

Contemporary ‘Non-*‘ulamā*’ Hausa Women and Islamic Discourses on Television Screens

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Abstract

Hausa¹ women have been either a major subject of discussion or at the receiving end of religious activities in the northern Nigerian Islamic sphere,² which has been dominated by men. However, media as both carriers and influencers of cultural production are changing the dynamics by redefining the role of women in Islamic discourses. This paper explores the theory of Islam as discursive tradition³ to analyse how the northern Nigerian filmmaking industry (Kannywood) has offered a platform on which contemporary Hausa women (outside *‘ulamā*⁴ class) have become more active in Islamic discourses in the region. The TV screens not only allow them to express alternative religious viewpoints that seek to redefine their religious life but also engage with specialist *‘ulamā* on some practices established through male-dominated discourses about Islam and everyday life. The Muslim women in the film industry seek to reconstruct

1 Sadiq, Mansoor. interview by the author, September 2014.

2 *Kishiya* is a Hausa term for a co-wife. However, it has a pejorative meaning characterised by jealousy and envy between co-wives. It is a big issue among the Hausa Muslims. Dozens if not hundreds of movies have been produced either for or against it.

3 It was inside a large living room.

4 A conversation in *Abokina* movie

meanings around some interpretations of religious texts that disadvantage them, especially on family issues in which women are at the centre. The data used is based on a three-year ethnography by the author in northern Nigeria, which was part of his doctoral project.⁵

Introduction

Some contemporary scholarship tends to study and analyse Islam as a “discursive tradition,” which according to Asad is one that is on-going and that continues to facilitate reproduction of knowledge that shapes Muslims’ lives base on the contexts of the present.⁶ As Asad points out, the emphasis of this theory is not on seeking the essence of Islam but on knowing the historical conditions needed for the existence of some specific Islamic practices. In other words, by theorising ‘Islam as a discursive tradition,’ Asad suggests analysing Islamic beliefs and practices as products of the social, historical, political, and economic institutions in which believers live out their faith.⁷ One question that this analytical framework brings to the fore is: who are the participants in the production of Islamic knowledge which turns out to be the cultural base of Muslims as a category? In other words: who speaks; on what grounds; who listens; who counter-speaks, and who is affected? Some scholars point out that specialists or *‘ulamā*’, construct meanings and thereby structure the Muslim societies through their statements and sermons. In other words, *‘ulamā*’ are the principal actors who make up the Islamic discursive tradition through both traditional and new media of communicating religious meanings.⁸

This perspective has been criticised by leaving out the agency of the

5 A conversation in *Da Kishiyar Gida* movie

6 The text is Quran 4:3 which states, “And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice].” This translation is based on *Sahih International*, available on <https://quran.com/4>. Last accessed on June 4, 2018.

7 Ustaz Abu Abdurrahman, Interview by the author, June 2015.

8 A Hausa film directed by Ali Gumzak (2012)

majority of Muslims who do not belong to the *'ulamā*' class. Some recent studies broadened this perspective by taking into consideration marginal Muslim actors and their attempts to "speak for Islam." The voices and statements of the non-specialists, ordinary believers, odd birds, and, not the least, women have recently become matters of concern and the subjects for research by the academics.⁹ In the same vein, recent research on Islam in Africa shows that there are many and diverse contemporary female voices who contribute to Islamic discourses either by affirming, opposing or reconstructing the status quo. This brings out their roles as part of those who "speak for Islam" and also informs the need for their roles to be considered as part and parcel of the Muslim discourses.¹⁰

However, it is essential to emphasise that women are not new in public Islamic engagements in northern Nigeria. This point is proved by the well-documented works on Nana Asma'u (1793-1864) who was a princess, poet, teacher and a daughter of a reformer and the founder of the Sokoto Caliphate Usman dan Fodio.¹¹ Pointing to the role of women in Islamic knowledge production in northern Nigeria, Mack and Boyd argue that the tradition of the *'Yan Taru* system of women's education instituted by Nana Asma'u has continued to this day in the region.¹² However, this paper raises the point that women following the traditional system of education, and even the refined one of the 'modern' *Islamiya* school system, as well as preaching on radio and television stations, fall under the category of the *'ulamā*'. They often if not always engage with religious texts in reproducing meanings based on the mainstream discourse. On the other hand, other women who are not recognised as *'ulamā*' but read Quranic texts to offer alternative interpretations that challenge the mainstream views about their own life, have received less attention in academic circles. This paper

9 Quran 17:70. The full text reads, "And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam [human] and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference." Translation from *Qur'an Sahih* International available on <http://quran.com/17/70>. Last accessed on 13 July 2016.

