about video film industry singing and dancing threatened female performances in popular culture, the women slowly steered their singing to praising the Prophet Muhammad. This immediately neutralized any public opposition to the visibility of a female voice in the public sphere—for no one wants to be accused of not liking songs praising the Prophet. This therefore gives the women immense opportunity to not only play with varieties

of vocal ranges and delivery, but to also branch out into moral-themed lyrics which are derivatives of the songs of the Prophet.

Conclusion

In Muslim Hausa societies, as in Middle Eastern societies, 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 of the body acre across the Muslim world. 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. The transgressions of these space boundaries in Hausa popular culture, using newly acquired media technologies, seemed to have created a tension between media globalization and tradition in Muslim cultures in which the distinctions between the private and public visibilities of female forms are increasingly blurred.

As Talal Asad (2003) pointed out, the terms “public” and “private” form a basic pair of categories in modern liberal society. It is central to the law, and crucial to the ways in which liberties are protected. These modern categories are integral to Western capitalist society, and they have a history that is coterminous with it. A central meaning of “private” has to do with private property, while “public” space is essentially one that depends on the presence of depersonalized state authority.

Further introduced by Hanna Papanek (1973) and Cynthia Nelson (1974) to place a sociological ground under discussions of honor 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 recognize and sanction a sphere of private action for individuals. In Western religions—that is, the Abrahamic traditions—human identity and individuality are emphasized 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, Nazih Ayubi (1995) has argued 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” privatized 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, Jon W. Anderson (2003) has argued 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 agendas. Further, as Gaffney (1994) also noted in analyzing Islamic preaching in Egypt, opening the social field to new spokespeople—in our case, Hausa female singers—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.

It is thus clear that a battle line has been drawn between the traditional Islamicate environment in northern Nigerian Hausa Muslim communities and purveyors of new popular culture with a focus on commercial and more “modern” appeal on their craft. The fact that there is so much resistance—focused not on the industries themselves, but the public space sexualization of the sanctity of the female in a Muslim society, and which the merchants of popular culture see as representing modernity—sex as a template for freedom from the shackles of a traditional society—indicates a very challenging development for the future of Muslim Hausa popular culture.

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