

ALLAH MADE US

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Rudolf Gaudio

ALLAH MADE US

SEXUAL OUTLAWS IN AN ISLAMIC
AFRICAN CITY

RUDOLF PELL GAUDIO

 **WILEY-BLACKWELL**

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For my parents, Christina and Alexander Gaudio, and my *oga*,
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NOTES ON ORTHOGRAPHY, TRANSLATION AND TRANSCRIPTION

Orthography

Hausa is usually written using a modified form of the roman alphabet that includes three special ‘hooked’ letters to represent sounds that do not exist in European languages: *D/ḍ* and *K/ḳ* are glottalized (pronounced like their unglottalized counterparts, but with a supplemental constriction of the glottis), while *B/ḅ* is implosive (pronounced with a sudden in-breath of air). Other consonants are pronounced approximately as in English, with the following exceptions: *ts* is glottalized; *c* is pronounced like English *ch*; *r* is trilled or rolled.

Hausa vowels are pronounced roughly as in Spanish, and are either long (*aa*) or short (*a*); they are also pronounced with a distinctive tone: high (*ú*), low (*ù*) or falling (*ú̃*). Although distinctions of vowel length and tone do affect word meanings, they are not marked in standard orthography. In this book I generally use standard spellings, indicating distinctive vowel qualities only when necessary – e.g., to distinguish the words *bábà* [‘mother’] and *bàbá* [‘father’]. Excerpts from published texts are reproduced with idiosyncratic spellings intact.

I have chosen to treat the words *Shari’a* and *Bori* as proper nouns, capitalizing them to emphasize their special religious and cultural significance.

In accordance with the normal convention, single quotes indicate a gloss.

Translation

In translating from Hausa to English, I have attempted to strike a balance between literal and idiomatic interpretation. Arabic expressions used in everyday Hausa speech are sometimes translated (e.g., *Wallahi* ['by God']), sometimes not. Where the Hausa original is provided along with an English translation, underlining, **boldface** and *italics* are sometimes used to indicate matching passages, e.g., an Arabic expression with its English translation, or a Hausa proverb with its English translation.

The word *Allah* is sometimes translated as 'God' and sometimes left untranslated; this choice follows the practice of English-speaking Muslims in Nigeria and elsewhere, who use both names more or less interchangeably. (Note that Hausa- and Arabic-speaking Christians also refer to God as *Allah*.)

All singular Hausa nouns, pronouns and adjectives are grammatically feminine or masculine; plural forms are unmarked with respect to gender. When grammatical distinctions of gender and number are relevant to my analysis, they are indicated in English translation using superscript forms, e.g., *ke* ['you^f'], *kai* ['you^m'] or *ku* ['you^{pl}']; *dogo* ['tall^m'] or *doguwa* ['tall^f'].

Transcription

Where a verbatim transcript of Hausa speech is provided along with an English translation, punctuation marks (period, comma, question mark, exclamation mark) are used as in colloquial written English. Other transcription conventions are as follows.

= indicates latching, i.e., a quicker-than-usual transition between speaker turns unaccompanied by a conversational pause.

[indicates the beginning of a conversational overlap, with the open-bracket being located as closely as possible to the point in the first speaker's utterance at which the second speaker started talking.

] indicates the end of an overlap.

- () indicates uncertainty regarding the accuracy of the transcription inside the parentheses.
- (xx) indicates indiscernible speech.
- (.) or <.> indicates that speech has been omitted from the transcript.
- (()) or < > indicates my commentary about the interaction (as an analyst, not as a participant).

INTRODUCING ‘YAN DAUDU

Hajiya Asabe had a feminine name and a handsome, mustached face. In the room he rented in Kano’s infamous Sabon Gari neighborhood, he received a daily stream of visitors: girlfriends stopping by to gossip, out-of-town relatives seeking financial assistance, flirtatious boyfriends, hopeful suitors. People knew they could count on finding Hajiya Asabe in his room because, as a self-described *karuwa*, or ‘prostitute,’ he woke up late most mornings and stayed close to home during the day. Most evenings he spent at a nearby nightclub where a modestly upscale, male clientele came to listen to live performances of Hausa and Arab music, to drink beer or a non-alcoholic alternative, and to socialize with the women and ‘*yan daudu*, feminine men like Hajiya Asabe, who served as the club’s unofficial hosts. (Regular customers had to pay a door fee; women and ‘*yan daudu* did not.) Among the ‘*yan daudu* who frequented the club, Hajiya Asabe stood out with his stylish dress and a graceful, self-confident demeanor that was both charming and haughty. It was this demeanor that had made me notice him during my earliest visits to the club, and that made him so alluring to the men who sought his company.

