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Private Sphere, Public Furor: Gender and Delineation of *Intimissphäre* In Muslim Hausa Video Films

Abdalla Uba Adamu

1.0 Introduction and Context

In Hausa (northern Nigeria) popular culture, the traditional *tatsuniya* folktale provides the quintessential template around which the Hausa mindset is displayed in public discourse. As the fountainhead of Hausa oral literature it provides a filmic canvas on the life of a Bahaushe (ethnic Hausa) in a traditional society. In this argument, however, I focus on orality as applicable to popular culture, rather than the whole gamut of oral literature which might encompass historical accounts, heroic epics, riddles and jokes, proverbs, etc. aimed mainly, but not exclusively, at children, the *tatsuniya* is an oral script aimed at drawing attention to the salient aspects of Hausa cultural life and how to live it in a moralist manner. Further, it is necessarily a female space, for as argued by Ousseina Alidou (2002b:139):

In Hausa tradition, the oldest woman of the household or neighborhood—the grandmother—is the “master” storyteller. Her advanced age is a symbol of a deep experiential understanding of life as it unfolds in its many facets across time and she is culturally regarded as an important source of knowledge production, preservation, and transmission. This matriarch becomes the mediator/transmitter of knowledge and information across generations... She uses her skills of storytelling to artistically convey information to younger generations about the culture and worldview, norms and values, morals and expectations. Her relationship with her younger audience of girls and boys...puts her in a position to educate, through her *tatsuniya*, about taboo topics such as sexuality, and shame and honor, that culturally prevent parents and children from addressing with one another.

Thus devoid of male space, the *tatsuniya* necessarily becomes a script on how to live a good life devoid of threatening corruptions. Strongly didactic and linear (without subtle sub-plot developments considering the relatively younger

age of the audience), it connects a straight line between what is good and what is bad and the consequences of stepping out of the line. The central meter for measuring the “correctness” and morality of a *tatsuniya* is the extent to which it rewards the good and punishes the bad. Its linearity ensures the absence of sexually moral conflict resolution scenes which present moral dilemmas for the unseen audiences. In cases where such conflicts exist—for instance theft situations—the narrator simply summarizes the scene. The reason for the linearity as well as the deletion, as it were, of conflict resolution scenes is attributed to Islam. As Ousseina Alidou (2002a: 244), building up on the earlier works of Skinner (1980) and Starratt (1996) points out:

The impact of Islam on oral literary production in Hausa culture has been multifold. First, the inception of Islam in Hausa culture infused the themes, style, and language of Hausa oral literature with an Islamic ethos and aesthetics. Its mode of characterization also took a turn towards a more Islamic conception of personal conduct that defines a person as “good” or “evil” Furthermore, many modern Hausa epics and folktales contain metaphorical allusions to spaces relevant to Islamic history and experiences.

The imaginative structure of the *tatsuniya* does not stop merely at narrative styles; it often builds complex plot elements using metaphoric characterizations. Animals thus feature prominently, with Gizo, the spider, taking the role of the principal character, although alternating between being good and being bad. One would even imagine traditional Hausa *tatsuniya* tellers using computer animation for their stories—for the animations used in Hollywood cinematic offerings such as *Antz* (1998, dirs. Eric Darnell and Tim Johnson), *Ice Age: The Meltdown* (2001, dirs. Carlos Saldanha), *Shrek* (2001, dirs. Andrew Adamson and Vicky Jenson), *Finding Nemo* (2003, dirs. Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich), *Shark Tale* (2004, dir. Bibi Bergeron), *Madagascar* (2005, dirs. Eric Darnell and Tom McGrath), *Racing Stripes* (2005, dir. Frederik Du Chau)—all aimed at metaphorically exploring the human psyche superimposed on the animal kingdom—could be seen as perfect renditions of the Hausa *tatsuniya* using the power of modern media technologies. A good example of this multiform structure is the Hausa folk tale of *The Gazelle has Married a Human*, in which a gazelle transforms into a beautiful maiden and entices a young man to marry her and live with her parents. When she is sent to the vegetable garden to fetch a vegetable for soup, she transforms into gazelle again, calls all her fellow animals and get seriously down with song and dance routines—a bit like scenes from the Hollywood film, *The Lion King* (1994, dirs. Roger Allers and Rob Minkoff).