10 Ibid.

11 A film produced by Aminu Saira (2015)

12 Karin Barber, "Popular arts in Africa." *African Studies Review* 30 (3, 1987, 1-78.

shows how women outside the *ulamā* class use the medium of film to reconstruct meanings around some interpretations of religious texts that disadvantage them, especially on family issues in which women and children are at the centre. This practice redefines ways through which cultural production takes place using the medium of film to challenge some religious practices established through male-dominated discourses about Islam and everyday life.

Islamic Cultural Production in Northern Nigeria

Specialists (*ulamā*) using conventional Islamic media have dominated Islamic cultural production in northern Nigeria. By conventional media, I refer to the traditional means of communication used by the specialists in learned religious circles such as books, mosques, and *madrassa* through which spiritual meanings are constructed, reconstructed, and transmitted. The recent increase in the role of media technology on religious engagements sees the specialists (*ulamā*) incorporating new media such as radio and TV broadcasts¹³ as part of the channels they use to engage in Islamic discourses and to communicate those to ordinary believers. This pattern of knowledge production limits cultural production to the *ulamā* albeit with different ideological persuasions. However, appropriation of new technologies is a global phenomenon not restricted to any section of society.¹⁴ This is evident in how the Nigerian video film industry emerged.

In 1986, Nigeria, under the supervision of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), introduced a Structural Adjustment Programme (SAP) characterised by some stringent economic measures that either set free many institutions hitherto controlled by the government or reduced

13 There are dozens of religious programmes aired on a large number of radio and satellite TV stations, and these are broadcast in the local languages. See Kabiru Haruna Isa *et al.*, "Media, Religion, and Pedagogy: Hausa Islamic Satellite Channels and Knowledge Dissemination in Northern Nigeria." In Suleiman Yaradua *et al.* (eds) *Islam and Media: Perspectives and portrayals* (Forthcoming).

14 Brian Larkin, *Signal and noise: Media, infrastructure, and urban culture in Nigeria* (North Carolina: Duke University Press, 2008). See also Matthias Krings, *African Appropriations: Cultural Difference, Mimesis, and Media* (Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2015).

their funding. Media was one of the liberated sectors in the country.¹⁵ One fallout from this was that many people lost their jobs. Many of them struggled for alternative ways of survival. Some retrenched government television and theatre workers teamed up with various private drama groups to record their dramas on VHS cassettes and later started selling them to the public.¹⁶

The purchasing power of Nigerians declined because of the SAP and this made room for the importation of second-hand goods from Europe, mostly smuggled into Nigeria from the neighbouring Republic of Benin. Electronics, such as used video machines and television sets, were among the items imported. The increased availability and affordability of those used items (in Hausa: '*Yan Cotonou*') made it easy for retrenched TV and theatre workers to start the local film industry. In Kano, for instance, Bashir Mudi Yakasai and Auwalu Marshal were among the first people who worked with Kano State broadcasting companies and later joined drama groups. Yakasai was a camera operator with CTV Kano and told me that some of them had their personal low-tech hand-held VHS recorder; they started using these to record actions of the drama groups, with the intention of selling these recordings. People who did not have their own cameras used to hire from their colleagues at different rates calculated either per hour or day. Later, camera hiring became a separate business as many people ventured into producing low budget video films.¹⁷ People who could afford the imported second-hand video players and television sets started to patronise such films. The first successful commercial indigenous video film in Hausa, *Turmin Danya* (the Draw), was produced in 1990 by Galadanci.¹⁸ As a sequel to these developments, Kannywood video films become a popular means of cultural production by ordinary people in northern Nigeria.

15 Jubril Bala Mohammed, "Democratization and the challenge of private broadcasting in Nigeria." *Africa Media Review* 8 (1), 1994, pp 81-95.