One day late in the dry season in 1994, I went to pay Hajiya Asabe a visit. As I entered the cement courtyard, I found him kneeling on a small mat outside his room. Not wanting to disturb him as he performed the late-afternoon *la’asar* prayer, I took a seat on a nearby bench while the compound’s other residents – most of them non-Muslims from southern Nigeria – went about their regular activities. Once he finished praying, Hajiya Asabe joined me on the bench

and called for Mama Ayo, the middle-aged Yoruba woman who managed the compound, to bring me a cold beer. Hajiya Asabe did not drink alcohol, but he was unfailingly hospitable towards his guests, and in the early days of our friendship he always offered me a bottle of Gulder, the most expensive beer on the market, whenever I came by to visit. Although Hajiya Asabe and I had been casually acquainted for almost a year, we had only recently begun spending time together, so we were still getting to know one another. After the usual exchange of greetings and small talk, he complimented me on my command of Hausa, the major language of northern Nigeria, and suggested that all that remained for me to become a ‘complete Hausa’ [*cikakken Bahausha*] was to embrace Islam. He even offered to slaughter a ram in my honor if I were to convert. Hajiya Asabe’s religious zeal astonished me. After all, the social milieu in which I knew him was hardly one that most people would characterize as Islamically devout.

“But how could I become a Muslim?” I asked him, clutching my bottle of Gulder. “I like this,” I reminded him, pointing to the beer. “And I like *harka*” – the ‘deed’ – that is, sex between men.

“Come now, Sani,” Hajiya Asabe replied, addressing me by my Hausa name. “Muslims do these things too. They do them more than anyone!”

My first interpretation of this surprising exchange was that, for Hajiya Asabe, being a Muslim was less important than being Hausa, and had more to do with the performance of cultural rituals than it did with accepting the moral precepts of Islam. His irreverent claim that Muslims engaged in forbidden acts like drinking and homosexuality “more than anyone” was clearly facetious, yet I knew it was based on his experiences in Nigeria and Saudi Arabia, where he had performed the *hajj*, the pilgrimage to Mecca, more than once. Like many other poor pilgrims, Hajiya Asabe had overstayed his visa on several occasions in order to live and work illegally in the port city of Jiddah. While most undocumented Nigerians take on menial jobs that are Islamically legal, Hajiya Asabe supported himself through what he called *karuwanci* [‘prostitution’], providing social and sexual companionship to men, some of whom might also enjoy the company of female prostitutes as well as marijuana, cocaine, or even alcohol. His most recent sojourn had ended over a year earlier, when he was arrested, deported and forced to leave behind most of the

wealth he had accumulated. The circumstances of Hajiya Asabe's expulsion from Saudi Arabia weighed heavily on him, yet his day-to-day practices signaled a decidedly positive attitude towards the country. He dressed in Saudi men's fashions, listened to cassette tapes of Arab music, and peppered his speech with expressions from Arabic. Though he was unable to read in any language, he kept Arabic-language magazines prominently displayed in his room, along with perfume bottles and other mementos. He also performed the five daily prayers more consistently, and more visibly, than most other 'yan daudu I knew.

Despite his apparent disregard of certain aspects of Islamic morality, I soon discovered that Hajiya Asabe's commitment to his faith was more sincere than I had initially thought; his irreverence had definite limits. Like many ethnographers, I learned of these limits accidentally, by transgressing them in a way that left me embarrassed but enlightened. On another visit to Sabon Gari, when Hajiya Asabe and I were sitting in his room to escape the midday sun, I sought to explain my ethnographic interest in the language practices of 'yan daudu. With my limited, graceless Hausa, I told him how I had initially come to Nigeria to learn about the speech of *malamai*, Islamic scholars, but that I had eventually lost interest in that topic. "Staying with them is not pleasurable," I said, "and their talk is not interesting." At this Hajiya Asabe's facial expression suddenly changed from that of a sympathetic listener to one showing hurt and indignation. "Sani," he reprimanded me quietly. "This is our religion."