A study of the thematic classifications of the *tatsuniya* by Ahmad (2002) reveals plot elements that, interestingly, resonates with commercial Hindi film plots and created creative convergence points for Hausa video filmmakers to use the *tatsuniya* plot elements, if not the direct stories, couched in a Hindi film masala frame. These themes according to Ahmad (2002) include unfair treatment of members of the family which sees various family conflicts focusing on favoritism (as for example in the *Kogin Bagaja* folktale), unfair or wicked treatment of children (*Labarin Janna da Jannalo*), and disobedience to parents (*The girl who refuses to marry any suitor with a scar*). This is supplemented by the second theme of the tales, which included reprehensible behavior of the ruling class or those in positions of authority. Sub-themes included forced marriage (*Labarin Tasalla da Zangina*), arrogance by members of the ruling elite (*The daughter of a snake and a prince*), oppression (*A leper and a wicked Waziri and a Malam*). Other themes deal with deceptiveness, personal virtues and virtuous behavior. For further embellishment, some of tales in the *tatsuniya* repertoire contain elements of performance arts where the storylines merge into a series of songs—often with a refrain—to further add drama to the story. The songs in Hausa folktales, however, are controlled by the gender spaces that characterize the stories. It is either boys, or girls dancing; rarely a mixture of the two.

The coming of Islam to Hausaland in about 1250 (Adamu 1999) lent a more religious coloration to the folktales and further reinforced the moral aura of their themes. The reinforcement of separate spaces for the genders in Islam consequently reflect the gender-space specificity of the Hausa *tatsuniya*. The gender space is described and clearly delineated—and this further underscores the moral imperative of the *tatsuniya* narrator who often improvises on the stories. Thus within this framework, the *tatsuniya* scripts do not provide for the exploration of the female *Intimisphäre*—the original German for private sphere as used by Habermas—but for the reinforcement of gender stratification of a male dominated society. This antecedent gender space limitation of the Hausa folktale mindset would come under serious challenge from the visualization of the Hausa folktales when transition is made to video medium—since such adaptation uses different literary codes than the familiar to the Hausa.

2.0 Traditional Hausa Cultural Mindset

The central argument in this paper is that modern visual form of storytelling which uses motifs and storyline structure from essentially Western models of narrative is at odds with what is known and accepted about Hausa literature. To the Hausa literature – adabi – is a reflection of society, which therefore forces a didactic structure to Hausa imaginative prose narratives.

Western cinema, on the other hand, has a more multifaceted perception of society—and combines art, literature and significant amount of fantasy in dramatic enactments; as, for instance, witnessed in computer-generated 3D animated films, or science fiction.

Further, to understand public reaction against modernized cinematic enactment of traditional literature, it is necessary to understand what I call the Hausa 'mindset' – which is not without its difficulties since many linguists and anthropologists have different—often contradictory—theories of what constitutes a 'Hausa' person whose mindset is necessary to understanding the furor generated by Hausa video films. Writings by both colonial and subaltern writers reveal that the ambiguity concerning the Hausa people (as opposed to the State) is long entrenched. For instance, Mahdi Adamu (1984: 269) argues that:

Originally, the term Hausa referred to the language, the inhabitants describing themselves as 'Hausawa' (meaning speakers of the Hausa language). Later and by a process of restriction, the term served to describe those living near the Songhay empire who directly represented the Hausa collectivity, that is the former kingdoms of Zamfara, Kebbi and Gobir.

The situation became less clearer immediately after the colonial occupation of northern Nigeria in 1903, when Lugard (later to become the Governor-General of Nigeria, 1914–1919) noted a year later that:

The Mohammedan Fulani, though the ruling race, form but a very small item in the population of Northern Nigeria. The indigenous people, who are subject to them, are of many different tribes. In the northern states of Sokoto, Kano, Zaria, and Hadejia they are chiefly Hausas. South of these are the great Nupe tribe, and south again in Illorin are the Yorubas. Of these the Hausas are the most considerable. They are found as settlers and traders in every province, and even as far as Sierra Leone and the Gold Coast. Their language is the lingua franca of Northern Nigeria, especially of trade, and their keen commercial instincts have earned for them the name of "the business-men of West Africa." (Lugard, 1904: 9).

