The Embodiment of Kunya Among Hausa Women of Kano, Nigeria

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The purpose of this study is to analyse the concept of *kunya* in relation to Hausa Muslim women in Kano, Nigeria, to understand their life from their experiences of *kunya,* and to identify its relation to the role of honour and shame*. Kunya* can be defined as multiple interrelated emotions such as shame, embarrassment, bashfulness, and shyness. *Kunya* can also refer to modesty, rudeness, and disgrace. An emphasis on *kunya* as modesty will largely be the focus of this paper in order to clearly define what this means for women who have been misrepresented previously as having a "hidden muted autonomy" (Callaway 1984, 449). An examination of the boundaries of the public/private dichotomy of space in the practice of *matan kulle* (gender segregation) is the primary way to understand the Hausa women's embodiment of *kunya*. This dichotomy is integral to knowing what it means to be Hausa, and to understanding the role of honour and shame in their relationships. The Hausa display of *kunya* indicates a necessity for cultivating and preserving modesty—a key aspect of Hausa women's identity within the community.

Context to Kano

The Hausa people are scattered across northern Nigeria, known as Hausaland, which includes the state of Kano, containing the second largest population in Nigeria after Lagos. Kano is one of the 12 *shari'a* states in the North. The long history of Islam in the core North is essential to understanding its strong patriarchal system, and I have studied the lived experience of women who are underrepresented. My 19 informants were either married or divorced women, including those who have children and those who do not, and single women.

A comprehensive understanding of *kunya* among Hausa women in Kano shows how it influences every realm of their life due to a high cultural value on modesty. *Kunya* is a complex emotion meaning shame, embarrassment, bashfulness, and shyness, but it is also known as an order of display for modesty, rudeness, and disgrace. The cultural practice of *matan kulle* meaning "women locked" involves gender segregation that highlights the meaning of symbolic space—the public/private dichotomy—and the metaphorical covering of a woman's home that encompasses her sense of honour. This is the backdrop to learning how women embody *kunya* in the context of perspectives and experiences of being Hausa.

The Significance of Kunya

My research (Myland 2022) focuses on the cultural value and display of *kunya* and the changing practice of *matan kulle* in order to determine a theologically and culturally relevant way to engage with the Hausa. The practice of *matan kulle* will highlight the depth of *kunya* displayed among Hausa women who have been previously labeled as having a "hidden" sense of autonomy, but whose complex lives illuminate their "Hausaness" through the role of honour and shame vital in understanding relationships. Recognizing the weight of *kunya* in the life of Hausa women will also equip Nigerian Christians for building relationships with them.

Barbara Callaway (1984) argues that there may be an enormous social advantage for women in private spaces (19). She writes, "Women are secluded, in part, to enable men to feel 'in control.' But, such physical and emotional separation means in a very fundamental sense that they are not dependent on men" (433). Callaway's findings reflect today's high rate of divorce for Hausa women, including some divorced women

who no longer live with a man. The divorce rate is very significant, since a woman living alone in Hausa society is very unusual, especially a woman without a male representative. The population of divorced Hausa women's voices has been neglected and that inevitably affects how women interact in the dichotomy of public and private space.

Callaway mentions fifty percent of Hausa women will divorce or be divorced in their lives, though their period of singleness after their divorce will not last long, as it is a cultural expectation for women to be married. She also points out that there is a different experience of gender segregation for divorcees that should be explored (1984, 443). Six of my 19 interlocuters scattered throughout the city are divorced and/or are currently in their second marriage. There is a sense of liberation in being married more than once, but the dichotomy of space remains for these women. Callaway suggests that women are often separated and independent from men, so, while they maintain a lingering ambiguous dependency on men, they still have autonomy in their secluded spaces (445, 449). I, however, have discovered that this "hidden muted autonomy" among women that Callaway describes is *not* representative of the women I met. Through exploring how this "hidden muted autonomy" is inaccurate by considering women's honour embodied in *kunya*, I will provide clarity as to the real experiences of underrepresented divorced women.

Chamo describes *kunya* as "a core value that one is expected to follow" (Chamo 2021, 49; cf. Musa 2019, 14). Dr. Maryam Yola explains *kunya* can be understood as both a negative and positive emotion (pers. com.). As previously stated, the context of *kunya* is necessary to understand its meaning. *Kunya* defined as shyness is positive among the Hausa and is part of being a morally good person with a sense of composure. Even more so, Yola describes this unique concept of *kunya* as being a "prerequisite" in her culture when describing a "nice person." On the other hand, Dr. Yola elaborates the meaning of *kunya* in terms of shame, a negative expression. For example, if someone says, "*ba ta jin kunya,*" they mean, "she does not have any shame," or "she did not feel shame" and it is considered an insult. Aisha Umar Adamu identifies "*kunya* as a bashfulness that controls the behaviour of individuals. If a person crosses the line his behaviour will be tagged as loss of face *abin kunya* or rudeness *rashin kunya* that will bring dishonour to not only himself but to his family" (2018, 164). This overview of *kunya* as embedded in Hausa culture illustrates the Hausa way of being within the world of honour and shame.