16 Interview with Balarabe Tela and Bashir Musa Yakasai who are two of the founders of the Hausa video film industry.

17 Auwalu Marshal and Bashir Mudi Yakasai. Interview with author in Kano, 2015.

18 Carmen McCain, "Video exposé: metafiction and message in Nigerian films." *Journal of African Cinemas* 4 (1), 2012, pp. 25-57.

In the beginning, Kannywood films were heavily influenced by Indian films (Larkin) and also *littattafan Soyayya* or Romantic Hausa Novels.¹⁹ The Indian influence was a result of decades of consumption of Indian films by Nigerian cinemagoers, since the 1960s, as well as some cultural similarities between Hindu and Hausa cultures.²⁰ The influence of romantic Hausa novels was strong; thus, following the success of *Turmin Danya*, some Hausa authors joined the Kannywood movie industry at its initial stage. They started transforming their love stories into low budget video films. For example, Ado Ahmad Gidan-Dabino was the chairperson of the Association of Nigerian Authors (ANA) Kano chapter, one of the pioneers of the Hausa Literary Movement, and one of the founders of the contemporary Hausa film industry (Kannywood). He used the stories of his own books *Indaso da Kauna* and *Wanihaninga Allah* to produce his first two Hausa video films with the same titles in 1993 and 1994 respectively.²¹

It is important to mention that the popular video culture developed simultaneously across the whole of Nigeria.²² However, because of cultural differences between the regions, a specific Hausa Muslim video film industry emerged in the north and distinguished itself from the southern Nigerian films, which are influenced mainly by Christianity and produced in the English, Igbo, and Yoruba languages. Thus, the general name for the Nigerian video film industry is Nollywood, and the northern Hausa Muslim cinema is Kannywood. The appropriation

19 Carmen McCain, "Reimagining Gender Spaces in Abbas Sadiq's and Zainab Idris's Video-Film Albashi1." *Facts, Fiction, and African Creative Imaginations*, 2009, pp. 163.

See also Yusuf M Adamu, "Between the Word and the Screen: A Historical Perspective on the Hausa Literary Movement and the Home Video Invasion." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15 (2), 2002, pp. 203-13.

20 Brian Larkin, "Hausa dramas and the rise of video culture in Nigeria." Nigerian video films, 2000, pp. 209-41.

21 Gidan-Dabino, Ado Ahmad: Interviews with author in Kano, 2014.

22 Jonathan Haynes and Onookome Okome, "Evolving popular media: Nigerian video films." *Research in African literatures: Official Journal of the African Literature Committee of the African Studies Association of America and the African Literatures Seminar of the Modern Language Association* 29 (3), 1998, pp. 106-28. See also Jonathan Haynes, *Nollywood: The creation of Nigerian film genres* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).

of different names and content reflects the regions' specific cultural differences.²³

By 1998, the Kannywood industry was well established with large numbers of movies covering diverse topics such as romance (*Kilu Ta Ja Bau*), family life (*Saudatu*), crime (*Wata Shari'a sai a Lahira*), social problems (*Wasila*), corruption (*Wasiyya*), and politics (*Gaskiya Dokin Karfe*).²⁴ While many people from all over northern Nigeria continue to join Kannywood, the phenomenon became a source of worry for the region's religious establishments. At this juncture, those establishments began to criticise the filmmakers, accusing them of polluting the Islamic culture of Hausa people by reproducing love stories that are detrimental to the region's Islamic values, as well as music and dance sequences based on Indian culture.²⁵

At the turn of the millennium, some northern Nigerian states introduced sharia.²⁶ Throughout the 2000s, members of the *'ulamā*' used the structures of the sharia states to increase their influence over all aspects of people's lives. In this vein, their dissatisfaction with Kannywood films progressed from verbal criticism to the use of the state's institutions to sanction the Muslim filmmakers as cultural corruptors and promoters of immorality. The *'ulamā*'s criticisms are mostly based on religious values

23 Alessandro Jedlowski, "When the Nigerian video film industry became "Nollywood": naming, branding and the videos' transnational mobility." *Estudos Afro-Asiaticos* 33 (1-2-3), 2011, pp. 225-51.