A few years later, Charles Orr (1908: 278), argued that:

"The first thing to note is that the word "Hausa" merely denotes "language." A pagan talking his unknown tongue in the Kano market will be met with "Ban ji *hausanka* ba" – I don't

understand your language.” In other words, a native will claim to be a Hausa merely because he speaks “the language,” and it is not uncommon for pagans and even Fulanis to describe themselves as “Hausawa”, merely because they speak that language. In Hausa-land proper, the real Hausa, as distinguished from Fulanis, Pagans, Bornuese, &c., is, as is well known, called a “Habe”; and this is unquestionably the correct title for the race. In enquiring about ancient rights and customs one refers always to the “old Habe kingdoms,” to distinguish what are more loosely called Hausa States”.

This, of course, differs from Lugard’s interpretation which placed a distinct racial boundary to ‘Hausa’. H. R. Palmer, who edited the Kano Chronicle and which gave the nearest documentation of the history of the Hausa contributed to the debate by noting that:

...the Fulani called any conquered negro people “Habe.” For this reason it seems better to keep the word Hausa to express the post-A.D. 1000 and pre-A.D. 1807 inhabitants of Hausaland, provided that it is not used indiscriminately of any peoples who speak the “Hausa” language. In fact, Habe is a far wider word than Hausawa, and practically means any negro race...The name in itself (Ha~e) proves nothing (Palmer, 1908:62).

This, again situates Hausa within specific spatial and cultural boundaries as more than just a language, but a distinct anthropological cluster. A further view on the linguistic-rather-than-people theory was given by Charles Lindsay Temple (1912: 155), who stated:

“The term “Hausa”, I am quite convinced, should be used only with reference to the language known by that name. For many tribes, with markedly different characteristics, speak this language. For instance, the natives of Argungu, the Kebbawa, now speak the Hausa, and have never spoken any other language. The same may be said of the native of Katsena, known as the Batsenawa. Yet these are very distinct tribes. A native describing himself as a Hausa will always, when pressed or questioned, define himself also by name of a tribe. Hausa is, therefore, today, the name of a language, and not of a tribe” (p. 155).

The stand I take is that 'Hausa' refers to a distinct group of people – just like English, Welsh, Scottish, Arab, Yoruba, etc.—who speak a distinct language called Hausa. In this, a group of people with distinct cultural boundaries and identities exist. They are called Hausawa, and were more than just a linguistic group.

The typical—or as typical as can be—Hausa mindset is characterized by about nine behavioral attributes, as argued by Kirk-Greene (1973). These included *amana* (strictly friendliness, but used to refer to trust), *karamci* (open-handed generosity) *hajuri* (patience), *hankali* (good sense), *mutunci* (self-esteem), *hikima* (wisdom), *adalci* (fairness) *gaskiya* (truthfulness), *kunya* (modesty, self-deprecation, humble, acknowledges others' opinion over his own), *ladabi* (respect self and respects others; also considerate of others, both older and younger).

Other typological profiles by Alhassan et al (1982) revealed additional attributes which included *zumunta* (community spirit), *ri}on addini* (adhering to religious tenets and being guided by them with attributes such as truth), *dattako* (gentlemanliness), *kawaici* (tactfulness), *rashin tsegumi* (no idle talk), *kama sana'a* (engaging one in gainful employment), and *juriya da jarumta* (fortitude, courage and bravery).

When Hausa drama, especially as shown on Television, evolved in the 1960s these mindset qualities became the main focus of the storylines of the more popular series, reflecting an often bucolic or simplified urban lifestyles. Taking CTV 67 based in Kano and operating from 1983, its "situation comedies" revolve around scams and tricksters. These include, "*Sabon [an Mogori]*", "*{uliya*", and "*Hankaka*". The first, "*Sabon [an Mogori]*," features a major protagonist who might be considered a lovable rogue. The second, *{uliya*, centers, around a roguish family. The third, "*Hankaka*", features a larger than life hero who regularly defeats rogues. As Louise M. Bourgault (1992:2) pointed out:

Aesthetically, these "situation comedies" are very satisfying. Shot in rural areas they have authenticity as well as visual charm. Spoken in Hausa, they possess a verbal richness typical of the traditional tales told in West Africa. For example, many of the characters of the Hausa dramas bear metaphorical names, epithets which give an insight into their personalities. The name *Hankaka* literally means "crow"; and the name *Buguzum* suggests a strong person who beats or thrashes others...Equally important to their success is resemblance of these "situation comedies" to the trickster and moral tales common throughout much of Africa. From observing the producers and actors develop these programs, and from watching audiences react to

them, it becomes imminently clear that these “situation comedies” derive from the indigenous folktale tradition. And like oral tales, they serve to instruct, explain, advocate and reinforce Hausa values, as well as to entertain.

It is this reinforcement of Hausa values that would become a standard benchmark in creating critical reaction to more experimental cinematic styles by the Hausa when the shift was made from Television series into video film dramas.

Space – The Final Frontier: Hausa Atrium, Conjugal Space and Habermas Television came to northern Nigeria in 1962 with the establishment of the Radio Television Kaduna (RTK) in Kaduna, which started relaying their programs to Kano in 1963. Due to the inadequate coverage of the whole State by RTK, the Kano State Government established an alternative television station in 1976 known as Kano State Broadcasting Corporation (KBC) and sent nine foundation staff for Extension Training on attachment to Radio Television Kaduna. However, in May 1977 the then military Government took over all the regional television stations via the promulgation of Decree 24 and created Nigerian Television Authority (NTA) with its base in Lagos. The Decree which took effect retrospectively from April 1976 brought all the ten existing television stations under the control of the Federal Government of Nigeria. Television stations were later established in the remaining state capitals where none existed before, including Kano State which established CTV 67 in 1983.

A strong feature of the NTA Kano when it started were 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 the food and serving the food to the husbands who appreciatively salute the wife’s excellent cooking. And in searching for storylines to emphasize the domesticity of the drama series, the producers used the same plot structure of the Hausa folktales and adopted the methodologies of their storylines. However, whereas the verbal tales rely on the audience to imagine the spaces described by the narrator, the availability of communication technologies now made it possible for a paradigm shift from orality to visuality. In translating Hausa oral culture to Hausa visual culture, drama series producers faced a central problem of protecting the sacredness of the female conjugal *Intimisphäre*. This was facilitated actually by 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 mature 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 organization. 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 largish living room. The *zaure* leads to a corridor that ends in the atrium. And as Prussin (1986:212) also observed, “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.

Contemporary or more appropriately, modernized housing configurations among the Hausa merely modified this architectural arrangement. As Schwerdtfeger (2003: 22) noted:

With the upturn in the Nigerian economy after the Second World War, such modern building materials as cement, corrugated iron roofing sheets and sawn wood were available on the market and used mainly to modify and improve traditional buildings, rather than construct new houses...As a result, the hitherto prosperous and very proud traditional building trade was seriously weakened and finally collapsed...

Yet despite the restructuring of Hausa houses to a more modern perspective, the essential concept of the home—even without the atrium—remains a private sphere. Indeed, if anything, the modern doorway merely reinforces the privacy of the house from outside, as opposed to the open doorway that leads to the *zaure* in the traditional structure.

The Hausa TV drama series strongly reinforced the image of the Hausa family and housing structure—with clearly delineated spaces for the genders. The filming technique not only emphasizes this spatial division, but it also imposes it 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 utilize 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 outside public need special permission to occupy such family atrium. Indeed, even neighbors 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 neighboring household—are demanded 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—for all these precautions serve to uphold the value of female space—is maintained. 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.

The critical theory propounded by Jürgen Habermas in his *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* (1962, translated into English and published 1989—it is the latter edition quoted in this paper) provides a convenient framework for further 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 particular appeal of this critical theory is in providing an analytical base that offers an opportunity to determine the impact of extraneous variables in the delineation of space in traditional societies. At the same time, it provides an insight into the application of the critical theory in a traditional society negotiating a redefinition of its public spaces within the context of media globalization.