Ethnography (Abridged)

Through doing this ethnography I became aware of the invaluable role ethnography can play for ministry, as I was working under a Christian mission organization. I spent time with 19 informants throughout the city of Kano, typically in the mid-afternoon to evening. Most visits were informal and led by the women. We spent hours sitting together in their parlours, or in 'interrupted' time cooking, busy with children, receiving other visitors, or being involved in visits for births, condolences, or special celebrations like Ramadan.

The phenomenological method intertwined with a narrative approach, as well as Christ's example of "self-emptying" became essential to my awareness of being received as more than just a researcher and led me to be attentive to my ethnographic presence. The practice of bracketing my assumptions and ways of perceiving my informants' lived experience helped me "quietly contemplate" their stories and practice being present (Lester 1991, 1; Parse Coyne & Smith 1985, 173). Then the humility required in language learning, but above all in the example of Christ's humility displayed when encountering women in the Bible, is what informed my practice. Philip Clayton (2009) in his work *Transforming Christian Theology* focuses on Philippians 2:7 (NRSV) "but [Christ] emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, assuming human likeness." The Greek noun *kenosis* means self-emptying. I believe that as I sat attentively listening to the Hausa women, my attitude reflected Jesus' humility and humanity as I encountered each woman who became more than just an informant.

Is Matan Kulle Necessary?

While I visited Fatima, by telling me her life story, she gave me clear examples of the practice of *matan kulle*. She described how she grew up in Kano but later moved to Cameroon when she married a relative. Later she divorced, returned to Kano, and eventually remarried. Her father was not entirely pleased when she decided to remarry, since he wanted her to receive an education. However, she remarried anyway. She shared how one evening, she and her friend Khadija went to a neighbour's house to do their hair. Khadija knew her husband would be home around 9 pm since

he was visiting a friend with Fatima's husband. Khadija planned to be back home well before he arrived. Unfortunately, she did not make it back on time. Neither did Fatima. When Fatima returned home late, her husband yelled at her, but she covered her ears with a pillow and went to sleep. In contrast, Khadija's husband locked her out of their house, leaving her outside as he continued to shout at her. Soon Fatima's husband intervened by calling Khadija's husband, as they were next door neighbours. He urged his friend to lower his voice, stressing that the other neighbours would hear. Fatima laughed as she recounted her night and the intense drama she hoped to avoid. She explained *matan kulle* is *dole* a "must" required by her religion, in the same way women are required to wear the *hijab*. She admitted to being tired of having to follow these practices but was still faithfully and obediently practicing both.

A constant balance must to be maintained in managing space at the beginning of a new relationship and in the marriage relationship itself, especially as observed in both Fatima and Khadija's experiences. Fatima and Khadija seem to dance within what seems to be a somewhat fading and changing practice of *matan kulle*. According to a female Hausa professor at Bayero University in Kano this practice is "still there but it's not as tight."

This was particularly true of Fatima: she sought to hide from her husband her life outside of their home, while her husband attempted to maintain a sense of control over her movement. Fatima tried to balance her desires to do things outside the practice, such as going to get her hair done, while not getting into trouble at home and seeking to maintain harmony in her marriage. The power Hausa women have to enter one another's homes is significant, as gatherings with neighbours, especially with Fatima, would often occur in her small parlour. If her husband came home, he would often retreat to their bedroom or sit outside their home with other men (known as *hirar majalinsa*—respected public space for men). Many traditional Hausa homes built decades ago have a long corridor or entrance known as the *soro* to separate women inside the home.

On the other hand, another interlocuter, Nabila who lives very differently than Fatima and Khadjia said, "*Gaskyia* [honestly] in my own view we don't really have that *kulle* now." She described how she goes to work each day and how frequently she and her husband go out together. She recalled that during her time growing up, she saw that her parents' experience was very different from her life now. Although Nabila comes from a high socioeconomic class, she is very well educated with a Ph.D. Thus, her experience is very different than Fatima's and Khadija's. Still, Nabila did not believe the practice of *matan kulle* differs between classes.

Another View of Matan Kulle from A Divorcee

I met Safiya at a wedding, situated next to the Kofar Mata, one of the oldest city gates in Kano. Safyia was very forward and initially approached me, eager to find out why I was in Kano. So a week or two after the wedding I visited Safiya's house where she grew up. I was greeted by her 20-year-old daughter who was studying physics at a local university. Safiya herself had studied Hausa in college and currently taught at a local primary school. This made it easy for me to ask questions, since she was eager to help me learn Hausa.

During one particular visit I asked Safiya about *matan kulle*. I thought to myself, "What does she think of this topic and how open and honest will she be in explaining her viewpoint?" She quickly affirmed that most people "have it" meaning most women are living within the bounds of *matan kulle*.

Safiya shared that she married at the age of 22 in 2000, laughing as she told me that she gave birth to her first two children in the consecutive years following her marriage. She then had two more children in the next three years. She appeared downcast about her divorce, but did not reveal any more details about it. She almost always mentioned her dream to remarry, and bypassed the part of her story about her return to her mother's house, leaving a life of luxury behind, along with her joy living with her now ex-husband. Divorced women most often return to their family's home. According to another informant, Ummratu, it would be a shame for her to live alone, even if she could afford it.