24 Yusuf M Adamu, "Between the Word and the Screen: A Historical Perspective on the Hausa Literary Movement and the Home Video Invasion." *Journal of African Cultural Studies* 15 (2), 2002, pp. 203-13.

25 Carmen McCain, "A growing Hausa Film Industry under Fire." WARA newsletter 2009 (20). McCain, Carmen. 2013. "Nollywood, Kannywood, and a Decade of Hausa Film Censorship in Nigeria," in Daniël Biltreyst and Roel Vande Winkel (eds.), *Silencing cinema: Film censorship around the world*, 223-40 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

Abdalla Uba Adamu, "Private Sphere, Public Wahala: Gender and Delineation of Intimiphäre in Muslim Hausa Video Films." *Negotiations of culture: Perspective from Africa* (Basel, Switzerland: Centre for African Studies, 2006).

See also Brian Larkin, "From Majigi to Hausa Video Films: Cinema and Society in Northern Nigeria." In Adamu, Adamu, and Jibril (eds) *Hausa Home Videos: Technology, Economy and Society*, pp. 46-53 (Kano: GidanDabino Publishers, 2004).

26 Philip Ostien, Jamila M. Nasir and Franz Kogelmann, *Comparative Perspectives on Shari'ah in Nigeria* (Ibadan: Spectrum Books, 2005).

associated with women. These include how women mix with men, how they are used in promoting nude images and videos, how they disobey their parents and *'ulamā* transgressing against sharia values to engage in the filmmaking, as well as the tendency of the films to teach housewives and children to disrespect their husbands and parents.²⁷

It is important to think and see Kannywood beyond the *'ulamā*'s narratives and discourses. In this context, I perceive sermons and Kannywood movies as being tools through which people discuss their religion, express alternative views, and struggle for influence and socio-religious and cultural changes in their society, based on such views. As in the case of the sermons, Kannywood videos serve as platforms that bring together individuals and groups with shared imaginaries. Those people discuss and (re)construct meanings around their lives, sometimes using religious texts. In other words, sermons and films are both media infrastructure through which the actors perform and communicate with their audiences. I regard the performances of people in the *'ulamā*' and Kannywood groups as being similar in one respect; thus, they both aim to control the cultural production of Hausa Muslims.

Thus, within the same framework of Islamic discursive tradition, I regard Kannywood movies as the site of cultural discourse where people engage in some religious exchanges about their real-life experiences. This viewpoint is discussed, further, below.

Kannywood films as sites and means of alternative Islamic cultural production

Access to new media for transmitting, receiving as well as influencing meanings across communities is a phenomenon not limited to any specific group. It is a practice that is open to all religious publics irrespective of

27 Carmen McCain, "Nollywood, Kannywood, and a Decade of Hausa Film Censorship in Nigeria," in Daniël Biltreyst and Roel Vande Winkel (eds.), *Silencing cinema: Film censorship around the world*, pp. 223-40 (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). See also Musa Ibrahim, "Conflict and Violence at the Crossroad of Religion and 'New' Media: Periscoping Faith-based Crisis through the Eyes of Camera in the Sharia-age of Northern Nigeria." *Journal for the Study of the Religions of Africa and its Diaspora* 3, 2017, pp. 91-109.

their categorisations.²⁸ Today, almost everybody has access to modern media and can make use of cameras, phone cameras, radio, TV, video, and the internet. All types of people can participate in a reality that they create and they are confronted with situations, sites and social relations that are technically mediated (Behrend, 2018). Since the turn of the millennium, when sharia was introduced in some northern Nigerian states, some Muslims outside the category of *ulamā* have been using films to engage in Islamic discourses with the latter, in redefining Islamic tradition in the region. This paradigm makes Kannywood movies essential avenues through which some religious public share their imaginations and anticipations while struggling for socio-religious and cultural changes. The way they do this is embedded in the production and consumption processes of those movies, which are very interactive. The process is a two-way channel of communication between producers and viewers about the general social life of Muslims in the region. For example, Abubakar Sani is a proprietor of 3SP Film Production in Jos city and has successfully made his company into one of the leaders in Kannywood; he relates his success to this two-way channel of communication:

You know, people like our movies because we are open to them. We write our [mobile phone] numbers on every film we produce. Our spectators call to criticise, advise, or applaud us. It is not our affair alone. The fact that we take their concerns seriously [has] informed their passion about what we produce in our movies and how we produce them.²⁹

Producers Aminu Bala Mai-lalle, Surajo Laba-Laba, and Mansoor Sadiq supported Sani's statement, above, by attributing their success in capturing a large audience, to their strategies of carrying that audience along in the production process. They, at different interviews, mentioned that

28 Musa Ibrahim, "Media, Religion, and Public Spheres in Contemporary West Africa: Islamic Radio and Television Programming in Ghana." (MA Dissertation, Cape Town: University of Cape Town, South Africa, 2013).

29 Abubakar S Shehu: interview by the author, September 2014.

they take suggestions, stories, and criticisms from their viewers seriously because they remain in business because of them.

This feature gives the local videos an edge over the others and explains why viewers easily connect with the message in some of these films. Moreover, the multiple interfaces between producers, marketers, viewers, and critics changed Kannywood from being merely a business-oriented venture into a social movement. Various private magazines such as *Tauraruwa*, *Fim*, and *Taskira* were set up to feature Kannywood superstars and also to facilitate the exchange of views between the people in the industry. These are published monthly in the Hausa language. In addition to editorial commentaries about the Kannywood movies, those magazines serve as platforms for interactions between role players in the industry.



Fig 1: Some Kannywood-based Hausa magazines: *Fim*, *Taskira*, and *Gambiza*.
Author's collection

Moreover, radio and television stations in many northern Nigerian states present programmes where producers, directors, actors, viewers, and critics are brought together either physically or 'on-the-air,' where they can interact. Some of these programmes include *filinfina-finan Hausa* on Freedom Radio, *Kundin Kannywood* on Arewa 24 Television, and *Dagafina-finan Hausa* on Raypower. Moreover, there are international Hausa radio stations such as Radio France International (RFI), which has a weekly

programme named *Dandalin Fim* which connects filmmakers and their audience to dialogue on issues, particularly motivations and expectations of the stakeholders on both sides of the debate. The *BBC*, *VOA*, and *Deutsche Welle* Hausa services have similar programmes.

As part of my ethnography, I have followed some of those programmes for more than two years to understand the nature of relationships between the various role players in the Kannywood movement. This work has given the writer insights about motivations, expectations, challenges, aspirations or visions of both filmmakers and the audience, and negotiations around these issues. For example, one regular question Aminu Sharif Momoh asks every Kannywood guest on his programme, *Kundin Kannywood*, is how they relate to their viewers/audience and fans. Their responses are all similar and to the effect that dialogue on societal issues, through these programmes, can strive to make positive changes in Hausa society.

These interactions and dialogues shape both the content and the aesthetic nature of Kannywood films. In other words, Kannywood evolves under a distinctive pattern of interaction that transforms the movies into platforms where people of various backgrounds share ideas and imaginations, as well as express fear and hope. After watching the films, members of the audience can call the phone numbers given at the end of the films provided by the producers to suggest other aspects of societal problems that they should address, and they express their readiness to buy such films when produced. Based on these observations, I regard Kannywood as a movement of some people who are expressing their views against the establishment. In other words, the interactive nature of Kannywood serves as a public sphere for discourse between people; this has transformed the Hausa video films into mediums through which people question some societal norms and values. What is evident in many filmmakers' narratives is that they are culturally literate. In other words, they are conscious of what is happening around them and actively participate in defining their lives.

Although statistics are hard to come by in Nigeria, my ethnographic experience reveals that a large percentage of the Kannywood filmmakers

and consumers are women. Together with their male colleagues in the industry, the women actors and audience create new religious meanings following their imaginaries that are often in conflict or opposition to the long-standing values of Hausa Muslim society, as created and promoted by *ulamā* and traditional religious authorities. This research finds that family or domestic issues relating to Hausa Muslims are at the centre of conversations between filmmakers and their audiences. For instance, in my interview with Mansoor Sadiq, who is the proprietor of *Final Dream Movies* in Kano, he mentioned that:

My movies are mostly on family life. This is because, as a Muslim and Hausa man, I realise that [the] majority of our Hausa-Muslim social problems revolve around family problems. So, my main motivation for joining [the] Hausa film industry is informed by the need to contribute my quota to the solution of those problems.³⁰

Many Kannywood filmmakers corroborate Sadiq's viewpoint, above. Although the filmmakers are part of society, their decisions to focus on family issues arose from dialogues between filmmakers and their audience; this pattern addresses the business interests of the filmmakers and the yearning for cultural changes of the audience. One of their approaches is to allow women filmmakers to articulate alternative views and to challenge some prevailing opinions that affect their lives, especially those that relate to marriage and family life. In the next section, I discuss how both women filmmakers and their audience make use of the alternative video platform to engage in religious discourses, about polygamy and marital dispute negotiation processes, that oppose the dominant religious views.

30 Sadiq, Mansoor. interview by the author, September 2014.

Muslim discourses on TV screens: sharing experiences and challenging the status quo

I watched a movie about *kishiya*³¹ (co-wife/step-mother), together with members of the extended family of a friend and some of their neighbours.³² The film was about a man who was living a decent life with his wife and two children. He decided to take a second wife based on his conviction that he could afford to support a second one. After the marriage, he divorced the first wife at the volition of the second one. He prevented her from taking any of her two children who were very young. Shortly after, the step-mother started abusing the two children. She influenced her husband to stop paying their school fees. Their father and stepmother completely abandoned the two little boys. The younger one became sick because of malnourishment, and the elder brother had to take care of him with money he got from begging and some menial jobs. His sick brother died in his arms while he was feeding him. At the end of the movie it transpired that the story was a flashback in which the surviving brother was telling his experiences to his friend and admonishing that friend that he is not discharging his responsibilities properly as a father. He cautioned him that Allah will be unhappy with him unless he changed.

I observed that the members of the audience paid full attention to the television screen; there was also much emotion with some of my co-watchers having misty eyes. Yusuf, who was in his mid-twenties was one of the emotionally moved people. At the end of the movie, I started a conversation with him to hear his views and to find out why he was moved. He told me that he felt as if the film was showing his personal experiences when he was growing up as a child under the care of his step-mother. Although he was alone, and nobody died, he felt that the narrative in the film was true because he had a similar experience. The distinctiveness of Kannywood productions is what makes their contexts appealing to the audience.

31 *Kishiya* is a Hausa term for a co-wife. However, it has a pejorative meaning characterised by jealousy and envy between co-wives. It is a big issue among the Hausa Muslims. Dozens if not hundreds of movies have been produced either for or against it.

32 It was inside a large living room.

In response to some of these cultural challenges, Kannywood filmmakers try to create a balance in discourses on polygyny; they do this by emphasising the importance of the conditions attached to polygyny, rather than regarding it as a license for permissiveness. Some of the films point out the consequences of not obeying those conditions.

Abokina (My friend), is a movie produced by AS Maikwai (2013). The film was about the maltreatment of women in their matrimonial homes. It opened with an exchange between Ali Nuhu (starring as Buhari), who wanted to marry a second wife (who is his friend's ex-wife), and his wife, Fati Ladan (starring as Aisha) who opposed this. Fati Ladan opposes this, firstly, because she does not want a *kishiya* (co-wife). A second reason was that she specifically would not want her husband's best friend's ex-wife as her co-wife. In response Ali Nuh argued that first and foremost polygamy is permissible in Islam and he wants to practice it. Also, according to him, there is nothing wrong in marrying his best friend's ex-wife because it is permissible in Islam. He justified his decision further by saying that he was following the example of Prophet Muhammad who married Zainab after Zaidu divorced her. The marriage took place even though the Prophet was a foster father of Zaidu.

Fati Ladan, who had tears cascading down her cheeks, interrupted her husband with the following:

I already know what you would say. I know, the only thing you would say is religion allows you to marry more women... But you should not forget that the same religion implores us to avoid what would create chaos among us [the believers]. Let me remind you that the Prophet Muhammad peace be upon him said: "sin is what the mind cannot withstand." And I know you are not comfortable with what you are about to do. It is only that your desire blinds you and I see it as my duty to bring you back on the right track.³³

These dialogues show how meanings are made and how women use Kannywood movies to deconstruct religious interpretations and misgivings

about some religious texts in male-dominated societies. The producers planned the script to convey what they described as “changing Hausa-Muslims’ attitudes” about certain cultural elements in their society.