I would wish to make it clear, however, that in this paper, I focus attention on the visual media re-enactment of the female private space in an Islamicate environment, and the critical reaction of such process from the properly constituted representatives of the public sphere. In my use of the term 'Islamicate'

to refer to northern Nigeria, I borrow Marshal Hodgson's original conception of the word who created it in the following argument:

'Islamicate' would refer not directly to the religion, Islam, itself, but to the social and cultural complex historically associated with Islam and the Muslims, both among Muslims themselves and even when found among non-Muslims (Hodgson 1974:58-59).

Thus, as Nilüfer Göle (2002:174) notes:

The public visibility of Islam and the specific gender, corporeal, and spatial practices underpinning it trigger new ways of imagining a collective self and common space that are distinct from the Western liberal self and progressive politics.

Such public visibility includes breaking the conjugal space barrier by video cameras to film an essentially conjugal family space and bring it to the attention of the public. In this, therefore, I do not focus attention on participation of Hausa Muslim women in negotiating what I refer to as "space chasm" that separate their private and public spheres in their attempts to be part of the Hausa Muslim economic system.

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 of the theory, 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 privatized individuals who are independent of public authority, enjoying cultural products and discussing them. As the institutionalized places for discussion such as salon, coffee house and theater increased, the places for family became more privatized and the consciousness about privacy strengthened more:

As soon as privatized 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 public sphere started to have an influence on legislating law, which overarched the monarchic power and became the universalized:

Included in the private realm was the authentic 'public sphere', for it was a public sector constituted by private people. Within the realm that was the preserve of private people we therefore distinguish again between private and public spheres. The private sphere comprised of civil society in the narrower sense, that is to say, the realm of commodity exchange and of social labour; imbedded in it was the family with its interior domain (*Intimisphäre*). (Habermas 1989:30).

Thus 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.

While Habermas was primarily interested in "rational-critical" communication as the ideal standard of modernity, he identified its practical emergence with the intermediate space of coffee-houses and salons, where private citizens could assemble as a public, between the private space and personalized authority of kin and the public realm marked by the theatre of royal and religious ritual. It was set apart from those by communication that had to be convincing without the external support of the authority of the speaker.

3.0 Islam and Privacy

What further contributes to the need for the demarcation of the public and private in Muslim northern Nigeria is the perception of the text in public affairs. For instance, Hausa tales are didactic, linear and sermonizing. Operating within the context of the Muslim Hausa mindset, it became a Herculean task to create a more "modern" concept of literary expression by the colonial administration in northern Nigeria. For instance, in requesting Muslims to write simplified indigenous language novellas for use in colonial-era primary schools in northern

Nigeria in 1932, it was noted by Dr. Rupert East, the Svengali of northern Nigerian literature that:

...the first difficulty was to persuade these Mallams that the thing was worth doing. The influence of Islam produces an extremely serious-minded type of person. The art of writing moreover, being intimately connected in his mind with his religion, is not to be treated lightly. Since the religious revival at the beginning of the last (19th) century, nearly all the original work produced by Northern Nigerian authors has been either purely religious or written with a strong religious motive. Most of it was written in Arabic, which, like Latin in Medieval Europe, was considered a more worthy medium of any work of importance than the mother tongue. (East, 1936: 350).

This “serious-minded type of person” came to symbolize the Hausa approach to popular culture which had already been influenced by the writings of the 19th century Muslim reformer, Sheikh Usman bn Fodiyo. Thus Islamic influence retains its hold on the northern Nigeria Hausa Muslim polity such at all discourse—whether private or public—is subject to Islamic injunctions. When the video film replaced the novel as a more powerful—and subsequently more influential—mode of social interpretation, the morality of the messages became a central focus.

A necessary problem faced by the video film makers in Muslim northern Nigeria is the reconciliation of the radically different modes of storytelling they adopt for their societies. A typical film storyline carries with it elements of conflict and ways of resolving the conflict. For the message to come out clearly, “unpalatable” scenes must be created, and as the story unfolds, contradictions and conflicts are sorted out. In essence, the private—conjugal family configuration—is made public. When the Hausa video industry was formed, it focused attention on exploring family tensions in a melodramatic fashion. It is this exploration of family spaces that brought the fore the tense relationship between the private and public spaces in Hausa cultural life.