Safiya clarified that *matan kulle* pertains only to married women but claimed that globalization has changed what the present practice looks like. She did not seem overly keen to discuss this topic, but I pressed her further to explain the changes she is noticing in her community. She gave me a prime example of her oldest daughter who can study at a university, along with other women who were beginning to have full freedom in society. She then quickly returned to sharing about her desire to remarry, implying that her freedom would change for the better. This seemed to contradict what she previously stated about a divorced woman's relative

freedom. She mentioned that her mother's house is private, but there would be a greater sense of privacy remarrying and having her own home. I think she may have desired to live separately from her mother while also finding security in living with a man and feeling protected.

The Jealous One, The Divorced Woman, and Yaji

A common theme arose among the stories of women who were their husband's first wife, and whose husbands chose to marry a second wife. For example, Safiya believed her husband was charmed with a physical object by her cowife, and Ummratu shared a strikingly similar story. At the tender age of 16 years, Ummratu married her husband (now her ex-husband) who was a wealthy man working in Lagos at the time. It was only two weeks before her ex-husband married a second wife and she found out about his decision. She described how his parents pressured him to obtain a second wife because his house was large enough and he could afford it. She gradually noticed his behaviour begin to change.

Her husband asked her to leave; however, this was not yet a formal divorce because he must say "*na saki ki"* three times. The woman must physically leave her husband's house each time he divorces her, up to three times. Nabila stated, "The first problem a wife makes is to go and report her husband [to her parents]. This is what we call *yaji*." *Yaji* is hot chilli pepper, but also describes the process whereby the woman's parents help her resolve her marital issue so she can return to her husband's house. The process clearly involves "heat" once the parents know about their daughter's marital issues. The daughter's family's response and involvement create this *yaji.* For example, Fatima's sister has now returned to her parent's house two times due to conflict with her husband, or more specifically with her cowife. Fatima explained the dread, stating, "*ina jin tausayi,*" meaning she has sympathy for her sister, while also being concerned about her sister's three children as well.

Nabila, who has never been divorced, pointed out that the rate of divorce in Kano is *very* high. She shared her thoughts on this, "My own view for a woman who goes for *yaji* at home, when she comes back, it will not be the same again. It's like she is reducing her own value . . . Whatever happens let me just resolve it in my house. The moment you leave, then your parents will know about it."

Nabila has remained the only wife of her husband who she explains is only a "one wife-oriented" man. She explained how "a Hausa woman is supposed to be patient, whatever kind of situation she finds herself in. You shouldn't ask for a divorce." In elaborating on the process of *yaji,* she shared that her sister is divorced and returned to her parents' home. She explained that her other sister, who lives at home and is not yet married, will lose respect for her divorced sister, and that her late father used to be "sensitive of where she is going." There is an unspoken suspicion surrounding divorcees who may engage in unacceptable behaviour, as indicated by her father's concern for his daughter. Nabila implied that a divorcee may engage in inappropriate physical intimacy with a man because of her previous experience. She said, "people can just think, maybe she's doing something, you know . . . because she's *bazawara* [divorced]." By elaborating on her experience, as well as her sister's, she explained how there are far too many pressures women face who experience divorce or endure the challenges that seem to unfold from having a rival.

Being Bazawara (Divorced)

Dankwali ya ja hula
The head tie pulls the hat.

One day, while I was visiting Bilkisu, she handed me the phone to greet a man she knew. She smiled as I greeted him; later, I found out he was one of the many men she speaks to. As a divorced woman in Kano with three children and one adopted daughter, she was open about her desire to remarry. When I asked which man I was greeting and if this is the one she wants to marry, she jokingly responded, "*Dankwali ya ja hula* [The woman pulls the man]." The *dankwali* is the head tie women wear, and the *hula* is the traditional hat Hausa men wear. This metaphorically means the woman takes control and becomes like the head in a relationship that pulls or leads the man, which is the opposite of the cultural norm. When I asked Nabila about the saying Bilkisu used, she said that she had never heard it before. She then asked about the context in which it was used; I vaguely explained the situation. She stated, "Maybe she uses it because she is a *bazawara.*" Being divorced creates a very different dynamic in terms of pursuing relationships and the pressures women endure in maintaining *kunya.*

I found it sad to hear Fatima say, "If a divorcee has daughters . . . if she is not married, she will not be honoured. Even her children will not be honoured, unless they get married." This explains Bilkisu's search and desire for marriage, along with Safiya's, another divorcee.

Nabila affirmed the tremendous loss a *bazawara* suffers. She told me about her sister who was married to a man who chose not to support her education despite the fact that he was a lecturer at a university. Her husband began to control her in every possible way and not honour her desires. Because of this, she returned to her family's house as a *bazawara.* Nabila explained, "For a normal Hausa household, when you are cooking lunch, especially lunch, you have to add extra in case there will be a guest. But in her husband's case, he wouldn't allow it. He would have to count how much meat she puts in her food . . . That is really un-Hausa like. So, the marriage had to come to an end."