This pattern of dialogue between men and women is prevalent in many Kannywood films. another example is the movie, *Da Kishiyar Gida* (2013), directed by Ali Gumzak. It is about a husband, Ali Nuhu, who is determined to marry a second wife even though his wife, Aina’u Ade, has vowed never to allow him to do this. The movie derived its title from a statement pronounced by the leading actress in the movie, Ainau Ade as her strategy against polygyny: “*Da kishiyar gida gara ta waje*” which I roughly translated as “It is better (for a wife) to allow her husband to keep a mistress than marry a second wife.” The same statement serves as a background song which is played throughout the film. During one of the dialogues in the opening scene, Ali Nuhu (husband) tried to convince his raging wife about his justification for polygamy. He told her that: “God has permitted me to marry three more wives; how dare you are to think that you can stop me. I challenge that you are too small for that.” The wife replied: “Allah’s permission should not be misinterpreted as an obligation as many of you [men] do.” The argument continued with no side willing to compromise.

Later, when Ali Nuhu met the woman he intends to marry as his second wife, he hesitantly told her that “I am afraid, I am married and want to marry you as my second wife.” The woman, Fati Musa, replied:

Whether you are married or not [it] does not matter to me at all. I know, men interpret the polygyny verse as if they are competing with their peers. You never consider at all the reasons and logic behind it [the verse]. So, it doesn’t matter to me because even if I am the first one, I know you will marry another one after me.³⁴

This pattern of dialogue with men in support of and women in opposition to polygyny, and both arguing from different religious perspectives, is

34 A conversation in *Da Kishiyar Gida* movie.

a representation that is common in Kannywood films. It alludes to how the expectations of women viewing those movies are represented. The filmmakers present two arguments around the same religious texts (Quran 4:3) that allows polygyny while laying down strict conditions.³⁵ In doing this, the films expose the suffering mainly of women and children because of ignoring the strict regulations attached to the permission. Sometimes, as in the case of *Da Kishiyar Gida*, the women resort to legalising haram or opting to let their husbands keep mistresses rather than marrying. By keeping mistresses, they minimise the tension, unhappiness and problems that often resulted because of the husband's failure to be just towards co-wives.

Although some of the films favoured male-dominated discourses about polygyny at the end of the films, the viewers have the agency to choose what aspects of the narratives they believe or overlook. I observed that the impact of these filmic representations of alternative views of Islamic culture in Hausa society is not only felt by the filmmakers and audience. The impact forces the specialist *ulamā* into discussing and negotiating local Islamic culture on TV screens. In other words, the mainstream *ulamā* are aware of these roles of the Kannywood films and thus rejected the video film development alleging that they are spoiling the *tarbiyya* (morality) of the people. Some of the *ulamā* accuse the filmmakers of negatively influencing people through their films. For instance, Ustaz Abu Abdurrahman is an alim (Muslim scholar) who is very much abreast of the activities of Kannywood filmmakers. He mentioned the scene in *Maza da Mata* film as a justification of why the Kannywood films are disparaging Islam:

In one of the [Hausa] films, I was told about, em, I forgot its name; a woman was taken to a sharia court because of

35 The text is Quran 4:3 which states, "And if you fear that you will not deal justly with the orphan girls, then marry those that please you of [other] women, two or three or four. But if you fear that you will not be just, then [marry only] one or those your right hand possesses. That is more suitable that you may not incline [to injustice]." This translation is based on *Sahih International*, available on <https://quran.com/4>. Last accessed on June 4, 2018.

her violent resistance and reaction against her husband and her parents in-law's decisions to marry a second wife. When the judge judged against her, she reacted: "May Allah cursed men." The judge asked, "Including your father?" she responded by asking that "is he not a man?"³⁶