In Islam, the first criterion of private life was that a person may choose to keep certain matters concealed from and inaccessible to others. This criterion implies a prohibition on search and investigation, and a prohibition on the dissemination of personal information and matters of the private sphere. Both have been clearly stated in the Qur’an (Surat Al-Hujrat, 49:12):

O ye who believe! Avoid suspicion as much (as possible): for suspicion in some cases is a sin: And spy not on each other behind their backs. Would any of you like to eat the flesh of his dead brother? Nay, ye would abhor it...But fear Allah. For Allah is Oft-Returning, Most Merciful.

Indeed even the name of the Surat, *Al-Hujrat*, or Inner Apartments, is an allusion to the inner and private soul of the believer—a sanctuary that should be free from trespass, either by voices or by cameras. Further, the Qur'an not only admonishes against prying into each other's personal spheres, but also forbids any dissemination of such information (Surat Nur, 24:19):

Those who love (to see) scandal published broadcast among the Believers, will have a grievous Penalty in this life and in the Hereafter: Allah knows, and ye know not.

The persistent accusations that the more “adult” scenes in Hausa films released in the years before the establishment of the Kano State Censorship Board in 2001 (e.g. *Sauran Kiris*, *Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka*, *Alhaki Kwikwiyo*) were that “children” would see them and thus become exposed to their “corrupting” influence. In these types of responses therefore we see media effects theories in action where it is believed that media influences behavior.

A solution to this, of course, would have been classification—thus restricting access. Yet in all the clamor for censorship in the Islamic polity classification was not considered a variable, and thus uniform judgments and restrictions are imposed on “children” and adult alike. This curtails the freedom of adults to interact with a text that talks about *their* realities. The end-product would therefore be a perpetually saccharine video film productions without any universal appeal.

I want to draw attention to the relevance of private/public discourse in African Muslim popular culture by discussing the evolution of Hausa video films, their transnational nature and the public reaction they generated as a result of what the public culture perceived as their deviation from both Islamic and Hausa cultural contexts.

4.0 The Hausa Video Film Industry

Hausa video film production started in 1990 with *Turmin Danya* in Kano. By 2000 a video film industry had been formed with three main storyline characteristics – love triangle (where two boys court the same girl; or two wives fight over the single husband), *auren dole* (where a girl or boy is forced to marry someone not of their choice), and song and dance (over 98% of Hausa video films

must contain at least two to three song and dance routines). All these elements were directly copied from Hindi cinema which the Hausa had been exposed to through Television stations in cosmopolitan cities of Kano, Kaduna and Jos, and also cinema theater releases of Hindi commercial cinema directly imported by Lebanese residents in northern Nigeria. By mid 1990s the Hindi cinema changed and departing from its cultural roots, adopted a more globalized blend of Hindu religion and Americanization. When Hausa filmmakers started full production from 2000, they tilted towards the same direction as Hindi filmmakers. As Viridi (2003:2) observes:

Despite its permeating Indian culture, Hindi cinema's stylistic conventions are paradoxically in complete disjunction from everyday reality: the films use dialogues instead of speech, costumes rather than clothes, sets and exotic settings, and lavish song and dance routines—hardly everyday familiar surroundings. Within the *mise-en-scène*, this nonspecificity of address distances Hindi films from “authentic” portrayals of Indian life. Regional markers of costume, dress, and culture are either erased or deployed arbitrarily, and elements from different regions are mixed to figure as signs of cosmopolitan culture that account for a particular type of kitsch, the insignia of Hindi films. Even though they abide by other realist conventions, such as cause-and-effect linear narratives, continuity editing, and spatial/temporal unity, the films show scant regard for looking “authentic” or bearing a similitude to realism.

Commenting further on the production values and styles of Hindi films, Ganti (2004:48) points out that:

The dominant tone about the Bombay film industry and filmmaking in general is that most films produced in India are escapist, frivolous, formulaic; for “mere entertainment” and not “meaningful” or “artistic” enough.

Hausa video film industry merely echoes these production values—targeting themselves at non-cerebral part of the market with a strong dosage of surrealism spiced with lots of mixed gender song and dance which often include structured choreography.

The development of Hausa video film lead to two strands of critical reaction from the northern Nigerian Islamic environment that brought to fore the sharp divisions between private and public sphere in Muslim popular culture.