After several months of my meeting with Nabila twice a week, her colleague Salma stopped by to visit. They gave me a different perspective on *bazawara.* They said that there is a small percentage of high-class Hausa women who are educated but not married. They explained how their potential suitors feel inferior because they are not likely to be as educated as the women. Thus, the men would not have the sense of control that they wish to possess in a marriage. Nabila and her friend both agreed that it is very difficult for highly educated women to marry. They also shared that there is a small group of upper-class divorced women that use this to their advantage, not seeking to remarry. Instead, they find work and learn how to be self-sufficient. Salma also confirmed my assumption that if a *bazawara* does remarry, she will have freedom to choose her new spouse, unlike for her first marriage. Moreover, she pointed out that women who are fair-skinned, but uneducated, will likely marry off quickly. They then showed me photos of female relatives who are quite fair and therefore seen as very attractive.

Hanatu's story also illustrates the many struggles a *bazawara* faces. I met Hanatu over a year ago in her father's house and shared many conversations with her and all of her sisters. During one of these conversations, she shared that another part of remarrying after being *bazawara* was that your status as a divorcee may be hidden as much as possible in order to avoid losing worth and respect. She told me she was previously married for about fourteen years and has a young daughter who is now living at her father's house. She explained how her ex-husband's mother-in-law did not like her. So, her husband divorced her, and she was forced to return to her father's house. She emphasized how not many people are aware of her first marriage, except for her family. My Hausa teacher said that most *bazwara* are married after dark in order to maintain their hidden status as *bazawara.* She is now in her first year of her second marriage and has a new start.

Kunya

Kunya da adon mace.
Kunya is like an adornment for a woman.

Now a deeper understanding of *kunya* will be explained in order to make sense of the pressures described above that women who are *bazawara* must endure in light of cultural expectations. Nabila described the proverb above as referring to the aspect of shyness. She said *kunya* is "an extra quality or a value in a woman." Fatima pointed out to me that there are many "branches of *kunya*." Fatima also provided her own metaphor of a *tsani* (ladder) to indicate the levels of growth for a Hausa girl learning *kunya* throughout her childhood. Fatima described this valuable metaphor thus:

Uwa akwai kunya sosai. Uwa sani ce.
A mother is just like a ladder.
Uba shi ne jigo.
The father is the overall pillar.
Za ta dora 'yarta akan kunya.
She will train her daughter on shyness.
Kakar mace akwai kunya.
The grandmother of women has shyness.
Kunya tsani ce.
Shyness is [like] a ladder.

Ummratu also explained, "Kunya will take you to a higher level, to places you don't expect. A good ladder, you have confidence and no fear. It will be the *tarbiya* [home training] of your parents that will influence you." The value of *tarbiya* is highly spoken of in terms of its ability to ensure children possess *kunya* taught by their parents. On another occasion, Safyia distinguished *kawaci* meaning politeness from *kunya* meaning shyness. She explained, "*Kawaci* is always on your mind; it is something you think twice about." In contrast, she said, "*Kunya* is your reality, like you are covered." Women would almost always associate certain words with *kunya* as a concept. However, it became vital to see it in action within a specific context. The constrains of a *bazawara* would make adorning oneself in *kunya* difficult, with the loss of a woman's protection and thus, worth.

Lacking Kunya

One time, when visiting Fatima's best friend Bilkisu she escorted us to the road to catch a *keke* (three-wheeled tricycle). I was expecting to return home, but instead discovered that all of us were going to visit the man who, according to Bilkisu, showed interest in her. I suspected this interest was probably reciprocated. His home was close by, but as we got closer, Fatima suddenly realized it was his parent's home, as Bilkisu was not initially clear about where we were going. Fatima became fearful and hesitant as we walked into the compound. Feeling extremely unsettled, she said to me, "*Bilkisu ba ta jin kunya*" (Bilkisu has no shame) because she is approaching the parent's home of the man she likes and lacks the cultural value of *kunya*.

For Bilkisu, being married at the age of 11 for six years, having four children and becoming a *bazawara*, her engagement in the community is very different than Fatima's even though they are both 35 years old. Fatima has said if her husband found out she was with other men, "*na shiga uku* (I am in big trouble)". She knows her husband would disapprove of her being with other men, and because of this, Fatima had previously told me her husband does not like Bilkisu. I think Fatima felt fearful her husband could find out about Bilkisu's relationship, not knowing who the man Bilkisu likes was, but also recognizing the many cultural boundaries of *kunya* Bilkisu has broken.

Labarin zuciya a tambayi fuska.
Ask the face about the heart.

I believe the proverb above illustrates well the life Hausa women lead. Closely observing a Hausa woman's face will help explain her often hidden emotions. Clearly, Fatima went along with Bilkisu's desire to greet the man whom she likes; but at the same time, her face showed surprise, shock, and perhaps even embarrassment. I will explore this below to understand what Aisha Umar Adamu (2020) calls "masking emotions," along with the innerworkings of *kunya* described in the stories and experiences above. *Kunya* is part of being Hausa that is not easily put into words, but, as Fatima showed, it is clear when the code or boundaries of *kunya* are violated.