Cultural and Sexual Citizenship in Northern Nigeria

In the Hausa-speaking region of Northern Nigeria, prevailing interpretations of *Shari'a*, Islamic law, mandate a strict separation of the sexes and different rules of behavior for women and men in virtually every facet of life. 'Yan daudu break those rules. As men who are said to talk and act 'like women,' they are widely perceived to be witty and clever, but they are also persecuted for their presumed involvement in heterosexual and homosexual prostitution. This book is about 'yan daudu (singular: *ɗan daudu*) in and around Kano,



Fig. 1.1 Approximate extent of Hausa city-states since 1810 C.E.

the economic and cultural center of Hausaland, whose government joined that of eleven other northern Nigerian states in officially adopting Shari'a in 2000.¹ (See Figures 1.1 and 1.2.) An ancient Islamic emirate that grew rich from the trans-Saharan trade, Kano today is one of Nigeria's and Africa's largest cities. It is also the hub of a transnational network of 'yan daudu, independent women, and other gender and sexual minorities that links cities and towns throughout northern Nigeria with Hausa-speaking communities in other regions and countries.

'Yan daudu are most visible in urban markets and motor-parks (taxi and bus stations) where they cook and sell food to male workers and



Fig. 1.2 Nigeria. Shaded area indicates the twelve states that have officially adopted Shari'a since 1999.

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travelers. Some ‘yan daudu live or spend time at ‘women’s houses’ where they and ‘independent women’ [*mata masu zaman kansu*, literally ‘women who live on their own’] entertain male visitors. The term *gidan mata* [‘women’s house’] is often translated as ‘brothel,’ reflecting the popular image of independent women as ‘prostitutes’ and of ‘yan daudu as their ‘pimps’ or as ‘homosexual prostitutes’ themselves. The translations are misleading. Some independent women, as they generally prefer to be called, and some ‘yan daudu, especially younger

ones, do sometimes have sex with (conventionally masculine) men in exchange for money or other gifts; and the women, ‘yan daudu or other men who facilitate these interactions are often given a kind of tip.² But *karuwanci* is not simply commercialized sex work. Rather, like the *malaya* prostitutes in colonial Nairobi,³ the independent women and ‘yan daudu who live and work at women’s houses provide a number of services other than sex: they serve food and drink, play cards and board games, and engage their visitors in friendly, flirtatious conversation.⁴

While cooking and serving food is considered women’s work, ‘yan daudu often describe their other feminine social practices – songs, dances, gestures, clothing and language – as ‘play’ [*wasal*]. ‘Play’ accurately reflects the pleasure these practices bring to ‘yan daudu and others, but it belies their serious, material consequences. ‘Women’s talk’ [*maganar mata*], for example, is useful for those ‘yan daudu who work as intermediaries [*kawalai*] between male patrons and independent women, for by engaging men in flirtatious banter ‘yan daudu are often able to make more satisfying, and potentially lucrative, matches. On a more covert basis, moving and talking ‘like women’ helps some ‘yan daudu attract their own friends, sex partners and patrons. These benefits are mitigated, however, by the material ways ‘yan daudu are made to suffer: they are regularly harassed and ostracized for their alleged immorality, and subject to abuse at the hands of police and young male hooligans, who can assault, rape, steal or extort money from them with impunity.

Nigeria – a member of OPEC – is rich with oil and other resources, but ‘yan daudu, like other Nigerians, are overwhelmingly poor and illiterate, and they suffer from the economic deterioration wrought by years of corruption and mismanagement by politicians, military dictators, businessmen, multinational corporations and international lenders.⁵ In addition to the impoverishment caused by this corruption, ‘yan daudu and karuwai are often scapegoated for it – accused of conspiring with corrupt ‘big men’ [*manyam mutane*] who use their ill-gotten wealth to satisfy their legendary appetites for sex and other pleasures. From a cosmological standpoint, many Hausa Muslims believe their collective suffering is God’s punishment for disobeying Him, and Muslim leaders commonly blame karuwai and ‘yan daudu for promoting such disobedience. In the last half of the twentieth century, if not earlier, Northern Nigerian states, emirates and municipalities