The first was at the mid-section of industry – in the mid-1990s – where the main focus was the seeming intrusion of the female *Intimisphäre* by revealing scenes that are exclusively conjugal to the family. The four video films that triggered the critical reaction were *Saliha?*, *Alhaki Kwikwiyo*, *Jahilci Ya Fi Hauka* and *Malam Karkata*. The second strand of critical reaction against Hausa video film and their violation of the female private space was in the clutch of video films that were released post-Shari'a. These video films rely mainly on female erotica by emphasizing female body structures especially in dance sequences—in defiance of the Shari'a legal code that sought to impose stronger moral modes of behavior. I will illustrate both the two strands in the arguments that follow.

Global Lure, Local Furor – Westernization and Hausa Female Film Star 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 upon various core Islamic injunctions against such trespass. For instance:

Aisha said: Asthma', daughter of Abu Bakr, entered upon the Apostle of Allah (may peace be upon him) wearing thin clothes. The Apostle of Allah (peace be upon him) turned his attention from her. He said: O Asthma', when a woman reaches the age of menstruation, it does not suit her that she displays her parts of the body except this and this, and he pointed to her face and hands. (Note 3523) Sunan Abu Dawood, Volume 3, Book XXVII, Chapter 1535, and Hadith number 4092, titled: "How Much Beauty Can A Woman Display? (4092).

Based on this Hadith, it is clear therefore, more experimental filmmaking among Muslim Hausa would have to negotiate these core prohibitions about the sacredness of the private, and often, conjugal sphere. This was more so because by 2000, and under a global media snow storm, Hausa filmmakers had started exploring various globalized configurations of behavior that have what was seen as direct diluting influences on core Muslim Hausa mindsets.

Hausa video filmmakers focus on the female *Intimisphäre* as a tapestry to paint what the filmmakers perceive to be the sexuality of essentially urban, transnational and globalized Hausa woman. A series of video films led the way in this. *Sauran Iris* was the first Hausa video film to attempt an onscreen kiss in a

bedroom. *Jalli* uses many bedroom scenes, with a husband and wife characters taking their clothes off and lying down on the bed as the scene fades to black. In *Daren Farko* a bride complains to the husband about lack of sexual attention. *Kumbo* has a scene in which the male and female principal characters were shown putting their clothes back on clearly after having “slept” with each other. *Gidauniya* was as explicit as could be in showing an attempted rape-scene. *Bajar Inuwa* has a host of adulterous scenes, with the lead “adulterer” clearly relishing his role after each bout of sexual activity. *Nasaba* shows principal characters repeatedly entering a hut for sex.

In exploring the female private sphere, the sexual focus of these Hausa video films merely replicate the early Hindi film experiments with exploring human sexuality. Examples include the romantic scene between Rani Mukherjee and Bachchan in *Yuva*; Priyanka Chopra kissing Akshay Kuma in *Andaaz*, and Karishma Kapoor kissing Aamir Khan in *Raja Hindustani*. As further observed by Saibal Chatterjee (2005:1) of these tendencies in Hindi cinema:

The expression of sexual desire has come out of the Bollywood closet. Over the past year, Hindi films have dealt with lesbian lovers, gay men, oversexed priests, cuckolded husbands, spouse-swappers, nymphomaniacs and other perceived deviants. And all this has happened in the comfort zone of the usually status quoist mainstream cinema.

Indeed by 2001 the Hausa video film was merely a reproduction of a Hindi film, which itself is a mere reproduction of a Hollywood film. The core cultural values of Hausa societies, as reflected in old Hausa Television dramas completely disappeared, and a more Westernized mode of story telling with emphasis on female sexuality became more common. A typical example of a comment is shown in the following Letter to the Editor of a popular culture magazine:

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 [Letter to Editor].

The filmmakers defend their art by pointing out that they are merely reflecting society. Mansura Isah, a former actress living in Kano and the most visible of the erotic dancers, suggested that such dances reflect changing times by arguing that:

It's modernization. They may not approve, but they still like it, you understand? It's modernity. We are only reflecting what is happening in the real world. You will see young girls and boys in real life going to a party and getting down; well we are only showing how they do it. And I can tell you the audience like the way we get down in the films. If not, they would not have bought them. If a film is to show all the girls in *hijab* (Islamic dressing) and no getting down, I swear the film will flop...But if you make a trailer of a film showing nubile girls dancing and getting down, the audience will whoop with approval; yet those who abuse us are those who will go the market and buy the films. Mansura Isah, defending her craft, *Mudubi*, July August 2005, No 11, p. 7).