Anthropological Analysis

Being Seen: Matan Kulle

Confronting Kunya

The various women I spoke with who are either married or divorced or young or old have different expressions of Islamic faith which influence how they

perceive themselves in terms of the dynamic views of *matan kulle* (gender segregation). Fatima's perspective on *matan kulle* was that it is "*dole*" (necessary): she sees it as an essential part of her practice of faith, comparing it to how important wearing the *hijab* is to her. This demonstrates how often *matan kulle* is interpreted as a part of faith practice rather than culture. The *hijab* represents modesty to Fatima because it holds significant meaning to possessing *kunya*. Without the *hijab* or *matan kulle* which are a part of Fatima's faith expression and identity, respect and modesty, *kunya* would be lost.

In contrast, Nabila and Dr. Yola hold a different perspective on *matan kulle*. Nabila explained how *matan kulle* is no longer practiced and Dr. Yola described how it is not as prevalent today as in the past. In Sherry Ortner's "Is Female to Male as Nature is to Culture?", she explains that by "shifting our image of the culture/nature relationships" women can be seen as participants and cultural makers, rather than as mediators of nature, which Ortner argues is the way women are viewed universally (1974, 85). Thus, I believe the majority of my informants, especially women such as Nabila and Dr. Yola with more education, would agree with Ortner's view and desire to see other women in diverse socio-economic backgrounds fully embrace their roles as cultural makers as well.

Ortner's understanding of women being viewed as closer to nature (1974, 72) is not necessarily viewed as a negative experience for the Hausa women I interviewed. They often express a sense of belonging and honour being married and having children. The social role of a Hausa woman becoming a mother is a valuable contribution to culture. To be childless and infertile is understood to be a shame and an anomaly within Hausa culture. In fact, the ways men recognize women's roles as mothers and teachers of their children needs further research. Women who teach their children *tarbiya* (home training) and *kunya* at a young age in the home play a significant role within the culture, since *kunya* is part of being Hausa for both men and women, though with greater pressure on women since they are responsible for teaching their children. Men learn *kunya* from their mothers and have similar expectations, including possessing *kunya* in different social settings and relationships (such as with in-laws or elders). Further exploration of men's experience of *kunya* is needed.

However, women who are wholly segregated from men, being closer to nature and experiencing gradual change, such as Fatima, are socially distant from women such as Nabila who live and engage with a contrasting process of what Ortner describes as social actuality (Ortner 1974, 87). For example, Nabila's contribution to her culture is far less public than Fatima's due to her lower socioeconomic status and her husband not supporting her desire to enroll in college. Nabila's significantly higher education offers her a different cultural perspective, such as seeing the need for change to support women. She has influence in shaping that change, which Fatima may not have due to her lack of education. Women I met with are seen and known by their space, and how much she is seen or how wide her space is differs with each woman. *Kunya* is an important social and moral code for women within their designated spaces. Thus, I believe some of the women will face new challenges displaying *kunya* (especially understood as shyness) as they begin to be seen more, taking on roles outside their homes. The home is where women first find their sense of belonging and identity. Nonetheless, Ortner's view that women are universally associated with being closer to nature than men indicates that men need to change their cultural view to see that "women are more than natural beings but also creative cultural makers" (87).

Designated space for women is important across their diverse lived experience. However, it is crucial women create space to share their own cultural view with other women. This in turn would provide empowerment and honour cultural differences, while learning from one another in the context of maintaining *kunya.* Bruce Malina and Jerome Neyrey (1991) eloquently describe honour as displayed "in the places or space where the physical body is located" (34). Some Hausa women are explicit about how they see themselves in their spaces, longing for privacy, sharing how their designated space gives them a sense of honour. There is an "inward direction toward the centre" which is the domestic space, indicating a distinction for "gender-based honour" (41). Whereas women such as Nabila, Dr. Yola, and the women I met who are not married have opportunities to participate in a new and more public space where men can see them more fully and honour who they are as each woman acknowledges and upholds her role within society.

The First Mistake: Yaji

Hausa women are expected to maintain their own honour, and are valued in their designated spaces, by

upholding honour and harmony in relationships. Nabila described *yaji* as the process when a wife's parents' help to resolve her marital issue in order for her to return to her husband's house. However, both Nabila and Fatima pointed out that there is a loss of value when a wife returns to her parents' home. A deep sense of shame emerges, since a woman's honour is intertwined with the honour of her husband, which is disrupted once a woman experiences *yaji* (Malina and Neyrey 1991, 44). The Hausa woman endures a lack of honour when she is no longer secure in her home. A woman's children are also often at risk. Thus, *yaji* seeks to restore honour but often disrupts harmony.

A Hausa woman loses her honour even more significantly by becoming a *bazawara*. Malina and Neyrey (1991) describe this as the "precarious position divorced women enter losing their sense of female honour or 'shamelessness' as they now have a dishonourable reputation . . . outside the boundaries of [an] acceptable moral life" (44). This is strongly connected to the embodiment of *kunya* as Hausa women seek to live modest and moral lives. Fatima describes the lack of a *wakilinta,* or a representative, because her husband gives her worth. It also makes sense of the fact that Hanatu kept the secret of her divorce from me for months. Moreover, her new marriage has restored her honour and thus her embodiment of *kunya.* Nabila mentioned, "If you don't have *kunya* you are nothing."