Ustaz Abu Abdurrahman cited this scene in *Maza da Mata*³⁷ (Men and Women). He condemned this kind of behaviours which he said actresses are teaching their viewers. He supported his disapproval of how the film narratives are challenging the status quo by citing a Quranic verse which reads, "And We have certainly revered the children of Adam ..." ³⁸ He further explained to me that some Kannywood filmmakers do not stop at re-interpreting religious texts and offering alternative religious views, they also teach violent resistance strategies to the women:

We discovered that some Kannywood films also teach violent resistance that sometimes resulted in harming, or even killing either the husband or the women that agree to marry their husbands."³⁹

Ustaz Abu Abdurrahman cited another example of Kannywood movie, *Dakin Amarya* (Bride's Apartment)⁴⁰, as a film that teaches violent resistance to polygyny. He also mentioned *Uwar Miji*, (Mother-in-law) written by Zainab Yunusa and directed by Bello Muhammed Bello (ND) as another film that teaches women how to deal with mothers-in-law who influence their sons to marry more wives. Members of the '*ulamā*' criticise the filmmakers based on the arguments that violent behaviours showed by women in those movies are rebellious against sharia rules that

36 Ustaz Abu Abdurrahman, Interview by the author, June 2015.

37 A Hausa film directed by Ali Gumzak (2012)

38 Quran 17:70. The full text reads, "And We have certainly honoured the children of Adam [human] and carried them on the land and sea and provided for them of good things and preferred them over much of what We have created, with [definite] preference." Translation from *Qur'an Sahih* International available on <http://quran.com/17/70>. Last accessed on 13 July 2016.

39 Ibid.

40 A film produced by Aminu Saira (2015)

require wives to be submissive to their husbands. This viewpoint provides the *ulamā* with a reason for rejecting the videos on moral grounds.

However, the filmmakers countered this viewpoint by pointing out that the social construction of marriage and family has led the society into the problems depicted in their films. They claim to be showing that children and women are victims of socio-cultural phenomena related to religion. In particular, religion does not allow men to take second wives when they cannot support their existing family either financially or socially. Kannywood tries to counter that notion by emphasising the conditions relating to polygyny, and the consequences bedevilling Hausa Muslims because of different interpretations of the verse. In both cases, the television screen provides a platform where non-specialists can engage with specialist *ulamā* in re-examining some specific Islamic practices. This shows the role of non-*ulamā* in discussing Islamic beliefs and practices as products of the social, historical, political, and economic institutions in which both groups live out their faith as Muslims.

Conclusion

Cultural production in northern Nigeria has moved into electronic and digital spaces. Both *ulamā* and filmmakers perform and transmit their activities via recorded audios and videos using CD and DVD formats. Within this context, this paper analysed how Kannywood, as a supposedly secular movie industry, has transformed into a process of interaction between the producers and consumers. By doing so, it has created one of the most effective ways in which ordinary people can talk about what they think of themselves, using the means of expression they feel to be appropriate.⁴¹ It serves as a channel that ordinary Hausa Muslims, especially women, can use to express alternative views about socio-cultural and religious values. Thus, like sermons, Kannywood films distinctively serve as platforms that bring together individuals and groups with shared imaginaries. Those people discuss and (re)construct meanings around religious texts. In other words, just as sermons and films are media infrastructure through which

41 Karin Barber, "Popular arts in Africa." *African Studies Review* 30 (3, 1987, 1-78.

the actors perform and communicate with their audiences, I perceive that the *ulamā* and Kannywood groups operate, from different perspectives, towards controlling the cultural production of Hausa Muslims.

Some of the storylines in the Kannywood movies touch, with relative freedom, on many aspects of social discontent not discussed anywhere else, except in the home videos. In this context, women who are marginal become active and express their views through the movies. They do this in conversation with their male counterparts in the films. They oppose the dominant views about marriage, especially meanings constructed around polygyny verse, vis-à-vis their own experiences and those of the audience. Their new meaning-making from the same texts does not completely oppose the long-standing views created and promoted by the men who have dominated traditional religious institutions. Instead, it seeks to strengthen it by emphasising what is neglected by the mainstream religious authorities.

Members of the *ulamā* respond to the discourses on screen. In this context, I see both sermons and Kannywood movies as tools through which people discuss their religion, express views, and struggle for influence and socio-religious and cultural changes in society.

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