Thus the Hausa filmmakers have noted that films that are traditional to Hausa societies simply do not sell as well as those with heavy doses of Westernization, no matter how defined (but most especially in song and dances which is an opportunity to show off cleavages in both spheres of the female body). A typical retort to the criticisms by the Islamicate establishment is by [an Azumi Baba, a novelist turned into filmmaker and the producer of *Bada*] *Jala* who argued:

The Hausa viewing audience contribute significantly to encouraging us (filmmakers) to adopt Westernization in Hausa films. This they do through refusal to buy films that do not have these elements, because despite all their criticisms, they still rush out to buy these films. □an Azumi Baba, columnist, *Fim*, June 2005 p. 3.

And it is partly for these reasons that the Kano State Censorship Board was created in 2001 in addition to complement the one at the national level in Abuja – to safeguard the culture and mindset of Hausa viewers in Hausa video films. It should be pointed out that the censorship mechanism in Kano had never insisted that its values must be acceptable to other non-Hausa or non-Muslim parts of northern Nigeria. Its main focus and influence is in Kano. Thus a film

produced outside Kano can be marketed and sold outside Kano without necessarily being subjected to the Kano State moral censorship mechanism.

5.0 Conclusions

As Chris Philo (2004) pointed out, commodity exchange and social labor, while normally taken as activities played out on a broader (public) canvas, are within Habermasian matrix, regarded as essentially the concerns of the private individuals who effect and experience them; in which case, these dimensions of civil society are tracked to the (inter-)personal relations, events and practices where they are ultimately 'real'. At this level, they parallel the more obviously private concerns of the family's 'internal space', to do with affairs of the heart and hearth, all being taken as essentially private matters, individualized and contained. Philo (2004:6) then argues that:

Yet, in Haberman's schema, the point is that these private concerns *do* translate into the (emerging) public sphere, as the just-mentioned (inter-) personal relations and the like *become*, in effect, the subject-matter, or at the least the prompts, for public debate, whether in a more cultural-literary or more political (politicised) vein.

Consequently, cultural reproduction as depicted in Hausa video films re-enact the conjugal spaces of the family—as distinct from even the private-public (or quasi-public) space of the *tsakar gida* and provides a commodity exchange—film and its messages—that became a public concern—away from the conjugal space to State authority (in the example of Hausa video film, emphasized by the introduction of Shari'a and censorship laws on video films). Critical reaction about the depiction of the Hausa Muslim female conjugal spaces started in popular press in northern Nigeria, drawing the attention of the government, which set up a censorship board, complete with an implementation mechanism of police and magistrate courts, to prosecute film producers who violated the conjugal space (interpreted as showing "immoral scenes") in Hausa video films.

The sensuality in these Hausa video films, however, is shocking only because of the Islamicate environment the filmmakers found themselves. Under conventional Western filmmaking techniques, they would not even attract any attention. In an Islamic society, however, expressions of intimacy, especially between the genders is certain to lead to sermons and condemnations. Also, the intrusion of the filmmakers' into the sacred Muslim Hausa woman's inner private sphere uses a filming technique that violates the Islamic principles of female private sphere. Further, it is clear that a long running-battle between youth

sexuality and implementation of Shari'a would not produce the kind of moral codes the Islamic environment envisages through censorship mechanism.

In cautioning the use of this theoretical framework in contemporary analysis of gender spaces particularly in Muslim world, Hanita Brand (2003:84-85) argued 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, I draw inspiration from 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 Islamization. Salma 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, in my paper I focus 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 of the body surface 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, 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 filmmakers seemed to have created a tension between media globalization and tradition in Muslim popular culture.

This view has been roundly critiqued, 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 modernization, 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 was 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 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 filmmakers—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. First, 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 as noted earlier, 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. There can be no doubt that Islamic law can fully accommodate the notion of the private domain. The challenge lies at delimiting the private domain from what is regarded as public in Islamicate environments.

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