There is a new perspective on *zaruawa* (divorced women) I was introduced to that is beginning to defy how women receive honour in relationships from their family, and how they display honour in their homes. The small percentage of Hausa women who are highly educated are superior to their potential spouses. Nabila believes women in this position are taking advantage of their singleness. These women are finding creative ways to contribute to culture. One of her colleagues and friends is unable to find a suitable spouse as she would surpass her future husband's education and financial stability. Although this makes being Hausa and holding honour in society very difficult, perhaps these exceptional women will help men understand women's roles as cultural makers too. For example, Nabila's husband holds respect for her role and supports her pursuits, however this sort of partnership in marriage is not common.

Hausa women define *kunya* as being part of who they are, and in general they support its value. *Kunya* has been described as something you are covered with, part of your reality, and what brings worth and belonging to being Hausa. Women seek to display this sense of hiddenness that includes their emotions. My interlocuters were courageous to share vulnerable parts of themselves that would normally be masked or hidden, as *kunya* maintains one's modesty, including emotional expressions. Their varying experiences in their individual spaces, including their sense of belonging and honour, are part of what defines *kunya*. The silence in hiding or "masking" one's true emotions to maintain the display of *kunya* largely means modesty (Adamu 2020, 7). Further, this is also part of submitting themselves to their faith. Nabila shared that *kunya* gives identity; for a woman to function without the display of *kunya* would be to fail to model an important value within the Hausa culture.

Theological Analysis

Privacy and Proximity

Through my research, I came to understand more fully the Hausa practices of *matan kulle* and *kunya.* I now see the public and private spaces differently according to how the Hausa value distinct spaces. It is true that because of *matan kulle* women's sense of privacy does not silence who they are but rather strengthens their community in female friendship and being neighbours to one another. Koyama (1999) reminds us that theology is done in community (77). Hence, women segregated from men in domestic spaces can and do form a strong sense of connectedness with one another that honors God.

I recognized that being connected not only in proximity, but in relationship, creates intimacy. The Lord establishes sacred space for women to dwell in relationship and bears with them, offering His presence. There is illuminating light that reflects God's presence. Psalm 34:5 says, "Those who look to him for help will be radiant with joy; no shadow of shame will darken their faces" (NLT). Safiya and others shared how *kunya* is their reality, a covering and part of how they embody modesty. This sense of modesty stretches beyond physical dress but embodies who they are and how they carry themselves. The Hausa women are confident in the way they practice faith, and by the display of *kunya* that involves being modest, they seek to be morally upright women before God. Learning from the Hausa and understanding *matan kulle* provided a new way for me to honour them and the sacredness of their spaces. I developed relationships with them in their homes that were both intimate and

sacred as I sought to honour who they are in their dwellings.

Responding to Yaji

Jesus is aware of the process of *yaji* and the astonishing rate of divorce in Kano. The process of divorce does not elevate women nor their sense of dignity or honour. In contrast, Kraybill (2011) illustrates the ways Jesus restored the honour of many women he encountered throughout his life (204). Jesus' engagement with women in the Gospels, such as speaking with a promiscuous Samaritan woman in public, opposed all of the sociocultural norms of Jewish culture, such as men being forbidden to speak to women in public (John 4:1-26, 205). Jesus' response and acknowledgment of women, who were often socially marginalized, was direct and incredibly public. *Yaji* may be interpreted as a mistake and a risk to one's honour, but Jesus acknowledges women and renews their honour in a deeply personal way. The process of *yaji* would cease in Jesus' presence as he "penetrates social boxes [and] barricades of suspicion, mistrust, stigma, and hate" (Kryabill 2011, 212). Women who have faced stigmas because of going through *yaji* or being *bazawara* would all be embraced by Jesus.

Understanding Honour and Shame in Kano

The importance placed on the preservation of harmony in relationships reveals why Hausa women's communities are so tightly woven together. The moral code and display of *kunya* keeps women within acceptable bounds and upholds the value system that the Hausa community follow to preserve harmony. The Hausa women have shown me the dynamic role of honour and shame present in Kano that is not usually acknowledged or understood in the literature. *Kunya* is interpreted as gender-based honour and, rather than providing "hidden muted autonomy", identifies women's positions in complex relationships.

The intricate display of honour and shame is reflected in stories of women who described their cowives charming their husbands. A Hausa woman may endure a great deal of fear when her husband is under the spiritual force of a charm—for example, the deep fear their relationship may be at risk or the fear of simply not knowing the effects of the charm. However, when listening to women describe their experiences to me, I noticed they sought to persevere in their relationships with their husbands at the time. They endured the changes of their husband's behaviour, and remained in their marriages for a period, because their deep longing for honour and acceptance could only be found in their marital status. This reflects how important honour is for a Hausa woman in her home, but also shows how related their honour is to their husband's (Malina and Neyrey 1991, 34, 44). Additionally, the process of *yaji* and becoming a *bazawara* confirms the importance of the marriage relationship in establishing women's honour or shame. A looming silence surrounds the dreaded "precarious position" of divorced women, and around the sense of shame that also would affect a woman's sense of living morally according to *kunya* (44). Confronting the inner works of honour and shame in relationships is *dole* (necessary).

Honour and shame in relationships and the moral code of *kunya* is part of being Hausa. A biblical understanding of the way Jesus restores women's honour relates closely to *zaurawa* (divorced women). The Scripture acknowledges many women in precarious positions who lived outside cultural norms, such as the Samaritan woman, previously discussed, whom Jesus personally acknowledges. Therefore, it is crucial that the Gospel transform relationships, touching the lives of divorced women to restore their honour. It is a complex and heavy burden women carry through the process of *yaji* or the weight of the stigma of being a *bazawara.* Thankfully, a place of belonging for divorced women and the development of deep intimate community can be found in being in relationship with Christ.

Implications for Christian Practice

Narratives are central to this process; they require us to operate in grace and humility to understand each story. We can do this by refraining from prejudicial ways of talking *about* the Hausa Muslim community; rather, we can talk with the Hausa *directly* to avoid false assumptions and exaggerated generalizations. Knibbe and Kupari explain this further in their "Theorizing Lived Religion." They write, "We must abandon pre-defined understandings of religion as a starting point of analysis in favor of an emphasis on the activities and interpretations of individuals" (2020, 159). Each Hausa woman engages in faith and community differently from the others; thus, rather than make assumptions about Hausa women overall, we must learn to engage each person through individualized questions and attentive listening. Koyam

(1999) reiterates the experience of encountering lived religion, emphasizing the following: "We must study [Islam], of course, if we wish to understand the [Muslim]. Our ultimate interest must lie, however, with understanding the [Muslim] not [Islam] (93)." We must see the *Imago Dei* in the Muslim in front of us. Otherwise, we are doing the Lord a disservice if we do not recognize that He is the Creator of our Muslim neighbours. Excluding certain groups from being seen as created in the image of God is grievous to the Holy Spirit, and ultimately, limits who God is (Genesis 1:26). We must refrain from denying our neighbours their sense of self by avoiding labelling people exclusively using religious categories.

The Confusion of Silence

The embodiment of *kunya* is displayed most often in silence known as *kara*. This is also true when a husband expects wives to endure heated words or hatred among his cowives, but says "*ki yi hakuri* (sorry)" expecting them to endure, words which I have heard from Hanatu. I have learned to listen within the spaces in which women dwell and now understand more about when, why, and how they want to be heard, and by whom. It is all too easy to misinterpret how women live and embody *kunya*, and it takes time to comprehend the complexity of their lives.

Following the way of Jesus means we as Christians must take a risk to become uncomfortable. For example, the woman bleeding for twelve years touched Jesus' cloak, to which Jesus responded by saying, "Daughter, you took a risk of faith, and now you're healed and whole" (Mark 5:21-34, The Message). This may mean facing persecution to embody the presence of Christ for our Hausa Muslim neighbours. To reinterpret the confusion of silence, and understand the roles of the women, we ought to be present and actually "move into their neighbourhoods" (John 1:14, The Message). A Hausa Christian shared this proverb: "*Ba ma ma'amila da wanda ba sa kallon gabas*." It can be translated: "The Muslims don't associate with those who don't face East [the direction they face when doing their five daily prayers]." Therefore, many Muslims do not have relationships with those who do not practice Islam in Kano. Christians and Muslims have not interacted easily in Kano. Christians have endured incredible persecution over the decades and currently continue to face increasing discrimination because of their faith.

The Lord's involvement with creation includes an understanding of an "affirmative and ordered response on the part of created man [and woman] to the creative, ordering work of God" (Niebuhr 1975, 192). This parallels Ortner's plea that women should be cultural makers and be involved in participating in culture on equal terms with men. Both men and women can participate in culture while seeking the redemptive and transformative ordered work of God because He is engaged with both creation and culture. This means he has "entered into human culture that has never been without his ordering action" (Niebuhr 1975, 193). God is supremely aware of the cultural circumstances in Kano and His involvement in creation and culture must prompt Christians to engage their Muslim neighbours outside their comforts.

Jesus' Way

Jesus' said to the Pharisees, "Let any one of you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her" (John 8:3, 7 NIV) when he encountered the woman caught in adultery. Jesus ascribes honour to the woman and gives her a sense of belonging, despite her immoral act. In the same way, the numerous Hausa women of Kano can receive a foretaste of the honour Jesus ascribes when they experience it in interfaith relationships with their sisters. There is no "precarious position," such as divorced women who are no longer connected to the honour of their husbands, as Jesus' sees them (Malina and Neyrey 1991, 44). This parallels the experience of the woman caught in adultery. Jesus completely turns the tables and simply says, "Then neither do I condemn you. Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11 NIV).

Honour and Shame and the Christian Church

Understanding the role of *kunya* and the honour the Hausa bestow in their relationships will help the Nigerian church more fully identify the spiritual needs of the Hausa. Scripture is written from a lens that the Hausa can identify with, as both honour and shame play a role in the narrative. Muslim–Christian relationships will be strengthened as Christians comprehend how the Hausa relate with one another and see themselves. There is significant opportunity to share in community about the numerous ways Christ sees the Hausa and identifies their desire to live modestly, maintaining their virtuous character in a way that is both honourable and understood by God.

There is significant need for the Christian community in Kano to understand the relevance of building relationships with the Hausa in terms of the role of honour and shame. Jerome Neyrey (1998) in his work *Honor and Shame in the Gospel of Matthew* paraphrases the Sermon on the Mount, found in Matthew 5:3-20 in a way that was culturally relevant for the hearers of the time, and certainly is so in the present day in Kano. He says, "Honored *by God* are *those who are shamed for being socially dispossessed and underprivileged,* because *(believe it or not!)* all the honorable blessings of God actually belong to them" [emphasis his] (164-228). Jesus relates well to the experience of the Hausa and sides with them, especially the *bazawara* woman who are seeking to be accepted since they have lost their sense of honour. Jesus graciously extends honour and desires to bless them, knowing that they belong to Him.

Likewise, Neyrey (1998) continues to paraphrase how Jesus addresses the persecuted. He places additional emphasis on the weight of honour and shame that was relevant to the culture of the time. He writes, "Honored *by God* are you when people revile you, *banish you from community,* persecute you and *slander your name by* falsely uttering all kinds of evil, all on account of me. *Amid this temporary shame,* rejoice and be glad since the heavenly reward *that vindicates your true worth* is great" [emphasis his] (164-228). The scope of God's love, grace, and restorative honour cover the vastly populated corners of Kano, including the Hausa women who deserve to hear and experience a fresh perspective on being in the world and to see a faith that turns everything upside down. They can then be invited to learn how Christ identifies with their experiences, in His self-emptying and taking on human flesh. I recognize the weight of God's call on the persecuted to rejoice in the midst of violence and discrimination, but the Lord graciously promises to stay with us, to never leave nor forsake us, and that provides renewed hope (Hebrews 13:5). In the same way God honours those who are persecuted, so the persecuted may seek to honour those who are socially misunderstood and appear hidden.

Conclusion

Two years ago, I did not have a clear understanding of the various ways the Hausa display the masked emotion and complex moral code of *kunya*, related to modesty. The Hausa women have vulnerably shared their experiences and stories and have given me new light to understand their lived space differently based on how they engage with others in community and family. These women have contributed their valuable perspectives on a topic that has not previously been well represented in the literature. The Hausa women have offered a variety of ways of understanding *matan kulle,* which influences how *kunya* is displayed in their relationships and engagement in community. The Hausa women who have shared with me during our numerous conversations, answered my questions, and told their stories have demonstrated the complex emotion and practice that is *kunya. Kunya* is a major part of maintaining honour in terms of what it means to be Hausa and of upholding the cultural expectations for modesty from childhood all the way to death. *Kunya* is a masked emotion, a display and moral code, that gives context to the intricate workings of honour and shame in community, marital relationships, and the changing practice of *matan kulle*.

There are many remaining questions about the experiences of the Hausa women, especially the vast and growing number of *zaurawa*. I deliberated on Barbara Callaway's (1984) concept of "hidden muted autonomy" of the "ambiguous social polarisation—physically and legally subordinate and socially almost invisible [women]." She claimed "[the Hausa women] are also tenaciously self-determining, independent, and strong willed" (448). Callaway sees this "hidden muted autonomy" to be the needed "change in the social structure of this society" (449). I believe Callaway failed to see the Hausa women from the perspective of honour and shame, with their constant obligation to maintain the code and display of *kunya,* specifically the gender-based honour that is interpreted through the practice of *matan kulle* and the embodiment of *kunya.* She also missed the ascribed honour that comes from a women's husband who offers her the physical and metaphorical space and security where she finds belonging. This does not mean women are confined or "muted." Rather, the Hausa women reflect a deep sense of honour and obligation to respect their husbands and family.

Thus, the high rate of divorce in Kano challenges current social-cultural expectations of the desired honour that most often comes from a woman's husband. I would say that change in these expectations has already begun to happen. Women are beginning to display autonomy in the midst of a culture that upholds family honour. This is reflected in Nabila's description of the small number of exceptional women who are either not married or divorced and who are

seeking a new way of being in community. In a society that strongly values marriage, these exceptional women are striving to find a place in the public sphere and choosing not to marry. I am certainly eager to hear from this small but seemingly growing population to understand how they are navigating change amidst the expectations of *kunya.*

Still, the moral code and display of *kunya* will likely always be a high and distinguished part of being Hausa, and continue to give women value and respect, since, "*kunya da adon mace*," meaning "*kunya* is like an adornment for a woman." I especially hope the Christians in Kano honour this valued part of being Hausa and support those who have become a *bazawara* and may have lost their sense of adornment and honour. An important part of the response from the Nigerian church must be in understanding the transformative role of Jesus in relationships. In the same way Christ offered restored honour to the promiscuous Samaritan and did not condemn the adulterous women, surely He calls us to offer grace and truth to women in polygamous marriages, in multiple marriages, or who are *zaurawa.*

The Hausa women's experience illuminates profound truths that are part of women's everyday experience and that offer Christians in Kano a deeper understanding of ways to relate to them that honours their culture. I believe Nigerian Christians have much in common with the Hausa and will gain valuable insight from Scripture that changes the way they can imagine how Christ transforms culture.

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